



EFFECT OF ASSERTIVENESS TRAINING TECHNIQUE ON BULLYING BEHAVIOUR OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract:

This study examined the effect of the Assertiveness Training technique on bullying behaviour of secondary school students in Anambra State. Two research questions guided the study, while two null hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significance. The study adopted a quasi-experimental, non-equivalent pre-test and post-test, control group design. A sample of 94 student bullies made up 54 males and 40 females were purposively drawn from two schools with the highest number of bullies and used for the study. Students Bullying Behaviour Identification Scale (SBBIS) and Students Bullying Behaviour Questionnaire (SBBQ) were adapted as instruments for data collection. The reliability of the instruments was established using Cronbach Alpha and with coefficients of 0.88 for SBBQ and 0.96 for SBBIS. SBBIS was administered two weeks before the commencement of the treatment aimed at identifying and screening of bullies while SBBQ was used for the pretesting and post-testing for the three groups. Mean was used to answer research questions, while the null hypotheses were tested using Analysis of Co-Variance (ANCOVA). The findings of the study revealed that the Assertiveness Training technique was effective in reducing bullying behaviours of secondary school students. The findings equally indicated that the difference in the effectiveness of the Assertiveness Training technique on bullying behaviours of male and female secondary school students was not significant. Based on the findings of the study it was recommended among others that assertiveness training techniques should be used by guidance counsellors working in secondary schools should modify behaviours of students with bullying behaviour.

Keywords: effect, assertiveness training technique, bullying behaviour, secondary school, students

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1. Introduction

Bullying seems rampant in secondary schools globally. It is a maladaptive behaviour that can happen anywhere. It is a serious issue that impacts on the school experience that occurs during or after school hours. It could happen to children or adults in places such as: in the home, at public facilities, in the buses, in the parks, in the neighbourhood or at school. Bullying occurs in many places especially in organized communities such as schools (secondary, boarding schools and tertiary institutions). It could take place in internet and phone communication e.g. texting, Facebook manipulation of photos. School bullying occurs in places such as toilets, hallways, playgrounds, classrooms, changing rooms and corridors where children and adolescents are less seen and supervised by teachers and staff.

Moreover, based on the notion put forward by Tambawal and Umar (2017), it is believed that there are many factors that contribute to school bullying. For instance, the composition of the peer group is made up of children from different backgrounds, for this reason it is likely that ill-behaved or bad eggs are often found in the group whose influence often leads to criminal tendencies by the group like bullying, petty stealing and so. Similarly, Omoteso in Tambawal and Umar (2017) noted that parents who model aggression as a way of meeting their needs or who use harsh or aggressive methods of discipline are significantly more likely to have children who engage in aggression. On the other hand, social learning theorists attribute bullying to both modelling and operant conditioning. Davison and Neale in Mugove (2017) in recognition of this notion asserted that children can learn aggressive behaviours such as bullying from adults who behave in that way. This implies that children who are from families where bullying and aggressive behaviours are practiced are more likely to practice the aggressive behaviours which may lead to bullying behaviour. Other factors attributed to the increasing rate of bullying in secondary schools as stated by Superville (2011) include low self-esteem, lack of self-confidence, negative interpersonal orientation and poor social skills among others. Also Cook, Williams, Guerra, Kim, and Sadek, (2010) believed that factors like family home environment, school climate, community factors, peer status and peer influence can be related to bullying behaviour.

