

SELF-MANAGEMENT COUNSELLING TECHNIQUES' EFFECT ON AVOIDANCE BEHAVIOUR AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN LAFIAGI KWARA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

School avoidance behaviour among secondary school students poses a serious threat to academic success, emotional wellbeing, and social development. Although counselling interventions have been widely explored, few studies have examined their effectiveness across distinct behavioural problems such as general avoidance. This study emphasizes the importance of dimension-specific, evidence-based interventions in addressing school avoidance behaviour by determining the effects of Self-Management Counselling Technique (SMCT) on academic and conflict dimensions of school avoidance behaviour among secondary school students in Lafiagi, Kwara State, Nigeria. The study adopted quasi-experimental research design involving pretest-posttest only and focused on 200 secondary school students identified with school avoidance behaviour in Lafiagi Kwara state, Nigeria. Participants were identified using the School Avoidance Behaviour Checklist (SABC) and 20 most ranked students were purposively selected. Data was collected from the identified students using School Avoidance Behaviour Questionnaire (SABQ) and were analyzed using paired sample t-tests. Two null hypotheses were raised and tested at 0.05 level of significant. Results indicated that SMCT ($t = 41.584$; $p = .000 < .05$) significantly reduced academic-related avoidance behaviour, but do not have a significant effect on conflict-related avoidance behaviour ($t = .410$, $p = .691 > .05$). Thus, concluded that self-management counselling technique hard positive effect on academic dimension of school avoidance behaviour but not on conflict dimension of school avoidance behaviour among the

students. The study recommended the use of SMCT for managing academic-related school avoidance behaviour, and integration of other strategies for conflict-related school avoidance behaviour.

Keywords: Self-management technique, School avoidance, Behaviour, Academic avoidance and Conflict avoidance

Introduction

One of the greatest barriers to change is staying away from it. Almost everyone, engages in avoidance behaviour every day; either in the form of procrastination, putting off a difficult conversation, postponing an appointment and much more. The issue here is that avoidance prevents students from confronting anxiety, or the things students fear and which is holding them back.

A student is exhibiting school avoidance behaviours when he or she either does not want to go to school or has trouble staying around all day. It's not uncommon for students to have student-motivated reluctance to attend school or stay in class for the entire day. Over the course of a few years throughout school, it can start with occasional absences and gradually escalate into a major issue. However, in most cases, symptoms that eventually lead to avoiding school start to accumulate slowly. According to the School Avoidance Alliance (SAA, 2024), school avoidance may manifest in several ways, such as complete absence from school, attending but leaving during the day, frequently retreating to the nurse's office, guidance counselor, or another perceived safe space, or deliberately arriving late to miss one or more class periods. It may also involve experiencing significant distress at the thought of going to school (SAA, 2024). Thus, school avoidance is regarded as a condition in which students, due to anxiety, depression, or social challenges, deliberately stay away from school because attendance triggers stress and discomfort.

In schools, avoidance behaviour is viewed as a maladaptive response in which students alter their actions to evade challenging academic tasks, thoughts, or emotions. Rather than confronting stressors, they attempt to escape them. This behaviour is considered unhealthy because it often intensifies stress instead of resolving its underlying causes. Procrastination is a common example, where a student delays or avoids completing necessary tasks, or even tries to suppress thoughts about them, despite the resulting increase in stress. In whatever case, avoidance behaviour is problematic for students and teachers. It negatively impacts students' learning and can place students at risk for being held back (Saxena, 2022). School avoidance behaviour can be assessed in various dimensions of Academic (avoiding all forms of curricular/cognitive activities in school) and Conflict (avoiding direct confrontations or situation that could lead to misunderstanding with other students) Students' use of avoidance strategies goes beyond merely evading effort. Often, they adopt avoidance as a defense mechanism, particularly when they feel

unprepared for a task and wish to shield their self-perception as competent individuals. To address these cognitive and emotional challenges, psychological interventions like the self-management counselling techniques may be necessary. Therefore, equipping students with the skills they need to achieve success, while also creating opportunities for them to experience and showcase that success, can help reduce their reliance on avoidance strategies. In essence, it becomes imperative to find a way of encouraging students to be active and proactive in the daily school activities. Such encouragement could come in the form of cognitive diffusion and self-management counselling interventions.

