

## Effects of Assertive Training on the Low Self-Esteem of Secondary School Students in Anambra State

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### Abstract

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The problem of low-self-esteem in secondary schools has been a source of worry because of its attendant consequences on the students, teachers, guidance counsellors, parents and the society at large. The students with low self esteem lack social skills and are usually unassertive, internalize feelings making them fight over minor provocations, flaunting school rules and regulations, all in bid to appear tough, while indeed they are merely masking their feelings of low self-esteem. These undesirable manifestations militate against the fulfilment of their potentials and calls for urgent attention. Many methods have been applied by the school and homes to help such students, but have yielded no result. The purpose of the study is to determine the effect of assertive training on low self-esteem of secondary school students in Anambra State. Two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. The design of the study is true experimental, randomized, pretest-posttest, control design. The population of the study is two hundred and fifty (250) SS II students with low self-esteem. The sample size consisted of forty-seven (47) SSS II students with low self-esteem purposively selected from two co-educational secondary schools in Awka metropolis. Instrument for data collection was the questionnaire "Index of Self-Esteem" (ISE) by Hudson (1982) revalidated for Nigerian use by Omoluabi (1997). The reliability co-efficient of the instrument is 0.92. The training period lasted 6 weeks, two sessions per week; each session lasted for 40 minutes. Both groups were pre-tested with ISE. After the treatment, both groups were post tested with same ISE after being reshuffled. Statistical score was used to answer the research questions while ANCOVA was used to test the hypotheses. The findings include that assertive training has effect on the low self-esteem of the students by enhancing their self-esteem. Also there is no significant difference in the effect of assertive training on low self-esteem of male and female students. Based on the findings, recommendations were made, among which was that counsellors should always expose every student to assertive training irrespective of their gender so as to help them interact better with themselves and others. The training is effective for both sexes, so awareness of this training should be created for parents in Parents Teachers Association (PTA) on the need to encourage their wards at home to practise the skills.

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**Key words:** Assertive Training, Low Self-Esteem, Students

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## Background to the Study

Low self-esteem has been identified as one of the causes of a wide range of ills facing the students of today. The importance of self-esteem in helping students cope with the basic challenges of life cannot be over-emphasized. It has been associated with a number of important life's outcomes including psychological adjustment, academic success, physical, health and relationship satisfaction (Kernis, 2006). Whether it causes these outcomes remains controversial. Individuals with relatively low scores on measures of self-esteem are regarded as possessing "low self-esteem and those with relatively high scores are regarded as possessing high self-esteem." The effects of self-esteem in students' lives is so crucial that those with high self-esteem are more likely to persist in the face of difficulties and are better equipped to cope with challenges that arises in their personal lives unlike those with low self-esteem. Self-esteem according to Branden (2000) is the experience of being competent to cope with the basic challenges of life and being worthy of happiness. Self-esteem has to do with ones self-evaluation which may be negative or positive and when perceived negatively, depicts low self-esteem hence a psychological dysfunction.

Unfortunately, some secondary school students have been exhibiting serious psychological dysfunctions emanating from low self-esteem. Low self-esteem may be seen as one's self-evaluation as being incompetent to cope with the basic challenges of life. Students with low self esteem manifest inability to express their opinions, interests and needs openly as a result of fear of peoples' opinions about them, inability to stand up for their rights in matters that concern them without violating the rights of others, they are usually withdrawn and timid. They tend to exhibit undesirable behaviours because the students see the world with more negative filters which make their general dislike for themselves colour their perception for everything around them. They internalize their feelings so they tend to explode easily making them often aggressive and fighting over minor provocations, flouting school rules and regulations all in the bid to appear tough to people, while indeed they are merely masking their feeling of low self-esteem. All these psychological and social dysfunctions emanating from low self-esteem have been attributed to factors such as systematic punishment from the home, neglect or abuse for failing to meet parental standards, poor affection, absence of warmth from significant others. Other factors include traumatic events, stress and hardship from the home, school and society at large.

