

Enhancing Learning Experience Through Group Counselling Among Course Carry-Over Undergraduates

DR. OTUBO, A.F et al
(07034522646, e-mail: otubofrancis@gmail.com)

Department of Educational Foundations
Faculty of Education, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, Ebonyi State

C.U. MGBORO (Ph.D)
(08055650255, email: chimgboro@yahoo.com)

Department Of Educational Foundations
Faculty Of Education, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, Ebonyi State

OKANUME-ONAH AMAKA VICTORIA
(0806601601, e-mail: okanumeamakavictoria@gmail.com)

Department of Educational Psychology, College of Education, Zing, Taraba State

MADUKA NWORIE
(08108520072, e-mail: nworiemaduka2020@gmail.com)
Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education
Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, Ebonyi State

Abstract

Course carry-over in tertiary institutions of learning in Nigeria was introduced to give students who failed some courses in their first time examination attempt another opportunity to correct their mistakes and/or improve on their performance to enable them pass those failed courses in the subsequent examinations before graduation. This was to correct the former mode of resitting failed courses repeatedly until it was cleared without being exposed again to further learning experience, nor graded above a pass (E-grade). Nevertheless, carrying over courses has also created other challenges to the learner such as high level of stress from heavy workload, lecture time clashes and many others which affect learning experiences negatively and thus lead to more academic failures with the attendant consequences on the school system, the teacher, the family and indeed, the society itself. This is why the situation is very worrisome and motivates this positional paper on enhancing learning experiences through group counselling among course carry-over undergraduates. This paper thus explores the concepts of group, counselling and group counselling with its characteristics, ways group counselling could enhance learning experience among course carry-over undergraduates and the group counsellor roles. Some recommendations which if followed will go a long way in making the learning process and knowledge acquisition more efficient and lasting among diverse students' populations for improved academic achievements were also proffered with conclusion.

Keywords: Learning Experience, group, counselling, Group Counselling and Course Carry-Over Undergraduates

DOI: 10.7176/JEP/14-19-04

Publication date: July 31st 2023

Introduction

Learning experience simply refers to the process of acquiring knowledge or skill through studying. This often involves the study of school subject or course contents that are being taught or to which learners are being exposed. Learning must have taken place when there is a relatively persisting or long-lasting change in behaviour due to one's activity, training or observation. Thus, Omebe (2001:5) explains learning as "a change in behaviour which is more or less permanent in nature, and which results from activity, training or observation". All those activities, training or observations resulting in relatively permanent behaviour changes in school learners are herein referred to as learning experience.

Obviously, the major aim of school instruction is to bring relevant changes in the learners' behaviour through the expansion of knowledge and thereby prepare them for different productive roles in the society. The teachers' responsibility in the education process is to encourage the learners at all levels of school education to acquire and to retain the knowledge imparted to them in school for future use in meeting life problems or challenges. This makes the school instruction to be largely goal-directed and then traditionally too in the school system to determine the learning outcomes among learners with a view to assessing performance. Occasionally, the assessment of the learning outcomes is done using continuous assessment or through examination process. The essence of assessment of the learning outcomes is for the obvious reasons of determining what has been

taught, what learners have learnt and what decisions should be taken with respect to grading, selection and transition of the school learners or candidates from one class or school level to another, or for the graduation of the candidates from school to the world of work.

Unfortunately, however, some learners are often unable to pass their examination in their first time attempt with the resultant ill consequences of failures. Failures in some courses result in course carry-over syndrome, which refers to a situation where a student who failed a course or more in his/her first examination attempt keeps on retaking the failed course or courses in the subsequent corresponding semester examinations the following academic session or year until the student passed the course or courses. All students in the tertiary institutions of learning such as universities; polytechnics; colleges of education, technology and agriculture; correspondence colleges and allied institutions affected by the course carry-over syndrome are herein referred to as course carry-over undergraduates.

