

**LIVED EXPERIENCES OF GESTALT COUNSELLING TECHNIQUES BY
STUDENTS WITH PEER RELATIONSHIP PROBLEMS AT A PUBLIC
UNIVERSITY IN KITWE, ZAMBIA: A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGICAL
APPROACH**

BY

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**A thesis submitted to the University of Zambia in fulfilment of the requirements of the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Guidance and Counselling**

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DECLARATION

I, **Nicholas Mwanza**, do hereby declare that this thesis presents my work and that it has not been previously submitted for the award of a degree or any other qualification to the University of Zambia or any other University. All references have been adequately acknowledged.

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Date.....

APPROVAL

The University of Zambia approves this thesis of **Nicholas Mwanza** as fulfilling the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Guidance and Counselling.

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Prof Daniel Ndhlovu
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my late father Lemmy Mwanza, my mother Justina Nkhoma Mwanza, my wife Mary Phiri and children: Asha, Nicole and Taonga, friends, family, Counsellors and pioneers of Guidance and counselling in Zambia. To family and friends your endless support and accepting my absence from meaningful interactions with you during the pursuit of this degree was my strength.

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Table of Contents

Copyright.....	i
Declaration.....	ii
Approval.....	III
Dedication.....	IV
Acknowledgement.....	v
Abstract.....	x
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.0 Overview.....	1
1.1 Background.....	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem.....	5
1.3 Purpose of the Study.....	6
1.4. Study Objectives.....	6
1.5 Research Questions.....	6
1.6 Significance of the Study.....	6
1.7 Limitations of the Study.....	7
1.7.1 Subjectivity and Researcher Bias.....	7
1.7.2 Generalizability of Findings.....	7
1.8 Delimitations of the Study.....	7
1.9 Theoretical Framework.....	8
1.9 Conceptual Framework.....	8
1.10 Definition of Key Terms.....	9
1.11 Ethical Considerations.....	10
1.12 Organization of the Thesis.....	11
1.12 Summary.....	14
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	15

2.0 Overview.....	15
2.1. Techniques in Gestalt Counselling.....	15
2.2 Benefits of Gestalt Counselling.....	23
2.3 The Empty Chair Technique and its Benefits to Clients.....	42
2.4 Body Language Counselling Technique and its Benefits to Clients.....	62
2.5 Limitations of the Empty Chair and Body Language Counselling Techniques.....	83
2.6 Knowledge Gap and Contribution of the Study.....	87
2.7 Summary.....	88
CHAPTER THREE-RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	89
3.0 Overview.....	89
3.1 Philosophical Paradigm.....	89
3.1.1 Pragmatic Paradigm.....	93
3.1.2 Positivist Paradigm.....	94
3.1.3 Interpretivist or Constructivist Paradigm.....	95
3.2 Research Approach.....	96
3.2.1 Qualitative Research.....	96
3.2.2 Other Research Approaches not used in this Study.....	97
3.3 Research Design.....	98
3.4 Population.....	99
3.5 Sample Size.....	100
3.6 Sampling Technique.....	101
3.6.1 Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria.....	102
3.7 Data Collection Instruments.....	102
3.7.1 Semi-Structured Interview Guide.....	102
3.7.2 Document Analysis Guide.....	102
3.8 Data Collection Procedure.....	103
3.9 Data Analysis and Presentation.....	103

3.10 Trustworthiness of the Study.....	106
3.11 Summary.....	108
CHAPTER FOUR PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS.....	109
4.0 Overview.....	109
4.1 How the Empty Chair Counselling Techniques Helped Students with Peer Relationships.....	112
4.1.1 Participants Knowledge of the Empty Chair.....	112
4.1.2 Experiences with the Empty Chair.....	114
4.1.2 Perceived Effectiveness in Addressing Concerns in Counselling using the Empty Chair Technique.....	115
4.1.3. Benefits from the use of the Empty Chair.....	116
4.1.4 Counselling Issues where the Empty Chair Technique was used.....	117
4.2 How the Body Language Counselling Technique helped Students with Peer Relationship Challenges.....	119
4.2.1 Knowledge of Body Language in Counselling.....	119
4.2.2 Experiences with Counsellors Exploring their Body Language.....	121
4.2.3 Addressing Client’s Issues with the Body Language Technique Counselling.....	123
4.2.4 Benefits on the use of Body Language Counselling Techniques.....	124
4.2.5 Limitations of the Empty Chair and Body Language Counselling Techniques.....	125
4.3.1 Challenges Experienced with the Empty Chair Technique.....	125
4.3.2 Zambian Context, Influence of Culture and Usage of the Empty Chair and Body Language in Counselling.....	127
4.4 How the Empty Chair and Body Language Counselling Techniques Helped.....	128
4.4.1 Factors that Helped the Client Overcome Challenges using the Empty Chair Technique.....	128
4.4.2 Factors that Helped Clients Resolve their Issues when Body Language Counselling Techniques were Used.....	130
4.4.3 Enhancing the Empty Chair Counselling Technique.....	132
4.4.4 Enhancing the Body Language Counselling Technique.....	134
4.5 Summary.....	136

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS.....	137
5.0 Overview.....	137
5.1 How the Empty Chair Counselling Techniques Helped Students with Peer Relationship Challenges.....	137
5.1.1 Participants' Knowledge of the Empty Chair.....	138
5.1.2 Client and Counsellor Experiences with the Empty Chair.....	139
5.1.3 Effectiveness in Addressing Concerns in Counselling using the Empty Chair Technique.....	141
5.1.4 Benefits from the use of the Empty Chair.....	142
5.1.5 Counselling Cases where the Empty Chair Technique was used.....	143
5.2 How the Body Language Counselling Technique Helped Students with Peer Relationship Challenges.....	145
5.2.1 Knowledge of Body Language in Counselling.....	145
5.2.2 Experiences with Counsellors Exploring the Client's Body Language (Lived Time)..	145
5.2.3 Addressing the Client's Issues with the Body Language Counselling Technique.....	147
5.2.4 The Benefit of the use of Body Language Counselling Techniques.....	147
5.3 Limitations Experienced with the Empty Chair Technique.....	148
5.3.1 Cultural Influences and Usage of the Empty Chair and Body Language in Counselling.....	148
5.3.2 Challenges in the use of the Empty Chair and Body Language Counselling.....	149
5.4 How the Empty Chair and Body Language Counselling Techniques Helped Student with Peer Relationship Challenges (Formation of A Framework).....	150
5.4.1 Factors that Helped the Client Overcome Challenges using the Empty Chair Technique (Lived Relations).....	150
5.4.2 Factors that Helped Clients Resolve Issues when Body Language Counselling Techniques were used (Lived Relations).....	151
5.4.3 Enhancing the Empty Chair Counselling Technique.....	151
5.4.4 Enhancing the Body Language Counselling Technique.....	152
5.5 Proposed Framework Based on Benefits of the Empty Chair and Body Language Gestalt Counselling Techniques.....	154

5.5.1 Justification for the Mwanza`S Empty Chair and Body Language Counselling Framework.....	155
5.5.2 Description of the Mwanza`S Empty Chair and Body Language Counselling Framework (Mecblcf).....	156
5.6 Summary.....	160
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE.....	161
6.0 Overview.....	161
6.1 Conclusion.....	161
6.2 Recommendations.....	162
6.3 Implications for Practice.....	162
6.4 Publications and New Knowledge.....	163
6.5 Chapter Summary.....	164
REFERENCES.....	165
APPENDICES.....	180

Abstract

The study aimed to investigate the benefits of Gestalt counselling techniques in assisting students in addressing peer relationship issues at a public university. Specifically, the study examined the use of the empty chair and body language Gestalt counselling techniques in assisting students with peer relationship challenges, employing a hermeneutic phenomenological approach. An expert purposive sampling method was employed to select four counsellors and criterion purposive sampling for the sixteen students who had received counselling that utilized the empty chair and body language Gestalt techniques. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and retrospective record reviews and subsequently analysed thematically. The results revealed that the majority of clients reported positive progress and were able to overcome their relationship challenges, while some experienced difficulty in engaging with the techniques. Factors contributing to the benefits of the empty chair technique included counsellor proficiency, the client's ability to employ their imagination, and the client's readiness to participate in the technique. Instances where the technique was less successful often stemmed from clients feeling uncomfortable with the method. The empty chair counselling technique was most employed in cases involving rejection, unresolved relationship challenges, the need for emoting, as well as intra and interpersonal conflicts. More findings showed that body language counselling techniques played a crucial role in the interaction between counsellors and clients, influencing the effectiveness of the counselling process. Positive results indicated that both counsellors and clients benefitted from enhanced communication and gained additional insights beyond verbal expressions, leading to increased awareness. Despite this, some participants experienced challenges and discomfort when the counsellor pointed out their body language. The study recommends that counsellors utilizing the empty chair technique and body language receive comprehensive training to enhance their benefits and ensure a comfortable experience for clients. Moreover, counsellors should incorporate culturally sensitive strategies when utilizing body language to enrich the counselling process.

Keywords *Empty chair counselling technique, Gestalt Counselling, student Counselling, peer relationships*

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Overview

This chapter presents the background of the study, a statement of the problem, objectives, and research questions, the significance of the study, the theory to guide the study, the conceptual framework, the definition of terms and a summary of the chapter.

1.1 Background

Understanding how the empty chair and body language counselling techniques help university students with peer relationship problems such as loss of contact, confluence, unfinished business, and fragmentation motivated this study. According to Ndhlovu (2015), when students lose contact with their environment, they may isolate themselves and miss out on interactions with others and the resources available to them. This highlights the importance of social interactions for all individuals, regardless of status. Failure to establish meaningful social interactions can lead to neurosis, as humans are social beings. Ndhlovu (2015) also discusses confluence, which occurs when an individual becomes too immersed in their environment, to the point where it takes control of their life and they lose the ability to make personal decisions or be aware of their identity. This can lead to challenges in peer relationships, as individuals may struggle to distinguish between their personal needs and those of their environment. Unfinished business refers to unmet or unfulfilled needs that are important to an individual. In learning institutions, students need social interactions with others to fulfil their need for belonging. When this need is not met, it can lead to neurosis. It is common for students to experience broken relationships. Fragmentation occurs when individuals attempt to do too many things at once and fail to achieve the desired results, leading to dissatisfaction.

It is important to study how Gestalt counselling theory can help students with peer relationship issues, as these problems can negatively impact their university experience. Counselling theories are crucial in guiding inexperienced counsellors and ensuring effective practice (Lofrisco, 2013). By providing a framework for interpretation and techniques, theories can help counsellors categorize phenomena, anticipate outcomes, and understand individuals' thoughts, actions, and emotions (Palmer, 2011). However, there is little research on the effectiveness of Gestalt counselling theory and its techniques, such as the empty chair and body language, in

helping students with peer relationship problems in Zambian higher education institutions. Gestalt counselling theory is an affective-oriented approach that focuses on emotions and feelings (Ndhlovu, 2015).

The Gestalt theory is an approach to life that emphasizes the importance of individuals finding their path and taking responsibility for their actions to reach a state of maturity. It was developed in the 1940s and 1950s through the combination of different cultural and intellectual influences (Yontef and Jacobs, 2008). The Gestalt theory was considered a unique form of counselling that offered advanced clinical and theoretical options, differing from the two primary approaches to therapy at the time, behaviourism and classical psychoanalysis.

The term 'Gestalt' originated from German and was pronounced as 'GESH-tawlt'. It means 'form' and emphasizes that the whole is made up of parts, and every part is essential to achieve the whole (Palmer, 2011). In Gestalt, a human being is considered a whole entity that cannot be separated into body and mind. This approach sets Gestalt counselling theory apart from other theories such as psychoanalysis and behavioural-oriented theories. The term 'whole' is central to Gestalt and encompasses everything, including thoughts, emotions, the body, and the relationship with the environment.

According to Clark (2013), Gestalt is a counselling theory that focuses on the present life and challenges of an individual rather than their past experiences. It is a humanistic and holistic approach that emphasizes the importance of understanding one's current context and taking responsibility for oneself. This philosophy is well suited for students in higher learning institutions who are encouraged to take charge of their lives and become independent from parental guidance.

Yontef (1993) in Palmer (2011) differentiates Gestalt counselling from other counselling and states that:

“In behaviour modification, the client's behaviour is directly changed by the Counsellor manipulating environmental stimuli. In psychoanalytic theory, behaviour is caused by unconscious motivations which becomes manifest in the transference relationship. By analyzing the transference, the repression is lifted, and the unconscious becomes conscious. In Gestalt counselling, the client learns

to fully use his internal and external senses through awareness so that he can be self-responsible and self-supportive.”

According to Clarkson and Cavichia (2013), gestalt counselling aims to help clients develop self-awareness. Many young people in universities experience relationship issues that may stem from a lack of awareness. Additionally, problems with peer relationships can arise when students struggle to collaborate and establish friendships.

According to Clarke (2013), Gestalt counselling doesn't involve any forced work or techniques. The focus is to create a space where clients can explore their experiences without any fear of judgement. The goal of Gestalt counselling is to collaborate with the client to increase personal awareness and overcome any obstacles that have been hindering their personal growth and progress. If left unchecked, peer relationship problems can lead to poor decision-making, difficulty maintaining friendships, being bullied, and even internalizing concerns. With all these principles in mind, this study aims to investigate the benefits of Gestalt counselling techniques in resolving peer relationship problems among university students.

Research has shown various advantages of using Gestalt counselling techniques. Clance et al. (1994) discussed the positive impact of Gestalt approaches based on clients' reports that it boosted their levels of self-realization and personal effectiveness, facilitated the development of their personality potentials, and enhanced their self-awareness and experiences. Additionally, scholars have noted that Gestalt has been effective in treating various mental health conditions, including anxiety, bipolar disorders, substance abuse, and relationship difficulties. Through increased awareness, couples can recognize and address underlying destructive behaviours that may affect their relationships and self-esteem (Brennam, 2021).

A Gestalt counsellor asks clients about their own experiences through 'what and how questions' instead of assuming intellectual doubt with 'why questions'.

To effectively use Gestalt counselling to intervene in social relationship problems, it's important to understand the underlying causes. According to Sommers-Flanagan and Sommers-Flanagan's (2004) research, individuals often struggle with social relationship issues when they avoid confronting or coping with core life issues. This avoidance can lead to unmet needs and unresolved issues, which can cause maladjustments. These unmet needs can stem from natural processes such as the need for contact, new learning, excitement, and self-

regulation. On the other hand, adaptive behaviour occurs when an individual has contact, full awareness, spontaneity, and full sensory function. The goal of Gestalt theory is to increase self-awareness in clients, allowing them to be fully present in the moment.

Ndhlovu (2015) explains that the Gestalt counselling theory identifies five major causes of neurosis or personal problems in individuals: lack of contact with the environment, confluence, unfinished business, fragmentation, and top dog/underdog. These causes can lead to peer relationship issues among students. To tackle these problems, it's important to understand the goals of the Gestalt theory and its counselling process to achieve recovery.

One of the cardinal aims of Gestalt counselling is to help individuals reach a state of full function and recovery from their problem or challenge. Scholars describe several stages that individuals go through in the recovery process. Sommers-Flanagan and Sommers-Flanagan (2004:168) called the stages peeling the onion that involves five stages as shown below:

“For clients to fulfil their potential and achieve psychological maturity, they must peel off five distinct layers of neurosis: (1) the phoney, (2) the phobic, (3) the impasse, (4) the implosive, and (5) the explosive. In the end, through awareness and integration, clients can wake up and become themselves, rather than pretending to be something they aren't. When this happens, they come in touch with an explosive and powerful source of energy.”

In counselling, people progress from a fake layer (phoney layer) where they often pretend to be someone they are not, to a layer of fear (phobic layer) where they hide their true issues, and then to a layer of feeling stuck (impasse layer) and confused. Eventually, they reach a layer (implosive layer) where they can identify their unfinished business and explore new possibilities. As they shed their old layers, they reach an explosive layer where they can reintegrate their whole self. Through this process, individuals become authentic and self-actualized, with the ability to connect with their environment (Seligman et al., 2006).

Counsellors have various humanistic approaches and theories at their disposal to help students, and one such approach is the Gestalt counselling theory. This theory emphasizes taking responsibility for actions and decisions, which is essential for students to make progress in tertiary education. However, according to Wagner-Moore (2004), Gestalt theory has not been well defined, and the techniques used have not been sufficiently validated. Additionally, it is

unclear how the empty chair and body language techniques of Gestalt counselling benefit Zambian students with peer relationship problems, such as lack of contact with peers, confluence, unfinished business, and fragmentation in public universities. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate how these techniques helped students with peer relationship problems at a public university in the Kitwe district.

Having good relationships with peers can motivate students to succeed, but negative relationships can also discourage them. According to Hattie (2012), students who feel rejected by their peers may feel lonely and disconnected, which can lead to disengagement and lower achievement. Maunder (2016) found that positive social interactions in school can improve students' overall experiences. Students who have strong connections with their peers tend to adjust better to university life, while those who struggle with peer relationships may have a harder time adjusting. It's important to explore how counselling can help students overcome challenges in their relationships with peers, as this can have a major impact on their overall adjustment and experience in school.

Poor peer relationships can hinder a student's progress in their university journey. Therefore, it is important to investigate how Gestalt counselling techniques can be used to help students with these issues and prevent them from dropping out. This study aimed to fill the knowledge gap by examining the advantages of Gestalt counselling for students struggling with peer relationships at a public university in Kitwe, Zambia.

1.2 Statement of the problem

According to Ankrom (2020), Gestalt counselling techniques are beneficial in addressing various issues such as anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, low self-efficacy, and relationship problems. In addition, the techniques can improve one's self-control, mental state regulation, and awareness of personal needs, tolerance for negative emotions, communication skills, mental health, and emotional understanding. However, it is unclear how the empty chair and body language techniques helped university students who had peer relationship problems such as loss of contact, confluence, unfinished business, and fragmentation.

Without conducting a study of this nature, we could not fully understand the benefits of Gestalt counselling techniques in improving peer relationships among university students. Therefore, it was imperative to explore how the empty chair and body language techniques helped

university students who had peer relationship problems such as loss of contact, confluence, unfinished business, and fragmentation at a public university in Kitwe district of Zambia.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The study sought to explore how the empty chair and body language counselling techniques helped students with peer relationship problems such as loss of contact with peers, confluence, unfinished business and fragmentation at one of the public universities in Kitwe district.

1.4. Study Objectives

The objectives of the study were to:

- i. Explore how empty chair counselling techniques helped students with peer relationship problems in universities.
- ii. Explore how body language counselling techniques helped students with peer relationship problems.
- iii. Establish limitations students with peer relationship problems experienced from the empty chair, and body language techniques.
- iv. Propose a framework demonstrating how the empty chair and the body language counselling techniques could be used to help students with peer relationship problems.

1.5 Research Questions

The study was guided by the following questions:

- i. How did the empty chair counselling techniques help students with peer relationship problems?
- ii. How did the body language counselling techniques help students with peer relationship problems?
- iii. What limitations if any, did students with peer relationship problems experience from the empty chair, and body language counselling techniques?
- iv. How can the empty chair and body language counselling techniques be used to help students with peer relationship problems?

1.6 Significance of the Study

The study's findings on the benefits of Gestalt counselling techniques for students struggling with peer relationship issues are expected to aid counsellors in improving their use of these

techniques, influence training programs for counsellors, and guide interventions aimed at assisting students with peer relationships problems. Additionally, these findings may influence policy decisions in this area.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

Hermeneutic phenomenology, while valuable for exploring lived experiences, faces limitations including researcher subjectivity, the challenge of achieving true bracketing (suspending pre-conceived notions) and difficulty in generalizing findings.

1.7.1 Subjectivity and Researcher Bias

A key challenge in hermeneutic phenomenology is managing researcher bias and subjectivity, as the researcher's interpretation plays a crucial role in understanding the data.

Achieving true bracketing (suspending pre-conceived notions) can be difficult, as researchers must constantly be aware of their assumptions and biases and work to mitigate them. To overcome this limitation, the researcher endeavored to remain neutral and included in the presentation of findings the verbatim statements from the participants.

1.7.2 Generalizability of Findings

Due to its focus on unique individual experiences, hermeneutic phenomenology often struggles to produce findings that can be easily generalized to broader populations. Therefore, it is crucial to exercise caution when extrapolating the findings of this study related to the benefits of the empty chair and body language Gestalt counselling techniques in addressing the peer relationship challenges faced by students.

1.8 Delimitations of the Study

The study was delimited to counsellors and their clients who had prior experience of the empty chair and body language Gestalt counselling technique in resolving peer relationship challenges at a public university in Kitwe District of the Copperbelt Province.

The study was based on a qualitative approach that used a hermeneutic phenomenology design, used to document and explore the lived experiences of counsellors and clients in resolving peer relationship challenges at a public university.

1.9 Theoretical Framework

The Gestalt theory developed by Fritz Perls guided the study. This theory aims at assisting clients to build their self-awareness of how they are in the moment. The theory raises awareness and contact in the present moment using methods and techniques that clarify experiences in the now, (Wagner-Moore, 2004). Seligman et al (2006) state that awareness is one of the vital elements in Gestalt counselling as it is seen as “*the hallmark of the healthy person and a goal of treatment*”. By this, the theory postulates that when an individual is aware they can adjust within their environment.

By using the five stages (phoney, phobic, impasse, implosive and explosive) to gain self-awareness, the theory assists the researcher in understanding the benefits of Gestalt counselling techniques in helping students with peer relationship problems. The theory suggests five stages to gaining self-awareness en route to the recovery of a client. The stages of self-awareness follow layers and include the phoney layer where an individual would often display assumed roles that are of pretence in nature. When individuals realise that they live a pretence life fear grips them. That is the phobic layer. At the impasse layer clients usually feel stuck and at times confused but when they are helped to realise that they have resources and potential they gain awareness of what they can do to free themselves from being stuck in phobia. They try to use their resources and potential and realise that they can do it. This is the implosive layer. Once the experiments in using their resources succeed, they explode in self-sustenance. This is the explosive layer. With such stages or layers of self-awareness, the researcher hopes to interpret experiences of counsellors who used the empty chair and body language techniques and the students whom these techniques were used to understand how the empty chair and body language techniques helped students with relationship problems.

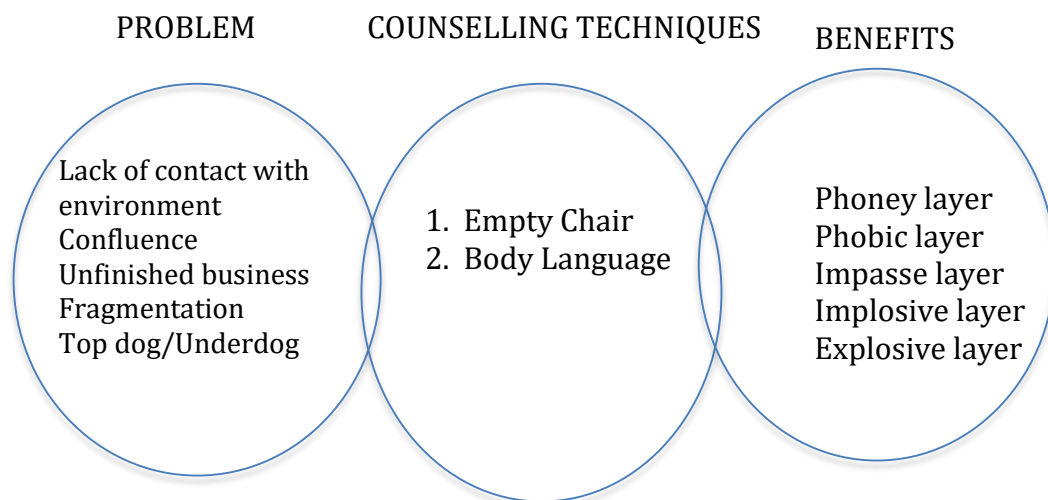
1.10 Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is mostly a diagrammatic representation of the relationship of variables in the study. A more conclusive explanation of a conceptual framework may include what a researcher assumes can best explain the natural progression of the occurrence to be investigated (Camp, 2001). The conceptual framework describes the relationship between the main concepts of a study. It is arranged in a logical structure or visual display of how ideas in a study relate to one another (Grant and Osanloo, 2014). In this qualitative research, the

conceptual framework served as a vital structured lens through which to interpret complex social phenomena. By outlining key themes and ideas, this framework helped in organizing thoughts, guiding inquiry, and framing analyses.

From the study objectives and theory guiding it, the following concepts were used to help understand the benefits of the Gestalt counselling technique in helping students with peer relationship challenges at a public university. The figure shows the relationship between the different factors that the researcher assumes to affect counselling services in public universities.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework on Benefits of an empty chair and body language Gestalt counselling techniques



The conceptual framework above provides a visual representation on how the empty chair and body language counselling techniques can help students with peer relationship problems such as lack of contact with environment, confluence, unfinished business with peers, fragmentation and top dog or underdog by passing through the route to recovery described as phoney, phobic, impasse, implosive and explosive layers.

1.11 Definition of Key Terms

Gestalt Counselling: a counselling approach that focuses on individual's present life with the central concept of wholeness which examines the integrated experiences of student and their relationships with society in this case university.

Counselling: refers to a helping process in which a relationship between a professionally trained counsellor and an individual seeking help exists

Peer relationship problems: this study shall refer to lack of contact with peers in the university, confluence, unfinished business and fragmentation in the behaviour of students

Empty chair counselling: a technique is an exercise in Gestalt counselling designed to allow individuals with issues to express their thoughts and feelings while imagining themselves or the person they have issues with sitting on a chair in front of them.

The body language counselling technique refers to the nonverbal communication that a client presents knowingly or unknowingly, which may reveal something internal that can be used to bring about awareness.

The benefit of this study; denotes self-awareness in clients shown through phoney, phobic, impasse, implosive and explosive layers.

Hermeneutics: here means the interpretation and meanings that students and counsellors from the interaction with the body language and empty chair counselling techniques.

Phenomenology: exploring the lived experiences of the counsellors and students as they interacted with the empty chair and body language counselling techniques while resolving peer relationships at the time.

Student: an enrolled individual at a university or institution of learning in any of the approved study programs.

1.12 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Zambia Humanities and Social Sciences Ethical Committee. See **HSSREC IRB No: 00006464 on appendices**. After approval from the ethics committee, the researcher got an introductory letter from the School of Education that was used to get permission to conduct research at the research site.

This scientific study ensured that data collection followed the stipulated ethical considerations. For instance,

Confidentiality and anonymity: The researcher ensured that there was anonymity, that the identity of the participants and research site were kept anonymous and that all data regarding this study was kept in double encrypted password-protected folders.

Informed consent: the researcher endeavoured to obtain written informed consent when dealing with all human participants in this study.

1.13 Organization of the Thesis

The following chapters provide a structural overview of this study:

- Chapter one provides background and context for this study. It begins by outlining the foundations of Gestalt counselling techniques. The problem statement articulates the challenges faced by students at the public university regarding peer relationships. The purpose of the study is clearly defined, aiming to explore how Gestalt counselling can equip students with practical strategies to navigate and improve their peer relationships and social interactions. The research objectives are explicitly stated, including the identification of key benefits derived from Gestalt techniques, understanding students' experiences with these techniques, and evaluating their effectiveness in resolving peer relationship challenges.

Aligned with these objectives, the research questions delve into the nuances of student experiences with Gestalt counselling. The significance of the study highlights its potential contributions to the field of counselling, particularly in academic settings, and underscores the importance of addressing peer relationship issues for overall student well-being. Lastly, the conceptual framework and guiding theory provide a structured approach to interpreting the study's findings, integrating principles of Gestalt theory with empirical research to foster a deeper understanding of the counselling process and its impact on students facing peer relationship difficulties. This chapter thus sets a foundational basis for the subsequent exploration of the benefits of Gestalt counselling techniques within the student population.

- Chapter two delves into the various techniques utilized in Gestalt counselling, providing a comprehensive review of relevant literature that highlights the benefits of this therapeutic approach. It specifically examines the use of the "empty chair" technique and the role of body language in Gestalt counselling, particularly in addressing and resolving peer relationship issues among individuals.

The review encompasses scholarly writings from a diverse range of African regions, alongside international studies outside Africa, to critically assess existing research. This comparative analysis aims to identify and highlight the gaps within the current

literature, illustrating the unique contributions and insights that this study aspires to provide. By synthesizing these perspectives, the chapter seeks to deepen the understanding of how Gestalt counselling techniques can effectively navigate interpersonal conflicts and promote healthier peer interactions using the empty chair and body language Gestalt counselling techniques.

- Chapter three presents the methodology. It specifically looks at the philosophical foundations underpinning the study, focusing on ontology, axiology, epistemology and methodology, and how these lead to the constructivist paradigm.

Furthermore, the chapter outlines the research approach adopted for the study, highlighting a qualitative approach and hermeneutic phenomenological design that emphasizes the participants' lived experiences. It describes the target population, detailing the specific characteristics of individuals selected for the study, and explains the sampling strategy employed to ensure diversity and representation.

The chapter also elaborates on the data collection methods utilized, including record reviews and interviews, while discussing the analytical framework used to interpret the data, ensuring rigor and validity in the findings. Finally, a summary of the chapter encapsulates the key points discussed, reinforcing the relevance of the philosophical underpinnings and research methodology to the overall objectives of the study.

- Chapter four presents the findings of the study. It begins with demographic profile of the participants, including factors such as age, gender and education level, to contextualize the data. The findings are then systematically organized according to the specific research questions outlined at the outset of the study. Each theme that emerged from the analysis is explored in depth, using thematic analysis to identify patterns and insights. This approach not only highlights key trends but also provides a nuanced understanding of the participants' experiences and perspectives related to the study's objectives.

- Chapter five provides an in-depth discussion of the findings of study, carefully correlating them with existing literature pertinent to each research objective. This section also elaborates on the theoretical framework that guided the study, reflecting on how these findings align with the five established benchmarks for a healthy individual.

It examines empirical data, discusses its implications, and highlights any significant trends or anomalies about previous studies, thus offering a comprehensive understanding of the results in the context of the broader academic discourse. Lastly, a framework has been proposed based on the findings in this study.

- Chapter six serves as the conclusion of this thesis, summarizing the key findings and insights gained throughout the study. This chapter presents a series of recommendations aimed at practitioners and educators in the field of counselling, emphasizing the practical applications of the research. Additionally, this chapter highlights the significant contributions of this study to the existing body of knowledge in counselling, illustrating how the findings can inform future research and practice, enhance effectiveness in counselling, and address gaps in the current literature. Through a detailed analysis, the chapter aims to demonstrate the relevance and impact of the study's outcomes on both theoretical frameworks and real-world counselling scenarios.
- References: This section provides a comprehensive list of all scholarly literature cited throughout this study, including books, journal articles, and other academic sources. Each reference is formatted according to the appropriate style guide, ensuring clarity and consistency. This list serves not only to credit the original authors and researchers but also to allow readers to easily locate the sources for further investigation and understanding of the topics discussed.
- Appendices: This section provides a comprehensive overview of the relevant tools employed for data collection throughout the research process. It includes detailed descriptions of the interview guides used to facilitate structured conversations with participants, ensuring consistency in data gathering. Additionally, record review guides are outlined to specify the criteria and methodologies employed in analyzing existing counsellor documents and records. The section shows two article publications that were developed from the first and second objectives, offering valuable context and support for the research findings. Furthermore, it includes invitations to a conference where preliminary results were presented, highlighting the peer engagement and feedback received that contributed to the study's development.

1.14 Summary

This chapter has presented the background of the study, a statement of the problem, research objectives, and research questions, the significance of the study, the theory guiding the study, conceptual framework, and definitions of terms, ethical considerations, thesis structure and a chapter summary is presented last.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Overview

The chapter presents a related literature review on the benefits of Gestalt counselling techniques in helping students with peer relationship problems at public universities. The literature review is presented in line with the study objectives. The objectives are; to explore how empty chair counselling techniques helped students with peer relationship problems in universities, explore how body language counselling techniques helped students with peer relationship problems, establish limitations students with peer relationship problems experienced from the empty chair, and body language techniques and to propose a frame-workk demonstrating how the empty chair and the body language counselling techniques could be used to help students with peer relationship problems. The chapter ends with a summary.

2.1. Techniques in Gestalt Counselling

Francesetti et al. (2013) assert that Gestalt counselling theory offers a profound foundation and invaluable tools for comprehending the complexities of human suffering. Building on this premise, the writing proposed the establishment of a Gestalt psychopathology that aligns with theoretical epistemology and proves beneficial for clinical practice. Human suffering was viewed as an emergent figure, intricately expressed by the individual yet deeply influenced by the surrounding relational field. Each person encounters a tapestry of experiences woven from the dual threads of pain and joy, limitations and resources gifted by life through their connections with others. It is their unique opportunity to transform these experiences into beauty and a sense of full presence, much like an artist crafting a masterpiece from raw emotion.

As therapists and counsellor find themselves engaged daily in this intricate and transformative process, supporting individuals in their quest to transmute pain into beauty, to “distil joy from suffering,” as one insightful patient once shared with one of the authors. This perspective unveils a profound and richly layered understanding of our vocation. To fulfil this role effectively, counsellor cultivate sensitivity and an acute awareness of the types of contact and relationship the suffering individual seeks. Moreover, counsellors must be prepared to embark on this transformative journey alongside them, investing our lives in the process.

Gestalt counselling and therapy offers a present-focused, relational approach that emphasizes the importance of the individual's subjective experience. At the core of this counselling approach is the fundamental belief that the client possesses an inherent understanding of the most effective ways to navigate their circumstances (Mann, 2021). This perspective empowers clients to take an active role in their healing process, fostering a sense of agency and self-discovery.

Rooted in humanistic counselling theories, Gestalt counselling prioritizes self-awareness and self-acceptance as essential components of personal growth and emotional well-being. It operates on the principle that increased awareness of one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours in the present moment can lead to transformative insights and healthier patterns of interaction (Ndhlovu and Mwanza, 2025).

To facilitate this journey of self-exploration, Gestalt counselling encourages an active collaborative interaction between the professional counsellor and the client. This relationship is characterized by a safe, non-judgmental space where clients can express themselves freely. Techniques employed often include experiential exercises, role-playing, and other active participation methods that engage clients in the therapeutic process (Langmaid and Begum, 2024). These strategies serve to enhance self-awareness and foster a deeper understanding of personal responses to current life situations, ultimately empowering clients to make informed choices that align with their true selves.

Individuals are fundamentally viewed as inherently good, endowed with an intrinsic nature that drives them to lead their lives positively and constructively. This perspective underscores the importance of self-awareness, emphasizing a phenomenological approach that focuses on the present moment, often referred to as the "here and now."

Key concepts associated with this view include paradoxical change, where accepting and embracing one's current state can paradoxically lead to transformation and growth. Additionally, there is a strong emphasis on personal responsibility; individuals are encouraged to take ownership of their choices and consequences, fostering empowerment and agency (Berry, 2023).

The idea of closure plays a crucial role in helping individuals process their experiences and emotions, allowing them to move forward rather than remain stuck in the past. Lastly, the connection to one's body is critical, promoting an awareness of how physical sensations and bodily experiences can influence emotional states and thoughts, thereby reinforcing the notion that a holistic understanding of oneself is vital for personal development.

This experiential counselling goes beyond traditional talk-based approaches by incorporating hands-on activities that engage clients in creative and emotional ways. This type of therapy can include various expressive modalities such as music, visual arts, and nature exploration, allowing individuals to tap into their emotions and experiences dynamically and interactively. By identifying and processing attached experiences and emotions, clients can achieve a deeper understanding of their feelings and behaviours.

Gestalt counsellors specifically focus on the unique needs and experiences of each client, employing a flexible approach that encourages improvisation and adaptation of techniques to suit individual circumstances (Francesetti et al., 2013) and (Ndhlovu and Mwanza, 2025). This individualized method often integrates aspects of other therapeutic modalities, particularly cognitive-behavioural therapies, to provide a well-rounded treatment experience.

Some of the commonly employed techniques in Gestalt therapy and counselling include the empty chair technique, which allows clients to engage in role-playing dialogues with an imagined person or aspect of themselves; exaggeration, dramatization, which encourages clients to amplify a gesture or feeling to uncover deeper meaning; and the use of "I" statements to promote personal accountability and self-expression. Other techniques may involve confrontation to challenge clients' defences, creative or physical activities to foster engagement, dream analysis to delve into unconscious thoughts, and the exploration of the "top dog" and "underdog" dynamics within the self to highlight internal conflicts (Begum, 2024).

Amendt-Lyon (2020) explored the journey of cultivating a personal style as a Gestalt therapist, emphasizing that this evolution is an ongoing and lifelong endeavour. Throughout our training, it is common to find ourselves mirroring the techniques and approaches of our trainers or the personal psychotherapists and supervisors who have guided us. However, developing a distinct personal style in Gestalt therapy is deeply rooted in nurturing one's creative process, replenishing vital emotional and intellectual resources, and embracing the unexpected turns

that therapeutic encounters often present. The author explores how the dynamic interplay between theoretical concepts and interventions arising from these therapeutic relationships has enriched her professional experience. Additionally, she introduces a contemporary model for Gestalt supervision that illustrates this holistic approach to personal and professional growth.

Some scholars, including Danquah (2023), have underscored the role of arts as therapeutic interventions, drawing specifically from the experiences of counsellors in Ghana who utilize Gestalt therapy. The term “Arts” encompasses various art forms such as visual arts, music, photography, dance, and drama—that serve as therapeutic tools. Research documented in professional journals highlights that these creative interventions can be as effective as traditional talk therapy in alleviating symptoms associated with stress and emotional distress. One significant advantage of using art forms is their ability to facilitate emotional expression without the necessity for verbal communication, thereby fostering a unique healing environment.

