

**EFFECT OF TOKEN ECONOMY TECHNIQUE ON TRUANCY TENDENCY AMONG
SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ORLU LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA**

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Abstract

This study examined the effectiveness of token economy technique on truancy tendency among secondary school students in Imo State. Two research questions and two null hypotheses tested at .05 level of significant guided the study. The study adopted a pretest-posttest, non-equivalent control group quasi-experimental design. The population for this study was a total of 116 SSII students from co-educational public secondary schools in Orlu Local Government Area. The sample size for the study comprised fifty (50) truants who were purposively chosen from two co-education public secondary schools in the area. Two instruments were used for data collection namely: SSII Class Attendance Register (CAR) and Student Truancy Survey (STS). The STS was validated by experts in the Departments of Guidance and Counselling as well as Measurement and Evaluation, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike and the reliability index established at 0.76 using Cronbach alpha statistic. Data collected from the study were analyzed using Mean and Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA). Results obtained from the study showed that

token economy technique was indeed significantly effective in modifying truancy tendency of secondary school students who participated in the treatment ($f=3.79, p<.05$). The results equally indicated that token economy technique was slightly more effective in modifying truancy tendency of the female truants than the male truants, but the difference in the effectiveness was not significant based on gender ($f=4.60, p<.05$). Based on the findings of this study, some recommendations were made. The researchers recommended among others that Imo State Ministry of Education should provide on-the-job training for both practicing school counsellors and therapists on the use of token economy technique in modifying truancy tendency through seminars, symposia and conferences.

Keywords: Truancy, Token Economy Technique and Gender.

Introduction

Truancy, the habitual absence from school without valid justification, has become a pervasive challenge in many educational systems, particularly at the secondary school level. Every registered student is expected to be in school and must be present in school, engage in class attendance and activities regularly in order to achieve academic excellence and sound education. It seems that some students are punctual while some are absent, skipping out of the class without good reasons. The ability of staying off the school unauthorized from parents or school authority is called truancy. The person who habitually stays away from school without good reasons is a truant. He or she is irregular at school attendance but finds other places more attractive than that of school. In Nigeria, and more specifically in Imo State, the rising incidence of truancy among students threatens academic performance, discipline, and the overall success of educational objectives (Ukoima *et al*, 2024). According to Sulaiman and Uhuegbu (2020), various behavioural and socio-economic factors contribute to truancy, including lack of motivation, peer pressure, family issues, and inadequate school engagement strategies. Addressing this issue requires the implementation of effective behavioural interventions that can promote regular school attendance and instil a sense of responsibility in students. Therefore, truancy has been identified and regarded as a serious problem which tenders the academic performance and school success at a high risk.

In Nigeria there is no doubt that one major challenge that public secondary schools both in urban and rural are facing these days is truancy. It has been viewed and defined differently by researchers. Truancy as defined by Okafor (2024) is an absence from school for no legitimate reason. In the same vein, Welle, (2020) states that truancy involves deliberately absenting of an individual from school without the consent, leaving and escaping of specific lesson periods without permission. According to Safyanu, *et al* (2019), truancy is unexcused absence by the students from school for a period of two days in a week or eight days in a month which constituted 30% absence. Truancy operationally referred to students prolongs absent without genuine reasons, regardless of whether it is known to or approved by the parents or school authority. The absence

from school may range from once a week to twice a week or absence from school throughout a week or month.

One promising approach to managing and reducing truancy is the token economy technique, a form of behaviour modification rooted in the principles of operant conditioning. This technique involves the use of symbolic rewards—tokens—which students can accumulate and exchange for desirable items or privileges. By reinforcing positive behaviour, such as regular school attendance, the token economy system offers a structured and motivating environment that encourages compliance with school norms and expectations. However, truancy is highly ranked as one of the most global acts of delinquency associated with adolescents in Nigerian secondary schools (Sulaiman and Uhuegbu, 2020). It has been observed by researchers that most students may come to school without participating in school activities or programmes such as attending morning assemblies, afternoon assemblies, classes and other extra-curricular activities mapped for them. Also, these truants perhaps fond of hiding away in the corners of the school or skipping out of the school surroundings either meeting with their bad friends or engaging in some anti-social activities. Often times these truants stay away from classes using unnecessary excuses, such as fake sickness or false suspension by the class teacher or school authorities.

