EFFECTS OF GROUP COUNSELING INTERVENTION IN REDUCING TRUANCY AMONG JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN TORO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF BAUCHI STATE

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Abstract
Determining whether there is difference between students exposed to group counseling intervention in reducing truancy and those in the control group were among the objectives of the study. Experimental research design was used. The population of the study constitute of 133 male and female students selected from 6 out of the sixty-two public junior secondary schools. A self-designed questionnaire titled Truancy Reduction Intervention Inventory (TRII) was developed, validated and used. A co-efficient of 0.82 was established for the stability of the items. The data was analyzed using mean, standard deviation and t-test. Hypotheses were formulated and lasted at $\alpha = 0.05$ level of significance. Findings from the study showed that only those in the treatment group were able to reduce their truancy behavior; students from low economic background practice truancy than those from high economic background and truancy among students during raining season is at the increase. However, the need to intensify counseling intervention in modifying behaviour of truant was encouraged instead of application of corporal punishment was among the recommendations made from this study.

Keywords: Group counseling, truancy, counseling intervention.

Introduction

The junior secondary is a compulsory free education in Nigeria. It is monitored by the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC). It is a transitional three years schooling from primary school to senior secondary school. The Nigerian government had made it compulsory for every child between the ages of four and sixteen years to attend a formal free uninterrupted nine years schooling (Wikipedia, nd). This comprises the first two segments of education in the country, these are primary schools and junior secondary schools. UBEC (2010) in one of her objectives said, the government will ensure a free, compulsory, uninterrupted nine years primary and junior secondary education. This signified the intention of the government to provide a free compulsory education for all citizens between the ages of four and sixteen years.

Subsequently, the good intention had met a great obstacle that hindered the government from achieving this intention which was created by truancy among students. Truancy is any unauthorized or illegal absence from compulsory education by students of their free will without permission from the school authority or any type of excuse related to sickness or loss of a family member.

Therefore, Sa'ad, Sabo & Dahuwa (2015) defined truancy as being absent from school for no legislative reason. Absence which is unacceptable by teachers and local education authorities but recognized and practiced by such pupils who are persistently truant.

According to Perry (2000), truancy is a deliberate absence from school with or with no medical or justifiable reason with or without parental knowledge. It therefore, includes intentionally absenting of oneself without permission. A child who engages in truancy is called truant. Educational Services and Attendance and Truancy (ESAT, 2016) defined truant as a child who is absent without valid cause from school. These valid causes could be illness, observation of religious holiday, death in the family among others.

Truancy in the junior secondary school is a situation in which students develop and show adverse attitudes and behaviours to learning. They absent themselves from classes using unnecessary excuses, such as fake sickness or false suspension by the class teacher or school authorities. Komakech & Osuu (2014) said it is a deliberate missing of school without good cause. It is further buttressed by Strained Relations (2012) who posited that if a child misses more than 30minutes of instruction without an excuse three times during the school year he/she must be classified as a truant and reported to proper school authority.

Truancy is divided into two according to Afful-Broni (2014) as 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.

It is likely that truancy rates are higher in public schools. This is evident with the large number of students who are eligible for free education. This made Ogun state government to put forward a condition for free payment of West African Senior School Examination Certificate (WAEC) for SS 3 students after making 80% attendance (Students' Forum Nigeria, 2015).

Truancy has three major causes as thus; the student himself as the cause, student's family or the school. Neil (2006) said, it is now understood a combination of all three

(student, student's family and school) factors usually affect truancy. It will be of paramount importance to assist the child to revert from truant behaviour through counselling intervention.

Group counselling is a type of counselling that involves one or more therapists working with several people at the same time (Adam, 2015). It is a counselling given to client with similar problems. This is done to complement individual counselling. The client could learn from the therapists as well as from the learners (participants). It becomes easier for client to identify the problem in him is not unique to himself or a person alone. Every member must accept that it is usual for people to have problem and that counselling aims at helping them resolve the problem (Azuide & Iwundu, 2006). This technique will help the clients open up and discuss with the counsellor what causes truancy in them. The clients' behaviour can be modified to adopt desirable behaviour towards positive adjustment and behaviour change,

Statement of the Problem
Despite government effort and intention to educate all citizens at the junior secondary schools by introducing free compulsory education, the problem of truancy continue. Some reviewed literature showed that the general public and the government have become increasingly worried at the great increase of poverty as correlates truancy. This made some of the students to go for hawking while they are supposed to be in the classroom at that particular period (Ahmad, 2015).

Subsequently, the increase in the number of solo dance house and games clubs had created cases of non-attendance of school, delinquent behaviour, teenage pregnancy, theft and violence among students in Toro Local Government Area (LGA).These situations could make the students fall behind grade level and drop out of school. This exhibited truancy behaviour persist despite preventive effort placed by school authorities, teachers, parents and other well meaningful members of the society. This persistently further brought about the need for alternative strategies. This calls for the thrust of this study, which is, introducing group counselling intervention in reducing truancy among junior secondary school students in Toro LGA.

