

Effect of Guidance and Counselling Interventions on Truancy Reduction and School Attendance in Ahoada West Local Government Area of Rivers State

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Article History	Abstract
Original Research Article	<p><i>This study investigated the effect of guidance counselling interventions on truancy reduction and school attendance among Junior Secondary School (JSS) students in Ahoada West LGA of Rivers State. The study adopted the quasi-experimental research design. The population was 3761 JSS students, with a sample size of 240 students, using four intact classes. Early Identification and Response Programme Questionnaire (EIRP), and Positive Attendance Support Programme Questionnaire (PASPO) were used to collect the required data from the experimental group (EGP) and control group (CGP), before and after intervention. The validity and reliability of the instruments were carried out, with reliability coefficients of 0.81 for EIRP, and 0.84 for PASPO using the Cronbach's Alpha test. Mean and standard deviation, were employed to address the research questions. To test the hypotheses, Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) were utilized, with the level of significance set at 0.05. The findings revealed, among others, that there was significant difference in the mean pre-test and post-test truancy scores of students exposed to the EIRP and those in the CGP in Ahoada West LGA of Rivers State. The study concluded that guidance and counselling interventions, particularly the Early Identification and Response Programme and the Positive Attendance Support Programme, are effective strategies for reducing truancy and improving school attendance among students. The study recommended, among others, that the Rivers State Ministry of Education should institutionalize structured guidance counselling intervention programmes such as EIRP and PASPO across JSS to address truancy proactively.</i></p> <p>Keywords: <i>Early Identification, Guidance Counselling Interventions, Positive Attendance Support, School Attendance, Truancy Reduction.</i></p>
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Introduction

Irregular school attendance and truancy have become pressing issues in many junior secondary schools (JSS) in Rivers State, Nigeria, undermining academic performance, student wellbeing, and educational planning. In recent times, educators and policymakers in Rivers State have reported increasing patterns of absenteeism characterized by unauthorized school absence, late coming, and low classroom engagement. This trend threatens the realisation of Universal Basic Education goals in Nigeria and raises concerns about students' psychosocial adjustment

(Ololube, 2016). With rising unemployment, socio-economic pressures on families, and changing adolescent needs, simple administrative measures (such as school rules and sanctions) have proven insufficient to sustainably address truancy and improve attendance.

Truancy and inconsistent school attendance persist as significant challenges in Nigeria's secondary school system. Truancy, defined as unauthorized and habitual absence from school activities (Nwankwo, 2016),

negatively impacts academic achievement, student motivation, peer relationships, and progression to higher levels of education. School attendance, referring to the consistent physical presence of students in scheduled academic sessions, remains a primary predictor of learning outcomes (Ololube, 2016). Despite policy efforts under the Universal Basic Education programme, many schools continue to record irregular attendance patterns. There is limited empirical evidence especially quasi-experimental research on the effectiveness of structured guidance counselling programmes such as the Early Identification and Response Programme (EIRP) and the Positive Attendance Support Programme (PASP) in reducing truancy and improving attendance in this context. This gap underscores the necessity for this study.

Truancy refers to unexcused absence by a student from compulsory schooling sessions without parental or school authorisation (Nwankwo, 2016). Dike and Maclean (2024) asserted that truancy is absent from school without permission or inconsistent school attendance. It is typically intentional and recurrent, reflecting disengagement from school expectations. In contrast, school attendance broadly denotes the consistent attendance of students in school programmes, demonstrating commitment to learning and interaction with the school environment (Ololube, 2016). Both constructs remain salient in the 21st century due to complex socio-economic factors, increased school competition, peer influences, and family dynamics all of which can affect students' school commitment and attendance behaviours (Ololube, 2016). These dynamics are exacerbated by rural schooling challenges and limited access to psychosocial support services.

