Effects of Counselling on Truancy among Senior Secondary School Students in Port-Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State

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ABSTRACT

This quasi-experimental study investigated the effects of counselling on truancy among senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt city local government area of Rivers State. The population consists of 2952 senior secondary one (SS1) students in PHALGA for 2017/2018 academic session. The purposive sampling technique was used to draw a sample size of 90 SS1 students from 2 public schools in PHALGA. Three (3) research questions and three (3) null hypotheses guided the study. Truancy assessment scale (TAS) developed by the researcher was the instrument used for data collection. The face and content validity of the instrument was ensured by experts from the field of guidance and counselling while its reliability was established through a test re-test procedure and it yielded a co-efficient of (r) 0.71. The research questions were answered with mean and standard deviation while paired sample t-test was used to test the 1st hypothesis and independent t-test for the 2nd and 3rd hypotheses. The result shows that counselling has a significant effect on truancy, the experimental group significantly improved above their control group counterpart’s with respect to truancy but no significant difference was found among male and female students in the experimental group with regard to truancy. These results were discussed, implications stated, the following recommendations amongst others were made; Truant students should be referred to counsellors for effective counselling and PHALGA should collaborate with the state government to ensure the employment of counsellors in all the secondary schools in her domain.

Keywords: Truancy, Counselling, Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, Students.

INTRODUCTION

Truancy is unapproved absence from school, usually without a parent’s knowledge. Bazemore, Stindcomb and Leip (2004) defined truancy as unlawful absence from school without parental knowledge or consent. The incidence of truancy in our public secondary schools is increasingly becoming a source of worry to teachers, Parents, school authority and the society at large. This is so because truancy is a major problem that is facing educational standard globally. Munn and Johnson in Ofele, Awoyemi, Siokwu and Ojukwu (2015) reported that in Scotland, 30%-33% children play truant at least once in the surveyed week. Brown in Ofele etal (2015) also reported similar findings in Australia where 40%-60% of adolescents play truancy. Moseki (2004) also reported that in South Africa 38% of adolescents from higher social economic community play occasional truancy while 6% are habitual truants and 72.6% engage in blanket truancy. With this statistic we can infer that truancy is not a one man’s affair but a global phenomenon plaguing nations. Truancy is inimical and detrimental to children’s education, health and socialization. Nwosu (2006) observed that truancy do not enhance the maintenance and actualization of potentials of individuals. Okosun (2010) pointed out that acts of indiscipline had rendered our schools unsafe for normal academic process, he said truancy is one of such acts of indiscipline. In response to this, stake holders in the business of education, scholars from diverse
disciplines are putting in tremendous efforts to unravel the factors responsible for truancy among secondary school students and a means of proffering solution to salvaging them. The researchers were not left out in this direction as they were spurred to undertake this study by what they observed among public secondary school students in Rivers state, especially among public secondary school students in Port Harcourt city local government area. Students were often seen in uniforms moving about the city in groups, playing football and seen around play stations during school hours. The researchers began to wonder what must have been the motivating factor for such acts of indiscipline, this spurred them to undertake this study by employing counselling as a means of salvaging truancy as such act will not help students’ progress academically and otherwise.

Peltzer (2010) linked truancy with negative outcomes such as substance abuse, vandalism, violent offending, auto theft, risky sexual practices, illicit drug use, alcohol drinking and cigarette smoking. Truancy starts from simple problem of lateness to school and progressed into a more serious problem such as truancy. Some students cannot bear to remain in the corrective atmosphere at home or school, they rather explore other places to relax and satisfy their curiosity.

Truancy is an act of skipping school. Skipping school is a cry for help and a signal that the child is in trouble (United states Department of Education in Peltzer 2010). They identified many reasons why children become truants. These include; lack of interest in education and alienation from school, falling behind academically in school, fear of violence on the way to school, alienation from authority, lax parental supervision, lack of parental support for education, drug and alcoholic abuse, working long hours while attending school resulting in chronic exhaustion, lack of significant consequences for failure to attend school, problems at home that require supervising young children or helping dysfunctional adults and lots more.

