

Using Family Support and Peer Tutoring in Reducing Truancy of Schooling Adolescents

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Abstract

This study reviewed the effect of family support and peer tutoring in reducing truancy behavior of schooling adolescents. It notes that though behavior may originate from the family and the heredity traits, internal and external motivation may also have a strong correlation in defining the behavior of schooling adolescents. The paper therefore suggest the use of family support and peer tutoring in reducing to a minimal the distraction to learning that truancy carries along among schooling adolescents

Introduction

Background of the study

Behavior is generally believed to be learned and unlearned. In agreement, Bos (1994) noted that students can be taught to discard old behaviors and to imbibe on new one. Behavior is the action or reaction of an object or organism, usually in relation to the environment. Hence behavior can be conscious or unconscious, overt, voluntary or involuntary.

Behavior can equally be said to result from various factors. Thus, Onu (2004) observed that the behavior of a child at any given moment is the result of both biological and environmental factors operating simultaneously. In other words, behavior is a product of nature and nurture. The child behaves the way he does, because he is surrounded and influenced by environmental and cultural factors or forces that determine how his needs will be met.

Furthermore, Petrill, Lipton, Hewitt, Plomin, Cherny, Corley, & Defries, (2004) see heredity and environment as factors which intimately and constantly interact for a wholesome formation of an individual. These two factors, therefore, contribute in concrete terms to the development of an individual. The way an individual is similar to, or different in his performance and personality is said to be due to these two factors. This is with respect to their biological needs. However, it is strongly eluded that issues of differences may therefore be created by the social environment in which those needs are fulfilled.

From the forgoing, therefore, human behavior could be viewed as a collection of behaviors exhibited by human beings and influenced by culture, attitudes, emotions, values, ethics, authority, rapport, persuasion, coercion and heredity. This implies that most of the behaviors human beings put up are influenced by the characteristics mentioned above; it doesn't just manifest on its own. It is not surprising then, that in the homes, schools and society

at large, we see different types of behavior of people, which may be acceptable, while in some cases some may not be acceptable to all, because of variations in the norms of the society in which people live.

Human nature is said to be so encompassing that nature is almost drowned in the given environment. Petrill et al. (2004) argued further that those physical and geographical conditions of the environment play important roles in shaping the personality of human beings. Family morale and economic factors equally have great influence on character formation. Poverty of parents as an example may lead to their inability to fulfill the legitimate needs of children, and may also lead to certain kinds of frustration whose resultant effect could manifest in behavioral problems.

These are not the only factors, Onu (2004) equally opined that the environmental factors, not only play a very significant role in mental development of the individual, but also have much to do with the type of character and personality the individual develops. The attitudes exhibited in the environment, coupled with both external and internal motivation determine very strongly the person's ways of behavior. Thus, schooling adolescents become victims in these types of behavior.

The adolescent period is the period of exploration, a growth stage which is encumbered with conflicts, considerations and choices. Some studies have shown that the adolescents are out of their way to do what they are not supposed to do and this leads to behavioral problems. Adolescence is equally a period of the development of behavioral traits and character. It is a time when the individual is attracted to more vices. In agreement with this statement, Spoth, Redmond & Shin (2001) maintained that adolescence is a stage when the individual is attracted much more to atheism, and darkness. Violence for them tastes better than righteousness, and they characteristically look down on the wisdom of the elders, and, or reject the counseling and sound experiences of adults, considering them not sensible.

Reasons for such acts of the adolescents might not be divulged from an earlier study by Longress (2000) who argued that adolescent age is a time when the individual strives towards achieving assurance of economic independence and acquires a set of values to guide his behaviors. This means that when and where negative behavioral factors are dominant and the positive ones are silent or recessive, then the choices made by the adolescents will be dominantly anti-social which leads to behavioral problems. Behavioral problems, according to Kirk (1972), are a deviation from age appropriate behaviors which significantly interferes with the child's own growth and development or lives. Behaviorally disordered children may be physically normal, but have serious problems like deviation from normal behaviors. This in turn interferes with their growth or development.

