



Influence of Selected Reinforcement Counselling Techniques on Truancy Reduction among Secondary School Students in Rivers West Senatorial District, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated influence of selected reinforcement counselling techniques on truancy reduction among secondary school students in Rivers West Senatorial District, Nigeria. Two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. Descriptive survey research design was adopted. Population of the study was 7,841 public senior secondary school students in Rivers West Senatorial District. Sample size was 381 SSS 1 students determined by Taro Yamene's formula and selected using stratified sampling technique. Out of the 381 respondents, only 378 returned the instruments which were used for data analysis. Influence of Reinforcement Counselling Techniques on Truancy Reduction Questionnaire was used for data collection. The face and content validity of the instrument was determined by two experts in Guidance and Counselling and Measurement and Evaluation. The instrument yielded internal consistency reliability of 0.72 and 0.74 for the two clusters using Cronbach Alpha. Mean and z-test statistic were used for data analysis. Results showed that positive and negative reinforcement counselling techniques influence truancy reduction among secondary school students in Rivers West Senatorial District to a high extent. It was recommended that positive reinforcement counselling technique should be adequately utilized, while negative reinforcement counselling technique should be minimally adopted for truancy reduction among secondary school students.

Keywords: Reinforcement, positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, counselling, truancy reduction.

INTRODUCTION

The importance of education in any society cannot be overemphasized because education is the route that leads to vocational development, job opportunities, wealth and prestige. In the educational industry, the learners or students have the primary obligation to attend school regularly and punctually if they are to fully enjoy or benefit from what the school has to offer. Being regular and punctual to school would not only enable the learners to keep abreast of educational development in the school, but make the learners to mature and progress in other areas (e.g. affective and cognitive) that are associated with academic development in schools (Adam, 2015). Despite the numerous benefits of attending school regularly, truancy seems to persist among students in schools. Truancy is simply defined as an unapproved absence from school, usually without a parent's knowledge (Eremie & Nwala, 2018). Okwakpam and Okwakpam (2012) described truancy as any intentional unauthorized or illegal absence from compulsory schooling. Truancy negates the reason behind the policy of education for all. Truancy is quite typical and likely to create problems which can lead to varied set of negative and even more dangerous consequences (Lawal, 2015). Truancy has been described as a cankerworm that has eaten deep into the fabrics of the educational programmes and has caused a lot of setbacks for secondary school students in their educational pursuits (Animasahum, 2009).

Lawal (2015) explained that truancy in secondary school is a situation in which students develop and show adverse attitude and behaviour to learning. Truancy is divided into two, which according to Afful-Broni (2014)

are blanket truancy and post registration truancy. The blanket truancy is where the student stayed completely away from school while post registration truancy is where the student initially registered officially as being present at school only for him/her to dodge the subsequent lesson of the day. The incidence of truancy in public secondary schools is increasingly becoming a source of worry to teachers, parents, school authority and the society at large. Truancy is inimical and detrimental to children's education, health and socialization (Eremie & Nwala, 2018). In fact, it has rendered our schools unsafe for normal academic process (Okosun, 2010). According to Nwosu (2007), parents, teachers and school authorities have reacted in different ways to put a stop to the incident of truancy by flogging, scolding, suspension, corporal punishment, denial of love, expulsion and so on.

However, there is the need to look into the extent to which reinforcement counselling technique can influence truancy reduction among students. Reinforce means to present or terminate a stimulus, which will strengthen response. Reinforcement therefore means to strengthen or give additional support to something (Eremie, 2007). Lerner (2007) described reinforcement as a consequent event that occurs after a person makes a behaviour response. Reinforcement can also be defined as the process in which behaviour is strengthened by the immediate consequence that reliably follows its occurrence (Mittenberger, 2008). This study however, considered the positive and negative forms of reinforcement as they influence students' academic performance. Positive reinforcement technique involves responding to the child's behaviour with a reinforcement, which increases the likelihood that the person will make a similar response in similar situation in the future. Positive reinforcements are favourable events or outcomes that are presented after the behavior and behavior is strengthened by the addition of positive reinforcers such as praise or a direct reward. The simplest way of conceptualizing positive reinforcement is that something pleasant is 'added' when a specific action is performed (Cherry, 2018). According to Eremie (2007), some of the positive reinforcers are praise from a teacher, a prize or award, water for a thirsty person, et cetera which will serve as positive reinforcers when they are contingent on some behaviours. Through positively reinforcing students' acceptable behaviours, whether academic or social, the students and the teacher benefits academically, behaviorally, socially, and emotionally (Rumfola, 2017). Students who are positively enforced to keep up the good behaviour are the students who will most likely learn to self monitor themselves in their learning environments (Otero & Haunt, 2015). Lawal (2015) reported in his study that the level of truancy of the experimental group was greatly reduced after treatment of the reinforcement counselling technique compared with the control group. Bernier, Simpson and Rose (2012) reiterated that students who were reinforced socially in a positive manner were more likely to do or follow what was being encouraged of them.