To explore the experiences of counselling psychologists employing these artistic modalities, a purposive sample of 12 counsellors was selected based on their expertise and exposure to creative arts therapies. This investigation was grounded in Gestalt therapy principles, which emphasize holistic and experiential approaches to understanding clients’ feelings and experiences. The study adopted a qualitative methodology, specifically utilizing hermeneutic phenomenology as its research design, which allowed for deep exploration of the counsellors' reflections and insights.

Thematic analyses of the interviews revealed that creative arts therapies are instrumental in mitigating various psychological issues, such as depression and trauma-related symptoms including dissociation, anxiety, nightmares, and sleep disturbances. Additional positive outcomes highlighted by the counsellors included enhanced emotional regulation, improved interpersonal relationships, and greater confidence in body image and assertiveness. Nevertheless, the study also identified several challenges associated with the implementation of arts as therapy. Key obstacles included a lack of formal training among counsellors in the diverse modalities of artistic expression, inadequate infrastructure to support the integration of arts into therapeutic practices, and negative client perceptions surrounding the legitimacy of arts-based therapies.

Considering these findings, the study recommends ongoing professional development sessions for practising counsellors to elevate their competencies in utilizing art forms as therapeutic interventions. Furthermore, it suggests that psychological associations should recognize, validate, and promote arts-based therapies to alleviate clients' apprehensions and foster a more accepting attitude towards these innovative approaches. Lastly, the study opens avenues for future research by identifying gaps and potential areas for further investigation into the efficacy and integration of arts in therapeutic contexts.

Coetzee (2010) studied the dynamic realm of music education within collaborative group environments, intertwining the foundational principles of Gestalt play therapy specific to the early phases of South African education. In this critical period of child development, group music education emerges as a catalyst for fostering personal growth and creativity. Early childhood is widely acknowledged as a pivotal time for nurturing a child's musical abilities, a period where the seeds of artistic expression are sown.

With the advent of outcomes-based education (OBE) in South Africa, the landscape of music curricula has undergone significant transformation. This research investigates the parallels between group music classes and Gestalt play therapy, seeking to weave together the therapeutic concepts of Gestalt play into the fabric of music group sessions. A thorough examination of relevant legislation was undertaken to uncover the expectations set forth by the South African government, particularly within the education sector, regarding music education.

In recent years, the curriculum has seen a pronounced reduction in the emphasis placed on music in the Foundation Phase compared to previous standards. Consequently, educators find themselves tasked with the responsibility of crafting their own music programs that align with the revised curriculum requirements. This study meticulously analysed the delivery of innovative music group classes that embraced the principles of Gestalt play therapy.

Gestalt play therapy represents a holistic approach that seamlessly integrates the tenets of Gestalt theory with the methodologies of play therapy. The primary objective of this research was to assess the effectiveness of embedding specific stages of Gestalt play therapy into music group classes. The findings underscore the necessity of acknowledging children's developmental milestones—encompassing physical, neurological, cognitive, and linguistic growth—when designing educational experiences. This awareness facilitates the guidance of children toward enhanced self-integration and internal balance.

Examining the principles of outcomes-based education suggests a promising pathway forward, advocating for the continued application of the OBE model with thoughtfully tailored

modifications. An inductive study incorporating practical observations and the execution of creative group classes revealed a concerning trend: many educators lack the requisite qualifications to lead music instruction, resulting in a deficiency of creativity within their teaching practices.

A historical investigation conducted by Sarkissian (1980) assessed the efficacy of a Gestalt training group aimed at equipping counsellors with the influencing skills associated with Gestalt therapy. The research involved eleven counsellors from an experimental group, a matched control group, and four clients who received coaching. A pre-test and post-test research design was implemented. Initially, counsellors in both groups were evaluated for comparability at pre-treatment levels. The dependent variables under scrutiny included the counsellors' response to a split: actual utilization of influencing skills like direct guidance, open questions, and non-verbal referents; intended utilization of the same skills; and the extent of personal growth goal achievement. Post-test assessments were employed to reflect the treatment's effectiveness. During the pre-test, each counsellor conducted a session with a client trained to present a conflict split. The Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed Ranks test was utilized to analyse the counsellors' response to a split and their intended use of influencing skills. The dependent t-test was implemented to assess the actual use of these skills. At the conclusion of the training, a Chi square test of independence was applied to compare both groups regarding their personal growth goal attainment. A Chi square goodness of fit was employed to evaluate the experimental group on their training goal achievement. Findings revealed that the counsellors in the experimental group responded to a split using the Gestalt two-chair technique significantly more often than those in the control group. Furthermore, the experimental group made significantly greater use of the influencing skills of direct guidance and open questions. Additionally, they expressed a significantly higher intention to use non-verbal referents than the control group. Regarding personal growth goal achievement, no significant differences were found between the two groups. The experimental group successfully met their training objectives. In conclusion, this Gestalt training group effectively trained counsellors in influencing skills. However, the benefits of Gestalt counselling techniques in assisting students with peer relationships at a public university in Kitwe remained unexplored.

Holzinger et al. (2015) conducted an exploratory clinical study investigating the efficacy of lucid dreaming (LD) as an adjunct therapy to Gestalt therapy in treating individuals suffering from recurrent nightmares. The study involved thirty-two participants who experienced

nightmares at least twice a week, classified under ICD-10 as F51.5. The participants were randomly assigned to one of two groups: Group A, the Gestalt Therapy Group (GTG), and Group B, the Gestalt and Lucid Dreaming Group (LDG). The intervention spanned a total of ten weeks, during which participants were required to maintain a sleep and dream diary to record their experiences and any changes. Assessments concerning nightmare frequency and overall sleep quality were conducted at multiple points: at baseline, after five weeks, after ten weeks, and during a follow-up three-month post-treatment, utilizing the Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (PSQI) as a benchmarking tool.

Results indicated a significant reduction in nightmare frequency for both groups by the conclusion of the ten-week intervention and this effect was sustained at the three-month follow-up (Wilcoxon test: $P \leq 0.05$). While both groups demonstrated this reduced frequency, a significant decrease in dream recall frequency was uniquely observed in the GTG (Wilcoxon test: $P \leq 0.05$). Notably, those participants who successfully learned the techniques of lucid dreaming reported results that were both earlier and more pronounced in terms of reduction in nightmare occurrences.

Moreover, improvements in sleep quality were evident for participants in both groups at the follow-up assessment ($P \leq 0.05$, Wilcoxon test). However, it was the LDG that showed a statistically significant enhancement in sleep quality specifically at the end of the therapy period ($P \leq 0.05$). These findings suggest that incorporating lucid dreaming techniques within Gestalt therapy presents a compelling approach to not only mitigate the frequency of nightmares but also to enhance the subjective quality of sleep experienced by individuals suffering from these disturbances.

In a study conducted in South Africa, Truby (2010) explored the integration of digital media within the realm of Gestalt play therapy. The findings highlighted a profound truth: the world we inhabit is increasingly shaped by digital media, which has become an integral aspect of countless children's daily lives. Those born within the last three decades are often referred to as 'digital natives', as they have grown up immersed in technology that has always been part of their environment.

This research posits that harnessing such media in play therapy could unveil innovative pathways to foster dialogue with children, especially since these digital tools remain largely

unexplored within therapeutic interventions. By overlooking this potential, therapists may inadvertently miss out on vital opportunities for connection and healing.

Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study utilized an email questionnaire distributed to play therapists across South Africa, aiming to gauge the extent to which digital technology is incorporated into therapeutic practices, the types of media being utilized, and their specific applications. To enhance the robustness of the data, a focus group interview was also conducted using the same questionnaire, thereby ensuring data triangulation and a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

The qualitative analysis of the gathered data yielded significant insights into the present usage of digital media in play therapy. The research expanded the existing knowledge within this field, revealing a more optimistic perspective towards digital technology than the researcher initially anticipated. It became evident that many young individuals, labelled as digital natives, express both a love for digital interactions and concerns regarding the implications of their technological engagement.

Interestingly, the study uncovered that several therapists also harbour cautious views regarding certain aspects of digital technology. This insight suggests that the research could serve as a catalyst, inspiring a shift towards a more open-minded and creative approach to incorporating digital media into therapeutic practice. Rather than retreating from the unknown or viewing it with apprehension, therapists might benefit from embracing the realities of modern life, cultivating a deeper understanding of digital technologies to enhance their therapeutic repertoire.

Ultimately, the research posits that technology can be viewed through a more positive lens, fostering a compassionate understanding of young people who are deeply engaged in digital realms, whether through video games or the pervasive use of smartphones. This new awareness has the potential to usher in meaningful benefits for personal growth and therapeutic development, paving the way for more enriched future engagements.

Through these varied techniques, experiential counselling aims to foster growth, self-awareness, and a stronger connection to one's emotions, ultimately leading to transformative healing and personal development.

2.2 Benefits of Gestalt Counselling

Gestalt theory is one of the counselling theories that have been noted to integrate the whole person into the environment that one exists in. An idea thought of a healthy individual is that he should be aware of his/her life in the present moment and not be preoccupied with the future or the past. Romadhon and Sanyata (2019:147) add that the objectives of Gestalt counsellors are:

“(1) Helping the counselee to reach awareness about what and how to do in which there is an element of self-acceptance, insight, knowledge of the environment, and responsibility for choices; (2) developing the ability to interact with other people or their environment; (3) can recognize, accept, express feelings, thoughts and beliefs himself.”

Arising from the foregoing, it is seen from the literature that Gestalt counsellors try to increase awareness of the client about themselves, their habitat and the choices they must make. Gestalt counselling helps clients understand themselves as they interact with other humans and the environment and increases acceptance of oneself in diverse contexts.

Gestalt counselling has been seen to be approaches that integrate specific techniques that help clients bring about awareness and take the necessary steps in their personal growth. Seligman and Reichenberg (2020) add that flexibility has been noted to be one of the strengths of Gestalt counselling. It has been seen to integrate well with other approaches like transactional analysis, person-centered counselling, cognitive behavioural development, mindfulness meditation and brief therapies.

The writing of Brownell (2016) significantly enriches our understanding of Gestalt counselling by emphasizing the intricate processes and structures through which individuals organize and interpret their perceived realities. This perspective revolves around the concept of discovery, highlighting how personal experiences shape one's worldview. Brownell posits that Gestalt counselling operates within a hermeneutic and phenomenological framework, which is realized through the dynamic relationship between therapist and client, particularly in the context of complex and often challenging situations.

Gestalt theorists and practitioners have evolved the therapy's foundational principles into a sophisticated, multifaceted approach that transcends mere multimodality. This evolution is

firmly grounded in a robust philosophical foundation, drawing heavily from continental philosophy and contemporary scientific insights. At its core, Gestalt counselling is characterized by its phenomenological nature, focusing on the individual's lived experiences and perceptions.

Central to this approach is its relational and dialogical emphasis, where the therapeutic relationship itself becomes a critical medium for personal growth. The therapy is also anchored in field theory, which considers the various environmental and contextual factors that influence human behaviour. Additionally, it embraces a strategic methodology, allowing for flexible and tailored interventions that meet the unique needs of clients.

Existential experimentation is another hallmark of Gestalt counselling, encouraging individuals to engage with their experiences in the moment, fostering self-awareness and personal accountability. This unified practice of 'contacting' that is, establishing meaningful engagement with oneself and others pulls together the diverse elements of the Gestalt counselling framework into a coherent theoretical approach.

Moreover, a burgeoning body of research is ongoing, providing empirical support for the philosophical underpinnings of Gestalt counselling. This research has demonstrated that Gestalt counselling is not only effective but is, in many instances, at least as effective as other psychotherapy modalities, substantiating its place within the broader mental health landscape. In summary, Brownell's insights contribute to a deeper appreciation of Gestalt counselling as a rich, relational, and scientifically supported approach to psychotherapy (Brownell, 2016).

O'Leary (2021) examined person-centred gestalt therapy, highlighting that this counselling approach operates on the foundational belief that emotional, social, and spiritual development can potentially extend throughout one's lifetime, provided there is no significant cognitive decline. This concept emphasizes the importance of "present experiencing," which encompasses a comprehensive understanding of feelings, thoughts, behaviours, and bodily sensations. Central to person-centred gestalt therapy is the therapeutic relationship, which manifests in various forms: notably, the client-therapist dynamic, the interaction between trainees or professionals and their facilitators in personal development groups, and the connections among group members themselves as they engage with the group therapist.

This approach integrates two core humanistic methodologies and is inherently grounded in existential and humanistic assumptions. Healing is conceptualized as unfolding over three distinct phases within the therapy process, facilitated by a relationship characterized by empathy, unconditional positive regard, and authenticity. Additionally, clients are encouraged to achieve eight specific task-outcomes throughout this journey, which collectively enhance the therapeutic experience. This integration of approaches empowers the therapeutic framework, making it more effective than either individual method could achieve in isolation.

Barlow (2016) conducted an extensive literature review exploring the intersection of Gestalt therapeutic practice, physiotherapy, and the treatment of individuals suffering from chronic pain. Barlow noted that interest in chronic pain management had been a significant aspect of his career from the onset of his practice as a physiotherapist. Chronic pain is alarmingly prevalent within the community, affecting approximately one in five individuals under the age of 65 and escalating to one in three for those over 65. Such pain can constitute a substantial source of suffering and distress, profoundly influencing various aspects of a person's life, including emotional well-being and social interactions.

Patients living with chronic pain often seek assistance from a multitude of healthcare professionals; however, they can be perceived as challenging due to the high levels of anger, distress, and suffering they commonly exhibit. Several physiotherapists and other healthcare providers may even avoid engagement with these patients due to the emotional toll their reactions impose. Nonetheless, evidence indicates that individuals suffering from chronic pain respond favourably to a holistic, relational approach that prioritizes validation of their experiences and acknowledges their lived realities.

Through my training as a Gestalt therapist, I transformed my previous feelings of anxiety and uncertainty when confronted with clients enduring chronic pain. This training endowed me with a deeper understanding, insight, empathy, and compassion regarding my own responses and those of my clients, fostering a more meaningful connection during therapy. Interventions rooted in this understanding have been shown to enhance patient outcomes, as deeper engagement tends to reduce levels of disability and improve overall quality of life. The following literature review is a culmination of my experiences as a physiotherapist practicing Gestalt therapy, offering insights into how individuals with chronic pain interpret their

experiences and how my enhanced understanding can effectively support their recovery journey.

Öztürk (2019) conducted a study aimed at enhancing university students' self-awareness and supporting their personal development through a structured intervention known as the "Gestalt Group Program," which is based on the principles of Gestalt Therapy. The research involved twelve participants, consisting of university students enrolled in the second, third, and fourth years of the Faculty of Education.

The intervention comprised eight interactive group sessions, each lasting 120 minutes. These sessions were designed to encourage participation, foster meaningful discussions, and facilitate experiential learning among the students. To gather comprehensive data for the study, the researcher employed qualitative research methods, specifically utilizing the content analysis technique.

For data collection, two tools were developed: a "Personal Information Form" to gather demographic and background information about the participants, and a "Gestalt Group Program Evaluation Form" to assess their experiences and insights gained from the program. The qualitative data obtained from these forms were then rigorously analysed using the content analysis method, allowing for the identification of common themes and patterns in participants' responses. The findings revealed that the "Gestalt Group Program" significantly enhanced the students' self-awareness, leading to a greater understanding of themselves and their interpersonal dynamics. The study underscores the effectiveness of Gestalt Therapy principles in educational settings, particularly for personal growth among university students.

Vela and Buscemi (2023) explored the relationship between Gestalt psychotherapy and chronic patients coping with the profound experience of loss, particularly through an aesthetic Gaze. Their writing elaborates on Gestalt therapy's unique holistic, relational, and field-oriented approach, highlighting its capacity to create a supportive environment in complex settings like oncology. In such contexts, therapists can foster a space that accepts and contains the feelings of disorientation that accompany the loss of physical integrity, as well as the shifts in family and social roles that individuals face upon receiving a cancer diagnosis. The authors emphasize that addressing grief is essential for supporting patients in integrating their illness into their life experiences and bodily awareness.

In this chapter, they present a detailed clinical case study to illustrate various psychotherapeutic tools designed to assist individuals enduring oncological illness. The authors aim to honour the profound feelings of loss experienced not only by the patient but also by their family members. They focus on facilitating the intentionality that emerge from the dramatic reality of their situation. Working with patients grappling with chronic illness requires psychotherapists to serve as a stable and reassuring presence, helping them navigate the intense fear and uncertainty that can arise. Together, both therapist and patient can confront the multitude of unresolved, distressing, and highly variable emotions that surface in the face of such life-altering challenges.

In a study conducted by Taghipour et al. (2020), the researchers aimed to explore the efficacy of group gestalt therapy in alleviating anxiety sensitivity and rumination among women diagnosed with panic disorder. This semi-experimental study employed a pre-test and post-test design, incorporating a control group, and was carried out at a psychological clinic in Ardabil during the summer of 2018. A total of 30 patients, carefully selected through an availability sampling method, were randomly assigned into two equal groups: an experimental group that underwent therapy and a control group that did not receive any intervention.

Participants were chosen based on a structured clinical interview assessing Axis I disorders. The experimental group engaged in an intensive eight-week program of gestalt therapy, while the control group simply continued their regular follow-up visits without additional treatment. To measure the outcomes, the research utilized validated questionnaires assessing anxiety sensitivity (Floyd et al., 2005) and rumination (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991) at both pre-test and post-test phases.

The data were analysed using descriptive statistics and analysis of covariance, which allowed the researchers to draw meaningful interpretations. The results demonstrated a significant difference in the post-test scores between the experimental group and the control group, particularly in terms of anxiety sensitivity and rumination ($p < 0.01$). This indicates that group gestalt psychotherapy effectively reduced levels of anxiety sensitivity and rumination among women dealing with panic disorder.

Despite these findings, there remains a notable gap in understanding how gestalt counselling techniques might influence students' peer relationships, specifically within the context of a

public university in Kitwe. Arising from this, further exploration in this area could provide valuable insights into the broader applications of gestalt therapy.

Cavanagh et al. (2024) provided an examination of personal therapy as a standard, mandatory component of counselling and psychotherapy training programs in the United Kingdom. Previous studies have established that this practice offers trainees a distinctive learning environment characterized by self-reflection and personal growth; however, it also incurs significant financial and emotional costs that can impact trainees' overall well-being. Critics of this requirement argue that mandating personal therapy raises ethical concerns, particularly regarding accessibility and equity.

At the core of many relational modalities, such as Gestalt psychotherapy, is the intricate relationship between client and therapist, underscoring the need for further research into how trainees perceive and experience existing training methodologies. In the current study, we recruited 11 trainee Gestalt practitioners and conducted one-on-one semi-structured interviews to delve into their personal experiences with engaging in personal therapy.

The analysis yielded several salient themes through reflexive thematic analysis. Trainees expressed that while they perceived personal therapy to bring about significant professional and personal benefits—such as enhanced self-awareness, improved therapeutic skills, and better emotional resilience, they also acknowledged the substantial financial burden and emotional strain associated with the therapy process. Most trainees identified personal therapy as an essential pillar of their educational experience, emphasizing its role in fostering their professional identity. However, they expressed a desire to participate in discussions regarding how this component of their training is structured and implemented.

Based on these findings, the study recommends that training providers and professional organizations create dialogue-oriented spaces that empower trainees to actively contribute to the shaping of personal therapy guidelines. Additionally, future research should pay particular attention to the barriers faced by minority clients and trainees, ensuring a more inclusive and equitable training environment.

Young (2024) explored the intricate relationship between gestures and affect, emphasizing that gestures carry emotional weight and depth. During a somatic therapy session, a woman

vividly envisions an embryo undergoing gastrulation, depicted through her gesturing in the space immediately in front of her body. This gesture serves as a multifaceted icon, simultaneously representing her envisioned baby, an ethereal presence of a baby in a dream, her aspirational future self, and the inner workings of her own body.

Through her tactile-kinaesthetic engagement, she makes these abstract and virtual entities not only visible to herself but also tangible for her listeners. As she palpates these imagined forms—her virtual interior, the essence of her past and future selves, and the representation of other potential beings—she experiences profound emotional resonance and personal transformation.

The act of gesturing, especially in conjunction with spoken words, plays a crucial role in shaping the meaning behind the dialogue. Co-speech gestures are not mere embellishments; they actively influence the emotional undertones and the significance feelings the gesturer associates with the verbal message. This capacity for self-affectation is central not only to the therapeutic principles of somatic psychology but also to how individuals express and modulate their emotions during everyday interactions. Ultimately, the way in which gestures can embody and convey personal and relational meaning underscores their importance in both therapeutic and communicative contexts.

Valerie (2016) conducted an exploration of Gestalt therapy through a comprehensive case study involving an inpatient diagnosed with co-occurring substance use and bipolar disorders. The objective of the paper was to shed light on the often unaddressed challenges faced by specific patient populations, particularly those grappling with substance use disorders and/or personality disorders. These individuals frequently experience complexities such as "multimorbidity," "over-diagnosis," and "diagnosis overlap," which complicate their treatment.

Valerie's study began by providing a thorough overview of key Gestalt therapy concepts, emphasizing its foundational principles. The study elaborated on the significance of the "here and now" and awareness, illustrating how these concepts were applied during 18 therapy sessions with the patient. This individual was not only dealing with substance use and bipolar disorders but also contended with an ongoing criminal charge, was suspected of having an antisocial personality disorder, and reported symptoms consistent with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

During the two-month therapy period, a transformative process unfolded for the patient. For the first time, he engaged in a daily rehabilitation program within the community, demonstrating notable progress after several prior hospitalizations. The therapeutic focus on developing awareness in the "here and now" facilitated the patient's exploration of various contact styles and cycles of experience. This process enabled him to cultivate a deeper connection with himself, uncovering his genuine needs and enhancing his interactions with his environment.

The improvement in his self-awareness and interpersonal contact significantly contributed to his overall well-being. As a result, the patient experienced a marked reduction in relapse rates, both in terms of substance use and criminal activities, paving the way for his successful rehabilitation and reintegration into society. Through this case study, Valerie highlighted the effectiveness of Gestalt therapy in addressing the complex needs of individuals with overlapping diagnoses, ultimately advocating for a more nuanced understanding of therapeutic approaches in mental health care.

Manton (2014) conducted an exploration of the application of Gestalt field theories to address the complexities inherent in stepfamily dynamics. This investigation was informed by relevant data indicating that by the year 2000, stepfamilies had emerged as the predominant family structure in the United States. In Australia, trends are mirroring this evolution; current estimates suggest that approximately 40% of all women and 30% of all children will spend some portion of their lives within a stepfamily environment. Furthermore, it is notable that 65% of remarriages occur where at least one participant has children from a previous relationship.

Gestalt field principles serve as a robust framework for effectively navigating the unique challenges posed by stepfamily situations. These principles extend beyond traditional family systems approaches by incorporating both the individual bounded family dynamics and the broader field-based forces that significantly influence the interpersonal processes within stepfamilies. By employing Gestalt field concepts, practitioners can gain a deeper understanding of the intricate and multifaceted nature of stepfamily interactions. This approach allows for a more thorough investigation of the various emotional and relational processes concurrently at play among family members, fostering a more holistic understanding of their experiences and challenges.

Thomas et al. (2022) investigated the integration of religion and spirituality with Gestalt psychotherapy to address clinical symptoms, drawing from preliminary findings in Gestalt pastoral care. An existing tension between religion and psychotherapy has limited discussion between these two areas regarding effective methods for enhancing mental health outcomes for individuals of faith. Preliminary research indicates that the intersection of these fields may yield beneficial mental health interventions.

As part of a larger big-data study supported by the Bridges Consortium at Brigham Young University and funded by the John Templeton Foundation, this study by Thomas aimed to assess the effectiveness of spiritually integrated strategies within Gestalt Pastoral Care (GPC) with two primary objectives: (a) to determine the overall clinical effectiveness of GPC, which had not been previously scientifically validated, and (b) to evaluate the effectiveness of GPC in reducing symptoms commonly reported by clients, using empirically validated clinical measures.

Employing a practice-based research design, the study followed 324 participants engaging in individual or multi person retreat formats over a period of up to one year. The measures used included the Clinically Adaptive Multidimensional Outcome Survey (CAMOS), the Clinical Outcomes in Routine Evaluation (CORE-10), the Primary Care PTSD Screen for DSM-5 (PC-PTSD-5), and the Spiritual Index of Well-Being (SIWB). A series of paired t-tests were conducted to compare outcomes from the initial session (pretreatment) to the final session (posttreatment), revealing significant improvements across all clinical measures. The data suggest that there may be a stronger relationship between symptom reduction and treatment delivery in a retreat setting.

Praszkier (2021) emphasizes the role of synchronization in transforming patients' dysfunctional patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours into functional ones. This article thoroughly delineates the concept of synchronization in psychotherapy, illustrating its feasibility through the lens of the free energy principle a theoretical framework that posits that the brain strives to minimize surprise by continuously updating its predictions based on incoming sensory information. While most publications focused on synchronization primarily examine the therapist-patient relationship, this article shifts the focus to the therapeutic process itself. It analyses how dysfunctional cognitive and emotional units both within an individual's psyche

and in their social interactions can assemble in a state of synchrony, contributing to maladaptive behaviours.

Furthermore, the article explores how psychotherapy facilitates the disassembly of these dysfunctional units, replacing them with newly formed, functional ones that promote healthier thought patterns and interpersonal dynamics. Gestalt psychology and Gestalt psychotherapy serve as prime examples within this context, illustrating the principles of synchronization through real-life case studies that highlight the therapeutic journey of clients. These case studies provide concrete evidence of how psychotherapy can effectively restore harmony within the person's mental landscape and social interactions.

The conclusion drawn herein emphasizes that understanding synchronization offers a valuable gateway into the dynamics of change that occur within psychotherapy. This insight not only enriches the theoretical understanding of therapeutic processes but also highlights the necessity for further research into synchronization as a pivotal factor in effective psychotherapy practices.

Du-Coudray (2020) observes that higher education policy increasingly frames industry-linked, service-oriented, and place-based educational models as forms of experiential learning. While this shift toward experience holds potential, it risks transforming and commercializing experience, a concern that is intensified by individualistic approaches to experiential learning. Purpose: Consequently, some researchers have advocated for more sociologically informed analyses of experiential learning, urging a closer examination of how individual experiences are intertwined with social, cultural, or environmental contexts.

This article by Du-Coudray addresses that call by clarifying the practice of Gestalt counselling, which is often linked to the individualistic human potential movement but provides a basis for redefining both the theory and teaching of experiential education in a more sociological light. A concise overview of the history of Gestalt therapy highlights its sociological and experiential foundations, followed by an explanation of its three core principles (dedication to dialogue, phenomenology, and field theory). Findings showed this framework is demonstrated to bolster a theory and practice of experiential education that is more sociologically grounded while also accommodating diverse interpretations of experience. In light of the shift toward experiential learning in higher education and the increasing prominence of collaborative social processes,

articulating experiential education more explicitly through the lens of Gestalt praxis offers a significant enhancement for both areas, aimed at promoting socially responsible goals. With such literature the need to explore the benefits of Gestalt counselling techniques to peer relations challenges among students at a public university in Kitwe.

In a study by Stripling (2021), it highlights Gestalt counselling as a versatile therapeutic approach that resonates deeply with a variety of groups. While much of the existing qualitative and quantitative research on Gestalt therapy has primarily centered on adult populations, this literature review shifts the focus to the promising benefits of Gestalt methods when applied to children and adolescents. The findings indicate that engaging in Gestalt therapy can profoundly enhance several key areas for younger individuals, including emotional self-expression, effective conflict resolution, and establishing meaningful connections with therapists. Additionally, it fosters overall well-being, boosts self-esteem, and sharpens communication skills, while also contributing to a reduction in symptoms of depression and anxiety, both for the children and their parents, as well as alleviating trauma symptoms.

Although the body of research is still evolving, it is noteworthy that eight studies conducted after the year 2000 have substantiated the effectiveness of Gestalt interventions for this demographic. The implications of these findings for Gestalt practice and future research focused on children and adolescents are explored, underscoring the need for continued exploration in this essential therapeutic field. What was yet to be known was how the empty chair gestalt counselling technique helped students with peer relationship challenges at a public university in Kitwe.

Gading (2020) conducted a study in Indonesia aimed at assessing the effectiveness of group counselling based on the Gestalt approach in reducing academic procrastination among high school students. The research employed an experimental design featuring a post-test-only control group format. The study targeted four high schools identified as having students with notably high levels of academic procrastination. A total of 61 students exhibiting significant procrastination tendencies were selected as participants. These students were randomly assigned to either an experimental group that received the Gestalt-based group counselling intervention or a control group that did not receive any such treatment, ensuring that each school was represented in both groups. To measure academic procrastination behaviour, the study utilized the Academic Procrastination Behaviour Measurement Instrument, which was administered both before the intervention and after its completion. The data collected was

rigorously analysed, and the effectiveness of the intervention was evaluated using a t-test to compare the pre- and post-treatment scores of both groups. The findings of the study indicated a statistically significant reduction in academic procrastination behaviours among students in the experimental group compared to those in the control group, suggesting that group counselling utilizing the Gestalt approach is an effective strategy for addressing academic procrastination in high school students

In a review conducted by Raffagnino (2019) from Italy, eleven studies published in esteemed international peer-reviewed journals were analyzed to assess the current landscape of literature surrounding the effectiveness of Gestalt counselling. The selected papers, all published between 2007 and 2018 in both English and Italian, offered a diverse range of insights into this therapeutic approach. The findings highlighted that Gestalt counselling demonstrates notable effectiveness, particularly in group settings, supported by its distinct concepts, methodologies, and techniques. This therapeutic model was regarded as a viable and acceptable option within the realm of humanistic therapies, highlighting comparability to other established clinical frameworks. However, the review also underscored a significant deficiency in research aimed at bridging the gap between theoretical exploration and practical application in clinical settings, indicating a pressing need for further investigation in this area.

Other studies conducted on Gestalt counselling can be seen from the works by Romadhon and Sanyata (2019) who looked at the implementation of Gestalt counselling to overcome parental divorce trauma in adolescents. The research was a review of the results of five (5) research journal articles that were purposefully sampled in order of relevance to the topic of the Gestalt counselling approach to overcome the trauma of divorce victims. Some of the findings included: Gestalt being established as an approach that was effective in dealing with trauma in children, adolescents and adults, and that Gestalt counselling was ideal in individual and group settings in school guidance and counseling. The study also highlighted the stages of Gestalt counselling in helping adolescents with trauma that resulted from parental divorce. In the face of such literature, it is still not known how helpful the empty chair and body language techniques of Gestalt are counselling to students with peer relationship problems in universities.

Peterson and Gough (2019) looked at the applications of Gestalt counselling in rehabilitation counselling for deafness. This study was conducted in the United States of America, confirms

that Gestalt is suitable to use in helping clients with disabilities as it was a theory that avoids stereotyping regarding individuals with disability. The theory encourages individuality, self-acceptance, and autonomy that are cardinal issues in rehabilitation. Even in the case of working with clients with disability the key in the Gestalt counselling process was to establish dialogue in the client and counsellor relationship to raise awareness. Because Gestalt theory emphasizes the whole and not the parts, the focus is not on the disability but the whole person hence acceptance is achieved. The here-and-now focus on Gestalt encourages awareness and processing of issues in the present using a wide range of techniques.

Asuman (2019) did a qualitative study in Turkey to explore Gestalt group practice to increase awareness among university students. The study employed university students in the second, third and fourth-year grades in about 8 sessions. The study explored a Gestalt group program that was found to have a positive impact on the participants as they were seen to have an increase in awareness. The Gestalt group program supported the personal development of the students by increasing awareness and contact styles. Other areas in the study above that showed improvement include a decrease in anxiety, a positive change in self-concept, self-efficacy, and the development of interpersonal skills. There was an increase in personal awareness in areas like (emotional, mental and physical dimensions). This study showed that there was some form of enhancing the Gestalt counselling through the ‘Gestalt group program’ that the research developed and used. From this study it could also be seen that Gestalt being a field theory gave room for some level of initiative on the part of the experiment.

Several researchers have looked at the effectiveness of Gestalt counselling over a wide range of challenges that affect individuals. For instance, Rizal et al. (2020) investigated the effectiveness of Gestalt counselling in overcoming unfinished business using library research. The research used a qualitative approach to collect data. The study identified six stages of Gestalt counselling in resolving unfinished business, established some strategies used in Gestalt counselling to address unfinished businesses in individuals and lastly stated the benefits of Gestalt counselling including raising awareness by taking important facets of one’s past and bringing them into the present, paying attention to nonverbal and body language, communicating immediacy as well as stimulating relationships.

Gestalt counselling has also been seen to help deal with clients with disorders like schizophrenia. Scholars like Uhlhaas (2009) explored Gestalt perceptions in schizophrenia

spectrum disorders. The research examined a hypothesis that schizophrenia spectrum disorders were characterized by Gestalt perception impairment. The examination used participants that had elevated levels of schizo type; both acute and chronic patients with schizophrenia and those with non-schizophrenia psychotic disorders were assessed on three Gestalt measures of perception. The findings were discussed from views of models of cognition that impaired Gestalt perceptions are a result of comprehensive impairment in the cognitive coordination of neural and cognitive activity. The findings also showed that dysfunctional Gestalt perception in the schizophrenia disorder spectrum was related to impairments in both the processing of concurrent and preceding context. The hypothesis was confirmed as the spectrum disorders displayed in all studies reduced in response to Gestalt properties of stimuli.

Gestalt counselling is an integrative therapy that allows combining it with other models of counselling. Mokrivala et al (2022) compared the effectiveness of Gestalt counselling on its own and when it was combined with cognitive behavioural counselling. The study employed a quasi-experiment that had a control group, a pre-test and a post-test design. The convenient sampling method was used to select 60 patients though 57 completed the test that had breast cancer out of a population of 90. The findings were that Gestalt counselling helped breast cancer patients to have hope and as such there was a significant decrease in pain intensity scores. The other finding was related to Gestalt counselling being integrated with cognitive behaviour counselling which showed a higher effectiveness in dealing with patients with breast cancer than the use of only Gestalt counselling. Following this, based on its findings, the study recommended using integrated methods.

A study conducted by Nizar and Cerkez in 2020 focused on the impact of group counseling utilizing Gestalt therapy to address psychological disorders, specifically depression, anxiety, and stress, among Yezidi women who have escaped from the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. The research aimed to determine how Gestalt group psychotherapy could help alleviate the flashbacks associated with their traumatic experiences, thereby aiding these women in moving forward and starting anew. The study involved 15 women aged between 14 and 24, who were selected from the Bersiv Camp 2 located in Zakho city, Northern Iraq. To assess the levels of depression, anxiety, and stress among the participants, the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale was employed. Data analysis was performed using independent sample t-tests to compare the pretest and posttest scores of the participants. Findings revealed that the Yezidi women

initially exhibited significant levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. However, following two months of group counseling with Gestalt therapy techniques, there was a notable reduction in these psychological symptoms. The results showed statistically significant differences in the levels of depression, anxiety, and stress before and after the intervention.

Trebski (2022) conducted a study on the contributions of Gestalt therapy to the fields of social work and client guidance. Within this research, key features and underlying principles of Gestalt therapy were explained, emphasizing its relevance in therapeutic settings. The study also examined a specific group of patients, women who have undergone treatment for breast cancer and are now facing symptoms associated with post-COVID syndrome.

This research is currently being carried out across several centers in Italy and Poland, specifically designed to support women battling breast cancer and addressing its multifaceted consequences. The study involved 200 participants, all women aged between 40 and 60, who were selected using purposive sampling to ensure a representative demographic with the required experiences. A qualitative approach was employed, utilizing semi-structured interviews as a primary method for data collection, allowing for in-depth exploration of the participants' experiences and expectations.

Preliminary findings indicate that the women in the study express a strong desire for key qualities from social workers performing the role of Gestalt therapists. These qualities include honesty, authenticity, reciprocity, tolerance, a non-judgmental attitude, accountability, and empowerment. The participants indicated that fostering genuine, collaborative relationships with their social workers helped them build confidence, thereby creating a conducive environment for personal change and emotional healing. The respondents highlighted that such supportive relationships enhance their awareness and sense of responsibility over their own healing process. Additionally, patients noted that they would have benefited from the guidance of social workers trained in Gestalt therapy, both during their cancer treatment and in the subsequent recovery phase. Many participants reported experiencing a reduction in various symptoms related to post-COVID syndrome, including mood swings, depression, anxiety, heightened stress reactions, and sleep disturbances. Various therapeutic exercises conducted by social workers, incorporating Gestalt techniques, contributed to a sense of physical and psychological relaxation among these patients, which in turn positively influenced their sleep patterns.

The study underscores the need for future research to adopt and further develop a client-centered model of guidance in social work that is rooted in humanistic and existential values, alongside integrating therapeutic aspects of social work. There is also a critical demand for updated training programs for social workers that are aligned with Gestalt therapy principles to adequately prepare them for this integrated approach to client support. Implementing these recommendations could enhance the effectiveness of guidance in social work, benefiting patients by navigating complex health challenges.

Reck (2009) points out that in evaluating the cultural suitability and sensitivity of theoretical orientations, the foundational theories of these orientations are frequently neglected, with more focus placed on the efficacy and effectiveness of interventions and techniques. Nevertheless, since interventions should ideally be rooted in solid theoretical principles, it is crucial to analyze the underlying values of these theoretical orientations. As a case study, Gestalt therapy was explored as a distinct theoretical approach. Many practitioners of Gestalt therapy describe it as exceptionally sensitive and adaptable to clients from various cultural backgrounds due to its philosophical, theoretical, and methodological inclusiveness and openness. A review of the implicit values associated with the central principle of organismic self-regulation aimed to assess whether this principle represents a universal process of operation or is simply a culture-specific heuristic. The investigation delved into how the philosophical foundations, theoretical stance, and methodological approach of Gestalt therapy influence the application of organismic self-regulation when working with clients from diverse cultural backgrounds. It was found that organismic self-regulation consists of two interrelated levels, one of which can be readily adjusted to suit various clients as it accommodates different cultural norms and traditions, enabling Gestalt therapists to maintain theoretical consistency while working with clients from different cultures.