Working with behaviorally disordered children can be cumbersome. Teachers in the classrooms get frustrated when they attempt to teach behaviorally disturbed children by conventional methods. In most cases, they may stop attending to them, or even drive them out of the classroom which further compounds the behavioral problems. Some people see behaviorally disordered children as those who are not able to cope with learning instructions. These traits and behaviors are found more with schooling adolescents.

Schooling adolescents are noted for some behavioral problems like aggression to people (Kazdin 1990), destruction of property (Loeber 1991), deceitfulness or theft and other serious violation of rules. These last two which are deceitfulness and serious violation of rules are related to truancy problem in schools. Truancy is a cankerworm that has eaten deep into the fabrics of Nigerian educational programs and has caused a lot of set-backs for children, adolescents and youths in their educational pursuits (Stoll 1990; Gesinde, 2004; Adeyemi, 2006; Animasahun, 2007b; 2010). Simply defined, truancy is an act of irregular attendance of school or unjustified, intentional absence from school. Hibbert and Fogelman (1990) opined that any absence from school without an acceptable reason is truancy. This is whether or not the student's parents know and approve of it or not.

Furthermore, Animasahun (2007a) suggested truancy to be an act of staying off school, which is one of the several kinds of anti-social behaviors. In agreement with this, Bakar, Sigmon and Nugent (2001) stressed that, as a risk factor for delinquency, truancy is found to be related to substance abuse, gang activity and involvement in criminal activities. Moreover, Animasahun (2005) in his study on poor school attendance behavior known as truancy, he x-rayed these major constructs in his definition to include laziness, excessive sleeping at home, sluggishness, lack of interest in morning duties, non-challant attitude to issues, rudeness, lack of interest in academics, never studying at home, having extravagant and strange hairdo, dirty looking, lack of required text books, having no school bags, but carrying only one or two exercise books by hand or uniform in pockets, their female counterparts carry fashion bags meant for one or two notebooks and spare clothes as well and cosmetics, armed with cassettes to watch or listen to, at any available time, consuming alcohol and smoking cigarettes or India hemp for fun. The attempt to address the concern of both civilized and uncivilized society about the use of increased family support and peer tutoring truancy of schooling adolescents are the main thrust of this paper.

This paper therefore addresses the followings

- a) Behavioral problems among schooling adolescents in Nigeria
- b) Families of schooling adolescents
- c) Truancy and its causes
- d) Family life and truancy
- e) Family support and truancy
- f) Individual factor in truancy
- g) Effect of peer tutoring in reducing truancy behavior

Behavioural problems among schooling adolescents

The Nigerian society or communities today has to grapple with many behavioural problems of its youths particularly in schools. Such problems according to Nnachi (2003) are enumerated at truancy, disobedience, drug offences, assault, insult, stealing, violent demonstrations, vandalism, examination malpractices, and robbery and secret cult activities. Apart from these widely published behavioral problems, heterosexual activities are also listed among types of behavioral problems prevalent in Nigerian secondary schools. These are variously named in the literature as sex abuse, sex offences, sexual misconduct, sexual immorality, sexual promiscuity, and sexual maladjustment (Odoemelorn 1996; Ndu 2000; Nnachi 2003)

There are too many types of behavioral problems among schooling adolescents, and they appear to have innumerable styles of unleashing them thus making the school atmosphere chaotic. Nwanze (2005) lamented that some schooling adolescents keep on adding and multiplying deadly behaviors such as robbery, smoking cigarettes and marijuana, rape, examination malpractices, killing of fellow students and teachers, threatening their parents who caution them, and attending classes with weapons which they display dangerously once they are provoked.

In Nigerian society today, the degeneration of schooling adolescents breaks the heart of teachers and parents. Odo (2005) reported that many schooling adolescents no longer pay their school fees. While the male ones use their school fees given to them to maintain their girl-friends, the females likewise use theirs to procure costly dresses and to commit abortions. When disciplined in order to be corrected, they either vent their anger on the teachers or become school drop-outs. Some of these schooling adolescents go the extent of demanding for marks in papers, in examinations they did not sit for with threats of violence on the teachers. Sonubi (2005) further pointed out the decaying situation in schools. He noted that some of the schooling adolescents flatter themselves by saying they are above school rules and regulations; and feel they must be feared by both the students and the teachers; they must have enough money through stealing from their teachers and fellow students, and all forms of extortions of money for high life. Atrocities committed by such students are so open that the nation cannot claim that she is not feeling the negative impact of these behaviors.