Imo State is one of the states in Nigeria where truancy rate is alarming among students in secondary schools and has become a growing issue (Okafor, *et al* (2024). It is an act of indiscipline and social menace. Some secondary school students have truancy tendency especially in a public schools; this anti-social behaviour could have a significant impact on them, affecting their mental health, academic achievement and overall socialization and adaptation. It is a source of worry to the state government and parents.

The causes of truancy in Imo State secondary schools could be attributed to several factors as Ukoima *et al*, (2024) was of the opinion that lack of parental guidance, poverty, drug and alcohol abuse, lack of family support, domestic problems, broken homes, family commitments including care duties in the home are some of the factors that make children engage in truant behaviour. It has been observed by researchers as professional counsellors worked in secondary schools for long period of time that truancy was as a result of poverty. Some students in the rural areas may be involved in roaming about from one village to another, going to their local markets to sell before coming to school or left school before dismissal or going to farms for cultivation or planting for people to make money. Their parents in rural areas may exercise their authority to get their children to go to the farm. In support of this Ukoima, *et al* (2022) said that at times they may work on the farm of a parent and at another time they move to the farm of another parent because some parents may collect loan which they have to repay with interest. There is evidence that adolescents from high socioeconomic status are at a high risk of substance abuse while students from low socioeconomic status are at risk of truancy behaviour than students from moderate socioeconomic status (Adelabu, *et al* 2016); While

Dohho (2015), found that family location and parent's socioeconomic status have significant impact on truancy.

It was noted that students themselves contributed to this problem. Okafor, *et al* (2024) maintained that children's need to catch up on homework or assessment tasks, illness, lack of social competence, mental health difficulties and physical health, lack of self-esteem, social skills and confidence; poor peer relations, lack of academic ability are some of the causes of truancy mainly coming from the student themselves. Similarly, the peer group and class mates have contribute on the students' truant behaviour. As the student frees himself from dependence and control of parents and other adults, he falls back on peer group, for direction and control.

Truancy is an undesirable behaviour whose effect on secondary school students do not only affect their academic performance, but also involve other kinds of abnormal behaviours namely, drug abuse, examination malpractice, fighting, stealing, lateness to school, bullying, insubordination, teenage pregnancy, assault of any kind, cultism, uncontrollable anger and school dropout and so on. Students who do not always stay at school fall behind their peers in the classroom and have poor attendance which leads to high school dropout. This may result to low self-esteem as well as drop out of school.

Students who constantly absent from school or classes will eventually drop out of school. It is very serious as rightly observed by Sulaiman and Uhuegbu (2020) who stressed that when students experience school failure, they become frustrated and end up alienated and experience exclusion leading to eventual dropout. Lakeia (2022) added that students who stay away from school without permission will not only be left out in the learning process but they may also probably end up engaging in anti-social behaviour such as in drug abuse, gangsters', bullying, alcohol consumption, free and unregulated sex, gambling and loitering with their negative consequences and experience. Okafor, *et al* (2024) concluded that lack of seriousness on the part of the students; poor academic achievement; poor school performance; problematic behaviour with teachers and parents; missing of classes; possibility of drop-out; threats to life and national development; and insecure and dark future of the students are the consequences of truancy.

Nonetheless, the above mentioned consequences cause truants level of academic achievement very low because of their lack of interest in learning. It was observed by researchers that some truants likely to perceive schooling as a kind of punishment, whereas some attend classes just to meet their truant friends or to please their parents and guardians. Students who skip out of the school unable to meet up with the learning standard mapped for them by the school management. During counselling session with truants concerning this problem, some truants revealed that going to school is just a waste of time since some rich people in the society may not have been educated.