The school, especially classrooms can be a complex environment at times and students can choose to engage in a plethora of behaviours (adaptive and maladaptive) among these maladaptive behaviours is avoidance behaviour. The School Avoidance Alliance (SAA) emphasizes the role of negative automatic thoughts in distorted thinking, a concept developed by Aaron Beck, founder of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, in the 1960s. These Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANTs) often involve pessimistic beliefs about oneself, the world, or the future and are especially powerful among students experiencing school avoidance. Research indicates that a large proportion of human thoughts are negative and repetitive, yet most worries never materialize. This suggests that excessive pessimism fuels unnecessary stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms, reinforcing avoidance behaviours among students.

Avoidance behaviour provides short-term emotional relief but ultimately strengthens fear and distress over time. From a cognitive perspective, including the work of Martin Seligman and Johnson (1973), avoidance reinforces the belief that feared situations are dangerous and unmanageable. By evading uncomfortable thoughts, emotions, or tasks, individuals miss opportunities to learn that they can cope effectively. In academic settings, this manifests as task avoidance, procrastination, classroom disruptions, or withdrawal, often driven by fear of failure, anxiety, or low self-esteem. Similarly, conflict avoidance occurs when students evade disagreements due to fear of negative reactions, which may stem from low confidence or avoidant attachment patterns developed in childhood.

The exact causes of school avoidance are not always clear, but psychological issues such as anxiety and depression, along with social challenges like peer rejection, lack of friendships, or bullying, often play a role. When avoidance intensifies to the extent that a student misses substantial amounts of school, it may signal more serious conditions, including childhood depression or anxiety-related disorders such as social anxiety, separation anxiety, or panic disorder. What distinguishes school avoidance from other disorders is that the difficulties are specifically tied to the school environment, whereas broader disorders affect multiple areas of a child's life. For instance, a highly sensitive student might react with fear to a teacher's strictness or criticism. Additionally, changes in classroom structure, staffing, or curriculum may trigger avoidance behaviours in students with special educational needs (Scott, 2024).

The consequences of school avoidance are far-reaching. Although avoidance may create temporary comfort, it gradually limits personal growth, weakens self-confidence, and heightens anxiety. Over time, suppressed emotions intensify and unresolved issues accumulate, affecting academic performance, relationships, and overall wellbeing. In schools, avoidance behaviours such as procrastination, reluctance to ask questions, or disengagement from tasks reduce learning opportunities and reinforce a cycle of fear and withdrawal, ultimately diminishing students' quality of life.

Self-management offers a constructive counselling strategy for addressing avoidance behaviours. Defined by Cooper, Heron, and Heward (2014) as the application of behaviour-change strategies to achieve intentional improvements, self-management empowers students to regulate emotions, set goals, and modify their environment to support positive behaviour. Drawing from behavioural and social learning principles, techniques such as self-observation, environmental restructuring, goal-setting, and self-reinforcement help students replace maladaptive avoidance patterns with productive habits. By strengthening self-discipline, resilience, and responsible decision-making, self-management enables students to confront academic and interpersonal challenges more effectively.

Self-management can range from simple individual actions to more complex plans and strategies (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007). At its core, the concept rests on the idea that while people are shaped by their environment, they also have the ability to modify that environment in ways that influence their own behaviour. For students, developing self-management skills is particularly vital. With the demands of balancing multiple subjects, extracurricular commitments, and constant digital distractions, these skills play a crucial role in meeting academic challenges. More than just staying organized or meeting deadlines, self-management is about exercising control over oneself and one's learning process. Ultimately, it enables students to take ownership of their educational journey, navigating challenges while fostering both academic success and personal growth (Omisakin & Ncama, 2011).

The students often avoid group project that associate them with a classmate they do not like or where their preferred candidate is not made the group leader. The thought that a particular teacher is wicked and too strict makes them avoid his class and they often avoid exams they perceive the teacher will rather deliberately fail them no matter how much they try. These erroneous feelings and thoughts are detrimental to the students' academic progress and achievement in school. Coban (2013) discovered that, compared to strategies such as problem-solving and seeking social support, avoidance was linked to a reduced sense of self-worth. Thus, for the students to prosper in school and in life, there is the need for counselling intervention to defuse their maladaptive thinking and feeling and/or train them in self-management skill to mend their school avoidance behaviour problems.