In a study conducted in Northampton, Borkan (2017) explored the profound impact of Gestalt therapy training on therapists as they navigate clinical encounters related to gender identity. The insights gathered from Gestalt therapists highlighted several critical themes, including the essential role of authenticity, the importance of genuine contact with clients, and a keen ability to question personal biases. These therapists emphasized the significance of self-examination and personal responsibility, alongside a deep awareness of their own gender identity privileges and the oppressions that others may experience.

The research reveals a contrast between the core principles of Gestalt therapy and the framework of anti-oppressive practice, suggesting that there are strikingly compatible philosophies underpinning both approaches. Participants in this study, along with the author, put forth several recommendations for future research directions. They advocate for a deeper exploration into the efficacy of Gestalt therapy training across diverse identities. Additionally, they call for collecting perspectives from individuals with marginalized identities to enrich the understanding of their therapeutic experiences with Gestalt-trained professionals.

Levin (2010), in a study about Gestalt therapy for the present and future, posits that Gestalt therapy has introduced a new way of knowing to psychology that contests the mechanistic, technical, and outcome-focused perspectives of scientists and globalization. Gestalt therapy is now prepared to express this epistemological and ontological transition from a focus on heroic utilitarianism to one of respectful hospitality. The notion of growth in Gestalt therapy encompasses the organism's capacity to collaboratively create, alongside its environment, a space where its needs and life resources come together to establish a place for human existence. By suggesting a space of habitation, or at times, rehabilitation, Gestalt therapy provides more than simple treatment; it emphasizes the importance of healing. Rehabilitation calls for and evokes a sense of belonging, a comforting space that symbolizes home for everyone. Healing cannot exist without rehabilitation, nor can rehabilitation occur without healing. This journeying and dwelling process, which constitutes the essence of psychotherapy, invites individuals to sacred ground. An unhealthy environment and community can be just as detrimental to a person as a troubled mind. Our times demand a healer who is committed to nurturing both the community and the environment by tackling a variety of political and socio-economic challenges, including globalization, as well as the deeper transpersonal and spiritual aspects of people's inner lives.

In Kenya, Ngeno (2022) delved into Gestaltic ideas and principles within the realm of bereavement counseling, particularly in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, which significantly altered the landscape of mental health care. The study employed secondary data to conduct an extensive review of existing literature related to bereavement, alongside insights gained from private practice experiences with families and individuals who were navigating the complexities of grief during this unprecedented time.

The literature review highlighted several foundational principles of Gestalt Therapy that are particularly relevant to bereavement counseling: holism, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of emotional and physical experiences; the figure-ground principle that focuses on recognizing and prioritizing immediate feelings over background distractions; personal responsibility, which encourages individuals to take ownership of their emotional responses; heightened awareness, which facilitates a better understanding of one's feelings and processes; and the importance of living fully in the present moment, despite the pain of loss.

The findings of Ngeno's study suggested a pressing need to broaden the methodologies employed in psychotherapy for bereavement. It became evident that, in many communities, bereavement practices leaned heavily towards spiritual approaches rather than evidence-based psychological frameworks. This imbalance highlighted the opportunity for integrating scientific techniques with cultural beliefs, thereby fostering a more comprehensive support system for those in grief. By acknowledging and addressing both spiritual and psychological dimensions of grief, practitioners could deliver more effective and culturally sensitive care to bereaved individuals and families.

In a comprehensive case report conducted in Nigeria, Igbokwe et al. (2012) explored the necessity of employing diverse strategies when addressing various aspects of a complex psychological case to facilitate effective interventions. The report emphasized the importance of evidence-based treatment, highlighting the need for therapeutic approaches that are tailored to address specific issues faced by clients. The study particularly focused on Gestalt therapy, which was identified as a valuable method for aiding clients in resolving feelings of guilt within the therapeutic alliance. Gestalt therapy provides therapists with the flexibility to experiment with different techniques, allowing for a more adaptive approach in helping clients achieve emotional closure. Furthermore, the findings suggested that Gestalt therapeutic approaches could be effectively integrated into an assimilative integrative psychotherapy framework in Nigeria. This consideration is especially pertinent given the country's unique cultural context, which differs significantly from the cultural origins of the Gestalt theory. This integration underscores the potential of tailoring psychotherapeutic modalities to align with the cultural and social nuances of Nigerian clients, enhancing the efficacy of mental health interventions.

In a study conducted by Long (2010) in South Africa, the focus was on understanding the intricate ways South African expatriate families acclimatize to a markedly different

environment, specifically the vibrant city of Dubai in the Middle East. This metropolis, renowned for its rapid development and diverse culture, has become home to a significant number of South African expatriates—estimated between 40,000 and 100,000 who find employment across various sectors, including hospitality, medicine, construction, education, and financial services. As these families navigate life in Dubai, they encounter a myriad of challenges stemming from the stark contrasts in laws, climates, cultures, religions, and social systems compared to their homeland. Many face an emotional landscape fraught with feelings of isolation, grief, and loneliness, exacerbated by unfamiliar living conditions and a dramatic shift in lifestyle that can plunge them into crises. Such challenges may lead to familial conflicts and financial strains that put additional pressure on their adjustment process.

Given the substantial population of South African families in Dubai, this study sought to explore not only how these families adapt to their new circumstances but also to develop therapeutic strategies tailored to their needs. Utilizing a phenomenological approach, the researcher sought to deeply understand the lived experiences of six South African families, complementing in-depth interviews with fifteen participants from a focus group. Audio recordings of these discussions were carefully transcribed to ensure the rich details of their experiences were captured accurately. Remarkably, three children chose to share their feelings through drawings, adding a poignant visual layer to the study.

Through comprehensive analysis, six recurring themes emerged from the data: social support, personality factors, environmental conditions, acculturation, grief, and disillusionment. These findings served as a foundation for the researcher to devise five therapeutic Gestalt techniques aimed at enhancing communication and connection among expatriate family members. Three of these techniques were crafted specifically for this study, while the other two were adapted from established Gestalt practices. This research aspires to enrich the existing body of knowledge surrounding Gestalt therapy techniques for families and children, while also contributing to current understandings of expatriate adjustment and the associated psychological effects of this unique experience. Even in the face of such literature, what was not known was how the empty chair and body language Gestalt counselling techniques helped students with peer relationship challenges, helped students at a public university in Kitwe.

A study by Gehle (2013) in South Africa found that the Center for Child Youth and Family Studies trains practitioners each year to become play therapists using a gestalt approach. After

completing their training, these new therapists can start practicing. Each therapist is responsible for finding their supervision. If therapists skip supervision, they may experience stagnation and burnout from not receiving support and knowledge from more experienced professionals and peers in gestalt play therapy. Currently, there are not enough supervision resources using a gestalt approach, especially for newly qualified therapists who live far from training centers. This study aimed to identify the supervision resources available to these therapists in South Africa. To gather information, the research used both quantitative and qualitative methods. An online survey was given to newly qualified therapists, which provided the quantitative data. In-depth interviews were conducted via Skype with experienced professionals in Gestalt therapy, contributing to the qualitative research. The overall results showed a shortage of qualified supervisors for gestalt-based supervision. This shortage limits resources for newly qualified play therapists. The geographical distance from supervision resources creates financial and time challenges for these therapists, making it hard for them to access supervision. Despite these challenges, the findings indicate that newly qualified play counsellors are trying to fulfill their supervision requirements.

The evidence from research puts Gestalt counselling techniques to be effective in helping clients in several situations. With all the literature reviewed it is still not known how beneficial the empty chair and body language techniques of counselling are to students with peer relationship challenges in Kitwe, Zambia.

2.3 The empty chair technique and its benefits to clients

The empty chair technique is a widely recognized intervention within Gestalt therapy, specifically designed to assist clients in articulating their thoughts and emotions in a supportive and non-judgmental setting. This technique is particularly effective for addressing intra and interpersonal conflicts, as it encourages individuals to confront and process unresolved feelings toward others. Other refer to it as a two-chair technique, the significant advantage is in the ability to resolve conflicts in the present moment by increasing awareness (Smith, 2019). During a session, the therapist asks the client to visualize the person they have unresolved issues with seated in an empty chair across from them. This imaginative exercise requires the client to engage actively with their thoughts and feelings, enabling them to express what they wish to say to that person directly. By doing so, clients can gain insights into their emotions, explore different perspectives, and work through their conflicts safely, even in the absence of

the other individual. The empty chair technique fosters a deeper understanding of one's feelings and can lead to emotional catharsis, helping clients to find closure or resolution related to their conflicts. Additionally, Elliott et al (2004) wrote that the

“Empty chair work is a therapeutic means for encountering the unfinished situation in imagination, especially if the other is unavailable. It is used for two types of unfinished business: (1) neglect or abandonment and (2) abuse or trauma. In both types of work, the representation of the other in the chair serves as a function that is integral to the resolution of the dialogue; however, the resolutions take different forms.

The words and gestures are purposefully directed at an empty chair, symbolizing the presence of an absent individual or situation. Through this innovative therapeutic exercise, both the counsellor and the client can explore and uncover new insights regarding the issues concerning the specific person or situation being addressed (Drake, 2022). The empty chair technique facilitates a safe space for clients to express their feelings and thoughts, enabling them to gain a deeper understanding of their emotions and motivations.

Despite the extensive literature on the efficacy of this approach, there remains a gap in understanding how the empty chair counselling technique has specifically benefitted students experiencing peer relationship problems in Kitwe. Investigating this aspect could reveal vital information about the effectiveness of such techniques in educational settings and ultimately contribute to improved mental health support for students navigating complex social dynamics. In the works by Glass (2010), the emphasis on the "empty chair" technique as a powerful tool for fostering self-awareness and facilitating interactions within group settings was made. This chapter investigated the origins of the technique, which was developed by Gestalt therapist Fritz Perls, and its application in group psychotherapy as an intervention aimed at enhancing self-awareness among individual group members while simultaneously promoting dynamic group interaction.

The empty chair technique profoundly impacted by the versatility and transformative potential of this approach sets apart from other traditional applications, Perls would have an individual demonstrate their readiness to engage in therapeutic work by occupying the "hot seat," a chair directly facing the therapist. Next to this chair would be an "empty chair," representing either a significant other in the client's life or a disowned or suppressed aspect of the self, thereby facilitating an internal dialogue.

The chapter indicated that for instance, consider a client grappling with internal conflict, where one part of themselves harbors high expectations for achievement while another part succumbs to procrastination and rationalization. This internal dichotomy, which Perls famously referred to as the "top dog/bottom dog" dynamic, serves as a classic example of the complexity inherent in human psychology. In this scenario, the therapist would guide the client to engage in a dialogue between these two opposing facets of their personality. The technique encourages the client to physically move back and forth between the two chairs, articulating their thoughts and feelings from each position alternately.

As the dynamic interplay between these contrasting elements is heightened and more fully experienced, the opportunity for integration through greater self-acceptance becomes attainable. Although Perls initially focused on Gestalt therapy as a primarily individual treatment modality, subsequent practitioners have expanded upon this foundational approach, effectively adapting it for group contexts in a manner that fosters enhanced interaction and deeper connections among group members. This evolution has enriched the therapeutic experience, allowing participants to explore their relationships with themselves and others more profoundly.

In a study conducted by Cowen (2018) in Australia, a detailed methodology was outlined for implementing the Gestalt empty chair technique within a hypnotic state. This innovative approach revealed that utilizing an empty chair during hypnosis served as a valuable supplementary tool, allowing practitioners to delve deeper into their clients' issues, particularly in areas that may have previously seemed unfamiliar or inaccessible. The hypnotic empty chair technique is meticulously defined through a structured, step-by-step process that is particularly effective for clients capable of vividly imagining their issues in a concrete and tangible manner. By facilitating a conversation with an imagined representation of emotions, thoughts, or even people, clients can gain insights and clarity about their experiences.

Furthermore, the study demonstrated that the effectiveness of the Gestalt empty chair technique is significantly enhanced when combined with other therapeutic modalities. This integrated approach not only broadens the scope of exploration for the client but also enriches the therapeutic experience, leading to more profound personal insights and emotional healing. Through this research, the synergistic benefits of combining the empty chair technique with

hypnosis have been established, highlighting its potential to transform the therapeutic landscape for both practitioners and clients alike.

The empty chair has been used in the counselling process of students to overcome the effects of bullying and anxiety. Zaitun and Wangid (2023) in Indonesia looked at the empty chair technique to overcome the anxiety of bullying victims. The study used a Likert scale questionnaire to measure the anxiety due to the bullying effects. The empty chair was found to have helped reduce the anxiety. The data collected before and after counselling using the empty chair showed that there was a significant reduction in overcoming anxiety in clients who suffered bullying. The study recommends research to test the empty chair technique on other variables, including research locations. From this, it could be seen from the recommendations that the empty chair technique is open for further research including how it is used in overcoming peer relationship challenges at a public university.

Khairunnisa et al. (2019) conducted a study at the Malang Correction Institution in India, examining the effectiveness of the empty chair technique as a therapeutic intervention for prisoners grappling with unresolved emotional issues. Through a combination of psychological assessments, including structured interviews, direct observations, and standardized tests, the researchers aimed to identify the underlying problems that contributed to the inmates' emotional distress.

The findings revealed that many inmates experienced significant feelings of sadness and guilt stemming from unresolved matters in their lives, which adversely affected their interpersonal communication and relationships. These unresolved issues often lead to a profound sense of isolation, making it challenging for the individuals to thrive within the correctional environment and hindering their overall rehabilitation. The empty chair technique was employed as a form of psychodrama, allowing clients to engage in a simulated conversation with a person or aspect of their past that they had unresolved feelings towards. This intervention provided a safe space for the inmates to articulate their emotions and confront the issues that weighed heavily on them. The study observed that participants found significant relief in finalizing their unfinished business, which contributed to reductions in feelings of guilt and sadness and fostered improved emotional well-being.

The results indicated that the empty chair technique was effective in assisting prisoners in addressing their emotional burdens, leading to enhanced emotional regulation and a greater capacity for social interaction within the correctional facility. However, despite these promising results, the researchers emphasized the necessity for further exploration into the application of the empty chair technique, particularly in understanding its impact on resolving peer relationship challenges among university students in Zambia. This highlights the potential for broader applications of therapeutic techniques across diverse contexts and populations.

The empty chair counselling technique has also been seen to be effective in overcoming guilt in adolescents. In a study conducted by Trijayanti et al. (2019) in Indonesia, researchers investigated the effectiveness of Gestalt counselling, specifically utilizing the empty chair technique, in addressing feelings of guilt among at-risk adolescents. This qualitative research employed a single subject research design, with a total sample of 16 adolescents selected through a purposive sampling technique, aimed at ensuring participants met specific criteria related to their experiences of guilt. Data were collected using well-validated guilt assessment instruments, which allowed for a nuanced understanding of each participant's emotional state. The researchers utilized an A-B design to compare the baseline mean scores of guilt before and after the intervention. The findings indicated a statistically significant reduction in feelings of guilt post-intervention, suggesting that the empty chair technique was effective in helping these adolescents process and alleviate their feelings of guilt.

The study concluded that the empty chair Gestalt counselling technique effectively reduced guilt among the participants. However, there is a gap in yet to be explored how this technique could be applied to assist students dealing with peer relationship issues at a public university in Kitwe, leaving room for further research in that area.

In a study conducted by Huan et al. (2021) in Malaysia, the researchers explored the effects of the empty chair technique on the psychological well-being of individuals grappling with grief through an in-depth case study. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the study employed a single-subject research design, focusing intently on a single participant to critically analyze the impacts of this therapeutic intervention. The intervention involved multiple sessions where the empty chair technique was implemented, allowing the client to engage in an imagined dialogue with a significant figure associated with their grief. Detailed accounts of the session dynamics, participant emotions, and reflections were rigorously documented and analyzed. The results of

this research indicated that the empty chair technique produced significant positive effects, notably enhancing the psychological well-being of the grieving individual.

The findings highlighted that Gestalt therapy, particularly through the application of the empty chair technique, facilitated the client's ability to confront and resolve unfinished emotional business related to their loss. This therapeutic process proved to be instrumental in helping the client articulate feelings of sorrow and regret, leading to a resolution of grief-related issues. The study underscores the value of innovative therapeutic techniques like the empty chair in addressing complex emotional challenges and improving mental health outcomes for individuals in mourning.

In a study by Frauke et al. (2021), they examined the effectiveness of different therapeutic approaches in addressing the parental punitive mode within schema therapy specifically for individuals diagnosed with borderline personality disorder (BPD). They compared the short-term effects of the empty chair technique, a method rooted in Gestalt therapy that facilitates dialogue with significant figures from the patient's past, against the cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) approach, which focuses on changing negative thought patterns and behaviors.

The researchers found that CBT emerged as a more effective intervention than the empty chair technique in mitigating the influence of the punitive parental mode, an internalised voice that can impose harsh self-judgment and criticism. Both therapeutic techniques demonstrated a capacity to diminish the perceived power and credibility of this punitive figure, subsequently allowing for a greater sense of personal agency and autonomy among participants. Notably, however, the reduction in punitive thoughts and feelings was significantly more pronounced in those receiving CBT compared to those engaged in the empty chair technique.

Interestingly, despite the objectively superior outcomes associated with CBT in terms of efficacy, participants expressed a clear preference for the empty chair technique over CBT. This preference may indicate a deeper emotional connection or perceived safety in the experiential nature of the empty chair method, suggesting that subjective experience plays a critical role in therapeutic choice and engagement. The study's findings highlight the importance of considering both empirical evidence and patient preferences in therapeutic settings, especially in the treatment of complex conditions like BPD.

Mangela et al. (2024) investigated the impact of individual counselling employing the empty chair technique on the self-concept of introverted children, utilizing a single subject research design. The primary objective of this study was to analyse and describe the self-concept levels of introverted children before and after undergoing individual counselling sessions that incorporated the empty chair technique. This research is classified as descriptive quantitative experimental research, utilizing a single subject research (SSR) framework structured in an A-B-A design. The study was carried out in Palu City, with participants selected through purposive sampling, focusing specifically on two children identified as having low self-concept. To evaluate changes in self-concept, the researchers employed a self-concept scale, which provided a standardized measure for assessing participants' self-perception.

The findings revealed a noteworthy increase in the self-concept of the introverted children following the individual counselling sessions that utilized the empty chair technique. Initially, during baseline 1 conditions—representing natural settings without any treatment or intervention—participants exhibited self-concept scores that reflected a 50% and 43% rate of positive self-perception, respectively. Upon introducing the intervention phase (B), substantial enhancements in self-concept were observed, with average scores of 60%, 65%, 70%, 80%, and 85% recorded throughout the treatment sessions. Following these interventions, the transition back to the baseline 2 (A2) condition yielded further improvements, with self-concept scores reaching 85% and 90%.

These findings indicate a definitive upward trend in self-concept scores during the intervention (B) and baseline 2 (A2) conditions, surpassing those recorded during baseline 1 (A1). Consequently, the results suggest that individual counselling services utilizing the empty chair technique are effective in facilitating significant improvements in the self-concept of introverted children, highlighting its potential as a valuable therapeutic approach in psychological interventions for this demographic. Literature indicating such effectiveness motivated the need to explore how the empty chair Gestalt counselling technique helped students with peer relationship difficulties at a public university in Kitwe.

White (2023) discusses the “empty chair” technique, a cornerstone of psychotherapy that has evolved significantly since its inception by Fritz Perls and later refinement by Edgar Stuntz. This article offers a thorough examination of the varied applications of the empty chair technique, especially within the framework of Transactional Analysis (TA). The author

outlines how therapists employ the empty chair to facilitate structural analysis a process in which clients explore their internal conflicts and re-decision-making, where patients revisit and change past decisions that have impacted their lives. Additionally, the article addresses the dynamics of parenting, illustrating how the empty chair can help clients process their feelings toward caregivers or their own parenting practices.

Drawing on concepts from TA, Gestalt therapy, and cognitive-behavioural therapy, the paper delves into the psychological mechanisms involved in chair work. It emphasizes the significance of regression, where clients may return to earlier stages of emotional development, and ego state integration, which involves reconciling different aspects of one's personality. The therapeutic implications of chair work are thoroughly explored, highlighting its beneficial effects on self-understanding, accurate diagnosis, and the enhancement of the therapeutic relationship. The article particularly notes how chair work can be tailored to meet the unique needs of clients suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), suggesting its effectiveness as a form of exposure therapy helping clients confront and process traumatic memories in a controlled, supportive environment.

Overall, White provides a comprehensive review of the empty chair technique, illustrating its versatility and profound impact within contemporary psychotherapeutic practice, as well as its potential to foster healing and personal growth across a diverse range of client issues.

A study conducted by Elliot (2004) delves into the concept of the "empty chair" technique as a powerful therapeutic tool for addressing unresolved issues, drawing from Gestalt principles. The underlying premise is that significant unmet emotional needs persist, refusing to fade into the background. The empty chair exercise allows individuals to confront these unfinished situations in their imagination, especially when the other party is physically absent. This method is particularly effective for two categories of unfinished business: (1) feelings of neglect or abandonment and (2) experiences of abuse or trauma.

In both scenarios, the representation of the individual in the empty chair plays a crucial role in facilitating a meaningful dialogue, yet the paths to resolution differ significantly between them. In this study, the authors primarily explored the first type of unfinished business, focusing on the profound emotions stemming from neglect or abandonment by a significant figure in one's life, who has played an essential role in development. These feelings of neglect or abandonment

may arise not only from past experiences but also within the framework of current important relationships, often symbolically linked to prior unresolved issues. In contrast, the realm of abuse or interpersonal trauma is unpacked in models that do not typically involve strangers, highlighting the complex nature of healing from such painful experiences.

In addition, a study by Kamra (2024) explored the efficacy of the Empty Chair technique, a cornerstone of Gestalt therapy, in addressing and resolving conflicts within parent-child relationships. The study outlines the developmental stages during which these conflicts are most likely to arise, emphasizing the critical moments when a child may require extra attention from their parents. Over the past decade, various types of conflicts have emerged in these relationships, with the research revealing a significant correlation between identity conflicts in adolescents and the dynamics of the parent-child relationship. If left unaddressed, these conflicts can trigger profound identity crises at any point in a child's life.

Moreover, the findings suggest that the Empty Chair technique serves as a powerful tool for effectively navigating these conflicts. By enabling families to engage in open dialogue, this technique has demonstrated notable improvements in conflict resolution, addressing both individual internal struggles and interpersonal external factors. The paper also identifies a substantial opportunity for further exploration within this field, advocating for additional research to understand how both Gestalt therapy and the Empty Chair method can be utilized to foster better communication and resolution strategies among various individuals, particularly in the complex dynamics of parent-child interactions. The implications of employing the Empty Chair technique warrant further investigation to enhance its application in therapeutic settings.

Jannah and Wangid (2023) equally investigated the pervasive issue of bullying in schools, uncovering its far-reaching negative impacts on students' mental health, particularly the profound anxiety experienced by victims. Recognizing the urgent need to support these individuals and mitigate the risk of long-lasting psychological distress, the researchers proposed that effective interventions, such as counselling, are essential. The focus of this study was to assess the efficacy of individual counselling utilizing the empty chair technique—a creative therapeutic approach designed to facilitate emotional expression and resolution—in alleviating the anxiety experienced by bullying victims. Employing an experimental research design, the study implemented a pre-test and post-test framework to track changes in anxiety

levels. To gather data, a Likert scale was utilized to quantitatively measure the anxiety levels of the students who had been targeted by bullying. The researchers employed a purposive sampling technique, ultimately selecting 10 students from a broader population of 70 in class X at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 7 Pidie. For data analysis, a paired t-test was administered to compare pre-test and post-test results of participants who received counselling. The findings revealed a significant difference in anxiety levels before and after the treatment, with a t-value of 17.052, far exceeding the critical value of 2.262.

Before engaging in counselling with the empty chair technique, the average anxiety score of participants was recorded at 51.90, indicating a relatively high level of distress. Conversely, following the counselling intervention, the average score improved dramatically to 78.20, highlighting the substantial positive impact of the treatment. The study demonstrated that individual counselling using the empty chair technique is not only effective but crucial in addressing and significantly alleviating anxiety among victims of bullying, thus reinforcing the importance of mental health support in educational environments.

In another study, Pascual-Leone and Baher (2023) examined two key aspects regarding the impact of chair-work in individual psychotherapy. First, they investigated the distinct effects of chair-work on emotional processes and treatment outcomes across various therapeutic modalities. Second, they explored how these effects stack up against other common intervention strategies. Utilizing appropriate datasets, the researchers implemented meta-analyses alongside narrative syntheses to derive estimated effect sizes for both psychotherapy processes and symptom relief. Their findings revealed that single-session chair work significantly enhanced client experiencing, achieving a striking effect size of $d = .90$, surpassing that of empathic responding. While chair work demonstrated similar effectiveness to other interventions in stimulating emotional arousal or altering the credibility of core beliefs, it stood out for its unique contributions.

Findings indicated that a single session of chair-work produced substantial pre-to-post symptom change, reflected in an impressive effect size of $d = 1.73$. However, this change appears to be comparable to the results yielded by other intervention techniques ($d = .02$). When chair-work was integrated multiple times throughout the course of treatment, its impact accumulated, leading to a significant effect size of $d = .40$ when compared to treatments that

did not incorporate chair-work. The study also identified therapeutic orientation as a potential moderator influencing these outcomes. Overall, the incorporation of chair-work into therapeutic practices appears to enhance both the emotional processing and overall effectiveness of interventions. The authors conclude with recommendations for training and practical applications, advocating for the inclusion of chair-work in therapeutic settings to optimize treatment outcomes.

Nurbaity et al. (2018) conducted a comprehensive study in Indonesia focused on the development of an empty chair technique module designed specifically for teachers, with the goal of enhancing their ability to promote self-dialogue among students. The research highlights the critical importance of self-communication as a foundational element in the cognitive process, facilitating deeper thinking and reflection.

This study aimed to create an effective media resource in the form of an empty chair technique module, intended for use both autonomously by teachers and as a tool within counselling guidance services in schools. The researchers employed a research and development (R&D) methodology, ensuring a robust framework for the creation and refinement of the module. The study's subjects included a panel of experts specializing in conceptual development and media design, who were involved in the product validation phase. Additionally, guidance and counselling teachers participated as potential end-users during the evaluation stage, providing valuable insights into the practicality of the module in real-world educational settings.

Data were gathered through a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, using structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews as the primary data collection tools. The validation process involved rigorous assessment from both conceptual and media experts, leading to the conclusion that the module fell within a sufficient category but was deemed to require enhancements before full implementation. After the validation process, the researchers incorporated the experts' feedback to refine the module further. The guidance and counselling teachers provided overwhelmingly positive evaluations of the module, rating it as very good overall, while also expressing a desire for certain refinements to optimize its effectiveness in practice. This study underscores the potential of the empty chair technique as a valuable resource in fostering self-dialogue and enhancing the educational experience for students.

Lourenco (2021) undertook a comprehensive examination of the role of chair work within the client change process in emotion-focused therapy (EFT). The principal objective of process–outcome research is to elucidate the specific therapeutic components that contribute to positive clinical outcomes. Our investigation delves into the intricate client processes that unfold during pivotal moments of chair work—specifically, the two-chair dialogue, two-chair enactment, and empty-chair work. We explore how these moments significantly influence client transformation in EFT, a treatment modality robustly supported by empirical evidence for its effectiveness in addressing depression.

Chair work serves as a cornerstone of EFT, specifically designed to tackle emotional processing challenges, such as the internal conflicts among different aspects of the self and unresolved interpersonal issues, which are intricately tied to the core emotional themes surrounding depression. Aligning with the theoretical framework and practical applications of EFT, previous research indicates that incorporating chair work techniques within the therapeutic process can yield substantial therapeutic outcomes by effectively addressing emotional processing hurdles.

However, we argue that methodological limitations in existing studies obscure the genuine impact of client engagement in these therapeutic tasks on alleviating symptoms and enhancing the depth of emotional processing throughout the course of therapy. In response to this gap, our thesis develops a novel method to monitor client development during chair work, grounded in EFT’s resolution models for these specific tasks. This advancement enabled us to conduct two empirical studies that investigate the long-term effects of chair work on clinical symptoms and the nuances of emotional processing.

The participants in our studies consisted of 10 clients experiencing mild to moderate depression, who completed a total of 16 sessions of EFT. We conducted a detailed analysis of their therapeutic journeys utilizing our measure of chair work resolution. In the first study, we evaluated the severity of clinical symptoms with the Beck Depression Inventory–II and the Outcome Questionnaire–10.2. In the second study, we measured the depth of emotional processing using the Experiencing Scale. Employing multilevel models and longitudinal data analysis techniques, our findings revealed a compelling connection: the progress clients made in chair work resolution emerged as a significant predictor of both symptom reduction and enhanced emotional processing depth throughout multiple sessions.

Despite certain limitations inherent in our research, our findings underscore the clinical significance of addressing internal conflicts and unresolved issues through chair work, particularly in the treatment of depressive states.

Gabler (2024) conducted a study in Toronto, focusing on the grounded theory analysis of the empty chair task as utilized by clients navigating through core painful emotion schemes. This research examined three clients selected from an extensive archival data set, all of whom were engaged in transformative emotional work during empty-chair sessions aimed at addressing unresolved issues, often referred to as unfinished business. Employing grounded theory methodology, the study delved into the intricacies of six distinct instances of empty-chair work, with two sessions dedicated to each client. The primary objectives of the research were twofold: first, to meticulously analyze the process through which clients transform their painful emotional schemas, and second, to re-evaluate the emotional change process that occurs during this therapeutic task, particularly in the context of resolving interpersonal injuries and traumas.

Empty-chair work is well-established as a foundational technique in Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT), yet the underlying mechanisms that facilitate change during this practice have remained largely unexplored over the past thirty years. This pilot study represents the initial phase of a more extensive project designed to investigate this therapeutic process in depth. By building upon Greenberg's change model (Greenberg & Foerster, 1996; Greenberg et al., 1993), the research aimed to illuminate the nuanced details involved in clients' transformative journeys through emotional pain, thereby contributing valuable insights to the field of emotion-focused therapy and potentially enhancing therapeutic practices. Arising from such studies, the need to explore the empty chair counselling technique on resolving peer relationship challenges at a public university in Kitwe Zambia remained unknown.

The authors Cheug and Nguyen (2012) explored the effectiveness of Gestalt empty-chair techniques within social work environments, specifically tailored for Asian client's individuals who may often find it challenging to express their emotions openly. This therapeutic approach was particularly beneficial in addressing bereavement issues, parent-child relationship conflicts, and the need to articulate feelings surrounding personal losses.

The application of the empty-chair method draws upon four distinctive cultural characteristics frequently observed among many Asian clients. First, it acknowledges the profound

significance of “shame” in therapeutic interventions, emphasizing the necessity of navigating sensitive topics carefully. Second, the approach takes into account the importance of “saving face,” which minimizes the risk of embarrassment when confronting relatives and friends about personal issues. Third, it integrates alternative and complementary therapeutic modalities that resonate more effectively than traditional methods, thereby facilitating deeper engagement. Lastly, it recognizes the role of inner control and spirituality in assisting clients to reconcile feelings of guilt and conflict that arise in interpersonal relationships.

Through concrete evidence collected from working with Asian clients, Cheug and Nguyen provide detailed therapeutic steps accompanied by practice dialogues. These examples serve as essential tools for practitioners aiming to cultivate culturally sensitive skills while implementing empty-chair techniques. The therapeutic dialogues are designed to foster positive outcomes across several dimensions: (1) facilitating a thoughtful response to the therapeutic exercise, (2) encouraging active engagement in addressing their specific issues, (3) demonstrating responsiveness to treatment within a single session while showing measurable progress within just two sessions, and (4) enabling clients to express their emotions or unresolved conflicts throughout their therapeutic journey. The implications drawn from this research highlight the strengths of Gestalt techniques in crafting culturally sensitive approaches tailored to meet the unique needs of Asian clients and their families. By grounding therapeutic practices in cultural understanding and respect, practitioners can enhance their effectiveness and truly support the emotional well-being of their clients.

Arndt (2020) has highlighted an intriguing area of research surrounding the Empty Chair Method, particularly its integration with virtual reality in therapeutic contexts and its potential to foster future-oriented thinking. Despite earlier studies demonstrating the advantages of these innovative approaches, a significant gap remains regarding the interplay between them. To investigate this relationship, the current study delves into the effects of the Empty Chair Method on future self-connection, both in real life (*in vivo*) and within a virtual environment. Employing a quasi-experimental design, the research involved a structured sequence comprising a pre-experiment questionnaire, the experimental phase, and a post-experiment questionnaire. This study involved three distinct conditions: Empty Chair (EC), Empty Chair Virtual Reality (ECVR), and Virtual Reality (VR). A total of 68 participants engaged in an immersive practical task within the controlled setting of the University of Twente's laboratory.

During the exercise, each participant conversed with their 10-year-old future self about a specific goal they hoped to achieve.

The findings revealed that there was no statistically significant difference in future self-connection (FSC) across all conditions following the experiment. However, a noteworthy outcome emerged: participants in the ECVR condition demonstrated a significant enhancement in their FSC when comparing pre- and post-experiment scores. Additionally, the study uncovered a significant correlation between the sense of presence experienced during the virtual interaction and the post-experiment FSC. Participants reported a markedly higher sense of presence in the ECVR condition compared to the traditional VR setting.

There has been a heightened interest in the use of experiential techniques within cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) (Pugh, 2018). Pugh (2018) explored chair work methods, including the empty-chair and two-chair interventions, are popular therapeutic approaches that stem from the psychodrama and gestalt schools of psychotherapy. Despite a growing body of supporting evidence, these techniques are infrequently integrated into traditional CBT practices. This article offers an overview of key cognitive behavioural chair work (CBC) techniques aimed at addressing maladaptive patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving. It highlights chair-based methods for restructuring distressing cognitions, resolving ambivalence, enhancing metacognitive awareness, fostering self-compassion, and improving emotional regulation. The paper then reviewed the evidence supporting the clinical effectiveness of CBC and discussed potential mechanisms of action based on cognitive science theories. Finally, it addresses the limitations associated with chair work and provides guidelines for its introduction, implementation, and consolidation in therapeutic settings. How the empty chair helped students with peer relationship challenges in the Kitwe district of Zambia remained to be explored.

Nabila (2025) conducted a study in Indonesia that focused on the effectiveness of empty chair therapy in alleviating symptoms of depression and anxiety in individuals diagnosed with early adult adjustment disorder. Adjustment disorder is characterized by an emotional or behavioural response that is disproportionately intense in relation to a significant life event or change, resulting in considerable stress. This condition can arise from an array of triggering factors, with everyone showcasing unique vulnerabilities.

In Nabila's study, the subject experienced adjustment disorder triggered by a confluence of stressful life events, including the profound loss of multiple family members to the Covid-19 virus, the distressing requirement from the school to transfer children to another institution, and the overwhelming pressure of completing doctoral education. These compounded experiences led to significant emotional turmoil, yet the subject struggled to effectively manage the stress and emotions that surfaced in response to these challenges.

Through comprehensive assessments, which included structured observations, detailed interviews, and standardized psychological testing, the presence of adjustment disorder was confirmed. Given the specific circumstances and symptoms exhibited by the subject, the chosen therapeutic intervention was carefully tailored. Empty chair therapy was implemented as a core component of the treatment strategy. This innovative therapeutic approach allows individuals to externalize and articulate suppressed emotions, fostering a dialogue within themselves. During sessions, the subject engaged in conversations with an empty chair, symbolically representing their feelings and burdens. This dialogue facilitated the expression of emotions that had been stifled, providing a safe space for the subject to confront their inner struggles. The aim was to guide the individual toward a path of self-discovery and emotional release.

The results of the intervention were notably significant. Post-therapy evaluations indicated that the subject experienced a marked reduction in emotional distress, expressing feelings of relief and newfound clarity. The therapy not only helped the individual navigate through their emotional landscape but also marked a positive step out of the inward spiral of introjection, ultimately leading to a resurgence of their authentic self.

Rancour (2016) conducted a comprehensive study on clinical treatments for body image disturbances, emphasizing innovative approaches such as interactive guided imagery, empty chair work, and therapeutic letter writing, specifically within the context of Columbus Ohio State University. The study articulated a critical perspective on the evolution of medical and surgical interventions, which have become significantly more invasive and intricate over time. It noted that individuals today are surviving illnesses that previously would have resulted in death, thanks to advances in medical technology. However, this technological progress often complicates the rehabilitation process, leaving patients to navigate the aftermath of their treatments without a restoration of their previous quality of life.

The underlying question posed by the study is poignant: if a patient endures an illness and the subsequent treatments that alter their body's appearance and function but is never able to regain their former self, how can such outcomes be classified as successful treatment? To address these challenges, Rancour's research introduced three therapeutic interventions aimed at aiding patients in their journey of recovery from these life-altering experiences.

The first method, interactive guided imagery, is rooted in the principles of psych synthesis. This transformative technique is characterized by its verbal interactivity and is designed to harness patients' visualization skills, facilitating a dis-identification from their physical form. By enabling patients to engage with their changing body parts and functions through guided imagery, this intervention encourages them to grieve their losses while simultaneously aiding in the reintegration of their altered identities into a cohesive whole.

Additionally, empty chair work serves as an experiential therapy method that provides patients with an opportunity to confront and express feelings related to their body image disturbances. By visualizing a conversation with an empty chair often symbolising lost aspects of themselves or external judgments—they can process their emotions in a safe and structured environment.