Worse still, Longress (2000) indicated how both male and female students are almost equally involved in the crimes committed in schools. In his findings, Akonwa (2005) showed that boys and girls who live in the same community are equally affected by the socialization factors available which lead to behavioral problems. Also, Gesinde (2004) submitted that male at any level of education play truancy more than girls. This is despite the age of the adolescents. At any stage of life, different strange behaviors are exhibited by adolescents. No wander Rayner & Riding (1996) alluded that truancy increases as students progress through high school, which means Senior Secondary students, possibly between ages 14-21, play truancy more than their counterpart 10-13 years. In the same way, Animasahun (2005) agreed that older students play truancy than their younger counterparts. However, Mashinane (1997) found that there are more truants in ages 11 than 10. Nevertheless, both grades are adolescents and they both exhibit truancy. In checking the behavior of adolescents, it is vital to consider the family of the schooling adolescents.

Families of Schooling Adolescents

The family is the basic social and for human development. It makes up the thread necessary to weave human society (Onu, 2004). The family is further seen as the headquarters of human development, a social institution that functions as a place for marriage, breeding children and developing kinship ties (Abrawowitz, 1992). The family therefore must be considered as an important agency that determines the fate of a child. The family plays a fundamental factor in a child's life. It has the ability to render the child useful or useless. According to Maduewesi (1987), the position of the family as the first socializing agent which provides support for the child at the most critical periods in his life cannot be contested. In agreement to this statement, Anyakoha and Eluwa (1988) noted that the family contributes a lot to the development of a child's personality, and provides the foundation a child needs for building his personality. In Africa, the extended family system further provides a cushioning effect where parents fail

or are not able to meet up with the demands. The child receives smiles, nods, encouragement and sometimes rebukes from uncles, aunties, grand parents who visit and stay with the family.

The family however, like any other unit in the world has witnessed evolution that has scratched and brought much transformations to the concept of families. These transformations are said to be due to the developing systems that are reflective of a changing world (Kathy, 2000). Though the family still determines its own existence, yet the family is forced to mould itself to the conditions of life which dominate at a given time and place. Therefore, shifts in family patterns are determined by both its internal organization and its external position in the community.

Although the family is changing, it remains a strong thread that ties together the society as it functions. It equally helps in the provision of socialization and companionship for the diverse groups of people within the family. However, Sigelman and Shaffer (1999) indicated that some of the recent changes in the developed and developing nations might have affected the family more adversely than can be comprehended. The family has witnessed changes as:

1. More adults are living as singles today than in the past.
2. More young adults delay marriage while pursuing educational career goals.
3. Fewer children in the family.
4. More couples are divorcing and remarrying.
5. Most women work outside the home despite having small children.

The resultant effect of the above mentioned changes will be reduced family support. However, the patterns of parenting also affect the type of support a child will get from the family. In observing children Bewnwind (1967, 1975) identified three groups of children who had experienced three different patterns of parenting. The first groups were self-reliant and socially competent in their dealings with their peers and teachers. Their homes were said to show warmth, love and effective communication. The second groups were confident, self-reliant, but socially withdrawn and generally distrustful. These children were said to be from homes that were too strict in controlling and not very warm. The family situation did not allow for much affection and the children rarely expressed their opinions. The third groups however, were quite immature, very dependent and passive. These groups of children were suspected to come from homes that were warm and affectionate, but were lax and inconsistent in discipline.

Truancy and its causes

The causes of truancy are as different and as diverse as the students who make-up our schools. There is not a clear cut and easily identifiable cause of truancy. Instead, there are many different factors and combinations of factors that lead to truancy. These factors include the operations of a school, such as school's enforcement of its truancy policies, a student's family life and living environment, and the student's own personal and developmental factors (Reid 2005). There are many additional factors that also contribute to the likelihood that a student will attend school. For example, the student's community, ethnic or minority status, and economic status also are possible causes of truancy.