On the other hand, negative reinforcement is an adverse consequence or outcome that can cause a decrease or removal of an undesirable behaviour. Negative reinforcement involves the removal of an unfavorable events or outcomes after the display of behaviour. Smith (2017) observed negative reinforcement as the removal of aversive stimuli in order to increase the likelihood that the behaviour is repeated. As observed by Rumfola (2017), negative reinforcement can allow students to 'escape' the task that they are looking for. Rumfola asserted that when the disruptive behaviour is negatively reinforced, it can even lead to socially inappropriate behaviour of other students who also wish to 'escape' a situation. Negative reinforcement has been shown to create more of a problematic behaviour (Bernier, Simpson & Rose, 2012). Destructive behaviour that is negatively reinforced can lead to an increase in socially inappropriate behaviours of others who are also wishing to escape a situation (Bernier, Simpson & Rose, 2012). In their study, Siziya, Muula and Rudatskira (2017) reported that males had increased likelihood of being truants than females.

It can be observed from the foregoing background that reinforcement counselling techniques are critical, and could positively or negatively influence truancy among students in the school system. However, literature available here tends to indicate that not much empirical studies in recent times have shown the extent positive and negative reinforcement counselling techniques influences truancy among students in Rivers State. It is against this backdrop that the conduct of this study becomes imperative.

Statement of the Problem

Globally, truancy has been regarded as a cankerworm that has eaten deep into the fabrics of the educational programmes and has caused a lot of setbacks for secondary school students in their educational pursuits (Adeyemi, 2011; Animasahun, 2007) and this seems to have given the parents, teachers and government great concern. To curb the incidence of truancy in schools, parents, teachers and school authorities according to

Nwosu (2007) adopted flogging, scolding, suspension, corporal punishment, denial of love, expulsion and so on. Despite these measures however, observations show that some senior secondary school students in Rivers State of Nigeria still indulge in various forms of truancy such like walking along the streets of Port Harcourt playing football, watching roadside television or listening to music on roadside musical shops during the school hours. Hence, there is an urgent need to carry out this study. This study therefore, investigated influence of selected reinforcement counselling techniques on truancy reduction among secondary school students in Rivers West Senatorial District, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of selected reinforcement counselling techniques on truancy reduction among secondary school students in Rivers West Senatorial District, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Determine the extent positive reinforcement technique influence truancy reduction among secondary school students in Rivers West Senatorial District.
2. Determine the extent negative reinforcement technique influence truancy reduction among secondary school students in Rivers West Senatorial District.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent does positive reinforcement technique influence truancy reduction among secondary school students in Rivers West Senatorial District?
2. To what extent does negative reinforcement technique influence truancy reduction among secondary school students in Rivers West Senatorial District?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female students on the extent positive reinforcement technique influence truancy reduction among secondary school students in Rivers West Senatorial District.
2. There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female students on the extent negative reinforcement technique influence truancy reduction among secondary school students in Rivers West Senatorial District.

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Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female students on the extent positive reinforcement technique influence truancy reduction among secondary school students in Rivers West Senatorial District.
2. There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female students on the extent negative reinforcement technique influence truancy reduction among secondary school students in Rivers West Senatorial District.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. According to Dike (2017), a descriptive survey research design attempts to gather and interpret data about a social institution, an event, a group or an area. The descriptive survey research design was considered suitable for the study because the study investigated the extent to which reinforcement counselling techniques influence truancy reduction among secondary school students in Rivers West Senatorial District, Nigeria without the researcher having any direct control over the independent variables as their manifestations have already occurred. The population of the study consisted of all the 7,841 (3,846 male 3,995 female) senior secondary school students in all the 95 public senior secondary schools in Rivers West Senatorial District (Rivers State Senior Secondary Schools Board, 2019). The sample size of the study was 381 (189 male and 192 female) SSS 1 students. While the sample size was determined using the Taro Yamene's sample size formula, stratified random sampling technique was used in selecting the sample size of the study. A self-structured instrument titled "Influence of Reinforcement Counselling Techniques on Truancy Reduction Questionnaire" (IRCTTRQ) was used for data collection. The instrument consisted of two clusters (clusters A–B) with 12 items (6 items in each cluster) which were prepared on a four point scale of Very Low Extent (VLE) with 1 point, Low Extent (LE) with 2 points, High Extent (HE) with 3 points and Very High Extent (VHE) with 4 points. Two experts in Guidance and Counselling and Measurement and Evaluation in the Faculty of Education, Rivers State University, Port Harcourt ascertained the face and content validity of the instrument. Using Cronbach Alpha method with the aid of the SPSS version 23, the instrument yielded the following internal consistency reliability coefficients: 0.72 for cluster A and 0.74 for cluster B, and 0.73 for the entire instrument. The mean was used to answer the research questions, while the hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance using the z-test statistic. The mean cut-off score was 2.50, hence items with mean scores of 2.50 and above were accepted and remarked as high extent, while items with mean scores below 2.50 were not accepted and were remarked as low extent. However, the z-test statistic was used to test the hypotheses because the sample size of the study is large (i.e. $n > 30$), which is a major criteria for the use of z-test statistic in data analysis.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: *To what extent does positive reinforcement technique influence truancy reduction among secondary school students in Rivers West Senatorial District?*