Parents, teachers, school authority have reacted in different ways to put a stop to the incident of truancy by flogging, scolding, suspending, giving corporal punishment, denial of love, expulsion and so on (Nwosu, 2006). All these efforts appears fruitless as they seem not to have lasting effect on the long run. Anagbogu in Nwosu (2006) suggested that counselling can be used to help an individual improve his/her behaviour problems. She affirms that counselling is a learning process designed to increase adaptive behaviour and to exterminate maladaptive behaviour.

Cognitive behaviour therapy was adopted in this study to remedy the incidence of truancy among students. This theory is based on the idea that a client’s cognition has an enormous impact on his feelings and behavior, i.e how we think (cognition) how we feel (emotion) and how we act (behavior) all interact together. Therefore, negative and unrealistic thoughts can cause us anxiety, anger, depression, unhappiness and other psychological problems which can result in major problems. The emotional and behavioral difficulties that people experience in their lives are not caused directly by events but by the way they interpret and make sense of these events. According to Beck, when clients can be helped to pay attention to the “internal dialogue”, the stream of automatic thoughts that accompany and guide their actions, they can make choices about the appropriateness of these self-statements, and if necessary introduce new thoughts and ideas which lead to happier or more satisfied life. Truancy constitutes a serious threat to excellent academic performance. Many psychologist, educationist and researchers have carried out different research works on truancy among students at various levels. Some of these works were x-rayed to ascertain their contributions and determine the existing gap that can be filled.

Nwosu (2007) conducted an experimental study consisting of 30 truants aged 9 to 14 years old from primary 4 to 6 classes from 3 urban public primary schools in Akwa South Local Government Education Authority of Anambra state using individual counselling. The results indicated among others that individualised counselling techniques led to significant remediation of Truancy in children.

Igwe (2013) investigated the effects of individual and group counselling on secondary school students Truant behaviour in Abia, he adopted quasi- experimental design. A sample size of 80 SS2 students were drawn from a population of 875 senior secondary school two students (SS2) for 2009/2010 academic session. Results indicated that there is no significant difference between individual and group counselling
on male and female students with truant behaviour: the effects of individual and group counselling on students’ truant behaviour do not differ significantly based on gender.

In a related development Fareo (2013) using a descriptive survey design ‘investigated truancy and academic performance of secondary school students in south western Nigeria: Implication for counselling. Results indicated amongst others that there was a significant difference between male and female students manifestation of truancy behaviour.

Kennedy (2008) asserts that counselling has been proved to have a high level of success in improving diverse individuals with diverse problems, the following studies confirms this assertion; Eniola & Adebiyi (2005) conducted an experimental study among (48) forty-eight visually impaired students in Federal College of Education (special) Oyo utilizing RET and Reality therapy in improving socialisation problems, using 3x2x2 factorial matrix. The results revealed that RET subjects socialised significantly better than all other subjects.

Olatunbosun (2015) investigated the efficacy of cognitive behaviour therapy on reducing bulling behaviour among secondary school students in Ikwerre local government area of Rivers State in a quasi-experimental study using a sample size of 90 students identified as bullies, using Olweus Bulling Questionnaire. Results shows that cognitive behaviour therapy had a significant effect in reducing bulling on the experimental group and no significant difference was noted among male and female students on bulling behaviour.

Ker, Ejoka & Ekoja (2007) also conducted an experimental study in Benue State University for 2004/2005 session post graduate students using a sample size of (60) sixty students, made up of 39 males and 21 females with a mean age of 36 years utilized RET to improve voters attitude. The results showed that the treatment factor RET produced significant mean difference between the experimental and control groups in favour of the former.

On this premise, counselling is necessary to remedy truancy amongst students. Group Counselling was employed in this study to investigate its effect on truancy among secondary school students in Port Harcourt city local government area. It is against this background that this study was carried out.