Objective of the Study

The study aimed at examining the effect of self-management counselling on school avoidance behaviour among secondary school students in Lafiagi Kwara State, Nigeria. The

study specifically examined the following objectives:

- i. Impact of Self-Management Counselling Technique on the Academic dimension of School Avoidance Behaviour among Secondary School Students in the Lafiagi, Kwara State, Nigeria.
- ii. Impact of self-management counselling technique on conflict dimension of school avoidance behaviour among secondary school students in Lafiagi Kwara State, Nigeria.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significant:

- i. There is no significant effect of self-management counselling technique on academic dimension of avoidance behaviour among secondary school students in Lafiagi educational zone.
- ii. There is no significant effect of self-management counselling technique on conflict dimension of avoidance behaviour among secondary school students in Lafiagi educational zone.

Methodology

The study employed a quasi-experimental research design, specifically the pre-test, post-test format. This design was chosen in line with Gopalan, Rosinger, and Ahn (2020), who note that quasi-experimental approaches help minimize the time and resources required for experimentation. Accordingly, the researcher adopted this design to investigate the effect of cognitive defusion and self-management techniques on avoidance behaviour among secondary school students in the Lafiagi, Kwara State.

The general population of this study comprises of all Public Senior Secondary School II (SSII) Students in Lafiagi Education Zone, Kwara State, Nigeria; totaling, 1,649 students. The target population however consists of Senior Secondary School Students (SSII) identified with school avoidance behaviour from the schools; Estimated at 200. These students were identified from the schools using a check list School avoidance Behaviour Checklist (SABC) adapted from Kearney and Albano (2007). The population distribution of the SSII students in the schools are therefore presented in Table 1:

Table 1: *Population Distribution by School*

S/N0	Schools	General Population	Target Population
1	Lafiagi Secondary School	234	25
2	Government Secondary School Lafiagi	701	65
3	Moh'd Shaaba Senior Secondary School Lafiagi	479	75
4	GDSS Lafiagi	235	35
	Total	1,649	200

The sample size of this study consists of 20 students, determined through purposive sampling techniques. Two Senior Secondary Schools, having the highest number of students identified with school avoidance behaviour were purposively selected as the participating schools. The study adopted a group counselling approach therefore, only an appropriate group counselling size is required as suggested by Oladele (2000) and Ezhumalai (2018). Thus, 20 students which is 10% of the identified students were purposively selected from These two schools (10 students each). This is because the set of students ranked 1st to 10th in each school are in dare need of the intervention. The sample distribution is presented in table 2:

Table2: *Sample Distribution by School*

S/N0	Schools	Target Population	Sample
1	Lafiagi Secondary School	25	-
2	Government Secondary School Lafiagi	65	10
3	Moh'd Shaaba Senior Secondary School Lafiagi	75	10
4	Government Day Secondary School Lafiagi	35	-
	Total	200	20

Two instruments were used in this study, they are: School Avoidance Behaviour Checklist (SABC) and School Avoidance Behaviour Questionnaire (SABQ).

The School Avoidance Behaviour Checklist (SABC) was adapted from Kearney, and Albano (2007). It has 24 items, with 7-point rating scale of Never (0), Seldom (1), Sometimes (2), Half the time (3), Usually (4), Almost Always (5), Always (6). In order to create a uniform rating (6-point Likert scale) for both instruments it was suggested that same ratings as used in the SABQ be adopted. therefore Seldom (S), Sometimes (ST), Half the time (HT) Usually (U) Almost Always (AA) Always (A) was used. The instrument, School Avoidance Behaviour Checklist (SABC) was analyzed and on the scoring format of: Seldom (S), Sometimes (ST), Half the time (HT) Usually (U) Almost Always (AA) Always (A)with scoring format rated as 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 respectively.

Scores between 24 – 50 (Low)

Scores between 51 – 90 (Moderate)

Scores between 91 and above(High)

The maximum score a respondent could get when all items are responded to is 144 (6x24) while the lowest mark is 24 (1x24). Respondents who scored between 24 and 50 were considered as having a low level of school avoidance behaviour while respondents with score between 51 and 90 were regarded as having a Moderate level of avoidance behaviour and those with score between 91 and 144 were regarded as having a high level of school avoidance behaviour. Only those with high level of school avoidance behaviour were considered.