Meanwhile parents, teachers, counsellors and school administrators have reacted in different ways to curb truancy among students by using several measures such as corporal punishment, verbal punishment (verbal abuse), caning, scolding and expulsion all to no avail and truancy tendency still increases beyond measure. This is worrisome, and one stands to reason that punishment of any kinds does not help in solving truancy among students. Instead it has led to increase the undesirable behaviour (truancy). For example, verbal punishment could make a truant student lose confidence in himself. The persistence and growing effects of truancy among secondary school students especially in Imo State suggest the need to remedy the consequences with psychotherapeutic intervention like token economy.

Token economy is any kind of reward that follows an acceptable behaviour, and is utilised to emphasize the positivity of the action. It is the basic factor of operant conditioning theory proposed by B. F. Skinner in 1953. Skinner assumes that if a person was rewarded for acting in a positive way, he or she would come to see that behaviour as the most natural and advantageous way to act. Operationally, token economy is a kind of behaviour modification technique involving responding to truant's behaviour with a positive reward which increases the likelihood that the truant will make a similar response in similar situations in the future. For instance, if Blessing is rewarded for her being constantly present in the school and for attending classes for a period of one week, she is more likely to do it again.

Token economy can be in the form of verbal remarks like praises, commendations, compliments, approval, encouragement and affirmation. For examples good job, well done, nice work and so on or tangible rewards like cash gift, pen, cake, sweets, erasers and so on and or none-verbal rewards like being clapped, a pat on the back, being smiled at and so on to encourage the repetition of such behaviour (Eremie & Doueyi-Fiderikumo, 2019).

This technique aims at increase of truants' self-awareness, and makes the truants have confidence as he or she understands what they are expected to do. According to Rumfola (2017), through positively reinforcing students' acceptable behaviours, whether academic or social, the students and the teacher benefit academically, behaviourally, socially, and emotionally. In support of this, Ukoima *et al* (2024) maintained that students who are positively reinforced to keep up the good behaviour are the students who will most likely learn to self-monitor themselves in their learning environments.

Therapeutic studies on token economy reported positive effects on the participant behaviours. For examples, Ukoima *et al* (2024) reported in his study that the level of truancy of the experimental group was greatly reduced after treatment of the reinforcement counselling technique compared with the control group. Also, Alam and Alay (2018) in their study proved that positive reinforcement affects students' academic performance. Likewise Okafor, *et al* (2024) affirmed that positive reinforcement techniques can be effectively used to reduce absenteeism among secondary school students, token economy technique has been deemed

effective in reducing the rate of truancy between, treatment group over control group, and among male and female secondary school students.

Observation shown that truancy as a deviant tendency exhibited by students cuts across gender. Gender has to do with expected behaviour of individuals in a society are assigned to different sexes and these expected behaviours differ from one society to another, one ethnic group to another and family to family, thereby providing opportunity to comparisons in activities within the family and society in general (Ekwelundu, *et al*, 2022). Nigerian researchers have indicated that both male and female secondary school students are involved in truanting behaviour (Okafor, *et al* (2024); Ehindero (2015) reported that truancy is prevalent but more among male students than female students. In contrast, Ukoima *et al* (2024) argued that female students are more likely to be involved in truant behaviours due to their group population and career choice taken compared to male students. He added that female students at adolescent age between (12-17) practice more of truant acts than the male students because they believe at this stage they are complete adult or becoming adult responsible for personal decision and tend to behave more disobediently as they are cautioned by their mental ability. It is obvious from literature that that there is gender differences in the acts of truancy among secondary school students.

The present researchers, having observed that many researchers have used this technique of token economy technique in modifying truancy tendency and some other behavioural problems and found out that it was effective, therefore sought to use the technique in the present study in order to find-out if the technique would be more effective in the curbing of truancy tendency in Orlu Local Government Area of Imo State.

Statement of the Problem

Truancy remains a persistent and troubling issue within the Nigerian education system, particularly among secondary school students. In Imo State, the increasing rate of student absenteeism poses a significant threat to academic achievement, discipline, and long-term educational goals. Students who frequently miss school are more likely to fall behind academically, disengage from school activities, and eventually drop out. Despite various efforts by educators, parents, and policymakers, existing measures to curb truancy have often proven inadequate or unsustainable, lacking a structured behavioural approach that directly addresses students' motivation and engagement.

