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Effect of Individual and Group Counselling on Secondary School Students' Truant Behaviour in Abia State

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Abstract

The study investigated the effects of individual and group counselling on secondary school students' truant behaviour in Abia State. Three (3) research questions and three (3) hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. The population of the study consisted of 875 senior secondary school two (SS2) students in the 2009/20010 academic session. A sample of 80 SS 2 students were drawn from the secondary schools. A simple random technique was used in drawing the sample. A questionnaire coded Truant Habit Scale (THS) was developed by the researcher and used for the collection of data. The Truant Habit Scale (THS) was validated by the experts and two other experts in Measurement and Evaluation. The reliability of the instrument was determined using test retest method and the correlation coefficient score of 0.87 was obtained. The research questions were answered with mean and standard deviation while the null hypotheses were tested with t-test and ANOVA at 0.05 level of significance. The researcher found out that there is no significant difference in the effects of individual and group counselling on male and female students with truant

behaviours; the effects of individual and group counselling on students' truant behaviour do not differ significantly based on gender. It was also found out that the effects of individual and group counselling on truancy among male and female adolescents differ significantly. Based on the findings, it was recommended that both individual and group counselling be adopted by counsellors in treating students with truant habits, although, the counsellors in Girls' Schools should use more of individual counselling while those in Boys' schools should use more of group counselling.

Introduction

Education is a strong pillar upon which every nation's economy depends as well as a source of empowering the youths morally and intellectually. We cannot afford to watch it being crippled by any social problem such as truancy. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines truancy as the practice of staying away from school without permission. A truant is a child who stays away from school without permission. Truancy has also been defined by Okon (2001) as the conduct of staying away from school or lessons without good reason. This negative attitude among students has been attributed to lack of orientation. It has been suggested that this negative attitude must be changed through re-orientation of their knowledge without the importance of education. He further described truancy as being counter-productive and antisocial.

As observed in Ogbodo (2004), truancy among adolescents in secondary schools has contributed largely not only to the poor performance of students in examinations conducted internally and externally but also to the moral decadence prevalent among adolescents in secondary schools. According to Williams (2000) truancy is the act of staying away from school or leaving home on the pretext of going to school while roaming the street only to return home at the close of the school. In his view, a truant is an individual who just does not want to go to school and makes plans to do some other thing else. The truth remains that truancy is a reflection' of the decay of social values and norms that have succeeded in destroying the very foundation of education and thus must be confronted head on. More worrisome is the fact that truancy in our schools cuts across every stratum of the educational system, from the Universities to the Polytechnics. In colleges of education, secondary and primary schools the story is the same, especially in the Secondary School in Abia State, in Aba North Local Government Area.

According to Rotmi (2005), same factors associated with Nigerian schools have provided a breeding ground for truants. These factors might include lack of teachers, idleness, lack of teaching and learning facilities, failure or lack of success in school, contempt for intellectual culture and lack of dedication on the part of the teachers. Williams (2000) identified some home factors as being responsible for students' truant behaviour. These home factors include defective discipline, disability of parents, lack of affection, marital adjustment, and broken homes among others. Williams (2000) further observed that truancy has interfered adversely with students' academic performance as well as their moral standard. Lack of or inadequate guidance and counselling services in schools have been identified as one of the major factors responsible for truancy among students in secondary schools. Therefore, there is need to find out the most effective counselling mode to help students with truant behaviour especially those that manifest high level truancy so that they can put up a more desirable and positive attitude towards their studies. At this juncture, it is important to mention that the researcher was permitted to take up this study as a result of her personal experiences with secondary school students for over a decade in the field of teaching. It was discovered by the researcher that students in secondary schools are no longer interested in school. They leave their homes in the morning on the pretext of going to school but they roam the street and return home at the close of the school. However, it is the belief of the researcher that guidance and counselling can proffer a lasting solution to this serious educational problem. Most students may have the abilities and opportunities to study and achieve their ambitions in life but they may not put these abilities and opportunities into use due to peer group influence and they may become truants. Therefore counselling should be provided to encourage such students to accept the responsibility for full utilization of their potentials and opportunities.

