https://journals.unizik.edu.ng/jgcs ISSN: 1596-1141

JOURNAL OF GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING STUDIES

EFFECT OF ASSERTIVENESS TRAINING TECHNIQUE ON SOCIAL MALADJUSTMENT AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN IMO STATE

[1]Juliet Chibuzo Emeji, [2]C. N. Nwokolo

[1]Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Owerri

[2]Department of Guidance and Counselling, Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

[1]most1@gmail.com, [2]cn.nwokolo@unizik.edu.ng

Abstract

This study investigated the effect of assertiveness training technique on social adjustment among secondary school students in Imo State. Three research questions and three null hypotheses guided the study. Quasi-experimental research was adopted in carrying out the study. The population of the study was 397 JS2 and SS2 students identified with social maladjustment in all the public secondary schools in Njaba Local Government Area of Imo State, and the sample size was 89 students from the two sampled schools in Njaba. The sample was derived using multi-stage sampling procedure based on the number of coeducational schools that scored high on Social Adjustment Scale. The Social Adjustment Scale (SAS) was used for data collection. The instrument was reliable at 0.90 coefficient. Data relating to research questions were analyzed using statistical mean, while data relating to hypotheses were analyzed using Analysis of Co-Variance (ANCOVA). Findings from the study revealed that assertiveness training technique was significantly effective on social maladjustment among the secondary school students. More so, the findings indicated that assertiveness training technique was more effective on social maladjustment among male and junior students, respectively. Finally, the findings revealed that there was no significant difference in the effectiveness of assertiveness training technique on social maladjustment among students who participated in the experiment based on gender and class level. Based on the findings, researchers therefore recommended that teachers should carefully observe their students' behaviours within the classroom setting and quickly refer the socially maladjusted ones to the school counsellor for professional assistance.

Keywords: Effect, assertiveness training, technique, secondary school, students

Introduction

Social adjustment is defined as people's ability to communicate with others in the social environment, with a view to create a balance between their role in the society and how they play such role (Dehghnnezhad, Hajhosseini & Ejei, 2017). It is the degree to which an individual engages in competent social behaviour and adapts to the immediate social context (Romera, Gomez & Ortega, 2016). Forsgren and Sillanp (2020) defined social adjustment as a psychological term used to describe an individual's ability to function in different social roles. Social adjustment enhances people's ability to behave in accordance with the norms, ethics, and value that will strengthen their survival so as to meet the social expectations of the social environment. In contrast, when an individual lacks the ability to relate with others, they may find it so difficult to function effectively in their social environment.

Social maladjustment is defined as a breakdown in the process of maintaining constructive social relationships (APA, 2018). It is a persistent pattern of violating social norms with lots of truancy, substance abuse, a perpetual struggle with authority, as well as a tendency to be easily frustrated, impulsive and manipulating (Derogatis, 2020). According to Briones (2017), social maladjustment is a situation whereby an individual is unable to successfully satisfy social needs, which establishes an imbalance between his personal needs and expectation of the society resulting in the disturbance of psycho-equilibrium. For the purpose of this study, social maladjustment is defined as the inability of a student to conform to the standards for behaviour established by the school and society.

Socially maladjusted students manifest maladaptive behaviours such as persistent violation of social norms, truancy, substance abuse and impulsivity (Mariamma, 2020). This tends to dent the educational system with the suggestion that socially maladapted individuals are being churn out of schools, instead of well-adjusted individuals which the stipulated lofty national educational goals and objectives were designed to produce. Therefore, the issue of social maladjustment has remained a source of concern to a range of stakeholders, especially parents who are concerned with their children's welfare, teachers/school administrators who are concerned with retention rates, students striving to succeed and mental health professionals, such as counsellors and psychologists who help students overcome challenges in adjustment.

Moreso, students, especially those in the secondary schools are faced with social problems with attendant academic problems that seem to have become part and parcel of their lives. Previous researchers have expressed great concern about the problem of social maladjustment among secondary school students. For example, Chigbu, Oguzie and Obi (2021b) in their study reported that social maladjustment is common among secondary school students. Also, a study conducted by Nwosu and Chinweuba (2021) showed that many secondary school students are finding it difficult to adjust socially. In the same vein, report from the work of Oguzie, Obi, Nnadi, Nwobi and Okpala (2023) indicated that 16.3% of secondary school students in Imo state are socially maladjusted despite various socializing programmes provided by the state's school curriculum.

