



EFFECTS OF REALITY AND RATIONAL EMOTIVE BEHAVIOUR THERAPIES IN IMPROVING REGULAR SCHOOL ATTENDANCE BEHAVIOUR AMONG TRUANTS' SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN AJEGUNLE, LAGOS STATE

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Abstract

This study investigated effects of reality and rational emotive behaviour therapies in improving regular school attendance behaviour among truants' secondary school students in Ajegunle, Lagos State, while considering the moderating effect of age and gender. The study adopted a pre-test, post-test control group quasi experimental design with 3x2x2 factorial matrix. The design is made of three rows representing the two treatment techniques, reality therapy and rational emotive behaviour therapy and the Control Group (non-treatment group). The two treatment groups were exposed to eight-weeks training in Emotional Intelligence and Cognitive Restructuring Training, while participants in the control group received no training. The sample for the study comprised of sixty secondary school students (male and female) who are truants and have consistently absented from school 15 times in each term (first and second term) without permission as recorded in their school attendance register. Participants were purposively selected based on their absenting record for two terms. One validated instrument: Regular School Attendance. Questionnaire ($\alpha = 0.82$) was used. Three hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. Data was analysed using Analysis of Covariance. There was significant main effect of treatment in the pre-post school attendance behaviour scores among secondary school truants' students in the experimental and control groups ($F(3,56) = 5.538, P < .05$). Also, there was significant moderating main effect of age in the pre-post regular school attendance behaviour scores among secondary school truants' students between older and younger students ($F(2,57) = 8.923, P < .05$). Likewise, there was significant moderating main effect of gender in the pre-post regular school attendance behaviour scores of truants' secondary school students ($F(2,57) = 2.244, P < .05$). School

counselling psychologists could adopt the two interventions to manage challenges of truancy among secondary school students.

Keywords: Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy, Reality Therapy, School, Students and Truants

Introduction

Regular attendance of school by students ensures enables them to stay connected with the curriculum, engage actively in classroom discussions, and benefit from daily interactions with teachers and peers. But more importantly, it teaches punctuality, responsibility, and self-management, all core elements of discipline. This implies that regular school attendance is a crucial factor that help enhances students' academic success and personal development. This because regular attendance ensures that students receive a consistent education, build strong relationships, and develop essential life skills. Life Skills Group (2023) report affirmed that regular attendance allows students to form lasting friendships, engage in extracurricular activities, and develop essential interpersonal skills they will need in adult life. For example, attendance instils discipline and a sense of responsibility in students, and employers often look for people with these traits who can demonstrate reliability and commitment.

Whitford (2025) stated that regular attendance has a direct link to academic achievement. Students who consistently attend school are more likely to stay on track with their coursework, have better grades, and be better prepared for future educational opportunities. By attending school, students gain not only knowledge but also the social and emotional tools to navigate the challenges of both school and life. Also, Nicolas (2025) summarized the results of 62 studies that studied the relationship between class attendance and academic performance with over 21000 students. The study found that student attendance was the single strongest predictor of academic performance in university, having a strong relationship with class grades and overall GPA. However, missing classes frequently as a result of truancy not only affects academic performance but also disrupts the learning flow, making it difficult for students to keep up and adjust to challenges of their learning environment and deprive them the opportunity to forge meaningful connections with their peers and teachers. This makes investigating effects of psycho-educational and systemic therapies in improving regular school attendance behaviour among truants' secondary school students in Ajegunle, Lagos State a necessity.

Expressed act of truancy among secondary school students is a devastating problem impairing educational outcomes and general well-being of students. School truancy is skipping classes without permission, not showing up at class and not attending school at all (Heyne et al., 2019). Earlier studies among secondary school students stated that high-income countries have a lower truancy prevalence than low- and middle-income countries (Seidu et al., 2021), ranging from 59% in Zambia, 36.6% in Mozambique, 31% in Ghana, 34% in Nigeria, 30.8% in Malaysia, 25.7% in Tanzania, and 22% in Swaziland to 12.0% found in the USA (Osborne et al., 2024). Truancy carries significant consequences for individuals and society. It is associated with lower academic achievement, increased risk of dropping out, and reduced future employment opportunities for adolescents. Truants are also more vulnerable to risky behaviours like substance abuse and delinquent activities. On a broader scale, high truancy rates can impede educational development goals, weaken social cohesion, and hinder economic progress (Osborne et al., 2024). Truancy can be a sign that secondary school students need help because the cause of truancy can be complex, emotionally tasking and mentally exhausting and the use of psychological intervention strategies to help truants back to normal academic life is documented by literature as a game changer.

