



Educational Counselling as a Tool for Improving School Attendance Among Public Secondary School Students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State

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Abstract

The study investigated educational counselling as a tool for improving school attendance among public secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Three research questions and three hypotheses guided the study. The population of the study comprised the entire 48,143 public secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State. A sample of 400 students was drawn from the population using Taro Yamane's formula. The stratified random sampling technique was used to compose the sample. The researcher developed instrument titled: "Educational Counselling as a Tool for Improving School Attendance Scale" (ECTISAS) was used for data collection. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while independent t-test was used to test the hypotheses at .05 level of significance. The Result of the study revealed that: Educational counselling strategies such as early morning preparatory talks, motivation to learning activities, punctuality and regularity tips help in no small way to improve school attendance among the student population. However, their usage among the students differ significantly based on gender. The researcher made some recommendations among which was that: Male students should strive to maximally harness the use of early morning preparatory talks to improve school attendance among the secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area.

Keywords: Educational Counselling, Improving, School Attendance, Students, Public Secondary Schools.

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INTRODUCTION

School attendance is integral to students' academic peregrination in our contemporary society. Adeleke and Temisanren (2023) disclosed that it is a fundamental requirement for academic success, social development, and future opportunities. Regular attendance in school is believed to help students develop good habits, build relationships, and achieve academic excellence (Armfield et al., 2020).

Ansari and Gottfried (2021) advanced that school attendance is essential for academic achievement given that when students attend school regularly, they are more likely to understand the subject matter, participate in class discussions, and complete assignments. Consistent attendance therefore helps students stay on top of their work, leading to better grades and academic performance. Moreover, regular attendance helps students develop good study habits, time management skills, and a sense of responsibility (Ansari & Gottfried, 2021).

Alongside, Archambault et al. (2022) informed that school attendance plays a significant role in social development. When students attend school regularly, they interact with their peers, build relationships, and develop social skills such as; communication, empathy, and conflict resolution. Regular attendance is believed to help students feel connected to their school community, reducing feelings of isolation and anxiety. Moreover, school attendance is believed to provide opportunities for students to participate in extracurricular activities, sports, and clubs, which helps them to build teamwork, leadership, and problem-solving skills.

Armfield et al. (2020) informed that good attendance can positively impact college admissions, scholarship opportunities, and future job prospects. It is worthy of note that employers and colleges often consider attendance records when making hiring or admission decisions. Regular attendance therefore demonstrate students commitment, responsibility, and reliability, making them more attractive candidates.

Askeland et al. (2020) submitted that frequent absences can lead to academic struggles, social isolation, and negative habits. This is so because students who miss school regularly tend to fall behind in their studies, struggle to catch up, and potentially drop out of school. Moreso, poor attendance can lead to a pattern of truancy, potentially resulting in legal consequences.

From the foregoing trend, one can adduce that school attendance is a critical aspect of a student's academic journey. Regular attendance tends to help students achieve academic success, develop social skills, and build a strong foundation for future opportunities. Parents, teachers, and students must therefore work together to prioritize school attendance and address underlying issues that may lead to poor attendance. In doing so, they can ensure that students develop good habits, build relationships, and achieve their full potentials. Improving school attendance therefore is crucial for enhancing educational outcomes and ensuring that students are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge for future success.

Improving school attendance as a phenomenon of interest requires a multifaceted approach that addresses the various factors contributing to absenteeism. Educational counselling in the view of the researcher is one of the trending multifaceted approaches of improving school attendance. Ghazizadeh et al. (2022) disclosed that educational counselling is a vital service provided in schools to support the academic, career, personal, and social development of students. It involves a collaborative process where counsellors, teachers, parents, and students work together to create a supportive environment that facilitates educational success and personal growth.

Contemporary educational counselling encompasses a broad range of services aimed at helping students navigate their educational journey. This includes academic advising, career planning, personal counselling, and social skills development. Counsellors tend to provide guidance on course selection, study habits, and time management, as well as support students in overcoming personal challenges that may affect their academic performance (Wankasi & Adekunle, 2023).

Kitambazi and Lyamuya (2022) espoused that educational counsellors assist students in developing effective study skills, managing time efficiently, and setting realistic academic goals. They help identify learning difficulties and work with teachers to implement strategies that cater for the needs of individuals. Educational counsellors more often than not provide a safe space for students to express their concerns and receive support. They also teach essential social skills, conflict resolution techniques, and coping strategies.