Therapeutic letter writing complements these approaches by allowing individuals to articulate their thoughts, feelings, and experiences on paper. This written expression can be healing, as it encourages reflection and helps patients articulate their journeys in a tangible form.

Collectively, these three interventions—interactive guided imagery, empty chair work, and therapeutic letter writing—offer effective strategies to empower patients mentally, emotionally, and spiritually as they navigate perceived attacks on their physical bodies. Through these therapeutic modalities, individuals can work toward healing their self-perception and reclaiming their sense of identity.

Masimula (2007) explored the impact of phonophenetics counselling, focusing on a diverse sample in South Africa. This study highlights a novel paradigm that integrates the interconnectedness of body, mind, and spirit, thereby facilitating more effective psychotherapeutic processes. By utilizing both verbal and nonverbal components of human experience, it transforms life's challenges into an empowering, transformational, and healing

journey. This approach creates opportunities for individuals to uncover and realize their true potential.

Philophonetics is defined as a unique modality that encompasses counselling, psychotherapy, and coaching. It employs a phenomenological approach to human experiences, enabling clients to engage in an active process of exploration, self-discovery, and empowerment. This method encourages individuals to achieve a heightened awareness of their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours, fostering a more conscious understanding of their existence in the world. Central to this approach is the acceptance of awareness through the living body, which serves as a vital conduit for knowing through various means, including physical sensations, movement, gestures, and visualization of internal dynamics. Additionally, the resonance of sound therapy plays a crucial role in this holistic experience.

Throughout the sessions, clients acquire skills that can be practiced and integrated into their daily lives, allowing for self-management and self-care both between sessions and after the completion of therapy. This ensures that the benefits of philophonetics extend beyond the therapeutic environment and empower individuals to continue their personal growth.

The findings from Masimula's study demonstrate the effectiveness of philophonetics as a transformative therapy, revealing its ability to resonate across different cultures. These results align with existing international literature, which emphasizes that philophonetics stands out from other therapeutic modalities due to its unique approach. Notably, it does not heavily rely on verbal communication; rather, approximately 80% of the therapeutic process is rooted in nonverbal communication, underscoring the modality's distinctive focus on the richness of human experience beyond words.

In a study by Gikonyo (2017). An investigation in the effectiveness of different counselling strategies and rehabilitation centres in tackling the widespread problem of illicit brew consumption in Laikipia County, Kenya was conducted. The alarming increase in illicit alcoholic beverage consumption presents a serious public health challenge nationwide. Although various strategies have been put in place to address this serious issue, counselling has emerged as an essential intervention. However, there is still a lack of empirical evidence that supports the impact of counsellors' engagement and the specific counselling methods used in Laikipia County.

The study aimed to thoroughly explore the effectiveness of various counselling strategies in reducing illicit brew consumption. The specific objectives included several key areas: first, to assess the impact of Psychoanalytic therapy in decreasing illicit brew intake; next, to determine the effectiveness of Cognitive therapy in this situation; to investigate the effectiveness of Gestalt therapy; to evaluate the prevalence of different counselling strategies employed; and to analyse the role of rehabilitation centres in reducing the indulgence in illicit brews within Laikipia County.

To achieve these objectives, the researcher utilized a descriptive survey research design, which allowed for a detailed description of the phenomenon under study. The target population comprised 548 counsellors working in the county, including private practitioners, school counsellors, and religious leaders, along with approximately 10,000 consumers of illicit brews. From this population, a strategically chosen sample of 721 respondents was selected using a stratified sampling technique based on the Krejcie and Morgan Sample Size Table. This sample consisted of 351 counsellors and 370 illicit brew consumers.

The research instruments used in the study included a questionnaire and an interview guide for focused group discussions. The questionnaire contained a mix of open-ended and closed-ended questions to elicit thorough responses. The researcher administered these instruments in various settings, including local educational institutions, rehabilitation centres, private practices, and religious organizations throughout Laikipia County. The collected data were then analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 22, employing both inferential and descriptive statistical techniques. Inferential analyses included ANOVA and coefficient determination to evaluate relationships between variables.

The study's findings showed a significant presence of Psychoanalytic therapy in the region, along with considerable use of Cognitive counselling strategies, while Gestalt therapy was employed to a lesser extent. Interestingly, the data revealed that clients preferred group counselling over individual sessions, with many expressing a preference for family-based interventions rather than direct experiences in rehabilitation centres. The contribution of rehabilitation centres in reducing illicit brew consumption was perceived as limited.

Furthermore, the study emphasized that among the counselling strategies, Psychoanalytic techniques were the most frequently utilized, closely followed by Cognitive therapy, while

Gestalt strategies were the least employed. Based on these findings, the study recommended that counsellors improve their skills to better address individuals struggling with addictions to illicit brews. It called for government and counselling professionals to initiate awareness programs aimed at promoting counselling strategies as crucial tools in fighting illicit brew consumption.

Additionally, the county government was urged to enhance the availability of rehabilitation facilities by investing in accessible, community-based rehabilitation centres. Support for the integration of recovering illicit brew drinkers into rehabilitation programs was identified as a necessary step to encourage more consumers to seek counselling. This study has shed light on the various counselling-based interventions accessible to social workers and government agencies, including NACADA officers, underscoring their vital role in addressing the problem of illicit brew consumption in Laikipia County.

In a study conducted in Zimbabwe by Nyandoro (2010), it was highlighted that the counselling skills derived from the gestalt model significantly enhance communication efficacy between counsellors and clients. This model emphasises the importance of being fully present and aware in the therapeutic process, which proves particularly beneficial in establishing rapport with vulnerable populations, such as orphans and abuse survivors. Recognising the unique challenges faced by these groups, counsellors need to undergo extensive training in diverse linguistic and communication techniques to effectively apply this approach.

The primary objective of the research was to assess the counselling skills among Roman Catholic priests within the Masvingo Diocese in Zimbabwe. This inquiry was prompted by the priests' frequent encounters with challenging pastoral situations that necessitated adept counselling abilities. The study aimed to evaluate the competence of these clergy members in providing pastoral care and support. To achieve this, a thorough survey was administered, which included responses from 40 priests and 50 parishioners, representing a diverse demographic within the diocese. The data collection methods comprised both structured questionnaires and unstructured interviews, allowing for a rich gathering of qualitative and quantitative insights.

The research framework commenced with a general introduction that outlined the context and significance of the study. This was followed by an exploration of several thematic areas related

to counselling literature, with a particular focus on pastoral counselling skills and the Christian response to mental health issues. After meticulous analysis of the findings, it became evident that there is a notable deficiency in counselling skills among the clergy, suggesting an urgent need for targeted training and development programs to enhance their capabilities in providing effective pastoral care.

2.4 Body language counselling technique and its benefits to clients

Body language a form of non-verbal communication, is vital for counsellors; it sets an opportunity for both client and counsellor to explore behaviour beyond what words are communicating. Reena (2012) communication plays a vital element in the health sector. Counsellors need to develop skills to evaluate human behaviour, development, and relationships, social and cultural issues. Not only is communication one-sided everything that the counselling does creates an impression on the client in the session. Body language is that unspoken communication that takes place in the face-to-face interaction between humans. Body language informs individuals about their true feelings because it usually occurs unconsciously. Feelings are mostly expressed through body language. San Diego Law Review (1990) argued that all humans have informally been trained since birth in the process of non-verbal communication including sending and receiving. Non-verbal communication just like verbal communication is equally two ways as it involves sending and receiving of information.

The writing of Erskine (Erskine, 2018) explains emotional experiences are intricately stored within the amygdala and the broader limbic system of the brain. This storage occurs as affective states, visceral feelings, and physiological sensations that lack formal symbolization and verbal language. These profound memories often manifest in the form of affect and are expressed through our bodily movements, gestures, and postures, reflecting the depth of our emotional lives. These so-called "body memories" are classified as unconscious, non-symbolized patterns of interaction that influence our self-perception and our relationships with others. They encapsulate past experiences that may not be readily accessible to conscious thought but significantly shape our emotional responses and social behaviours.

Various methods of body psychotherapy explore these dynamics in depth, integrating somatic awareness and relational techniques to facilitate healing. Clinical case examples underscore the practical application of expressive methods within a relational psychotherapy framework,

highlighting the therapeutic potential of engaging both the body and mind to foster emotional understanding and growth (Erskine, 2018). Through this integrative approach, individuals can better connect with unprocessed emotions and physical sensations, leading to more meaningful self-awareness and improved relational dynamics.

An older study by Lafrance et al. (1976) utilized systematic observation techniques alongside a structured questionnaire to investigate the intricate relationship between posture sharing and self-reported indicators of rapport within a group setting, specifically in college seminar classrooms. The study uncovered a notable pattern of significant positive correlations, indicating that as the amount of mirroring behaviours and congruent postures exhibited by students about their instructor increased, so too did the students' ratings of their involvement and engagement in the classroom activities. This suggests that when students adopt similar postures to their teacher, it fosters a sense of connection and participation.

Conversely, the research also highlighted a significant negative correlation between the display of incongruent postures—where students' body language contradicted that of the teacher—and the students' reported levels of interest in the seminar. This finding underscores the importance of body language in facilitating or hindering effective communication and engagement in educational environments.

The implications of these findings for group dynamics and environmental design are substantial, as they suggest that fostering congruent posturing through classroom arrangement and teaching styles may enhance rapport and engagement among students. By considering the role of nonverbal communication, educators can create more effective learning environments that promote interaction and participation.

The writing of Edward (2021) similarly reveals that Counselling is a multifaceted semiotic profession, and while students can certainly benefit from exploring the field of semiotics, it is experienced practitioners who are likely to gain the most value. An understanding of semiotics enables counsellors to recognize a broader array of client signals, leading to enhanced clinical judgments and a deeper awareness of how their signals might influence clients. This awareness is essential, as indicators of status can either facilitate or obstruct the therapeutic alliance.

Moreover, semiotics provides valuable tools for interpreting a client's narrative in innovative ways. For instance, paradigmatic analysis can redirect attention from mundane issues to more profound concerns, uncovering subtle diagnostic nuances that might otherwise go unnoticed. A counsellor well-versed in Peirce's classification system can derive insights by observing the sign categories that clients prefer or avoid. Ultimately, semiotics promotes the perception of each client as an integrated sign system, challenging reductionist approaches and fostering interpretive clarity and emergent meaning. This perspective enriches the counselling experience, infusing it with creativity and unexpected revelations.

Domene, Valach and Young (2015) noted the contextual action theory (CAT) offers a comprehensive framework to comprehend human action within daily life settings, including those related to counselling practice. This chapter starts with a summary of how CAT conceptualizes goal-directed human behaviour. It includes an outline of the viewpoints from which action can be analysed: observable behaviour, internal cognitive processes, and societal significance. Additionally, it describes how action is organized at different levels, which involves its components, functional stages, and intentional frameworks. The summary concludes with an explanation of the temporal dimensions of action, encompassing immediate tasks, medium-term projects, and long-term careers. This framework for understanding action is then applied to the counselling setting. In particular, it outlines five key tasks essential to a CAT approach in counselling. These tasks can occur simultaneously and in any sequence, including the initial establishment and ongoing support of a strong therapeutic alliance; evaluating and identifying the organization and systems of action relevant to the client; tackling identified problematic actions, projects, and careers; addressing the client's emotions and emotional memories; and linking to the client's everyday experiences. While empirical research on the application of CAT is still in the early stages, this approach shows significant potential for enhancing counselling practice.

In the article by Westland (2009), the intricate dynamics of communication are explored through both verbal and non-verbal dimensions, highlighting the importance of these elements in body psychotherapy. The author explores theoretical frameworks that elucidate how language functions within the therapeutic context, examining the psychotherapist's role in attuning to the client's unique linguistic expressions. Various therapeutic objectives are considered, demonstrating how psychotherapists can strategically utilize language to foster deeper connections and facilitate healing.

The article is enriched with illustrative case vignettes that exemplify the practical application of these concepts in real-world scenarios, allowing to grasp the complexities of therapeutic interactions. Furthermore, Westland draws connections to contemporary discussions in neuroscience and cognitive psychology, emphasizing how understanding the brain's response to language can enhance therapeutic outcomes.

The author also discusses the multifaceted relationship between language and emotional regulation, shedding light on how integrating verbal and non-verbal communication can lead to heightened spiritual awareness. By emphasizing intention, presence, contact, and awareness, the article underscores the significance of a holistic approach to communication within the counselling relationship, ultimately fostering a more profound and transformative experience for both the client and counsellor.

Westland (2009) explores the multifaceted nature of communication, emphasizing its dual aspects: verbal and non-verbal. This article explores the theoretical foundations surrounding the use of language within the context of body psychotherapy. It examines how psychotherapists engage with their clients' linguistic expressions, adapting their relational approach to enhance therapeutic effectiveness. The study outlines various strategies in which therapists employ language intentionally, tailored to achieve specific therapeutic objectives, such as fostering understanding, promoting healing, and facilitating insight.

To illustrate these concepts, the article includes detailed case vignettes, providing concrete examples of how language and body language intertwine in a therapeutic setting. These narratives not only demonstrate the practical application of the theories discussed but also highlight the nuances of therapist-client interactions.

Furthermore, the study connects these insights to contemporary discussions in neuroscience and cognitive psychology, illustrating the impact of language on emotional regulation, cognitive processes, and spiritual growth. It emphasizes that effective communication in therapy involves a deliberate synthesis of both verbal and non-verbal elements, with a strong focus on intention, presence, tactile contact, and heightened awareness. This holistic approach aims to create a more profound therapeutic relationship, facilitating emotional regulation and enhancing clients' spiritual awareness throughout the therapeutic journey.

Calsius et al. (2016) conducted an exploration of the concept of touching the Lived Body in patients who present with medically unexplained symptoms (MUS). The study highlights the potential benefits of integrating hands-on bodywork and body awareness techniques within psychotherapy, particularly for individuals diagnosed with alexithymia—a condition characterized by difficulty identifying and expressing emotions. MUS represents a significant challenge in general practice, often leaving healthcare professionals without clear physiological explanations for patients' symptoms.

One of the core hypotheses presented is that alexithymia and the associated difficulties in mentally processing bodily arousal serve as key mechanisms contributing to the manifestation of MUS. This lack of emotional processing negatively affects the embodied experience of these patients, influencing their overall engagement and participation in the world a phenomenon referred to as "the lived body." The notion of embodied existence underlies what is generally recognized as body awareness (BA), which encompasses an individual's ability to perceive and interpret their internal bodily sensations.

The study proposes an innovative hypothesis regarding how hands-on bodywork can significantly enhance body awareness, suggesting that this approach can serve as a solid foundation for developing a body-integrated psychotherapeutic strategy for addressing MUS. Research substantiates the idea that body awareness operates through what is termed a bottom-up 'bodily' mechanism, deeply rooted within an interoceptive-insular pathway (IIP). This pathway is intricately linked to various autonomic functions and emotional brain areas, as well as contributing to both verbal and non-verbal memory processes.

Furthermore, the authors stress the importance of considering the skin and myofascial tissues as crucial interoceptive generators when approached through appropriate manual techniques. The article offers compelling evidence demonstrating that 'haptic' touch can activate this interoceptive-insular pathway, thereby restoring the myofascial 'armoured' body. This process aids patients in rebalancing their window of tolerance and facilitates a deeper engagement with their bodily inner world.

From a trans-disciplinary perspective, the article reflects on the profound healing potential that arises from the integration of bodywork with non-directive verbal guidance. This synergistic approach can be particularly transformative for the lived body experience in patients with

MUS. Specifically, for those with alexithymia, this methodology offers crucial support in addressing their challenges related to the representation and interpretation of bodily arousal. By enhancing body awareness and fostering emotional connection, therapy can become a powerful tool for these individuals to reclaim their embodied experience.

Calsius et al. (2016) conducted another exploration of the concept of “Lived Body” in patients experiencing medically unexplained symptoms (MUS). This research addresses how the integration of hands-on bodywork techniques and enhanced body awareness within psychotherapy may offer significant benefits for individuals with alexithymia—a condition characterized by difficulty in identifying and describing emotions. Medically unexplained symptoms pose a considerable challenge in general practice, often leaving both patients and healthcare providers frustrated due to a lack of identifiable physiological causes.

Alexithymia, along with challenges related to the mental processing and elaboration of bodily sensations, is posited as a crucial mechanism underlying MUS. This inability to articulate and understand bodily experiences profoundly affects the embodied existence of these patients, inhibiting their ability to fully engage with the world around them. The term ‘lived body’ encapsulates this idea, emphasizing the importance of body awareness (BA) in contributing to one’s overall well-being.

The study presents a novel hypothesis regarding the impact of hands-on bodywork on enhancing body awareness and posits it as a compelling rationale for adopting a body-integrated psychotherapeutic framework specifically tailored for addressing MUS. Research indicates that body awareness operates as a fundamental, ‘bottom-up’ experience—rooted in physiological processes—anchored in an interoceptive-insular pathway (IIP). This pathway is intricately linked to autonomic functions and emotional processing in the brain, as well as both verbal and non-verbal memory systems.

Furthermore, the article underscores the importance of considering skin and myofascial tissues as critical interoceptive generators, emphasizing the necessity for these areas to be approached through appropriate manual techniques. It provides supportive evidence on how ‘haptic’ touch can activate this interoceptive-insular pathway, potentially restoring balance to the myofascial armored body. This restorative process helps patients recalibrate their window of tolerance—

an important concept in trauma-informed care—and facilitates deeper engagement with their inner bodily experiences.

From a trans-disciplinary perspective, the study reflects on how the integration of bodywork practices with non-directive verbal guidance can be profoundly healing and resourceful for enhancing the lived body experience in cases of MUS. Specifically for patients with alexithymia, this integrated approach may offer significant support in overcoming their representational challenges regarding bodily arousal, allowing them to reconnect with their emotions on a deeper level. This holistic method not only aids in symptom alleviation but also fosters a greater sense of agency and empowerment in the therapeutic process.

Buckley (2017) investigated the integral role of the body in cultivating resilience, utilizing a sensorimotor psychotherapy framework. In this reflection, the authors aim to underscore the significance of integrating somatic resource interventions that promote embodied resilience, which they argue is a vital component of effective therapeutic treatment. Sensorimotor Psychotherapy, a body-oriented therapeutic approach, offers a unique perspective on resilience and how it can be predicted and influenced in the context of both traumatic and developmental challenges.

The paper emphasizes the concept of prediction, which is central to understanding the functioning and purpose of defensive subsystems and the process of meaning-making. These mechanisms are crucial as they help preserve activation and reactivity in response to contemporary reminders of adversities faced in earlier life stages. By illustrating the intricate relationship between prediction and the innate resilience displayed in early development, the authors reveal how somatic resourcing can enhance resilience, enabling individuals to respond to present-day situations with greater health and flexibility.

Moreover, the authors delve into the key concept of Embedded Relational Mindfulness, presenting it as a practical tool for accessing and recognizing the wisdom embedded in early adaptive resilience. This mindfulness practice allows for a transformative process where individuals can reframe their understanding of past experiences, fostering a more robust capacity for resilience in the face of life's challenges. Through this exploration, the authors advocate for a more comprehensive approach to treatment that prioritizes the body's role in the healing process.

Panhofer (2011) conducted an in-depth examination of the extent to which lived, embodied experiences can be articulated through language. This study involved the design of a comprehensive framework that integrated artistic research methodologies, emphasizing both narrative and perceptual practices. The innovative combination of writing and movement demonstrated the significant role of non-verbal forms of knowledge, reinforcing the concept of embodied cognition and the embodied mind as recently articulated within contemporary philosophy.

The research highlighted how artistic methodologies that incorporate embodied perceptual practices can enrich the fields of counselling and psychotherapy, advocating for their broader implementation. By traversing different modalities and engaging both hemispheres of the brain, these practices facilitate access to profound, often unconscious material that emerges during clinical work. This approach allows practitioners to tap into the innate wisdom of the body, transcending the limitations of verbal communication and enabling a deeper understanding of clients' experiences.

In a study conducted by Sakurai et al. (2020), the authors investigated the significant role of embodiment in robot-assisted counselling, particularly to specific cultural contexts. A key proposal of this work was to incorporate traditional Japanese nodding behaviour, known as “unazuki,” into the repertoire of social gestures used in human-robot interactions. This approach is grounded in the understanding that small, culturally specific body gestures can enhance trust-building between individuals and robotic entities.

The research focuses around CRECA, with context-respectful counselling agent, which aimed to facilitate empathetic dialogue during therapeutic interactions. The frequent nodding associated with “unazuki,” often accompanied by the verbal affirmation “un-un” (which translates to “I agree” in Japanese onomatopoeia), is a gesture that conveys empathy and signals unconditional approval. The hypothesis that the integration of “unazuki” will foster higher levels of empathy and result in longer and more meaningful conversations between the robotic counsellor and users.

To test this hypothesis, the researchers conducted an experiment involving ten subjects who participated in interactions with the counselling robot. Our quantitative evaluation utilized classic metrics of conversational utterance, finely tuned to accommodate the nuances of the

Japanese language. The results indicated that interactions incorporating “unazuki” exhibited a significantly higher value in these metrics compared to those without the gesture. Furthermore, participants rated the counselling robot’s trustworthiness and kindness as exceptionally high, averaging 5.5 on a Likert scale (with ratings typically ranging from 1 to 7), compared to lower scores of 3 to 4.5 for interactions devoid of nodding behaviour. This highlights the substantial effect that social gestures can have in promoting empathetic dialogue, particularly among diverse demographics, including the younger generation.

Findings emphasize the crucial role of gestural communication when utilizing robotic agents as therapeutic tools aimed at enhancing emotional well-being and social interactions. The evidence presented indicates that embodiment through culturally relevant gestures can have a profound, positive impact on user experience, warranting further investigation into this area. Moreover, the 3D printable robot design facilitated the development of culture-specific libraries of social movements, allowing the gestural repertoire to be effectively adapted for different cultural backgrounds. Considering these explorations, there remains an ongoing need to examine how students are assisted in navigating peer relationship challenges at a public university in Kitwe, particularly through the application of body language Gestalt counselling techniques.

Emerging from significant advancements in the embodiment of robotic agents, scholars such as Harrison (2024) pose an intriguing question: What happens to our gestures when our social and professional spoken interactions are mediated through screen technologies, such as videoconferencing platforms? This inquiry has garnered attention across several research fields, two of which are explored in this paper: applied linguistics and psychotherapy.

Though these disciplines diverge in their objectives—applied linguistics focusing on language structures and their applications, while psychotherapy emphasizes emotional and psychological healing—they share common interests. Both fields thoroughly examine language, communication, and the intricate dynamics of participation and inter-subjectivity. They also consider relational asymmetries and the varying degrees of communicative ability or skill that individual’s exhibit within interactions. Central to both domains is the meaningful experience of being present with others, which is often profoundly influenced by nonverbal cues.

Gesture, a key component of this experience, receives considerable attention in each field, but is approached through distinct conceptual and methodological frameworks, leading to differing interpretations of online gesture. Applied linguists frequently report a sense of 'loss', 'impossibility', 'absence', and near 'non-existence' of gestures during virtual interactions, suggesting that the natural flow of communication is impeded by the constraints of digital communication tools. In contrast, psychotherapists offer a more nuanced perspective, identifying not only the negative ramifications of reduced gestural communication but also instances of 'amplification', 'increase', 'closeness', 'enhancement', and even 'overload' of gestures in virtual settings. This paper by Harrison aimed to explore these disparate disciplinary perspectives, posing critical questions about the implications of gesture within online environments. It investigates what gestures signify in these contexts and examines the criteria by which perceived online loss or amplification is evaluated across and within these different spheres of research.

Philip et al. (2020) emphasize that building rapport is an essential part of the counselling process; however, most prior studies have mainly concentrated on rapport in face-to-face settings. This research aimed to improve understanding of the cues and techniques counsellors use to develop rapport during telephone sessions. The investigation involved interviews with nine counsellors with various qualifications and different levels of experience in telephone counselling. The information was analysed through thematic analysis, uncovering three main themes: the utilization of empathy, the significance of paralanguage cues, and deliberate harmonization. The outcomes of this research add to the existing literature, as well as to the training and supervision of counsellors, by illuminating the cues and strategies that counsellors indicate they use to cultivate rapport with clients via phone. What remained unclear was how body language counselling techniques assisted students in addressing peer relationship issues at a public university in Kitwe.

In a study conducted by Felipe et al. (2024) in Brazil, the researchers investigated the concept of body image, defining it as the complex mental representation of one's physical self, shaped by a myriad of cognitive, biological, behavioural, sociocultural, and environmental influences. This topic is particularly pertinent for university students, who frequently grapple with the pressures and challenges associated with body image perceptions. The systematic review examined various interventions aimed at fostering a holistic and positive body image among this demographic. Employing the PRISMA 2020 guidelines alongside the PICO method, the

researchers were able to systematically identify, select, assess, and synthesize relevant studies. The research drew upon extensive databases including Scopus, Web of Science, and PsycINFO, focusing on interventions specifically tailored for university students aged 18 to 39.

To evaluate the quality of the studies included in the review, the QATSDD tool was utilized, leading to the identification of 21 pertinent studies, predominantly sourced from the United States. Most of these studies employed quantitative methods, with a noticeable emphasis on female participants. Various innovative intervention strategies were explored, such as cognitive-behavioural techniques, media literacy programs, and physical and resistance training, alongside an increasing integration of technology, like mobile applications, to enhance engagement and accessibility.

Many of the studies from Felipe's systematic review reported positive outcomes, including significant reductions in body dissatisfaction and notable increases in self-esteem post-intervention. However, the review also illuminated critical gaps in the existing literature, such as a limited number of formative interventions and a scarcity of qualitative research approaches. While the incorporation of technology into these interventions presents exciting opportunities for improvement and reach, the researchers emphasized the importance of conducting careful assessments and thoughtfully selecting evaluation instruments to ensure the reliability of results.

Looking ahead, future research endeavours should prioritize addressing these gaps by investigating more formative interventions and integrating qualitative methodologies. This would provide a richer, more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of body image interventions tailored for university students, ultimately aiding in the development of more effective strategies for fostering positive body image in this vital population. Such literature motivated the need to explore how body language counselling was used to help students with peer relationship challenges at a public university in Kitwe.

Yokotani, Takagi, and Wakashima (2019) conducted a study examining nonverbal synchrony (NVS) between a patient's and therapist's body movements during therapy sessions, highlighting its significance in fostering a strong therapeutic alliance. While prior research has established a connection between NVS of various body parts and the therapeutic relationship,

the specific link between NVS involving facial features and therapeutic alliance remains inadequately explored. Understanding this relationship is crucial for advancing the comprehension of NVS in therapeutic contexts.

To investigate this link, the researchers utilized an advanced video imaging technique, which allowed for quantitative analysis of synchrony in facial expressions between the participants and their therapists. A total of 55 participants, who had previously participated in earlier research, were involved in structured psychotherapeutic interviews, during which both the participants' and therapists' facial movements were meticulously recorded.

The machine learning algorithm deployed in the study quantitatively analysed 500,500 data points representing facial movements and expressions from both the participants and therapists. The findings revealed that absolute synchrony in expressions of happiness and fear was positively correlated with the strength of the therapeutic alliance, indicating that when both the therapist and the patient exhibited similar emotional expressions, the therapeutic relationship became more profound and effective.

Conversely, the study found that symmetrical synchrony of left eye movements served as a negative predictor of therapeutic alliance, suggesting that when participants and therapists' left eyes moved in a synchronized manner, this might impede emotional engagement. Notably, the researchers controlled for variables such as participants' sex, age, the overall volume of facial movements, and the frequency of facial expressions to ensure the robustness of their results.

The analysis designated absolute synchrony of facial expressions as indicative of emotional interaction with a mere 2-second delay, while symmetrical synchrony of left eye movements was conceptualized as a potential barrier to emotional connection, further enriching the understanding of nonverbal communication dynamics in therapeutic settings.

A similar study by Ramseyer and Tschacher (2014) conducted an in-depth exploration of the coordination between patients' and therapists' bodily movements, focusing specifically on a phenomenon known as nonverbal synchrony. This concept has been empirically demonstrated to correlate significantly with the outcomes of psychotherapy, suggesting that the alignment of nonverbal cues can enhance therapeutic effectiveness. Their findings were primarily based on dynamic movement patterns observed in the entirety of the body during therapy sessions.

The study presents a new analysis of an existing dataset, extending previous empirical findings by offering a granular differentiation of movements occurring in the head and upper-body regions. The study utilized a sample of 70 patients, comprised of 37 females and 33 males, who were treated at an outpatient psychotherapy clinic. To quantify nonverbal synchrony, the researchers employed an advanced automated video-analysis algorithm known as motion energy analysis, which allows for precise measurement of movement dynamics.

Head and body synchrony were specifically quantified during the initial 15 minutes of video-recorded therapy sessions, providing insight into the early phases of therapist-client interaction. Micro-outcome measures were evaluated through self-report questionnaires distributed to both patients and therapists immediately following each session. These questionnaires sought to assess immediate therapeutic experiences and perceptions. Macro-outcome measures, on the other hand, were gathered through comprehensive questionnaires designed to quantify the attainment of treatment goals and observable changes in patients' experiences and behaviours after therapy.

The analysis revealed that differentiating between head-synchrony and body-synchrony illuminated their distinct roles in therapeutic outcomes. Notably, head-synchrony demonstrated a strong predictive capacity for the global outcomes of therapy, indicating its potential importance in establishing a therapeutic alliance and promoting overall treatment effectiveness. Conversely, body-synchrony was found to predict the outcome of individual therapy sessions rather than global therapy results, suggesting that while bodily coordination is vital in the moment-to-moment sharing of experiences, it may not carry the same weight in long-term therapeutic success. These findings underscore the complex interplay between various facets of nonverbal communication in the therapeutic context, calling for further exploration into how these dynamics can inform and enhance clinical practice.

The results pose an important amendment to previous findings, which showed that nonverbal synchrony embodied both outcome and interpersonal variables of psychotherapy dyads. The separation of head- and body-synchrony suggested that distinct mechanisms may operate in these two regions: Head-synchrony embodied phenomena with a long temporal extension (overall therapy success), while body-synchrony embodied phenomena of a more immediate nature (session-level success). More explorations with fine-grained analyses of synchronized

phenomena in nonverbal behavior may shed additional light on the embodiment of psychotherapy process.

Other researchers, such as Singh et al. (2008), assert that facial expressions are undoubtedly the most powerful form of nonverbal communication. The face has always represented an individual's identity. The face marks the boundary between identity and oblivion. Every line on a face contributes an aspect to that identity. These lines become more pronounced when individuals feel an emotion, and they remain relatively constant as they age. The study introduces a novel approach to face recognition that emphasizes the emotional expressions of the person to identify their face. The experimental results demonstrate that this method can pave the way for advancements in face recognition technology. This approach serves as a solid foundation for the field of face recognition and could be applied as a primary method for essential defence and security matters. What was yet to be known was how body language was used to help students at a public university navigate peer relationship challenges.

In a study conducted in Japan by Nagaoka et al. (2006), experienced counsellors highlighted the significance of the client-counsellor relationship in the therapeutic process. They proposed that this relationship may be intricately linked to the embodied synchrony of nonverbal behaviours, such as gestures, posture, and eye contact. Despite its importance, there remains a notable scarcity of quantitative research exploring this nuanced connection. Their study aimed to bridge this gap by capturing the embodied synchrony of nonverbal behaviour during counselling sessions, utilizing a multiple communication channel perspective. This approach sought to examine the interplay between various nonverbal channels including body language, vocal intonation, and timing of responses. In addition, the research investigated how embodied synchrony correlates with the cognitive and emotional processes experienced by both clients and counsellors, particularly focusing on the development of trust within the therapeutic alliance.

A total of 9 to 24 participants engaged in role-playing exercises simulating school counselling scenarios, during which they rated aspects of visual and vocal embodied synchrony alongside their perception of trust towards their counsellor. The findings revealed that elements of embodied synchrony, such as the coordination of body movements, the similarity in vocal strength and tonal quality, as well as the smoothness of response timing, exhibited a significant co-occurrence. Furthermore, strong correlations were found between these synchrony metrics

and the participants' assessed sense of trust, suggesting that embodied synchrony serves as a meaningful indicator reflecting the underlying mental processes of both clients and counsellors in a therapeutic context. This research underscores the importance of nonverbal communication in fostering trust and enhancing the effectiveness of counselling relationships. Literature of this nature motivates the value of exploring how peer relationship challenges were resolved using Gestalt body language techniques at a public university in Kitwe with remained unknown.

Yokoyama et al. (2024) conducted a study exploring the effectiveness of objective machine learning models in deciphering patients' perceptions from therapists' facial expressions during virtual counselling sessions conducted via video. Eight therapists participated in simulated online counselling sessions with the same patient, allowing for a controlled examination of therapist expressions. The nuances of the therapists' facial emotions were extracted from the recorded session videos. Utilizing a sophisticated random forest algorithm, the study aimed to analyse and predict the impressions conveyed by the therapists as perceived by the patients.

The findings revealed that the therapists' neutral facial expressions served as significant influencing factors on the patients' impressions. Remarkably, a predictive model trained on just three key neutral facial features was able to achieve an impressive accuracy rate of 83% in discerning how patients viewed their therapists.

This research suggests that neutral facial expressions play a crucial role in shaping patient impressions during online counselling, particularly in a context marked by spatiotemporal disconnections. The study represents a pioneering application of expression recognition technologies within the realm of online counselling, where the visibility of therapists' emotional expressions may be inherently limited. The insights gained from this research hold great potential for enhancing psychiatric clinical practices through the integration of advanced Information and Communication Technology.

The study conducted by Yamamoto et al. (2016) focuses on the development of a Japanese robotic support system capable of recognizing and responding to nodding, which is integral to creating a context-respectful counselling agent. Recognizing the high levels of stress experienced by many IT workers, who often have limited access to counselling resources, the researchers proposed a virtual agent named CRECA (Contextual Response Counselling Agent).

CRECA is designed to listen attentively to clients, facilitating a reflective dialogue by responding in a manner that preserves the context of the conversation. It utilizes advanced natural language processing to identify and extract emotional keywords from clients' speech, allowing the agent to monitor emotional shifts throughout the dialogue. At the conclusion of these interactions, CRECA provides a summarization of the dialogue that highlights these emotional changes, fostering clients' self-awareness and encouraging further reflection.

To enhance the user experience, the project plans to involve a virtual avatar that displays nonverbal cues, epitomizing a more human-like interaction. A key feature of this avatar's design is its ability to nod at appropriate intervals during conversations. This behaviour mimics natural Japanese conversational practices, known as "unazuki," which conveys approval and engagement, essential for creating a supportive and empathetic atmosphere within counselling sessions. Grounded in Carl Rogers' theories of counselling, the aim is to model the humanistic approach in the design of this automated agent, ensuring clients feel understood and respected throughout their counselling experience.

A paper by Hazel and Mortensen (2014) explored the dynamic evolution of courses of action that are both proposed and negotiated among co-participants during interactive exchanges. Each action taken by participants opens a subsequent array of possible responses; however, which specific response is ultimately produced by the co-participant is not pre-determined. The trajectory of an activity unfolds organically, shaped by the decisions and choices made at each moment by the individuals involved, as well as their comprehension of prior actions. In this context, physical visual displays such as gaze direction, gestures, and postural orientation alongside vocal tones, material objects, and linguistic expressions, collectively provide participants with a rich repository of resources. These resources enable them to create public displays of understanding that are contextually relevant to the interaction at hand.

Participants in an interactive setting frequently encounter the practical challenges of defining one situated practice from another. This involves navigating transitions into and out of bounded activities as well as moving across successive juncture points within a singular activity. To mitigate any potential disorientation among co-interactants regarding the specific frame or context they are currently engaged in, these transitions often require some form of delineation or marker.

In this investigation, Hazel and Mortensen specifically examined how co-participants strategically utilize aggregates of interactional components—such as verbal communication, eye contact, body language, and physical objects—to construct actions that are sequentially relevant within the context of their interaction. Our primary focus is on the use of materials in the immediate surroundings, particularly within study guidance counselling meetings at a university, and how these are employed in conjunction with spoken dialogue, gaze, and postural orientation to establish local social order.

The analysis reveals that physical objects and bodily conduct are not merely supplementary but are actively employed to project social actions that serve a symbolic function in institutionalizing interaction. It is through the deliberate arrangement of bodies and objects into recognizable configurations that participants can engage in specific types of tasks, which then serves as a gestural display of their institutional orientation. This study highlights the intricate interplay between materiality and bodily conduct in shaping and maintaining the structure of social interactions.

Foley and Gentile (2010) highlighted that the mental status examination is an essential and multifaceted component of any comprehensive psychiatric evaluation, playing a pivotal role in informing both diagnosis and treatment strategies. This thorough assessment encompasses a variety of factors, including the patient's overall appearance, behaviour, emotional expressiveness, level of eye contact, and patterns of motor activity. Notably, any variations in these elements from one session to another can yield critical insights for the psychiatrist, illuminating the patient's emotional and psychological state over time.

In the realm of psychiatry, there is a profound emphasis on understanding not only the verbal expressions of patients what they say and how they articulate their experiences, but also on observing their nonverbal interactions with both their surroundings and the healthcare provider. Such observational skills are vital, as they can reveal inconsistencies between spoken words and physical demeanour, which might indicate deeper issues that the patient is reluctant or unable to vocalize.

