



# EFFECT OF ASSERTIVENESS TRAINING TECHNIQUE ON SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' LOW SELF- ESTEEM IN ORLU EDUCATION ZONE, IMO STATE

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## ABSTRACT

Low self-esteem is a central construct in present day research. *This study investigated the effect of assertiveness training technique on secondary school students' low self-esteem in Orlu Education Zone of Imo state. The study is a quasi-experimental research which adopted a pre-test, post-test, control research design. One research question guided the study while one null hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance. A sample size of 102 SS 1 male and female secondary school students were purposively sampled from two highest determined schools with students identified with low self-esteem. The instrument for data collection was Index of Self-esteem which was developed by Hudson in 1982 but revalidated and used in Nigeria by Onighaiye (1996). The data collected was analyzed using mean scores for the research question while ANCOVA was used in testing the null hypothesis. The mean score norm of 30.89 for female students and 32.04 for male students provided in the instrument manual guided the decision. The findings of the study revealed among others that assertiveness training technique was effective in enhancing the students' low self-esteem. Based on the findings and implications of the study, the following recommendations were made: it behooves guidance counsellors to start early and adopt the use of assertiveness training technique to counsel students in enhancing their low self-esteem. Also, the government and nongovernmental organisations should fund training programmes on enhancing low self-esteem through workshops, seminars for equipping teachers, counsellors and other significant others in order to assist in the enhancement of students' low self-esteem.*

*Key words: Assertiveness training Technique, Secondary School, Students, Self-Esteem*

## Introduction

Low self-esteem is quite a widespread problem that has become a source of concern to students, parents, teachers, guidance counsellors, researchers and other stake holders in recent times. Indeed, it had contributed immensely to the falling standard of education and morality, as well as unrest and insecurity in the nations worldwide. The unbearable dreary of low self-esteem has equally resulted to the incessant rate of poor academic performance and negative behavioural disposition among secondary school students. However, it has been observed that some students operate at very low levels of sociability. This could be attributed to their heart dispositions, for as an individual thinks or feels in the heart, so is the person (Proverbs 23:7a). Such students with low self-esteem rarely engage in social interactions with others, and are therefore regarded as isolates. Yet, it has been established that, everyone including the secondary school student has an esteem of what and who they are (Yahaya, 2009).

Low self-esteem is the negative attitude that individuals have of themselves. It is an individual's pessimistic estimate of his or her self. Low self-esteem according to Weisten, Dunn and Harmer (2012) is defined as negative mental picture of oneself, or a collection of self perceptions. According to Pastorino and Portillo (2013), low self-esteem is seen as one's negative perception or image of one's abilities and one's uniqueness. From the above definitions, this implies that one's negative view of self would likely influence his or her abilities and the totality of his wellbeing. However, in the context of this study, low self-esteem is perceived as the negative perception an individual has of his or her self about the strength, weakness, value, belief and attitude derived from environment or social interaction. From the above definitions, this implies that one's negative view of self would likely influence his or her abilities and the totality of his wellbeing. However, in the context of this study, low self-esteem is perceived as

the negative perception an individual have of his or her self about the strength, weakness, value, belief and attitude derived from environment or social interaction.

An individual's low self-esteem develops and evolves throughout life by the image built through experiences with different people and activities. In fact, experiences during childhood plays particular major role in shaping of our basic self-esteem. Most often, students with low self-esteem is identified from childhood as those who were often criticized harshly, were yelled at or maltreated, beaten and were given little attention by those they were closest to. Low self-esteem is cognitive as the individual consciously thinks about himself negatively (Papalia, Olds & Feldman, 2008). Low self-esteem can leave a student feeling insecure and unmotivated. Such students often interpret non critical comments as critical. As a matter of fact, they are more likely to experience social anxiety and low levels of interpersonal confidence. Furthermore, low self-esteem individuals tend to be pessimistic towards people and groups within the society.

