

Effects of Individual and Group Counseling on Truant Behaviour among Secondary School Students in Taraba State Nigeria

Amuche Christian Igomu^{1*}, Atsue Terhile Emmanuel² & Amuche Blessing Ehi³

¹School of Postgraduate Studies, Taraba State University, Jalingo;

²Department of Educational Guidance and Counseling, Taraba State University, Jalingo;

³Department of Social Science Education, Taraba State University, Jalingo

*Corresponding Author

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ABSTRACT

There has been concerns of truancy among students in secondary schools in Taraba State Nigeria. This menace has contributed to students' poor academic performance. Truancy is about learners who have not been attending school regularly as required by the school, parents and even the authorities. Truant behaviour is a problem for the individual, the family, the school and society in general. This study was carried out to determine effects of individual and group counseling on secondary school students' truant behaviour in Taraba State, Nigeria. Quasi-Experimental Design was used for the study. A questionnaire coded Truant Habit Scale (THS) was developed by the researchers and used for the collection of data. The Truant Habit Scale (THS) was validated and a reliability index of 0.80 was obtained using test-retest method. The reliability of the instrument was determined using test retest method and the correlation coefficient score of 0.80 was obtained. The population of the study consisted of 14, 196 senior secondary school two (SS2) students in the 2018/2019 session. A sample of 450 SS 2 students was drawn from the 9 secondary schools cutting across the 9 education zones of Taraba State Nigeria. A simple random technique was used in drawing the sample. The research questions were answered with mean and standard deviation while the null hypotheses were tested with t-test and ANOVA at $p < 0.05$. The researchers found out that there is a significant difference in the effects of individual and group counseling on students with truant behaviours; however the effects of individual and group counseling on students' truant behaviour do differs significantly based on gender. Based on the result, it was recommended that both individual and group counseling should be used by the counselor because the combination will produce a positive effect to make the students realize the need to stay and be stable in school for better academic performance. Counsellors, education policy makers and would be researchers will definitely benefit from this research.

Keywords: Counseling, Truant, Behaviour, Education, Secondary Schools, Individual Counseling, Group Counseling

INTRODUCTION

Truancy refers to unauthorized absentee from school during the compulsory going years. Several students skip schools for their own reasons and lose a lot in the education system. Different schools have various definitions for truancy but the number of truants is on the increase. Truancy is noticeable among secondary school students in Taraba State, Nigeria. Truancy occurs when do not go to school all day, come to school

but do not follow the lessons according to the set schedule, or avoid teaching and learning activities. This could be one of the main causes of poor academic performance among students. The lack of truancy affects all levels of the education system. In colleges of education, secondary and primary schools, the story is the same, particularly in secondary schools in Taraba State. Some factors associated with Nigerian schools have created a breeding ground for truancy. Abari, Azaager and Demsey (2013) agreed that these factors could include lack of teachers, idleness, lack of teaching and learning opportunities, failure or lack of success in school, disregard for intellectual culture and lack of teacher commitment. In Nigeria, some parents with low socioeconomic status and illiteracy often engage their children in agriculture and petty trading during school years, which encourages truancy Olamofe (2008). Similarly, Maduabuchi (2013), Van Breda (2014) and Musa (2014) suggest that lack of parental guidance, poverty, drug and alcohol abuse, lack of family support, domestic problems, broken families and family responsibilities, including care responsibilities Home, this is what some of the factors that cause children to skip school lead to. Community factors contribute noticeably to truancy among students. Some communities in Taraba State's rural and urban areas support drug, gang and other criminal activities. In other words, in some communities, it is difficult for students to attend classes without frequent intercommunal clashes that result in the loss of lives, including innocent children. Fear of the community in which the schools are located could increase truancy rates. An inexhaustible list of causes of truancy include: undiagnosed or mistreated learning disabilities, bullying by school bullies, teachers or school staff, fear of school, family problems such as abuse and neglect or responsibilities to care for parents or younger siblings, mental health problems, and illnesses such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), which are sometimes punished instead, can force students to drop out of school. Schools fail to notify parents of student absences: Some school systems notify parents after a student absence, others wait 30 to 40 days. Fareo (2013) suggests that lack or inadequate guidance and counseling services in schools have also been identified as one of the main reasons for truancy among secondary school students. The Counseling Service offers students the opportunity to discuss concerns and problems with a professional counselor in a confidential atmosphere. Counseling services help students prone to instability and other problems that arise during the secondary school years. Counseling services include individual and group counseling.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Truancy