Moreover, it is equally crucial for psychiatrists to maintain a heightened awareness of their own nonverbal communication and cues. These can significantly influence the therapeutic relationship, either fostering a sense of safety and openness or creating barriers to effective communication and trust. The following article will leverage a series of clinical vignettes to

illustrate various aspects of nonverbal communication that may emerge within psychotherapy settings. By being attuned to these subtle yet telling nuances, psychiatrists can gain invaluable insights into the patients' inner worlds, ultimately enhancing the therapeutic process and promoting better clinical outcomes. Similar to counselling sessions, this study motivates the need to explore how body language Gestalt counselling techniques helped students with peer relationship challenges at a public university in Kitwe Zambia.

In a study by Tay (2017) delves into the intricate interfaces between two pivotal constructs in the realms of linguistics and psychotherapy: metaphor and the human body. This exploration serves as a compelling means of illustrating the profound connections that exist between linguistic nuances and mental health research. The study identifies three robust research strands, each distinct yet interconnected, that remain largely underexplored:

- (a) The theoretical relationship between metaphor and the corporeal form, highlighting how language and bodily experience interact;
- (b) The strategic use and management of metaphors within therapeutic contexts, unveiling how metaphorical language shapes understanding and healing;
- (c) The body as a vital therapeutic resource that enriches verbal interactions, emphasizing the importance of physical embodiment in the healing process.

Employing a practitioner-informed methodology known as “correspondent analysis,” Tay merges the methodologies and insights of both metaphor researchers and psychotherapists. A selection of session excerpts is meticulously analysed to demonstrate the intricate ties among these three strands, drawing implications for both the study of metaphor and the practice of therapy. This comprehensive examination culminates in the proposal of a nuanced triangle model that encapsulates the metaphor–body–psychotherapy relationship. The study concludes by discussing the broader implications of these findings for applied metaphor research, suggesting potential avenues for future inquiry and practice.

Endrizzi, Duglio & Govoni (2017) describe movement psychotherapy (MP) and dance/movement therapy (DMT) as psychotherapeutic methods that focus on the body and utilize movement to harmonize emotional, cognitive, physical, social, and spiritual elements of the self (European Association Dance Movement Therapy, 2010). This approach uniquely combines bodily movement and sensation with verbal self-reflection (Bloom, 2006). While

several studies have highlighted DMT as a beneficial treatment in general medical and cancer care, there remains a lack of robust evidence-based research. The authors illustrate a clinical case that reflects numerous situations where the experience of facing death can be especially distressing. This emotional strain can create barriers to communication, which may jeopardize the therapeutic relationship. The role of the movement therapist involves clarifying aspects of body language, which has significant implications for clinical practice, particularly concerning challenging end-of-life decisions like palliative sedation therapy (PST). Although procedural guidelines for PST assist physicians and care teams in navigating the decision-making process and help them feel more at ease addressing physical suffering, doctors often report feeling emotionally pressured when their patients encounter psychological challenges, raising concerns that PST might become a potential “counterphobic defence to treat.”

In an analysis, Lobb (2015) explored somatic experience through the lens of Gestalt epistemology, emphasizing its phenomenological, relational, and aesthetic dimensions. This foundational understanding of somatic experience encourages therapists to direct their attention toward the dynamic movement co-created by both the therapist and the client, highlighting their complementary intentions. The article revisits several key concepts, including integration, self-function, holism, aggression, and the support for the "now-for-next," all within the context of somatic experience.

Lobb also provides clinical examples illustrating various manifestations of bodily suffering, such as anxiety disorders, desensitization, and psychosomatic disturbances. Additionally, he outlines essential therapeutic competencies necessary for effective Gestalt work focused on the body. This comprehensive approach underscores the importance of body therapy and movement in Gestalt psychotherapy and the phenomenology of the body-in-contact. Key terms included in this discussion are body therapy, movement, and Gestalt psychotherapy, phenomenology of the body-in-contact, anxiety disorders, desensitization, psychosomatic disturbances, and the concept of "now-for-next."

In a study focused on the construction of shared semantic spaces using gestures within interpreter-mediated psychotherapy sessions, Chwalczuk (2022) asserts that gestures represent an integral component of all face-to-face interactions, enriching communication beyond spoken language. Despite this, their significance in interpreter-mediated contexts has largely been overlooked and underexplored within the discipline of interpreting studies. Drawing on a

rich multimodal corpus of interactions occurring in child psychiatry settings with migrant patients, this research specifically investigates the application of iconic gestures those that visually represent their referents and examines how these gestures facilitate the bridging of linguistic divides and contribute to effective cultural mediation. The study's findings highlight that gestures not only assist in the collaborative construction of shared semantic spaces but also serve as crucial indicators of the fidelity of interpretation, ultimately playing a vital role in establishing and nurturing trust in the relationships between migrant patients and their public service interpreters.

A study conducted by Kimmell (2018) highlights the significance of group work as a fundamental modality in social work practice. This research aims to explore the integration of body-oriented psychotherapy into group work and to ascertain its potential implications for social work practices involving groups. In-depth interviews were carried out with 20 practitioners who are pioneering this emerging approach throughout the United States. Utilizing thematic analysis, we identified how the incorporation of body-oriented psychotherapy may influence the nature and execution of group work from their perspectives.

The primary theme that emerged from the study is that employing body-oriented psychotherapy serves to deepen the group process and enhance its therapeutic potential. This central theme is supported by four subthemes that illustrate how participants effectively used body-oriented psychotherapy to enrich their group work. These subthemes include: 1) Coming into the Present Moment, 2) Accessing the Body's Unconscious Knowing, 3) Regulating Affect and Facilitating working through, and 4) Enhancing Interpersonal Connection.

The study discusses how our findings align with existing research on group work and body-oriented psychotherapy and reflect contemporary neurobiological models of therapeutic change. Additionally, identify potential benefits and limitations associated with the use of body-oriented psychotherapy in group settings and outline key considerations for adapting to this emerging trend within the profession.

AIPC (2009) adds that language is mostly associated with spoken or written language, and it is the unique ability that sets humans apart from other primates. To this ability, body language is supreme as it communicates volumes of messages. In addition, 93% of the communication is exchanged non-verbally whereas 65% to 90% of it is body language in each interaction. Body language according to AIPC (2009) is taken for granted as it occurs involuntarily or semi-

voluntary which can represent mental dispositions in many instances. Literature of this nature gives insights into the role that body language plays in communication. It becomes necessary to explore how the Gestalt body language technique is used to explore clients' peer relationship challenges at a public university.

Afdal (2016) explored ways how to understand the non-verbal behaviour of clients and techniques in counselling sessions. From this article, it's clear that in the practice of counselling a counsellor needs to understand clients' expressions and that counsellors need to develop skills to assist clients in giving meaning to nonverbal communication. The behaviour or body language of both the counsellor and client is vital in a counselling session. The study showed that many counsellors only focus on what the clients say without paying attention to what is indicated by nonverbal behaviour mostly depicted by the body. Additionally, the findings pointed to counselling being an art that was not superficial, sceptical and not focusing on a single technique but various techniques to explore the issues of clients. For a Gestalt counsellor, the client needs to be allowed to feel the direct presence of the session of counselling through the techniques in use to interpret and give meaning to all forms of communication.

Attention to Body language in therapy is a way to gain insights into the non-verbal expressions of clients in therapy. Aboh (2015) in Nigeria investigated body language as a tool for nonverbal communication in a case study of youths in the Department of Linguistics, Igbo and other Nigerian languages. The study pins its investigations on the idea that people especially youths neglected the effects of body language. This investigation despite not being counselling related, gives insights into the role of body language in communication. The findings show that nonverbal communication was a tool used to express thoughts and ideas and that it formed a very important form of communication. The study further recommended that care should be exercised in the way individuals use nonverbal expressions like their body language, face, eye blinking, hands and other gestures as it may have several interpretations.

The study above depicts the role of body language in communication. When applied to counselling, Palmer (2011) adds that '*Body language is thought to be a subtle indicator of intense emotions.*' Nonverbal gestures like posture, body movements, and other expressions in a counselling session may be an opportunity to help the client to exaggerate the movement. By doing so the client is helped to attach meaning to that behaviour possibly the client is asked to explain the meaning of the expression or feeling to gain awareness in the now moment. Clarke

and Marsh (2021) add that the Gestalt counsellor would notice clients tapping a foot and mention their observation and may even ask clients to give their feet a voice and talk about it. Through such observations of nonverbal behaviour such as body language, the clients are helped to recognize the interruption of contact and to be aware of the possible hindrances from gaining clarity through awareness.

Peterson and Gough (2019) add that techniques are not that important, but the process that facilitates the counselling to gain awareness. The techniques are tools or experiments used to bring about awareness.

The reviewed literature has demonstrated how helpful the empty chair and body language techniques are in their use as Gestalt counselling techniques. The question of how helpful these techniques are in helping students with peer relationship challenges at a public university in Zambia has not been addressed hence the need to conduct this study.

Anake and Asor (2012) of Nigeria discussed gestures in guidance and counselling and their pedagogical/andragogical implications. The study explored the implications, usage and relevance of gestures in guidance and counseling. The paper identified gestures as non-verbal clues, a type of body part movement that conveys a certain meaning that counsellors can explore and utilize in a counselling relationship. The study pointed to the counsellor's competence in the use of gestures in counselling and how effectively the counsellor uses such gestures to help clients. This study did not explore the usage of body language from the Gestalt theory point of view. There is still a need to study how Gestalt body language techniques are used to help clients resolve peer relationship issues in Zambia among university students.

2.5 Limitations of the empty chair and body language counselling techniques.

Gestalt counselling has been proven through research to be effective in several scenarios. One such scenario is seen in the studies done by Hitge (2006) from South Africa who worked on determining how Gestalt counselling could be used to create awareness of undesirable life scripts and the position of a client to help the client re-write the life script. This study adopted a qualitative design that used a single case study to explore how Gestalt counselling could be utilized to raise awareness in a client with a self-defeating life script. Hitge (2006:126) recommended the techniques used in the study:

“The following techniques have been used with good effect by the researcher and are recommended for use by all Gestalt Therapy practitioners dealing with clients with undesirable life script: The rosebush technique, scribbling, dialogue (including semantic techniques, the empty chair and role-play), exaggeration, enactment, grounding (including breathing, relaxation and visualization), offering choices and taking responsibility for their choices to clients and self-nurturing, which aids in self-support.”

From the study above, the client was able to address her life’s self-defeating issues from the understanding that was developed through raising awareness brought about by Gestalt counselling.

Despite evidence from research that shows the benefits of Gestalt counselling, researchers like Ndhlovu (2015:96) identified some limitations that the Gestalt theory holds. Among the weaknesses was the theory being *‘self-centred, as a result, it is more concerned with just individual development.’* *‘The theory deals only with the here and now’*, and that the *‘theory does not deal with diagnosis and testing’*. Such analysis, however, creates a need to explore further what limitations if any the empty chair and body language counselling techniques have in helping students with peer relationship challenges.

Dolliver (1981 in APA Psych Net Direct, 2022) suggested some other limitations of Gestalt theory similar to Ndhlovu's (2015) views’ that included the theory being developed by one man Fritz Perls that could have incorporated the personal biases and limitations of his personality that might pose to be limitations of the theory somehow. Some personal limitations are seen in the *‘I and Thou’*, *‘should’*, *‘lose your mind’* and self-support. To this, the other applications of Gestalt try to go beyond such limitations in their modern application to counselling.

Other writers like Corey (2005) suggest that Gestalt counsellors would require deeper personal development to focus only on the here and now during counselling. The techniques try to raise awareness in the now and present experience of past unmet needs. The effectiveness of such confrontations of issues from the past may be limited and may not be well established. Corey (2005) speaks further to Gestalt counselling being so flexible and versatile in its approach with many techniques that may be applied hence posing a danger for the counsellor to misuse this

power they have with clients in counselling. It is the wish of this study to unearth suggestions if any to help navigate through such biases and possible abuse of the use of these counselling techniques.

Another study by Sicoli (1998) in the United States of America analysed the client performance in the two-chair method. In this study, ten softening and eight non-softening counselling dyads on performance comparison task completion were investigated. The study highlighted the importance of task completion with an emphasis on those tasks to do with “wants and needs” and that concerning clients' “emerging experiences”. The study further puts a caution on the need for counsellors to recognize the nature of the sequence of the two-chair therapeutic process and why clients must complete tasks. This need is especially more pronounced in novice counsellors trying to use techniques they are not conversant with. The risks may arise from possibly lacking experience leading to wrong questioning or impeding the resolution process due to overzealousness in counsellors. The other caution comes when counsellors may risk fast-forwarding the counselling process, thereby prematurely running through techniques with clients.

Another limitation seen in the use of Gestalt counselling by Brennan (2021) is that it was found not helpful with the psychological effects of some behaviours that were hereditary. And was also found to be limited in helping with psychological factors not influenced by individual thoughts. This entails that Gestalt counselling was more effective in dealing with issues of unfinished business caused by contact with the environment, an individual is found in Petroland, those to do with perceptions and lack of awareness.

Other scholars, such as Orfanos (2021), have provided a critical perspective on the Gestalt therapeutic approach, emphasizing its foundational belief that every individual possesses inherent resources vital for personal growth. This growth, according to the Gestalt philosophy, is best achieved within authentic and meaningful relationships that allow individuals to explore and express their true selves. One notable strength of the Gestalt approach is its foundation in empirical research, which validates its efficacy for various psychological disorders. Numerous studies have corroborated the advantages of its techniques during therapeutic applications, particularly for issues such as anxiety, depression, and trauma. Furthermore, the Gestalt approach is distinctive in its ability to engage with the past while simultaneously relating it to

an individual's present circumstances, allowing for a deeper understanding of how past experiences may influence current behaviours and emotions.

Flexibility is another hallmark of the Gestalt approach that Orfanos stated, which employs a diverse range of techniques tailored to suit the unique needs of individuals. This adaptability makes it relevant for various therapeutic contexts, enabling practitioners to modify their methods based on the specific goals of therapy and the characteristics of individual clients. Moreover, the utility of the Gestalt approach is not limited by age, developmental stage, or cultural background; it is applicable to a wide demographic, emphasizing the universal need for self-exploration and authentic expression (Orfanos, 2021).

Through this therapeutic methodology, individuals are empowered to embrace their uniqueness, fostering an environment where diversity is celebrated. Clients are encouraged not only to confront their discomfort but also to unearth hidden dynamics and capabilities, ultimately cultivating new norms of behaviour and thought patterns.

However, it is essential to acknowledge certain weaknesses associated with the Gestalt approach. For instance, it requires the Gestalt healer to possess a significant level of personal growth and self-awareness, which can vary widely between practitioners. Additionally, measuring the effectiveness of specific therapeutic techniques poses a challenge due to the lack of standardized metrics, making it difficult to establish clear benchmarks for success. Lastly, criticism has been directed towards the approach's theoretical foundation, which some argue is not as robust or well-defined as that of other therapeutic modalities (Orfanos, 2021).

Notably, Gestalt therapy cannot be effectively learned through theoretical study alone, as its core principles and practices are deeply experiential. As articulated in the approach itself, "real learning can only come from direct contact with the Gestalt healer or a person who has engaged in the Gestalt way of life." This highlights that the essence of Gestalt therapy lies not in the acquisition of knowledge through reading or writing, but rather in the transformative experiences shared between the client and the practitioner. In essence, Gestalt therapy is a relational journey: it is both my experience and your experience, deeply rooted in personal interaction and engagement.

Some other writers have identified the focus on body language and emotions to be a limitation in Gestalt techniques in that it may put some people in a defensive state rather than a safe and supported state, similarly, to focusing on the body language and emotions (Clarke and Marsh, 2021). This entails that issues of paying too much attention to the client's body and the actions there may even be misinterpreted by clients, especially the opposite sex and may lead to failure of the counselling process due to misunderstandings.

Gulotta (2024) highlights that although Gestalt Therapy has many advantages, it is also important to recognize its drawbacks. This therapeutic method requires a certain degree of preparedness and a true willingness to face and engage with one's emotions and thoughts. The writing further explains that while some people may find these expressive techniques liberating and life-changing, others might feel uncomfortable or overly exposed, which could impede their progress in therapy. Moreover, since Gestalt Therapy strongly focuses on personal accountability and self-awareness, there is a potential risk of victim-blaming. This risk becomes more significant when therapy is not conducted by skilled and sensitive professionals who can carefully handle these dynamics. Consequently, therapists need to apply Gestalt techniques thoughtfully, ensuring that clients feel secure and supported throughout their therapeutic journey.

Literature has shown some limitations of the Gestalt theory and some techniques, and the wish of this study is to establish how these limitations affected the use of the empty chair and body language techniques in helping students with peer relationship challenges.

2.6 Knowledge gap and contribution of the study

The literature reviewed has provided relevant evidence that Gestalt counselling techniques are useful in helping clients overcome various issues. Despite this evidence, there remains a knowledge gap on how the empty chair and body language counselling techniques are used to help students with peer relationship challenges at a public university in Zambia. This study therefore explored how empty chair and body language counselling techniques have helped students with peer relationship problems in universities, and further establish limitations if any, students with peer relationship problems experienced from the empty chair, and body language techniques.

2.7 Summary

The chapter reviewed various literature related to Gestalt counselling and its benefits. The literature was presented according to the research objectives. Despite the reviewed literature showing the use, effectiveness and some limitations of Gestalt counselling, the question remains unanswered as to the benefits of an empty chair and body language counselling techniques in helping students with peer relationship challenges at a public university in Kitwe.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Overview

The chapter presents the methodology that was used to study how the empty chair and body language Gestalt-counselling techniques helped students with peer relationship problems at one of the public universities in Kitwe district. It covers the following sections: Philosophical paradigm, research design, target population, sample size, sampling procedure, research instruments, and procedure for data collection as well as data analysis. It ends with the trustworthiness of the study and chapter summary.

3.1 Philosophical Paradigm

A research paradigm encompasses the fundamental philosophical assumptions that guide the research process (Ngulube, 2015). It reflects a researcher's worldview regarding how knowledge is constructed and understood within the research context. Lincoln and Guba (2013) assert that a paradigm consists of a set of beliefs that influence how researchers interpret and engage with the world around them. These beliefs are often categorized into three primary paradigms: positivism, which emphasizes objective measurement and observable phenomena; constructivism, which focuses on subjective experiences and the co-creation of knowledge; and pragmatism, which advocates for practical approaches that consider multiple perspectives and the applicability of ideas.

This study is anchored in the constructivist paradigm, which posits unique beliefs about four fundamental elements: ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology (Patricia, 2017). Ontology pertains to the nature of reality and asserts that multiple, subjective realities exist, shaped by individual experiences. Epistemology relates to the nature of knowledge, suggesting that understanding is constructed through social interactions and reflections. Axiology reflects the values and ethics inherent in the research process, emphasizing the importance of recognizing the researcher's biases and values in shaping the research outcomes. Lastly, methodology encompasses the strategies and techniques employed during the research process, aligning with the constructivist emphasis on qualitative methods that promote an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences.

In this study, it is crucial to examine how these four elements of the constructivist research paradigm inform the investigation into the benefits of empty chair and body language counselling techniques for students experiencing peer relationship challenges. By adopting this perspective, the study aims to gain deeper insights into how these therapeutic techniques can facilitate personal growth, enhance communication skills, and foster a sense of connection among students grappling with interpersonal difficulties.

Ontology

Ontology refers to the fundamental nature of knowledge, encompassing our understanding of reality. In this study, ontology specifically pertains to the subjective knowledge and lived experiences of both the counsellors and the students who employed the empty chair and body language techniques in the context of Gestalt therapy. Adil and Khalid (2016) articulate that ontology involves an exploration of our beliefs regarding the essence of reality and knowledge. Building on this foundation, Patton (2002) asserts that engaging with ontological questions compels researchers to delve into the various realities that surround individuals and to critically examine their validity and implications.

In alignment with these philosophical perspectives, the present study aimed to investigate the benefits that students experience when utilizing Gestalt counselling techniques, particularly in navigating peer relationship challenges at a public university in Kitwe. This inquiry seeks to illuminate how these counselling techniques facilitate deeper self-awareness, improve communication skills, and foster healthier interactions among students, thereby contributing to their overall emotional well-being and social cohesion within the university environment. Through this exploration, the research aspires to enhance our understanding of the practical applications and transformative potential of Gestalt counselling in academic settings.

Epistemology

Epistemology refers to the study of knowledge specifically, how individuals come to understand and interpret the world around them. In the context of this research, it focuses on the subjective knowledge possessed by counsellors and students who utilized the empty chair technique and body language techniques in their counselling sessions. This knowledge encompasses the insights and perceptions gained through their experiences with these counselling methods. Adil and Khalid (2016) further elaborate on this, stating that

epistemology involves examining the philosophical underpinnings of knowledge, including its nature and the processes through which it is acquired.

In this study, subjective knowledge was primarily sourced from the lived experiences of students who faced challenges in their peer relationships and subsequently participated in counselling sessions employing the empty chair and body language techniques. These techniques encouraged deeper emotional expression and facilitated clearer communication, leading to enhanced self-awareness and resolution of interpersonal conflicts. The students' reflections and testimonies about their experiences not only highlight the effectiveness of these methods but also underscore the varied ways in which knowledge can be formed through personal encounters and counselling practices.

This exploration of epistemology provides a framework for understanding the significance of these counselling techniques and their impact on students' emotional and social development.

Axiology

The branch of philosophy that studies the nature of values and value judgments, plays a crucial role in research by uncovering the underlying assumptions related to value systems (Parthirage et al., 2008). For researchers, this involves a critical examination of ethical considerations, specifically what constitutes good and bad practices within the context of their work, as well as identifying the core values that emerge from their research findings.

Kiyunja and Kiyuni (2017) further elaborate on axiology as the philosophical foundation that addresses pivotal questions regarding the nature of ethics and the ethical behaviour expected towards both study participants and the research itself. Acknowledging the impact that ethical decisions can have on the integrity of research outcomes, the researcher in this study made it a priority to adhere to ethical standards.

To ensure the dignity and values of the participants were respected throughout the research process, thorough ethical considerations were employed. This included obtaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality, and being transparent about the research intentions and methodologies. In compliance with institutional guidelines, ethical clearance was successfully

obtained from the University of Zambia, demonstrating the commitment to uphold ethical standards in all aspects of the study. For further details, please refer to Appendix 4, which contains the ethical clearance documentation with number HSSREC IRB No: 00006464.

Methodology

Methodology outlines the systematic approach through which knowledge is acquired, as noted by Stenbacka (2001). It encompasses the frameworks and principles guiding a research study. Methods refer to the specific techniques and procedures employed to implement the methodology. In this context, Kamal (2019) describes methodology as a strategic plan or process designed to collect and analyse data effectively.

For this study, qualitative research methods were employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the benefits students derive from Gestalt counselling techniques when addressing peer relationship challenges. Utilizing interviews and document analysis, the research aimed to uncover the emotional and cognitive experiences of these techniques, revealing how they enhance students' skills in navigating peer relationships.

Types of Research Paradigms and justification for the choice of constructivism paradigm

Three primary research paradigms serve as frameworks guiding various philosophical perspectives about the world: pragmatism, positivism, and constructivism. Each of these paradigms influences how research is conceptualized and executed. According to Nyimbili (2021), the choice of research methodology is inherently connected to the research paradigm selected, which must align with the design chosen for a particular study.

This study specifically adopts a constructivist paradigm to investigate the benefits of Gestalt counselling techniques for students facing challenges in their peer relationships. The constructivist paradigm is characterized by its emphasis on subjective epistemology, which recognizes that knowledge is constructed through social interactions and personal experiences. Kiyunja and Kuyuni (2017) further elaborate that this paradigm incorporates a balanced approach to axiology considering the values and ethics involved in research while maintaining a relativist ontology, meaning it acknowledges multiple perspectives and interpretations of reality. Additionally, it employs a naturalist methodology, which emphasizes understanding phenomena in their natural contexts.

To fully appreciate the research undertaken in this study, it is crucial to understand the implications of each of the three research paradigms regarding their applicability and limitations. The inclusion of a constructivist worldview allows for a more nuanced exploration of individual experiences within interactions, while positivism and pragmatism may offer alternative perspectives that could either complement or contrast with constructivist approaches. Understanding these paradigms enables a clearer insight into the rationale behind the chosen methodology and the implications of the findings derived from this research.

3.1.1 Pragmatic paradigm

For this study, a pragmatic worldview was consciously set aside. The choice to do so stemmed from the understanding that adopting a pragmatic approach offers researchers the flexibility to choose from a diverse array of methods, techniques, and procedures. This flexibility is crucial because it allows for a more nuanced exploration of complex phenomena rather than viewing the world as a singular, absolute entity. By not employing a pragmatic perspective, the research aimed to maintain a more structured framework, leading to clearer conclusions grounded in specific methodologies. This choice ultimately facilitated a deeper investigation into the subject matter on the benefits of Gestalt counselling techniques in resolving peer relationships, while avoiding the potential ambiguity that can accompany a more open-ended, pragmatic approach. Creswell (2014 in Raubenheimer, 2016:105) adds that:

“Pragmatism is not committed to one philosophical system and reality; individual researchers have a freedom of choice of methods, techniques and procedures; the world is not seen as an absolute unity; the truth is what works at the time; researchers look to the “what” and “how” to research based on intended consequences; pragmatism opens the door to multiple methods, different worldviews and assumptions as well as different forms of data collection”.

The pragmatic paradigm fundamentally challenges the notion of accessing truth through a singular worldview, as is commonly observed in the positivist and interpretivist paradigms, which tend to adopt a mono paradigmatic perspective. This approach emphasizes the importance of multiple perspectives and the contextual nature of knowledge, advocating for a more inclusive understanding of truth.

In the context of this study, the pragmatic paradigm was intentionally overlooked because the research objectives align more closely with the constructivist paradigm. Constructivism prioritizes the subjective interpretations and experiences of the participants, particularly within a phenomenological framework, which seeks to understand the essence of individuals' experiences in this case with the empty chair and body language counselling techniques.

The positivist paradigm, conversely, is rooted in quantifiable methodologies, typically involving controlled experiments and statistical analysis. These methods were deemed unsuitable for exploring the nuanced benefits of Gestalt counselling for students facing peer relationship challenges. As indicated by Creswell (2014), such an exploration requires a more qualitative approach, one that captures the complexities of human experience and the personal meanings ascribed to these interactions, rather than merely relying on numerical data or generalized findings. By focusing on subjective experiences, the study aimed to uncover insights that are more reflective of the participants' realities and the effectiveness of Gestalt counselling in their lives.

3.1.2 Positivist paradigm

Augustine Comte first proposed the positivist paradigm during the period from 1798 to 1857, advocating that the foundation of research should be rooted in scientific inquiry. This paradigm emphasizes that the primary methods for expanding knowledge and understanding should be experimentation, observation, and rational reasoning derived from empirical experience. According to Comte (1856, as cited in Nyimbili, 2021), this approach asserts that only through measurable and observable phenomena can researchers derive valid conclusions.

However, this study does not adopt the positivist paradigm because its focus is on elucidating the complexities of human experiences rather than solely relying on quantifiable data such as numerical metrics. The objective of this research aligns more closely with a qualitative analysis, seeking to understand the nuanced, subjective experiences of students working through peer relationship challenges. To achieve this, the study employs Gestalt counselling techniques, which facilitate personal insight and emotional awareness. This falls squarely within the constructivist paradigm, which posits that knowledge is constructed through individuals' interactions with their environments and through the meanings they derive from these interactions (Creswell, 2014, p. 8). Thus, the methodological approach taken in this study

is designed to capture the rich, contextual experiences of students as they navigate their interpersonal issues, highlighting the importance of understanding the subjective nature of their challenges and resolutions.

3.1.3 Interpretivist or Constructivist Paradigm

The interpretivist paradigm, often referred to as the constructivist paradigm, aims to foster a nuanced understanding of the subjective experiences that shape human interactions and perceptions. In the context of this study, it specifically explored the individual experiences of students as they navigate peer relationships and highlighted the benefits, they encountered through the application of Gestalt counseling techniques (Creswell, 2014). This approach places significant emphasis on comprehending how each respondent interprets their own realities and the meaning they derive from their experiences.

Furthermore, Simui (2018:93) asserts that “the interpretivist paradigm emphasizes the ability of the individual to construct meaning,” underscoring the significance of personal context and interpretation in the research process. By adopting this constructivist paradigm, the study delves deeply into the complexities of interpersonal relationships among students, illustrating the transformative impact that counselling techniques can have on their social interactions and emotional well-being. Through this lens, the research offers insights into the lived experiences of participants, contributing to a broader understanding of the dynamics at play in their social lives and interactions.

Justification for choice of constructivist paradigm

The constructivist paradigm is proposed for this study to understand the benefits of Gestalt counselling techniques based on lived experiences of students with peer relationship challenges when exposed to Gestalt counselling techniques. This paradigm is seen to support the idea of investigating the benefits of Gestalt counselling techniques in helping students with peer relationship challenges from their subjective experiences with the empty chair and body language technique. Constructivism supports the construction of reality based on social realities (Matta, 2021). The study objectives brought out how helpful the Gestalt counselling techniques have been and explored the limitations in the use of these counselling techniques. These objectives guided the study to benefits based on exploring the experiences of these clients and users of the counselling approach. As stated by Cohen, Manion and Morrison

(2018) meanings in their world are held by individuals based on their experiences that can only be known through interactions with them.

The paradigm is seen to help create collaborations that allow the respondents to share their experiences and describe them using their voices that assisted the researcher to understand reality from their views (Lincoln and Guba, 2013). Through this paradigm, the researcher hopes to describe the lived experiences of the respondents about resolving peer relationship challenges through their interaction with counselling using Gestalt counselling techniques.

3.2 Research approach

The plan and procedure for conducting this study aligned with the ability to collect data from the respondents' views, attitudes and opinions. The approach to this study was suitable to bring out the benefits of Gestalt counselling techniques to students experiencing or who have experienced peer relationship challenges. Nyimbili (2021:134) states, "*There are three types of research approaches which are used in social science research. These are qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approach Research.*" This study used a qualitative approach to explore the benefits of Gestalt counselling techniques to students with peer relationship challenges.

3.2.1 Qualitative research

The study used a qualitative research approach to explore the benefits of the empty chair and body language counselling techniques for students with peer relationship challenges. Qualitative research is subjective to the way respondents or participants experience their reality. Ramasodi (2009:26) adds that qualitative approaches in research allow researchers to answer questions about the complex nature of phenomena from the perspectives of the participants. It gives an in-depth view of how individuals make sense of their experiences. For this study on the benefits of Gestalt counselling techniques to students with peer relationship challenges. A qualitative approach was used to unearth the experiences of students exposed to Gestalt counselling techniques when dealing with peer relationship challenges on campus.

Justification for the Qualitative Research Approach

The approach was chosen because it allowed the researcher to assume an emic position to gain insights into the benefits of Gestalt counselling techniques when dealing with peer relationship challenges based on lived experiences of students exposed to the empty chair and body language techniques. Tenny et al (2022) add similarly that qualitative approaches allow researchers to gather participants' experiences, perceptions and behaviour, which makes it easier to answer the how and why questions and not the many questions. Hence, this study takes on a qualitative approach to understand the personal experiences of students and counsellors in the use of Gestalt counselling technique.

Through a qualitative approach, the study endeavoured to unearth the benefits of Gestalt counselling techniques to students with peer relationship challenges using the empty chair and body language techniques. Both students and their counsellors gave perspectives from their experiences of these techniques in resolving challenges in peer relationships.

3.2.2 Other Research Approaches not used in this study

i. Mixed Methods Approaches

The mixed method as described by Nyimbili (2021:135) is an approach that is seen to be suitable to add breadth and depth of understanding to a study to validate data. This approach enables the researcher to employ both qualitative and quantitative approaches. By doing this, the researcher takes advantage of two approaches and bridges the gaps between the challenges of the two methods and takes advantage of their strength to complement the findings as both numbers and narratives provided the validity needed. This study did not adopt a mixed method approach to explore the benefits of Gestalt counselling techniques to students experiencing peer relationship challenges because the study explored subjective lived experiences from the experiences of the qualitative respondents.

ii. Quantitative research

Quantifiable data is collected, analyzed and interpreted using quantitative approaches in research. Hopkins (2000 in Chanetsa, 2017:134) argues that this form of study works with numerical or statistical data. It uses descriptions or experiments to collect data that is presented in the form of comparisons like frequencies of the items being measured. This may mean that quantitative approaches deal with studies that border on statistical interpretations of findings

to understand the issue at hand. This makes it not suitable for this study as it did not make use of numerical data to validate the findings from the verbal data.

3.3 Research design

Research designs tend to give a clear road map of how the project or study was carried out. This means that the design tends to spell out the mapping strategies that are to be employed to collect data. Tavakoli (2012) postulates that the research design is like the architectural plan of a study.

This study endeavours to use a qualitative approach that dictates the type of design to be used. As such the Hermeneutic phenomenology shall be used. Therefore, this study explored the benefits of Gestalt counselling techniques to students with peer relationship challenges using a hermeneutic phenomenological design.

i. Justification for choice of hermeneutic phenomenological research design

A hermeneutic phenomenological design seeks to bring out an understanding, descriptions and interpretations of the behaviours of humans and the meanings in these subjective experiences (Carpenter, 2013). This design is proposed to bring out the lived experiences of students about the benefits of gestalt counselling techniques to students with peer relationship challenges. A phenomenological study allows the researcher to use interviews and open-ended questions on questionnaires for respondents to express themselves about their subjective experiences in terms of descriptions, interpretations and meanings.

This study used a qualitative design to explore the lived experiences of respondents to bring about an understanding. Simui (2018) justifies the use of a hermeneutic phenomenology design in that it is concerned with the experiences of humans, as it is lived. This brings out the details no matter how small they may be seen about the aspects found in an individual's experience that others may take for granted to construct meaning and bring about an understanding. Simui further argues that phenomenology takes the form that is inductive to the lived experiences of an individual and is suitable for studies that aim to fully describe experiences that the participants have gone through. Using this understanding, it is the wish of the researcher that

the words of the respondents who have experienced peer relationship challenges and used Gestalt counselling will inform the study.

This study brought out an understanding of the benefits of gestalt counselling techniques to students with peer relationship problems and using data collection that included exploring the meanings of the lived experiences of the students. The study used Van Manen's life world existential reflections to explain and understand the phenomenology of the participants that includes exploring the lived body, lived time, lived space and lived relations (Rich et al, 2013). This is critical to the selection of the design being a hermeneutic phenomenological design that supports exploring the socially constructed experiences of the respondent.

Rich et al (2013) states that understanding lived experiences requires the four existential reflections which are lived body that refers to bodily presence in everyday life including how one feels, reveal, conceal, and share using our body as we interact with the world. In this study the lived body were the counsellors and students who experienced the empty chair and body language counselling techniques. Lived time encompasses time as it is experienced in its subjective form. This may affect how individuals feel, which can influence time, moments, freedoms, constraints and all that is affected by time. Concerning this study, the lived time is when the counsellors and students experienced the empty chair and body language techniques and felt by using these techniques. The third one is lived space, which entails felt space, subjective experiences of space and how we experience space. For this study, it implies experiences of counsellors and students, good or bad, about how they experienced the empty chair and body language techniques during counselling sessions. And lastly, lived relation covering the relationships made or maintained with others in our life world. The implication for this study in terms of lived human relations is the outcome of how counsellors and students view each other, and the counselling relationship experienced. Rich adds that these four life existential offers how life experiences is interpreted by corresponding to exploring phenomena.

3.4 Population

The target population was students from the second, third, fourth and fifth years, and Student counsellors. The students from the second year to the fifth year have been targeted with the assumption that they had experienced university life and developed peer relationships and might have had an experience of the challenges that come with such relationships and have

been exposed to Gestalt counselling techniques. The inclusion of counsellors was based on the fact that they were the providers of the counselling services to students and, therefore, would be a valuable source for data on the benefits of Gestalt counselling techniques in helping students with peer relationship challenges.

3.5 Sample Size

Sidhu (2014) states that the sample is a smaller portion of the population picked for the study. For this study, twenty (20) participants were the sample size. This consisted of sixteen (16) students who had experienced Gestalt counselling techniques and four (4) counsellors who had used the body language and the empty chair counselling techniques to help the students. This sample was seen to be adequate for the study because it could help arrive at data saturation and sufficiency.

Data Saturation occurs when additional data collection yields minimal new insights or themes. In qualitative research like this one, open-ended questions generate rich data, and purposeful sampling increases the likelihood of reaching saturation. Once new information ceases, researchers should halt data collection and may explore atypical cases for validation. Data Sufficiency indicates that collected data should allow for comparisons among study dimensions and ensure cohesive results that synthesize related works. Ultimately, researchers must ensure that the data is adequate to answer the study's research questions (Musarrat, Sudeepta, and Ranajee, 2019).

ii Justification on Sample Size

Other literature by Bekele and Ago (2022) on phenomenological studies suggests that a minimum of six participants is essential for capturing rich, qualitative insights. In contrast, several other studies indicate that a sample size ranging from 10 to 20 participants is optimal for effectively illuminating the complexities of lived experiences (Bernard, 2013). Drawing upon these guidelines, the researcher purposefully selected a sample of 16 students, who had prior exposure to peer relationships challenges and were helped using the empty chair and body language counselling techniques, along with four practicing counsellors from the public university. This combination was designed to ensure a comprehensive exploration of the participants' perspectives on benefits of Gestalt Counselling based on their lived experiences

and the dynamics of the counselling process with the empty chair and body language techniques within this academic setting.

3.6 Sampling technique

The study used a non-probability sampling technique, which was expert purposive sampling of the counsellors. Frey (2018), and Nyimbili and Nyimbili (2024) qualify the use of expert purposive sampling in that it helps to select participants that can inform a study based on expert knowledge and experience. The sample described in 3.5 is seen to meet the criterion for expert purposive sampling. McCombes (2023) postulates that sampling in research deals with the act, process, or technique of selecting or picking a suitable representative of a population to set boundaries based on the features of the whole population. For this qualitative study using a small sample size, a researcher was able to explore the benefits of the empty chair and body language techniques.