National Policy on Education (FRN; 2013) stipulates that secondary students' education is an instrument for national development that fosters the worth and development of the individual for further education and general development of the society and equality of educational opportunities to all Nigerian children, irrespective of any real or marginal disabilities. Students in the secondary schools are mostly adolescents who are faced with developmental metamorphosis accompanied by physiological and psychological tendencies which subsequently result to stress, perplexities, ambiguities and complexities. Resultantly, such secondary school students tend to suffer from low self-esteem. Bameister (2011) opines that the process of the development of self-esteem begins from childhood and gains momentum during the turbulent years of adolescence. Secondary school students are expected to be interactive, be in good social contact and relationship with their peers, classmates and teachers.

The secondary school age is a stressful and critical transitional stage, from childhood to adulthood which ranges between ages 11 and 25 years (Meyer, Schwartz, & Frost, 2008) It is equally regarded as a total change in quantity and quality of the child's development (Eissa, 2010; Schmied & Tully, 2009; Wan, 2012).The way students think, feel, believe, value themselves as well as how they respond to one another, affects their self-esteem and learning outcome in the secondary school. In the same vein, Makinde and Akinteye (2014) asserts that due to rapid physiological changes in the secondary school students, particularly when they are unable to transit successfully, they tend to manifest some unhelpful psychological, emotional and behavioural tendencies which tend to becloud their self-esteem.

Gender differences in self-esteem are a recurrent field of research. Gender is related with how individuals perceive themselves in such a way that most people of the same sex identify themselves with certain attributes. These attributes according to Katrin and Marcus (2014) could affect children as they develop. For example, Men are more likely to describe themselves as independent, achievement oriented, financially oriented, and competitive than women. Women, on the other hand, describe themselves as sociable, moral, dependent, and less assertive. Although boys and girls report similar levels of self-esteem during childhood, a gender gap emerges by adolescence, in that adolescent boys have higher self-esteem than adolescent girls whose low self-esteem appear to be more vulnerable to perceptions of the ideal body image perpetuated in western media (through methods such as airbrushing models on magazine covers (Robins et al., 2002).

Behaviour modification techniques are the methodical and organized manner of applying learning principles to change human behaviours so as to ameliorate suffering and enhance

functioning. Anagbogu (2005) identifies the following techniques: reinforcement, systematic desensitization and aversion. Although, a number of stringent measures of applying the carrot and stick like praise, gift and award, denials of pleasures, starving children of food, scolding, caning, casting of negative aspersion, human relations, value clarification, goal setting activities, modelling, systematic desensitization, stimulus control, proximity control, time out, shaping and other behaviour modification techniques had been used in various dimension and settings to improve students' self-esteem yet the self-esteem of most students is still low. The reason could be that studies have not really harnessed and enhance students' self-esteem by the application of assertiveness training technique.

Assertiveness training technique has been widely studied globally in a variety of areas as treatment measures in the literature by some scholars who have also justified its effectiveness as behavioural management techniques (Anagbogu & Anyaechebelu in Okoye, 2007; Animasahun & Akinade, 2012). Assertiveness training technique, according to Michelle (2017) is a form of behaviour therapy designed to empower people, help them stand up for themselves, in more contemporary terms. Similarly, Mehrabi, Taghavi and Attari (2009) sees assertiveness training technique as a structural intervention which is used for social relationship improvement, anxiety disorder therapy, and phobias in children, teenagers and adults alike. From the above definitions, this implies that the skills of relating to people and helping to avoid stereotypy and repetitive behaviour but to respond appropriately to current situation are concerned with assertiveness training. However, in the context of this study, assertiveness training is a form of behaviour therapy designed to assist individual's will power to stand up confidently for themselves without fear; in order to empower themselves and courageously declare their ideas or rights, without necessarily infringing on the rights of others in an interpersonal relationship.