Table 1: Mean Ratings on the Extent Positive Reinforcement Technique Influence Truancy Reduction among Secondary School Students in Rivers West Senatorial District

S/No.	Items	Male Students (n = 188)			Female Students (n = 190)		
		\bar{X}	SD	Remarks	\bar{X}	SD	Remarks
1.	My attendance to school tends to drop when I'm verbally abused for lateness	2.91	0.84	High Extent	2.80	0.76	High Extent
2.	Most times, canning makes some bright students to avoid going to school regularly	2.89	0.85	High Extent	2.78	0.80	High Extent
3.	I like to skip school to avoid being asked to cut grass, especially when I did not do my assignment	2.39	0.66	High Extent	2.31	0.60	Low Extent
4.	Fear of being flogged for lateness makes me to play truant in school without my parents' knowledge	2.34	0.62	High Extent	2.40	0.70	Low Extent
5.	Encouragement from teachers can make students to always be present in school	2.88	0.84	High Extent	2.79	0.79	High Extent
6.	Bonus marks gives me a push to be regular in school	2.98	0.78	High Extent	2.90	0.71	High Extent
Grand \bar{X}		2.74		High Extent	2.66		High Extent

Source: Field Data, 2020.

Results in Table 1 showed that the mean ratings of the respondents (male and female students) on four items (items 1, 2, 5 and 6) were higher than the mean cut-off mark of 2.50 and were accepted and remarked as high extent. Table 1 further revealed that the mean ratings of the respondents on two items (items 3 and 4) were lower than the mean cut-off mark of 2.50 and were rejected and remarked as low extent. With the grand mean of 2.74 and 2.66 for male and female students which are higher than the mean cut-off mark, it can be concluded that positive reinforcement technique influence truancy reduction among secondary school students in Rivers West Senatorial District to a high extent.

Research Question 2: *To what extent does negative reinforcement technique influence truancy reduction among secondary school students in Rivers West Senatorial District?*

Table 2: Mean Ratings on the Extent Negative Reinforcement Technique Influence Truancy Reduction among Secondary School Students in Rivers West Senatorial District

S/No.	Items	Male Students (n = 188)			Female Students (n = 190)		
		\bar{X}	SD	Remarks	\bar{X}	SD	Remarks
7.	Some students tend to increase their attendance to school when the teachers stop criticizing them in class	2.75	0.80	High Extent	2.70	0.76	High Extent
8.	Withdrawal of manual labour as a means of punishment could help to reduce students' absenteeism in school.	2.80	0.85	High Extent	2.91	0.85	High Extent
9.	Negative reinforcement could make a student engage in certain desirable behaviour	2.71	0.70	High Extent	2.81	0.82	High Extent
10.	Negative reinforcement can enhance the students' willingness to go to school	2.67	0.65	High Extent	2.77	0.74	High Extent
11.	Negative reinforcement on students may have nothing to do with truancy reduction among students	2.40	0.61	Low Extent	2.48	0.66	Low Extent
12.	Negative reinforcement is useful for reduction of truancy among students	2.88	0.90	High Extent	2.99	0.92	High Extent
Grand \bar{X}		2.70		High Extent	2.78		High Extent

Source: Field Data, 2020.

Table 2 showed that the mean ratings of male and female students on items 7, 8, 9, 10 and 12 were higher than the mean cut-off mark of 2.50 and were accepted and remarked as high extent, while their mean ratings on item 11 were lower than the mean cut-off mark of 2.50, hence the item 11 was rejected and remarked as low extent. With the grand mean of 2.70 and 2.78 for male and female students which are higher than the mean cut-off mark (2.50), it was concluded that negative reinforcement technique, to a high extent, influence truancy reduction among secondary school students in Rivers West Senatorial District.

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female students on the extent positive reinforcement technique influence truancy reduction among secondary school students in Rivers West Senatorial District.