Guidance and counselling interventions are planned, systematic services provided within educational settings to support students' academic, career, social, and emotional development (Akinade, 2022). In this study, two structured programmes are adopted: EIRP: This intervention focuses on identifying at-risk students early, implementing individual counselling sessions, engaging parents, and monitoring attendance trends to reduce truancy. PASP: A preventive programme designed to promote positive attendance behaviours through motivational group counselling, attendance awareness campaigns, reinforcement systems, and peer support structures. These programmes are adapted from established counselling practices documented in Nigerian educational research (Nwosu, 2019; Akinade, 2022) and situated in the school context to address attendance concerns. The rationale for their implementation lies in their potential to improve behavioural outcomes and strengthen student engagement.

Several recent Nigerian studies have explored counselling interventions and student engagement, albeit with limitations.

Nwosu (2019) examined the impact of structured counselling techniques on truancy among adolescents in public secondary schools in South-South Nigeria and found that counselling significantly reduced absentee behaviour. However, that study lacked a quasi-experimental design with control groups, limiting causal inference. Kalu (2018) investigated determinants of truancy in South-East Nigerian secondary schools and recommended comprehensive counselling structures but did not measure intervention effectiveness. Alutu (2016) reviewed the role of school counsellors in improving student adjustment and school commitment; the study highlighted positive relationships between guidance services and student outcomes, though attendance was not isolated as a primary variable. These studies affirm the relevance of counselling for behavioural improvement but reveal gaps in rigorous experimental evidence on attendance and truancy outcomes within the Rivers State context. This study aims to fill that empirical gap.

This study is anchored in Social Learning Theory, propounded by Albert Bandura in 1977. Social Learning Theory posits that learning occurs through observation, imitation, reinforcement, and modelling within a social context (Bandura, 1977). According to Bandura, behaviour is shaped by the dynamic interaction of cognitive, behavioural, and environmental factors a process termed reciprocal determinism. The theory was developed in response to limitations in classical behaviourism, which neglected cognitive processes in behavioural acquisition. Social Learning Theory has been widely applied in educational psychology, behavioural interventions, and counselling practices, particularly in designing programmes that model positive behaviours, reinforce desirable conduct, and restructure negative beliefs (Bandura, 1977). In the context of this study, the EIRP and PASP are grounded in Social Learning Theory as they incorporate modelling, reinforcement, and social supports to influence attendance behaviours. Mentorship, structured group sessions, parental engagement, and peer accountability are mechanisms through which students observe and internalise pro-attendance norms, consistent with Bandura's theoretical propositions. This study investigates the effect of structured guidance counselling interventions specifically the EIRP and the PASP on truancy reduction and school attendance among JSS students in Ahoada West Local Government Area (AWELGA), Rivers State. The research seeks to determine whether these counselling programmes produce significant improvements in attendance outcomes compared to standard school practice.

Statement of the Problem

Although JSS education forms an integral component of Nigeria's basic education framework, schools continue to experience persistent cases of truancy and irregular

attendance. Teachers and school administrators from basic to secondary consistently report recurring patterns of unauthorized absence, habitual late-coming, absenteeism during specific subject periods, and prolonged withdrawal from academic activities without valid justification. In some cases, students leave home in school uniform but do not report to school; in others, they are absent during market days, community events, or farming seasons. These behaviours are often associated with weak parental supervision, peer influence, academic frustration, low motivation, and limited psychosocial support structures within schools. Truancy in Nigerian secondary schools is frequently indicative of deeper behavioural and adjustment challenges rather than mere indiscipline. Irregular attendance also disrupts instructional continuity and weakens academic accountability systems in public schools. Although measures such as suspension, manual attendance registers, and parental summons are commonly applied, they have produced limited long-term success in modifying attendance behaviour among adolescents in rural and semi-urban settings.