According to Afful-Broni (2014), truancy is divided into two groups: blanket truancy and post-registered truancy. With blanket truancy, the student stayed away from school entirely, while with post-registration truancy, the student first officially registered as being present at school, only to avoid the following class of the day. In its popular meaning, Carter (2007) views truancy as intentional absence from school on the part of the student without parental knowledge and consent; Student's absence from school for which there is no reasonable or acceptable excuse. This latter concept significantly expands the definition and makes it synonymous with unexcused absence. Truancy means "running away from class" and the students who always tend to stay away from learning and avoid classes are called truants (Gosain, 2013). In another sense, Stoll in Chukwuka (2013) defines truancy as absence from school without a legitimate reason. Nwana, as quoted in Adekunle (2015), added that truancy includes intentionally staying away from school without permission, leaving school without permission and bypassing certain classes. It is therefore clear that a situation in which a student is absent from class without a specific reason and the parents are not aware of this can be considered truancy.

Concept of Counseling

Counseling is about developing a therapeutic relationship between a client and a psychologist that focuses on the client's concerns and problems (Eugene, 2011). This requires a collaborative effort as the two parties

work together to identify and work towards the client's goals. Through this process, clients can develop a better understanding of themselves, including their patterns of thinking, feeling and behavior and the ways in which these may have been problematic in their lives. Counseling is a professional relationship between a professionally trained counselor and a client (counselor) seeking help in solving a problem, Shultz (2010).

Individual Counseling

Individual counseling consists of those one-to-one interactions with clients in which the therapeutic process is applied to resolving personal concerns, careers and educational decisions and problems of human adjustment. It is a personalized, confidential personal help given to a client by a counsellor to resolve his or her adjustment problems so as to become happier and more productive in life. According to Oladele (2012) individual counseling is a counseling relationship involving the counsellor interacting or exchanging views with the client, with the aim of helping the client to present or solve personal problems or change some negative or maladaptive behaviour. In individual counseling the interaction is highly confidential.

Concept of Group Counseling

On the other hand, group counseling is a counseling relationship that stimulates more closely social interaction and interpretation patterns than individual counseling. It is a counseling relationship between a counsellor and the group members who are between 8 and 10 clients. Group counseling is a counseling relationship between a counsellor and two or more clients. Group counseling operates on the principle of freedom of expression by the clients, that is, clients are free to express their feelings and attitudes without being reprimanded and judged. They share their feelings with each other, display empathy and interest in their members' problems, keep the rule of confidentiality and desist from resisting and manipulating behaviour that may hinder the progress and growth of the group counseling process Kachaar (2013).

According to studies, there is no discernible difference between the effects of individual and group counseling on truant behavior in male and female students; additionally, there is no gender-specific difference in the effects of individual and group counseling on truant behavior in students. It was also discovered that there are notable differences between the effects of individual and group counseling on truancy among adolescents who identify as male and female. In Ogun State, Nigeria, Musa (2014) investigated the effects of truancy and absenteeism on students' academic performance in secondary schools. She discovered that peer pressure, the students' socioeconomic background, and subpar academic performance are all contributing factors to truancy and absenteeism in secondary education. In the Toro Local Government Area of Bauchi State, Muhammad, Ayuba, and Ishak (2014) conducted a study on the impact of group counseling intervention in lowering junior secondary school truancy rates. Chujor and Margret (2016) conducted a study on the impact of counseling on university secondary school students in Rivers State, Nigeria, with the aim of reducing persistent tardiness to class. The three experimental groups that received counseling showed positive, significant effects in reducing persistent tardiness to school, according to the results. A more individualized kind of therapy is individual counseling. However, some people may find that group counseling is more enriching than individual counseling. Group counseling facilitates understanding and helps the student accept that the counselor is willing to assist. Group counseling assists the student in realizing that they are not alone in their problems. The student feels accepted by their peers despite the fact that mistakes are made and group members tried to help fix the mistakes. The student understands, sympathize with, and can help other people. According to Kochar (2013), the student is aware of trusting others.