Prior to the introduction of course carry-over in tertiary institutions of learning in Nigeria, students who failed to make the grade in their first time examination attempt or missed the examinations were often given the opportunity for a resit after all semester examinations each academic year or session. That is, the second chance to retake the course in a make-up examination after the first unsuccessful attempt within that semester of the academic session that the student failed. However, the unfortunate thing with such resit examination was that the maximum grade obtained was E, no matter how the candidate may have improved on his or her previous performance. The situation, no doubt was not in students' academic best interest, especially the serious academic minded ones who fail sometimes, by mistake or in error. In 1995, an attempt to redress the anomalous situation ushered in idea of carrying over courses which is just a modified form of resitting failed or missed courses. This modified form of resit where courses are carried over to the subsequent academic session or year allows students with improvement in their school learning experiences to score better and possibly an A and be graded accordingly without being limited to E grade as in the old form of resit. It also gives the learner another opportunity to be exposed again to the course of reference. Nevertheless, the situation would seem to create more academic, emotional and economic problems which the effected students share with parents, guardians and sponsors, as well as the institution and the general society. Take for instance, the situation, often times, pushes some the undergraduate students who feel they cannot withstand the challenge posed by it out of the school system for fear of repeated failures at the end of the day still. Part of the reasons for the fear is because, failure, just like imprisonment, tends to be a socially pejorative word due to its popular misconception. Most people wrongly perceive and or misconstrue failure as "a fall and never to rise again" rather than viewing it as an opportunity for growth and development in knowledge or wisdom. Following this common misconception by people, nobody really likes to be associated with failure.

Failure simply means a lack of success in doing something or in achieving one's aim (Horby, 1995). That is, the inability to accomplish one's objective which only denotes an error or that something is wrong somewhere. The error could be a mistake or an omission somewhere, which simply calls for the detection and rectification to get things right. Therefore, failure should be viewed as a lesson or an experience to learn from. A lesson in the sense that when one tried to do something and failed, the essence of the failure is not that one is born doomed to failure but for one to look back at what one is doing and rectify the situation and continue to try again and again until success is realized. After all, success, many a time, comes after many failures. Without doubt, failures can be very upsetting and discouraging, but as the saying goes, "Determination is success". If one is determined to succeed in what one is doing, the number of times one failed may not really matter rather than the eventual success. Thus, we are not only always required to simply try again after the initial failure, or even success, but also try much harder with an intence and persistent determination to succeed to avoid a second or repeated failure. As Valerian, Barbara and Warran (1991:350) put it, "Persisting and trying harder after initial failure may often bring success with the best outcome, whereas quitting" without any plan to try again "leaves the project as a failure". Therefore, an initial failure in an undertaking or examination is not expected to deter anyone or students from continuing to try, not just again but harder, to avoid repeated failures.

Many factors account for students' academic failure and resultant carrying-over of courses in tertiary institutions of learning as in the university setting. Among the factors include: a lack of relevant study materials, example, textbooks; poor study habit; poor time management; laziness; poor organization of study materials or tasks; poor memory/forgetfulness; illness, financial constraints; irregularity/inconsistency in attending classes; excessive hanging-outs; accommodation problems; incessant absenteeism; poor examination behaviour; unstable academic calendar due to insistent strikes of workers; poor academic morale, and a lot more. These factors and their likes are not only debilitating to learning but also counter-productive to academic achievement. Apparently without great courage and determination in battle with the foregoing challenging factors or their likes, one's "self-esteem and self-concept", as well as academic interest may be under the constant threat of erosion following the disintegration of one's "psychological, emotional and social stability" (Otubo, 2015:7).

Students experiencing repeated school failures or low academic performances, despite all they did to succeed but to no avail, usually experience shame and academic incompetence as they recount their previous

fruitless examination experiences. Such students do compare their disgraceful learning outcomes to those of others with good academic fortune with excessive (that is, a lot of) worries about what will even become of the outcome of the next resit for which they often feel unprepared for fear of failing again. Such perceived failure or doubtful success commonly leaves some course carry-over students moody and distraught following their poor sense of personal efficacy or general sense of incompetence. This dysfunctional (or ineffective/self-defeating) belief would seem to make some of them see their academic future in defeat and so question their adequacy to the challenges of passing their carry-over courses.