The involvement of the student in bullying is diversified in the sense that bullying takes different forms or patterns and inflicts varying degrees of physical, psychological and emotional pain on the victims. Lee (2017) identified some forms of bullying behaviour such as issuing of threat, stealing, injuring someone, destroying property, issuing an embarrassing statement, peddling false rumour against another person, humiliating another person, teasing, name-calling, sending an abusive text message, physical attack and several other dehumanizing actions against people. Mitsopoulou and Giovazolias (2013) identified some kinds of bullying namely; direct/physical/verbal attack, indirect aggression, relational aggression (damage to peer relationship), and social aggression (damage to self-esteem or social status). Bullying also comes as exclusion, gossip and non-verbal body language. It could range from direct to indirect harassment,

from minor irritation to major assault, from “just having a bit of fun” to breaking the law. All of such forms affect individually, or collectively, and contributes to a child’s bullying. School bullying in recent times has become a wider spread issue that affects school students in many parts of their lives such as; psychologically, educationally and professionally. The use of power to suppress the weak is the order of the day in public secondary schools here in Anambra State. This affects the students’ academic achievement since bullied students feel fear and weak and at the same time, it affects students’ personality traits and self-confidence. Therefore, such a situation makes bullied students in public secondary schools in Anambra State unable to follow or to pay attention to their studies and even they might not like to go to school. Sometimes they miss opportunities to participate with their mates or even enjoy school activities. In this vein, Shahriar, Zhicheng and Yu (2015) submitted that bullying is deemed as a serious problem in academic settings in all parts of the world. Shahriar et al. further submitted that bullying has a negative impact on academic performance.

Students involved in bullying in any way are at a greater risk for negative experiences in school. Bullying involved students are more likely to carry weapons, including guns, to school on a semi-regular basis and are less likely to perceive their schools as safe places to be (Minnesota Department of Education, 2013). Young people who bully others are also more likely to do poorly in school; turn to violence as a way to deal with problems; damage property or steal; abuse drugs or alcohol; and get in trouble with the law (Child Family Community Australia, 2014). Observations have shown that secondary school students especially in Anambra State are overly aggressive or controlling towards their peers; un-motivating towards academic pursuit, have the risk of stress-related issues, have psychological and behavioural problems, experience frustration, attempt suicide and depression and so on.

Lohmann (2014) reported that victims of bullying are unhappy, anxious, depressed and sometimes find it hard to concentrate on their studies. Ohanaka and Okobia (2017) made it clear that bullying does not only harm both the intended victims and the perpetrator. It may affect the climate of the school, the morale of teachers and indirectly the ability of all the students to learn to the best of their ability. Even students who are not directly involved in bullying or victims of bullying also find the school environment hostile and not conducive for learning (Ugwu & Olatunbosun, 2016). Students who are bullied often suffer from problems in school competence, social competence and find it difficult to negotiate with parents and teachers. In addition, students who bully are more likely to abuse substances, engage in earlier sexual activity, get into fights, drop out of school, and become abusive adults towards family, spouses, and other children who are not considered bullies (stopbullying.gov, 2014).

Bullying in schools has constituted an obstacle to effective teaching and learning in secondary schools in Anambra State. It is an anomaly that tends to affect students’ mental and physical health, their self-esteem, their school attendance, and their academic performance. The effects of bullying as Kowalski and Limber (2013) noted, not only harm students for the duration of the incident, but they can continue to hinder individuals long

after their school years are over. This perhaps could be the reason why Vaillaincourt, Hymel, and McDougall (2013) in their study on the neurology of bullying reported that experiences of victimisation can affect an individual's development, putting them at risk for life-long poor mental and physical health. Van der Plog, Steglich, Salmivalli, and Veenstra (2015) found that victims of frequent and multiple victimisation, and victims who were victimised by several bullies, suffered more than those whose experiences were less frequent or perpetrated by fewer peers.

Research such as Eweniyi, Adeoye, Ayodele and Adebayo (2013), and Ikediashi and Akande (2015) have suggested the use of effective psychological techniques like assertiveness training, self-management, assertiveness training in the management of bullying and prevention of future occurrences. Aderanti and Hassan (2011) also noted that there is a wide array of interventions that could correct bullying behaviour; which include assertiveness training; assertiveness training; token economy; thought-stopping; self-management; reinforcement; punishment; modelling and family therapy.