Reality therapy (RT) is a dynamic approach use in counselling and psychotherapeutic interventions to help distresses individuals assume responsibility for their behaviour. Reality therapy focuses on helping individuals take responsibility for their actions and make choices that meet their needs for love and belonging. Central to this approach is creating a supportive relationship where clients can explore solutions and set realistic goals. Techniques in reality therapy encourage evaluating current behaviours and developing effective strategies to foster meaningful change (Loggins, 2025). Reality therapy maintains that the core problem of psychological distress is that one or more of the client's essential needs are not being met thereby causing the client to act irresponsibly or make poor choices. The therapist then addresses this issue and asserts that the client assume responsibility for their behavior. Postulations of Reality therapy asserts that individuals can learn and re-learn responsibility at any time in life (Loggins, 2025).

Ojewola (2016) found that utilization of reality therapy enables students (truants) become aware that they are responsible for the reason that made them become unserious and start absenting themselves from school. The main goal of reality therapy towards truants in school is to help them become emotionally strong and rational enough to accept personal responsibilities for their life choices (Ojewola, 2016). This goal discourages truants from blaming parental background, teachers, society, school and government as responsible for their desire to skip school. Reality therapy maintains that the therapist must reject all unrealistic and unacceptable behaviours, but not to reject the client or the counselling involvement (Ojewola, 2016). According to Ojewola (2016) reality therapy is an effective intervention technique that can help students reduce the incidence of truancy among students, the basic goal being to help clients learn better ways of fulfilling their needs.

According to Turner (2016) rational emotive behavior therapy (REBT) is an action oriented psychotherapeutic approach that focuses on helping people deal with irrational beliefs and learn how to manage their emotions, thoughts, and behaviours in a healthier, more realistic way. When people hold irrational beliefs about themselves or the world, problems can result. REBT helps people recognize and alter those beliefs and negative thinking patterns in order to overcome psychological problems and mental distress (Turner, 2016). This is because REBT operates with the fundamental assumption that human beings do not get emotionally disturbed by unfortunate circumstances, but by how they construct their views of these circumstances through their language, evaluative beliefs, meanings and philosophies about the world, themselves and others (Ellis, 2001). Ellis (2003) affirmed that the application of REBT principles by therapist often involves active-directive teaching of the client on how to identify irrational and self-defeating beliefs and philosophies which in nature are rigid, extreme, unrealistic, illogical and absolutist, and then to forcefully and actively question and dispute them and replace them with more rational and self-helping ones. By using different cognitive, emotive and behavioural methods and activities, the client, together with help from the therapist and in homework exercises, can gain a more rational, self helping and constructive rational way of thinking, emoting and behaving (Ellis, 2003). Brabangard (2017) observed that Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy most of the time is used as a brief therapy to resolve deeper and more complex challenges associated with students' truancy and other anti-social behaviours. According to Rachman (2014) through the therapeutic process, Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy employs a wide array of forceful, active and disputing methodologies to bring the consciousness of truants to acknowledge the negativity associated with their dispositions of non-school attendance. He also noted that central through these methods and techniques is the intent to help the client or student challenge, dispute and question their destructive and self-defeating cognition, emotions and behaviours. The methods and techniques incorporate cognitive-philosophic, emotion-evocative-dramatic, and behavioral

methods for disputation of the clients' irrational and self-defeating constructs and help the client come up with more rational and self-constructive ones.

In the same vein, National Centre for School Engagement (2005) has reported that both boys and girls are indulging in truancy behaviour. Similarly, Oluremi (2013) had found that there was significant difference between male and female manifestation of truancy behaviour. Similarly, Nkomo (2014) also found out that there was significant difference between male and female student involvement in truant anti-social behaviour in schools. However, girls are more often truant because they are caring for their own children or other family members. However, boys are more likely to be engaged in truancy because of their peers. Similarly, response of both genders shows that engagement in sexual romantic relationship cause truancy; moreover, girls are more likely to be truant due to their relationship with older boys. Other worthy factors to consider for truancy among secondary school students in Ajegunle Lagos state is the unfriendly school setting. Students who do not have friends or are being bullied are likely to miss school. Moreover, some students who are facing peer group pressure also miss class. Teachers also attest that students who lack confidence in their mental abilities or have learning disabilities also tend to be truant. High truancy rates also are seen in schools that have unfriendly relationships between staff and students and a poor attendance policy.

