



EFFECT OF SOCIAL SKILLS TRAINING ON AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ZARIA METROPOLIS, KADUNA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined the effect of Social Skills Training Counselling Technique on aggressive behaviour. Three (3) objectives guided the study. Related to this, three corresponding null hypotheses were formulated and tested. All hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance. The study adopted a quasi-experimental design involving pre-test and post-test only. The population of the study comprised 120 SSII students identified with symptoms of aggressive behaviour through the use of the aggressive behaviour scale. A multistage sampling procedure was used to select fifteen (15) students among those who scored 40 – 60 points on the students' aggressive behaviour scale from the population. All 15 students were exposed to Social Skills Training. The instrument used for data collection was the Aggressive Behaviour Checklist and aggressive behaviour assessment scale by Buss and Perry (1992). Data collected from the participants were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Frequency and percentages were used to present the bio-data of the respondents, paired sample t-test was used to test all hypotheses 1-3. The results of the findings revealed that social skills training had significant effect on physical dimension of aggressive behaviour ($p = .001$, $t = 11.62$, $df = 14$); students exposed to social skills training on verbal dimension had a reduced on verbal aggressive behaviour ($p = .001$, $t = 10.19$, $df = 14$); and on emotional dimension had a reduced on emotional aggressive behaviour ($p = .001$, $t = 9.04$, $df = 14$); among secondary school students in Zaria Metropolis, Kaduna State, Nigeria. Based on the findings, it was concluded that social skills training significantly reduced the physical, verbal and emotional dimensions of aggressive behaviour among secondary school students. It was recommended among others that Counselling Psychologists are encouraged to adopt social skills training as an intervention strategy for addressing the physical, verbal and emotional dimensions of students' aggressive behaviour.

Keywords: Effect, Social Skills, training, Aggressive behaviour, Secondary School, Students

Introduction

Aggressive behaviour is increasingly widespread among young people and poses both immediate and societal challenges, impacting not only victims but also perpetrators. Aggressive behaviour is an intentional behaviour aimed at causing harm, destructive to interpersonal relationships and societal harmony. Aggressive acts are deliberate, with the perpetrator anticipating harm to the target, who, in turn, seeks to avoid it. This form of behaviour, which has become more visible among secondary school students, often results from stress, frustration, anxiety, and the pressures of modern life. Aggressive behaviour may manifest in reaction to physical exchange of blows, arguments, threats, or frustration and can range from emotional outbursts to calculated violence.

Adolescents, in particular, display aggressive tendencies in varied and harmful ways. It is often symptomatic of emotional deregulation and is influenced by personality traits and environmental stressors. Aggressive behaviour can be triggered by conflict, power struggles, and interpersonal challenges, and may escalate into conduct disorders if left unaddressed. Badamas (2022) noted that verbal aggressive behaviour in adolescents can be a precursor to adolescent delinquency. Jimoh (2021) described aggressive behaviour as any behaviour intended to inflict harm, whether physical, verbal, or emotional. Its effects range from damaged relationships and legal consequences to psychological trauma, thus making it a pressing concern for educators, mental health professionals, and society at large (Akorede et al., 2021).

Kazdin (2018) asserts that aggressive behaviour is a frequent phenomenon, affecting individuals across socio-economic strata and age groups. Its presentation varies by context and severity, from irritability to extreme violence. Card and Little's (2016) meta-analysis revealed that between 10% and 25% of school adolescents exhibit aggressive behaviours, with a higher prevalence among boys. Odgers' (2008) longitudinal study similarly found that approximately 40% of adolescents displayed aggressive tendencies at some point in their development. Among adolescents, aggressive behaviour remains a serious mental health issue, affecting workplace dynamics, community safety, and interpersonal interactions. Environmental factors such as poverty, exposure to violence,

and dysfunctional family backgrounds further increase the likelihood of aggressive behaviour (Moffitt & Dodge, 2009).