When looking at the causes of truancy, the natural focus would be to first look at the school and its rules and operations, to determine if the school has any effect on its students' truant behaviors. There are numerous variables within a school that could contribute to and encourage student's truancy. The school may not be able to control some of these causes, such as a school's enforcement of its truancy policies and the student's knowledge of the school's protocol (Walls 2002). Research has also shown that teachers and staff can affect a school's truancy rate as well as the overall school climate.

Research has shown that the size and location of a school, factors not in the school's control, have a relationship to truancy levels in the school. While there is no national data on truancy, research has shown that schools in larger cities report truancy rates than schools located in smaller cities (Baker Sigmon, & Nugent 2001). Other research completed by the National Center for Education Statistic (1996) found that inner city urban schools tend to have higher truancy rates higher than schools that are located in rural and suburban locations. In a study by Puzanchera, Stal, Finnegan, Tierney and Snyder (1998), schools that have larger student population tend to have higher truancy rates than schools with smaller student populations where teachers and staff are able to give more attention and consideration to each student.

Another factor contributing to school's truancy rate is the degree to which the school enforces its truancy policies, a factor within a school's control. A study by Epstein and Sheldon (2002) demonstrates that schools that have established goals aimed at reducing truancy actually saw an increase in their rate of daily student attendance.

On the other hand, those schools that did not enforce their truancy policies or did not make students aware of the school's truancy policies consistently tended to have higher truancy rates. Yet, many schools do not have truancy consequences which are severe enough to deter students from skipping school (Baker, Sigmon & Nugent 2001).

A school's truancy rate is also influenced by the teachers, their methods of teaching and the school curriculum. For example, according to Dougherty (1999), students are likely to skip school if their teachers are not supportive, or if the teachers do not make efforts to develop relationship with the students. If a teacher does not have high expectations for his or her students, the students may not feel supportive by the teacher and may be more likely to skip school (Baker, et al. 2001). Students are also more likely to skip school when they are bored with school and are not challenged by the academic curriculum (Malcolm, Wilson, Davidson, & Kirk 2003). The teacher's inability or refusal to use a variety of teaching styles to meet each of his or her student's learning styles has also been shown to negatively affect a school's truancy rate.

The expertise of teachers and staff is also another consideration. Students are more likely to skip school when a full-time experienced teacher who has a relationship with the students is substituted with an auxiliary teacher (Malcolm, Wilson, Davidson & Kirk 2003). This increases the need for states and local government to properly, manage staff and reduce the staff turn over rate.

Students who play truancy in school may also be influenced by other students. For example students who are bullied or teased at school are more likely to avoid the teasing all together and skip school, Malcolm et al. (2003). Furthermore, student may succumb to peer pressure and skip school if their friends are also doing the same. A fear of isolation that comes from being teased if not fitting in at school causes truant behavior.

Family factor

Family life and truancy

The students' family life affects his or her willingness to attend school on a regular basis. The structure of a family affects the students' attendance at school. Children living in a single parent household tend to have higher truancy rates than children who live in a two-parent household (Reid 1999). In addition, students who live in families with a large number of children also tend to have higher rates of truancy. These children are often at home caring for their younger siblings or their parents who are sick because of lack of resources available to pay for care for such individuals (Malcolm et al. 2003).

The social economic status of a family is also a predictor of the likelihood of a students' truancy. Students who come from families in poverty tend to have higher rates of truancy (Baker et al. 2001). The lack of financial stability in the family may result in a higher rate of truancy because of overcrowded living conditions or poor living conditions. Children from such families are often unable to afford the necessities of school, such as school uniform, supplies, or equipment and are more likely to skip school (Malcolm, Wilson, Davidson, Kirk 2003).

Contrary to families who are considered to be in a low socioeconomic status, families who are considered to be in a higher socioeconomic status, tend to be more involved in their children's education resulting in lower truancy rates (Teasley 2004). These parents tend to interact with their children's teachers and other school staff on a more regular basis and may be more likely to become involved in school activities. However, parents who work long hours tend to be less involved in their child's education which may lead to an increase in the children's truancy rate (Malcolm et al. 2003). Similarly, children who do not have a strong relationship with their parents tend to be truant from school more often than those with a strong family relationship (Teasley 2004).