Statement of the problem
Truancy is a serious problem that can mire the progress of a student academically and otherwise. It poses big problem to teachers, parents, school administrators and society at large. It is a known fact that most children who set out to go to school end up not setting their foot to school rather they are seen on play fields and hideouts. Truancy exposes the child to danger of kidnapping, failing academically leading to frustration and subsequent loss of confidence. To salvage these ugly situations the researchers investigated the effects of counselling on truancy among secondary school students in Port Harcourt city local government area of Rivers state.

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of the study is to investigate the effects of counselling on truancy among secondary school students in Port Harcourt city local government area of Rivers state. Specifically, the study is aimed at achieving the following,

1. Determine the effects of counselling on truancy among secondary school students in the experimental group as measured by their pre-test and post-test mean scores.
2. Investigate the effects of counselling on truancy among male and female secondary school students in the experimental group as measured by their post-test mean scores.
3. To ascertain the effects of counselling on truancy among students in experimental and control group as determined by their post-test mean scores only.

Research Questions
The following research questions were posed to guide the study:
1. To what extent does counselling affect truancy among secondary school students in the experimental group as measured by their pre-test and post-test mean scores?
2. To what extent does counselling affect male and female secondary school students in the experimental group as measured by their post-test mean scores?
3. What is the differential effect of counselling on truancy when the post-test mean scores of the experimental group is compared to that of the control group?

Null Hypotheses
The following corresponding null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance to give bearing to the study;

1. There is no significant difference on the effects of counselling on truancy among secondary school students in the experimental group when their pre-test and post-test mean scores are compared.
2. There is no significant difference on the effects of counselling on truancy among male and female secondary school students in the experimental group as determined by their post-test mean scores.
3. There is no significant difference on the effects of counselling on truancy among students in the experimental and control group as determined by their post-test mean scores only.

Scope of the study
The content scope of the study covers the subject matter ‘Effects of counselling on truancy among senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt city local government area of Rivers State.

The geographical scope of the study covers Port Harcourt city local government area where the students in the study reside and are duly registered as students. The study is delimited to group counselling. It utilized experimental and control group for comparison.

Methodology
This study adopted the pre-test, posttest control group quasi-experimental research design. Nwankwo in Nwankwo (2013) defined quasi-experimental study as “a study which cannot properly control some threats to validity because of inevitable situations arising in a study when human beings are used for experimental study.

The researchers are convinced that quasi-experimental research is the most appropriate design for this study.

The target population of this study consist of all the SSS one students in Port Harcourt city local government area of Rivers State in the 12 public senior secondary schools for 2017/2018 academic session. As at the time of this study the total number of SS1 students in the local government was 2952 (Source: state ministry of education).

The sample of the study consist of 90 students who were selected through a non-probability purposive sampling technique from 2 public senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt city LGA (CSS Abuloma and CSS Nkpolu).

The instrument used as outcome measure was the ‘Truancy Assessment Scale’ (TAS). It is a non-achievement oriented scale on a 4 point scale of Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), Strongly Disagree (1). The instrument measured students’ school and class attendance behaviour to enable the researchers identify students who possess truancy behavior. The instrument was sectioned into two with 20 items accompanied with a transmittial letter which specified the essence of the study.

Section A elicits personal information such as, name of school and gender of student while section two consist of 18 self-report items in relation to school and class attendance behavior.

Face and content validities were ensured by experts in guidance and counselling departments from the 3 universities in Rivers state.

Reliability was determined through the test-retest method for a measure of stability. Twenty (20) students outside the sampled schools responded to the instrument, after two weeks’ interval of the first administration a retest was given. The initial and retest scores were correlated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation test and it yielded a value of ‘r’ 0.71.

The research questions posed in the study were answered using mean and standard deviation of the pretest and post-tests scores while null hypothesis 1 was tested with paired sample t-test and null hypotheses 2 and 3 were tested with independent t-test.