The persistence of truancy and poor attendance carries serious implications for students. Chronic absenteeism reduces exposure to classroom instruction, lowers academic performance, weakens social integration, and increases the risk of school dropout and delinquent behaviour. Students who are frequently absent are less likely to develop consistent study habits, participate effectively in peer learning, or benefit from structured guidance services. Beyond academic outcomes, irregular attendance may diminish students' self-efficacy and long-term educational aspirations. These consequences underscore the need for structured behavioural interventions that extend beyond punitive control toward preventive and corrective counselling strategies. Guidance counselling interventions particularly structured Truancy Reduction and School Attendance Improvement programmes grounded in systematic identification, counselling support, behavioural reinforcement, and parental collaboration offer a potentially transformative approach to addressing these challenges. However, within Rivers State, there remains limited quasi-experimental evidence to determine the effectiveness of such programmes in improving attendance outcomes among JSS students. This study seeks to deal with this empirical gap by examining whether structured guidance counselling interventions can significantly reduce truancy and improve school attendance in AWELGA thereby achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 4 which emphasized on quality education to promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

This study investigated the effect of guidance counselling interventions on truancy reduction and school attendance among JSS students in AWELGA of Rivers State. The specific objectives include are to:

1. Determine the effect of the EIRP on truancy reduction among JSS students in AWELGA of Rivers State.
2. Examine the effect of the PASP on school attendance among JSS students in AWELGA of Rivers State.

Research Question

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the effect of the EIRP on truancy reduction among JSS students in AWELGA of Rivers State?
2. What is the effect of the PASP on school attendance among JSS students in AWELGA of Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no noteworthy difference in the mean pre-test and post-test truancy scores of students exposed to the EIRP and those in the CGP in AWELGA of Rivers State.
2. There is no noteworthy difference in the mean pre-test and post-test school attendance rates of students exposed to the PASP and those in the CGP in AWELGA of Rivers State.

Methodology

This study adopted a quasi-experimental research design, specifically the pre-test–post-test non-equivalent CGP design. The design was considered appropriate because intact classes were used, and random assignment of individual students was not feasible within the natural school setting. In educational research, quasi-experimental designs are suitable where manipulation of the independent variable is possible but full randomization is impractical due to administrative constraints. In this study, two groups were involved: an EGP exposed to the Truancy Reduction and School Attendance Improvement Interventions, and a CGP that continued with conventional school practices. Both groups were pre-tested before the intervention and post-tested after the intervention period to determine the effect of the guidance counselling programmes on truancy reduction and school attendance.

The population of the study comprised all JSS I–III students. According to official records obtained from the Rivers State Ministry of Education and the Rivers State Universal Basic Education Board (RSUBEB, 2024, Port Harcourt Zonal Office), there are 3,761 JSS students enrolled in seventeen public JSS within AWELGA. This study used four intact classes with a sample of 240 students; the sample consisted of 45 students in the EGP 1, 80 in the control group 1, 40 students in the EGP 2 and 75 in the

control group 2. Both the school and the participating classes were chosen through a simple random sampling method.

Data were collected using a researcher-developed instrument titled the EIRP for experimental and control group 1, and PASPQ. Each questionnaire consisted of 10 items divided into two clusters. Cluster A contained demographic information, while Cluster B contained 10 items measuring truancy-related behaviours and school attendance behaviours respectively. Each instrument was structured on a four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (4), to Strongly Disagree (1). Negatively worded items were reverse scored. Higher scores in EIRP (after reverse scoring) indicated lower truancy behaviour, while higher scores in PASPQ indicated improved school attendance behaviour.

The instrument was subjected to face and content validity procedures. Experts in Guidance and Counselling as well as Measurement and Evaluation reviewed the items to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study objectives. Their corrections and suggestions were incorporated before the final administration of the instrument. To establish reliability, a pilot study was conducted using 30 JSS students from a public secondary school outside the study area but with similar characteristics. Data collected from the pilot test were analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha to

determine internal consistency. The reliability coefficients obtained were 0.81 for EIRP, and 0.84 for PASPQ. Since these coefficients exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.70, the instrument was considered reliable for the study.

Permission was obtained from the principals of the selected schools before data collection commenced. The researcher administered the pre-test to both experimental and CGPs prior to the intervention. The intervention lasted for six weeks and included structured counselling sessions, attendance monitoring, reinforcement strategies, and parental engagement activities in the experimental school. The CGP continued with regular school activities without exposure to the intervention.

