



Effectiveness of Psychosocial Intervention to School Refusal Behavior among Pupils in Public Primary Schools in Keiyo North Sub-County, Elgeyo Marakwet County, Kenya

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Abstract

Despite the many efforts by parents, teachers, and counselors to curb school refusal behavior, there is much evidence that the problem has persisted from times immemorial. The objective of the study was to determine psychosocial intervention strategies to school refusal behaviour among pupils in public primary schools. The current study aimed to determine the Effectiveness of Psychosocial Intervention in reducing school refusal behavior among pupils in public primary schools in Keiyo North sub-county, Elgeyo Marakwet County, Kenya. The study was based on a positivist philosophy and Hirschi's control theory, which explains how attachment to a given school can be a means for a learner to make positive academic and social life choices. The research design employed was descriptive, and a survey was used. The targeted population was grade 7 and 8 pupils in public primary schools who were absent from school or class for at least 10% or more days in their previous academic year. They were identified with the assistance of their class teachers. Keiyo North Sub-County has a total of 5806 pupils in both classes. Purposive sampling was used to select the public primary schools participating in the research. Gill et al. (2010) used a sample size determination table to calculate the sample size, and a sample of 357 learners was derived. Four schools from each of the four zones in the sub-county were used for piloting and did not participate in the actual research. Data was collected using document analysis, which included attendance registers, records from guidance and counseling departments, discipline books, and pupils' questionnaires. To determine the validity of the research instrument, piloting, correlation analysis, and consultation with supervisors who are experts were done. Cronbach alpha was used to ascertain the reliability of the instruments, which resulted in an alpha value of 0.7.

This was considered high enough and was thus accepted and used. Data from questionnaires were validated, coded, and tabulated, then analyzed with the help of the SPSS computer package for social science version 23. Descriptive statistics used were charts and percentages to present demographic data and inferential statistics (chi-square) to determine the relationship between dependent and independent variables. It was concluded that there is a relationship between psychosocial interventions and school refusal behavior and that the psychosocial support given to school refusers is not sufficient, thus making the problem of school refusal persist. The study recommended that urgent measures should be put in place to enhance the Effectiveness of intervention strategies to curb school refusal behavior. Also, all stakeholders should utilize intervention strategies that best suit their learners, collaborate to understand the underlying reasons for the problem of school refusal and create warm and friendly school and home environments for learners. Additionally, further studies should be carried out on other intervention strategies to curb school refusal behavior.

Keywords: *psychosocial interventions, school refusal behavior, cognitive intervention strategy, primary school pupil.*



INTRODUCTION

School refusal behavior is a broad concept that encompasses instances where school-going children exhibit a deliberate choice to abstain from attending school or experience challenges in maintaining attendance for a whole day (Kearney, 2002; Kearney & Chapman, 2008). Regular school attendance is crucial for learners to flourish academically, as there is a direct correlation between school refusal and academic performance. Children who decline to attend school may encounter problems that hinder their advancement and progress, which will also affect the individual and society at large. This is due to the fact that education is a fundamental pillar of development. The problem of school refusal results in short-term effects like diminished academic performance (Filippello et al., 2020), challenges in completing school, and a decline in overall academic performance. Also, the problem of school refusal causes long-term consequences, which include an increased susceptibility to adjustment on issues like social withdrawal (Benarous, 2022), the problem of suicidal tendency, violence, greater school dropout rates, and a greater risk of developing psychological problems and other issues like depression. School refusal is a frequent reason for consultation at child mental health services, and it is thought to concern about 1% of pupils and 5% in preadolescence and adolescence. It can be associated with comorbidities such as anxiety or depression (Kearney & Silverman (1995). Thus, Hancock et al. (2013) emphasize the importance of early intervention in order to prevent further problems that will affect the current and future lives of the child. The current study aims to determine effectiveness of cognitive interventions to school refusal behaviour in children who are in public primary schools, in order to eliminate the problem early in their lives.

According to a Japanese longitudinal study done on first-graders in Adachi City, Tokyo, in 2015, 2016, and 2018, the prevalence of school refusal was 1.8% in the second grade and 2% in the fourth grade (Fukuya et al., 2021). Another research conducted in a community sample of 6–10th graders in Norway, 3.6% of the students showed indications of beginning school refusal (Havik et al., 2015). This suggests that one young person in every class of twenty-five was vulnerable to developing SR. Furthermore, compared to children, pre-adolescents and teenagers appeared to have a higher frequency of school refusal (Elliott & Place, 1998; Heyne et al., 2002), and adolescents are more likely to be referred for proven school refusal (Heyne & Sauter, 2013).