Counselling is a helping relationship that can be entered into by a professional counsellor with one person only (i.e. individual counselling or with two or more persons (i.e. group counselling). Nwoje (2001) viewed counselling as the integral part of guidance which provides the forum for interaction and exchange of views between the client and the counsellor. Okobiah (2001) defined counselling as a process of helping the client understand and solve a problem. According to Uzoeshi (2004), counselling is aimed at assisting the client to overcome his problems and become happier and more effective. Kolo (2000) also viewed counselling as a process of

assisting an individual with problem or problems through the expert advice of the counsellor which is given in the course of his interaction with the client. The enhancement of individual's growth and overcoming problem as gathered from the above definitions can also be made possible through either individual or group counselling. These counselling modes (individual and group counselling) have their unique advantages and disadvantages. Therefore, the counsellor's choice of any of the above counselling modes should be informed by the merits and the nature of his client's problem as well as the facilities at his disposal.

Individual counselling consists of those one-to-one interactions with clients in which the therapeutic process is applied to resolving personal concerns, careers and educational decisions and problems of human adjustment. It is a personalized, confidential personal help given to a client by a counsellor to resolve his or her adjustment problems so as to become happier and more productive in life. According to Oladele (2002) individual counselling is a counselling relationship involving the counsellor interacts or exchanges views with the client, with the aim of helping the client to present or solve personal problems or change some negative or maladaptive behaviour. In individual counselling the interaction is highly confidential.

On the other hand, group counselling is a counselling relationship that stimulates more closely social interaction and interpretation patterns than individual counselling. It is a counselling relationship between a counsellor and the group members who are between 8 and 10 clients. Group counselling is a counselling relationship between a counsellor and two or more clients. Group counselling operates on the principle of freedom of expression by the clients, that is, clients are free to express their feelings and attitudes without being reprimanded and judged. They share their feelings with each other, display empathy and interest in their member's problems, keep the rule of confidentiality and desist from resisting and manipulating behaviours that may hinder the progress and growth of the group counselling process. During the group counselling relationship, clients also learn desired behaviours. Group counselling is recommended for only those students who are experiencing continuing or temporary problems. It attempts to modify attitudes ""stressing effective involvement of clients". Group counselling is a process of using group interaction to facilitate deeper self - understanding and self acceptance. There is need for mutual respect and acceptance to exist between the counsellor and members in the group.

This paper has therefore intended to investigate the problem of students' truant behaviour, the effect of individual and group counselling and to compare the effects of the two modes on secondary school students' truant behaviour. In view of the complex nature of the school environment, making a choice between individual and group counselling in adequately tacking students educational problems poses a serious challenge to the school counsellor. Again, there have not been study on the effects of individual and group counselling on secondary school truant behaviour in Abia State. It is against this background that this study has set out to investigate which of the counselling mode; individual or group would have more effects on students with truant behaviour.

With the above scenario in mind, the researcher is worried about the high rate of truant behaviour among these adolescents in secondary schools. Perhaps, counselling can change the negative attitude of the students, but the issue is, which mode, individual or group would produce better results. The problem of this study pose as a question is; which of the counselling mode; individual or group has more effects on students with truant behaviour in Abia State? Providing answers to this question is the thrust of this paper.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to find out the effects of individual and group counselling on secondary school student's truant behaviour in Abia State. In specific terms, the study intended to:

1. Find out the effects of individual counselling on secondary school student's truant behaviour.

2. Determine the effects of group counselling on secondary school students' truant behaviour.

3. Compare the effects of individual and group counselling on secondary school students' truant behaviour

Research question

The researcher formulated the following research questions to guide the study:

1. What is the effect of individual counselling on students with truant behaviour?

2. What is the effect of group counselling on students with truant behaviour?

3. Which of the counselling modes (individual and group) is more effective in reducing high rate of truant behaviour among secondary school students?