Bameister (2002) believed that the process of development of self-esteem begins from childhood but solidifies and gain momentum during the turbulent years of adolescence. Apparently, the poor social and psychological outcome spills over to adolescence. Students in secondary schools are adolescents who are faced with developmental challenges, usually accompanied by rapid physiological and psychological changes with demand for new roles. Consequently, some of them are unable to transit successfully, that means that they tend to, not coping and manifesting consequences of low self-esteem as earlier mentioned.

Stakeholders in education saw the significance of preventing low self-esteem in students and trying to enhance their self-esteem to enable them function optimally, by developing positive self-esteem that will make them be useful to themselves and contribute their quota to the society in general. This necessitated the use of punishment in schools; such as grass cutting, canning and washing of toilets, to effect change on such students. Parents on the other hand, resorted to canning, screaming or shouting on them; others are starving them of food and love. Moral instructions were also introduced, all in a bid to effect a change in behaviour in such students. All these attempts have not yielded any recognizable outcome; rather it has led to increase in the rate of crime experienced in the society. Malbi and Reasoner (2000), noted that many societal ills such as teenage pregnancy, drug abuse, violence, cultism, arson, kidnapping, rape and others are the outcome of low self esteem.

Most of these students in the process of trying to effect a change in behaviour by the stakeholders through the methods mentioned, drop-out of school to roam the streets, tout in motor parks, abuse drugs, alcohol, engage in kidnapping, arm robbery and for the girls unwanted pregnancies and committing of abortion which atimes lead to pre-mature death.

Again, the extent to which self-esteem is affected by gender seem to have contradictory results. While some found heightened self-esteem in boys, others found girls to have higher self-esteem. So the “no gender difference” and “gender difference” brought in complexities in assessing the interactions between self-esteem and gender (Campbell, Krueger & Voh, 2003) (Sar Abadani, 2006 & Mireai, 2006).

The present researcher as a school guidance counsellor observed these harvoc militating against the fulfillment of the students potentials as a result of low self-esteem outcome and the ineffective methods being applied by the stakeholders, concluded that there is a missing link and that it needs an effective and practical intervention such as assertive training to enhance such students' self-esteem to enable them learn how best to face and cope with life challenges and stand up for their rights with confidence without violating the rights of others.

The researchers believed that low self-esteem can be enhanced through the application of assertive training. Assertive training is a type of training that increases the awareness of peoples' right, differentiating between non-assertiveness and assertiveness, differentiating passive aggressiveness and aggressiveness, including teaching of both verbal and non-verbal assertiveness skills (Rausepp, 2005).

Assertiveness is a quality of being self-assured and confident without being aggressive (Alberti & Emmons, 2001). In the field of psychology, assertiveness is a learnable skill and a means of communication. It is characterized by a confident declaration of a statement without need of proof, which affirms the person's rights or point of view without other aggressively threatening the rights of another. Unassertive persons are usually people who have social anxiety or depression in their lives. Assertive people are happy, honest and less manipulative. Assertion is so fundamental to happiness and human well being. Unassertive people are usually unable to do anything about their condition but might eventually burst into a fit of anger at what they find difficult doing and this depicts psychological dysfunction. They feel so pressured by others, easily pushed around by way of manipulation out of fear of other people opinions about them that is fear of being adjudged negatively. This makes them unable to stand up for their rights in matters that concern them. The core of unassertiveness comes from low self-esteem. People who have low view about themselves believe automatically that other people's point of view is stronger than theirs.

The goal of assertive training therefore, is to increase awareness of personal rights, differentiating between non-assertiveness and assertiveness, differentiating between passive aggressiveness and aggressiveness, learning verbal and non-verbal assertiveness skills. It also deals with teaching of personal boundaries and how to avoid manipulation or abuse through fear. So to people who are unassertive, the best way to effect a change is to let them realize their rights by standing up for their rights, by creating awareness of their right to exist. Not thinking of what others think and avoiding worrying about how to measure up to others.

According to Nnodum (2001), it is a practical model that teaches and encourages the outward expression of feelings and basically raising the individual self-esteem if properly applied. Assertive training is based on the principle of social learning theory and it incorporates many social skill training methods.