Statement of the Problem

The inability of some secondary school students to adjust to the complex challenges of academic demands and societal expectations is often accompanied by apprehension and tension that has untold negative effect on their emotions, self-concept, dispositions towards school attendance and their academic well-being. Thus, the effect of their inability to find solution to their challenges of adjustment is accompanied by undue anxiety and a drop in their school attendance and academic performance. These in turn impair on students' emotional well-being, attitude to school and undermine their academic motivation. Consequently, all these, if not checked, could eventually lead to maladjustment of such students becoming chronic truant. Therefore, this study is anchored on Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This theory postulates that people are centrally concerned with motivation -- how to move themselves or others to act. Therefore, individuals struggle to find energy, mobilize effort and persist at the tasks of life and work as people are often moved by external factors such as reward systems, grades, evaluations, or the opinions they fear others might have of them. These intrinsic motivations help sustain passion, creativity, and efforts. Hence, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) represents a broad framework for the study of human motivation and personality with the assumption that people are active organisms, with evolved tendencies toward growing, mastering ambient challenges, and integrating new experiences into a coherent sense of self. These natural developmental tendencies do not however, operate automatically, but instead require ongoing social nutrients and supports as could be experienced with a psychological intervention treatment programme on the management of truancy behavioural disposition among secondary school students (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Therefore, the study investigated the effects of reality and rational emotive behaviour therapies in improving regular school attendance behaviour among truants' secondary school students in Ajegunle, Lagos State, while considering the moderating effect of age and gender.

Purpose of the Study

This study is focused in investigating the effects of reality and rational emotive behaviour therapies in improving regular school attendance behaviour among truants' secondary school students in Ajegunle, Lagos State, while considering the moderating effect of age and gender.

Research Hypotheses

In this study the following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant main effect of treatment in improving regular school attendance behaviour among truants' secondary school students
2. There is no significant moderating main effect of age on regular school attendance behaviour among truants' secondary school students
3. There is no significant moderating main effect of gender on regular school attendance behaviour among truants' secondary school students

Methods

Research Design

The study adopted a pre-test, post-test control group quasi experimental design with 3x2x2 factorial matrix. The design is made of three rows representing the two treatment techniques, reality therapy and rational emotive behaviour therapy and the Control Group (non-treatment group). There is also a column denoting gender (male and female) participants and age (younger and older) participants as shown in table 1

TABLE.1

A 3x2X2 Factorial Matrix Design to manage irregular school attendance behaviour of secondary school students

Treatment	Gender						Total
	Male			Female			
	Younger	12-	Older	Younger	12-	Older	
	16 years		17-21	16 years		17-21	
			Years			Years	
A1 Reality Therapy	A1 B1C1n=6		A1 B1C2n=7	A1 B2C1n=4		A1B2C2n=3	20
A2 REBT	A2 B1C1n=7		A2 B1C2n=2	A2 B2C1n=5		A2 B2C2n=6	20
A3 Control Group	A3 B1C1n=6		A3 B1C2n=5	A3 B2C1n=5		A3B2 C2n=4	20
Total	19		14	14		13	

The population for this study consists of all secondary school students in Ajegunle Lagos state.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

The sample for the study comprised of sixty secondary school students (male and female) who are truants and have consistently absented from school 15 times in each term (first and second term) without permission as recorded in their school attendance register. Participants were purposively selected based on their absenting record for two terms.

Instrument

The questionnaire used for this study is Regular School Attendance Questionnaire. It is a researcher self-constructed questionnaire. It is a 15-item questionnaire with items such as: I like attending school regularly; I do not feel bad if I do not attend school; It has a 4-point Likert scale, response pattern with "1" representing "strongly disagree" and "4" representing "strongly agree," The reliability coefficient of the instrument is 0.82. gotten through test-re-test measure.

Procedure

I got permission to carry out this research from the authorities of the three secondary schools used for the study in Ajegunle Lagos state. Preliminary visits were made to the three secondary schools. And through these visits, I informed the principals and class teachers of the purpose of the study and liaised with them to get the needed information from the student's school attendance record as to facilitate effectively the process of purposive sampling of students who have consistently fail to attend school 15 times for first and second term without permission. Similarly, the initial visit to the schools was used as a pilot study. The three secondary schools were selected using the simple random sampling technique. Two of these secondary schools were used as the treatment groups while one served as the control group. The treatment groups received eight weeks training while the control group received no training. The groups were subjected to pre-treatment and post treatment sessions.