School Avoidance Behaviour Questionnaire (SABQ) on the other hand, has 20 Items in different dimensions of: Academic Avoidance and Conflict Avoidance. It was adapted from General and Specific Avoidance Questionnaire (GSAQ) by Stemment, Roger, Kuntz and Borill (2015). It is in different components of academic and conflict avoidance with 6-point Likert scale of: Strongly Disagree (SD) Moderately Disagree (MD) Slightly Disagree (SD) Slightly Agree (SA) Moderately Agree (MA) Strongly Agree (StA). Originally, it was on two Likert scale of (true or false) rated (1 and 0) but in the process of validation, it was observed that 6 Likert scale be used instead of two Likert scale. The instrument, School Avoidance Behaviour Questionnaire (SABQ) was analyzed and on the scoring format of: Strongly Disagree (SD) Moderately Disagree (MD) Slightly Disagree (SD) Slightly Agree (SA) Moderately Agree (MA) Strongly Agree (StA).with scoring format rated as 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 respectively.

To ensure the validity of the instrument, it was subjected to expert review. Specifically, a specialist in measurement and evaluation as well as research experts from the Department of Educational Psychology and Counselling, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, assessed the instrument for content relevance, clarity, and appropriateness. To achieve the reliability of the instrument, 40 copies of the SABQ was administered to 40 students in Government Day Secondary School (GDSS) Gbugbu which is not part of the study but shares similar characteristics. Cronbach's Alpha was used to calculate its reliability coefficient to determine whether or not the instrument could be reliable enough for the study. The reliability index was 0.84

Treatment Procedure

The research was conducted across three distinct stages: pre-treatment, treatment, and post-treatment phases.

Pre-Treatment Phase

The first phase in the treatment procedure was the pre-treatment phase. This phase was the preliminary stage for the diagnostic process and serves as a means of identifying the target participants through their respective school counsellor who served as research assistant; the approach also helped determining the actual state of the affair with the target population

(students identified with high index of school avoidant behaviour) before being exposed to a particular counselling intervention. This was done a week before the full commencement of the treatment intervention. After this an adapted questionnaire “School Avoidance Behaviour Questionnaire” (SABQ) was administered on the participants to get baseline information on their state of affair regarding avoidance behaviour.

Treatment Phase

The treatment phase represents the second stage of the intervention process. At this stage, participants were directly exposed to the treatment conditions, specifically addressing their high levels of school avoidance behaviour. The intervention involved interactive sessions between the researcher and the participants, which spanned a duration of 8 weeks with a total of 12 hours of engagement for both groups (A and B). Each group attended two counselling sessions per week, with each session lasting 45 minutes. Data collected for this study were analyzed using inferential statistics of paired sample t-test. The two hypotheses were tested using paired sample t-test since it is testing differences between the pretest and posttest effect.

Results

In this study, two null hypotheses were formulated and tested at the 0.05 level of significance using the paired samples t-test. The findings are presented as follows:

H01: There is no significant effect of the self-management counselling technique on the academic dimension of school avoidance behaviour among secondary school students in the Lafiagi, Kwara State.

Table 1: *Paired sampled t-test comparing pretest and posttest mean score of self-management counselling technique on academic dimension of school avoidance behaviour*

Variables	N	Mean	SD	t	df	P
Pretest	10	59.60	2.31			
				41.58	9	.000
Posttest	10	22.90	1.52			

Table 1 presents the analysis results, showing a pre-test mean of 59.60 and a post-test mean of 22.90, with a t-value of 41.58 and a p-value of .000, which is below the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis stating that self-management counselling technique has no significant effect on the academic dimension of school avoidance behaviour is rejected. This therefore implies that self-management counselling technique has no effect on academic dimension of school avoidance behaviour among the students.

H02: There is no significant effect of the self-management counselling technique on the conflict dimension of school avoidance behaviour among secondary school students in the Lafiagi, Kwara State.