Behaviourally, assertiveness is exercised when an individual is capable of freely expressing his or her emotions, is able to defend his or her purposes or goals in general and specific situations, and can establish rewarding and fulfilling interpersonal relationships. Affectively and cognitively, assertive people are capable of expressing and reacting to positive and negative emotions without undue anxiety or aggression. Likewise, assertiveness is a response that seeks to maintain an appropriate balance between passivity and aggression. Assertive responses promote fairness and equality in human interactions, based on a positive sense of respect for self and others.

Assertiveness training technique therefore is understood to be more students oriented and it allows students to interact freely amongst the group to practice skills they could not ordinarily be able to act in real life as a result of fear of other people's opinion about them and lack of confidence. The students are expected to imbibe the adequate information concerning their rights, understanding the difference between non assertiveness, passive aggressiveness and aggressiveness, including verbal and non-verbal assertive skills. They are expected to rehearse and role play the desired alternative behaviours such as eye contact, voice tone, facial expression, gesture such as hand posture and goal directedness (assertive components) to master the act of assertion and enhance self-esteem. Many researchers efforts on the effects of assertiveness training such as; Unachukwu and Onwuka (2009), Tannous (2015), Daodu, Adedotun and Elegbede (2016) showed that assertiveness training was effective in handling many behavioural problems. This indicates that it could be used to enhance the self-esteem of secondary school students.

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, assertiveness training technique has not been applied as packages to improve self-esteem among secondary school male and female students in

this study's geographical setting by other researchers but have been found to be effective. It is on this note that this present study deemed it necessary to fill the existing gap by embarking on assertiveness training technique as treatment models in enhancing secondary school students' low self-esteem in Orlu Education Zone of Imo State.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Many secondary school students with low self-esteem in Imo state have inferior perception of themselves. They lack self-confidence, concentration, positive achievement in classroom, stable emotion and acceptable behaviour in social situations. Also, they are rarely assertive, as they are often too fearful of upsetting others, to tell the truth, ask for what they want, or share their feelings. Instead, they become passive until their anger builds up at points which they become aggressive, defensive, sarcastic, rude or violent as it is the case with deviants, gang and teen violence. The unfortunate treatments the students with low self-esteem face daily have been known to affect the way others perceive and relate with them, increase their emotional inability, and give them the feeling of guilt, shame and the tendency to make them feel withdrawn from the society.

Teachers have hitherto been saddled with too much of pedagogy at the expense of psychotherapy. Apart from this, the school administrators lack the essential tools for handling psychotherapeutic problems in schools so they rely on punishments in form of caning, cutting of grass, washing of toilets, suspension, referral and expulsion to no avail. The parents have equally tried screaming over their children's heads, starving them of love and food without much effect but have rather led to dropping out of school to roam the streets, run away from homes to tout in motor parks engaging in kidnapping and in arm-robbery. The school counsellors have also been grappling with referral cases of student misbehaviours due to clouded self-esteem through

different behaviour modification techniques like reinforcement; conventional counselling, conversation skills; play interaction skills, interview skills yet the situation still remain unabated.

Literature have revealed abundant evidence of the effectiveness and positive outcomes of some behavioural techniques like assertiveness training technique in reducing maladaptive behaviour and developing acceptable behaviours such as self-esteem, conflict resolution, realistic goal-setting, self-determination, stress management, (Anyamene, Nwokolo&Ezeani, 2015; Vatankhah, Daryabari, Ghadami &Naderifar, 2013). It becomes very imperative for the researcher as a school guidance counsellor to involve scientifically tested behavioural and cognitive strategies to modify deficiency in behaviour as may be associated with low self-esteem. Wholesome development of this population is as germane as the need to help them become happy and develop positive self-esteem to enhance interpersonal encounters and effective learning. It is against this background that this study explored the effects of assertiveness training technique to enhance secondary school students' low self-esteem in Orlu Education Zone, Imo State.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study investigated the effect of Assertiveness training technique on secondary school students' low self-esteem in Orlu Education Zone, Imo State. It specifically determined the difference in the pretest posttest mean score of low self-esteem secondary school students exposed to assertiveness training and that of those exposed to conventional counselling.