Suffice it to state that educational counselling is a crucial component of the educational system that supports students' academic, career, personal, and social development. By providing tailored guidance and support, educational counsellors help students navigate the complexities of their educational journey, overcome challenges, and achieve their full potential. The positive impact of effective counselling therefore is evident in improved academic performance, better career readiness, enhanced personal well-being, and a supportive school environment (Ocholi & Ocholi, 2017).

The educational counselling offerings that students can use to tackle their school attendance problems in Port Harcourt Local Government Area include; early morning preparatory talks, motivation to learning activities and punctuality and regularity tips to school attendance. Early morning preparatory talks help set a positive tone and get students ready for what is ahead. It addresses what they would like to talk about, their goals and priorities for the day or maybe something on their mind that they would like to tackle (Wankasi & Adekunle, 2023).

Concomitantly, motivation to learning activities refers to the driving forces that initiate and sustain learning behaviors, enabling individuals to pursue and achieve their academic goals. It is the enthusiasm, interest, and willingness to engage in learning activities, overcome obstacles, and persist in the face of challenges.

It is worthy of note that punctuality and regularity are essential habits that involve arriving on time and attending events, appointments, and commitments consistently. More often than not, developing punctuality and regularity requires discipline, consistency, and patience (Askeland et al., 2020). Previous researches have proved that educational counselling is a veritable tool for improving school attendance. For instance,

Kanga (2017) examined gender comparison in the effectiveness of guidance and counselling services in enhancing students' adjustment to school environment in boarding secondary schools in Kenya. The study adopted a descriptive research survey design. The study target population was 36,671 comprising of 35,659 form 3 students, 506 Form 3 class teachers and 506 teachers in charge of Guidance and Counselling from boarding secondary schools in Kitui, Nyeri and Nairobi counties in Kenya. Purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used to select 756 respondents comprising of 720 Form 3 students, 18 Form 3 class teachers and 18 teachers in charge of Guidance and Counselling from 18 secondary schools for the study. Questionnaires were used to collect data from Form 3 students and their class teachers while an interview schedule was used to collect data from teachers in charge of Guidance and Counseling. Using Spearman Brown Prophecy formula by split half technique

reliability coefficient of 0.745, 0.746 and 0.736 were realized for students, class teachers and teachers In charge of Guidance and Counseling respectfully. This was accepted because an alpha value of 0.7 and above is considered suitable for making group inferences that are accurate. The data was analyzed by use of inferential and descriptive statistics with the help of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 17.0 for windows and presented in frequency distribution Tables and percentages. The findings revealed that counselling to a high extent improved school attendance; a component of school adjustment to a high extent irrespective of gender.

Wankasi and Adekunle (2023) conducted an assessment of benefits and factors that affect guidance and counselling services in secondary schools in Owo Local Government, Ondo State and found among other things that counselling and allied social factors improve school attendance irrespective of gender and age of students.

Karunanayake et al. (2020) investigated students' attitudes about school counselling. Data analysis was undertaken using thematic analysis. Although the results showed that the students have both negative and positive attitudes towards school counselling, students have more negative attitudes than positive attitudes, and gender influenced in forming their attitudes. Pise and Kaikade (2019) investigated the impact of counselling on school attendance among medical students. The academic performance and attendance rates of selected medical students were recorded and tabulated systematically. The data was evaluated for the group of students having low academic performance and attendance over the study period. Statistics applied to determine significant impact of counselling on attendance and academic performance of students over the study period. The result showed positive and significant impact of counselling on attendance and academic performance of the students. The study also revealed positive correlation between attendance and academic performance.

Ruhoo and Thomas (2021) conducted a study to ascertain whether counselling affects school attendance. The objective of this paper was to analyze statistical data for two successive cohorts of undergraduate students over the academic years 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 in order to assess the impact of their attendance on academic performance. The construction of observations comes from students' enrolment on a second year, Economics undergraduate course at a U.K. University. The researchers conducted a regression analysis by Ordinary Least Squares of attendance at seminars and lectures on combined exam and continuous assessment results, which determine overall performance. The researcher's extended their analysis by including a 'surrogate' variable that embraces the effect of ability and motivation. Their findings show that the statistical effect of attendance yields a positive, significant effect on academic achievement.