Social maladjustment among students has been found to be significantly correlated with gender and class level. For example, Oguzie, Obi, Nnadi, Nwobi and Okpala (2023) reported that social maladjustment is more present in female than male students. In a contrary report, Rubin and Barstead (2018) in their study found that social maladjustment is greater in males compared to females. However, Oladipo and Idemudia (2014) had a contrary view on the gender difference in social maladjustment, as they reported that there was not significant gender and age difference in social maladjustment among students. Moreso, studies have shown that the number of socially maladjusted students in junior classes is far greater than the senior level (Oguzie, Obi, Nnadi, Nwobi & Okpala (2023).

The problem of social maladjustment has become a worrisome phenomenon because of its tendency to affect students' overall output in school and the likelihood that they may resort to anti-social behaviours like drug use and abuse, robbery, alcoholism, withdrawal from social situations among others, as coping mechanisms. Therefore, this problem needs immediate intervention as to enable students achieve their maximum potential as enshrined in the national objectives of education. There is no doubt that social maladjustment is a behaviour problem, which would require an array of behaviour intervention approaches for its solution. Consequent of this, one of the behaviour modification techniques that may be used to enable students to overcome the problem of social maladjustment is assertiveness training.

Assertiveness Training (AT) is a behaviour modification therapy developed by Joseph Wolpe in 1958 which is used to help individuals to openly express their thoughts and feelings. It is a counselling technique which can be used to reduce shyness, timidity and inability to express

one's emotions, opinions, demand one's right or privileges (Oguzie, Ezunu, Uba & Osagie-Obazee, 2018). Roschebezer (2022) defined assertiveness training technique as a type of behavioural therapy or skill development program that teaches individuals how to behave more boldly and self-confidently. The purpose of assertiveness training is to teach the individual appropriate strategies for identifying and acting on their desires, needs, and opinions while remaining respectful to others (Oguzie, Obi & Chigbu, 2020). For the purpose of this study, assertiveness training technique is viewed as a behaviour modification strategy aimed at inculcating reasonable social competence and confidence into socially anxious individuals to enable them feel free in their interactions with their social environment as social beings.

When students are not able to freely express themselves, they may become depressed, anxious, or angry, and their sense of self-worth may decline. Consequently, the students' relationships with other people may also suffer because people may become resentful when they do not read students' minds for what they are not assertive enough to tell them. Being assertive gives the individual enough confidence in communicating boldly, frankly, articulatively, honestly, directly, authoritatively and spontaneously (Oguzie, Ezunu, Uba & Osagie-Obazee, 2018). According to Anyamene and Nwosu (2019), assertiveness training enhances people's interaction with others, and this reduces withdrawal tendency, thereby encouraging exhibition of social skills. However, in Africa and Nigeria in particular, assertive behaviour may ignorantly be regarded as rude behaviour especially when displayed by children or females.

Assertiveness training therapy generally lasts for a period of 6 to 8 weeks. Sessions during assertiveness training will generally include, relaxation training, role play and social skills training. The psychotherapist would teach relaxation techniques that can be used to counter the anxious feelings, when the client is in a social environment. The client would rehearse these techniques and implement them outside of the therapy session. In addition, those undergoing assertiveness training may also participate in group therapy sessions and will generally have activities to perform outside of the therapy sessions. Uba and Idieune (2016) asserted that one goal of assertiveness training technique is to increase people's behavioural repertoire so that they can make choice of whether to behave assertively in certain situations.

During assertiveness training, the Counsellor or therapist should be aiming at achieving some objective which include inculcating in participants the ability to freely and openly express

their feelings stand their grounds, freely give their opinions and participate actively and effectively in both classroom and social activities, among others. Assertiveness training technique will be used in this study due to a number of reasons. First, since social maladjustment is a behavioural problem, thus, it seems equally appropriate to employ psychotherapeutic approach to take care of it instead of chemotherapy. Also, empirical studies available in literature have attested to the success of assertiveness training technique in treating problem behaviours among students (Nasim, Kakabraee, Hamzeh & Fayegh, 2023). Oguzie, Obi and Chigbu (2020) observed that assertiveness training technique can be used at school, in the home and in the social setting to refute questionable demands from people and to demand one's rights. The current researchers hence believed that assertiveness training technique may be an effective treatment for students who have difficulties in their interpersonal relationship or social functioning.

In the recent past, a good number of researchers (Anyamene, Obi & Okpala, 2023) have investigated the possible factors that cause social maladjustment without due priority to the counselling intervention techniques that can be used in reducing the problem among students. Perhaps, this is the reason why the problem of social maladjustment still remains a source of worry to students, parents, educationists and society in general. Due to the increase in the rate of social maladjustment among students, there is need to explore various behaviour modification strategies to help students overcome social maladjustment and become able to function maximally as active members of the society. Based on this background this study ascertained the effect of assertiveness training technique on social maladjustment among secondary school students in Njaba Local Government Area of Imo State.