Therefore, there is need to find out the most effective counseling mode to help students with truant behaviour especially those that manifest high level truancy so that they can put up a more desirable and positive attitude towards their studies. At this juncture, it is important to mention that the researchers was motivated to take up this study as a result of his personal experiences with secondary school students for

close to a decade in the field of teaching. It is obvious that students in secondary schools in Taraba State show negative attitude towards schooling. Farauta and Godlove (2013) laments that truant students leave their homes in the morning under the pretext of going to school but roam the streets and return home at close of school. However, it is the belief of the researchers in individual and group counseling can proffer a lasting solution to this serious educational predicament. Most students may have the abilities and opportunities to study and achieve their ambitions in life but they may not put these abilities and opportunities into use due to peer group influence and could lead to truancy.

Theoretical Framework

This theoretical framework is based on theories considered relevant to the effects of individual and group counseling on truancy behavior among secondary school students in Taraba State, Nigeria. That is; Person-or client-centered theory by Carl Rogers. The person-centered approach is based on the work of Carl Rogers (1902-1987) and is intended to promote openness, growth and change in the understanding of the counseling processes. It is a practical and helpful approach to education as it can solve some of the extra-curricular problems that students face. For example, it provides a way to understand and solve problems related to relationships, emotional development and ethical behavior, which appear to be the cause of most problems in school and society as a whole. However, it is important to incorporate some accelerating ingredients to create conditions that facilitate growth. This includes acceptance, empathy and positive regard from others.

The low performance in the WASSCE Examinations is due to inconsistency in school attendance by students, especially when they are in the senior class. It is only true that truancy denies the students involved the privilege of listening to teachers' explanations during the lesson delivery. When such students depend only on copying notes later on from their colleagues, their comprehension is very low. The researchers wonder which of these forms of counseling (individual and group counseling) will be more effective in schools to address the problem of truancy behavior among students in secondary schools in Taraba State. There is therefore a need to compare the effects of two types of counseling on secondary school students' truancy behavior. Given the complexity of the school environment, deciding between individual and group counseling to adequately address students' educational problems represents a major challenge for the school counselor.

Recent reports confirmed that over 20% of the world out of school children representing 10.5 million is in Nigeria, meaning one out of five in the country. Sixty (60) per cent of this population is concentrated in the north eastern part of the country and Taraba State accounts for 259,000 (UNICEF, 2017). Among the already identified factors, insurgency and communal crisis between herdsman and farmers stand out as been largely responsible for children been out of school in Taraba State. The thrust of this study is to determine the effect of individual and group counseling on secondary school students' truant behaviour in Taraba State.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There is noticeable problem of truancy among students in secondary schools in Taraba State Nigeria. This is a situation where students fail to stay in school from commencement of lessons to the time of closing. In worse cases, the students leave their homes and parents but do not end up reaching the school. In some cases, they go to school but do not concentrate to the end and some will follow their peers to go out to the streets to play, watch football or movies at show centres while some simply hawk on the streets. The study therefore seeks solution to this problem of truancy through individual and group counselling of students. Truancy is a problem because the absent students cannot benefit from the various programmes that the school offers. Effects of truancy have been reported to include lower academic achievements, delinquent and criminal activities. It has been established that truancy is cog in the wheel of teaching learning.

Truancy poses a serious threat to learning in most schools; the school on the other hand does not seem to be able to cope with the problem because no sufficient attempt has been made to reach its root. One clear fact about this issue is the fact that there is a growing tendency for students to be involved in social vices such as stealing and smoking. Hence, this study compared the effects of two modes of counseling strategies (individual and group) on managing truant behaviour among secondary school students in Taraba State, Nigeria.

STATEMENT OF HYPOTHESES

The following null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. All the null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

Ho1: There is no significant effect of individual counseling strategy on truant behaviour among students in secondary schools in Taraba State, Nigeria.

Ho2: There is no significant effect of group counseling strategies on truant behaviour among secondary school students in Taraba State, Nigeria.

Ho3: The effects of individual and group counseling on truant behaviour among students do not differ significantly in secondary schools in Taraba State, Nigeria.