It is based on the assumption that assertive and non-assertive behaviours are learnt and can be unlearned through application of social learning theory. The training is often conducted in groups using modeling, role-playing and good behaviour rehearsal and reinforcement to practice new behaviour in every day life. The skill learning requires considerable practice, adequate information, good modeling to facilitate change. This is done through provision of adequate desired possible and positive alternative behaviours in form of verbal and non-verbal behaviours, which are modeled, rehearsed and role-played by the students. This is aimed at instilling confidence, improve their assertive beliefs and drive out anxiety that make expression difficult where necessary in their interpersonal interactions (Onyeizugbe, 2001).

Individual's self-esteem can be raised by directly instructing the client on how to act assertively through modeling, behaviour rehearsal, role-playing, verbal instructions, coaching, exploring, brainstorming, reinforcing, giving of assignments, clarification and direct teaching. It is the behaviour that is modeled that is called 'assertive behaviour'. Assertive behaviours are part of the under-range of possible alternative behaviours available to every professional counsellor, based on the perceived need of each individual situation, time and place (Gladding, 2001). Assertive training has no single method of exposing people to assertive skills but it depends on the nature of behaviour that is needed to be worked on, so the choice of the alternative behaviour to replace the undesirable behaviour is not stereotype. It could be taught through broken record – which consists of repeating ones refusal every time, he or she is met with resistance, especially where the other person cannot take "No" for an answer. Fogging which is finding some limited truth to agree with, in what the other person is saying – one can agree in part or in principle. Negative Assertion is another way of asserting, where one agrees with the criticism without letting up demand, and negative inquiry can be used by requesting for further or specific criticism.

Assertive training therefore is understood to be more student-oriented and it allows students to interact freely amongst the group to practise skills they could not ordinarily be able to act in real life as a result of fear of others people's opinion about them and lack of confidence. According to Mireal (2006), the students are expected to imbibe adequate information concerning their rights, understanding the difference between non-assertiveness and assertiveness, passive aggressiveness and aggressiveness, including verbal and non-verbal assertive skills. They are expected to rehearse and role-play the desired alternative behaviours such as eye contact, voice tone, facial expression, gesture such as hand posture and goal directedness (assertive components) to master the act of assertion and enhanced self-esteem.

The practice of the various assertive skills is expected to avail the students of the opportunity to effect change in their behavior by being expressive and stand up for their rights without violating the rights of others. It is against this background that the study was carried out to investigate the effect of assertive training on the low self-esteem of secondary school students.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The problem of low self-esteem in secondary school students has been a source of worry to all, because of its attendant consequences on such students, schools, homes and society at large including the ineffective methods being used to help the students. Definitely, there is a missing link which needs a practical and effective intervention that will help the students to have their self esteem enhanced. People with low self-esteem are usually unassertive and internalize feelings, making them to explode and fight over minor provocations, flouting school rules and regulations, all in a bid to appear tough to people while indeed they are merely masking their feeling of low self-esteem.

They lack the social skills that will enable them manage their feelings, stand up for their rights without violating the rights of others. These militate against the fulfillment of their potentials and contribute to breakdown of law and order in the home, school and the society at large. The schools and homes worried about the consequences have made efforts to help in enhancing their self-esteem through application of many methods such as metting, punishments in form of canning, cutting of grass and washing of toilets, suspension and expulsion to no avail. On the other hand, the parents have tried canning, screaming over their heads, starving them of love and food without much effect but have rather led to dropping out of school to roam the streets, run away from homes to tout in motor parks engaging in kidnapping and in arm-robbery. While for the girls, unwanted pregnancies and abortion which often lead to premature death. Kernis (2006) noted that self-esteem has been associated with a number of important life's outcomes including psychological adjustment, academic success, physical health and relationship satisfaction.