The foregoing belief tends to make them to give up or stop trying to be effective in their academic lives, even to the extent of missing their lectures but will helplessly turn up for examinations. One could imagine what somebody who never attended classes may write in such examinations. This is why some course carry-over students engage in all forms of examination misconduct like inviting examination mercenaries, lobbying for marks by way of enticements and every other means including certificate forgery where all efforts to get the certificate by fair means or foul failed.

In any case, Maiwada (2006), reports that students including the course carry-overs often desire to improve their academic performance and obtain high grades in examinations but they have problems with their study techniques or habits. Maiwada reiterates that students' study patterns and attitudes to study determine to a large extent their academic successes or failures in school learning. Unfortunately, Undiyaundeye (2010:109) documents that appropriate studying ways are seldom taught properly in schools and as a result, students lack adequate "information on the right and wrong ways to study". This, according to her, "has resulted in poor academic performance of students" generally, Undiyaundeye's documentation corroborates Anagbogu, Obineli and Okonkwo (2009:26) who had earlier on noted that the "pervasive academic failures among all categories of students has given rise to various dimensions of examination malpractice, which now constitutes a barrier to educational development of the nation".

Not surprisingly, Okonkwo (2009) maintains that the consequence of students' massive failure and its end products are grave and far reaching, yet counselling interventions to address them are under-utilized in the educational system. Altogether, the point at issue as Chibuko (2006:22) points out still remains that school failure is generally not the child's failure alone but could also "be the failure of the education system, of the school, the teachers, the family and in fact the society" at large. This is why the situation is a source of worry to teachers, parents, and counsellors and indeed, all stakeholders in the education industry. This calls for the need to assist the course carry-over undergraduates to develop the right attitudes and behaviour to study to enable them excel in their various fields of academic endeavours and move the nation forward. It is in this direction that this paper proposes the use of group counselling as a very potent approach to enhancing learning experience among course carry-over undergraduates for improved academic achievements and national development.

Group and Group Counselling

The term group has been variously defined by different people without any consensus of opinion on a single definition. However, no matter the angle from which one attempts to view it, one fundamental fact is that when people or a number of things sharing the same identity gather together as a corporate entity or unit, a group has been formed. Thus, Omebe (2004) defines group as a social unit composed of two or more individuals who have common interest or characteristics. Nevertheless, Shertzer and Stone in Otubo (2012: 65) explain that for a social unit to be regarded as a group in counselling, it must be characterized by the following:

- A dynamic interaction between and among members, which produces relevant changes in each member;
- The members have a common goal such as finding solutions to their varying problems, needs or other issues of common concern which encourage peace and progress in the group and society at large;
- The group has norms that regulate the conduct of individual members and so bind them into a string with well-defined roles which allow for participation and contribution of every member to attainment of the group goal;
- The members have the capacity for self-direction; and finally;
- Membership is by volition and consent. Based on these characteristics, a group could be viewed as an organized number of willing individuals with common goals and norms who interact meaningfully in order to achieve their objectives.

There are groups of different types in guidance and counselling but the one of most concern for this paper in group counselling. Group counselling is a helping process involving one counsellor in a relationship with more than one client at a time. It is a mode of counselling organized for a number of students with common or similar concerns such as the course carry-over undergraduates with a view to helping them enhance their learning experience for improved academic achievements. For cohesion and functionality, the group membership is usually relatively small, say between 2-15 members depending on the effectiveness, efficiency and ingenuity of the group counselling leadership.

Theoretical Framework

The group counselling approach to learning is anchored on the social learning theoretical orientation of Albert Bandura (1977). The theory is based on the premise that behaviour is learned within a social set up through cognitive thinking activity involving observation and imitation depending on the consequences of the behaviour for the individuals. Bandura, in the theory, viewed humans as naturally social beings who crave for relationships or interactions with others and consequently, are particularly prone to observe and imitate the way others behave in social settings to enable them belong or for improved relationships. As such, personality or human behaviour patterns can best be explained in terms of the cumulative effects of a series of learning experiences acquired in social settings as in group counselling where the course carry-over undergraduates can utilize the co-operative supportive values of the group situations to cultivate a reading culture that will enhance their learning outcomes. This is where the relevance of this social learning theoretical orientation lies in enhancing learning experience among course carry-overs. The theory, in essence, provides understanding and meaning to the inner dynamic of group life or behaviour, which this paper ultimately aims at using to help course carry-over undergraduates drop the facade of poor study habits that are debilitating to learning and develop good ones that can enhance their learning experiences under the professional guidance of the counsellor for the desired benefits.