As noted, it is very important for parents to take an active role in their children's education. In a study by Epstein and Sheldon (2002), children whose parents are actively involved in their education have lower truancy rates. This involvement ranges from taking a simple interest in the child's grades and abilities in school, to actively monitoring the child's homework and other school activities. Even parental involvement in the school Parents Teachers Association (PTA) results in a decrease in the probability of a child being truant. Conversely, children whose parents display a lack of guidance or supervision are more likely to have unauthorized absences from school (Baker, Sigmund, & Nugent 2001).

The values and beliefs of a child's parents also affect the truancy rate of the child. For example, parents who do not value the importance of education or do not care if their children regularly attend school or not are more likely to permit their children to stay at home from school without a valid excuse (Malcolm et al. 2003). Children may also be more likely to skip school if their parents are not aware of the school or government attendance laws (Baker et al. 2001)

Children who are part of families in which the parents or other siblings have criminal records, or families that are already involved with social vices, are also more likely to be truants from school. A child's exposure to violence in the home could be a factor leading to truancy behavior (Reid 1999). Such violence includes physical and

emotional abuse and other types of family conflicts. Not only does physical and emotional abuse have a correlation to a student's truant behavior, but alcohol and drug abuse within the family environment tends to increase the chance of students truancy (Baker et al. 2001:13b).

Family Support and Truancy

The result of researches are currently stating contrary to former opinion of lack of parental support being a strong factor in the development of antisocial behavior, this research found that it is not while doubting its contribution, however, data has shown that while support which is a mere commitment to uphold whatever is of value, matters, adolescents were found to be moved more by "every mind and breeze of classroom behaviors (Onu, 2004).

It is true that parental support at the early stage of life helps the child build confidence. Longress (2000), utilized that singular variable to define a strong family. The family is said to be known for what they are, rather than what they have. An earlier research by Sesse (1997) equally supports this by insisting that expression of love and appreciation make family members feel they are supported.

However, it has been discovered that in spite of the support, a child may be provided with, contacts with 'strong' external factors outside the home may be more distracting that it depletes whatever support was built in. the adolescents studied did not found family support strong enough from keeping them away from antisocial behaviors. It is further suspected that the vicarious but weak contributions of parents and siblings goes further to buttress the decaying family ties and could be adduced as one of the reasons for the negative weaknesses of Nigerian youths.

Individual Factor of Truancy

There are several personal factors of the truant student that may contribute to his or her willingness or ability to attend school regularly. The first factor is the individual student's physical and mental health (Desocio, Van Cura, Nelson, Hewitt, Kitzman & Cole 2007). Students might not attend school if they have physical illness or injury. Even though many schools will excuse a student's absences for medical reasons, some students do not have the means available to obtain a doctor's excuse.

Mental health diagnoses such as depression, anxiety, post traumatic stress disorder, and antisocial disorder also have an effect on a student's desire to attend school. A student who suffers from antisocial disorder will have a very difficult time functioning in a socially interactive classroom (Reid 2005). That student may then try to avoid school as a result of her mental illness.

Another factor is the individual students' personal skills and abilities. Research has shown that a student's lack of academic ability in a subject area may also impact negatively on the student's willingness to attend school (Reid 2005). Longitudinal studies demonstrate that students who have academic difficulties in specific subject areas in elementary school tend to avoid those subject areas in secondary and tertiary institutions (Teasley 2004). This research argued that students who devote their time doing something else than academics may not do well in their studies.

Furthermore, adolescents are known to communicate freely with their peers more than with adults. Communication which is the exchange and flow of information and ideas from one person to another has been argued to be largely responsible for the problems that occur in organizations (Mistry et al. 2008). A situation where a student keeps to himself and is not open to other peers that can help him is capable of precipitating behavioral problem like truancy.