In England, pupil absence rose between 5 and 28 percent, whereas school-age children opted out of school at some stage in their lives. According to data from 2017 to 2018, the overall rate of absences in state-funded primary, secondary, and special schools rose from 4.7 percent in 2016/17 to 4.8 percent in 2017/18. The elementary school's overall absence rate increased from 4.0 to 4.2 percent, but the secondary school's absence rate rose from 5.4 to 5.5 percent.

In Africa, school refusal behavior leads to the highest rate of behavior, whereby 19% of primary school pupils miss school (UNICEF, 2015). Northern Africa and Western Asia rank second with a percentage of 9%, while Southern Asia ranks third with a percentage of 7%. Based on data from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) in 2015, it is evident that in South Sudan, the rate is 62%, Equatorial Guinea 55%, Eritrea 47%, and Mali has a proportion of 41%. Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, and Mali also have many individuals who do not attend school as a result of truancy, absenteeism, and school refusal problems.

Kenya's 2015 Education Data Survey on school refusal, conducted by the National Population Commission in collaboration with USAID, the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), the Federal Ministry of Education, and the National Bureau of Statistics, revealed that the Southeast region has the highest primary net attendance rate (81%) of any region, with 19% of



students missing school, compared to the North West region's 43%, and 57% of students missing school altogether. The frequency of this tendency did not alter significantly in 2019, according to a quick look at some of the statistics, which is what has motivated current research on intervention options for school refusal behavior.

According to Sonoda et al. (2008), in the absence of appropriate early interventions, school refusal behavior may persist and become more challenging to address since school refusal has been shown to increase youth anxiety related to returning to school. Early intervention techniques are therefore essential in tackling the issue of school refusal to guarantee that students' performance is improved in both their academic and overall lives.

Few studies have been done on school refusal, and none that are known to exist in Kenya's Keiyo North Sub-county of Elgeyo Marakwet County have examined psychosocial intervention strategies for school refusal. This is in contrast to the numerous studies that have been done on other forms of absence from school, such as truancy and habitual or chronic absenteeism. Therefore, it is of great importance to examine the cognitive intervention strategy for school refusal in order to curb the problem.

Purpose of the Study

The study's goal was to determine the Effectiveness of psychosocial intervention strategies for treating school refusal behavior among pupils in public primary schools located in the Keiyo North sub-county, Elgeyo-Marakwet County, Kenya. To achieve this objective, the study was guided by the following objective, which served as the foundation for the study: to determine effectiveness of cognitive intervention strategies for school refusal behavior among pupils in primary schools in Keiyo North sub-county, Elgeyo Marakwet County, Kenya.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Keiyo North sub-county, Elgeyo Marakwet County, Kenya. The study used a quantitative research design, which gathers quantifiable data and uses computer, statistical, or mathematical techniques to analyze a phenomenon methodically and allows findings to be generalized to the whole population to provide improvements on current problems (Creswell, 2014)—cross-sectional survey to gather information from pupils in primary schools across the sub-county at the same period. The target population was grade 7 and 8 pupils who were school refusers. The sub-county has a total of 73 primary schools and a population of 5806 pupils. The sub-county has four zones, namely Kamariny and Bugar in the highlands, Kessup zone in the hanging valley, and Kaptum zone in the base of the valley. From each zone, ten schools were randomly picked using a sample size determination table by Gill et al. (2010), and a sample size of 357 respondents was obtained. Document analysis comprising of attendance registers, discipline books, and records from guidance and counseling departments was used to possessively identify school refusers who had missed 10% of the class attendance during their previous academic year through the assistance of the class teachers. Questionnaires, which, according to Bielick (2017), are written sets of questions given to people to gather facts or opinions about a phenomenon, were used as the main tools to obtain information from respondents, and a return rate of 76% was obtained, which is good enough.

Validity was ascertained by using a pilot study, and the opinion of the supervisors, who are specialists, was also sought and corrected. Correlation analysis was also used to test the construct validity of the instruments, whereby bivariate correlations between the research variables (school



refusal and cognitive intervention strategy) were computed, and each term's correlation was then determined using the total correlation test.

According to Kothari (2014), reliability pertains to the extent to which a measurement of a certain construct exhibits consistency or dependability. The current study ascertained reliability using Cronbach's alpha. The Cronbach alpha reliability obtained was 0.71, demonstrating a high level of data reliability.

Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, and to determine whether or not there was a connection between two categorical variables, a chi-square test for association was carried out. In this test, Pearson chi-square and linear-by-linear associations were obtained. The software utilized in this study was Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23, which involved converting quantitative data into mathematical codes, after which replies from questionnaires were encoded, and appropriate commands were given. Data analysis for descriptive statistics was summarized and presented in the form of charts and percentages.