Ways Group Counselling can Enhance School Learning

Given the cooperative supportive values of group situations which members commonly utilize to modify their self-defeating thoughts and thereby learn and, or unlearn certain attitudes and behaviours through collective judgement, group counselling is much likely to enhance learning experiences among course carry-over undergraduates in several ways as follow:

Group counselling is unique in providing students with opportunity to discuss or interact and study freely together with mates or colleagues and thereby learn bountifully from one another in a protected environment. The ample opportunity for discussion or interaction with colleagues will not help the course carry-over undergraduates to study together in a group but also to assimilate ideas very quickly for improved academic achievements.

Group counselling also provides students with “situations and opportunities for more adequate problem-solving activities” (Shetzer & Stone, 1981: 212). Put in other words, it will facilitate social learning problem-solving activities among course carry-over undergraduates as it will provide a forum where they could share with colleagues or mates their individual problems, experiences and issues of social concerns such as factors that contributes to academic failures among them and possible remedies, the perennial examination malpractice problem and so on, with the counsellor presiding over them for the desired modifications and improvements in their study patterns. By so doing, collective judgement can be focused on common problems and critical issue relating to disciplinary and other problems prevalent among them. For instance, their poor attitudes to schooling and studying can be examined collectively together. The feedback that some receive from other members of the group can influence their study patterns with better learning outcomes (Otubo, 2012).

Moreover, the group counselling membership “gives one a sense of belong” (Omebe, 2004:97). That is to say, it gets people to listen to the problems and experiences of others and then know that the problems they have are not peculiar to them. There are other people with similar or the same kind of problems seeking the same solutions as they. Getting the course carry-over undergraduates together by the instrumentality of group counselling will not only help in this regard, but also in contribution of ideas and efforts under the guidance of an adept counsellor for resolution.

Group counselling equally offers students great prospects of having insight into their individual academic problems. When academic problems or difficulties are discussed under the auspices of group counselling with the counsellor presiding over the discussions, the course carry-over undergraduates are likely to have insight into their own personal learning difficulties and mistakes for precaution as they keep themselves informed about others’ views on the life similar to theirs.

In the same vein group counselling enriches students, and in this case the course carry-over undergraduates, with self-awareness and the need for relevant changes in their academic perceptions and study behaviours for better outcomes. They take the opportunity of group situation to discuss their learning experiences with colleagues and then learn some things about their individual behavioural study problems from the open reactions of their group members. Shetzer and Stone (1981:211) note that “this chance to learn something about oneself from the open reactions of others is real, important and not often available in the society”.

Again, the group counselling situation also offers students the opportunity to imitate positive and satisfying learning skills or study behaviours from their group mates. Through group study and or counselling, students, especially the course carry-over ones who may have been already absolutely desperate to graduate will not only have the opportunity to discuss the fears and concerns they have about their academic life and share more reactions and new ideas, but also imitate constructive socially acceptable learning attitudes and behaviours of other group members or the leader consciously or unconsciously. As they discuss and learn to express

themselves in actions, feelings and attitudes, some watch the way each behaves and try to find the learning secrets of their colleagues who have been always very successful in their own studies and examination for emulation.

Furthermore, group counselling has a unique contribution to make in providing students as the course carry-over undergraduates with realistic and practical lifelike social situations useful for modifying their personal study habits, attitudes and behaviours that are debilitating to good academic performance. Not surprisingly, Lieberman, Yalom and Miles in Otubo (2008: 86) defined counselling group as a “social oasis where people can drop the facade of competence demanded by a fast moving competitive society and discuss their doubt, fears and disappointments”. In the light of this definition, counselling group as “social oasis” can be a place for refining the course carry-over undergraduate students’ poor study habits or techniques for improved learning outcomes.