The experimental procedure adopted in this study was divided into three stages.

Stage 1 – Pre-test administration
The researchers administered TAS to every SS1 student in the sampled schools (CSS Abuloma and CSS Nkpogu).

**Stage 2 – scoring of the pre-test**
The researchers scored the responses of students on each item on TAS to determine school and class attendance behaviour of students. Those who scored 20-59 points were adjudged truants while those who scored 60-80 were regarded as non-truants.

**Stage 3 – placement of subjects into experimental and control groups**
The researcher separated students with truancy behaviour from those who attend classes. Those who attend classes were exempted from the experiment while those with truancy characteristic were placed into experimental and control group. Both schools had experimental and control group subjects while counselling was given to the experimental subjects, placebo was given to the control group subjects where students were taught ‘Imbibing good self-concept for proper adjustment’.

**Treatment Procedure was also divided into three Phases as follows,**
Phase 1 – Pre-treatment phase
Phase 2 – Treatment Phase
Phase 3 – Post Treatment Phase

**Treatment stages were divided into 3 segments as follows;**
First Segment – Introductory stage, 1 week, one session.
Second Segment – Consolidation stage, 2 weeks, 2 sessions.
Third Segment – Termination Stage 1 week 1 session.

**RESULTS**
**Research Question 1:** To what extent does counselling affect truancy among secondary school students in the experimental group as measured by their pre-test and post-test mean scores?

**Null Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant difference in the effect of counselling on truancy among secondary school students in the experimental group when their pre-test and post-test mean scores are compared

**Table 1: Paired T-test analysis on the efficiency of counselling on truancy among students in the experimental group as determined by their pre and post-test mean scores.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>T-crit</th>
<th>T-cal</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre test</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>Reject Ho</td>
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<tr>
<td>Post Test</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>51.3</td>
<td>9.9</td>
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</table>

Table 1 revealed that the mean of the students in the experimental group on truancy for pre-test was 28.1 and a standard deviation of 6.8 before being exposed to counselling, after exposure to counselling the mean increased to 51.3 with a standard deviation of 9.9 for post-test. Furthermore, when this mean difference was subjected to paired t-test, it was observed that the t-test value obtained was 7.4 and this was significant at 0.05 level (P>0.05). Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected. The rejection of the null hypothesis indicates that counselling had significant effect on truancy among students.

**Research Question 2** To what extent does counselling affect truancy among male and female secondary school students in the experimental group as measured by their post-test mean scores?

**Null Hypothesis 2:** There is no significant difference in the effect of counselling on truancy among male and female secondary school students in the experimental group as determined by their post-test mean scores.
Table 2: Independent t-test analysis on the effects of counselling on truancy among male and female students in the experimental group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Posttest Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S. D</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>D.f</th>
<th>T-crit</th>
<th>T-cal</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>51.9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>2.014</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>Retain Ho</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>50.2</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Posttest mean scores/ standard deviation

Table 2 revealed that the post-test mean score for male students’ on TAS was 51.9 and a standard deviation score of 10 while their female counterparts had a post-test mean score of 50.2 with a standard deviation of 8.9. The mean scores showed that the difference between male and female students’ post-test mean score was 1.7. This mean difference was further subjected to independent t-test and it was observed that the obtained t-test value of 0.2 was not significant at 0.05 level (P.>0.05). Hence, the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference on the effects of counselling on truancy among male and female secondary school students in the experimental group was retained.

Research Question 3: What is the differential effect of counselling on truancy when the post-test mean scores of the experimental group is compared to that of the control group?

Null Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference in the effects of counselling on truancy among students in the experimental and control group as determined by their post-test mean scores only.