Behavioural modification techniques, such as the token economy technique, have been successfully used in other contexts to shape and reinforce positive behaviours. However, there is limited empirical research on the application and effectiveness of this approach in addressing truancy tendencies within Nigerian secondary schools, particularly in Imo State. Without a clear understanding of whether such an intervention can produce measurable and lasting changes in

student attendance, schools continue to struggle with ineffective disciplinary strategies that do not tackle the root causes of truancy.

This study, therefore, seeks to fill this gap by investigating the effectiveness of the token economy technique in reducing truancy tendencies among secondary school students in Imo State. The outcome of this research is expected to provide practical insights and evidence-based recommendations for school administrators and policymakers seeking to improve student attendance through positive reinforcement strategies. Therefore, the study ascertained the effectiveness of token economy technique on truancy tendency among secondary school students in Orlu Local Government Area, Imo State

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the effect of token economy technique on the secondary school students' truancy tendency when compared with those treated with conventional Counselling using their pre-test and post-test scores?

2. What is the difference in the effectiveness of token economy technique on the male and female secondary school students' truancy tendency using their pre-test and post-test scores?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses guided the study, and were tested at the .05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant difference on the truancy tendency scores of secondary school students when compared with those treated with conventional counselling using their post-test mean scores.

2. There is no significant difference on the effectiveness of token economy technique on the truancy tendency scores of male and female secondary school students using their post-test mean scores.

Methodology

This study is a quasi-experimental research design. The pre-test, post-test, non-equivalent control was specifically adopted. The study involved two treatment conditions (experimental & control) groups for the students having truancy tendency. Treatments were introduced only to the experimental participants, after which the two groups (treatment & control group) were measured.

The study was conducted in Orlu Local Government Area of Imo State. The choice of the area by researchers is because of high rate of truancy tendency among secondary school students irrespective of punitive measures taken to stop this problem. The population of the study was 116 student comprised 51 males and 65 females. They were senior secondary school students (SS2) truants in Orlu Local Government Area. The population of students was obtained using SS2 Class Attendance Register (CAR). Students whose attendance report indicated school absence for over 10 days within a term without permission /excuse were regarded as truants. However, the rationales for adopting SSII were because the selected treatment package topics were expected to be covered in SSII and they are more stable in school environment and conversant with the school system.

The sample size of 50 SSII truants was used for the study. The researchers used purposive sampling technique. The instrument Student Truancy Survey (STS) for data collection was structured questionnaire designed by the researchers. The questionnaire consists of two sections. Section A contains the truant's bio-data and Section B sixteen (16) items for measuring Truancy tendencies with a modified four (4) point scale ranges from strongly agree =SA, agree to =A, disagree = D and strongly disagree = SD. The response options were scored as follows: SA=4, A=3, D=2 and SD=1 respectively. The instrument STS was validated by experts in the Guidance and Counselling and Measurement and Evaluation Departments, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umdike Abia State. The instrument was trial tested using Cronbach Alpha and the reliability coefficient of 0.76 was established.

Researchers obtained the approval of the schools' management for carrying on with the research through a consent letter that was given to the management. The Class Attendance register (CAR) was used for identification of truants in their various schools. The register gives the researchers comprehensive records of students' attendance to classes and their punctuality. The truants then were identified through their total weekly attendance as recorded in their previous five weeks attendance scores. Student Truancy Survey (STS) was administered to both treatment and the control group as pre-test with the help of research assistants (guidance counsellors). The two sampled schools were chosen randomly; one for experimental and the other for the control. The treatment lasted for eight weeks using 40 minutes per session for both the treatment and the control group. Each training session lasted for 40 minutes using the counselling scheduled periods as specified by the schools. The treatment group was treated with token economy technique, while the control group received placebo in the form of tips for successful studentship. In each training day, truants in the treatment group within and after lesson, received some social token economy like praise, and different other forms of wordings encouragements. The students in attendance in addition received at different meetings the gifts of exercise books, biros, meat pies per each student as a token for their attendance.