Assertiveness Training is a technique that deals with the expression of one's rights, needs, feelings and opinions in such a way as not to interfere with another person's needs, rights or feelings. It is a behaviour modification therapy developed by Wolpe in 1958 which is used to help individuals openly express their thoughts and feelings. It refers to being able to stand up for oneself, making sure your opinions and feelings are considered and not letting other people always get their way. It is a way of communicating and behaving with others that helps the person to become more confident and aware of themselves. Michelle (2017) saw it as a form of behaviour therapy designed to empower people, help them stand up for themselves, in more contemporary terms. In this study, the assertiveness training technique is viewed as a behaviour modification technique aimed at inculcating reasonable social competence and confidence into socially anxious individuals to enable them to feel free in their interactions with their social environment as social beings so as to achieve their maximum potential.

Researchers have also shown that assertiveness training improves human relations; affects personality behaviour positively, increases positive personal reactions, and reduces social anxiety (Lee, Chang, Chu, Yang, Ou, Chung, & Chou, 2013; Lambertz & Blight, 2016). According to Waksman and Steven in Keser and Barlas (2016), assertiveness training helps in developing adolescents' social skills, reduces self-humiliation and increases self-control.

Assertiveness training as Keliat, Tololiu, Daulima, and Erawati (2015) observed is effective in improving social coping skills in adolescents, whether they be bullies or victims of bullying, modifying aggressive behaviour, raising individual social skills and emotional health. Herman, Nurshal and Novrianda (2020) in their study observed that assertiveness skills could be maintained as an intervention that will be able to prevent bullying in both male and female adolescents. Hence, this researcher is motivated to examine the effect of assertiveness training techniques on bullying behaviour of secondary school adolescents.

2. Statement of the Problem

Bullying has been a serious and complex problem among students in schools, especially in secondary schools. In Anambra state, most of the violent behaviours prevalent in public secondary schools seem to be a result of bullying. This problem is often associated with short- and long-term effects on the adolescents' psychosocial adjustment and later life outcomes. Bullying behaviour disrupts the peace and tranquillity necessary for the normal functioning of our schools. It has a disastrous effect on the bullied and the bully. Victims of bullying are unhappy, anxious, depressed, may suffer physical injuries, have a poor self-image and may find it difficult to concentrate on their studies because of the bullying they experienced. They sometimes may stay away from school because of fear of the bullies. These situations may lead to health problems, poor academic performance and failure. Also, lessons are disrupted, lives of students and teachers are under threat and the school administrators spent much time and money to handle issues that arise from bullying.

Furthermore, students who enact bullying may be rejected or disliked by their peers or may be at risk for criminal arrest, school drop-outs and physical violence, for the reason that bullying is aggressive and violent behaviour. Perpetrators of bullying suffer from internalizing difficulties, including depression, anxiety and loneliness due to the psychological distress they suffer. The school climate also is negatively affected by bullying. Students who are not directly involved in bullying will find the school environment as not conducive for learning due to aggression and hostility in the school environment.

Considering the enormous consequences of bullying within the school system, various corrective measures have been in use which includes corporal punishment, rustication and expulsion from school among others. All these measures however have not yielded the desired result. Thus, considering the obvious devastating effects of bullying behaviour in the school communities, researchers have used some psychological techniques such as self-mentoring, self-management, modelling, and behavioural rehearsal in an attempt to bring solutions to the problem of bullying; the problem seems to be increasing in an alarming rate. Moreover, many of these studies were done outside Awka education zone of Anambra state. This has necessitated this study that sought to determine the effect of assertiveness training technique on bullying behaviour of secondary school students in Awka Education Zone of Anambra State.

2.1. Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to examine the effect of assertiveness training on bullying behaviour of male and female secondary school students in Awka Education Zone. Specifically, the study sought to:

- 1) Determine the effect of assertiveness training techniques on bullying behaviour among secondary school students in Awka Education Zone.

- 2) Find out the difference in the effectiveness of Assertiveness training technique on bullying behaviour of male and female secondary school students in Awka Education Zone.