Aggressive behaviour among secondary school students is particularly alarming, manifesting in behaviours that pose risks both to self and others. The behaviour can be classified into physical, verbal, and emotional. Physical aggressive behaviour includes acts such as hitting, kicking, stabbing, and vandalism, verbal aggressive behaviour encompasses yelling, name-calling, and the use of derogatory language, while emotional aggressive behaviour involves impulsive harm, often triggered by situations such as school sports rivalry (Bushman & Huesmann, 2010). Aggressive behaviour tendencies can emerge in any human setting, including homes, schools, public transport, and workplaces and are evident across both genders, though with differences in expression and causation.

Aggressive behaviour among students constitutes a pervasive global concern, cutting across cultural, gender, and age boundaries. Its prevalence varies by region and educational context, yet a common thread is the frequent exposure to or exhibition of aggressive acts by secondary school students worldwide, including bullying, physical altercations, and verbal hostility. Contributing factors such as peer influence, academic pressure, family instability, and exposure to violent environments play a significant role in fostering such behaviours in secondary schools. The World Health Organisation (2020) reports that approximately 35% of adolescents globally have either experienced or engaged in aggressive behaviours, often involving physical harm or interpersonal conflict. The U.S. Department of Education indicate that 32% of students aged 12 to 18 have been victims of physical aggression in school settings (Wakoli & Bundotich, 2020). Furthermore, a significant proportion of students reported feelings of insecurity and dissatisfaction within the school environment. In Nigeria, Yunusa (2023) found that between 45% and 60% of students in Kaduna State have experienced physical aggression in schools, often exacerbated by peer dynamics and insufficient preventive measures. His study also indicated that 70% of students had participated in or observed aggressive acts such as fighting or property destruction.

It is pertinent, therefore, against this backdrop, this study investigated the effect of Social Skills Training on aggressive behaviour among secondary school students in Zaria Metropolis, Kaduna State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Secondary School Students in Zaria Metropolis are expected to grow and thrive in environments that promote mutual respect, emotional regulation, and healthy interpersonal relationships, devoid of aggressive manifestations. Such environments are essential for equipping them with the capacity to manage emotions constructively and resolve conflicts peacefully. Reports and direct observations by the researchers indicate an increasing incidence of aggressive behaviour among secondary school students, ranging from verbal abuse and physical confrontations to, in some cases, emotional spreading of rumours, social exclusion, manipulations and blackmail.

This upward trend in aggressive behaviour may be driven by various factors, including peer influence, exposure to violent content in media, and socioeconomic stressors. Over the years, educators, researchers, and policymakers have raised concerns about Secondary School students' aggressive behaviour, particularly due to its consequences, which include physical harm, threats to school safety, and, in severe instances, loss of life. Interactions with school administrators and teachers across Zaria Metropolis revealed disturbing manifestations of aggressive behaviour, including riots, weaponised fights involving machetes, knives, and sticks, as well as slapping, shoving, name-calling, and the spread of damaging rumours.

Despite concerted efforts by families, educators, policymakers, and other stakeholders in education, to manage physical, verbal and emotional aggressive behaviour, the problem persists. It is against this backdrop that this study examined the effect of Social Skills Training on aggressive behaviour among secondary school students in Zaria Metropolis, Kaduna State, Nigeria.

Objectives

The objectives of the study are to determine the:

1. effect of social skills training on physical dimension of aggressive behaviour among secondary school students in Zaria Metropolis, Kaduna State, Nigeria
2. effect of social skills training on verbal dimension of aggressive behaviour among secondary school students in Zaria Metropolis, Kaduna State, Nigeria

3. Effect of social skills training on emotional dimension of aggressive behaviour among secondary school students in Zaria Metropolis, Kaduna State, Nigeria

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test mean scores of the physical dimension of aggressive behaviour among secondary school students exposed to Social Skills Training in Zaria Metropolis, Kaduna State, Nigeria.
2. There is no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test mean scores of the verbal dimension of aggressive behaviour among secondary school students exposed to Social Skills Training in Zaria Metropolis, Kaduna State, Nigeria.
3. There is no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test mean scores of the emotional dimension of aggressive behaviour among secondary school students exposed to Social Skills Training in Zaria Metropolis, Kaduna State, Nigeria.

