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# Counselling Techniques in Tackling the Problem of Truancy among Students in Nigerian Schools

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**Truancy is a major problem that cuts across all levels of education in Nigerian schools. The researcher carried out a theoretical work by using counselling techniques in tackling the problem of truancy in Nigerian schools' where various techniques were used in resolving the problem include Rational Emotive Behavioural Therapy (REBT) of Albert Ellis and Behavioural Modification include modelling, assertiveness training, cognitive restructuring, behavioural modification, reinforcement both positive and negative. Effects of truancy on academic performance of students in schools were vividly discussed. Various counselling implications were discussed such as the need to form an attendance review team to deal with the problem of truancy as early as possible, provision of individualize support for the children in school, building a positive school culture to guide the child in school and focusing on the most essential behaviours which were noticeable in schools. Problem of truancy would definitely be solved if suggested techniques and skills are appropriately used by a trained professional counsellor.**

## INTRODUCTION

Counselling is said to be a helping profession which deals with the process of helping individuals to discover and develop their educational, vocational and psychological potentialities and thereby achieve an optimal level of personal happiness and social usefulness (Ipaye, 1995). Counselling can be classified into two types include individual counselling and group counselling. In an individual counselling, where a trained counsellor uses his professional skills and techniques in handling an individual with a particular problem and how it can be solved while group counselling involves a professional trained counsellor handling clients or individuals problems with a minimum of five clients and maximum of seven with similar problems (Rutan & Alonso, 1982).

Techniques are the major instruments used by counsellor during counselling session either in an individual or group which makes counselling differed from advice giving (Rooyen, 2011). Truancy is the action of staying from school without good reason or without permission (Attwood, 2006) and when a child intentionally misses more than the allowed number of days of school (Kristi, 2016) other names for truancy are school refusals or school phobia. Baker, Sigmon & Nugent (2001) non-

attendance at school is also referred to as truancy.

Researches have shown that truancy between 2002 and 2014 as correlates of truancy across raced/ethnic group in the United States examining temporal trend and correlates by race, age and gender have shown between 2002 (10.8%) and 2014 (11.1%) rates were highest among older youth, females, and Hispanic youth. The researches further shown that African American and Hispanic youth were found to engage in truancy often earlier age than non-Hispanic white 54.1% for African American and 27.9% relative to non-Hispanic (Brandy, Maynard & Michael, 2014). The prevalence and correlates of truancy among school-going adolescents in three West African countries between 2012 and 2017 have shown that 8912 school-going adolescents age 11-18 years who participated in the Global School- based Student Health Survey between 2012 and 2017. The overall prevalence of past 30-day truancy in the three countries were 22.9 %, 36.5 % and 45.9 % for Benin, Ghana and Liberia respectively. The findings show that boys generally reported higher prevalence of truancy than girls in the three countries.

Tata, U.S.,Sheu, S. and Aliu, A. D. (2015) worked on Investigation into the Causes of Truancy among Public senior Secondary School Students in Azare Metropolis of Bauchi State, Nigeria. 357 students were used and the findings showed that 232 students 65% rate of truancy were higher while 125 (35%) were low but the causes of truancy which emanate from children include low intelligence, weak physical health, social and emotional, maladjustment. It was also found out that some causes of truancy emanating from the school include fear of teachers, fear of school activities and difficulties of school subjects.

**Types of Truancy**

There are several types of truancy among students in secondary schools  include habitual truancy or constantly absent oneself from school without permission, occasional truancy that is not common and casual truancy which occurs by chance or accident (Lawal, 2015).

**Causes of Truancy**

Mark Twain (2016) describes truancy as joy us rebellion against authority and responsibility and various factors were identified according to him which includes;

**Family Factor**

Mark opined that inadequate supervision on the part of child's parent, too much house chores, non-intact homes such as divorce, broken, separated, living apart can cause truancy. He further expatiated that illiteracy on the part of child's parent as a result of ignorance is another cause. Mark (2016) also pointed out that poor social economic factor on the part of the child's parent, truancy and also accepted that parenting styles can also responsible for child's truancy in school. Parenting styles include authoritarian and lazier-faire or when a child is endowed with too much freedom may also contribute.