Chujor and Kennedy (2014) investigated the effects of counselling in curbing persistent lateness to school among students in university owned secondary schools in Rivers State. The goal was to identify intervention strategies through counselling that could have an impact on students' early attendance to school. Research conducted in this area could provide schools with vital information on how to curb lateness to school or manage it effectively through the tool of counseling. Results showed positive significant effects of counselling in curbing persistent lateness to school among the 3 experimental groups that received counselling. Punctual school attendance significantly improved better among the 3 experimental groups than those in the controls group. Finally there was no statistical significant mean difference between the 3 experimental groups, no group was found to be more effective than the other. It was recommended among others that counsellors, para-counselors, teachers and those in the helping profession be trained to use group counseling based on cognitive approaches to counseling to

improve punctual and regular school attendance among secondary schools student. From the foregoing, it is evident that school attendance plays a pivotal role in the overall benefit of the student, it is against this background that this study is conceived.

Statement of the Problem

The importance of school attendance in the general academic performance of students cannot be over emphasized, school attendance plays a major role in education. Schooling is a cumulative venture that demands punctuality and regularity on the part of students. School programmes are therefore designed in content and function to keep students meaningfully engaged throughout their academic programme. This is to ensure that the cognitive, affective and psycho productive domains of the students are well developed to enable them compete favourably with their peers in the larger society.

Contrary to the ideal, the researcher observed that lots of public secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State absent themselves from school regularly. The litany of cases of absenteeism in the registers of most of the public secondary schools in the area suggests that the problem has reached a crescendo.

Attempts to curb the problem of absenteeism among the student population using corporal punishment has not been able to yield the desired result as lots of students in public schools have continued to absent themselves from school irrespective of the punishments meted out on them; this portends grave danger among the student population, as it can culminate into poor academic performance, low self-esteem, dropout syndrome, cultism, unwanted and unintended pregnancy to mention but a view.

There is a gradual paradigm shift in the strategy of tackling absenteeism in the area. Educational counselling strategies such as early morning preparatory talks, motivation to learning activities, punctuality and regularity tips to school attendance are projected as the panacea for tackling the problem in view given their urbane and germane nature. Thus, public secondary schools in Port Harcourt Local Government Area are beginning to harness educational counselling as a tool for improving school attendance among the secondary school students courtesy of the intervention of school counsellors. However, not much is known about how the male and female students in question harness the counselling offerings to improve their school attendance. Based on the foregoing, it is incumbent on the researcher to ascertain if educational counselling can actually improve school attendance among public secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State. This is the problem of the study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to investigate educational counselling as a tool for improving school attendance among secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State. In specific terms, the objective of the study included to:

- Examine if early morning preparatory talk can improve school attendance among secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State based on gender;

- Determine if motivation to learning can improve school attendance among secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State based on gender;
- Investigate whether punctuality and regularity tips can improve school attendance among secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State based on gender.

Research Questions

The following questions were formulated to guide the study:

- What is the extent to which early morning preparatory talk influence school attendance among male and female secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State?
- What is the extent to which motivation influence school attendance among male and female secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State?
- What is the extent to which punctuality and regularity tips influence school attendance among male and female secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State based on gender?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

- There is no significant difference between male and female secondary school students who receive early morning preparatory talk in the assembly to improve school attendance in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State
- There is no significant difference between male and female secondary school students who receive motivation to learning to improve school attendance in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State.
- There is no significant difference between male and female secondary school students who receives punctuality and regularity tips in the assembly to improve school attendance in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study comprised the entire 48,143 public secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State. The least tolerable sample size for the study as determined from the population using Taro Yamen's formular was 397; however the sample was increased to 400 and drawn using stratified random sampling technique for a better representation of the target population. A total of 16 public secondary schools were randomly selected in Port Harcourt Local Government Area and 25 students were sampled per school.

Researchers developed instrument titled: "Educational Counselling as a Tool for Improving School Attendance Scale (ECTISAS)" was used for data collection. The instrument

was validated by one test experts and a guidance counsellor both from Rivers State University paying special attention to the face and content validity. The reliability of the instrument was determined through the internal consistency method using the Cronbach Alpha statistics which gave a coefficient value of 0.79. The face to face method was used to administer the instrument. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while independent t-test was used to test the hypotheses at .05 level of significance.