Finally, group counselling also offers great prospects of cooperation and healthy competition among students in addressing their academic problems. Students often view themselves as social equals and as such, respond better or function more effectively in a group of their colleagues or peers. This is evident in the way students working in counselling groups often become deeply involved together in social interaction and less expectant of advice or direction from the counsellor as a leader. This follows students’ friendly disposition engendered by the cooperative sharing relationships in the group due to the affective and thrilling nature of the group experience which reduces the counsellor to a mere group participant. Group counselling thus sets students completely at ease in discussing their academic problems together in the group of colleagues and thereby develop the mutual interpersonal capacity necessary for addressing themselves fairly and squarely to their common academic concerns under the guidance of the counsellor.

The Group Counsellor Roles for Effective Counselling Process

The group counsellor is saddled with many and varied roles or responsibilities as follow: The counsellor will first of all structure the group by leading members into getting acquainted with one another by way of self-introduction, usually in the group inception; knowing the aims of the group formation; establishing the guidelines to be followed by the group by pointing out the do’s and don’ts of the group through the formulation of rules and regulations defining the roles of members in the group functioning.

It is also the function of the counsellor to create an atmosphere of serenity characterized by mutual trust and respects for members to enable them have free self-expressions without fear of being molested or antagonized. This involves protecting the interest of all the group members by prompt curtailing of the group excesses by the counsellor. For instance, when there are cliques and oppositions in the group, or there is misdirected hostility: or other situations likely to disrupt the group process, it is incumbent on the counsellor as the group leader to intervene in order to “prevent members from being hurt”, and at the same time “keep the group process from disruption” (Odoemelam, 1997:24).

The counsellor will equally encourage effective participation of individual members of the group and warm cooperation among them through the cultivation of a democratic spirit where every group member will realize that the views of every member are important and needed for the attainment of the group goals. This will make the group members to see themselves as equals, thereby giving mutual support to and avoiding unwarranted attacks on one another.

In the event of any conflict in the group, the counsellor will act as a peacemaker to the disagreeing parties by assisting them face the conflict with objectivity to ensure the group members optimal development. The counsellor will perform this function by trying to bring out common issues on what different members have said, thereby helping members see some commonalities or relationships in their problems which are not peculiar to any one individual. This often consoles as some members hear about others in worse situations than them and so consider themselves very lucky to have come together to proffer solutions to their own problems.

The counsellor will also perform the functions of interpretation, reflection, clarification and summarization with a view to shading more light on what the group members have discussed especially before the meeting is terminated for enhanced understanding. The counsellor will equally enhance communication among the group members to enable them interact and communicate their experiences, feeling and ideas effectively while discussing their concerns for possible resolution. All these and many more roles of the counsellor too numerous to be exhausted here will be exhibited when students with carry-over courses consult with him/her. At the same time, teachers can also be taught these counsellor roles for a united front to enhance learning experience in the classroom for the benefit of all learners.

Conclusion

Course carry-over is the act of resitting or continuous retaking of a course or courses one failed to make the grade in the first time or previous examination attempts in the subsequent corresponding semester examination usually the following academic session or year for a better result. The ways group counselling can influence learning experiences among course carry-over undergraduates for improved academic outcomes through the

inherent peer influences as explored in this paper cannot be overestimated and indeed, many, various and inexhaustible under the professional superintendence of the school guidance counsellor in partnership with other critical stakeholders in the education industry, particularly the teachers. Let us all present a united front in using group counselling to assist diverse students' population and in particular, the course carry-overs to develop the right attitudes and behaviour to study to enable them excel in their various fields of academic endeavours for the development of our society.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are put forward based on the foregoing discussion with a view to complementing the guidance counsellors efforts in enhancing learning experiences among diverse students populations across all levels of education.