Hypothesis

The following null hypotheses which were tested at 0.05 level of significance were formulated to guide the study:

1. There is no significant difference in the effects of individual counselling on truant behaviour among male and female adolescents in secondary schools.

2. There is no significance difference in the effects of group counselling on truant behaviour among male and female adolescents in secondary schools.

3. The effects of individual and group counselling on truant behaviour among male and female adolescents do not differ significantly.

Methodology

The research design adopted for this study is quasi experimental. This is because the study is dealing with human beings, furthermore, it involves pre-test and post-test and the experiment was conducted under conditions that do not permit total control of intervening variables that could affect the subjects. Agbakwuru (2007) stated that the treatment design employed in this study by the researcher is pre-test and post-test designs. Two groups were measured or observed not only after being exposed to a treatment of some sort, but also before.

Area of the study

The study was carried out in Abia State, Aba North Local Government Area in Abia State. The Local Government Area is bordered in the east and south by Osisioma Ngwa Local Government Area, in the North by Aba South Local Government Area and in the west by Obingwa Local Government Area. It is an urban area and a commercial town. As an urban and commercial area, its inhabitants do not speak a common language. They are mostly traders, civil servants, businessmen and women.

Thus, Aba North Local Government Area in Abia State is appropriate for this study because adequate sample size is assured based on the large population of students and availability of infrastructure for group and individual counselling services.

Population of the study

The population of this study consisted of the senior secondary school class two (SS11) of six secondary schools in Aba North Local Government Area in Abia State. The population was 875 SS II students during the 2009/20 10 academic session (Secondary Education Management Board, SEMB 2010).

Sample and sampling technique

A sample of eighty (80) senior secondary class two (SS2) was used for the study. These students with high level of truancy were drawn from six senior secondary schools. The schools were randomly selected for the research. Each of the schools' names were written on a separate paper and placed in a bowl. After shaking the bowl, the papers were collected one after the other until the desired numbers of schools were selected.

The truant habit scale was used to select the sample for the study while random sampling technique by balloting was used to assign subjects to groups for individual, group counselling and control considering their gender as well. There were 20 participants for individual counselling (12 males and 8 females), 40 for group counselling (20 males and 20 females) and 20 for control (10 males and 10 females) giving a total of 80 (42 male and 38 females). See table 1.

Instrument for data collection

The instrument used to collect the required data was the Truant Habit Scale (THS). It was developed by the researcher. The researcher developed a large pool of positively and negatively keyed items related to truant behaviour, the researcher was able to develop a large pool of attitude--items focusing on truancy due to her wide exposure to literature, both empirical and theoretical in nature. The Truant Habit Scale (THS) is in two parts-the first part seeks personal information from the respondents while the second part consists of 25 items in form of direct questions to which the respondents are required to provide answers on a four point scale. The truant habit scale (THS) was designed to select students with high level of truant behaviour. It has a minimum of 25 marks and a maximum of 100 marks.

Validity of the instrument

The Truant Habit Scale was given to two experts. The instrument was validated by two experts in Measurement and Evaluation to study and determine its face and construct validity. The' instrument was later modified in line with the corrections given by the experts. The instrument is a non-compound instrument because it was developed on one variable that is truant behaviour.

Reliability of the instrument

The reliability of the instrument was determined using test- retest method for a measure of its consistency and reliability. A sample of 10 students was used for pilot testing of the instrument in Aba South L.G.A which is not part of the area of study. The researcher administered copies of the instrument to this sample with request that the sample should respond to all the items of the instrument as diligently and honestly as possible. After an interval of two weeks, the same instrument was administered to the same sample to respond as usual. Their reactions to the instrument showed that the items were clearly understood by them. There were no cases of item ambiguity. Time allocation of 10 minutes for filling the whole instrument was adequate. Then, the initial and retest scores of the sample were correlated using Pearson product moment correlation (r). The correlation co-efficient was found to be 0.87.