The researcher asked the counsellors for records of students who were counselled using the empty chair and body language techniques. Then, a typical case purposive sampling procedure was used to select the 16 students. Typical case sampling is a type of purposive sampling useful when a researcher wants to study a phenomenon or trend as it relates to what is considered "typical" or "average" members of the affected population (Ashley, 2020). In this case, it was students who had peer relationship problems and were counselled using the empty chair and body language techniques.

An expert purposive sampling procedure was used to select the counsellors. This technique was chosen because it allows the selection of experts in the area being studied. The counsellors are the experts with expert knowledge (lived body) and experiences on how they used the empty chair and body language techniques (lived space) during the counselling interaction (lived time). to counsel the selected students (lived relations) at a public university.

3.6.1 Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

Based on the sampling techniques described in 3.6 and supported by Manen's (1997) life world of four existential reflections for phenomenological exploration, the following exclusion and inclusion criteria were used:

The students and their counsellors who experienced the empty chair and body language counselling techniques were the lived body. How the students and the counsellors felt during the counselling interactions was referred to as lived time, while the subjective experiences of the two counselling techniques were referred to as lived space. The lived relations were the outcome of the counselling interactions between the students and their counsellors.

3.7 Data Collection Instruments

The study used semi-structured interview guides and document analysis guides to collect data from the participants. Kasonde-Ngandu (2014) echoed that data collection tools are what researchers use in collecting the needed information. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from the sixteen (16) students and four (04) counsellors.

3.7.1 Semi-structured Interview guide

The study used semi-structured interview guide to collect data from both students and counsellors. The semi-structured interview guide was used because it allows for follow-up questions to have a deeper understanding of the benefits of empty chair and body language counselling techniques.

3.7.2 Document Analysis Guide

The study used a document analysis guide to verify that the Counsellors used the empty chair and body language techniques to counsel the students in the sample. Secondly, the document analysis guide was used to verify records indicating how the students benefited from the empty chair and body language counselling techniques.

3.8 Data collection procedure

The research sought approval from the University of Zambia Humanities and Social Sciences Ethical Committee before starting the data collection stage. When the approval was granted, a request was written to the research site for permission to conduct the study. After receiving clearance, the researcher commenced engaging participants in the research sites to start the data collection process.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with students who had been counselled using the empty chair and body language counselling techniques to collect data on how they benefited from such counselling techniques.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the counsellors to collect data that helped to verify the use of the empty chair and body language techniques and how the students benefited from such counselling techniques.

Document analysis was conducted on the records of counselling to verify the usage of empty chairs and body language techniques and how the students counselled benefited from such counselling techniques.

3.9 Data analysis and presentation

The thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data collected through interviews and document analysis.

Bryman (2016) explains thematic analysis being a qualitative approach to analysing data. This involves categorizing data based on familiarization, creating of codes according to data themes, searching themes in the coded data, reviewing the categories of data and naming before finally reporting the findings under the subheadings of themes.

I. Familiarization

The researcher immersed themselves in the data by carefully listening to the audio recordings from the interviews, which allowed for a nuanced appreciation of participants' perspectives and emotions. After this initial phase of active listening, the researcher transcribed the recordings, capturing not only the spoken words but also the nuances of tone and pauses that could reveal deeper meanings. Through this comprehensive process, the researcher was able to discern

patterns and themes that emerged across different interviews, ultimately leading to a rich and thorough understanding of the data collected. This approach facilitated a more informed analysis and interpretation of the findings, providing valuable insights into the subject matter.

II. Creating Labels

The second step involved highlighting specific sections of the transcribed data that exhibited similarities in themes or content. Once these key portions were identified, we assigned distinct labels to each section to facilitate easy identification and streamline follow-up processes. To further enhance organization, these labels were then systematically grouped into categories based on shared characteristics, allowing for a clearer overview and more efficient referencing in subsequent analyses.

III. Searching Themes in the data Labels

The third step in the analysis required that the labelled data be put in similar groups or themes. Similarities among the labelled data were identified using through review of the labels to create new groupings or themes.

IV. Reviewing Themes

The fourth activity in the analysis required the researcher to recheck the themes and confirm that they represent the actual labels and data that were collected and how they respond to the general research questions.

V. Naming Themes

The fifth stage in the analysis involved assigning names to the themes. The researcher at this stage analysed the names to ascertain that the names clearly denoted the data that each theme represents, leading to the final stage.

VI. Writing the Report

The final stage involved writing chapter four of the findings indicating the main themes being the research questions and the sub themes arising from the process of analysis of the data.

i. Other Types of Analysis not used in this study

Qualitative data analysis is a systematic process that involves the detailed examination and interpretation of non-numerical data to extract meaningful insights and contribute to the generation of new knowledge. This process encompasses a variety of data forms, including textual documents, images, audio recordings, videos, and other qualitative sources, allowing researchers to identify and analyse underlying patterns, themes, and relationships (Tyler, 2023).

Different ways within qualitative data analysis offer unique perspectives and tools for analysis.

These include:

Content analysis: for instance, focuses on systematically coding and categorizing text or visuals to quantify specific variables and understand trends.

Narrative analysis: dives into the structure and content of stories and personal accounts, highlighting the meanings conveyed through language and context.

Discourse analysis; examines the way language is used in context, revealing how power dynamics and social processes influence communication.

Grounded theory is an inductive methodology that aims to develop theories based on data collected through interviews and observations, facilitating a deep understanding of social phenomena.

Lastly, thematic analysis, which was chosen for this study, offers a flexible approach by identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (or themes) within qualitative data, making it applicable across various research contexts (Tyler, 2023).

By utilizing these diverse analytical approaches, qualitative data analysts are equipped to explore the rich complexity of human experiences and societal interactions, as outlined by (Tyler, 2023) and (Hecker and Kalpokas, 2025).

ii. Justification for Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is recognized as a valuable qualitative analysis technique due to its versatility and depth. The researcher was equipped with the tools needed to identify, analyse, and report patterns (themes) within data, leading to a detailed, and complex understanding of the benefits of Gestalt counselling for students navigating peer relationships, particularly through the empty chair and body language techniques at a public university using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was chosen for its capacity to encompass a wide range of perspectives, thereby facilitating a nuanced understanding of diverse data sets (Hecker and Kalpokas, 2025).

From the foregoing, Sudiksha, Othale, and Raman (2023) add that thematic analysis is a widely used and effective technique for recognizing patterns in qualitative data, presenting numerous benefits. It enables researchers to investigate and uncover new viewpoints, along with identifying similarities and differences among participants. Moreover, it offers a flexible and adaptable framework to align with research objectives, inquiries, and data sources. Additionally, this method aids in communicating and presenting results by arranging data into significant themes that can be exemplified with quotations or illustrations, which the research felt was ideal for such a study on benefits of Gestalt counselling of students with peer relationships based on interpretation of lived experiences.

The study, designed using hermeneutic phenomenology, required the researcher to encompass a diverse range of perspectives and interpretations. By identifying key themes, the study aimed to understand how Gestalt techniques, specifically the empty chair and body language, assisted students in navigating peer relationships at a public university, thereby documenting the associated benefits.

3.10 Trustworthiness of the Study

Trustworthiness encompasses the degree to which stakeholders can have confidence in the management and interpretation of data, including the methodologies employed throughout the research process (Pilot and Beck, 2014). In this study, the researcher took deliberate steps to ensure data integrity and reliability, in line with Amankwa's (2016) recommendations, emphasizing that the necessary protocols and procedures must be regarded as essential to the research design. This approach involves adhering to specific criteria that establish the credibility, dependability, conformability, transferability, and authenticity of the findings.

Credibility addresses the accuracy and truthfulness of the data, ensuring that the ways in which information has been collected and interpreted reflect the real-world context. Dependability involves the consistency of the data over time and across various conditions, highlighting the need for a reliable research framework. Conformability refers to the degree to which the findings can be corroborated by others, reinforcing the objectivity of the researcher. Transferability allows for the application of findings from this study to similar contexts or populations, thereby enhancing the broader relevance of the research. Lastly, authenticity

speaks to the genuine representation of participants' voices and experiences, ensuring that the study reflects their realities. This adherence to trustworthiness criteria solidifies the research's overall integrity and value.

i. Credibility

The study endeavoured to employ techniques of prolonged engagement with respondents through interviews, reflective journaling and member checking to ensure confidence in the truth of the study (Ahmed, 2024). Adequate time was spent in building rapport with participants to ensure a good understanding of deep perspectives of participants.

ii. Dependability

To ensure dependability, the researcher ensured that process logs are kept that included field notes of the activities that relate to this exploration. This ensured that evidence of the choices concerning the theory and methods of the study, including the rationale for such choices, is documented. Polit and Beck (2014) add that research dependability refers to how stable the information collected is over time during the process of the study.

iii. Conformability

The study ensured to maintain neutrality in the exploration to make the findings consistent. In this qualitative study, conformability was seen in the findings being the lived experiences of the participants in this case students and counsellors and not the characteristics and preferences of the researcher, (Smith, 2006). This was ensured using verbatim extracts of the respondents' reactions as findings.

iv. Transferability

The study endeavoured to make the findings useful in other settings by providing a detailed explanation of the respondents as seen in 3.5. Korstien and Moser (2018) add that transferability is based on the researcher providing a thick description of respondents and the process that enables the readers to examine the research findings being transferable to their settings.

v. Authenticity

This study adhered to authenticity requirements as advanced by Polit and Beck (2014) that researchers need to fairly and wholly depict the range of realities and use a realistic view to show the participant's lives. In this study, the criterion of authenticity was addressed following the writing of Schou et al (2011) that the selection of an appropriate sample and

provision of detailed descriptions of the methods used demonstrate the authenticity of the study.

3.11 Summary

This chapter provided an exploration of components of the research process. It began by outlining the research paradigm, which sets the philosophical framework guiding the study, highlighting its qualitative orientation and the philosophical assumptions underpinning the investigation. Next, the chapter investigated the methodological approach employed, detailing the specific strategies used to collect and analyse data. It described the overall research design, the hermeneutic phenomenological design that was adopted to effectively address the research questions posed.

The chapter further elaborated on the population and sample size, identifying the target demographic from which participants were drawn. It clarified the criteria used to define the population, along with the rationale behind the selected sample size. Sampling procedures were also outlined, explaining the techniques employed. This included a discussion about the implications of the chosen techniques on the reliability and validity of the results.

Additionally, the chapter detailed the instruments used for data collection, interviews and document analysis. Lastly, the procedure for data collection and analysis was described, illustrating the step-by-step process followed to gather, process, and interpret the data to draw meaningful conclusions. This overview emphasized the rigor and systematic nature of the research conducted, ensuring transparency and reproducibility of the findings.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

4.0 Overview

The study aimed to investigate the benefits of the empty chair and body language Gestalt counselling techniques. The findings of the study were obtained using interview guides from counsellors and clients who have been helped using the empty chair and body language counselling techniques from Gestalt theory.

The chapter begins with a detailed overview that sets the context for the study. It includes a comprehensive breakdown of participant demographics, specifically categorized by sex, providing insight into the composition of the sample. A table summarizing the key themes identified during the analysis follows, offering a visual representation of the findings.

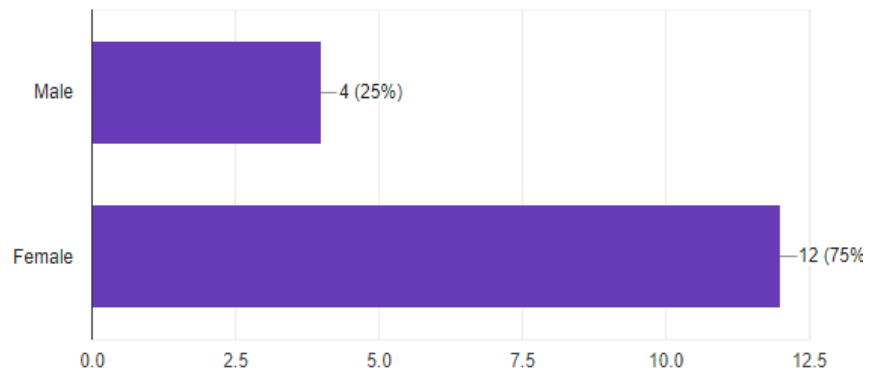
The results are organized around the four primary research questions, each accompanied by a thorough discussion of the corresponding themes that emerged from the thematic analysis. Each theme is supported by relevant quotations and examples from the data, illustrating the participants' perspectives and experiences in a nuanced manner. Following this presentation, the chapter transitions into a discussion of the implications of these findings and their relevance to the broader field of study in chapter 5.

The four study research questions were:

- i. How did the empty chair counselling techniques help students with peer relationship problems?
- ii. How did the body language counselling techniques help students with peer relationship problems?
- iii. What limitations did students with peer relationship problems experience from the empty chair, and the body language counselling techniques?
- iv. How did the empty chair and body language counselling techniques help students with relationship problems?

Demography of participants by sex

Student Participants by Sex



The Demographic representation of student participants in Figure 1 by sex shows the 4 male participants and 12 female participants.

Emergед Themes

The study findings are presented using the research questions and themes that emerged to show consistency in answering the questions.

The Table 2 Emergед Themes

Themes	Sub-Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Knowledge of the empty chair technique ➤ Experiences with the empty chair counselling technique ➤ Empty chair counselling technique effectiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Brought disclosures, promote imagination, and can be used in child counselling. ➤ Hesitation, confidentiality issues, facing fears, & coming to terms. ➤ Concerns were addressed.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Benefits from the empty chair counselling technique 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Encouraged emoting, developed awareness, and counsellor skills, and addressed interpersonal conflict.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Application of the empty chair counselling technique 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Unmet needs, frustrations, unresolved conflicts, relationship & emotional challenges, disclosures, and helps deal with rejection.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of the body language counselling technique • Experiences with the body language counselling technique • Effectiveness of body language • Benefits of using body language counselling techniques 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nonverbal signals helped to pick unconscious states. • Showed counsellor attentiveness, aids in clarifications, identification of masked emotions, counsellor self-awareness, and discomfort. • It was seen to be effective. • Unmasking emotional states and showing genuine concern and care, gave context to the sessions, enhanced the counselling experience
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Limitations in the use of the empty chair and body language counselling technique 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Fears of being misunderstood, seen to be a strange technique and Cultural influences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Factors contributing to success. ▪ Suggestions for enhancing the empty chair and body language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Good rapport, client readiness, counsellor attending skills, ability to imagine, client readiness to experiment, attention to unspoken emotions, and cultural influences. ▪ A welcome environment, integrating other techniques and skills, needs to educate users

4.1 How the empty chair counselling techniques helped students with peer relationships

Question one highlights responses on the lived experiences of counsellors and clients in the use of the empty chair Gestalt counselling techniques. Counsellors and clients who have been exposed to the empty chair Gestalt counselling technique responded to this research question.

4.1.1 Participants Knowledge of the Empty Chair

Participants were asked to describe how they understood the empty chair counselling technique. The findings showed that there was a common understanding of the empty chair technique as a technique that enabled users to vent emotions and address their issues using an empty chair. Further, participants understood that the empty chair counselling technique demanded a participant talk to an unoccupied chair while imagining the other person or situation they had issues with is seated on the empty chair. It also meant role-playing a person they had a problem with seated on an empty chair and talking to him about the feeling experienced in the now.

Some verbatim were extracted to support the findings. For instance, participants became aware of their thoughts and emotions. One of the students, participant #2 had this to say: *“This is where I need to express my emotions”* (PS2). Similarly, counsellors agreed with the students. For instance, one of the counsellors, participant # 3 said that; *“the empty chair counselling technique is an approach that allows individuals to process interpersonal or internal conflicts and become aware of their thoughts and reactions”* (PC3),

Helps to bring disclosures: Further findings from other participants indicated that the empty chair was a counselling technique that helped to bring about disclosures, especially if one could not physically address the person or things that may have somehow brought them distress or pain. For instance, one of the counsellors, participant # 1 said that: *“This is a counselling technique usually, the client who plans to share/disclose certain information impersonates the person (s) with whom they would wish to know this information in their absence”* (PC1).

Promotes imagination: Students who participated in the study knew the empty chair counselling technique requires one to use his or her imagination to imagine the person they had unresolved issues were in the empty chair and had to confront them as a way of addressing

their concerns. In support, one of the students, participant #11 recalled, “*I imagined that the person I wanted to talk to is seated in the empty chair listening to me*” (PS11).

Counsellors agreed with the students and one of them, participant # C4, said that: in using the empty chair counselling technique, clients imagine a person is in an empty chair facing them and therefore engage in a dialogue with them. The technique helps clients to explore unresolved feelings, conflicts, or unexpressed thoughts. It provides a tangible way of addressing internal and interpersonal challenges. In addition, the empty chair counselling technique serves as a symbolic tool for expressing emotions and gaining insight into resolving the problem at hand. (PC4).

For instance, one of the students, participant # 8 stated that; “*the empty chair counselling technique encouraged me to express myself in an imaginary manner*” (PS8). The techniques also helped to create awareness of conflicts clients had in themselves. For instance, Student Participant # 14 said, “*this is an approach that allows individuals to process their interpersonal or internal conflict and become aware of their thoughts.*” (PS 14)

Can be used in child counselling: Another student, participant # 4 indicated “*the empty chair counselling technique can also be used on children with problems. A child client would face the empty chair while imagining that there is an elderly and fearful person whom he intends to confront*” (PS 4). In agreeing with the students, one of the counsellors, participant C2 had this to say: the empty chair technique is a counselling technique that helps clients to emote and address their unresolved issues by using their imaginative ability to imagine a significant other person with whom they may have issues is seated in the chair (CP 2).

Based on these findings, it is evident that the participants (both counsellors and students) understood the empty chair counselling technique. This can be attributed to their experiences with the technique. Overall, the findings suggest that the empty chair counselling technique was an effective intervention-counselling tool for the participants who had interpersonal relationship problems.

4.1.2 Experiences with the Empty Chair

The students and their counsellors were asked to share their experiences using the empty chair counselling technique. Findings are that some initial challenges due to hesitation by some students were experienced. However, many of them eventually became more comfortable with the process and were able to open freely. The clients who pushed past this inertia were able to overcome hesitation and eventually made progress with the use of the empty chair.

Hesitation for first time users: In agreeing with the experiences, one of the students, Participant # 3, stated that *the process was quite overwhelming. At first, I was not comfortable enough*” (SP3). Another student, participant # 7 added by saying; *“there was a lot of hesitation when starting but I seemed to have gotten the concept along the way”* (SP7). Student participant # 5 however, expressed mixed experiences by saying, *“It was okay but a bit hard”* (SP 5).

Despite some students experiencing hesitation and difficulty when starting, many of them indicated that they had good experiences with the empty chair counselling technique. This was due to:

Assurance of confidentiality: One of the experiences that made it good was the assurance of confidentiality from the counsellor. This was alluded to by student participant # 11 that, *“It was awesome because it was just between me and the counsellor, and I was assured that what we discussed in the counselling session was not going to go anywhere else to third parties”* (SP 11). Similarly, student participant # 12 revealed how the Counsellor helped him to freely express himself by saying *“The Counsellor helped me express my feelings without limits”* (SP12).

Facing their Fears: In triangulating the data generated so that truth is established, counsellors were also asked to express their experiences of using the empty chair counselling technique. It was found that one of the positive outcomes of using the technique was that students came to terms and faced their fears. To this effect, one of the counsellors, participant # 2 had this to say.

It was interesting. Whereas many students initially were sceptical about using the empty chair counselling technique since it felt to them like they were doing the actual disclosures. But in

the end, most of the students who went through it appreciated how the technique exposed their fears and gave them the mental and physical tenacity to proceed with actual disclosures. (C2)

Acceptance/Coming to terms: Similarly, another Counsellor, participant # 3 said that “*clients were able to come to terms with their situations as they talked their mind to the imaginary person in the chair*” (C3). When this finding was further verified with the students, one of them, Participant # 3 that “the empty chair counselling technique enabled me to address my fears and emotions” (S3).

The experiences of the empty chair were positive and negative to some of the counsellors. The positive aspects included being able to freely express themselves, face their fears, and freely come to terms with unresolved issues, while the negative experiences included hesitation and discomfort to engage in the technique. Therefore, counsellors must use the positive side of the experiences to help clients with interpersonal relationship challenges and inform practice.

4.1.2 Perceived Effectiveness in addressing concerns in counselling using the empty chair technique.

The participants were asked to show how they felt helped by the empty chair counselling technique. Figure 2 shows the results of how clients felt helped by the empty chair.

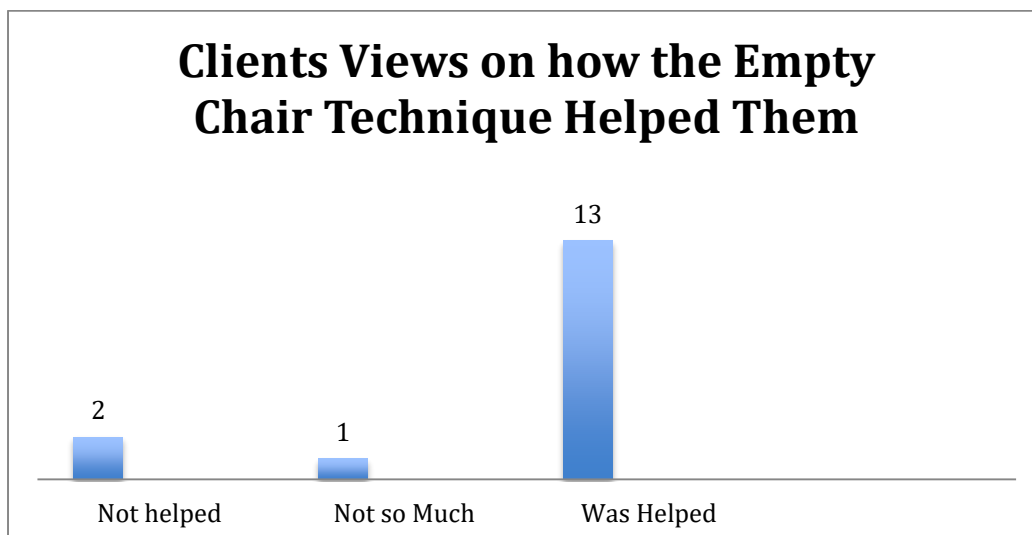


Figure 2: Results from fieldwork show how clients felt helped from the use of the empty chair counselling technique in addressing students' concerns during counselling sessions.

In terms of how the students who went through the counselling perceived the empty chair counselling technique in addressing their concerns, it was found that 13 indicated that their concerns were addressed. This implies that the empty chair technique is helpful in counselling people with peer relationship challenges.

4.1.3. Benefits from the use of the empty chair

The study established some Participant's lessons from the use of the empty chair. Some of the views that were common to all included the ability to aid in venting for unfinished business.

Encouraged Emoting: Participants were able to express their issues on the empty chair as evidenced by Participant 2 who stated, *"I have learnt that it helps in expressing a lot of intrapersonal things like my emotions."* (PS 2). Another student, participant #1 added that *"the empty chair can be used for several interpersonal issues that clients may have"* (PS 1).

The empty chair was also seen to be a technique that allows clients to freely imagine their problem situation and be able to speak freely about it. This was what one of the counsellors, participant C3 said about the empty chair technique, *"It works where the client can understand and has an average abstract or imagination of the situation or person, they have issues with sitting in the empty chair"* (C3).

Developed awareness: The study findings revealed that there was an emphasis on the client being willing to open and speak freely about their situation. Openness to address their concerns was found to be key to bringing about awareness. One of the counsellors, participant # 4 stated. *"If the student can stay open to laying their thoughts and feelings on the chair, their issues tend to feel bearable and can be processed, and the student could find some peace after using the techniques"* (C4)

Counsellor Skills: The need for counsellors to have a well-developed skill set and expertise in using the empty chair was vital. The counsellors alluded to this fact and stated that the role of the counsellor's skill in using the empty chair technique was vital and needed to be perfected as most of its effectiveness depended on it.

The counsellor's skills in using the empty chair were further emphasized so that they can help clients reduce conflicts that may arise out of confronting each other.

Addressed Interpersonal Conflict: The empty chair was seen to help reduce interpersonal conflict that may arise from individuals confronting each other. For instance, one of the students, participant # 11 noted that; *“It is a good way of using diplomacy because you can use it outside your school place as well to keep your situation under control”* (PS 11).

Further, another student, participant # 13 added that *“the empty chair counselling technique helped me to learn how to let go of the feeling of hurt without having to talk to the actual person.”* (PS13)

The research findings suggest that the empty chair technique can be an effective tool for resolving various issues in counselling. The technique works particularly well when the client is willing and able to engage with it. Additionally, the empty chair technique can be especially helpful for clients who are unable to confront the person or issue they are struggling with in person. In such cases, the client can use their imagination to vividly picture the person or issue in the empty chair. This can help the client to work through their issues and find resolutions. Overall, the empty chair technique is a valuable tool for therapists to use in helping clients to express and resolve their emotions.

4.1.4 Counselling issues where the empty chair technique was used

Participants were asked about the type of issues the empty chair was mostly employed. The results from the counselling documents that were reviewed showed that the technique was mostly applied to situations that needed clients to address issues that were unmet like stress, frustrations, unresolved conflicts and relationship challenges.

Stress & Interpersonal Conflicts: This was confirmed by the responses from the students. For instance, participant # 12 stated; *“the empty chair when I was feeling stressed and had interpersonal issues”* (SP12). Another student, participant # 15 said *“empty chair technique was used on me when I had unresolved traumas and conflicts”* (PS 15).

Relationship and Emotional Challenges: Relationship challenges were among the issues addressed using the empty chair technique. The responses from interviews supported this statement. For instance, one of the students, participant # 16 said *“The empty chair technique*

was used when clients had problems in their relationships” (PS 16). One of the counsellors, participant # C1 added “mostly interpersonal issues where the client needs to vent and wouldn’t normally approach the other person physically” (C1). Participant 10; “Conflicts, unresolved emotional issues”, Participant #11 and “Childhood and adulthood traumas” (PS 11)

Helped with Disclosures: The study revealed that using the empty chair to help with disclosures for those clients who could not fully come to accept their found HIV status and would want to vent. The technique was seen to help aid disclosure and help clients come to terms with their found HIV, STI and pregnancy status. Participant #9 indicated that:

“Often disclosures of various kinds... forinstance, HIV and STI disclosures, and pregnancy disclosures. Also, I often use it a lot in behaviour modification with students” (PS 9)

Help with Rejection: Aiding dealing with rejection issues was also noted to be among the issues that were addressed by the empty chair technique. Some participants hinted at the technique being able to assist victims of rejection and relationship disappointments. Confirmed by Participant #12 stated that *“the technique helped with dealing with rejection” (PS 12).*

Participant #14 emphasized that the technique helped to deal with or have an imaginary dialogue with someone who has offended, or you have offended, or the same person has challenges with different parts of their personality.

“By involving the client having an imagined conversation with someone they have an issue with, or it could be used to facilitate dialogue between different parts of the client’s personality” (PS 14)

Based on the study findings, it was observed that the use of empty chair body language was most commonly associated with addressing a wide range of issues, including but not limited to unresolved relationship challenges, rejection issues, the need for venting and releasing emotions, managing stress, and resolving intra and inter-personal conflicts.

4.2 How the body language counselling technique helped students with peer relationship challenges

Question two documents' findings on the experiences of the counsellors and clients on the use of body language Gestalt counselling techniques.

4.2.1 Knowledge of body language in Counselling

Nonverbal signals: The findings showed Participants' knowledge of the body language technique. The following highlights some of the words used to describe the body language counselling technique by Participants characterized by common features such as nonverbal signals, gestures, body posture and sign language.

Participant # 3 said that:

“Body language is a range of nonverbal signals that you can use to communicate your feelings and intentions”, (PC 3)

Participant # 4 added that;

“Physical appearance and gestures of a client”, and Participant S1 said; “That’s the use of sign language like nodding of your head to show that you are paying attention to what the client is saying” (PC 4)

Helps pic up unconscious states: Further descriptions included: Participant # 5; *“Looking at someone and their expressions” (PS 5)*, Participant # 7 added; *“the actions and cues that are visible to the counsellor and client” (PS 7)*

Participant # 8 added that.

“Counsellor observes the body language of the client to gain clues of what they are communicating without words.” (PS 8)

Participant #9.

“Use of non-verbal actions to communicate information”, Participant C1; “In counselling, body language refers to the non-verbal cues and expressions

communicated through physical gestures, postures, facial expressions, and other bodily movements. Therapists often pay attention to these cues as they can provide valuable insights into a client's emotions, thoughts, and overall state of being.” (PS 9)

Human Body Being Highly expressive: It was also established that the human body can communicate feelings and intentions without the use of words.

Participant # 11.

*“This is how you come out. You can tell how someone is feeling through their actions”,
(PS 11)*

Participant # 12;

“Paying attention to the person's body posture and expression”, (PS 12)

Participant # 14;

“It is a range of nonverbal signals that can be used to communicate feelings and intentions” (PS 14)

Participant # 2;

“The human body is extremely expressive, able to convey countless emotions without saying a word” (PC 2)

From the findings, it can be stated that body language refers to the nonverbal cues that are conveyed intentionally or unconsciously by both the client and the counsellor during the counselling process. These cues can be used to facilitate communication and understanding between the parties involved. By paying close attention to body language, counsellors can gain insight into the client's emotional state, attitudes, and beliefs, and use this information to help the client overcome their challenges and achieve their goals.

4.2.2 Experiences with counsellors exploring their body language

The study established experiences of students with their counsellors in the counselling space utilizing body language techniques. Several themes emerged in this exploration

Shows Counsellor Attentiveness: The views of Participants on the experiences with the use of the body language counselling technique were explored and the following themes were established that noted the good experiences due to counsellor attentiveness, and how the counsellor helped to interpret reactions.

Participant # 2; *“It was very good”* (PC 2), Participant # 3 added; *“Well the counsellor was attentive to every little detail”* (PS 3), Participant # 4 stated; *“It was helpful for the counsellor to understand my reactions during counselling”* (PS 4)

Aids Clarification: The responses showed that there is a need to bring about clarification and meanings of the unspoken that are portrayed by facial expressions and other gestures to bring clients to a level of awareness. Participant # 4 stated that;

“The client had facial expressions and hand gestures. Having the ability to understand and interpret the body language helped to pick up on unspoken issues or feelings” (PC 4)

Participant # 2;

“I have seen clients who for example shake their heads several times and when asked to attach words to their action or what it means to them others say it others would say a feeling they didn’t realize they were expressing” (PC 2)

Identification of Masked Emotions: Other findings pointed to body language facilitating communication and indicating other feelings that clients were unable to talk about freely.

Participant # 1;

“It was helpful especially when related to what was communicated verbally, and also in times when the client was not open enough to talk, body language aided the communication process”.(PC 1)

Participant # 11;

“It felt good because there are certain words that you cannot express verbally but the counsellor can read that through my body language and help me deal with it” (PS 11)

Counsellor self-awareness through Actions: The study noted the need for counsellors to be aware of their body language in a counselling session. Counsellors do communicate to clients both verbally and through their body language. The findings indicated that the counsellors needed to be aware of their body language and how it affects the counselling process. Participant # 1;

“As a counsellor, it is important to be aware of body language and observe the client’s non-verbal communication to enhance understanding and facilitate a more comprehensive therapeutic process” (PC 1).

Participant # 2 emphasized;

“It helped me understand my client both the internal and external meanings of messages” (PC 2)

Uncomfortable: Despite the positive experiences with body language, some participants felt and reported that they were somehow uncomfortable with the experience. Participant # 5 reported the experience being *“difficult” (PS 5)* and Participant #12 that it was *“Uncomfortable for them” (PS 12)*

Based on the results of the study, it can be inferred that the nonverbal cues exhibited by the counsellors were instrumental in facilitating effective communication with their clients. By closely observing the body language, gestures, and facial expressions of the clients, the counsellors were able to offer guidance, support, and empathy, which helped the clients gain deeper insights into their thoughts and emotions. However, it was also noted that some clients felt uneasy about being closely monitored and scrutinized for every reaction they made, which could potentially hinder the counselling process.

4.2.3 Addressing client's issues with the body language technique counselling

Some of the views on how body language counselling techniques helped to address clients' issues in counselling were explored. The experiences of the Participants showed that there was enhanced communication. The body language technique enhanced communication. Participant # 4 noted that *"I was able to communicate effectively"* (PS 4), while Participant # 1 indicated that *"We were able to interact mutually"* (PS 1),

Some other Participants indicated that their issues were made clear with the attention given to body cues that the counsellor was able to pick on during their sessions. The study established that a counsellor's ability to pick on the actions and help clients attach meanings contributed to clarifying the challenges and bringing about awareness. Participant # 3 adds that;

"Through being observant of the actions, and trying to attach meanings to the nonverbal cues, aided the communication and contributed to clarifying their issues" (PC 3), and Participant # 8; *"Very well, added depth"* (PS 8)

Supported by Participant # 11;

"Feelings were laid out as to what I was feeling at the moment, and this helped me pinpoint the actual feeling I had which gave the counsellor direction on how to help me. So, I can say my concerns were very well met" (PS 11)

Participant # 14 said; *"Effectively because the counsellor created a holding environment"* (PS 14), and Participant # 6; *"Ability to supplement oral discussions"* (PS 6)

Other findings showed that some participants' issues could not be addressed fully. The study findings indicated that some clients felt that their issues were not fully addressed despite attention to their body language. Participant # 13 stated that *"Averagely met"* (PS 13), and Participant # 5; *"Not so much"* (PS 5).

The results of the study indicated that the use of body language counselling techniques could be highly beneficial in addressing clients' concerns during the counselling process. These techniques were particularly effective when used in conjunction with other counselling methods, as they provided additional insights into the emotions and issues that clients were experiencing. However, it should be noted that some clients' needs may not be fully met by

body language counselling alone and may require the integration of other techniques that encourage the release of emotions or concerns.

4.2.4 Benefits on the use of body language counselling techniques

Unmasking hidden emotions: Some of the benefits that users of body language counselling techniques indicated included the ability to pick up information that was not verbally expressed. Participant # 3 notes that; *“It helps a lot in getting information verbal aspects can't”* (PC 3), supported by Participant # 4; *“It helps to explore the client's concerns”* (PC 4), Participant # 2 adds the ability of the technique to help understand the possible feelings and experiences that may not be verbally let out;

“That the body language communicates a lot of what goes on within the person. By studying them, it is possible to make close predictions of what someone is thinking or feeling even without them saying it” (PC 2)

Showed Concern and Care: Clients felt cared for, as the counsellors were attentive and paying attention to their nonverbal cues. Observing the client's body language in counselling created confidence in the client as they felt someone giving them full attention. Participant # 1; *“It creates confidence in the client that a counsellor is a caregiver”* (PC 1)

Counsellors also were able to be self-aware of their body language. Participant # 2;

“Paying attention to my body language as a counsellor has helped me to communicate effectively, as I am mindful of my gestures and actions with clients” (PC 2)

Participant # 1;

“It makes me realize when I am on my highs and the lows in that way, I can rationally react to situations according to the situation” (PC 1)

Participant # 4;

“It gives you a clue of how a person is truly feeling even when words do not match Body language has the power to communicate feelings and emotions” (PC 4)

Participant # 3 ;

“Body language assists us in understanding and decoding what the person is saying. That is the importance of body language. It also helps us to interpret others' moods and emotions. Moreover, it enhances our conscious understanding of people's reactions to what we say and how we say it.”(PC 3)

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that there are numerous benefits associated with observing body language and expressions to pick up on information that clients may not be explicitly talking about during counselling sessions. This practice can help counsellors become more aware of their actions, provide clients with a sense of confidence in their counsellor's care, and add depth to the counselling process by allowing exploration of emotions and feelings that may not have been addressed otherwise.

4.2.5 Limitations of the Empty Chair and Body Language Counselling Techniques

Theme three brings out findings on the limitation on the use of the body language and empty chair Gestalt counselling techniques as experienced by the counsellors and the clients.

4.3.1 Challenges experienced with the empty chair technique

Fears of being misunderstood: The study established challenges encountered when using the empty chair counselling technique. Some of the findings noted the fear by clients of being misunderstood when seen talking to an empty chair. Such fears made some clients hold back and not fully engage in the technique. Participant # 12 *“Fear of being misunderstood”* (PS 12)

There was a lot of inertia to engage in the practice. Participant # 2 adds that;

“For the first time, I did not open up because it was my first time going to a counselling office, so I felt so uncomfortable talking about my issue” (PS 2)

Similarly Participant # 7 experienced inertia;

“It took some time for the client to fully come to terms with what was required to work with the empty chair” (PC 7)

Strange Technique: Some other findings showed that some of the clients saw the experience to be somehow unusual and it made them not to freely open to the process. Participant # 2;

“Some felt the technique was weird and would not work. Others wanted to know the technique and how it works in its entirety, which obscured information collection from the student as others concealed certain information” (PC 2)

Further findings pointed to the conditions that the clients were in that made them fail to fully engage in the technique and might have required other interventions. Leading to some clients being seen holding back and not fully immersed in disclosure Participant # 4; *“The client not opening up on some issues” (PC 4)*, and Participant # 1 *“Failure for clients to express themselves” (PC 1)* also Participant # 2 stated;

“Some clients may be too challenged and fail to assume the role of a counsellor and a client at the same time” (PC 2)

Other challenges included what Participant # 13 noted the process to be *“Uncomfortable for me at first glance” (PC 13)* and Participant # 14;

“It did not work for everyone. I did not receive the emotional benefits I expected. It's possible the therapy could help one achieve peace, but in the process, because one to experience a negative domino effect on family relationships” (PS 14)

Further exploration indicated that some did not experience challenges with the empty chair counselling technique. The participants claimed that the empty chair met what was expected from the counselling. Participant # 8; *“I didn't experience any challenge because it provided what is needed in Counselling” (PS 8)*, and Participant # 11; *“I have not experienced any challenges yet” (PS 11)*

The research findings indicate that during the application of the technique, some challenges were encountered by clients. These challenges included a fear of being misunderstood, hesitation to engage in the technique, perceiving the technique as being wired, and a general sense of discomfort for some clients. However, it is worth noting that some clients found it easy to work with the technique. The findings suggest that those who use this technique should take advantage of this knowledge to better understand the challenges that may arise and seek

ways to improve the application of the technique. This would enable them to offer a more effective and comfortable experience for clients.