Statement of the Problem

Generally, schools are considered as hubs for transformational learning and life skills. In this regard, students are expected to exhibit good level of sociability. In other words, all students should be interactive, lively, and be in a good social contact and relationship with their peers, classmates and teachers. In the time past, students in Njaba local government area of Imo State were known for their spirit of togetherness and solidarity. In those days, students operated in social clusters and performed very well socially and otherwise. However, the trend seems to have changed towards the opposite direction. This is glaring because the researchers' observation in the

course of discharging her duties as a practicing school-based Counsellor shows that some students in Njaba L.G.A. operate at a very low level of sociability.

Such students rarely engage in social interactions with others, are unable to perform effectively in social situations, find it very difficult to air their views and opinion in public settings, and as such are regarded as being socially maladjusted. As social beings, individuals including students are expected to be able to initiate and participate actively in interactions, and have positive self-evaluation and identity. They are expected to interact with same and opposite sex without difficulty. The above does not hold true for some students in Imo state because of social maladjustment. This is because these socially maladjusted students have problems with being assertive, frank and active in social activities and classroom interactions.

In a bid to circumvent this problem, a number of the socially maladjusted students resort to ego defence mechanisms such as avoidance and withdrawal from public scenes, illicit use and abuse of hard drugs, unnecessary excuses, lying and cheating, among others, which obviously later on in life does more harm than good. With the prevailing number of problems associated with inability to adjust to the social environment in school, a lot of researchers have tried to look at the antecedents of overall adjustment of secondary school students. The problem of this study is that, while many researchers have tried to look at the factors associated with students' adjustment, not much local studies have availed their research milieu to explore behaviour intervention measures that can be used to treat students with social maladjustment. To help solve the problem of social maladjustment, this study examined the effect of assertiveness training technique on social maladjustment among secondary school students in Imo State.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the effect of assertiveness training technique on social maladjustment among secondary school students when compared with those who received conventional counselling using their pretest and posttest mean scores?
2. What is the difference in the effects of assertiveness training technique on social maladjustment among male and female secondary school students using their pretest and posttest mean scores?

3. What is the difference in the effects of assertiveness training technique on social maladjustment among junior and senior secondary school students using their pretest and posttest mean scores?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 levels of significance:

1. The is no is significant difference in the effect of assertiveness training technique on social maladjustment among secondary school students when compared with those who received conventional counselling using their posttest scores.
2. There is no significant difference in the effects of assertiveness training technique on social maladjustment among male and female secondary school students using their posttest scores.
3. There is no significant difference in the effects of assertiveness training technique on social maladjustment among junior and senior secondary school students using their posttest scores.

Methods

This study was carried out in Imo State. The study adopted a non-randomized pretest-posttest control group quasi-experimental research design. According to Nworgu (2015), a quasi-experimental study is a type of experimental study that determines the effect of a treatment paradigm on a non-randomised sample. The population of the study comprised all 397 JS2 and SS2 students identified with social maladjustment. The students were identified using Social Adjustment Scale (SAS), using the norm of 82.5 as stipulated in the instrument manual as a guide. The sample for the study consisted of 89 secondary school students drawn through multi-stage sampling procedure. This was drawn from JS2 and SS2 students from the three chosen coeducational secondary schools Njaba local government area.

The instrument that was used for measuring students' social maladjustment in this study is the Social Adjustment Scale (SAS) developed by Fudah in (2008). Based on the SAS norms, scores above 82.5 were regarded as students who are socially adjusted and scores from 82.5 and below were regarded as students who are socially maladjusted. Social Adjustment Scale (SAS) was reported to have good psychometric properties (Fudah, 2008). The internal consistency of the instrument ranges from 0.70 to 0.84, with an overall reliability coefficient Cronbach's alpha of

0.90. The completed Social Adjustment Scale (SAS) for the pre-test were scored following the scoring instruction and the same measure was taken for the post-test. All data to be collected for this study were organised in tables and analysed. Arithmetic mean was used in answering the research questions and analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was used in testing the null hypotheses at 0.05 levels of significance. According to the Social Adjustment Scale manual, students who score 82.50 and below in the tests were identified as social maladjusted. In line with the benchmark, students that scored 82.50 and below in their pre-test and above 82.50 in their post-test after the treatment were said to have gained from the self-management and assertiveness training techniques treatments, respectively.