**School Influence**

School as one of the agencies of socialization can also responsible for truancy on the following ways; negative peer influence, unconducive school enrolment, bullying by the child's colleagues, boredom as a result of examination failure, overpopulation of members, poor location of school, community influences and when teachers' method of teaching is not enjoyable

**Student Factor**

The students themselves are influenced and several factors are caused for their truancy include when a child is a slow learner he or she sees nothing attractive in school, emotional problem as a result of inferiority complex, lack of ambition as popularly called "No Future Ambition" (NFA), getting poor grades will discourage him or her from school and learning disabilities and difficulties would scare him or her away from school. Such a child may decide to taking of substances abuse.

**Health Factor**

This is another factor that responsible for truancy among students in secondary schools include illness, mental illness, mental retardation, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), emotional well-being, social well-being and post-traumatic stress disorder.

**Effects of Truancy**

Several effects of truancy on the client include;

• Low or poor academic performance in school.
• Cheating and involving in examination malpractices
• Joining of gangs/occultism
• Involvement in substance abuse
• Involvement in crime such as stealing
• Juvenile delinquency
• Isolation, he or she may prefer to be alone always
• Involvement in sexual misconduct.
• It may cause unwanted pregnancy
• It may result to school drop out
• It may result to mental illness if persisted

## Handling a Child with School Truancy

Counselling is a voluntary self-help profession and the child who needs help should contact the trained counsellor for rehabilitation.

• It may be a referral from the parents or teachers of the client to see a counsellor if the parent discovers that he or she needs help.
• The client may submit him or herself when he or she realizes his/her challenge and might decide to seek counsellor's help.
• The counsellor can notice or discover the child with the problem of truancy and decides to invite him or her for counselling.

## Counselling Clinic

The venue where the client and the counsellor are meeting during counselling session is called counselling clinic. The setting is attractive, containing comfortable furniture, tape recorder, files and jotters, various psychological tests or inventories for collecting data of the client during counselling session.

## Pre-Counselling

Before moving to counselling proper, there would be pre-counselling on the part of the counsellor where he or she is expected to create a rapport establishment, asking questions concerning the bio-data of the client, guaranteeing of the client's confidentiality which involves keeping secret-secret. Seeking indulgence of the client to jot down notes if needed to record the counselling session, especially for academic purpose and finally agreement on time and venue of meeting.
Counsellor's Qualities

There are qualities that must be possessed by the counsellor for an effective counselling to take place include;

- Acceptance of the client
- Giving unconditional positive regard to the client
- Showing empathy to your client
- He must be knowledgeable and expertise since you cannot give what you don't have.
- He must also have sense of humour

## Counselling Skills

Counsellor must have acquired certain skills that would be of help during counselling session.

- Attending – paying attention to the client with active listening.

- Silence – allowing your client to say what he or she has in mind.
- Focusing – do not be diverted from the real problem and rather be focused.
- Questioning – asking your client questions to discover more facts about him or her.
- Probing – asking him or her question to say out what he or she might be reluctant to say.
- Confrontation – this is needed when the client is hiding some truth or information about him or herself.
- Reflection and paraphrasing: these are useful for more clarification during counseling.
- Effective communication – take note of the client verbal and non-verbal expression during counselling session.

## Ways of Tackling Truancy

Truancy may be handled at the initial stage in the following ways if the client problem's is discovered at early stage before it becomes a perpetual truant.

- They may form an attendance team (monitoring attendance daily)
- Be friendly with the child
- Celebrating the successes of the truant
- Joining clubs and parties participating in sports – A truant would definitely come on the day of sport if loved sports
- Instructing parents and guardians to engage in proper monitoring their wards.