4.3.2 **Zambian context, influence of culture and usage of the empty chair and body language in counselling**

Culture Influences: The study explored cultural issues that may impact the usage of the empty chair counselling technique among the clients who had prior experience with this technique. The results indicated the need for counsellors to be mindful of cultural diversities when introducing clients to such techniques. Different gestures and other body language may be interpreted differently and mean different things to certain individuals. Participant # 2 argued that;

“There seemed some uneasiness that could be attributed to cultural interference for someone to talk to an empty chair” (PC 2).

Participant # 3;

“Were clients believe that the technique is a replacement for dirties or even elderlies for problem resolution, it gets even more challenging to use the technique” (PC 3)

Others like Participant # 8 added that it was not a Zambian practice and that it was a foreign concept *“Culturally uncomfortable. It’s a Western concept” (PC 8).*

Other Participants saw the empty chair to be less significant noting the culture in the country was one that encouraged interpersonal and good relationships. The culture was already allowing its people to openly share and help one another. Participant # 10:

“In the Zambian culture interpersonal and community relationships hold significant importance in a person. The Zambian culture emphasizes harmony and interdependence so the empty chair method may be of less significance” (PS 10)

Participant # 11 adds that:

“Culture does not support the use of these techniques because culture perceives youths as children without problems, only adults have problems. So, culture does not support the use of this technique” (PS 11)

The need to Educate: The study established that there was a lot of learning to be done around the use of the techniques in society and that its full potential has not been fully utilized. Participant # 3; *“It’s still a learning curve” (PC 3)*, and Participant # 4; *“Gives room for an individual to imagine any conversation which traditionally may be seen as not being well” (PC 4)*

The research findings indicate that certain aspects of Zambian culture may not align well with the empty chair counselling method and non-verbal communication. The study revealed several themes that supported this notion, including the reluctance of participants to converse with an empty chair due to cultural norms, the potential for misunderstandings due to cultural variations in gestures and expressions, a belief that interpersonal issues are already addressed by cultural practices, and the perception that young people do not face significant challenges warranting such interventions.

4.4 How the empty chair and body language counselling techniques helped

Question four documents the perspectives on enhancing the empty chair and body language Gestalt counselling techniques from the counsellors and the clients based on their lived experiences. The section is presented under four subheadings, factors that helped clients overcome challenges and suggestions on ways of enhancing each of the two techniques.

4.4.1 Factors that helped the client overcome challenges using the empty chair technique

The study explored factors in the application of the empty chair counselling technique that helped clients overcome their challenges. The following factors contributed to clients' overcoming their challenges using the empty chair counselling technique. The themes that

emerged are good rapport, client readiness, Counsellor attending skills, ability to imagine, and the flexibility of the Counsellor.

Good Rapport: The participants indicated that the empty chair counselling technique gave them a chance to talk about their issues freely due to the good rapport created by the Counsellor. Participant # 2 stated that: *“Good rapport helped to freely express myself”, (PS 2)*

Participant # 3 also noted that similarly the way they were made to feel comfortable in the counselling room by stating *“Making me comfortable enough to open up” (PS 3).*

Ability to Imagine: Also, additionally Participant # 4 noted self-expression to have helped by stating *“Self-expression” (PS 4), and Participant # 5 indicated the ability to imagine the situation or the other person in the chair whom you have issue with helped; “Imagining someone is in the other chair” (PS 5)*

Others indicated, like Participant # 7, that;

“I felt I had gotten control of the situation and was able to speak freely to the empty chair after letting go of the anger towards the imagined person on the empty chair” (PS 7)

Student Readiness: The client’s readiness to take part in the empty chair technique was found to be essential in making the technique work. Participant # 1 added that other factors that relate to the client's readiness to follow through with instructions and the counsellors’ abilities including flexibility helped by stating that:

“Client readiness to adapt to the method. Use of clear instructions by the counsellor, flexibility, counsellor’s skills” (PC 1)

Counsellor Attending Skills: Appreciation of the techniques and Counsellor attending skills played a role. Some of the respondents indicated that the counsellors were calm and used techniques that helped them to work through their issues. Participant # 11 hinted that *“Calmness and the good psychological techniques that were paired to calm me down.” (PS 11)*

The research conducted on the factors that helped clients overcome their issues using the empty chair counselling technique suggests that several factors contribute towards overcoming the challenges faced during counselling. Among these factors, the development of good rapport between the counsellor and the client is of utmost importance. Additionally, the counsellor's ability to exhibit a range of skills, including active listening, empathy, and the ability to provide feedback, plays a critical role in creating a safe and supportive environment for the client to explore their thoughts and emotions. Moreover, the counsellor's flexibility in adapting to the client's needs and preferences is also crucial in building a strong therapeutic alliance. Another key factor that can aid in overcoming challenges is the client's ability to use their imagination and engage in visualization exercises.

Finally, the readiness to experiment with the empty chair technique, where the client imagines a person or situation and engages in a dialogue with an empty chair, is effective in addressing various issues such as anxiety, depression, and relationship problems. By taking into account these factors, counsellors can create a safe and supportive environment that can help clients overcome the challenges they face.

4.4.2 Factors that helped clients resolve their issues when body language counselling techniques were used

Further inquiry was conducted on what helped clients resolve their issues using body language counselling techniques and what led to the success of other sessions and others not to succeed.

Attention to Unspoken: Findings indicated that in those where success was recorded, the factors of communication and attentiveness by the Counsellor being improved was central, Participant # 2 highlighted that “*Communication was very good*”(PS 2), while Participant # 5 mentioned “*Being attentive*”(PS 5), and confirmed by Participant # 10 “*Being attentive to the unspoken but expressed through body language*” (PS 10). This communication, attention to cues, unspoken words and patience facilitated the recorded success.

An opportunity to delve into masked emotions: In other cases, where success was recorded, the findings showed that body language was not in tandem with the verbal responses being given, and the Counsellor took time to explore more with the client to bring about awareness.

Participant # 3 reported, *“Well, the fact that the body language was giving something else I took much interest in exploring the specific aspects asked”* (PC 3)

Adds Context: Further findings on those cases that clients noted to have been helped revealed that body language counselling techniques brought in context in the counselling session. Some of the words spoken had their meanings clarified based on the gestures and behaviour that preceded them, Participant # 1;

“Body language created contextual meanings because I was able to observe the client's behaviour and the client was able to tell that I was with him” (PC 1)

More findings indicated that asking clarifying questions on what the body language was expressing, remaining calm and being patient with the client were found to be attributes that complemented the use of body language counselling techniques.

Participant # 2;

“Patience and let the client freely express their issues in the counselling situation” (PC 2)

Participant # 11;

“Staying calm and allowing me to cry out my pain so that I get back to a steady state for me to think well” (PS 11)

Participant # 3;

“Calming them down and reminding them that I am just paying attention to their concerns and not judging them” (PC 3)

Participant # 1 mentioned;

“Asking clarifying questions to draw the client out based on observed behaviour” (PC 1)

Enhanced the experience; Being able to anticipate and interpret some of the behaviours and actions that the client took within the counselling. The knowledge and flexibility of the Counsellor to what the client brought to the counselling room. Participant # 4;

“It was the appropriate response to the specific body language portrayed that helped. For, if a client was scared, the strategic repositioning of the furniture helped them feel at ease” (PC 4)

To address their clients' concerns effectively, counsellors have found success by utilizing body language counselling techniques. This approach involves maintaining a calm and patient demeanour, asking clarifying questions to gain a deeper understanding of the client's experiences, actively listening and acknowledging the client's emotions, and working collaboratively to create meaning and understanding. By employing these techniques, counsellors can create a safe and supportive space for clients to explore their thoughts and feelings, and work towards finding solutions to their challenges.

4.4.3 Enhancing the Empty Chair Counselling Technique

The study explored suggestions from its respondents on how they felt could be done to enhance the application and usage of the empty chair. The following aspects were suggested;

Welcoming Environment: The need for a counselling environment where clients feel welcome and supported was noted. The study established the need for an environment that is friendly and non-judgmental. Participant # 2 echoed *“I feel counsellors should be very good and create an environment where we as clients open up”* (PS 2)

Integrating other Techniques and Skills: Secondly, integrating other skills and techniques into the session. The findings noted the need to integrate other techniques that would assist clients in reaching awareness. Participant # 3 adds that *“Including other technicalities like body language counselling”* (PS 3), would help to clarify and bring about awareness in clients.

Other participants mentioned incorporating techniques that encourage clients to open and release emotions that have somehow been suppressed. Evidence from Participant # 1;

“There might be a need to integrate it with other techniques that encourage venting and self-expression” (PC 1),

Supported by Participant # 11;

“If we can have stress balls during the use of the technique it can help to get through the process” (PS 11), and Participant # 14; “Having many strategies” (PS 14)

Other findings on enhancing the usage and application of the empty chair suggested that counsellors needed to raise awareness and sensitize their clients about the technique. There is a need to educate clients on the technique, their role and expectations well in advance before engaging in the session. With such sensitizations, clients would have knowledge of what to do and their roles in the process. Participant # 5; *“Sensitizing patients about it beforehand” (PS 5), Participant # 12; “Encourage people that imagination is not harmful when applied correctly” (PS 12)*

Encouraging the need to inform clients of the benefits of venting concerning the empty chair. Participant # 4;

“Build client confidence in the effectiveness of the technique, encourage the students to trust the process. If the students are open to projecting their thoughts and feelings on the chair, that jumpstarts the process of resolving their issues.”(PC 4)

The study's findings have provided valuable insights into ways of improving the application and usage of the empty chair technique based on the perspectives of the respondents who participated in the research. The results indicated that counsellors have a significant role to play in educating their clients about the various roles and expectations associated with the technique. This can help to reduce any hesitation or uncertainty that clients may have, while also building their confidence in the effectiveness of the technique. Additionally, integrating the empty chair technique with other self-expression techniques can help to enhance its overall impact and effectiveness. Overall, these findings shed light on how counsellors can better support their clients in utilizing this tool.

4.4.4 Enhancing the Body Language Counselling Technique

The study investigates ways the body language technique could be enhanced from the perspectives of the clients. The findings indicated the need to incorporate other verbal techniques with the body language technique. The findings showed that other techniques would assist in understanding and interpreting body language thereby better communication. Participant # 3 added that; *“Including verbal techniques”* (PS 3), supported by Participant # 14; *“By using many approaches as well”* (PS 14),

More ways of enhancing the body language included appreciation of culture. The study established the need to appreciate the meanings and gestures based on the client's culture. This will reduce the confusion that may arise due to differing meanings. Participant # 4; *“Orientation of culture”* (PS 4)

Further suggestions on enhancing the application of the body language counselling technique showed the need to integrate other techniques that would elicit the client to express themselves. Counsellors and other help practitioners need to embrace various forms of non-verbal communication in their work as it adds depth to communication and work. Through body language and other expressive techniques, clients can be helped to freely express themselves without using words. Participant # 1; *“The client not opening up on some issues”* (PC 1), and Participant # 4 *“Failure for clients to express themselves embrace it because non-verbal communication adds value to the understanding”* (PC 4)

Enhancing the application of the body language technique findings further pointed to counsellors being aware of their body language and using it to communicate effectively with their clients. Counsellors are expected to make their clients aware of the expectations within the counselling relationship. This goes further to denote the counsellor being aware of their body language and gestures in the counselling relationship. Participant # 5; *“Explaining to clients what is expected of them during the session”* (PS 5), and Participant # 3;

“Counsellors need to be aware of their body language and also understand some gestures that might have cultural implications and varying meanings” (PC 3)

Other findings on enhancing body language indicated that counsellors ought to develop patience as they employ attending skills with clients. The clients lead and the counsellor facilitates to help come to realization and awareness. Participant # 3;

“Don't rush to end the session or to ask the next question, let them speak however long they take to respond, and ask questions based on your observations to draw them out”, (PC 3)

Participant # 2;

“Showing more interest by maximising body language like leaning towards, as well as improving attending skills both verbally and non-verbally. It speaks a lot of what one fails to say verbally. Whatever goes on in our inner worlds mirrors the outside, and body language is one way it shows. Hence, I would recommend that body language and what someone wishes to say verbally are in tune to reduce time on resolving the problems and improve treatment effectiveness ”(PC 2),

Being attentive and observant to the non-verbal expressions that clients display in the counselling process was found to be another way suggested in enhancing the usage and application of the technique. Participant # 3 on attention to the clients added; *“Paying particular attention to the non-verbal cues and being able to read and interpret the unspoken” (PC 3),* supported by Participant #1;

“You can make it very effective because you are just seeing/looking at the person. If I am the one portraying those feelings, the other person can only give ideas. So, using a questioning can help to arrive at what someone is feeling so that they can be helped in good time” (PS 1)

The study gathered opinions from participants on the most effective ways to improve the body language Gestalt counselling technique. The results indicate that counsellors must be mindful of their body language during the counselling process and utilize it to enhance communication with their clients. Additionally, counsellors must pay close attention to nonverbal cues, such as facial expressions and body postures, to gain a deeper understanding of their client's emotional state. It is also essential for counsellors to be culturally sensitive and aware of their client's cultural backgrounds to avoid any potential misinterpretations. Moreover, counsellors must remain patient and calm throughout the counselling session, as this helps to build trust

and establish a safe environment for the client. Lastly, the use of other techniques, such as active listening and open-ended questioning, can encourage clients to express themselves freely and aid in their emotional healing process.

4.5 Summary

In this chapter, findings of a comprehensive study conducted under the guidance of research questions were presented. The study followed specific themes, which emerged from data analysis to ensure the research was organized and focused. The themes were carefully chosen to align with the objectives of the study and to ensure that the research questions were answered satisfactorily. In the subsequent chapter, I will delve deeper into these findings and discuss how they relate to the existing literature, as well as the Gestalt theory that guided the interpretation of the research results. This will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research and its implications.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.0 Overview

Chapter four presented a comprehensive analysis of the findings regarding the effectiveness of the empty chair technique and body language Gestalt counselling methods in addressing peer relationship challenges faced by students. These techniques were systematically applied in various counselling sessions, revealing numerous benefits such as improved self-awareness, enhanced communication skills, and deeper emotional connections among participants.

In chapter five, looks a broader discussion of these findings, specifically examining how they connect to the four thematic areas of lived experiences as articulated by Max van Manen's framework for existential reflective thematic analysis. According to Rich et al. (2013), these four existential reflection areas encompass: lived body, which pertains to the physical and sensory experiences individual's encounter; lived time, reflecting on the temporal aspects of life and how they influence perception; lived space, which considers the environmental context in shaping experiences; and lived relations, focusing on interpersonal dynamics and relationships.

This discussion will be organized around the key themes and sub-themes derived from each research question posed in the study. By engaging with these thematic areas, the study provides an understanding of how the Gestalt techniques not only facilitate individual growth but also foster meaningful interactions among peers. Below, is an exploration of a detailed discussion of the findings, illuminating the interplay between theoretical insights and the lived experiences of the students involved in the study revealing the benefits of Gestalt counselling techniques in helping students with peer relationship challenges.

5.1 How the empty chair counselling techniques helped students with peer relationship challenges

This question is discussed using the themes and sub-themes, which emerged from the data. The themes to guide the discussion include participants' knowledge of the empty chair, and clients' and counsellor experiences with the empty chair.

5.1.1 Participants' knowledge of the Empty chair

The participants exhibited a thorough comprehension of the concept of the empty chair. Some of the commonly mentioned aspects in the explanation of the empty chair technique included its usefulness in allowing clients to express and release their emotions, by talking to an unoccupied chair while visualizing a person or situation that they may have unresolved issues with.

The findings of the study revealed that the empty chair technique was also found to be an effective tool for role-playing, gaining insights, and symbolically processing emotions. Similar explanations of the empty chair counselling technique were recorded by (Drake, 2022 and Elliott et al., 2004). The studies revealed that the empty chair technique serves as an effective tool for counsellors, allowing clients to navigate and process unresolved issues often referred to as "unfinished business." This technique encourages clients to engage in imaginative visualization, whereby they project their thoughts and feelings onto an imaginary figure seated in the empty chair. Participants expressed that this approach facilitated a significant level of self-expression and introspection as they articulated their emotions or experiences to the unoccupied chair. The findings strongly resonated with the insights shared by study participants, highlighting a collective understanding of the empty chair's role in fostering emotional clarity and connection. Additionally, these revelations underscore the benefits participants felt they gained from their interactions with the empty chair, particularly while addressing complex dynamics in peer relationships. Such insights contribute to a broader understanding of the counselling process and its impact on enhancing interpersonal relationships.

The study established that the empty chair was a counselling technique that helped with disclosures and was ideal to help clients that had issues with and could not confront that significant other person or situation but through the empty chair role playing, the clients could find some relief as if they had talked or addressed the person or issue that gave them some discomfort. Sommers-Flanagan and Sommers-Flanagan (2004) highlighted what happens when an individual struggles with social relationships issues and they avoid confronting the issues that the unresolved issues can cause maladjustments. Similarly, Ndhlovu (2005) emphasises the goal of Gestalt theory being partly increasing self-awareness in clients that allows them to be present in the moment, therefore as they role-play with the empty chair, they have a chance

at addressing their unresolved issues. Through this process, the counsellor and the client gain insights into the issues and can take responsibility and resolve them in the now. The empty chair sessions build confidence in the counselling sessions, which are relevant to the development of the clients' openness in handling issues and resolving them as they arise in the process.

5.1.2 Client and Counsellor Experiences with the Empty Chair

The findings point to the empty chair counselling technique being widely used to help clients deal with emotional and psychological issues. However, the success of the technique according to the findings was influenced by both positive and negative experiences of its users. The findings supported by Brennan (2021) that the limitations of Gestalt counselling are that the techniques were more effective with unfinished business and not so effective at resolving cases that had hereditary psychological effects. Brennan (2021) and Ndhlovu (2015) also support these findings by stating that the techniques are effective on unfinished business caused by contact with the environment where an individual is found and not effective on psychological factors not influenced by individuals' thoughts. This analysis highlights several significant drawbacks related to the nature of clients' challenges, particularly those rooted in individual thought processes rather than genetically influenced factors. These challenges may manifest as cognitive distortions, unrecognized limiting beliefs, or emotional barriers that hinder personal growth and well-being. An effective approach to addressing these difficulties is the empty chair counselling technique. This method allows clients to engage in a dialogue with different aspects of themselves or significant others in their life, creating a safe space for exploration and expression. By incorporating the empty chair technique, counsellors can facilitate deeper self-reflection and understanding, enabling clients to confront and work through their diverse challenges in a more constructive manner. As such, counsellors should carefully consider this technique when determining the most appropriate counselling interventions tailored to the unique needs of each client.

The study also established that some first-time users have reported hesitancy and inertia. Some users found it difficult to engage with the technique due to discomfort, feeling overwhelmed, and reluctance to express their concerns. This hesitation to engage with the empty chair could also be partly attributed to the views of Simmers-Flanagan and Sommer-Flanagan (2004) and Ndhlovu (2005) who argued that for clients to fully reach the recovery stage enabling them to

fully function they have to go through five stages that starts with the phoney stage where the client is somehow not making real efforts but hiding in some façade. The unreal stage requires both counsellor skills and the client being willing to go to the next stage resulting in a hesitancy to engage in the counselling process. It is vital that the counsellor in this case appreciates the process and facilitates a smooth application of the techniques so that the clients can reach a stage of awareness and take responsibility for resolving their challenges.

The findings of the study have shown that the empty chair technique has also been associated with positive experiences. Some clients reported overcoming inertia and making significant progress in expressing their emotions. Clark (2013) notes that Gestalt counselling techniques do not involve any forced work there for these findings agree with this ascension that the clients were able to overcome their initial challenges without being forced to do so. As such the technique helped them to face their fears and anxieties, which improved their overall well-being. Zaitun and Wangid (2023) also showed that the empty chair counselling technique helped to reduce the effects of anxiety. The findings of this literature agree with the results of this study. It can be concluded that by actively overcoming their initial inertia, clients were able to engage in intentional and purposeful efforts to achieve a significant stage of personal change. This transformative process, in which the clients take ownership of their journey without external coercion, is vital. It not only fosters a sense of responsibility but also cultivates essential skills that empower clients to tackle future challenges effectively. By developing self-efficacy and enhancing their decision-making abilities, clients are better equipped to navigate obstacles and pursue their goals with confidence and resilience.

Further findings of the study indicated the role that the counsellor played in facilitating for the client to adjust and come to terms with what the activities required. The counsellors' skills and ability to help the clients be at home was key in the process. The writing of Lofrisco (2013) recognised the counsellor skills and noted the role that counselling theories play in guiding counsellors in their practice. From the foregoing, it can be seen that the counsellor skills and practice need to be based on counselling theories that can help guide practice and anticipate outcomes. It should also be noted that the role of the counsellor in gestalt counselling is that of allowing clients to become more aware of their experiences in the now moment, their responses and their perceptions in the now about the situation (Clarke, 2021). A counsellor in this context should play a pivotal role in guiding clients toward a heightened awareness of their current challenges. By creating a safe and supportive environment, the counsellor facilitates a process

through which clients can fully recognize and confront their issues as they exist in the present moment. This involves actively listening, asking thought-provoking questions, and employing various counselling skills and techniques that encourage self-reflection and insight.

As clients engage in this reflective process, they begin to gain clarity about their feelings, thoughts, and behaviours related to their challenges. The counsellor assists them in identifying the underlying factors that contribute to their difficulties, empowering the clients to take meaningful action to address and resolve these issues. Ultimately, this approach positions the counsellor not just as a source of guidance, but as a collaborative partner in the counselling process, promoting personal growth and effective problem-solving skills in the clients.

To ensure that the empty chair technique remains effective, its users need to consider both the positive and negative experiences. They should focus on the positive side to help clients deal with issues in their lives, while also addressing the negative side to inform the counselling practice. By doing so, counsellors can help clients overcome their emotional and psychological challenges, leading to better outcomes.

5.1.3 Effectiveness in addressing concerns in counselling using the empty chair technique

The findings on how the participant's concerns were addressed when exposed to the empty chair indicated that 79 per cent of the clients felt their issues were addressed, 7 per cent not so much addressed, and 14 per cent felt not addressed. The scores put the empty chair as an effective tool in addressing issues clients had. This agrees with various writers like Hitge (2006), Ndhlovu (2005), and Drake (2022) that have recorded the effectiveness of the empty chair, which agrees with the 79 per cent of the clients that indicated yes to the empty chair being effective in addressing issues. Brownell (2008) states development of change is through a holistic integration of experience and awareness. From this discussion of findings, it can be stated that the empty chair technique serves as an effective tool in Gestalt counselling, providing clients with an opportunity to engage with their thoughts, feelings, and experiences tangibly. This approach encourages individuals to project their thoughts or unresolved issues onto an empty chair, symbolizing a person, emotion, or situation they need to address. By doing so, clients can confront and process these elements directly, leading to a heightened sense of awareness regarding their feelings and behaviours.

Awareness is a central objective in Gestalt counselling, as it empowers clients to recognize patterns in their lives and understand the underlying factors contributing to their challenges. As clients gain this critical awareness, they become equipped to make informed decisions and take necessary steps toward resolving their difficulties, ultimately fostering personal growth and emotional healing. The empty chair technique not only facilitates this introspective journey but also encourages clients to reclaim their narrative, fostering empowerment and self-acceptance.

Despite the high score of 79 per cent, there were other participants that 7 per cent scored not so much addressed and others 14 per cent felt not addressed. The critics of Gestalt counselling like Clarke and Marsh (2005), Brennan (2021) and Corey (2005) mentions some limitations of the theory that could be used to explain the ratings of some clients whose concerns were not addressed. It could be said that the empty chair technique is not effective for all types of client issues. This can help to say that counsellors need to be knowledgeable enough to anticipate which counselling approach and technique is adequate to respond to a variety of client concerns.

5.1.4 Benefits from the use of the empty chair

The empty chair technique is an effective tool for resolving various issues that arise among students who are experiencing intrapersonal and peer relationship issues. According to research findings, this technique is particularly successful when the client is willing and able to engage with it fully. Khairunnisa et al (2019) found similar results that the empty chair helped prisoners to address their unfinished business that included sadness, guilt and often being less involved with others. The counsellor's skills and expertise also play a vital role in the effective use of the technique. The counsellor facilitates and helps the client appreciate their role as they role-play with the empty chair.

One of the significant advantages that the findings pointed to on the empty chair technique is that it can especially be helpful for clients who are unable to confront the person or issue they are struggling with in person. In such cases, the client can use their imagination to picture the person or issue in the empty chair vividly. The study findings are in line with Palmer (2011) who stated that in Gestalt counselling the client learns to use internal and external senses to

bring about awareness to become self-supportive and self-responsible. This, in turn, can help the clients to work through their issues and find resolution. These results are in line with the findings of Frauke et al., (2021) that the empty chair Gestalt counselling was a preferred intervention by clients. The study highlighted the significance of the empty chair in promoting client responsibility. This approach enables clients to acquire skills that they can apply independently to address various life challenges.

The study showed further that the empty chair technique requires the counsellor to create a safe and comfortable environment for the client. The counsellor then encourages the client to imagine that the person or issue they are experiencing is sitting in an empty chair. The client is encouraged to express themselves fully to the imaginary people or issue as if they were present in the room. The counsellor listens actively and provides guidance and support throughout the process. Through this process the client is helped to become self-aware (Cavichia, 2013).

Overall, the empty chair technique is a valuable tool for counsellors to use in helping clients to express and resolve their emotions. It can be an alternative way to gain insight into the client's thought processes and feelings and help them work through difficult situations they may be facing agreeing with the goal of Gestalt where the client collaborates with the counsellor without fear of being judged (Cavichia, 2013). Even from this, it can be noted that the empty chair can help both the counsellor and client learn more about the experiences of the client as they are allowed to re-live their experiences in the now without fear of being judged or misunderstood

5.1.5 Counselling Cases where the empty chair technique was used

The study revealed through the records maintained by counsellors that the most common issues faced by clients for the empty chair technique to be used are related to unresolved relationship challenges, rejection issues, the need for venting and releasing emotions, managing stress, and resolving both intra and interpersonal conflicts. Most of these issues are characterised by feelings of anger, shame, frustration, sadness, some form of grief and low self-esteem due to unmet desires.

These challenges were often addressed by using the empty chair technique, which involves visualizing a significant issue or person whom one has an issue within an empty chair and allowing the client to express their emotions, thoughts, and feelings towards the person or situation that is causing them distress. This ascension is supported by Romadhon and Sanyata (2019) that found Gestalt techniques help in facilitating the resolution of deep-seated emotional issues and promotes healing and growth. Which further aligns with the writing of Ankrom (2020) that the techniques in gestalt help to improve one's self-control, mental state regulation, awareness, tolerance for negative feelings and emotions, communication and understanding of one's personal needs. The findings indicate that the empty chair technique was employed in scenarios where individuals needed to confront and articulate unresolved issues that were deeply rooted in social, emotional, and psychological contexts. This method allows clients to personify their feelings or relationships by engaging in dialogue with an imagined figure, symbolizing their unresolved conflicts or traumas. By facilitating this expressive exchange, the empty chair technique encourages participants to explore their thoughts and emotions in a safe environment, ultimately fostering greater self-awareness and psychological healing.

It can be seen from these findings and the common issues that the empty chair technique was used mostly in issues that arise from non-hereditary challenges. Brenna (2021) conforms such findings that the Gestalt counselling techniques were not so effective in addressing behaviours that were hereditary but helpful on social and psychological issues impacting on behaviour. This knowledge is a call to awareness on the counsellors to trade cautiously on the selection of techniques to employ on the various challenges clients brings to the counselling room.

Most of the cases that the counsellor records indicated to have involved the empty chair showed deep rooted emotional states that required the clients to relieve their past experiences, bringing their issues in the now moment making them be conscious at the present moment rather than living in the past or worrying about the future then take responsibility for self-growth and health. These findings are in tandem with Ndhlovu (2015) and Brenna (2021) who revealed that issues are brought conscious in the moment for purposes of resolving and addressing the concerns in the present moment. In so doing the client can take the necessary steps towards self-growth and wellbeing.

5.2 How the Body Language Counselling Technique Helped Students with Peer Relationship Challenges

5.2.1 Knowledge of body language in Counselling

The study conducted an in-depth analysis of the participants' comprehension of body language counselling techniques. Body language, as commonly understood, encompasses the nonverbal cues that are conveyed intentionally or unintentionally that can be unconsciously conveyed by both the client and the counsellor during the counselling process. These cues, comprising gestures, facial expressions, posture, and tone of voice, can serve as a powerful tool to promote effective communication and understanding between the parties involved, similar to the writing of Reena (2012) and AIPC (2009). From this literature and findings, body language could be that part of communication that reveals masked feelings that words would not express. It could form a vital part of communication that both the counsellor and client can use to enhance communication. The physical body's responses to stimuli indicated the emotions that were present, and paying attention to such could help counsellors appreciate the state that the clients were in.

From the study findings, it was also established that by paying close attention to the client's body language, counsellors could gain valuable insights into their emotional state, attitudes, and beliefs, which may otherwise remain hidden. This was emphasised by the writing of Afdal (2016) that non-verbal behaviour of both counsellor and clients in counselling sessions should help in assisting the client feel the direct presence of the session through the techniques. This literature and findings of this study have demonstrated that body language, if correctly used, can prove valuable in helping the client overcome their challenges and achieve their goals. For instance, a client who appears defensive or guarded may be struggling with trust issues, while one who avoids eye contact may be feeling ashamed or guilty. By carefully observing such cues, counsellors can create a safe and supportive environment that encourages clients to open and share their thoughts and feelings.

5.2.2 Experiences with counsellors exploring the client's body language (Lived Time)

The utilization of body language counselling techniques has been thoroughly examined, resulting in significant findings. It has been established that the non-verbal expressions

demonstrated by both counsellors and clients play a pivotal role in establishing effective communication and rapport in the counselling process. Anake and Asor (2012) document that nonverbal clues and movements convey a meaning that counsellors can explore further with their clients to bring about understanding. The literature in this study confirms what was found about non-verbal clues playing a pivotal role in enhancing communication and rapport in the counselling process.

The counsellors' ability to closely observe their clients' body language, gestures, and facial expressions has proven to be instrumental in offering guidance, support, and empathy, which in turn has helped clients gain deeper insights into their thoughts and emotions. The writing of Palmer (2011) recognises body language to be a subtle indicator of emotions. This literature sheds light on the role that a counsellor's ability to observe and interpret nonverbal expressions plays in providing effective support. It emphasizes that a skilled counsellor must not only recognize their own emotional expressions but also be attuned to the subtle cues of their clients. By being aware of facial expressions, body language, and other nonverbal signals, counsellors can foster a deeper understanding of their clients' emotional states. This understanding allows them to respond more empathetically and tailor their interventions to meet the specific needs of everyone. Ultimately, the capacity to interpret these expressions is instrumental in enhancing the therapeutic relationship and promoting greater awareness and healing for clients.

However, it is important to note that some findings show clients expressing discomfort with being closely monitored and scrutinized for every reaction they make. Such uneasiness could potentially hinder the counselling process, and it is therefore important for counsellors to be mindful of their client's comfort levels and to establish an environment in which they feel safe and secure. The writing of Clarke (2021) confirms similarly the need for counsellors to be aware of how they use body language techniques that they have the potential of misinterpretation and causing uneasiness. Additionally, Peterson and Gough (2019) emphasized that techniques were not to be the main thing in the Gestalt counselling but the process that facilitates the counselling to gain awareness. The techniques such as focusing on body language are like tools to be used to get the work done. Overall, the study's findings can be employed to enhance the effectiveness of body language counselling techniques and improve the overall experience for both counsellors and clients.

5.2.3 Addressing the client's issues with the body language counselling technique

The findings from the study highlighted that incorporating body language counselling techniques can be particularly advantageous in addressing clients' concerns during the counselling process. This approach proved especially effective when combined with other counselling methods, as it offered deeper insights into the emotions and issues clients were facing. In line with this, Seligman and Reichenberg (2020) demonstrated that Gestalt counselling effectively integrates various approaches, including cognitive behaviour therapy and transactional and other person-centred methods.

However, from the findings and literature, it can be concluded that this adaptability of Gestalt therapy allows counsellors to customize their strategies to meet the unique needs of each client, ultimately providing tailored support based on their specific experiences and challenges. It could as well help to note that some clients' needs may not be fully met by body language counselling alone and require the integration of other techniques that encourage the release of emotions or concerns.

5.2.4 The benefit of the use of body language counselling techniques

Through the process of observing body language and expressions during counselling sessions, counsellors can pick up on valuable information that clients may not be explicitly talking about. This practice can lead to numerous benefits for both the client and the counsellor, such as providing a deeper understanding of the client's emotional state and allowing exploration of feelings and emotions that may not have been addressed otherwise in the counselling process. In line with this finding, Clarke and Marsh (2021) speak of clients being helped to gain clarity of what they are expressing through the process of attaching meanings to what is being expressed nonverbally. A counsellor would notice a particular action and draw in to ask the client to verbally explain or attach words to the action. This brings about awareness of what the client is experiencing hence the client can deal with the emotions.

Furthermore, counsellors who possess a heightened awareness of their actions and interactions can instil a greater sense of confidence and trust in their clients. This sense of security is crucial as it contributes to a more productive and successful counselling experience overall. The

research conducted by Palmer (2011) and Ndhlovu (2015) aligns with this perspective, highlighting the significant impact of a counsellor's awareness on therapeutic outcomes.

By observing and interpreting nonverbal cues such as body language, eye contact, and facial expressions, counsellors are better equipped to create a safe, empathetic, and supportive environment. This atmosphere encourages clients to delve deeply into their innermost thoughts, emotions, and experiences without fear of judgment. As a result, clients are more likely to engage in meaningful self-reflection, which fosters personal growth and facilitates the healing process on their journey towards mental and emotional well-being. Ultimately, this refined approach not only enhances the counselling relationship but also promotes lasting emotional release, transformation and growth in clients' lives.

5.3 Limitations experienced with the empty chair technique

5.3.1 Cultural Influences and usage of the empty chair and body language in counselling

The findings of this research indicate that certain aspects of Zambian culture may pose challenges to the implementation of the empty chair counselling technique, as well as body language a form of non-verbal communication technique. Specifically, the study identified several key themes that highlight participants' reluctance to engage in dialogue with an empty chair, which stems from deep-seated cultural norms and beliefs surrounding interpersonal communication. Many participants expressed discomfort with the notion of speaking to an empty chair or space, viewing it as incongruent with their cultural values that prioritize direct and relational interactions. Supporting this finding, the work of Tanaka-Matsumi (2022) emphasizes the importance of counsellors recognizing the cultural influences that shape the counselling process. This insight underscores the necessity for counsellors to be aware of and sensitive to the cultural backgrounds of their clients. Furthermore, it suggests that the role of the counsellor should extend beyond that of simply guiding the client; instead, counsellors must adopt the role of a facilitator who actively engages with and respects the cultural context that the client brings into the session.

This perspective is particularly relevant within the framework of Gestalt therapy, which is fundamentally centred on the "here and now" experience of the client. To foster an effective counselling environment, counsellors need to adapt their approaches to fit the cultural

narratives and communication styles of their clients, ensuring that the counselling process is both respectful and effective. By embracing the unique cultural experiences of clients, counsellors can create a more meaningful connection and enhance the overall counselling experience.

Additionally, there is potential for misunderstandings due to cultural variations in gestures and expressions, which could compromise the effectiveness of this approach. Tanaka-Matsumi (2022) speaks similar while emphasising that all behaviour is learnt and is displayed in specific contexts, that there is need for counsellors to integrate culture centered counselling as the core of cultural informed and sensitive interventions. It is clear from the findings and literature that counsellors need to have training in culturally sensitive practices and sensitivity to provide a service that should accommodate many diverse clientele. Gestalt counsellors do not hold a view to impose on clients rather the client's views or truth is respected and communicated. Brownell (2008) stated the need for counsellors to get the clients to express their worldview and be respected for it. The goal should be to help bring about awareness in the subjective world of the client. By helping recognize whom they truly are in the moment for change to happen, as what will be dealt with in this awareness is the authentic person and not the phony.

Moreover, participants expressed a belief that interpersonal issues are already addressed by cultural practices and that young people do not face significant challenges warranting such interventions. Such findings are similar to Kurniawan (2018), that it is common for individuals from a dominant culture to perceive their reality from their own vantage point and assume it to be true for everyone else. These findings and literature underscore the importance of considering cultural factors when designing and implementing counselling interventions in diverse settings. It can also be deduced that the counsellor and client have a role to play in bringing about a negotiated cultural accepted mutual relationship that is critical to the counselling outcomes.

5.3.2 Challenges in the use of the empty chair and body language Counselling

According to the research findings, it was found that while utilizing the technique, some clients faced certain challenges that hindered their experience. These challenges included a fear of being misunderstood, hesitancy to engage in the technique, perceiving the technique as being wired and awkward, and a general sense of discomfort for some clients. This indicates that

while the technique can be beneficial, it may not be suitable for everyone and may require specific modifications based on individual needs. Another way to look at these findings would be to note the writings of Sicoli (1998) on the need for counsellors to ensure that clients understand and complete tasks, not just rush through activities, and caution counsellors not to try techniques on clients that they are not conversant with due to being overzealous. From these findings, different views could be raised, including inexperience in the techniques being applied, leading to clients being confused in the process, feeling awkward and seeing the process as wired.