Peer tutoring

Effect of Peer Tutoring on Truancy

Peer tutoring is a very old practice, traceable back at least as far as the ancient Greeks. Archaic definitions of peer tutoring perceived the peer tutor as a surrogate teacher, in a linear model of the transmission of knowledge, from the teacher to tutor and to tutee (Topping, Simpson, Thompson & Hill 1996). Peer tutoring is characterized by specific role taking; at any point someone has the job of tutor while the other(s) are in role of tutee(s).

Peer tutoring comes in many forms and goes by many names. It may be referred to as peer-assisted learning, peer monitoring, peer facilitator or peer-mediated instruction. The common thread that links these terms together is the use of peers. Peer tutoring is used in a variety of areas; reading, writing, Mathematics and science to name a few (Kalkowshi 1995).

By taking on the role of the tutor the instructor is able to develop and extend on their own current knowledge adapting it in a way that is accessible to the tutee as they are challenged to consider the subject area from a different perspective. This provokes the tutor to engage in active monitoring, to identify and correct errors, to

reorganize and clarify their own knowledge understanding and to elaborate on their questions in order to provide help that can be useful to the tutee (Fuchs & Fuchs 2000).

In peer tutoring, the behavioural problem students learn appropriate behaviors by observing and imitating the tutor. Peer tutoring has shown very positive results in several areas. Tutees improved in academic achievement more than tutors and the number of disciplinary referrals has reduced considerably (King 1994). Peer tutoring is of great importance among the tutor/tutee students whose behavior is changed among schooling adolescents in the course of tutor-tutee interaction. The tutee is given the opportunity of closely observing their tutor's concentration on the material that is being taught, their ability to explain the material and their efforts to give feedback. This means that the tutees will tend to imitate their tutors by modeling their own behavior which will result in change generally and also in the school. Also peer tutoring include exchange of information and insights among cooperators, increase ability and the development of a shared cognitive representation of problems (Qin, Johnson & John 1995). The greatest level of achievement by the tutee has been found to occur when the tutor is a high achiever. Such children are able to incorporate greater conceptual focus and provide quality and effective explanations which maximize their tutees understanding (Fuchs Karnes, Hamlet; Dutka & Katzaroff 1996).

The use of demonstration technique in peer tutoring to teach individual student how to solve specific problem reduces the behavioral problem among schooling adolescents (King 1994). Before a child or adolescent solves the problem, the peer tutor demonstrates by solving it first of all in the presences of the tutee. This remained as referent as the child worked on his or her own. There is a saying that accuracy dramatically improves others (Smith & Lovioit 19975). In line with this group application of this peer tutoring approach, when verbalized solves the problems, decreased the accuracy of behavioral problem among the adolescents (Hermrick 1979). Peer tutoring is usually considered less threatening and intimidating. There are many benefits for both the peer tutor and tutee in their relationship, one aspect of this is that tutor can establish rapport with the tutee in a way that the teacher cannot. Another reason for the peer tutoring is that peers are more likely to see the behavior exhibited as it occurs naturally across the settings of which the teacher does not have access to.

Conclusion

It is based on these findings and discussions of the study that the following conclusions are made:

Students with truancy behavioral problem who were exposed to instruction on communication and planning one's day through peer tutoring acquired the skills used to overcome truancy behavioral problem. Therefore, there was significant difference in the mean scores of students exposed to the instruction and those who were in control group.

Age was not a significant factor in the mean score of schooling adolescent's with behavioral problems.

Gender was a significant influence in reducing truancy behavioral problem among schooling adolescent.

The interaction effect of peer tutoring and gender was equally significant.

Educational Implications

The findings of the study have some important educational implications for students, teachers, guidance counselors, heads of schools and parents.

The result of the study has shown that students actually help each other to learn. Since peer tutoring is aimed at helping the peers help themselves, and teaching others to teach them. This is made possible as they master the skills involved in communication and how to plan one's day by making time table, the students involved in truancy are greatly helped. So in the same way, if this is allowed in various schools it will be a tremendous help to other students.

The findings of this study will be of great help to the teachers. Teachers often do not know why some students behave the way they do. With trained peer tutors as this study has demonstrated, a lot of the causes of students' truancy problem can be unearthed and tackled. Consequently, teaching and learning would take place with minimal distractions.

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