Ho4: The effect of individual counseling on truant behaviour among male students does not differ significantly from that of female students in Secondary Schools in Taraba State, Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

Quasi-Experimental Design was adopted. Quasi-experimental design was used in this study because all the true conditions for a true experimental design were not possible. The researchers conducted the study in 15 public senior secondary schools made it difficult to take individual students at random from classes to participate in the study. The researchers therefore used intact classes and school counselors for each school selected for the study. Comparison groups were available and the treatments were assigned randomly. The targeted population of this study was 14,196 students of SS II class during the 2018/2019 academic session consisting of 9,391 males and 4, 805 females.

A sample of 450 students; 270 and 180 female senior secondary school two (SS2) was used for the study. This number represents both male and female students in 9 randomly selected schools. There were 135 participants for individual counseling 90 males and 45 females. There were 225 for group counseling comprising 135 males and 90 females. There was a control group of 90 students comprising 45 males and 45 females. This gave a total number of 450 students of SSII class during the 2018/1019 academic session comprising 270 males and one hundred and 80 females. A total of 15 School counselors from 15 public secondary schools were trained to offer group counseling to a group of 15 selected students in their schools while the researcher handled a group of 15 students in Government Secondary School Kofai. The choice of 15 students for the group counseling was to cater for the event of experimental mortality. A total of 6 students each were given individual counseling by same counselors.

The instrument that was used to collect the required data was the Truant Habit Scale (THS) developed by the researchers. The THS has a list of positively and negatively keyed items related to truant behaviour. The researchers were able to develop these attitude-items focusing on truancy due to wide exposure to literature, both empirical and theoretical in nature. The instrument was duly corrected by the experts who validated the final draft of the instrument. The reliability of the instrument was determined using test- retest method for a

measure of its consistency and reliability. A sample of 30 students was used for pilot testing of the instrument in Ardo-Kola Local Government Area. Cronbach alpha was used to determine the reliability coefficient which was found to be 0.80. The two group pretest-posttest designs were used to assess the effect of weekly counseling sessions on the students with high level of truancy. The researchers met with students twice a week for a period of 6 weeks, during which students were encouraged to express their feelings and concerns individually (individual counseling) and collectively (group counseling). The researchers used a 20-item (Truant Habit Scale) to measure students' level of truancy both before and after the 6 weeks period. The t-Test statistics at $p \leq 0.05$ level of significance was used to test the 4 hypotheses.

RESULTS

Hypothesis One

There is no significant effect of individual counseling strategy on secondary school students' truant behavior in Taraba State, Nigeria.

Table 1: t-test analysis effect of individual counseling on secondary school students' truant behavior in Taraba State, Nigeria

| Group | N | Posttest Mean | Posttest SD | Df | t _{cal} | t _{tab} | Decision |
|-----------------------|-----|---------------|-------------|-----|------------------|------------------|----------|
| Individual Counseling | 135 | 21.58 | 14.21 | | | | |
| | | | | 225 | 2.56 | 1.97 | S |
| Control | 90 | 30.44 | 16.19 | | | | |

Key: S=Significant; $p < 0.05$

The result of Table 1 showed that the calculated t-value 2.56 is greater than the critical t-value 1.97. Thus, there is statistical significant difference in the effects of individual counseling on truant behaviours of students, when compared to students who did not receive individual counseling. Thus, the null hypothesis is not accepted.

Hypothesis Two

There is no significant effect of group counseling strategy on secondary school students' truant behavior in Taraba State, Nigeria?

Table 2: t-test analysis effect of group counseling on secondary school students' truant behavior in Taraba State, Nigeria.

| Group | N | Posttest Mean | Posttest SD | Df | t _{cal} | t _{tab} | Decision |
|------------------|-----|---------------|-------------|-----|------------------|------------------|----------|
| Group Counseling | 225 | 20.56 | 14.21 | | | | |
| | | | | 315 | 2.85 | 1.97 | S |
| Control | 90 | 30.44 | 16.19 | | | | |

Key: S=Significant; $p < 0.05$

The result of Table 2 showed that the calculated t-value 2.85 is greater than the critical t-value 1.97. Thus, there is statistical significant difference in the effects of group counseling on truant behaviours of students, when compared to students who did not receive group counseling. Thus, the null hypothesis is not accepted.