## Research Questions

The following research question was formulated to guide this study:

What is the difference in the pretest post-test mean score of Low Self-Esteem students exposed to assertiveness training technique and that of those exposed to conventional counselling.

## Research Hypothesis

To actualize the main objective of the study, the following null hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significant:

There is no significant difference in the effect of assertiveness training on low self-esteem secondary school students when compared to those in conventional counselling.

## Research Design

The researcher adopted a non-randomized pre-test, post-test, control group quasi experimental research design. This was because the study estimated the causal impact of the training on the target population. This quasi experimental research was conducted in a school setting where it was not possible to use pure experimental design which was considered a disruption of school activities.

**Table 1: Non Randomized Pre-test - Post-test - Control Group Design**

| Group            | Pre-test | research condition           | Post-test |
|------------------|----------|------------------------------|-----------|
| Experimental (1) | O1       | X1(Treatment)                | O2        |
| Control (2)      | O1       | X (Conventional counselling) | O2        |

Where O1 stands for pretest that was given to the students

X 1 - stands for training given to the experimental group

X - stands for the conventional or normal counselling had with the control group

## **Sample and Sampling Technique**

The researcher adopted purposive sampling technique to select participants for the study. The participants were 102 (51 Male and 51 Female) SS 1 secondary school students in Orlu education zone of Imo state. Their ages ranged between 12 and 14 with a mean age of 13.

## **Instrumentation**

Index of Self-Esteem (ISE) of Walter W. Hudson (1982) and re-standardized for Nigerian use by Onighaiye (1996) was adopted for the study. The test is a 25-item self report instrument designed on a five scale-point scale to measure the degree, severity or magnitude of problems with self-esteem. The instrument has thirteen directly worded statements while twelve items were reversely worded. According to Onighaiye (1996), the bench mark norms for the scale are 30.89 for male and 32.04 for female are considered to imply that the student has low self-esteem.

## **Validation of the Instrument**

The instrument (Index of Self-Esteem) (ISE) is an adopted instrument which has already been standardized. It is developed by Walter W. Hudson (1982) and revalidated by Onighaiye (1996) for Nigerian use. This current researcher therefore adopted the Index of Self-Esteem (ISE) and did not have need to do any further validation. It had reliability co-efficient value of 0.92).

## **Procedure for Data Collection**

The researcher collected data on the study by administering the questionnaire personally. The researcher ensured that the participants did not have influence over one another in responding to questionnaire by approaching them separately. Moreover, the researcher explained verbally the main purpose of the test to the participants assuring them of confidentiality.

Questions were entertained before they started reacting to the test. The researcher was available for further clarification during the process of responding to the test.

### Data Analysis

Mean score was used to analyse the research question while Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was employed to test the null hypothesis raised in the study.

### Research Question

What is the difference in the pretest, post-test mean scores of low self-esteem of students exposed to assertiveness training and that of those exposed to conventional counselling?

**Table 2. Mean Pre-test Post-test scores of Low Self-esteem Students in the experimental (ATT) and Control groups**

| Source of variation    | N  | Pre-test Mean | Post-test Mean | Lost Mean | Remark    |
|------------------------|----|---------------|----------------|-----------|-----------|
| Assertiveness Training | 34 | 46.37         | 29.74          | 16.63     | Effective |
| Control                | 68 | 42.74         | 38.71          | 4.03      |           |

Norm 31.47

Table 2 reveals that the students exposed to assertiveness training technique had pre-test mean score of 46.37 and post-test score of 29.74 with lost mean of 16.63 in their low self-esteem, while their counterparts in the control group who received conventional counselling had pre-test mean score of 42.74 and post-test score of 38.71 with lost mean of 4.03. With post-test mean score of 29.74 which is below the norm of 31.47, assertiveness training technique is effective in enhancing secondary school students' low self-esteem.

## Null Hypothesis

There is no significant difference in the effect of assertiveness training on low self-esteem secondary school students when compared to those in conventional counselling.