Table 3: z-Test Analysis of Difference Between the Mean Ratings of Male and Female Students on the Extent Positive Reinforcement Technique Influence Truancy Reduction Among Secondary School Students in Rivers West Senatorial District

Respondents	N	\bar{X}	SD	df	z-cal	z-crit	α	Remark
Male students	188	2.74	0.77					
				376	1.13	± 1.96	0.05	Not Sig.
Female students	190	2.66	0.73					

Source: Field Data, 2020.

Table 3 revealed that at 0.05 level of significance and 376 degree of freedom, z-calculated value = 1.13 and z-critical value = 1.96. Since the z-calculated value of 1.17 < z-critical value of 1.96, the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female students on the extent positive reinforcement technique influence truancy reduction among secondary school students in Rivers West Senatorial District is therefore accepted. This implies that male and female secondary school students in Rivers West

Senatorial District are in agreement that positive reinforcement technique influences truancy reduction to a high extent.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female students on the extent negative reinforcement technique influence truancy reduction among secondary school students in Rivers West Senatorial District.

Table 4: z-Test Analysis of Difference Between the Mean Ratings of Male and Female Students on the Extent Negative Reinforcement Technique Influence Truancy Reduction Among Secondary School Students in Rivers West Senatorial District

Respondents	N	\bar{X}	SD	df	z-cal	z-crit	α	Remark
Male students	188	2.70	0.75					
				376	-1.00	± 1.96	0.05	Not Sig.
Female students	190	2.78	0.79					

Source: Field Data, 2020.

Results for hypothesis 2 as shown in Table 4 revealed that at 0.05 level of significance and 376 degree of freedom, z-calculated value = -1.00 and z-critical value = 1.96. Since the z-calculated value of -1.00 < z-critical value of 1.96, the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female students on the extent negative reinforcement technique influence truancy reduction among secondary school students in Rivers West Senatorial District is accepted. This indicates that male and female secondary school students in Rivers West Senatorial District are in agreement that negative reinforcement technique influences truancy reduction to a high extent.

DISCUSSION

Results for research question 1 as shown in Table 1 revealed that positive reinforcement technique influence truancy reduction among secondary school students in Rivers West Senatorial District to a high extent. Results for hypothesis 1 as shown in Table 3 further revealed that there is no significant difference in the mean scores of male and female students on the extent positive reinforcement technique influence truancy reduction among secondary school students in Rivers West Senatorial District. This finding shows that positive reinforcement is crucial in behaviour analysis and modification. The finding agrees with Bernier, Simpson and Rose (2012) when they found that students who were reinforced socially in a positive manner were 68% more likely to do or follow what was being encouraged of them. Students learn to self-monitor themselves, manage their time, set goals, and self-evaluate through the reinforcement of the teacher (s) (Otero & Haunt, 2015). Teachers who use apps and unique activities which are applicable to the real world are more likely to maintain students' attention, and thus reduce the rate of truancy among the students (Malala, 2009). Rumfola (2017) observed that when a child experiences positive reinforcement, there is often a greater willingness to exhibit positive behaviour.

From the results of research question 2 as shown in Table 2, it was observed that negative reinforcement technique influence truancy reduction among secondary school students in Rivers West Senatorial District to a high extent. It was also observed from the results of hypothesis 2 as shown in Table 4 that there is no significant difference between the mean scores of male and female students on the extent negative reinforcement technique influence truancy reduction among secondary school students in Rivers West Senatorial District, which implies that male and female secondary school students in Rivers West Senatorial District are in agreement that negative reinforcement technique influences truancy reduction to a high extent. This finding is disagreement with Abdulahi (2015) who reported that there is no significant relationship between negative reinforcement and truancy reduction among junior secondary school students in Kankia education zone. Bernier, Simpson and Rose (2012) observed that negative reinforcement has been shown to create more of a problematic behaviour. According to Rumfola (2017), when the disruptive behaviour is negatively reinforced, it can lead to socially inappropriate behaviour of other students who also wish to 'escape' a situation. It is thus important to put the behaviour and background of other students in the class or within the environment into considerations before using negative reinforcement technique in reducing the truancy rate of a student.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed that positive and negative reinforcement counselling techniques influences truancy reduction among secondary school students in Rivers West Senatorial District, Nigeria. It was therefore, concluded that positive and negative reinforcement counselling techniques significantly contribute to truancy reduction among secondary school students in Rivers West Senatorial District, Nigeria. However, the use of positive or negative reinforcement counselling techniques in reducing truancy among students could be determined by the environment or the nature of disruptive behaviour exhibited by the student.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Positive reinforcement counselling technique should be adequately utilized for truancy reduction among students.
2. Negative reinforcement counselling technique should be minimally adopted for truancy reduction among students.

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