Table 3: Independent t-test analysis on the effects of counselling on truancy among students in the experimental and control group as determined by their post-test scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S. D</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>D.f</th>
<th>Tcrit</th>
<th>Tcal</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>51.3</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>1.986</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>Reject Ho</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Posttest mean scores/ standard deviation

Table 3 revealed that the post-test mean score of students in the experimental group was 51.3 with a standard deviation of 9.9 while their counterparts in the control group had a post-test mean score of 31.8 with a standard deviation of 7.7 with a mean difference of 19.5. When this mean difference was subjected to the independence t-test it was found to be significant. Thus this indicates that truancy improved significantly among students in the experimental group while that of the control group did not show any improvement, this shows the gains of counselling.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Effects of counselling in improving truancy among students in the experimental group

The result on table 4.1 showed that the pre-test and post-test mean scores of the students treated with counselling were higher at the post-test level than at the pre-test level. This is an indication that truancy improved after treatment (counselling). When this mean difference was subjected to paired t-test it was found that counselling had a significant effect in improving truancy among students. This finding was expected not surprising as counselling has been proved to have a high success level in improving peoples’ lot in diverse areas of life. This finding is in positive connotation with the findings of Kennedy (2008), Eniola & Adebisiy (2005), Ekoja & Ekoja (2007) which stated that counselling has been proved to have a high level of success in improving diverse individuals with diverse problems. From their various findings as stated in the empirical review counselling is empirically supported and has been shown to effectively help individuals to overcome a variety of challenges of which truancy was inclusive.
Effects of Counselling in improving truancy among male and female students in the experimental group,

Table 4.2 shows that the post-test mean score of male and female students were almost at par although that of the male students was slightly higher than that of their female counterparts. When this mean difference was subjected to independent t-test statistic, it was proved that no significant difference exist in the effects of counselling in improving truancy among male and female students in the experimental group. This result is not surprising but expected since both the male and female students were found in the experimental group benefiting from counselling it did not have any differential effect on them. This result agrees with that of Igwe (2013) and Olatunbosun (2015) in which the outcome of their findings showed that respondents had similar responses irrespective of their gender on effects of counselling on truancy. This result however negates that of Fareo (2013) who used a descriptive survey design to investigate truancy and academic performance of secondary school students in south western Nigeria: Implication for counselling’ Results indicated amongst others that there was a significant difference between male and female students manifestation of truancy behaviour. The reason for this variation could be as a result of the different methods adopted in the study.

Effects of counselling on truancy among students in the experimental and control group

Table 4.3 shows that the post-test mean score of students in the experimental group improved tremendously after counselling over their counterparts in the control group. When the mean difference was subjected to independent t-test, it was proved that there was a significant difference on the effects of counselling on truancy among students in the experimental and control group. This finding also agrees with the findings of Nwosu (2007) who conducted an experimental study consisting of 30 truants aged 9 to 14 years old from primary 4 to 6 classes from 3 urban public primary schools in Akwa South Local Government Education Authority of Anambra state using individual counselling. The results indicated amongst others that: individualised counselling techniques led to significant remediation of Truancy in children.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this study the researcher drew the following conclusions;

1. Counselling based on Cognitive Behaviour therapy was an effective tool in improving truancy behaviour among SS1 students in PHALGA of Rivers State.
2. Counselling based on Cognitive Behaviour Therapy had no significant differential effect on truancy behaviour among male and female SS1 students.
3. Counselling based on Cognitive Behaviour Therapy was found to be effective on truancy behaviour among subjects in the experimental group over those in the control group who received a placebo. This was evident in the improved posttest mean scores of the experimental group over the control group.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Evident on the findings of this study, it was recommended as follows;

1. To prevent relapse another researcher should be involved in the sampled schools as a follow up study to ensure, the gains of counselling are not truncated when these students get to SS3.
2. Secondary school students with truancy behavior should be referred to professional counsellors for proper counselling and follow up.
3. Port Harcourt city local government should collaborate with the state government to ensure the employment of counsellors in the secondary schools within her domain to take care of the counselling needs of students.
REFERENCES