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this study investigated the effect of group counselling techniques in reducing truancy among secondary school students, the study intends to:
1.   Find out whether there is difference in school attendance between students exposed to experimental group and those in the control group.
2.   Examine whether there is a significant difference in the attendance of students from low economic background and those from high economic background.
3.   Investigate whether there is significant difference in the mean attendance of students during dry seasons and rainy season.

Research Questions
The following research questions were put forward to guide this research work as thus:
1.   What is the difference between the school attendance of students exposed to experimental group and those in the control group?
2.   What is the difference between attendance of students from low economic background and those from high economic background exposed to group counselling treatments?

3.   What is the difference between mean attendance of students during dry season and raining season exposed to group counselling treatment?

Hypothesis

The following are postulated to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance:

HO₁: There is no significance difference between school attendance of students exposed to experimental group and those in the control group.

HO₂: There is no significant difference between school attendance of students from low economic background and those from high economic background exposed to group counselling treatment.

HO₃: There is no significant difference between the mean attendance of students during dry season and raining season.

Research Design

The study adopted a quasi-experimental research design which is aimed at establishing relationship between counselling intervention and reduction of truancy among junior secondary schools students.

Population and Sample Size

The population of the study comprises of 133 male and female students from six junior secondary schools of the three districts in the LGA who exhibited chronic truancy before the experiment in the sample schools. The six schools were selected using purposive sampling technique, out of which two schools were selected from each of the three districts in the L.G.A. the researcher was assisted by the classroom teachers in selecting the sample (truants) in their different classes using a researchers designed rating scale together with their class attendance registers. The random sampling technique was used in assigning participants into treatment or control group.

Instrumentation

A questionnaire called Truancy Reduction Intervention Inventory (TRII) was developed by the researchers and used in this study to test the three hypotheses. The instrument was divided into section A and B respectively, while section A dealt with personal information of the sample of the participants. Section B contained 20 items on a modified four points Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Of the 20 items 3, 5, 7, 10, 11, 15, 18 and 20 were negative response items and the rest items were positive responses, while the maximum score is 80 marks and the minimum is 20 marks. The total scores for each item were taken as the index assessment for no significant difference between experimental group and control group on truancy.   The mean score of 3 (m = 3) and above for each scored items indicated agreement or acceptance with the statement on the item, while the mean score less than three (3) is in disagreement or rejection of the statement on the item. 20 participants from a different local government were pilot tested.   Initially   the instrument contains 25 items of which 5 were rejected during the validation. A reliability index of 0.82 was obtained using Cronboch's alpha.

Procedure for Data Collection

The instrument was distributed to the 133 participants selected from the six junior secondary schools. Research assistants were employed and trained on the administration and collection of data for this research work. 126 (94.7%) questionnaires were returned while 7 (5.3%) questionnaires were not returned.

Procedure for Data Analysis

The independent sample t-test was employed to analyze the three hypotheses using the SPSS software package. The justification for using the independent sample t-test was to test the differences between the mean in both the treatment and control groups.

Treatment Procedure

The researchers used the following procedure in given their treatment. Firstly they identified the target population with truant behaviours in the schools with the help of their teachers. The researchers then gave their counselling intervention as thus:

The procedure for the treatment involved three phases, these includes; the pre-treatment phase, treatment phase and post- treatment phase, with this arrangement the school administrators, teachers, and students co-operated positively.

The samples were divided into two (treatment and control) groups. The treatment group was given treatment using the treatment package titled Group Counselling Intervention for Truancy (GCIT), while the control group were left without any treatment.

The treatment was given for the period of six weeks starting from 14th March and terminated at 30th April. The sample selected received treatment in their respective schools in classes with similar conditions. In each of the schools a day and time was fixed for the administration of the treatment.

Data presentation and Hypotheses Testing

The hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The results of data analysis are as follows:

Ho$_1$:   There is no significant difference between attendance of students exposed to experimental group and those in the control group.

The hypothesis was tested using the independent sample t-test, the result is presented in table 1 as thus:

Table 1: Independent sample t-test analysis of differences of attendance between students exposed to experimental and control group

Variables	N	Mean	SD	df	t-value	t-crit.	Decision
Treatment group	63	70.11	6.10				
				124	30.85	2.03	Significant
Control group	63	42.19	4.08				

Sig (2-tailed)

Table 1 showed lower mean result of 42.19 (SD = 4.08) as the control group score as against treatment means scores of 70.11 (6.10) on effect of group counseling on reducing truancy among students, this indicated that research question one can be adequately answered by concluding that there is a significant difference in the attendance of students exposed to experimental group and those in the control group.

The hypothesis which said there is no significant difference between treatment group and control group exposed to group counseling was tested using independent sample t-test. The result showed that the t-value is greater than the t-critical. This indicated that the null

hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis that said there is significant difference between the control group and the treatment-group exposed to group counseling intervention as regard school attendance was accepted.

Ho₂: There is no significant difference between school attendance of students from low income background and those from high income background.

The null hypothesis was tested using the independent sample t-test statistics. The result is presented in table 2.

Table 2: Independent sample t-test analysis of difference between school attendance of students from low income background and those from high income background.