Treatment procedure

The two group pretest-posttest designs were used to assess the effect of weekly counselling sessions on the students with high level of truancy. The researcher met with the students twice a week for a period of 6 weeks, during which students were encouraged to express their feelings and concerns individually (individual counselling) and collectively (group counselling). The researcher used a 25-item Truant Habit Scale (THS) to measure student's level of truancy both before and after the 6 weeks period. The table for the design of the study is presented in appendix 1:

The researcher divided the students into the following groups for the purpose of counselling.

(a)   **Experimental Group 1 (Individual counselling)**. A treatment schedule was drawn to guide the activities of the researcher with this group. Two days a week were used for individual counselling. The purpose of this technique is to create positive attitudinal change in

the truants. It lasted for 42 sessions of 40 minutes per session, i.e. a total of 6 weeks.

However, before the counselling sessions began, the researcher used one week to establish rapport with both the school heads and the students, develop an interview structure, : achievable goals and treatment strategies to be used during the counselling sessions, another one week was used for administration of post treatment test and termination..

(b)   **Experimental Group 11 (Group counselling).** The treatment schedule that guided the activities of this group involves four stages: Introduction/ familiarization, working, consolidation and termination. The researcher met with the group counselling class twice a week for 6 weeks. The first week featured introduction of the researcher and group members. This was succeeded by explanation of the purpose of the meeting. Basic group rules relating to honesty, confidentiality and orderliness were made known. The group counselling class was subdivided into 2 smaller groups with a group leader appointed for each group and orientation given to the group leaders.

During the second week, group members explored problems and difficulties that made them practice truancy while the researcher reaffirmed some of their problem areas with copies of their scored instrument. Third, fourth and fifth weeks were for actual working stage. This time, the researcher made an indepth exploration of the problems. In the last week, the sub-groups were brought together for them to make their observations. Thereafter, a post-treatment test was administered which was followed by termination.

(c)   Control Group: No treatment was given to the control group.

Scoring of the instrument

The instrument had four response levels namely:

Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). These were weighted 4 points, 3 points, 2 points and 1 point respectively. On the, basis of the assigned weights and in recognition of the fact that the instrument is non- compound or uni-variable, the total score of each respondent on the instrument was obtained by the sum of the scores for all

the items multiplied by 4 marks each. So, the highest score was 100 marks (25 items x 4 marks each) while the lowest was 25 marks (25 items x 1 mark each). For negative items, 1 takes 4 points, 2 takes 3 point etc.

Method of data analysis

Mean and standard deviation were the statistical tools to answer the research questions. One – way analysis of variance (ANOVA) at 0.05 level of significance was used to test hypothesis s while hypotheses 1 and 2 were tested using t- test. This is because in hypothesis 3, three independent group means were compared while in hypotheses 1 and 2 two independent groups were compared.

Data presentation and results

Research question 1: What is the effect of individual counselling on students with truant habits?

Table 1: showed that twenty (20) students experimentally treated with individual counselling had a pre-test mean score of 89.10 and a lower post – test mean score of 42.25. This amounted to a 46.85 decrease. In the other hand, the control group had pre-test and post mean scores of 88.45 and 89.10 respectively which amounted to 0.65 increase. This result showed that individual counselling affected students with high level of truancy by reducing the mean by 46.85.

Research questions 2: What is the effect of group counselling on students with truant habits?

Table 2: Showed that the students experimentally treated with group counselling had a pre-test mean score of 88.85 and a lower post-test mean score of 43.50. The pre-test and post–test mean scores difference amounted to 45.35. On the other hand, the control group had pre-test and post–test mean scores of 88.45 and 89.10 respectively, giving a difference of 0.65 increase. The result showed that group counselling affected students with truant habit positively by reducing their high level of truant habits, hence the post-test mean score was much less than the pre-test mean score.

Research question 3: Which of the counselling modes (individual and group) is more effective in reducing high rate of truancy among secondary school students?