1. Students at all school levels should endeavour to always obey or co-operate with their parents and guardians who should in turn/see it as a point of duty to provide their children and wards with recommended textbooks and necessary other stationeries to facilitate their studies/learning.
2. Students, especially those of them faced with academic failures should learn to take their studies very serious and also strive to cultivate healthy study habits for improved academic performance.
3. Students should also be sensitized and encouraged to consult with their school teachers and guidance counsellors for necessary assistance in the course of their studies. This will help to clear areas of doubt as they learn.
4. Students and particularly those with the problem of academic failures who find group counselling too threatening for utilizing the group interactions and experiences to increase self-understanding and cultivation of appropriate study habits for improved learning outcomes should be counselled individually.
5. Given that students of all categories get scared and are very dreadful of academic failure, teachers at all school levels of education should be encouraged to adopt the group counsellor roles in the course of their teaching to enhance students' learning activities in the classroom. This will help students rise up to their learning challenges by stimulating them into healthy learning competition, thereby taking their studies very serious as they will begin to make out time to read and revise their class works in readiness for any examination.
6. Teachers including school heads and administrators should work in partnership with the school guidance counsellors by referring students with learning difficulties to the counsellor for possible assistance. This will help to guarantee the educational and personality developments of students at all levels of school education to promote national development.
7. Government at all levels in collaboration with other stakeholders in the education industry such as, teachers, parents, philanthropists and non-governmental organizations should help to make school learning environment more conducive to effective teaching and learning as well as guidance and counselling services delivery by assisting schools with fund. This is to enable them procure the basic facilities that facilitate learning such as functional libraries, information and communication technology (ICT) centers as well as other necessary guidance and counselling equipment and furniture, as adequate office accommodation and "computer for record keeping and easy retrieval of data to enhance the counsellors operations" (Otubo, 2012:75).

REFERENCES

- Abramson, P.R. (1980). *Personality*. Holt, Rinehart, and Winston: USA.
- Anagbogu, M.A; Obineli, A. & Okonkwo, M.C. (2009). Prevention of academic failure through counselling intervention strategies for educational development. *Conference proceedings, (August), 25-36*.
- Anyamene, A. & Izuchi, M.N. (2010). Counselling needs of prison inmates in Anambra State, Nigeria. *The counsellor, 28*, 117-124.
- Chibuko, V.C. (2006). *Useful hints on students counselling*. Port Harcourt: Pharz Prints.
- Hornby, A.S. (1995). *Oxford advanced learner's dictionary of current English (5th ed)*. Great Clarendon Street: Oxford University Press.
- Maiwada, D.N. (2006). Counselling Examination and Irregularities: A case study of the University of Maiduguri. *Maiduguri Journal of Educational Studies*.
- Odoemelam, A.M. (1997). *Group guidance and counselling for Nigeria children and adolescents*. Owerri, Nigeria: Mercy Divine publisher.
- Okeke, B.A. (1996). *Principles of guidance and counselling: An outline for beginners*. Enugu, Nigeria: Emma Publishing Company.
- Omebe, S.E. (2004). *Guidance and counselling: A comprehensive approach*. Enugu: Paul and Cosmas publisher.
- Omebe, S.E. (2001). *Human learning*. Enugu, Nigeria: Cheston Limited.
- Otubo, F.A. (2008). Perceived influence of group and individual counselling as strategies for initiating

- premarital counselling for secondary school students in Enugu State. *An unpublished M.Ed Dissertation*, Ebonyi State University; Abakaliki.
- Otubo F.A. (2012). Group counselling as an approach to teaching attitudinal changes in Nigeria secondary schools. *The tertiary Counselling* 1, 63-76.
- Otubo, F.A. (2015). Effect of rational emotive therapy on the psychological adjustment of prison inmates in Ebonyi State. *An unpublished Ph.D Thesis*, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki.
- Shetzer, B. & Stone, S.C. (1981). *Fundamentals of guidance* (4th ed), Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Undiyaundeye, F. (2010). Study techniques as a prerogative for enhancing academic performance among secondary school students. *The counsellor*, 28(August), 108-166.
- Valerian, J.D., Barbara, A.W. & Warren, H.J. (1991). *Personality: Contemporary theory and research*: Chikago: Nelson-Hall Publisher.