2.2. Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

- 1) What is the effect of assertiveness training technique on bullying behaviour among secondary school students in Awka Education Zone when compared with those exposed to conventional counselling using their pre-test and post-test mean scores?
- 2) What is the difference in the effectiveness of the Assertiveness training technique on bullying behaviour of male and female secondary school students in Awka Education Zone when compared using their pre-test and post-test mean scores?

2.3. Null Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at .05 statistical level of significance:

- 1) The effect of Assertiveness training technique on bullying behaviour of secondary school students in Awka Education Zone when compared with those exposed to conventional counselling using their pre-test and post-test mean scores is not significant.
- 2) There is no significant difference in the effectiveness of the Assertiveness training technique on bullying behaviours of male and female secondary school students in Awka Education Zone when compared using their pre-test and post-test mean scores.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Research Design

This study is a non-randomized pre-test, post-test, control group quasi-experimental research. The study involved two treatment conditions (Experimental and Control group), each comprising of students that showed a tendency to bullying.

3.2. Research Setting

The study was conducted in Awka Education Zone of Anambra State, Nigeria. The area was chosen for the study based on observation by the researcher has recorded a high rate of bullying behaviour among secondary school students irrespective of the punitive measures taken to stop them from being bullied.

3.3. Participants

The sample of the study comprised 94 students selected from a population of 586 students. The population comprised all the students identified with bullying tendencies.

The selection was based on the level of their inclination to bullying indicated by their pre-test scores obtained through the administration of the questionnaire.

3.4. Instrument for Data Collection

The two instruments for data collection were Students Bullying Behaviour Identification Scale (SBBIS) and Students Bullying Behaviour Questionnaire (SBBQ). Students bullying behaviour Identification Scale (SBBIS) was developed by Usman 2019 and adapted by the researcher. It was designed for the purpose of identifying the students who are bullies. It has a four-point rating scale with response options of Strongly agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and strongly disagree (SD). The second instrument used in the study titled "Students Bullying Behaviour Questionnaire" (SBBQ) was developed by Isiyaku (2016). It was adapted by the researcher. The items were placed on a four-point scale of Strongly agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly disagree (SD). Using Cronbach Alpha, the reliability coefficient of 0.96 for SBBIS was obtained.

3.5. Experimental Procedure

The researcher obtained the approval of the schools' management for carrying on with the research through a consent letter that was given to the management. The experimental training sessions then took place at the two schools chosen for the study. The researcher, with the assistance of the guidance counsellors in the schools as research assistants, conducted a training programme which was held for eight weeks for both the treatment and control group. The treatment sessions were carried out in the school's counselling centres. The day and time for each group's training were established and maintained throughout the treatment.

Each training session lasted for 50 minutes using the counselling scheduled periods as specified by the schools. The participants in the experimental groups were trained on Socio-cognitive Skills while those in the control group were received the usual conventional group counselling. Each of the groups received training for eight weeks. After the eight weeks of treatments, the Students bullying behaviour Identification Scale (SBBIS) was re-administered on all the participants in both the experimental and control groups. The scores obtained were stated as the post-test. The post-test scores along with the earlier elicited pre-test scores were then collated and analysed.

3.6. Method of Data Analysis

The completed instruments were scored following the scoring instructions provided in the Students bullying behaviour Identification Scale (SBBIS) manual. The research question was answered using statistical meanwhile the null hypotheses were tested using the Analysis of Co-variance (ANCOVA).

4. Results

The data analysed are presented as follows.

Research Question 1: What is the effect of the Assertiveness Training technique on bullying behaviour of secondary school students when compared with those exposed to conventional counselling using their pre-test and post-test mean scores?

Table 1: Pre-test and Post-test Bullying Behaviour Mean Scores of students Exposed to Assertiveness Training Technique and those treated with Conventional Counselling (Norm= 70.00)

Source of variation	N	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Lost Mean	Remark
Assertiveness Training Technique	28	80.78	63.82	16.96	Effective
Control	35	80.63	78.09	2.54	

The result in Table 1 shows that the pre-test mean scores of the students exposed to Assertiveness Training is 80.78 while the post-test mean score is 63.82, with a reduction in mean of 16.96. While those in the control group who received conventional counselling had pre-test mean score of 80.63 and post-test mean score of 78.09 with a reduction in mean of 2.54. Thus, with a post-test mean score of 63.82 which is below the norm 70.00, the Assertiveness Training technique is effective in reducing the bullying behaviour of secondary school students.