Table 3: Showed that twenty (20) students experimentally treated with individual counselling had a pre-test mean score of 89.10 and post –test mean score of 42.25. On the other hand, forty (40) students experimentally treated with group counselling had a pre-test mean score of 88.85 and a post –test mean score of 43.50. The result showed that individual counselling with a lower pose mean score of 42.25 was more effective in reducing high rate of truancy among secondary school students than group counselling with a higher post –test mean score of 43.50

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the effect of individual counselling on truancy among male and female students in secondary schools.

Table 4: The result showed that the calculated t-value 0.73 is less than the critical t-value 2.10. Statistically, this result indicated that there is no significant difference in the effects of individual counselling on male and female students with truant habits. It therefore means that effects of individual counselling on students with truant habits do not differ significantly among male and female adolescents in secondary schools. Thus, the null hypothesis is accepted. The result also showed that female students had a lower mean score of 42.00 than male students who had a mean score of 42.63; meaning that individual counselling had more positive effect on the female students than on their male counterparts.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the effects of group counselling on truancy among male and female adolescents in secondary schools.

The data in table 5 above showed the calculated t-value of 11.97 at 0.05 level of significance is less than the critical t-value of 2.02. This result showed that there is no significant difference in the effects of group counselling on male and female students with truancy habits. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted.

Hypothesis 3: The effects of individual and group counselling on truancy among male and female adolescents do not differ significantly.

From the above table, the calculated F-value of 6.76 is greater than the F-critical value of 3.15 at 0.05 level of significance. This showed that the effects of individual and group counselling on truancy among male and female adolescents differ significantly. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Discussion of the findings

The result as shown in table 1 showed that students experimentally treated with individual counselling on truancy had a pre-test mean score of 89.10 and a lower post –test mean score of 42.25 on the truant habit scale (THS). The students' truant habit was reduced by 46.85. The control group had a pre-test mean score of 88.45 and 89.10 respectively which amounted to an increase of 0.65. Also, comparing, the post-test mean score of the experimental group with that of the control group, it showed that individual counselling affected the students with high level of truant habits positively by reducing it. The positive result could be due to obvious benefits the students derived under a professionally trained counsellor. These benefits may have helped them to understand the futility and danger associated with truancy. This finding is in line with that of Balogun (2001) who revealed that the impact of counselling on students with maladaptive behaviour for the experimental group received counselling service and changed their behaviour. However, a study in Hanshaw (2001) disagreed with the present one. The result showed that the students in the experimental group did not improve on their reading habit after receiving individual counselling.

The null hypothesis showed no significant difference in the effects of individual counselling on truant behaviour among male and female adolescents in secondary schools. The result further showed that the females had a lower post-test mean score than the male. This showed a reduction in the level of truancy among female students than that of their male students. This might be possible because the counsellor is female and a mother. These attributes might have made female students to be more interested in a one-to –one counselling relationship than their male counterparts.

The findings in table 2 indicated that students experimentally treated with group counselling had a pre-test mean score of 88.85 and a lower post-test mean score of 43.50. This showed a reduction in the level of truancy among the students. This finding is in line with the work of Jacob (2002) in "group counselling strategies and skill" which revealed that group counselling provides an exciting and fertile atmosphere for change because of the collected energy available. The null hypothesis revealed that there is no significant difference in the effects of group counselling on male and female students with truant habits. One environmental reason that can be adduced for these findings was the co-educational schools used for this study where both the males and females were exposed to the same teaching and learning

condition. The finding of this study is in line with Hanshaw (2001) who observed that the male had much improvement on their academic performance after receiving group counselling.

The findings in table 3 which x – rayed the effects of individual and group counselling on truancy among male and female adolescents showed that individual counselling with a lower post-test mean score of 42.25 was more effective in reducing high rate of truancy among students than group counselling with a higher rate post-test mean score of 43.50. The result was expected because as observed in Corey (2000), individual counselling offered those clients who were their shy to talk in group the opportunity to discuss their problems privately. The result of this study agreed with Zebulon (2000) who observed that individual counselling impacted more positively on students with text anxiety than group counselling. However, this finding contradicts the research findings of Balogun (2001) who noted that group counselling had a more positive effect on students with maladaptive behaviour than individual counselling. The reason for this divergent finding may be because the students had the opportunity to learn from one another's mistakes and they had to put what they learned during the counselling session into practice.