Methodology

This research employed a quasi-experimental design involving a pre-test and a post-test group only. Yusuf et al. (2026) asserts that quasi-experimental research exploits the vigour and control that exist in experiments as well as preludes an absolute answer to the cause-and-effect relationship between research variables. Biu et al. (2025) states that quasi-experimental design is most often performed in natural settings where the research question is very important but not practicable to conduct true experimental research. Most educational researchers use a quasi-experimental design, because they must be conducted on real students in real schools without disrupting the education process. The design involves the manipulation of one or more independent variables but without the random assignment of subjects into conditions.

The general population of the study comprised all SSII students in Zaria Metropolis totaling 5513. The targeted population consisted of 120 students identified with aggressive behaviour in six (6) public secondary schools within Zaria Metropolis, Kaduna State, Nigeria. Purposive sampling technique was used to get the targeted population, and a total number of fifteen (15) students identified with aggressive behaviour were purposely selected from the overall targeted population, based on the number of responses that justified the highest number of students identified with aggressive behaviour, through the use of the aggressive behaviour scale. Fifteen (15) students were exposed to Social Skills Training. The choice of fifteen students to serve as the sample was based on Dewinter (2013), who stated that depending on the nature, risk, cost and prevalence of the research condition, a sample of 3-40 can be used in experimental research. In addition, having a small size can give the researcher adequate control over the participants.

Two instruments used for data collection Aggressive Behaviour Checklist and the Aggressive Behaviour Assessment Scale. The Aggressive Behaviour Checklist (ABS) was adapted from Raine, Buss, Perry, and Yudofsky (2014), which has 20 items with options 1-5 from most of the time and never. The higher the score of the respondent, the higher the aggressive behaviour and vice versa, for the identification of students with aggressive behaviour. The Aggressive Behaviour Assessment Scale (ABAS), adapted from Buss and Perry (1992), consists of two sections (A & B). Section A seeks bio-data of the respondents, which includes; class, gender and age. While section B consists of thirty-five 35 items across the three dimensions, physical, verbal and emotional dimensions of aggressive behaviour, with options 1-5 ranging from Extremely Uncharacteristic of me (1), Somewhat Uncharacteristic of me (2), Neither Uncharacteristic of me (3), Very Characteristic of me (4), and Extremely Characteristic of me (5). Cronbach's Alpha, the split-half method was applied on the data collected, the result revealed that the Aggressive Behaviour checklist (ABC) has a reliability index of .794 and the Aggressive Behaviour Assessment Scale (ABAS) has a reliability index of .898, which depicted that the instruments are reliable for data collection.

Treatment Procedure

Treatment Phase: Pretreatment phase, treatment phase and Post-treatment phase

Treatment: Social Skills Training

1. **Week One:** The researchers established a cordial relationship with the participants and exposed them to the meaning types and challenges of aggressive behaviour problems, which led to the participants' exploration.
2. **Week Two:** The researchers asked the participants to share their experience and feelings about aggressive behaviour. After that, he explained what social skills training means and its components, and how the sessions would be, and then began the session by leading participants into a discussion on the meaning and importance of communication.
3. **Week Three:** The researchers engaged the participants in a role-playing exercise on healthy communication. Two participants volunteered to role-play as a class monitor and a noise maker in a classroom, where the noise maker aggressively responded to the class monitor in a manner that displeased him after violating the class rule.
4. **Week Four:** The researchers exposed the participants to assertiveness by identifying when one is passive, aggressive and assertive, as well role played in assertiveness.
5. **Week Five:** The researchers inform the participants that having conflict is inevitable and it is a normal part of human relationships. Conflict is not completely bad as it is portrayed by people; it is the excessive engagement in conflict that is absolutely wrong and unacceptable. Also, the researchers display a scene in which one is aggressive and angry towards the other and the situation is brought under control without unnecessary outbursts.
6. **Week Six:** Summarised the treatment gain with questions and answers, and then terminated the session.

After the treatment sessions, a post-test was conducted to compare the pre-test and the post-test scores to measure the efficacy of the intervention after controlling for the intervening variables. The data collected were subjected to statistical analyses using a paired sample t-test.