Results

Table 1: Pretest and Posttest social adjustment mean scores of secondary school students treated with assertiveness training technique when compared with those who received conventional counselling

N = 82.50

Source of Variation	N	Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean	Gained Mean	Remark
AT	50	66.04	124.32	58.28	Effective
Control	39	63.77	77.13	13.36	

Table 1 indicated that the secondary school students treated with assertiveness training technique have pretest social adjustment mean score of 66.04 and posttest mean score of 124.32 with gained mean score of 58.28, while those who received conventional counselling had pretest mean score of 63.77 and posttest mean score of 77.13 with gained mean 13.36. With posttest mean score of 124.32 for AT which is above the norm of 82.50, assertiveness training technique is effective on secondary school students' social maladjustment.

Table 2: ANCOVA on the effect of assertiveness training technique on social maladjustment among secondary school students when compared with those who received conventional counselling

Source of variation	SS	df	MS	Cal. F	Pvalue	$P \leq 0.05$
Corrected Model	57637.508	2	28818.754			
Intercept	1947.483	1	1947.483			
Pretest Scores	8842.253	1	8842.253			
Treatment Methods	43363.788	1	43363.788	123.851	0.000	S
Error	30110.986	86	350.128			

Total	1043728.000	89
Corrected Total	87748.494	88

Table 2 showed that at 0.05 level of significance, 1df numerator and 88df denominator, the calculated F is 123.851 with Pvalue of 0.000 which is less than 0.05. Therefore, the first null hypothesis is rejected. So, the effect of assertiveness training technique on social maladjustment among secondary school students is significant when compared with those who received conventional counselling.

Table 3: Pretest and Posttest social adjustment mean scores of male and female students treated with assertiveness training technique

N = 82.50

Source of Variation	N	Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean	Gained Mean	Remark
Male	20	65.14	127.36	62.22	More effective
Female	28	66.75	121.93	55.18	

Table 3 revealed that the male students treated with assertiveness training technique had pretest social adjustment mean score of 65.14 and posttest mean score of 127.36 with gained mean of 62.22, while the female students had pretest social adjustment mean score of 66.75 and posttest mean score of 121.93 with gained mean of 55.18. With gained mean scores of 62.22 for the male students as against 55.18 for female students, AT was more effective in enhancing male students' social adjustment.

Table 4: ANCOVA on the effects of assertiveness training technique on social maladjustment among male and female secondary school students

Source of variation	SS	df	MS	Cal. F	Pvalue	P ≤ 0.05
Corrected Model	8236.068	2	4118.034			
Intercept	1167.335	1	1167.335			
Pretest Scores	7872.136	1	7872.136			
Gender	744.672	1	744.672	3.147	0.083	NS
Error	11120.812	47	236.613			
Total	792130.000	50				
Corrected Total	19356.880	49				

Table 4 showed that at 0.05 level of significance, 1df numerator and 49df denominator, the calculated F is 3.147 with Pvalue of 0.083 which is greater than 0.05. Therefore, the second null hypothesis is accepted. So, there is no significant difference in the effects of assertiveness training

technique on social maladjustment among male and female secondary school students using their posttest scores.

Table 5: Pretest and Posttest social adjustment mean scores of junior and senior students treated with assertiveness training technique

N = 82.50

Source of Variation	N	Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean	Gained Mean	Remark
Junior	20	65.69	127.00	61.31	More effective
Senior	28	66.42	121.42	55.00	

In table 5 it was observed that the junior students treated with assertiveness training technique had pretest social adjustment mean score of 65.69 and posttest mean score of 127.00 with gained mean of 61.31, while the senior students had pretest social adjustment mean score of 66.42 and posttest mean score of 121.42 with gained mean of 55.00. With gained mean scores of 61.31 for the junior students as against 55.00 for senior students, AT was more effective in enhancing junior students' social adjustment.

Table 6: ANCOVA on the effects of assertiveness training technique on social maladjustment among junior and senior secondary school students

Source of variation	SS	df	MS	Cal. F	Pvalue	P ≤ 0.05
Corrected Model	8039.013	2	4019.507			
Intercept	1290.722	1	1290.722			
Pretest Scores	7649.966	1	7649.966			
_Class Level	547.617	1	547.617	2.274	0.138	NS
Error	11317.867	47	240.806			
Total	792130.000	50				
Corrected Total	19356.880	49				

Data in Table 6 revealed that at 0.05 level of significance, 1df numerator and 49df denominator, the calculated F is 2.274 with Pvalue of 0.138 which is greater than 0.05. Therefore, the third null hypothesis is accepted. So, there is no significant difference in the effects of assertiveness training technique on social maladjustment among junior and senior secondary school students using their posttest scores.