The ANOVA summary on the effects of individual counselling, group counselling and control on male and female with truant behaviour differ significantly. The result of the present study agreed with that of Williams (2000) who observed that there was a significant difference in the effects of individual and group counselling on students indulging in cultic activities. However, the findings of the present study disagreed with Walter (2005) who observed that there was no significant difference in the effects of individual and group counselling on the reading habits of students in secondary schools.

Conclusion

The findings of the study have shown that both counselling modes (individual and group) were effective in treating students' truant habits. Individual counselling was however more effective in treating male students with truant habits while group counselling impacted positively on female students with truant habits. Therefore, individual and group counselling can be used side by side in co-educational schools in tackling most of the educational problems of the students.

Recommendations

In line with results of the present study, the researcher made the following recommendations.

1.   Based on the result that individual counselling effects student with truant habits more especially the females. It was recommended that school counsellors in girls' schools should use individual counselling in treating students with truant habits.

2.   Also, since the result revealed that female students responded better and benefited more in individual counselling while female students were positively affected by group counselling, it was therefore recommended that female students with truant habits be treated with individual counselling while male students with truant habits be treated with group counselling.

3.   Again, based on the result that there was no significant difference in the effects of group counselling on male and female students with truant habits, it was recommended that group counselling should be adopted in co-educational schools counsellors.

4.   Finally, based on the result that the effects of individual and group counselling do not differ significantly among male and female students with truant habits, it was recommended that school counsellors could adopt both individual and group counselling in treating student with truant habits.

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Appendix 1

O	X	O
Pretest	**Treatment**	**Post-test**
25 items of Truant Habit Scale (THS) were completed by respondents	Six weeks of counselling	25 items of Truant Habit Scale (THS) were completed by respondents

Table 1: Pre-test and Post- test mean scores of experimental group (individual counselling group) and control group on the Truant Habit Scale (THS)

	N	Pre- Test		Post – Test	
		$\overline{X}$	SD	$\overline{X}$	SD
Individual Counselling	20	89.10	2.90	42.25	3.05
Control	20	88.45	2.35	89.10	2.90

NB: Lower mean scores indicate more positive effect.

Table 2: Pre-test and Post- test mean scores of experimental group (individual counselling group) and control group on the Truant Habit Scale (THS)

	N	Pre- Test		Post – Test	
		$\overline{X}$	SD	$\overline{X}$	SD
Group Counselling	40	88.85	2.91	43.50	2.52
Control	20	88.45	2.35	89.10	2.90

Table 3: Pre-test and Post- test mean scores of experimental group (individual counselling group) and control group on the Truant Habit Scale (THS)

	N	Pre- Test		Post – Test	
		$\overline{X}$	SD	$\overline{X}$	SD
Individual Counselling	20	89.10	2.90	42.25	3.05
Control	40	88.85	2.91	43.50	2.52

Table 4: t-test analysis effect of individual counselling on male and female students with truant behaviour

Sex	N	$\overline{X}$	SD	Df	Cal.t	Crit.t	Result
Male	12	42.63	2.64				Not significant
Female	8	42.00	1.53	18	0.73	2.10	

- Significant of 0.05 levels

Table 5: t-test analysis of the effects of group counselling

Sex	N	$\overline{X}$	SD	Df	Cal.t	Crit.t	Result
Male	20	42.75	2.75				Not
Female	20	44.25	2.00	38	1.97	2.02	significant

Table 6: Summary of ANOVA on the effects of individual counselling group counselling and control on male and female with truant behaviour

Source of variation	d/f	Sum of squares	Mean of squares	f-ratio	f-crit	Result
Between groups	2	9025.83	4512.9			
				6.76	3.15	Significant
Within groups	57	38043.9	667.4			
Total	59					