However, it is important to note that some clients found it easy to work with the technique. The study suggests that those who are implementing the technique should take advantage of this information to understand better the challenges that may arise and find ways to improve the application of the technique. This could include providing additional support and guidance to clients who are hesitant or uncomfortable, offering modifications to make the technique more accessible, or adjusting the overall approach to better suit individual needs. By doing so, it would be possible to offer clients a more effective and comfortable experience, leading to better outcomes and greater satisfaction.

5.4 How the empty chair and body language counselling techniques helped Student with peer relationship challenges (Formation of a Framework)

5.4.1 Factors that helped the client overcome challenges using the empty chair technique (Lived Relations)

The findings showed the following factors to be the main contributors to clients' overcoming their challenges using the empty chair counselling technique. These included good rapport, client readiness, Counsellor attending skills, ability to imagine, and the flexibility of the Counsellor. These findings agree with the goal of Gestalt counselling, which is as stated by Clarke (2013), to collaborate with the client to raise individual awareness that would help overcome personal challenges that stood in the way of personal growth.

For such to be achieved, the counselling process needs to put the client at the centre of its counselling process. This could further be emphasized that Gestalt is a field theory that puts

the client's experiences in the context of their situation. Understanding is through what the client reveals and not through the counsellor's interpretation of the situation.

5.4.2 Factors that helped clients resolve issues when body language counselling techniques were used (Lived Relations)

This research has shown that effective counselling requires the use of body language techniques to identify and explore the unspoken issues so that clients' concerns can be addressed successfully. It was found that by utilizing these techniques, counsellors could create a safe space for clients to explore their thoughts and emotions and work collaboratively towards finding solutions to their problems. This aligns with the writing of Raffagnino and Sanyata (2019) that by observing the non-verbal behaviour that entails paying attention and helping the client recognise the interruption of contact and to be aware that they are being distracted from consciousness. And that Gestalt theory believes individuals can change, develop and grow when they experience who they are and are aware of whom they are today. The findings and literature show that addressing those things that hinder consciousness and usually expressed non-verbally could do this.

This approach involves several key components, including maintaining a calm and patient demeanour, which helps to put clients at ease and build trust. Additionally, counsellors ask clarifying questions to gain a deeper understanding of the client's experiences, which helps to establish a strong rapport and create a sense of empathy. They also actively listen and acknowledge the client's emotions, providing validation and support throughout the process.

Finally, the counsellor works collaboratively with the client to create meaning and understanding, helping them to gain insight into their experiences and develop strategies for moving forward. Overall, counsellors who employ these techniques have found that they can help clients overcome their challenges and achieve greater success in their lives.

5.4.3 Enhancing the Empty Chair Counselling Technique

The study has revealed some valuable insights into the effectiveness of the empty chair technique and its role in counselling. The research findings suggest that counsellors can play a crucial part in sensitizing their clients about the various aspects associated with the technique

to make it more effective. The writing of Corey (2005) confirms these findings that the counsellors' job is to invite the clients in an active partnership where they can learn about themselves through experiential attitudes in trying out behaviours and see what happens. By doing so, counsellors can help to alleviate any hesitation or uncertainty that clients may have, while also building their confidence in the technique's effectiveness.

Additionally, the study also highlights the importance of integrating the empty chair technique with other self-expression techniques to enhance its overall impact and effectiveness. Core (2005) and Seligman (2006) both identified flexibility of Gestalt counselling to integrate other approaches in its experimental work. Techniques are experimental in nature like the empty chair that should be designed to suit individual clients. This approach can help clients develop a more comprehensive understanding of the technique and how it can be used to achieve their goals.

Overall, the study provides valuable insights into the use of the empty chair technique in counselling and how counsellors can better support their clients in utilizing this tool. Knowing when to use the tool and understanding how to bring about the suggestion of the empty chair in the dialogue is vital. By sensitizing clients and integrating the technique with other self-expression techniques, counsellors can help clients take responsibility for achieving a greater sense of self-awareness, self-expression, and emotional healing.

5.4.4 Enhancing the Body Language Counselling Technique

The study has established that the body language Gestalt counselling technique is effective in helping individuals overcome emotional distress. The study has shed light on the most effective ways to improve this technique to ensure that counsellors can assist their clients more efficiently. The study gathered opinions from participants, who emphasized the importance of counsellors being mindful of their body language during the counselling process. Counsellors must utilize their body language to enhance communication with their clients. This includes maintaining eye contact, using appropriate facial expressions, and adopting an open posture to show attentiveness and empathy.

Furthermore, the participants in the study highlighted the significance of counsellors paying close attention to nonverbal cues during counselling sessions. Facial expressions, body

postures, and other nonverbal cues can provide vital information about the client's emotional state. By being attentive to these cues, counsellors can gain a deeper understanding of their client's struggles and provide more effective treatment. Similarly to the emphasis by Seligman (2006) that the physical sensations that are expressed are also important and can be used to help clients through three stages that include identification of the actions or signs being exhibited, secondly locating the emotions in the body where the client is experiencing and thirdly trying to exaggerate the action by repetition which is hoped to focus the attention on the emotion and help to experience it in the now and possibly deal or release it. By dealing with the emotions in the now, the client can take responsibility for what they are experiencing and is helped to gain awareness, devising steps on how to progress without blaming others or situations.

The study also emphasized the importance of cultural sensitivity. Counsellors must be aware of their client's cultural backgrounds to prevent any potential misinterpretations. Being culturally sensitive, it enables counsellors to tailor their treatment approach to their client's unique needs and beliefs, creating a safer and more supportive environment. Tanaka-Matsumi (2022) wrote, emphasising the need for counsellors to be culturally sensitive in their practice. By doing this, the role of a counsellor to facilitate awareness, which is an important element for a Gestalt counsellor, is achieved.

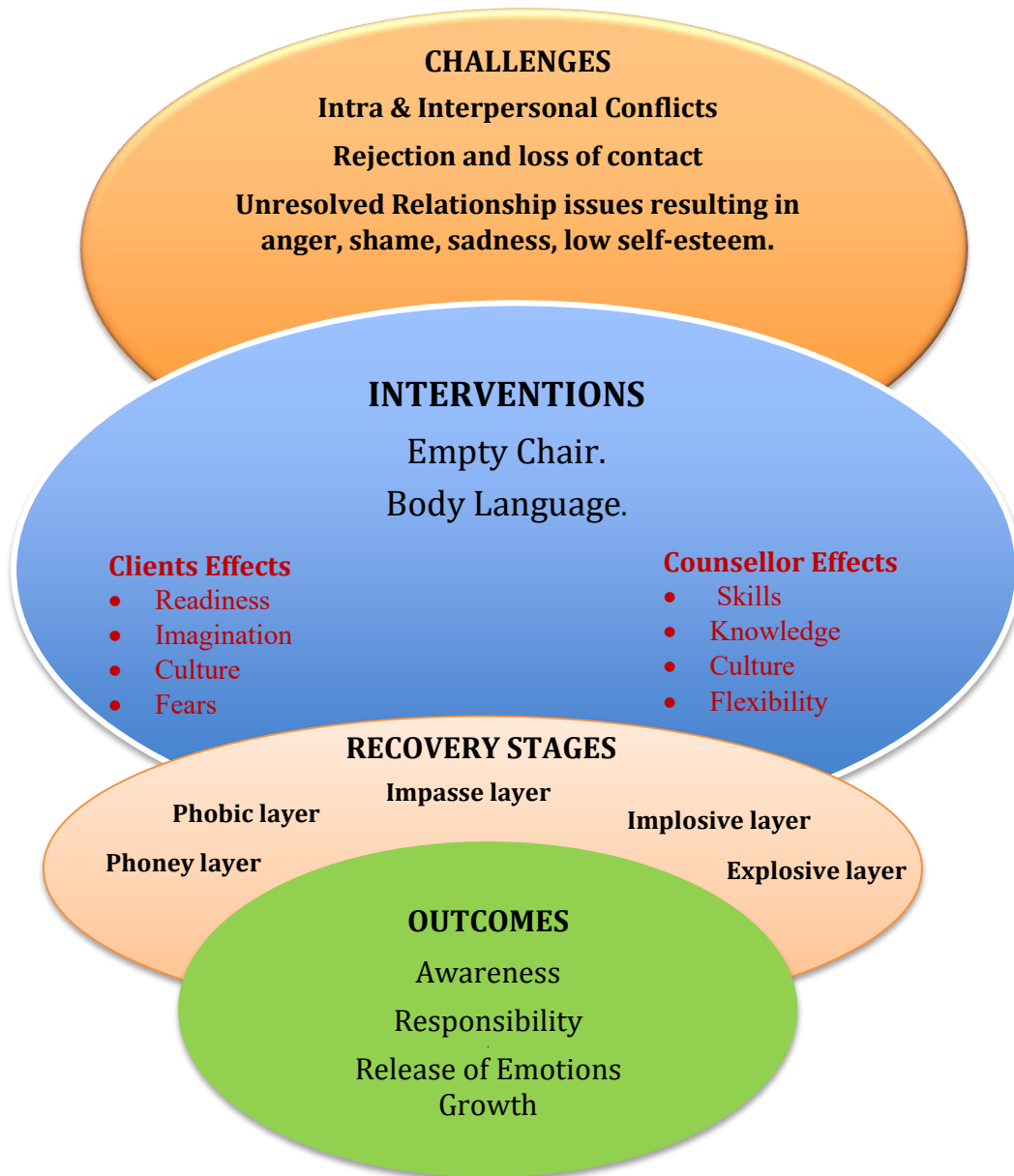
Additionally, the participants in the study highlighted the importance of counsellors remaining patient and calm throughout counselling sessions. Raffagnino (2019) wrote on some of the causes of experiencing awareness to be attributed to preoccupation with an individual's past, with fantasies, the flaw and strengths that may hinder someone from seeing the whole picture. As patients remain calm and patient in their facilitation, this helps to build trust and establish a safe environment for the client, facilitating their emotional healing process. Gestalt counselling is known to use various experimental approaches to help clients take their next step towards their growth and development, as clients are seen to be masters of their own experiences.

Finally, counsellors can utilise other techniques, such as active listening and open-ended questioning, to encourage clients to express themselves freely. By adopting these techniques, counsellors can provide more effective treatment and aid their clients in their emotional well-being, thereby ensuring supportive peer relationships.

5.5 Proposed Framework Based on Benefits of the Empty Chair and Body Language Gestalt Counselling Techniques

This part of the report outlines the findings and discussion regarding the benefits of utilizing the empty chair and body language Gestalt counselling technique. The content directly addresses objective number four, which pertains to establishing a framework that showcases how these techniques can assist students dealing with peer relationship issues. The framework serves as a guide for effectively employing the empty chair and body language Gestalt techniques to support young people in addressing challenges related to disconnection from their environment, internal conflicts, unresolved issues, emotional fragmentation, power struggles, and other interpersonal difficulties that necessitate the release of emotions such as rejection, anger, sadness, low self-esteem, and other forms of distress. The framework, named Mwanza's Empty Chair and Body Language Counselling Framework, is presented based on the insights gleaned from the current study (MECBLCF).

Figure 3: Mwanza`s empty chair and body language Counselling Framework



Source: Own Illustration based on Current study

5.5.1 Justification for the Mwanza`s empty chair and body language Counselling framework

The author aims for this framework to succinctly capture the insights and conversations stemming from the real-life experiences of individuals who have utilized the empty chair and

body language Gestalt counselling techniques. This framework is designed to serve as a guide for utilizing these findings to enhance and fortify the counselling experience. Partelow (2023) similarly suggests that frameworks can offer a summary that lays the groundwork for future projects. In this instance, Mwanza's empty chair and body language, Counselling Framework is shaped by empirical data derived from the experiences of both counsellors and clients who have utilized these techniques.

5.5.2 Description of the Mwanza`s empty Chair and Body Language Counselling Framework (MECBLCF)

The MECBLCF is a four-stage process that elucidates the intricacies of relationship challenges. It encompasses interventions that utilize techniques such as the empty chair method and the nuanced interpretation of body language. The framework also outlines the various recovery stages within the counselling journey, culminating in the evaluation of the effectiveness of these interventions. Below is a detailed exploration of the MECBLCF, shedding light on each component and its significance in fostering healthier relationships.

i. Challenges in Peer Relationships

The relationships that students form with their peers and the environment are instrumental in shaping their experiences and success within educational environments. Positive connections with fellow students can greatly motivate individuals, propelling them towards achievement. Conversely, negative interactions can have a profound, detrimental impact, potentially leading to feelings of disillusionment and withdrawal. As emphasized by Hattie (2012), students who feel ostracized by their peers may grapple with emotions of isolation and detachment, significantly affecting their engagement levels and academic performance. Additionally, Maunder (2016) underscored the pivotal role of positive social interactions in educational settings, emphasizing their capacity to enrich students' overall educational journeys.

Additionally, the cited literature suggests that students who form strong connections with their peers are more likely to adjust successfully to university life, while those who struggle with peer relationships may face greater challenges in this regard. The current study highlighted rejection, intra and interpersonal challenges, unresolved relationship issues leading to feelings of anger, shame, frustration, lack of contact and other forms requiring release of emotions were

mainly resolved by the application of the empty chair and use of body language, Gestalt counselling techniques.

Interventions through the Gestalt empty chair and body language, Counselling Techniques

The interventions in this stage do not aim at analysis or introspection like other counselling strategies but help the client to re-live their troubling or unresolved emotions, relationship issues, and other challenges in the present so that the client can deal with them in the now. This study has highlighted the importance of utilising the empty chair technique and body language, Gestalt counselling techniques as valuable tools for counsellors in assisting clients with expressing and resolving their emotions. These techniques offer an alternative approach to gaining insight into the client's thought processes and feelings and provide a means to help clients navigate challenging situations. The goal of Gestalt is for the client to collaborate with the counsellor without fearing being judged, as Cavichia (2013) noted. The empty chair and body language techniques can facilitate a deeper understanding of the client's experiences, allowing them to re-live and explore their emotions in a safe and non-judgmental environment.

In the study, it was found that both the client and the counsellor have important roles to play in the success of the empty chair counselling technique. The client's willingness to actively participate in the dialogue and to experiment with the empty chair is crucial for the technique to be effective. Additionally, the client's cultural background and orientation should be taken into consideration, as it can impact the success of the technique. Furthermore, the client's ability to use their imagination is equally important, as they need to be able to envision the significant person with whom they have unresolved issues sitting in the opposite chair for the technique to work effectively. By addressing these factors, fears and challenges associated with engaging in the empty chair counselling technique can be minimized. It is also essential for the counsellor to possess the necessary skills and knowledge about these techniques for the intended outcomes to be achieved.

The Recovery Process (Layers of Neurosis)

In Gestalt counselling, the central emphasis revolves around understanding the individual, including their interactions with the environment, relationships, and emotions. The counsellor in this approach aims to help the client develop an awareness of their present reality. To

accomplish this, clients are supported in facing their unresolved emotions in the present moment and are encouraged to take responsibility for their personal growth and development.

In the process of assisting the client, the study has established that a variety of counselling techniques can be employed, including the empty chair technique and the observation of body language. These techniques help the client progress through different layers that they may have developed as a coping mechanism. Initially, they may present a fake layer (phoney layer), where they pretend to be someone they are not. Followed by a layer of fear (Phobic layer), where they conceal their true issues, and then a layer of feeling stuck and confused. Through the counselling process, they can eventually reach a layer where they can identify their unfinished business and explore new possibilities (impasse layer). As they shed their old layers (implosive layer), they reach a phase of reintegration, becoming more authentic and self-actualized (explosive layer), with the ability to engage more effectively with their environment (Seligman et al., 2006) and (Ndhlovu and Mwanza, 2025).

In relation to the five benchmarks for becoming a healthy individual that guided this study, several insightful observations emerged.

At the phoney layer, counsellors employed techniques designed to help clients articulate their feelings in the moment. By encouraging clients to identify and express their emotions, counsellors were able to clarify the underlying issues that may have been obscured by defensive behaviours. This process not only facilitated greater self-awareness among clients but also provided counsellors with insight into the emotional landscape, enabling them to tailor interventions more effectively.

Moving to the phobic layer, the introduction of the empty chair technique, along with the emphasis on non-verbal communication cues, initially led many clients to experience discomfort and instinctively adopt a defensive posture. This reaction was common as individuals confront deep-seated fears or unresolved conflicts. However, as the counselling process progressed to the impasse layer, the counsellors employed clear instructions and demonstrated flexibility in their approach. Their adept use of interactive strategies allowed clients to navigate through their discomfort, ultimately fostering a sense of safety that was essential for further exploration of their emotions.

As participants reached the implosive layer, they began to gain significant insights into their thoughts and emotions. This heightened awareness marked a pivotal point in the counselling journey, allowing individuals to confront their inner turmoil with greater clarity (Rizal et al., 2020).

Finally, under the explosive layer, participants reported feeling a newfound sense of control over their emotional narratives. Many were able to express their thoughts and feelings freely while engaging with the empty chair, symbolizing the other person in their lives that they held unresolved feelings toward. This cathartic release, akin to the findings of Huan et al. (2021), illustrated a crucial breakthrough as participants let go of pent-up anger and frustration, paving the way for healing and personal growth.

Out Comes (benefits of the empty chair and body language, Gestalt Counselling Techniques)

During counselling sessions, this study has shown that counsellors can utilize both body language and the empty chair technique to gain valuable insights into clients' unspoken emotions and internal thoughts. By observing non-verbal cues such as posture, facial expressions, and eye contact, counsellors can better understand what clients might be feeling beneath the surface. The empty chair technique involves having the client imagine that a significant person or aspect of themselves is sitting in an empty chair. This innovative approach facilitates a dialogue that allows clients to articulate feelings they may struggle to express directly, thus providing a richer context for understanding their experiences.

The practice of using the empty chair technique can yield numerous benefits for both the client and the counsellor. For clients, it offers an opportunity to explore complex emotions such as grief, anger, or regret that may not have been adequately expressed in traditional counselling approaches. This technique fosters a safe environment where clients can confront unresolved issues or relive pivotal emotional moments, leading to catharsis and insight. For counsellors, it deepens their understanding of the client's emotional landscape, equipping them with the insights necessary to tailor interventions that are more effective and empathetic.

Ultimately, the overarching goal of this interaction is to help the client develop greater self-awareness. By examining how they engage with their environment and the relationships that shape their lives, clients are empowered to take responsible steps toward addressing their

issues. This process enhances their emotional maturity, enabling them to navigate challenges with resilience and insight. In essence, the combination of body language awareness and the empty chair technique creates a profound and transformative counselling experience, guiding clients toward healing and personal growth.

5.6 Summary

This chapter has examined the findings in relation to the research questions posed at the outset of the study. Key themes that were identified in chapter 4, and relevant literature, along with the theoretical frameworks guiding this research, has been analyzed. Furthermore, the practical implications of these findings have been highlighted, emphasizing how they can inform and improve practice in the field. The upcoming chapter will provide a comprehensive conclusion, summarizing the key insights gained from the study, along with actionable recommendations aimed at enhancing future practice and research efforts.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

6.0 Overview

This chapter concludes the study by offering a comprehensive summary of the key findings, highlighting their significance and relevance to the field. It outlines specific recommendations for practitioners aimed at improving practices based on the results. Additionally, the chapter discusses the broader implications of these findings and academic publications that were done, suggesting areas where further exploration could contribute to a deeper understanding of the topic.

6.1 Conclusion

The study explored the benefits of Gestalt empty chair and body language counselling techniques based on the lived experiences of counsellors and students who were exposed to the two techniques in resolving peer relationship challenges. From this hermeneutical phenomenological study, the following experiences emerged: knowledge of the techniques, cases where these techniques were mostly used, factors that affected the experience, benefits from the use of the techniques, limitations and ways of enhancing the techniques.

The study demonstrated that the empty chair techniques were in use and several benefits were seen from the lived experiences of the clients who reported being able to gain awareness and emotional well-being. In the use of the empty chair, 13 students rated it to be effective in addressing their issues, 2 students rated the technique as not effective, and 1 student rated it as not so much. Some of the aspects that impacted the use of the empty chair technique included the client's readiness to engage in the activities, the client being able to use their imagination, culture influences, and counsellor skills. The empty chair technique was seen to be effective in addressing issues that had to do with intra-personal conflict, inter-personal issues, issues with rejection, relationship concerns, anxieties, disclosures, and other concerns that require the release of emotions and gaining awareness to enhance personal growth and responsibility.

The counselling approach that focuses on body language proved to be most effective when integrated with other expressive methods, emphasizing that the counsellor must be mindful of

its application, as it has the potential to disrupt the counselling process. Body language can aid clients in attaining a greater level of self-awareness, which is a primary goal in Gestalt therapy. On the other hand, when a counsellor fails to connect with a client's emotional state, this research indicates that ignoring the client's body language can hinder the counselling experience.

The two techniques require a well-developed skill set on the part of the counsellor to navigate and avoid challenges such as culture concerns, rushing through, and not putting the client at the centre of the counselling that may arise in its application. The study has shown how important the counsellor is in helping clients. The knowledge and level of training for counsellors have a huge role in making the counselling process a success.

6.2 Recommendations

Arising from the findings, the following recommendations were developed.

- i. A study to ascertain the counsellor's skills in facilitation of the Gestalt counselling techniques so that interventions can be established to improve practice.
- ii. Training providers to offer specialized training in the use and application of various counselling techniques to practicing counsellors.
- iii. There is a need for Counsellor Regulatory Bodies to conduct examinations to regulate Counsellor Licensing periodically as Counsellor Skills play a pivotal role in counselling.

6.3 Implications for Practice

Counsellors play a crucial role in addressing a wide range of client issues by applying their knowledge and expertise to determine the most suitable counselling approach and technique. It's important that counselling isn't approached with a one-size-fits-all mentality but rather allows for an eclectic experience that encourages both the client and counsellor to experiment and explore various strategies to bring about awareness.

One strategy in counselling settings is the application of the proposed MECBLCF developed from the findings of this study which employs a comprehensive four-stage process. This method incorporates the empty chair technique and nuanced interpretations of body language

to assist clients in resolving persistent challenges in peer relationships. The framework has demonstrated efficacy in addressing a variety of issues, including feelings of rejection, intra- and interpersonal conflicts, and unresolved relational traumas that often manifest as deep-seated emotions such as anger, shame, and frustration.

Additionally, the MECBLCF serves to facilitate genuine contact and connection, encouraging clients to articulate suppressed feelings that may hinder their emotional well-being. By employing these techniques, the study has demonstrated that counsellors can more effectively help clients navigate the complexities of their emotional landscapes, enabling them to achieve meaningful resolutions to their relational struggles. Through this structured approach, clients are empowered to process their emotions in a safe environment, leading to enhanced self-awareness and improved interpersonal skills, leading to a healthy personal.

6.4 Publications and New Knowledge

This thesis has significantly advanced scientific knowledge through the publication of articles and the presentation of preliminary findings at an international conference. Specifically, two articles have undergone rigorous peer review and have been successfully published in reputable academic journals, as detailed in appendices 5, 6, and 7. The publication of these articles not only highlights the research undertaken but also contributes to ongoing discussions within the field, fostering further academic inquiry and collaboration. Additionally, the conference presentation provided an invaluable opportunity to engage with fellow researchers and receive critical feedback, which has enriched the overall research process.

The first article, published on June 25th, 2024, was based on a study exploring how the empty chair Gestalt counseling technique facilitated improved peer relationships among students at a public university in Zambia. This article was developed using a hermeneutic phenomenology research design, which enabled in-depth exploration of students' lived experiences and perceptions. Through interviews, the research uncovered significant themes related to students' emotional challenges and their journey towards establishing healthier interpersonal connections.

The second article, released on March 5th, 2025, built upon the initial findings by investigating how body language counselling techniques were effectively employed to assist students

navigating social interactions at the same university. This research delved into the nuances of non-verbal communication and its impact on interpersonal dynamics, revealing that students who engaged in body language awareness and counselling experienced enhanced confidence and better social integration. Together, these two articles provide compelling empirical evidence on the utilization of these innovative counselling techniques within the Zambian educational context, highlighting their potential to foster supportive peer networks and promote emotional well-being among students.

The full citations of the published articles are;

- i. Ndhlovu, D., and Mwanza, N., (2024) Use of the Empty Chair Counselling Technique in Helping University Students with Peer Relationship Challenges: A Hermeneutic Phenomenology. *International Journal of Research and Scientific Innovation*. XI(VII):528-539 DOI: [10.51244/IJRSI.2024.1107040](https://doi.org/10.51244/IJRSI.2024.1107040)
- ii. Ndhlovu, D., and Mwanza, N., (2025) Exploring Body Language in Gestalt Counselling of Students at Public University Using Hermeneutic Phenomenology. *International Journal of Research and Scientific Innovation*. IX(ii):1399-1405 DOI: [10.47772/IJRISS.2025.9020113](https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.9020113)

6.5 Summary

The chapter effectively presents a conclusion and outlines several key recommendations based on the findings of the study. It emphasizes the importance of these recommendations in enhancing practical applications within the relevant field. Additionally, the chapter highlights the broader implications for practice, showcasing how the insights gained from this research can influence future methodologies and policies. Furthermore, it discusses the significant contributions to the advancement of scientific knowledge, particularly through the publication of articles in peer-reviewed journals and the participation in a relevant conference presentation. These activities not only disseminate the findings to a wider audience but also encourage ongoing dialogue and collaboration within the academic community.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Semi-structured Interview Guide for Students

Benefits of Gestalt Counselling Techniques to Students with Peer Relationship Problems at a Public University in Kitwe, Zambia: A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Approach

i. Empty chair counselling techniques

- a) What do you understand by the empty chair counselling technique?
- b) How was your experience with the empty chair technique in the counselling session you attended?
- c) How well were your concerns addressed with the empty chair technique in your counselling sessions?
- d) What do you think helped you resolve your challenge when the empty chair technique was used?
- e) From your experience, what have you learnt about the use of the empty chair?

ii. Explore how body language counselling techniques helped students with peer relationship problems.

- f) What do you understand by body language?
- g) How was your experience with the counselling exploring your body language in the counselling session you attended?
- h) How well were your concerns addressed with body language in your counselling sessions?
- i) What do you think helped you resolve your challenge when the body language technique was used?
- j) From your experience, what have you learned about paying attention to your body language?

iii. Limitations and suggestions to improve the empty chair, and body language techniques.

- a) From your own experience, what challenges did you experience when the empty chair technique was used in your counselling session?

- b) From your own experience, what challenges did you experience when the body language technique was used in your counselling session?
- c) From your own experience with the empty chair and counselling technique, what could be done to enhance its effectiveness?
- d) From your own experience with the body language counselling technique, what could be done to enhance its effectiveness?
- e)
- f) What would you recommend to others regarding the use of the empty chair and body language in helping students resolve relationship issues?
- g) Could there be anything else you would like to mention about your experience with the empty chair and body language technique in counselling?

Appendix 2 Semi-structured Interview Guide for students' counsellors

Benefits of Gestalt Counselling Techniques to Students with Peer Relationship Problems at A Public University in Kitwe, Zambia: A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Approach

- i. Use of the empty chair counselling technique in helping students with peer relationship problems in universities.
 - k) What do you understand by the empty chair counselling technique?
 - l) From your own experience, how have you used the empty chair in counselling?
 - m) What counselling issues do you normally apply the empty chair technique?
 - n) What went well with your counselling session as you used the empty chair technique in your counselling sessions?
 - o) What do you think helped the client resolve their issues in your use of the empty chair technique?
 - p) From your experience, what have you learnt about the use of the empty chair in helping students?
 - q) What has been interesting to you as a Counsellor in your use of the empty chair?
- ii. Use of body language counselling techniques in helping students with peer relationship problems.
 - a) What do you understand by body language in counselling?
 - b) From your experience as a Counsellor, how have you used body language in counselling?
 - c) What went well with your counselling session as the client's body language used in your counselling sessions?
 - d) What do you think helped the client resolve their issues in your use of the body language technique?
 - e) From your experience, what have you learnt about body language in helping students?
 - f) What has been so interesting to you as a Counsellor in your use of both your and your client's body language in counselling?
- iii. Limitations and ways to enhance the empty chair and body language techniques.

- a) From your own experience, what challenges have you experienced using the empty chair and body language techniques?
- b) From your own experience with the empty chair and body language counselling techniques, what could be done to enhance its effectiveness in your work?
- c) What would you recommend to others regarding the use of the empty chair and body language in helping students resolve relationship issues?
- d) Could there be anything else you would like to mention about your experience with the empty chair and body language technique in your work as a counsellor?

Appendix 3 Document analysis guide

- a) Verify whether counsellors used the empty chair and body language techniques on the said students
- b) Verify how the students benefited from the empty chair and body language counselling techniques

The figure shows steps followed to review the counsellor's records

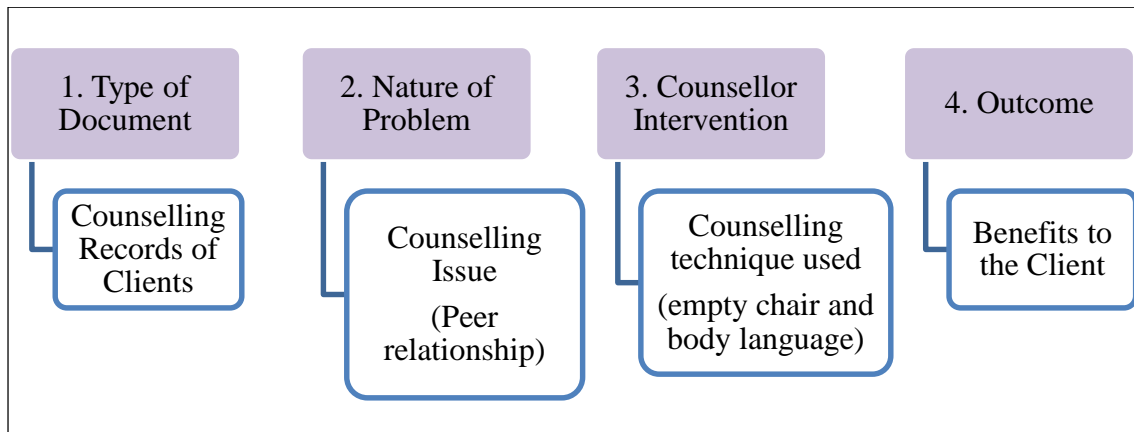


Figure 1 Retrospective Record Review Guide

Appendix 4: Ethical Approval Number 00006464



THE UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA DIRECTORATE OF RESEARCH AND GRADUATE STUDIES

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APPROVAL OF STUDY

IORG No. 0005376
HSSREC IRB No. 00006464
REF NO. HSSREC-2023-SEPT-027

5th October, 2023

Mr. Nicholas Mwanza
The University of Zambia
P.O. Box 32379
LUSAKA

Dear Mr. Mwanza

RE: “ BENEFITS OF GESTALT COUNSELING TECHNIQUES TO STUDENTS WITH PEER RELATIONSHIP PROBLEMS AT A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY IN KITWE, ZAMBIA: HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH.”

Reference is made to your submission of the protocol captioned above.

The HSSREC resolved to approve this study and your participation as Principal Investigator for a period of one year.

Specific conditions will apply to this approval. As Principal Investigator it is your responsibility to ensure that the contents of this letter are adhered to. If these are not adhered to, the approval may be suspended. Should the study be suspended, study sponsors and other regulatory authorities will be informed.

Appendix 5: Article Publication on the Use of the Empty Chair Gestalt Counselling Techniques in helping Students with Peer Relationships Challenges; A hermeneutic Phenomenological Approach



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH AND SCIENTIFIC INNOVATION (IJRSI)
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Use of the Empty Chair Gestalt Counselling Technique in Helping University Students with Peer Relationship Challenges: A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Approach

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to explore the use of the empty chair Gestalt counselling technique in helping students with peer relationship challenges by using the hermeneutic phenomenological approach. An expert purposive sampling method was used to select all 4 counsellors currently working at a public university and 16 students who had been counselled using the empty chair Gestalt counselling technique to inform this study. Semi-structured interviews and retrospective record reviews were used to collect data there after the data was analysed thematically. The findings indicated that most of the clients reported progress and were helped to resolve their relationship challenges while a few showed difficulties in engaging with the technique. Factors that positively contributed to the success of the empty chair technique included counsellor skills, the client's ability to use their imagination, client's willingness to engage in the empty chair technique. Where the technique did not work well, it was mainly in circumstances where clients felt some discomfort with the technique. The notable cases where the empty chair counselling technique was mostly used were rejection, unresolved relationship challenges, need for emoting, and intra and inter-personal conflicts. The study recommends that counsellors who use the empty chair technique need to have adequate training in its application to offer a more effective and comfortable experience for clients.

Keywords: Empty chair counselling technique, Gestalt Counselling, student Counselling, peer relationships

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was to explore the use of the empty chair Gestalt counselling technique in helping students with peer relationship challenges at a public university in Kitwe, Zambia. The relationship challenges included lack of contact with peers, confluence, unfinished business, and fragmentation. According to Ndhlovu (2015), when students lose contact with their environment, they may isolate themselves and miss out on interactions with others and the resources available to them. This highlights the importance of social interactions for all individuals, regardless of status. Failure to establish meaningful social interactions can lead to neurosis, as humans are social beings. Ndhlovu (2015) also discusses confluence, which occurs when an individual over-trusts others to the point where they lose control of their life and ability to make personal decisions or be aware of their identity. This can lead to challenges in peer relationships, as individuals may struggle to distinguish between their personal needs and those of others. In terms of unfinished business, it refers to unmet or unfulfilled needs that are important to an individual. In learning institutions, students need social interactions with others to fulfil their need for belonging. When this need is not met, it can lead to neurosis. Students may experience broken relationships due to an unmet



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Appendix 6: Conference Presentation on Exploring Benefits of body Language Gestalt Counselling Technique to students with Peer Relationship Problems at a Public University in Zambia using hermeneutic phenomenology.



Congratulations! Your abstract (Exploring Benefits of body Language Gestalt Counselling Technique to students with Peer Relationship Problems at a Public University in Zambia using hermeneutic phenomenology) was accepted to the third ERAZ Annual International Conference to be held in Lusaka-Zambia from 6th to 8th November 2024 at M'kango Golfview Hotel. Therefore, we invite you to this conference to present your paper. Remember to register for the conference by Friday 31st October 2024. Payment details are in the conference call attached.

The Educational Research Association of Zambia Journal (JERAZ) will be publishing Volume 2 issues before November 2025. Should you wish to publish with us, please send your manuscript by 20th October 2024.

You will be expected to prepare a comprehensive PowerPoint presentation for 15 minutes and send it to erazassociation@gmail.com in readiness for presentations.

Looking forward to seeing you in Lusaka.

Yours Faithfully

President

Sitwe Benson Mkandawire (PhD)

Email: bmsitwe@gmail.com

Appendix 7: Article Publication on Exploring Body Language in Gestalt Counselling of Students at a Public University Using Hermeneutic Phenomenological Approach



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH AND INNOVATION IN SOCIAL SCIENCE (IJRISS)
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Exploring Body Language in Gestalt Counselling of Students at a Public University Using Hermeneutic Phenomenology

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ABSTRACT

This study explored how counsellors utilise body language Gestalt counselling techniques to assist students at a public university and to understand the experiences of counsellors and clients in this context. Based on a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, the study used an expert purposive sampling method to select 4 counsellors at a public university and 16 students who had prior exposure to the body language counselling techniques for this study. The participants were interviewed using semi-structured interviews and document analysis based on a retrospective record review employed to collect data. The data from interviews was analysed using thematic analysis. The research findings demonstrated that body language played a crucial role in the interaction between counsellors and clients, influencing the effectiveness of the counselling process. Positive results indicated that both counsellors and clients benefitted from enhanced communication and gained additional insights beyond verbal expressions, leading to increased awareness. However, some participants experienced challenges and discomfort when their body language was pointed out by the counsellor. Additionally, the study found that body language techniques were most effective when complemented by other counselling methods. It was suggested that caution should be exercised when using body language techniques, as they could potentially lead the client to become defensive and hinder progress. Nonetheless, when used correctly, these techniques could help both the counsellor and client become more cognizant of their body language and utilize it to enrich their dialogue.

Keywords: Body language counselling technique, Gestalt Counselling, student Counselling,

INTRODUCTION

Body language is a form of non-verbal communication that is vital for counselling. It includes non-verbal language, where the movements and behaviours of the body are used instead of words to express and convey information. Abdulghafor and Ali (2022) posit that body language involves hand movements, facial expressions and hints, eye movements, tone of voice, body movements and positions, gestures, use of space, and the like. Body language informs individuals about their true feelings because it usually occurs unconsciously. Feelings are mostly expressed through body language. Non-verbal communication just like verbal communication is equally two ways as it involves sending and receiving of information. For counsellors, it even goes beyond just two-way communication to include far more than merely having a conversation with the client's vocalisations and nonverbals but responding to their interpretations, judgements, questions, and so on, as prompted by their inner voice (Paré and Lysack, 2004).

AIPC (2009) adds that language is mostly associated with spoken or written language and it is the unique ability that sets humans apart from other primates. To this effect, body language is supreme as it communicates volumes of messages. For instance, 93% of the communication is exchanged through non-verbal and of this, 65% to 90% is communicated through body language. However, as far as 2009, AIPC noted that body language was taken for granted as it occurs involuntarily or semi-voluntary but represents mental dispositions in many instances. Literature of this nature gives insights into the role that body language plays in communication. It becomes necessary to explore how the body language counselling technique advocated by



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