Discussing of Findings

The findings of this study showed that assertiveness training technique was effective on social maladjustment among secondary school students as compared to those in the conventional counselling group. Results relating to the second research question revealed that students in the

assertiveness training technique group were socially maladjusted before the commencement of the treatment as evidenced by their scores in the pre-test. The findings also indicated significant posttest mean score difference between the assertiveness training technique and conventional counselling groups. Again, students in the assertiveness training technique group recorded a significant increase in their social adjustment mean scores as compared to those in the conventional counselling group. This finding is in-line with the report of previous researchers (Nasim, Kakabraee, Hamzeh & Fayegh, 2023; Oguzie, Obi & Chigbu, 2020; Uba & Ideune, 2016) who found that assertiveness training technique was effective in treating problem behaviours such as social maladjustment among students.

Moreso, the findings of this study supported by the findings of Anyamene and Nwosu (2019) who in their study concluded that assertiveness training technique enhances student's interaction with others, and this reduces withdrawal tendency, thereby encouraging exhibition of social skills. A possible reason for the significant increase in social adjustment among students in the assertiveness training technique treatment group as found in the present study may be that due to the strong boldness the technique gives people during social situations. In support of this reason, Oguzie, Ezunu, Uba and Osagie-Obazee (2018) found that being assertive gives individuals enough confidence in communicating boldly, frankly, articulatively, honestly, directly, authoritatively and spontaneously.

Another finding of this study also revealed that there was gender difference in the effects of assertiveness training technique on social maladjustment among the secondary school students. The result of research question two indicated that the increase in social adjustment scores of the male students was greater than that of the females after they had been treated with assertiveness training technique. This finding showed that the male students benefited more from assertiveness training technique treatment than the female students. This finding aligned with the previous findings by (Animasahu & Oladeni, 2022; Chikwe & Ugwueze, 2017; Uba & Ideune, 2016) who in their studies concluded that assertiveness training technique was more beneficial to male participants than the females. The possible reason for this finding may be because males by nature tend to be more assertive than females. Perhaps, during the experiment, the assertiveness training may have captured the attention and aroused the interest of the male students a bit more than the females thereby making the males to benefit more from the experiment. However, it very important to point it out that the gender difference in the effects of the assertiveness training technique in this

study was little because the test of null hypothesis two indicated that there was no significant difference in the effects of assertiveness training technique among male and female students who participated in the treatment.

Finally, the findings of this study also indicated that there was slight difference in the effects of assertiveness training technique on social maladjustment among junior and senior secondary school students. The result of research question three showed that the increase in social adjustment among junior students was slightly higher than that of their senior students after they had participated in assertiveness training technique treatment. This suggests that the junior students seem to have benefited a bit more from assertiveness training technique treatment than the senior students. This finding is in consonance with the previous findings by (Animasahu & Oladeni, 2022; Oguzie, Ezunu, Uba & Osagie-Obazee, 2018; Osarenren & Ajaero, 2018) who reported that junior participants benefited more from assertiveness training technique than their senior counterparts.

However, the difference in the effects of assertiveness training technique on social maladjustment among the junior and senior students who participated in the experiment was not significant. This is because the test of null hypothesis three showed that there was no significant difference in the effects of assertiveness training technique on social maladjustment between junior and senior students who received assertiveness training treatment. Perhaps, the reason for the insignificant difference in the effect of assertiveness training technique in enhancing the social adjustment of the students is because both the junior and senior students who participated in the assertiveness training treatment were given equal attention in the same condition. Moreso, there was no room for hierarchy, rather positive climate was created to ensure free flow of interaction between the junior and senior students. Maybe, those measures taken by the research assistants during the experiment encouraged both the junior and senior students to participate actively and gain similarly during the experiment. This could mean that all things being equal, both junior and senior students who are finding it difficult to adjust in their social environment can be successfully treated with assertiveness training technique.

Conclusions

This study investigated the effect of assertiveness training technique on social maladjustment among secondary school students in Imo state. The study concluded that assertiveness training technique was significantly effective on social maladjustment among the students who participated in the experimental treatment. It was also concluded that assertiveness training technique was more effective in enhancing male and junior students' social adjustment, respectively.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. School counsellors should be constantly trained and retrained through organized conferences, seminars and workshops on the use of assertiveness training technique in treating clients who are socially maladjusted.
2. Parents should encourage their children to participate in social activities such as games, debates and other group functions.
3. Parents should also refer their children to counsellors for professional assistance whenever they have difficulties adjusting to their social environment.
4. Teachers should carefully observe their students' behaviours within the classroom setting and quickly refer the socially maladjusted ones to the school counsellor for professional assistance.
5. Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON) should collaborate with government to ensure that adequate qualified counsellors are employed in secondary schools to take adequate care of the students' psychological needs.

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