## Counsellor's Way of Handling Truancy

Truancy can be handled by using some techniques in counselling theories to handle truancy. One of the major theories that is appropriate in dealing with truancy is Rational Emotive Behavioural Therapy (REBT) by Albert Ellis (1990). Ellis beliefs that people condition themselves to feel disturbed and none is responsible for his being disturbed, the erroneous beliefs that someone is responsible for what the client is passing through is not true but he or she is the real cause of his/her problem. The erroneous belief would now be disputed.
Ellis originates several techniques in his theories that could help in resolving truancy which include; modelling, assertiveness training, cognitive – restructuring.

**Modelling:** the truant should try to emulate and imitate those students who are regularl in school and copy them so as to be effective and performing well in his academic.

**Assertiveness training:** truant should try to be assertive, having it in his/her mind that he/she could do better, let he or she be repeating it several times that "I will do better", "I will stop absenteeism" by saying these, he/she would work towards achieving it. This is called "record broken".

**Cognitive – Restructuring**: Here, the truant would erase the erroneous belief that someone is responsible for his truancy such as poor home, parental ignoring, lack of funds etc. but should try to turn a new leaf that he is the cause of the problem he/she is passing through by disputing the irrational thinking and erroneous beliefs.

**Social Skill:** Can also be used in handling truancy here the student would try to cope with stigmatization that resulted from truancy (Ellis, 1992).

**Behavioural Modification** is a maladaptive behaviour. Behaviour modification involves the reducing or eliminating evasive responses, undesirable or unhealthy behaviour and learning or increasing pleasant responses or desirable and healthy. This was first mentioned by Pavlov Skinner in 1935 in his book, titled behaviour of organism.
Other counselling techniques are:

- Reinforcement
- Positive reinforcement
- Negative reinforcement
- Schedule of reinforcement
- Contingency contract
- Token economy

Reinforcement is a strong technique that will strengthen in organism future behaviour whenever that behaviour is preceded by a specific antecedent stimulus. There are two types of reinforcement namely positive and negative reinforcement.

For positive reinforcement, a reward is offered on expression of the wanted behaviour. Truancy is corrected when a child is encouraged to attend and constantly present in school for a period of week, the counsellor would assure him or her the need to reward him/her so as to repeat the same behaviour. The moment is being rewarded, he/she will be repeating the expected behaviour (Schultz, 2015). The positive reinforcers then provide a desirable stimulus.

The negative reinforcement is characterized by taking away an undesirable stimulus. A perpetual truant may not allow or remove the pleasure he or she enjoys in absenting him/her from school (Schultz, 2015).

*Contingency contract is an if-then agreement that states which actions under certain conditions will result in specific outcome (Bazerman & Gillespie, 1999).*

This is an agreement between a truant and the counsellor, where both of them would sign agreement on the part that the truant would be rewarded if stood to the agreement of attending school regularly, he or she will be rewarded. This is not automatic or permanent, if violated the contract, then they may break it.

Token economy is a behaviour therapy, a programme, sometimes conducted in an institutional setting like hospital, classroom and churches. Here the desired behaviour is reinforced by offering tokens that can exchanged for special foods, television time, passes or other rewards (Jackson & Hackenberg). It is commonly used and have been successfully modeled with pigeons in laboratory setting. The counsellor may decide to reward the child if attended school to serve as reinforcement to repeat the same behaviour.

## CONCLUSION

Truancy is one of the behaviour that causes examination failure in our schools. This behaviour is very perpetual in our schools and there would be need to curb it. Many of the students that are physically and mentally sound cannot attain or achieve academic success due to truancy.

If truancy is dealt with at early stage it would not harm the future of the child. Various skills and techniques can be employed in tackling the problem of truancy among students in Nigerian schools if well handled by a professional trained counsellor.

The counsellor can use more than one technique to achieve the desired goal which is behaviour modification. However, this goal cannot be achieved in a session, it might take some weeks or months depending on the gravity of the maladaptive behaviour (in this case truancy needs to be dealt with since it can ruin the career of a students in the future).

**Counselling Implications in Tackling Truancy**

1. There is need to form an attendance review team to catch problem of truancy as early as possible.
2. There is need to provide individualize support for the children in schools.
3. There is need to build a positive school culture to guide the child in school.
4. There is also need to focus on the most essential behaviours that are noticeable in schools

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