RESULTS

Research Question One: What is the extent to which early morning preparatory talk influence school attendance among male and female secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean Rating of Early Morning Preparatory Talk as a Tool for Improving School Attendance Based on Gender

S/N	Items	Male		Female			
		\bar{x}	SD.	Result	Mean	SD.	Result
1.	I use the preparatory talks given to us in the morning to encourage myself to come to school early daily	2.10	1.10	LE	3.71	1.21	VHE
2.	I prepare my minds for the school day during morning devotions	3.51	0.11	VHE	2.01	1.02	LE
3.	I use the morning hours to pick coping mechanisms for the day	3.02	0.23	VHE	3.91	1.11	VHE
4.	I rarely miss school due to my early morning preparatory talks	2.11	0.31	LE	3.62	1.21	VHE
Grand Mean		2.69	0.44	HE	3.31	1.14	VHE

Table 1 above shows the mean rating of early morning preparatory talk as a tool for improving school attendance among male and female secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State. An overview of the table revealed that the male students had a grand mean of 2.69 while the female students had a grand mean of 3.31. This shows that the female students used early morning preparatory talks as a tool for improving school attendance than the male students. The answer to the research question one therefore is that the female students utilize early morning preparatory talks to improve school attendance than the male students to a very high extent.

Research Question Two: What is the extent to which motivation influence school attendance among male and female secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State?

Table 2: Mean Rating of Motivation to Learning as a Tool for Improving School Attendance Based on Gender

S/N	Items	Male			Female		
		Mean	SD.	Result	Mean	SD.	Result
1.	Educational counselling sessions have helped me develop a positive attitude towards learning	3.62	0.23	VHE	3.91	1.02	VHE
2.	Counselling support has increased my interest and willingness to participate actively in classroom learning.	3.51	0.71	VHE	3.31	1.11	VHE
3.	I feel more motivated to overcome academic challenges after receiving educational counselling.	3.63	0.25	VHE	3.92	1.04	VHE
4.	Educational counselling has helped me discover effective study habits that keep me motivated to learn.	3.32	0.11	VHE	3.34	1.11	VHE
5.	Grand Mean	3.52	0.33	VHE	3.62	1.07	VHE

Table 2 above shows the mean rating of motivation to learning as a tool for improving school attendance among male and female secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State. An overview of the table revealed that the male students had a grand mean of 3.52 while the female students had a grand mean of 3.62. This shows that the female students used motivation to learning activities as a tool for improving school attendance than the male students. The answer to the research question two therefore is that the female students slightly used motivation to learning to improve school attendance, nevertheless both male and female students used motivation to learning to improve school attendance to a very high extent.

Research Question Three: What is the extent to which punctuality and regularity tips influence school attendance among male and female secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State?

Table 3: Mean Rating of Punctuality and Regularity Tips to School Attendance as a Tool for Improving School Attendance Based on Gender

S/N	Items	Male			Female		
		Mean	SD.	Result	Mean	SD.	Result
1.	I come to school early by making use of the punctuality tips I receive in school	3.52	1.11	VHE	2.21	1.11	LE
2.	I harness the regularity tips I receive from school to come to school regularly	2.91	1.21	HE	2.11	1.24	LE
3.	I am enlightened about how to make it to school early daily via counseling	3.24	1.21	VHE	2.40	1.25	LE
4.	I get students tips on what I stand to benefit from punctuality and regularity via counselling	3.31	1.12	VHE	2.51	1.20	HE
	Grand Mean	3.25	1.16	VHE	2.31	1.2	LE

Table 3 above shows the mean rating of punctuality and regularity tips as a tool for improving school attendance among male and female secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State. An overview of the table revealed that the male students had a grand mean of 3.25 while the female students had a grand mean of 2.31. This shows that the male students used punctuality and regularity tips as a tool for improving school attendance than the female students. The answer to the research two therefore is male students' utilized punctuality and regularity tips to improve school attendance than the female students to a very high extent.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant mean rating difference in the use of early morning preparatory talk as a tool for improving school attendance among male and female secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Table 4: Independent t-test Analysis of Early Morning Preparatory Talk as a Tool for Improving School Attendance Among Students Based on Gender

Gender	N	Mean	SD	T	df	sig	Decision
Male	189	2.69	0.44	7.294	398	.005	Significant
Female	211	3.31	1.14				

Table 4 above shows independent t-test analysis of use of early morning preparatory talk as a tool for improving school attendance based on gender. An overview of the table revealed that the calculated t-value of 7.294 is greater than the 398 degree of freedom this justifies the need to reject the null hypothesis on the basis that the alternate hypothesis is accepted which means there is a significant difference between a p-value of .005 which is below 0.05 level of significance. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference in the use of motivation to learning as a tool for improving school attendance among male and female secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Table 5: Independent t-test Analysis of Motivation to Learning as a Tool for Improving School Attendance Among Students Based on Gender

Marital Status	n	Mean	SD.	T	df	sig	Decision
Male	189	3.52	0.33	1.269	398	.063	Not Significant
Female	211	3.62	1.07				

Table 5 above shows independent t-test analysis of motivation to learning as a tool for improving school attendance among male and female secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State. An overview of the table revealed that the calculated t-value of 1.269 has a p-value of .063 which is above 0.05 level of significance. Thus, the null hypothesis is retained.