At the end of the six-week period, the post-test was administered to both groups. The researcher, assisted by trained research assistants, supervised the administration and retrieval of the instruments to ensure proper coordination and a high response rate. Mean and standard deviation, were employed to address the research questions. To test the hypotheses, Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) were utilized, with the level of significance set at 0.05.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the effect of the EIRP on truancy reduction among JSS students in AWELGA of Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean and Std. Dev. of the Effect of the EIRP on Truancy Reduction among JSS Students in AWELGA of Rivers State

Group	N	Pretest		Posttest		Main Gain
		Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	
Experimental	45	20.40	3.26	33.33	2.38	12.93
Control	80	20.51	3.30	21.14	3.59	0.63

Interpretation: Higher scores indicate lower truancy behaviour

1-15 score – High Truancy Behaviour, 16-30 score – Moderate Truancy Behaviour,

31-40 score – Low Truancy Behaviour

Table 1 indicated that students in the EGP showed a remarkable improvement in truancy reduction, with their mean scores increasing from 20.40 (SD = 3.26) at pretest to 33.33 (SD = 2.38) at posttest, reflecting a main gain of

12.93. This shift corresponds to a change from moderate to low truancy behaviour. In contrast, the CGP's mean scores changed minimally, from 20.51 (SD = 3.30) to 21.14 (SD = 3.59), with a marginal gain of 0.63, indicating persistent moderate truancy behaviour. These findings suggest that the EIRP show noteworthy contributed to reducing truancy among JSS students in the EGP.

Research Question 2: What is the effect of the PASP on school attendance among JSS students in AWELGA of Rivers State?

Table 2: Mean and Std. Dev. of the Effect of the PASP on School Attendance among JSS Students in AWELGA of Rivers State

Group	N	Pretest		Posttest		Mean Gain
		Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	
Experimental	40	21.08	3.63	32.27	3.11	11.19
Control	75	20.65	3.67	20.27	3.57	-0.38

Interpretation: Higher scores indicate **improved attendance behaviour**

1-15 score – Low Attendance, 16-30 score – Moderate Attendance,

31-40 score – Improved Attendance

Table 2 shows the impact of the PASP on school attendance scores of students in both experimental and CGPs. The EGP demonstrated a substantial increase in attendance scores, from a pretest mean of 21.08 (SD = 3.63) to a posttest mean of 32.27 (SD = 3.11), resulting in a mean gain of 11.19. This

improvement suggests a transition from moderate to improved attendance behavior. Conversely, the CGP's scores slightly decreased from 20.65 (SD = 3.67) to 20.27 (SD = 3.57), with an insignificant gain of -0.38, indicating no meaningful change in attendance. These results imply that the PASP effectively enhanced school attendance among students in the EGP.

Hypothesis 1: There is no noteworthy difference in the mean pre-test and post-test truancy scores of students exposed to the EIRP and those in the CGP.

Table 3: Summary of ANOVA of the Difference in the Mean Pre-test and Post-test Truancy Scores of Students Exposed to the EIRP and those in the CGP in

Dependent Variable: Posttest						
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	4283.66 ^a	1	4283.66	415.04	0.00	0.77
Intercept	85451.67	1	85451.67	8279.37	0.00	0.99
Group	4283.67	1	4283.67	415.04	0.00	0.77
Error	1269.49	123	10.32			
Total	87013.00	125				
Corrected Total	5553.15	124				

a. R Squared = .771 (Adjusted R Squared = .770)

Table 3 shows that there is a statistically noteworthy effect of the EIRP on reducing truancy ($F_1 = 415.04$, $df = 123$, $P < 0.05$), with a large effect size (Partial Eta Squared = 0.77). The model accounted for 77% of the variance in posttest scores ($R^2 = 0.771$). These findings lead to the rejection of the null hypothesis at the 0.05 level of significance,

confirming that the EIRP show noteworthy reduction in truancy among JSS students.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the mean pre-test and post-test school attendance rates of students exposed to the PASP and those in the CGP.