Research Question 2: What is the difference in the effectiveness of the Assertiveness training technique on bullying behaviour of male and female secondary school students when compared using their pre-test and post-test mean scores?

Table 2: Pre-test and Post-test Bullying Behaviour Mean Scores of Male and Female Students Exposed to Assertiveness Training Technique

Source of variation	N	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Reduced Mean	Remark
Male	17	80.71	64.00	16.71	More effective
Female	11	80.55	61.91	18.64	

The result in Table 2 revealed that the pre-test mean scores of male students exposed to Assertiveness training is 80.71 while the post-test mean score is 64.00, with a mean reduction of 16.71; while the pre-test mean of female students who were also treated with Assertiveness training technique have pre-test mean score of 80.55 and post-test mean score of 61.91 with a reduction in mean of 18.64. Therefore, with a mean reduction score of female students being higher than the mean reduction score of male students, the Assertiveness training technique was more effective in reducing bullying behaviour of female secondary school students.

4.1. Testing the Null Hypotheses

Null Hypothesis 1: The effect of the Assertiveness Training technique on bullying behaviour of secondary school students when compared to those in the control group using their pre-test and post-test mean scores is not significant.

Table 3: ANCOVA on the Bullying Behaviour Post-test Mean Scores of Students Exposed to Assertiveness Training Technique and those who Received Conventional Counselling

Source of variation	SS	df	MS	Cal. F	Pvalue	P≤.05
Corrected Model	3792.992	2	1896.496	141.363		
Intercept	18.829	1	18.829	1.404		
Pre test	627.905	1	627.905	46.804		
Treatment_Model	3169.833	1	3169.833	236.277	.001	S
Error	804.945	60	13.416			
Total	328890.000	63				
Corrected Total	4597.937	62				

The result presented in Table 3 revealed that at .05 level of significance, 1df numerator and 62df denominator, the calculated F-ratio is 236.277 while the p-value is .001. Since the P-value was less than the required .05 significance level, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, the effect of the Assertiveness Training technique on bullying behaviour of secondary school students when compared to those in the control group using their pre-test and post-test mean scores is significant.

Null Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the effectiveness of Assertiveness Training technique on bullying behaviours of male and female secondary school students.

Table 4: ANCOVA on the Post-test Bullying Behaviour Mean Scores of Male and Female Students Exposed to Assertiveness Training Technique

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	Cal. F	Pvalue	P≤.05
Corrected Model	57.897	2	57.897			
Intercept	87.703	1	43.851			
PRETEST	58.505	1	58.505			
Gender	27.459	1	27.459	1.689	.206	NS
Error	406.404	25	16.256			
Total	112257.000	28				
Corrected Total	494.107	27				

The result presented in Table 4 revealed that at .05 level of significance, 1df numerator and 27df denominator, the calculated F-ratio is 1.689 while the p-value is .206. Since the p-value was more than the required .05 significance level, the null hypothesis is accepted. Therefore, there is no significant difference in the effectiveness of the Assertiveness Training technique on bullying behaviours of male and female secondary school students.

5. Discussions

The findings of this study were discussed as follows:

5.1. Effect of Assertiveness Training as Compared to Conventional counselling on Bullying Behaviour among Students

The result as shown in the Table revealed that the pre-test mean scores of the students exposed to Assertiveness Training is 80.78 while the post-test mean score is 63.82, with a reduction in mean of 16.96. While those in the control group who received conventional counselling had pre-test mean score of 80.63 and post-test mean score of 78.09 with a reduction in mean of 2.54. Thus, with post-test mean score of 63.82 which is below the norm 70.00, the Assertiveness Training technique is effective in reducing bullying behaviour of secondary school students.