Control of Extraneous Variables

In controlling extraneous variables that possibly could affect the results of the study, the study involved several stages of randomization of treatment to the experimental group. Also, the Rosenthal effect was controlled by keeping the control group busy with their usual daily school routine during the experimental sessions. Via this measure, the contaminations which are beyond the reach of the design and other procedures of the research was taken care of by using ANCOVA statistical tool for analysis.

Method of Data analysis

ANCOVA (Analysis of Covariance) was used as the statistical tool for the study. Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was used to compare the differential effectiveness of the treatments.

RESULTS

Hypothesis One

There is no significant main effect of treatment in improving regular school attendance behaviour among truants' secondary school students:

To test this hypothesis, Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was employed to analyse the post test scores of participants on truant behaviour, using the pre-test scores as covariates to find out if post experimental differences were significant. The result obtained was tested at 0.05 significant levels as presented in table 2, 3 and 4 below.

Table 2: Summary of Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) of pre-post test interactive effects of truancy scores of truant secondary school students in the Treatment Groups, Reality Therapy and Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy.

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Covariates	2990.667 ^a	11	271.879	4.353	.000
Main Effect:					
Treatment Group	52225.709	1	52225.709	836.09	.000
Age	691.860	2	345.930	5.538	.001
Gender	557.385	1	557.385	8.923	.000
Error	140.190	1	140.190	2.244	.003
Total	2998.267	48	62.464		
Corrected Total	77266.000	60			.
	5988.933	59			

The result in table 2 showed that there was significant main effect of treatment in the pre-post school attendance behaviour scores among secondary school truants' students in the experimental and control groups ($F(3,56) = 5.538, P < .05$). This means that there is a significant main effect of treatment in the mean post test truancy scores of participants exposed to treatment and the control group. Therefore, hypothesis 1 is rejected.

Hypothesis Two

There is no significant moderating main effect of age on regular school attendance behaviour among truants' secondary school students: Table 2 showed that there was significant moderating main effect of age in the pre-post regular school attendance behaviour scores among secondary school truants' students between older and younger students ($F(2,57) = 8.923, P < .05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Table 3: Scheffe Post-Hoc Pairwise significant differences of regular school attendance behaviour among older and younger secondary school truants' students.

	Age Groups	Sig
Regular School Attendance Behaviour	Older	.000
	Younger	.010

It is shown above that there is pair significant differences between the older and younger secondary school truants' students school attendance behaviour.

Hypothesis Three

There is no significant moderating main effect of gender on regular school attendance behaviour among truants' secondary school students: Table 2 showed that there was significant moderating main effect of gender in the pre-post regular school attendance behaviour scores of truants' secondary school students ($F(2,57) = 2.244, P < .05$). Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. This shows that the impact of gender on expressed act of truancy among truants' secondary school students is significant.

Table 4: Scheffe Post-Hoc Pairwise significant differences of regular school attendance behaviour among boy and girls secondary school truants' students.

	Gender	Sig
Regular School Attendance Behaviour	Boys	.000
	Girls	.020

It is shown above that there were pair significant differences between boys and girls secondary school truants' students school attendance behaviour.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the first hypotheses showed that there was significant main effect of treatment in the pre-post school attendance behaviour scores among secondary school truants' students in the experimental and control groups ($F(3,56) = 5.538, P < .05$).

This means that there is a significant main effect of treatment in the mean post test truancy scores of participants exposed to treatment and the control group. Truants in the experimental groups benefited positively and had attitudinal change, realized the implication of not attending school regularly on their future, developmental wellbeing and quality of life.

This align with the fact that reality therapy (RT) is a dynamic approach use in counselling and psychotherapeutic interventions to help distresses individuals assume responsibility for their behaviour. Reality therapy focuses on helping individuals take responsibility for their actions and make choices that meet their needs for love and belonging. Central to this approach is creating a supportive relationship where clients can explore solutions and set realistic goals.