Results

Table 1: Distribution of Participants by Treatment Technique

Groups	Frequency	Percentage
Social Skills Training	15	100%
Total	15	100%

Table 1 indicates that fifteen (15) representing one hundred per cent (100%) of the sample were exposed to Social Skills Training.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test mean scores of the Physical dimension of Aggressive Behaviour among Secondary School Students exposed to Social Skills Training in Zaria Metropolis, Kaduna State, Nigeria.

Table 2: Paired Sample t-test on the Effect of Social Skills Training on Physical Dimension of Aggressive Behaviour

Treatment	Variables	N	Mean	SD	df	t	p
ST	Pre-test	15	46.73	2.12	14	11.62	.001
	Post-test	15	21.93	7.86			

Significant at $P < 0.05$

Table 2 shows the pre-test mean score of 46.73 and standard deviation of 2.12. After the treatment, the mean score reduced to 21.93 and the standard deviation of 7.86, with the degree of freedom 14 and t-value of 11.62, respectively. From the table above, the p-value of .001 was found to be less than the 0.05 alpha level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis, which states that there is no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test mean scores of Social Skills Training on the physical dimension of aggressive behaviour among secondary school students in Zaria Metropolis, Kaduna State, Nigeria, is rejected. This means that there is a significant effect of Social Skills Training on the physical dimension of Aggressive Behaviour.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test mean scores of the Verbal dimension of Aggressive Behaviour among Secondary School Students exposed to Social Skills Training in Zaria Metropolis, Kaduna State, Nigeria.

Table 3: Paired Sample t-test on the Effect of Social Skills Training on the Verbal Dimension of Aggression.

Treatment	Variables	N	Mean	SD	df	t	p
ST	Pre-test	15	43.13	3.77	14	10.19	.001
	Post-test	15	20.00	8.42			

Significant at $P < 0.05$

Table 3 shows the pre-test mean score of 43.13 and standard deviation of 3.77 after the treatment, the mean score reduced to 20.00 and the standard deviation of 8.42 with the degree of freedom 14 and t-value of 10.19, respectively. From the table above, the p-value of .001 was found to be less than the 0.05 alpha level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis, which states that there is no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test mean scores of Social Skills Training on the verbal dimension of aggressive behaviour among secondary school students in Zaria Metropolis, Kaduna State, Nigeria, is rejected. This suggests that there is a significant effect of Social Skills Training on the verbal dimension of Aggressive Behaviour.

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test mean scores of the Emotional dimension of Aggressive Behaviour among Secondary School Students exposed to Social Skills Training in Zaria Metropolis, Kaduna State, Nigeria.

Table 4: Paired Sample t-test on the Effect of Social Skills Training on Emotional Dimension of Aggressive Behaviour.

Treatment	Variables	N	Mean	SD	df	t	p
ST	Pre-test	15	48.00	3.77	14	9.04	.001
	Post-test	15	23.86	10.06			

Significant at $P < 0.05$

Table 4 shows the pre-test mean score of 48.00 and standard deviation of 3.77 after the treatment, the mean score reduced to 23.86 and the standard deviation of 10.06 with the degree of freedom 14 and t-value of 9.04, respectively. From the table above, the p-value of .001 was found to be less than the 0.05 alpha level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis, which states that there is no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test mean scores of Social Skills Training on the emotional dimension of aggressive behaviour among secondary school students in Zaria Metropolis, Kaduna State, Nigeria, is rejected. This suggests that there is a significant effect of Social Skills Training on the verbal dimension of Aggressive Behaviour.

Discussion

The first finding of the study revealed that Social Skills Training (SST) had a significant effect on the physical dimension of aggressive behaviour among secondary school students in Zaria Metropolis. This indicated that students exposed to social skills training had a reduction in their physical aggressive behaviour. This finding corroborates that of Sayed, Vahid and Naser (2024), who reported that social skills training SST significantly reduced physical aggressive behaviour among children with Down syndrome. Mayowa (2022) similarly found reductions in aggressive behaviour following SST implementation among Lagos State students. Although some studies (e.g., Yavari, 2019) reported non-significant changes in physical aggressive behaviour, the majority support the position that SST improves self-control, empathy and conflict-resolution skills, leading to reductions in physical aggressive behaviour. It is also in line with findings of Aryan and Kasim (2021) who reported that social skills training had a significant effect in reducing aggressive behaviour among students.