Hypothesis Three

There is no significant in the difference between the effects of individual and group counseling on truant behaviour among secondary school students in Taraba State Nigeria.

Table 3: t-test analysis effect of group counseling and individual counseling on secondary school students' truant behaviour in Taraba State, Nigeria.

| Group | N | Posttest Mean | Posttest SD | Df | t _{cal} | t _{tab} | Decision |
|-----------------------|-----|---------------|-------------|-----|------------------|------------------|----------|
| Group Counseling | 225 | 20.56 | 14.21 | | | | |
| | | | | 359 | 0.44 | 1.97 | NS |
| Individual counseling | 135 | 21.58 | 14.21 | | | | |

Key: NS=Not Significant $p < 0.05$

The result of Table 3 showed that the calculated t-value 0.44 is less than the critical t-value 1.97. Thus, there is no statistical significant difference in the effects of group counseling and individual counseling on truant behaviours of students. Thus, the null hypothesis is not rejected.

Hypothesis Four

There is no significant in the difference in the effects of individual counseling strategy between male and female students in secondary school students in Taraba state, Nigeria.

Table 4: t-test analysis effect of individual counseling on male and female secondary school students' truant behaviour in Taraba State, Nigeria.

| Group | N | Posttest Mean | Posttest SD | Df | t _{cal} | t _{tab} | Decision |
|--------|----|---------------|-------------|-----|------------------|------------------|----------|
| Male | 90 | 19.17 | 14.48 | | | | |
| | | | | 135 | 0.38 | 1.98 | NS |
| Female | 45 | 17.93 | 12.57 | | | | |

Key: NS=Not Significant: $p < 0.05$

The result of Table 4 showed that the calculated t-value 0.38 is less than the critical t-value 1.98. Thus, there is no statistical significant effect of individual counseling on male and female students' truant behaviours. Thus, the null hypothesis is not rejected.

DISCUSSION

It is important to note that the discussion of the findings on the effects of individual and group counseling on secondary school students' truant behaviour in Taraba State, Nigeria were done under the following sub-headings.

Findings showed that students who received individual counseling had a pretest mean score of 30.43 and posttest mean score of 21.58, which indicate a decrease of 8.85 in the truant habit mean score. The pretest mean score of the control group is 29.87 while the posttest mean score is 30.44, which indicates an increase of 0.57. The difference between the pretest and posttest truant habit mean scores for the two groups shows that individual counseling affected students with high level of truancy by reducing the truant behavior as

seen in the decrease of the mean score by 8.85. This goes in line with Uzoamaka (2013) who agreed that the impact of individual counseling on students with truant behaviour for the experimental group received counseling and changed their attitude of staying away from school and class activities. The findings also support Eremie (2015) who recommended that individual counseling with adequate modalities should be provided for students with truant behaviour. The null hypothesis showed that the calculated t-value 2.56 is greater than the critical t-value 1.97. Thus, there is statistical significant difference in the effects of individual counseling on truant behaviours of students, when compared to students who did not receive any counseling. This finding is in line with previous findings by Nyaga (2011) whose study in Kenya revealed that guidance and counseling provision had an effect on performance of students who received the service. Thus, the null hypothesis is not accepted. This study therefore concludes that there is significant positive effect of individual counseling on secondary school students' truant behaviour in Taraba State, Nigeria.

Also, findings showed that students who received group counseling had a pretest truant habit mean score of 30.33 and posttest mean score of 14.21, indicating a decrease of 9.77 in the truant habit mean score. The pretest truant habit mean score of the control group is 29.87 while the posttest truant habit mean score is 30.44, which indicate an increase of 0.57. The result showed that group counseling affected students with truant behaviours positively by reducing it, as evident in the decrease in posttest truant habit mean score by 9.77. In a related study, Audu, Ali and Pur (2017) agreed that group counseling has played significant positive effect on students in terms of preventing them from engaging in truant behaviour that keep them away from school. The null hypothesis showed that the calculated t-value 2.85 is greater than the critical t-value 1.97. Thus, there is statistical significant difference in the effects of group counseling on truant behaviours of students, when compared to students who did not receive any counseling.

It therefore means that students in the treatment group made many changes after the treatment. The result was in agreement with Atsua & Abdullahi (2015) who used group therapy to reduce truancy among students. Thus, the null hypothesis is not accepted.