RESULTS

The questionnaire achieved a return rate of 76% which is good enough as the rate is considered to be high. Groves & Peytcheva (2008), also agrees that it is important for a study to achieve a high response rates as it mitigates the potential of non-response bias and assures representativeness of the sample.

In this study, one hypothesis was tested;

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between the Effectiveness of cognitive intervention strategies and school refusal behavior among pupils in public primary schools in Keiyo North sub-county, Elgeyo Marakwet County, Kenya.

The results were represented as shown below;



Intervention Strategies and School Refusal Behavior

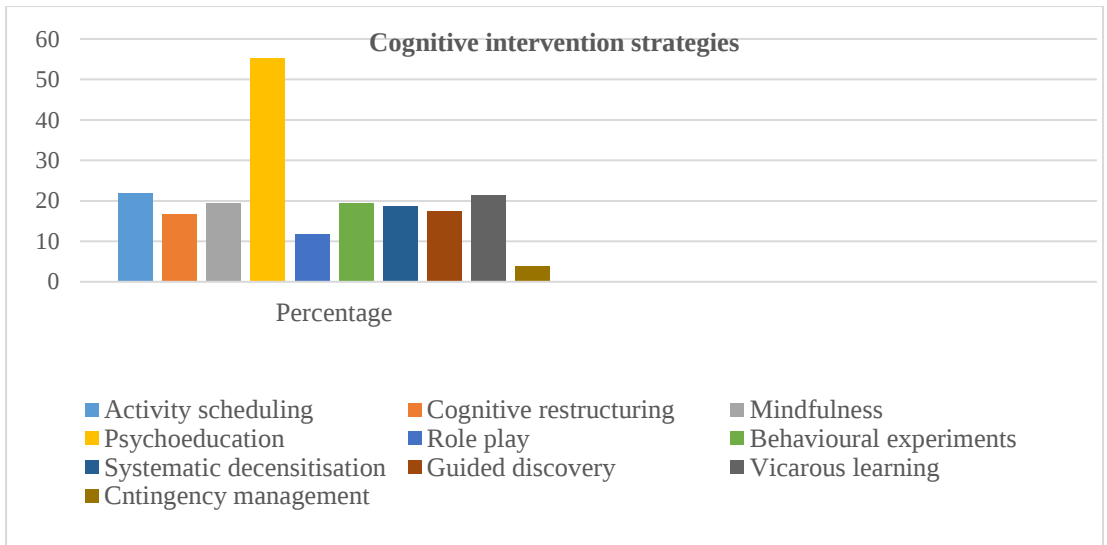
“Table 1. Effectiveness of Cognitive Intervention Strategies”

No	Statement	Technique	Percentage(%)
1	My teachers assist me in doing activities I like	Activity scheduling	21.9
2	I was made to challenge my irrational thoughts	Cognitive restructuring	16.7
3	I have been assisted to acknowledge my past and focus on the future	Mindfulness	19.3
4	I have been taught the importance of regular class attendance.	psychoeducation	55.3
5	I participate in acting on scenarios that cause fear	Role play	11.8
6	I am assisted to predict my fears and later judge if it came to pass	Behavioural experiments	19.4
7	My teacher helped me write down all fear causing activities and assisted to face them one by one	Systematic decensitization	18
8	I have been asked to explain how I view my problems and given information to challenge my worldview	Guided discovery	17.5
9	I have watched videos showing unhappy youth who dropped out of school	Vicarious learning	21.5
10	I am rewarded whenever I don't miss school or avoid some lessons	reinforcement	3.9
11	We have made agreement with my teachers o their expectations and consequences if I fail	Contingency management	7.8
	Mean		19.4

Source: Survey, (2022)

From the above table, it is was found out that all the cognitive intervention strategies are not utilized effectively. The mean obtained from the study was 19.4 %, which is not even quarter of the strategies, were fully utilized.

A bar graph was used to rate the techniques according to the frequency used;



“Figure 1. Frequency of use of Cognitive Intervention Strategies”

To test the null hypothesis, a chi-square test was computed in order to determine if there was any relationship between the Effectiveness of cognitive intervention strategies and school refusal behavior. The findings are presented in the table below:

“Table 2: Chi-square Table for Effectiveness of Cognitive Intervention Strategies and School Refusal Behavior”

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	65.073	56	.019
Likelihood Ratio	37.663	56	.032
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.482	1	.015
N of Valid Cases	228		

Source: Survey 2022

As shown in Table 2, a Pearson's chi-square value of 65.073, a degree of freedom of 56, and a p-value of 0.019 were obtained. Since $p < 0.05$, the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that there was a significant relationship between the Effectiveness of cognitive intervention strategies and school refusal behavior among pupils in public primary schools in Keiyo North sub-county, Elgeyo Marakwet County, Kenya.