Table 4: Summary of ANOVA of the Difference in the Mean Pre-test and Post-test School Attendance Rates of Students Exposed to the PASP and those in the CGP

Dependent Variable: Posttest						
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	3761.74 ^a	1	3761.74	321.87	0.00	0.74
Intercept	72016.35	1	72016.35	6162.04	0.00	0.98
Group	3761.74	1	3761.74	321.87	0.00	0.74
Error	1320.64	113	11.69			
Total	73793.00	115				
Corrected Total	5082.38	114				

a. R Squared = .740 (Adjusted R Squared = .738)

Table 4 indicated that there is a noteworthy difference between the experimental and CGPs ($F_1 = 321.87$, $df = 113$, $P < 0.05$), with a substantial effect size (Partial Eta Squared = 0.74). The model explained 74% of the variance in attendance posttest scores ($R^2 = 0.740$). Consequently, the null hypothesis is rejected at the 0.05 level of significance, demonstrating that the PASP showed noteworthy improvement school attendance rates among JSS students.

Discussion of Findings

The result of research question one revealed that adolescents in the EGP exposed to the EIRP showed a noteworthy reduction in truancy behaviour compared to the CGP. Specifically, the EGP's truancy scores improved from moderate to low truancy behaviour, while the CGP showed minimal change. Correspondingly, Hypothesis one was supported, as the ANOVA results indicated a noteworthy difference in post-test truancy scores between the experimental and CGPs. This demonstrates that the EIRP effectively reduces truancy among JSS students. These findings align with the study by Okoro and Eze (2021), who found that behavioral intervention programs noteworthy reduction in truancy rates among Nigerian adolescents. Similarly, Adeyemi and Afolabi (2019) reported that school-based intervention strategies enhance student attendance and reduce absenteeism in Nigerian secondary schools.

The result of research question two showed that students exposed to the PASP exhibited a substantial improvement in school attendance, transitioning from moderate to improved attendance scores post-intervention, unlike the CGP which showed no meaningful change. Hypothesis 2 was confirmed as the ANOVA revealed a noteworthy difference in posttest attendance scores between groups. This confirms the effectiveness of the PASP in enhancing school attendance among JSS students. These results concur with findings from Chukwuma and Nwankwo (2020), who demonstrated that positive attendance support programs significantly increase student attendance rates in Nigerian schools. Moreover, Emeka and Udeh (2018) emphasized that targeted attendance interventions lead to improved academic engagement and reduced dropout rates in local educational contexts.

Conclusion

The study has demonstrated that both the EIRP and the PASP significantly reduce truancy and improve school attendance among JSS students in AWELGA of Rivers State. The EGPs exposed to these interventions showed marked improvements compared to CGPs, highlighting the effectiveness of targeted behavioral and attendance support programs in addressing absenteeism challenges within the local educational context. The study concluded that

guidance counselling interventions, particularly the Early Identification and Response Programme and the Positive Attendance Support Programme, are effective strategies for reducing truancy and improving school attendance among students in AWELGA of Rivers State.

Implications of the Study for Counselling and Education

The following are the counselling implications of the study:

1. Counsellors should help students to overcome truancy behaviours through guidance programme, group counselling and individual counselling. This is aimed at improving students interest on education thereby increasing the quality of education and attainment of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 4
2. Counsellors should endeavour to identify reasons of truancy so as to provide specific interventions that could address such issues. School Counsellors can engage parents and community leaders on what to do to curb truancy tendencies among students.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were proffered:

1. The Rivers State Ministry of Education should institutionalize structured guidance counselling intervention programmes such as EIRP and PASP across JSS to address truancy proactively. The government should employ more school counsellors to help students to overcome truancy tendency.
2. Educational policymakers and stakeholders should provide adequate training and resources to School Counsellors and teachers to implement these intervention programs successfully, ensuring sustainability and scalability for broader impact across the state.

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