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant difference in the use punctuality and regularity tips to school attendance as tools for improving school attendance among male and female secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Table 6: Independent t-test Analysis of Punctuality and Regularity Tips as Tools for Improving School Attendance Among Students Based on Gender

Qualification	N	Mean	SD.	T	df	Sig	Decision
Male	189	3.25	1.16	7.96	398	.001	Significant
Female	211	2.31	1.2				

Table 6 above shows independent t-test analysis of punctuality and regularity tips as a tool for improving school attendance based on gender. An overview of the table revealed that the calculated t-value of 7.96 has a p-value of .001 which is below 0.05 level of significance. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected.

DISCUSSION

The results of research question one and hypothesis one (Table 1 and Table 4) revealed that female students significantly used early morning preparatory talks as a tool for improving school attendance than male students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area. The result is an interesting one. It suggest that the female students use more of the early morning preparatory talks as a tool for improving school attendance probably due to their homely nature as influenced by the prevalent cultural norms in Port Harcourt metropolis. This result disagrees with the finding of Wankasi and Adekunle (2023) which revealed among other things that gender does not significantly moderate the counselling dynamics that improve school attendance. The result however agrees with the findings of Karunanayake et al. (2020) which revealed that gender is one of the significant educational counselling dynamics.

The results of research question two and hypothesis two (Table 2 and Table 5) revealed that female students slightly used motivation to learning activities as a tool for improving school attendance than male students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area. This suggest that both the male and female students similarly use motivation to learning activities as a tool for improving school attendance. The observed slight difference may be linked to the source of the motivation among the male and female students and their locus of control which could be intrinsic or extrinsic. The result agrees in part with the findings of Kanga (2017) which revealed that gender does not significantly moderate the impact of counselling on school attendance.

The results of research question three and hypothesis three (Table 3 and Table 6) revealed that male students significantly used punctuality and regularity tips to school attendance as a tool for improving school attendance than female students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area. The male students may have used punctuality and regularity tips as tools for improving school attendance the more due to their gender based roles and responsibilities in Port Harcourt Local Government Area. The result is in agreement with the findings of Karunanayake et al. (2020) which revealed that gender is one of the significant educational counselling dynamics.

CONCLUSION

Educational counselling is a vital tool for the improvement of school attendance in Port Harcourt Local Government Area. Educational counselling strategies such as early morning preparatory talk, motivation to learning activities and punctuality and regularity tips help in no small way to promote school attendance among the student population. However, their usage among the students differs based on gender to a high extent on each of the variable

Implication for Counseling

The findings of this study have significant implication for counsellors in the society. Counselling contributes positively towards behaviour change and we are in a society where only few schools can boast of counsellors while the number of students who need counselling is high. Teachers, administrators, stake holders in education are continuously looking for ways to solve the problem of poor attendance in schools. Counsellors in the state under the umbrella of counselling association of Nigeria (CASSON) can organize a community project for secondary schools in the state to help students curb unacceptable patterns of school attendance moving from school to school and on specific days and time to salvage our schools from the dilemma of lateness to school and other unacceptable behaviours.

Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON) should work in harmony with government and other stake holders in the education sector to advocate the employment of counselors at all levels of education. Teacher counselors who currently perform guidance functions in schools can be taught the techniques of self-management and cognitive restructuring by members of the Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON) through organized seminars and workshops.

Finally all school heads, teachers, prefects etc should recognize the importance of counseling and refer cases of unacceptable behaviours to the counsellor where they exist to curb persistent absenstism to school and other unacceptable behavioural patterns.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher recommended as follows:

- Male students should strive to maximally harness the use of early morning preparatory talks to improve school attendance among the secondary school students.
- Male and female students should brace up in their use of motivation to learning activities as a tool to improved school attendance.
- Female students should strive to improve on their use of punctuality and regularity tips as a tool to improve school attendance.

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