Table2: Paired sampled t-test comparing pretest and posttest mean score of Self-Management Counselling Technique on conflict Dimension of School avoidance behaviour

Variables	N	Mean	SD	t	df	P
pretest	10	18.90	7.95	.410	9	.691
posttest	10	18.00	1.82			

Table 2 presents the analysis, showing a pretest mean of 18.90 and a posttest mean of 18.00, with $t = 0.410$ and $p = 0.691$, which is greater than the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant effect of the self-management counselling technique on the conflict dimension of school avoidance behaviour is retained. This therefore implies that self-management counselling technique has no significant effect on conflict dimension of school avoidance behaviour among the students.

Discussion of the Findings

The findings revealed a significant effect of the self-management counselling technique on the academic dimension of school avoidance behaviour among secondary school students in the Lafiagi Educational Zone of Edu LGA, Kwara State. This indicates that the technique was effective in reducing academic avoidance behaviours among the students. The result aligns with the study of Uzoekwe et al. (2022), which examined the “Effects of Self-Management Techniques on Mathematics Avoidance Behaviour among Junior Secondary School Students.” Their findings similarly showed that the self-management technique was effective, as evidenced by pretest–posttest mean differences. This further implies that self-management is a viable approach for reducing mathematics and academic avoidance behaviours. The result is also in line with that of Lauren, Megan and Amanda (2019) on “Effect of Self-management technique on School avoidance behaviour among High School Students” it indicated that the self-management intervention with peer training significantly reduced school avoidance behaviour and improve academic achievement in the treatment group. Similarly, the present study supports Mooney, Ryan, Uhing, Reid & Epstein (2005) whose study was about “Using Self-management and Reinforcement to reduce school avoidance behaviour and Improve Homework Completion among Middle School Students”. The result showed that the self-management and reinforcement techniques significantly improved the students’ engagement rate especially in homework completion while it reduces school avoidance behaviour. This was reflected in the response of the treatment group compared to the control group. The result apart from the increased self-image and academic engagement among the students, also reduced disruptive and school avoidance behaviours among the students.

The finding also revealed that there is no significant effect of self-management counselling technique on conflict dimension of school avoidance behaviour among secondary school students in Lafiagi educational zone of Edu LGA, kwara state. self-management techniques had no significant impact on conflict dimension of school avoidance behaviour. This is reflective in

the insignificant pretest-posttest mean score differences (18.90 and 18.00) respectively. The finding reflects a limitation in self-management interventions in managing this dimension of school avoidance behaviour. The intervention primarily focused on intrapersonal regulation (thoughts, feelings, behaviours) and not directly on interpersonal skills. The study found no significant effect of self-management counselling technique on the conflict dimension of school avoidance behaviour indicating that interpersonal issues, such as conflicts with peers, teachers other or authority figures, were not sufficiently addressed by the interventions. self-management focus on intrapersonal change, it may not directly influence interpersonal conflict resolution. This claim is supported by Daly and Sugai (2001), who emphasized the importance of social skills training and conflict resolution strategies in addressing peer-related and authority-related school avoidance. However, the study contradicts Maeda and Heyne (2019) whose study involves the use of self-management to enforce rapid return to school and discouraging school avoidance behaviour resulting from fear of conflict among Japanese adolescents. The adolescents recorded at least 85% classroom attendance within three months, and this level of consistency was sustained for the following six months, during which they remained in class at least 85% of the time. This outcome confirms the effectiveness of self-management in enhancing emotional well-being and discouraging school avoidance behaviour.

Conclusion

The following conclusions were however, made:

Self-management counselling technique had significant effect on academic dimension of school avoidance behaviour among secondary school students in Lafiagi, Kwara State. However, self-management counselling technique had no significant effect on conflict dimension of school avoidance behaviour among secondary school students in Lafiagi, Kwara State. Hence not adequate in managing conflict dimension of school avoidance behaviour.

Recommendations

the study, recommended that:

- i. School counsellors be trained and encouraged on the use and adoption of self-management counselling technique in addressing the issue of self-management counselling technique to address academic dimension of school avoidance behaviour
- ii. Additional interventions such as peer mediation and conflict resolution training should be implemented by counsellors to target the conflict dimension of school avoidance.
- iii. Government makers should ensure that teacher training programs include modules on identifying and responding to school avoidance behaviour to create a more supportive learning environment.
- iv. Parents should be engaged through workshops and counselling sessions to reinforce the positive behavioural strategies at home.

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