This is so because, in the assertiveness training group, bullying students were trained on how to express and control their behaviour and have respect for others. In the assertiveness training class, participants were given the opportunity to learn how to control their emotions. This is in support of Keliat, Tololiu, Daulima and Erawati, (2015), had it that assertiveness training is effective in improving social coping skills in adolescents, whether bullies or victims of bullying, modifying aggressive behaviour, raising individual social skills and emotional health. The finding also agrees with Boket, Bahrami, Kolyale and Hosseini (2015) whose findings showed that assertiveness training can increase adolescents' knowledge, beliefs, self-concept, self-efficacy and assertive behaviour, which helps change negative attitudes and create more effective interpersonal relationships.

Furthermore, the findings of the study revealed that the effect of Assertiveness Training technique on bullying behaviour of secondary school students when compared to those in the control group using their pre-test and post-test mean scores is significant. What this implies is that the effect of assertiveness training techniques on bullying behaviour of secondary school students is substantial. The reason might be that secondary school students in the treatment group gained a better understanding of their bullying acts as a result of receiving assertiveness training techniques. This is in support of finding of Herman, Nurshal and Novrianda (2020), that there were differences in bullying behaviour before and after intervention between the control group and the intervention group (p-value 0.001). This means that the participants were taught during training to identify the emotional and physiological signs that precede annoyance and to use the treatment package used in teaching them the new role of behaviours in real-life situations to control their potential bullying responses. What this portends to this present study is that the assertiveness training technique utilised by the participants was able to reduce the bullying behaviour of secondary school students who participated in the study.

5.2. Difference in the Effectiveness of Assertiveness Training Technique on Bullying Behaviour of Male and Female Secondary School Students

The findings revealed that the pre-test mean scores of male students exposed to Assertiveness training is 80.71 while the post-test mean score is 64.00, with a mean reduction of 16.71; while the pre-test mean of female students who were also treated with

Assertiveness training technique have pre-test mean score of 80.55 and post-test mean score of 61.91 with a reduction in mean of 18.64. Therefore, with a mean reduction score of female students being higher than the mean reduction score of male students, the Assertiveness training technique was more effective in reducing bullying behaviour of female secondary school students. This means that female students benefitted more slightly than the male students. Assertiveness training could be seen as more viable to the female than their male counterpart on bullying behaviour. This finding is rather surprising; since males and females are known to differ in personality characteristics because boys are more naturally assertive than their female counterparts. Also, males are more socially acceptable to be bullies than females. Nevertheless, both male and female students in the assertiveness training group benefitted in terms of reduction in mean bullying behaviour. Even though there was a slight difference in the post-test mean scores. This indicated that although the current study found a little difference in the post-test mean score of students with respect to gender, this difference was only marginal and not significant.

The test of null hypothesis as indicated in Table confirmed that, there is no significant difference in the effectiveness of Assertiveness Training technique on bullying behaviours of male and female secondary school students. The study of Keliat, Tololiu, Daulima and Erawati (2015) found that there was no significant difference between genders. Perhaps, the effectiveness of assertiveness training on bullying behaviour is consistent across the two levels of gender suggesting that both male and female students benefitted and the difference in their benefits was insignificant.

5.3. Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions are made:

This study provided evidence that the assertiveness training technique was effective in reducing bullying behaviour among secondary school students. The assertiveness training technique was more effective in reducing the bullying behaviour of female secondary school students.

5.4. Recommendations

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

- 1) Assertiveness training technique is an effective therapeutic technique in reducing bullying behaviours among secondary school students. Therefore, practicing counsellors working in secondary schools should make use of the technique in modifying bullying behaviour.
- 2) Assertiveness training could be seen as more viable to the female than their male counterpart on bullying behaviour. This finding is rather surprising; since males and females are known to differ in personality characteristics because boys are more naturally assertive than their female counterparts.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors hereby declare that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization with any financial interest or non-financial interest in the subject discussed in this manuscript.

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