**Table 3: ANCOVA summary of the Low Self-esteem Scores of Secondary School Students Exposed to Assertiveness Training and Those in the Control Group**

| Source of variation | SS                    | df  | MS       | Cal. F | Pvalue | $P \leq 0.05$ |
|---------------------|-----------------------|-----|----------|--------|--------|---------------|
| Corrected Model     | 2478.847 <sup>a</sup> | 2   | 1239.423 |        |        |               |
| Intercept           | 1089.217              | 1   | 1089.217 |        |        |               |
| Pre-test            | 654.827               | 1   | 654.827  |        |        |               |
| Treatment model     | 2235.279              | 1   | 2235.279 | 59.21  | .000   | S             |
| Error               | 3737.467              | 99  | 37.752   |        |        |               |
| Total               | 115454.000            | 102 |          |        |        |               |
| Corrected Total     | 6216.314              | 101 |          |        |        |               |

In table 3, it was observed that at 0.05 level of significance, 1 df numerator and 101 denominator, the calculated F is 59.21 with P value of .000 which is less than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. So, the effect of the assertiveness training technique on the secondary school students' low self-esteem is significant.

## Discussion

### The Effect of Assertiveness Training Technique in Enhancing the Low Self-esteem of Secondary School Students

The results showed existence of statistical significant differences at the level ( $\alpha \geq 0.05$ ); in performance between the experimental and control groups. The result of the study indicated that assertiveness training technique is effective in enhancing secondary school students' low self-esteem. This shows that the practical assertiveness skills which the training offered to those in the experimental group were learnt; the students interacted and imbibed the numerous incorporated skills displayed within the training period.

The present finding is in consonance with the results of Hamoud, El Dayem & Ossman (2011) who declared that behaviour is assertive and self-esteem can be learned and that students can benefit greatly from training programs on self-assertion to increase the skills of assertive behaviour and self-esteem. In line with this finding, assertiveness skills training program has good experimental support in enhancing mental health and improving interpersonal skills and a variety of research have reported the positive effect of this kind of training on enhancement of self-esteem, social compatibility and social skills (Barton-Arwood, Morrow, Lane & Jolivet, 2008). Thus, the results of this study is in consistent with the results of the study conducted by Makhinjaand Singh (2009) which indicated the effectiveness of assertiveness training program on self-esteem and academic achievement in adolescents.

## **Conclusion**

Low self-esteem enhancement for secondary professionals is particularly important because the opinion of any individual about his own character so much determines his imagination about his environment and society. If self- imagination of someone were positive and relatively well-balanced the person is known mentally healthy, conversely a person with an unbalanced and negative self-esteem was known mentally unhealthy person. Self-esteem is related to their cultural and social life background. The main reason for establishing self confidence in individuals should be searched in their relationship with its community, especially during an important period of secondary school age. Warm and supportive family environment, parents and other adults with reasonable expectations of the ability and capability of secondary school students and also respect and giving importance to them could ameliorate low self-esteem in students.

One of the important factors of an effective relationship between the individuals is the ability or inability of a person's assertiveness. Assertiveness training technique enables a person to operate effectively in dealing with stressors factors. This increases the self-confidence, the logical expression of ideas and emotions reduce anxiety, improve community relations, respect for others' rights and eventually increase the ability of coping with stress. In the above mentioned technique, to evaluate the effect of assertiveness training has been used, the null hypothesis rejected and contrary hypothesis is confirmed. This means that assertiveness training technique would greatly enhance low self-esteem

### **Recommendation**

The school should organize sensitization programmes and valuable information for the students against the consequences of low self-esteem. Counsellors on the field are encouraged to replicate or adopt this work to situation in their various locations in order to help students under them overcome their poor self-image and social vices. Programme like seminars, workshop on assertiveness training technique and low self-esteem enhancement should be designed by counselling psychologists under the support and supervision secondary school board funded by the government and nongovernmental organisation to enhance students' low self-esteem. Counselling Association of Nigeria should organize enlightenment campaigns and seminars for parents and the public on the need and value of self-esteem enhancement for students.

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