DISCUSSIONS

The objective of the study was to determine the Effectiveness of cognitive intervention strategies in treating school refusal behavior in pupils in public primary schools in the Keiyo North sub-county. The findings were based on the Effectiveness of cognitive behavior techniques and the



Effectiveness of the intervention strategies based on cognitive techniques that are used to treat undesired behavior and include strategies such as activity scheduling, cognitive restructuring, mindfulness psychoeducation, role play, behavioral experiments, systematic desensitization, guided discovery, vicarious learning, reinforcement, and contingency management.

It was discovered that teachers in primary schools need to utilize cognitive intervention strategies more effectively, as shown in Table 1.1. Psychoeducation led in the strategies with 55.3%, activity scheduling at 21.9%, vicarious learning at 21.55, mindfulness at 19.3 %, behavioral experiments at 19.4%, systematic desensitization 18%guided discovery at 17.5 %, and cognitive restructuring at 16.7%, role play 11.8% contingency management 7.8, and the least used technique is the use of rewards. When the techniques are not applied efficiently, children may end up developing a dislike for schooling, thus, school refusal behavior. They should be allowed to access their favorite activities with moderation, like participation in co-curriculum, watching movies, and visiting friends, among others. School refusers may increase their class and school attendance in general.

They should also be shown ways of taking a hard look at the negative thought patterns they hold, which may be affecting their actions. Such negative thoughts include overgeneralization or assuming that the worst would happen. This is supported by a study by Stiles-Shields (2019), which found that cognitive deficits, cognitive distortions, or faulty cognition about other people or the world around us bring on abnormal behavior. Pupils may, at times, hold on to negative cognitions, which may make them end up with emotional discomfort and behavioral issues, including school refusal. Teachers should assist them in re-organizing their thoughts, a method called cognitive reorganization, which will aid pupils in changing how they feel about issues that frustrate or worry them and may have an impact on their behavior (Dietzell, 2022).

To avoid pain and negative behavior, pupils must be assisted in avoiding past pain and, preferably, concentrate on the positive things that they are currently experiencing in life. According to Sigmund Freud's theory, if a child's needs at any particular age are not fully satisfied, then the child becomes fixated, and this will have lasting effects on life (Porter, 2020). Using counseling techniques, the counselor could help students come out of their past, which could be causing school refusal, and move on with the present.

Also, to increase performance and manage school dropout behavior, more positive exposure should be promoted to ensure that pupils' misconceptions of regular school attendance are altered (Berg, 2002). This is consistent with Bandura (1965), who discovered through his study of a Bobo doll that children learn through imitation and observation. School-refusing pupils may frequent school attendance if they see the success of those who attend school or even the positive life of those who complete their education.

Findings on the use of contingency management showed that teachers rarely use motivate learners as a means of assisting learners with the problem of school refusal. This could be due to a need for more skills to apply the strategies or a choice of alternative means, such as punishment which seems easy and effective although its disadvantages outweigh the advantages by far. The results obtained from the current study agree with the findings by Lussier et al. (2006), who found that regardless of the considerable evidence supporting the Effectiveness of contingency management, there is a lack of familiarity among participants regarding these interventions. Another study by Antonio et al. (2024) on the effects of motivation showed that children who are intrinsically motivated are likely to exhibit fewer behavior problems and low engagement in irresponsible behavior. Thus, teachers should motivate learners to enable them to acquire good behavior and sustain it.



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, psychosocial intervention, in particular cognitive strategy, has yet to be fully explored by teachers. In particular, primary school teachers resort to punishment to correct school refusal, which may not always work. This has been banned in learning institutions and even banned from being used. Since school refusal behavior is a very delicate behavior that has far-reaching consequences, it should be taken seriously by all stakeholders as it affects the livelihood of the child and the future of society. It is recommended that teacher development workshops, seminars, and short courses on classroom management be organized to empower teachers on how to effectively apply cognitive interventions to treat school refusal since the strategy is very effective. Learners will be able to attend school regularly, allowing them to reach their full potential. Discipline should be offered to all educators, with an emphasis on creating awareness about the use of alternative disciplinary measures. If all of the above is followed, the problem of school refusal will be solved, and students will be able to reach their full potential in life.

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