At the end of the treatment, the STS was reshuffled and re-administered to both the treatment and control groups. This was to find out if the experimental conditions provided a change

in the dependent measures. The participants in token economy technique group confirmed that they had an impressive reduction in truancy behaviour as a result of the treatment.

Mean was used to answer the research questions, and Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was used to test the null hypotheses at .05 level of significance. When the post-test mean score of a group is below the norm of 49.00, the treatment technique for that group is considered “effective”, while scores above the norm is “not effective”. For the null hypotheses, when the p-value is less than .05 level of significance the null hypotheses is rejected, but when the p-value is greater than the .05 level of significance the null hypothesis is not rejected

Results

Research Question One: What is the effect of token economy technique on the secondary school students’ truancy tendency when compared with those treated with conventional counselling using their pre-test and post-test scores?

Table 1: Pre-test and Post-test Truancy Mean Scores of Students Treated with token economy Technique (TET) and those in the Conventional Counselling Group (Norm = 49).

Source of Variation	N	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Lost Mean	Remark
Token Economy	30	64.40	18.80	45.6	Effective
Conventional Counselling	20	62.36	66.33	-3.97	

Table 1 indicated that the students treated with token economy technique had pre-test mean score of 64.40 and post-test mean score of 18.80 with lost mean of 45.6 in their level of truancy, while the students in the conventional counselling group had pre-test mean score of 62.36 and post-test mean score of 66.33 with lost mean of -3.97. This signifies that token economy technique was effective in modifying truancy tendency of secondary school students.

Research Question Two: What is the difference in the effectiveness of token economy technique on the male and female secondary school students’ truancy tendency using their pre-test and post-test scores?

Table 2: Pre-test and Post-test Truancy Mean Scores of Male and Female Secondary School Students Exposed to Token Economy Technique TET (Norm = 49).

Source of Variation	N	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Lost Mean	Remark
Male	15	61.66	20.35	41.31	More effective
Female	15	64.00	16.27	47.73	

Table 2 indicated that male students exposed to token economy technique had a pre-test mean score of 61.66 and a post-test mean score of 20.35, with a reduction in mean score of 41.31, while the female students in the group had a pre-test mean score of 64.00 and a post-test mean score of 16.27 with a reduction in mean score of 47.73. This signifies that token economy technique is more effective in curbing truancy among female secondary school students than the male students.

Testing the Null Hypotheses

H₀₁: The effect of token economy technique on the truancy tendency scores of secondary school students will not be significant when compared with those exposed to conventional counselling using their post-test mean scores.

Table 3: ANCOVA on the Truancy Tendency Post-Test Mean Scores of Students Exposed to Token Economy Technique and those who Received Conventional Counselling

Source of Variation	SS	Df	MS	Cal. F	Pvalue	P≤.05
Corrected Model	1015.079	2	507.539I			
Intercept	874.882	1	784.820			
Pretest	69.227	1	69.227			
Treatment_Model	769.265	2	769.265	3.79	.000	S
Error	7009.247	46	128.435			
Total	326038.000	50				
Corrected Total	8024.370	49				

Table 3 indicated that at .05 level of significance, 1df numerator and 49df denominator, the calculated F is 3.79 with p-value of .000 which is less than .05 ($f=3.79$; $p<.05$). Therefore, the first null hypothesis is rejected. Thus, effectiveness of token economy technique on the truancy tendency among secondary school students was significant.

H₀₂: The effectiveness of token economy technique on the truancy tendency scores of male and female secondary school students will not differ significantly using their post-test mean scores.