Variables	N	Mean	SD	df	t-value	t-crit.	Decision
High income	63	60.00					
				124	15.94	2.13	Significant
Low income	63	42.19	4.08				
Sig (2-tailed)							

Table 2 showed lower mean score of 60.000 (SD = 7.87%) of treatment group as against a mean score of 42.19 (SD = 4.08) of the control group. This indicated that research question two can be adequately answered as students from low income background are more truant than those from higher income background.

The hypothesis was tested using the independent sample t-test. The result indicated that the t-value is greater than the t-critical. This indicated that the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was accepted. Therefore, it depicts that there is a significant difference between school attendance of students from low income background and those from high income background exposed to the treatment package.

Ho₃: There is no significant difference between the mean attendance of students during dry season and raining season in terms of truancy.

The null hypothesis was tested using the independent sample t-test statistics and the result is presented in table 3.

Table 3: Independent sample t-test analysis of difference between mean attendance of students during dry and raining seasons.

Variables	N	Mean	SD	df	t-value	t-crit.	Decision
Dry season	63	70.44	7.81				
				124	14.55	2.15	Significant
Raining season	63	48.83	8.62				
Sig (2-tailed)							

Table 3 showed lower mean score of 70.44 (SD = 7.81) of 48.83 (SD = 8.62) of the control group. This indicated that research question three can adequately be answered that students' truancy increases more in raining season than dry season.

The null hypothesis was tested using the independent sample t-test. The result indicated t-value is greater than the t-critical. This indicated that the null hypothesis was

rejected and the alternative was accepted. Therefore it depicts that there is a significant difference between attendances of students during dry season than raining season.

Summary of the findings

Based on the hypotheses tested, the following are the major findings of this study.

1- The study has found out that treatment group exposed to group counseling was able to reduce their truancy behaviour compared to those in the control group. The study discovered that Solo dance houses and games clubs are major factors that cause truancy among students.

2- The study also found out that those students from low income background practiced truancy more than students from high income background. The study was able to discovered hawking, food insecurity and grazing of animals (cows and sheep) as factors causing truancy among student from low income background.

3- The study also found out that students' non-attendance to school is more in raining seasons than dry seasons. This was due to students engaged in farming instead of going to school; they as well go to the village market to sell their farm produce on school days. They also stay away from school on raining days due to distance between their homes and schools.

Discussion

From the analysis of the data collected and the hypotheses tested. It was discovered in hypothesis one that there is significant difference existing between students exposed to group counseling and those in the control group. This indicated that the null hypothesis was rejected. It therefore means that students in the treatment group made many changes after the treatment. The result was in agreement with Atsua & Abdullahi (2015) who used group therapy to reduce truancy among students. This is an indication that providing effective counseling strategy will reduce the level of truancy in our schools. In the same vein, Mora (2011) reported an improvement in class attendance among the treatment group after undergoing a counseling intervention.

Findings from hypothesis two showed a difference in school attendance between students from low economic background and those from high economic background after applying a t-test. The result of the findings indicated a rejection of the null hypothesis. It therefore means that children from low income families recorded a higher rate of truancy than those form the high income families. This coincides with Sara, Mbuiza & Dukku (2012) who reported that children from less to do parents are more truants than those from well to do parents. This is likely associated with the reality that some families engaged their children in hawking activities to supplement some economic difficulties in the family. This also agrees with Chike (2006) who lamented that most students embraced truancy in order to raise money to supplement their feeding and other needs in the school. In the findings of Sa'ad, Sabo & Dahuwa (2015) they believed that students' lack of finance to take care of their educational needs in the public senior secondary schools forced them out of their classes to work or hawk and earn money.

The findings from hypothesis three showed a difference between students' school attendance during dry and raining seasons. The mean score of attendance during dry season is greater than the mean score during raining seasons while the t-test analysis showed a significant difference between attendances of students during dry season than raining season.

This indicates that the null hypothesis was rejected. This therefore means students' attendance during dry seasons was more regular and frequent than the raining seasons. This is in agreement with Blogger (2015) who reported that farming provides money to take care of students' needs in the school and for that, children have to work at home to contribute to raising monies that would cover their needs in some cases they have to take farm products to sell in the market. This makes them absent from school. This also coincides with Komakech & Osuu (2014) who reported that most of their participants were absent from school every Tuesday by going to hawk and earn money to carter for their breakfast, lunch and personal requirement. Agriculture is the backbone of the peasant economy and during raining season all efforts are geared towards food products for survival which interfered with the children school attendance.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusion was made, the present study promulgate students' truancy is possible defect to effective learning which could make them to drop out of school. This may make them engage in delinquent activities that will have negative effects in the society. A solution to arrest the situation was proffered through group counseling intervention.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the present study, the following recommendations are put forward;

1- There is the need to intensify counseling intervention in modifying behaviours of truancy instead of using corporal punishment.

2- The government should pump more money to educational sectors that can carter for students' welfare, thereby solving their immediate needs that may keep them away from schools.

3- The government should provide a scholarship for these students and build hostels in all schools to accommodate students living far away from school.

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