The results of the analysis of research question three showed that students in the individual counseling had a pretest truant habit mean score of 30.43 and posttest mean score of 21.58, which indicate a decrease of 8.85 in the truant habit mean score. The students that received group counseling had a pretest truant habit mean score of 30.33 and posttest truant habit means score of 20.56, which indicate a decrease of 9.77 in the truant habit mean score. The result showed that group counseling with a pretest/posttest mean difference score of -9.77 was more effective in reducing rate of truancy among secondary school students than group counseling with a pretest/posttest mean score of -8.85. The findings of this study collaborates that done by Ashlyn (2018) which proves that unlike group counseling which involves more than one person at a time, individual counseling allows individuals to embark on a journey of self-exploration and gives more room for privacy and intimacy between the counsellor and the client. Thus students in individual counseling session express themselves better. However this finding contradicts findings by Balogun (2011) who noted that group counseling had more positive effect on students with maladaptive behaviour than individual counseling. The null hypothesis showed that the calculated t-value 0.44 is less than the critical t-value 1.97. Thus, there is no statistical significant difference in the effects of group counseling and individual counseling on truant behaviours of students. Thus, the null hypothesis is not rejected.

The result of the statistical analysis on the difference in effects of individual counseling in controlling truant behaviour among secondary school students in Taraba state according to gender showed that students in the male students in the individual counseling had a pretest truant habit mean score of 30.59 and posttest mean score of 19.17, which indicate a decrease of 11.42 in the truant habit mean score. The female students that had a pretest truant habit mean score of 31.24 and posttest truant habit mean score of 17.93, which indicate a decrease of 13.31 in the truant habit mean score. The result showed that female students with a pretest/posttest mean difference score of -13.31 benefited more from the individual counseling in reducing

the rate of truancy than their male counterparts with a pretest/posttest mean score of -11.42. Milcah (2019) agreed that female students show more obedience and devote more time to individual counseling sessions and so benefit more than the male students. The result shows that the calculated t-value 0.38 is less than the critical t-value 1.98. Thus, there is no significant effect of individual counseling on male and female students' truant behaviours. Thus, the null hypothesis is not rejected.

Therefore group counseling has more effect positively on the female students in curtailing truancy among secondary school students in Taraba State, Nigeria.

The study found out that:

1. Individual counseling affected students with high level of truancy by reducing the truant behaviour.
2. Group counseling affected students with truant behaviours positively.
3. Group counseling was more effective in reducing rate of truancy among secondary school students than group counseling.
4. Female students benefited more from the individual counseling in reducing the rate of truancy than their male counterparts

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that truant behaviour exists among secondary school students in Taraba State Nigeria. There is significant difference between students who received guidance and counseling services generally and those who did not receive in both individual and group counseling services. Those who received guidance and counseling services became more stable in school than those who did not receive. It is evident from this study that counseling has a very positive effect on secondary school students who involve in truant behaviour in Taraba State Nigeria. However, of the two modes of counseling; individual and group, it is individual counseling that have more effect on the students in terms of controlling or eradication truant behaviour, benefitting female students much more than their male counterparts. Therefore, individual and group counseling can be used side by side in controlling truant behaviour among secondary school students in Taraba State, Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the present study, the following recommendations are put forward:

1. The principals of secondary schools should put in place individual guidance and counseling services and make the services accessible to students where it affords them the opportunity to meet one-on-one with the counsellor for optimal results.
2. Group counseling affords the students the opportunity to share with their mates common problems. Students should be encouraged by management, parents and guidance and counsellor to interact with one another and also avail themselves with counseling services.
3. Encouraging all students in public secondary schools to Access guidance and counseling services to enhance holistic growth and development. This is because there is evidence that this has a positive effect on the development of vocational, interpersonal, study and problem solving skills.
4. Based on the result that there was no significant difference in the effects of individual and group counseling on male and female students with truant behaviour, both modes should not be neglected by the counsellor for they will combine to make the students realize the need to stay and be stable in school for better academic performance.
5. A mandatory policy should be put in place by government to offer guidance and counseling services to all students. This will ensure that all students benefit from the guidance and counseling services and

it will go a long way in curbing truancy.

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