Table 4: ANCOVA on the Post-test Truancy Tendency Mean Scores of Male and Female Students Exposed to Token Economy Technique

Source of Variation	SS	Df	MS	Cal. F	Pvalue	P≤.05
Corrected Model	78860.902	2	35484.916			
Intercept	920.133	1	920.133			
Pretest	58.505	1	58.505			
Gender	1660.179	1	1660.179	4.60	.000	NS
Error	450.152	11	17.005			
Total	147413.000	15				
Corrected Total	4594.100	14				

In Table 4, it was observed that at .05 level of significance, 1df numerator and 14 df denominator, the calculated F is 4.60 with p-value of .000 which is greater than .05 ($f=4.60$; $p<.05$). Therefore, the second null hypothesis is accepted. This revealed that effectiveness of token economy technique on the truancy tendency of male and female secondary school students did not differ significant. It was an indication that both male and female truants benefited same way from the treatment.

Discussion of Findings

The findings in hypothesis one showed that there was a significant difference in post-test scores of truancy tendency among truants exposed to token economy technique (TET) group over the participants in the control group. This means the intervention had a significant effect in truancy reduction. This is in line with that of Ukoima *et al* (2024) reported in his study that the level of truancy of the experimental group was greatly reduced after treatment of the token economy technique compared with the control group. This finding is in corroboration with Okafor, *et al* (2024) affirmed that token economy techniques can be effectively used to reduce absenteeism among secondary school students, token economy technique has been deemed effective in reducing the rate of truancy between, treatment group over control group, and among male and female secondary school students. The above result was expected because according to Rumfola (2017), through token economy students' acceptable behaviours, whether academic or social, the students and the teacher benefits academically, behaviourally, socially, and emotionally. Skinners' theory of reinforcement as Senyamator, *et al* (2020) which refers to the process of reinforcing behaviour by consistently giving positive or negative reinforcement. The goal being to increase the probability that the reinforced behaviour will reoccur more frequently whereas those behaviours not rewarded will die out (extinct), and those met with unpleasant (punishment) consequences will be weakened. Because truants' act of attending school was met with pleasant consequences or rewards, they decided to avoid be absent, skipping out of the class.

Another finding of this study is that token economy technique was more effective in reducing truancy tendency among female secondary school students than their male counterparts. This is to say that female truants benefited more from the token economy technique treatment than the male truants. The findings further revealed that the effect of token economy on truancy tendency male and female secondary school students was not significant. This is to say that the technique is not gender sensitive. The male and female truants exposed to token economy technique reduced their truancy behaviour than male and female truants in the control group. The result of the study is in line with that of Ukoima *et al* (2024) who found that there is no significant difference in the indulgence in truancy among male and female secondary school students while Okafor, *et al* (2024) affirmed that token economy techniques can be effectively used to reduce absenteeism among secondary school students, token economy technique has been deemed effective in reducing the rate of truancy between, treatment group over control group, and among male and female secondary school students.

Conclusion

Based on the findings and the discussion that followed, the researchers concluded that token economy technique is significantly effective in modifying truancy tendency of secondary school students. More so, it was also concluded that token economy is significantly

more effective in modifying truancy tendency of female secondary school students who participated in the study than their male counterparts.

Implications of the Study

According to the finding of this study, the implication is that since the token economy technique is effective on truancy tendency among secondary school students; both the school administrators and guidance counsellors are now presented the opportunity to explore the use of this technique in reducing the truancy tendency of secondary school students.

Furthermore, it was also indicated that female secondary school students benefited more from treatment using token economy technique. This signifies that in using token economy technique on secondary school truants, professional counsellors, school psychologist and researchers should consider difference in truants' gender. This is to say that token economy technique could be applied more to the female truants when reducing truancy tendency in the secondary schools.

Recommendations

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

1. Token economy is an effective therapeutic approach in reducing truancy tendency among secondary school students. Therefore, Government through Imo State Ministry of Education should provide on-the-job training for both practicing school counsellors and therapists on the use of token economy technique in modifying truancy tendency through seminar, symposia and conference.
2. As a result of the fact that token economy technique on the truancy tendency of male and female secondary school students did not differ significantly. So, the use of token economy technique should be commenced in full force in secondary schools where teachers, parents and others who work directly to the students should not be mindful of students' gender as a way of handling students' truancy tendency.

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