The second finding of the study revealed that Social Skills Training (SST) had a significant effect on the verbal dimension of aggressive behaviour among secondary school students in Zaria Metropolis. This indicated that students exposed to social skills training had a reduction in their verbal aggressive behaviour. This finding is in agreement with International studies by Alavi et al. (2013) and Narges (2011), which showed strong reductions

in verbal aggressive behaviour following social skills training SST, highlighting improvements in communication, empathy and emotional regulation. Sayed et al. (2024) further demonstrated that SST reduced verbal aggressive behaviour even among special-needs populations, reinforcing SST's relevance across contexts. Given that verbal aggressive behaviour often stems from poor communication skills, poor emotional awareness and low frustration tolerance, the skills-based nature of SST (e.g., assertiveness, active listening, and anger control) makes it especially effective for this dimension. The present findings, therefore, align strongly with existing literature showing that SST has a robust effect on reducing aggressive verbal expressions.

The third finding of the study revealed that Social Skills Training (SST) had a significant effect on the emotional dimension of aggressive behaviour among secondary school students in Zaria Metropolis. This indicated that students exposed to social skills training had a reduction in their emotional and aggressive behaviour. This finding is not in agreement with that of Jimo, Bello, Sambo and Dagari (2022), who found that social skills training had no significant effect on the emotional dimension of aggressive behaviour, but the present findings align more closely with studies that identified positive effects of social skills training on emotional aggressive behaviour.

The findings of this study have also proven some of the assumptions of the theories adopted for the study. For instance, Social Learning Theory, propounded by Albert Bandura, assumes that aggressive behaviour is learned, maintained, and modified through social interaction, observation, and reinforcement. In counselling psychology, these assumptions provide the theoretical foundation for intervention strategies such as Social Skills Training. Social learning theory implies that aggression begets aggression. For instance, children who are physically abused at home, those who suffer severe physical punishment and those who merely witness violence in the community are more likely to be involved in fighting, aggressive play and anti-social behaviour at school. Social learning theory emphasised that one learns from the examples of others as well as from direct experiences with reward and punishment. Watching a parent hit the other parent or neighbours hit one another may not only increase children's likelihood of hitting but also the children's belief that hitting is normal when one is provoked. People not only learn specific aggressive behaviour from aggressive models but also develop a more positive attitude and beliefs about aggression in general and construct aggressive scripts that serve as a guide for how to behave and solve social problems. The construction of aggressive scripts may be via observation of violence in the mass media. The development and application of these theories to aggressive behaviour has been led by Arnold Buss and Albert Bandura. In sharp contrast to the instinct or drive views of aggression, which suggest that aggression stems from one or a limited number of crucial factors, the social learning framework holds that it may actually be elicited and established by a large and varied range of conditions.

Assumption of Frustration–Aggression Theory, originally proposed by Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, and Sears (1939), assumes that aggression arises as a psychological response to frustration when an individual's goal-directed behaviour is blocked. In counselling psychology, this theory provides a framework for understanding aggressive behaviour as an emotional reaction rather than an inherent trait, thereby justifying intervention strategies such as Social Skills Training.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was revealed that, the use of Social Skills Training was effective in reducing aggressive behaviour among secondary school students in Zaria Metropolis, Kaduna State, Nigeria. This study therefore, concludes that Social Skills Training significantly reduced the physical, verbal and emotional dimensions of aggressive behaviour among secondary school students in Zaria Metropolis, Kaduna State, Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Since social skills training is effective in reducing aggressive behaviour especially physical, verbal and emotional dimensions of aggressive behaviour it is recommended that the technique should be utilise in managing aggressive behaviour among students.
2. Counselling Psychologists are advised to adopt social skills training as intervention strategy for addressing the physical, verbal and emotional dimensions of students' aggressive behaviour.

3. Seminars, conferences and workshops should be organised by Counselling Association of Nigeria CASSON and Association of Professional Counsellors APROCON for teachers and parents on how they could nurture social skills training on their students and children to help them manage aggressive behaviour.

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