Techniques in reality therapy encourage evaluating current behaviours and developing effective strategies to foster meaningful change (Loggins, 2025). Also, according to Turner (2016) rational emotive behavior therapy (REBT) is an action-oriented psychotherapeutic approach that focuses on helping people deal with irrational beliefs and learn how to manage their emotions, thoughts, and behaviours in a healthier, more realistic way. When people hold irrational beliefs about themselves or the world, problems can result. REBT helps people recognize and alter those beliefs and negative thinking patterns in order to overcome psychological problems and mental distress (Turner, 2016). This is because REBT operates with the fundamental assumption that human beings do not get emotionally disturbed by unfortunate circumstances, but by how they construct their views of these circumstances through their language, evaluative beliefs, meanings and philosophies about the world, themselves and others (Ellis, 2001).

The outcome of the second hypotheses revealed that there was significant main effect of age in the pre-post regular school attendance behaviour scores among secondary school truants' students between older and younger students ($F(2,57) = 8.923, P < .05$). The older students of ages 17-21 years overcome their truancy challenges better than younger students of ages 12-16 years.

The reason could be that at ages 17-21 years students can think more abstractly and synthesis ideals better than younger students. They are able to evaluate the consequences of their behavioural dispositions on their future better and realise the need for change to safeguard their future. Postulations of Reality therapy asserts that individuals can learn and re-learn responsibility at any time in life (Loggins, 2025). Ojewola (2016) found that utilization of reality therapy enables students (truants) become aware that they are responsible for the reason that made them become unserious and start absenting themselves from school. According to Ojewola (2016), reality therapy is an effective intervention technique that can help students reduce the incidence of truancy among students, the basic goal being to help clients learn better ways of fulfilling their needs. Brabangard (2017) observed that Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy most of the time is used as a brief therapy to resolve deeper and more complex challenges associated with students' truancy and other anti-social behaviours.

According to Rachman (2014) through the therapeutic process, Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy employs a wide array of forceful, active and disputing methodologies to bring the consciousness of truants to acknowledge the negativity associated with their dispositions of non-school attendance. He also noted that central through these methods and techniques is the intent to help the client or student challenge, dispute and question their destructive and self-defeating cognition, emotions and

behaviours. The methods and techniques incorporate cognitive-philosophic, emotion-evocative-dramatic, and behavioral methods for disputation of the clients' irrational and self-defeating constructs and help the client come up with more rational and self-constructive ones.

The outcome of the third hypotheses showed that there was significant moderating main effect of gender in the pre-post regular school attendance behaviour scores of truants' secondary school students ($F(2,57) = 2.244, P < .05$). This shows that the impact of gender on expressed act of truancy among truants' secondary school students is significant. Also, boys managed their truancy challenges better than girls. This is consistent with previous findings. National Centre for School Engagement (2005) has reported that both boys and girls are indulging in truancy behaviour. Similarly, Oluremi (2013) had found that there was significant difference between male and female manifestation of truancy behaviour. Similarly, Nkomo (2014) also found out that there was significant difference between male and female student involvement in truant antisocial behaviour in schools. However, girls are more often truant because they are caring for their own children or other family members.

Implications of the Study

This study has several implications which include among others the fact that the study has proved that Reality Therapy and Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy training are effective intervention techniques in the management of expressed truancy behaviour of secondary school students who are truants. Therefore, since the two therapeutic techniques applied were effective, the skills learnt would enable secondary school student develop the required psychological skills and competence to overcome their negative truant behavioural dispositions, attend school regularly and become focused in their studies and academic task. Furthermore, the study revealed the fact that secondary school students that are truants face frustrated situation and as such there is the need for government and school authorities to make available functional counselling services as a means to coming to the aid of students who are involved in truancy on time before their situation gets worst.

Conclusion

The study revealed that Reality Therapy and Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy training techniques were effective in managing expressed negative truancy behaviour of secondary school students. This implies that the challenges of truancy can be managed. Also, that regular school attendance behaviour can be enhanced among secondary school students.

Recommendations

Students should be given appropriate orientation that would inspire them to develop positive attitude towards attending school, good study habit and teacher student consultation experience as it would enable them get acquainted with their course content, manage anxiety and overcome challenges that might discourage them from attending school.

Teachers should endeavour to encourage and motivate secondary school students to attend school regularly by making school and learning experience interesting to students by applying teaching methods that would cater for the individual differences of students as to carry them along and make the teaching and learning experience rewarding and fruitful.

Counselling / psychological intervention programmes should be put in place to help truants' students to self-rediscover their potentials, abilities and capabilities and improve on their academic competence. This would help them develop interest in school learning activities and attending school regularly.

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