The observation of the present researchers about these self-esteem's outcome and the ineffective methods being used to address the inadequacies made her to conclude that there is a missing link that needs an effective and practical intervention such as assertive training to enhance the self-esteem of the secondary school students. They are expected to rehearse and role play the desired alternative behaviours such as eye contact, voice tone, facial expression including gestures such as hand posture and goal directedness (assertive components) to master the act of assertion for enhanced self esteem. The problem of the study therefore, is to investigate the effect of assertive training on the self-esteem of secondary school students in Anambra State. Although studies have been done in various dimensions and settings on the effect of assertive training on self-esteem by many researchers such as Nnodum (2001), Yen Ru, Ishin et al (2004), Unachukwu and Onwukav(2009), their findings cannot be generalized to the present setting with a different background and geographical location. A lot more, needs to be done in a new environment such as ours, as such study is unknown to the present researchers. Moreso, because of the complexities in assessing the students' self-esteem and gender, the study also verified how assertive training influences the self-esteem of the male and female students.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to determine the effect of Assertive Training on the low self-esteem of secondary school students. Specifically the study will compare;

1. The difference in the mean scores of secondary school students in the experimental group exposed to assertive training and those in the control group exposed to conventional counselling.
2. The difference in the mean scores of male and female secondary school students in the experimental group exposed to assertive training.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study.

1. What is the difference in the mean self-esteem score of secondary school students in the experimental group who received assertive training and those in the control group who received conventional counselling.
2. What is the difference in mean self-esteem score of male and female secondary school students exposed to assertive training?

**Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were stated to help the researcher have more insight into the study.

1. There is no significant difference in the mean self-esteem scores of secondary school students exposed to assertive training and those who received conventional counselling.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean self-esteem scores of male and female secondary school students exposed to assertive training.

**Method**

The study adopted true experimental randomized, pre-test, post-test control group design. According to Gliner and Morgan (2000), when respondents are randomly assigned to treatment condition, thereby eliminating any systematic error that might be associated with using intact class group, it is a true experimental design. A true experimental design is an empirical study used to estimate the casual impact of our intervention on its target population. Random assignment is an experimental technique for assigning participants to different treatments and non-treatment groups. In randomizing treatment, the treatments will be roughly equivalent. Therefore, any effect observed between treatments can be linked to the treatment effect and it is not a characteristic of the individual in the group. So in this design, the random assignment of participants in experimental or treatment and control groups help to ensure that any difference between and within the groups are not systematic at the outset of the experiment. Random assignment does not guarantee that the group are equivalent, only that any differences are due to chance. Below are the randomizing Pre-test, Post-test control group.

**Table 1: Randomizing Pre-Test-Post Test Control Groups**

Group	Pre-test	Treatment	Posttest
R1	E1	O1	X1
R2	E2	O2	X2

R1

-Experimental Group A – Assertiveness training

R2

-Experimental Group B – Conventional Counselling

E1, E2

-Pre-test (variable before treatment)

O1

-Treatment (Assertiveness Training)

O2

-Conventional Counselling 88

X1

-Instrument Administered to Participants (ISE)

X2

-Instrument Administered to Participants (ISE)

} Post-Test  
(Variable after treatment)

Therefore, X1, X2, represent same instrument administered to subjects as posttest and they served as the evaluative measures. Although reshuffled before the posttest.

The study was carried out in Anambra State. It is located in the South-South Zone of Nigeria and it is bounded on North by Kogi State, East by Enugu and Abia States, West by Delta State and South by Imo State. Anambra State has six education zones namely; Awka, Ogidi, Nnewi, Aguata, Onitsha and Otuocha. The study was carried out in Awka education zone of the state and concentrated in Awka metropolis. Awka metropolis comprised of Nawfia, Umuokpu, Amawbia, Agulu-Awka, Ezi-Awka, Amenyi and Okpuno.

The population for the study consisted of 250 SS II secondary school students with low self-esteem. They were identified through the use of "Index of Self-Esteem" (ISE) as having low self-esteem. The SS II students also used were considered to be appropriate since those in SS I may not have concluded their registration to qualify them as bonafide students of the school and the SS III students were in the examination class and needed to concentrate in the examination preparations. So SS II students were considered appropriate for the study.

The sample size of the study was 47 SS II secondary school students with low self-esteem and purposively sampled one education zone from the six education zones in Anambra State, Awka metropolis was also purposively selected from Awka zone, out of which two co-educational secondary schools were purposively selected from the three school types (males, females and mixed or co-educational schools) and randomly sampled two co-educational secondary schools out of the six in the metropolis. This is to enable the researchers cater for the gender issue in the study. The two co-educational schools chose, had at least two and three streams respectively.

The instrument for data collection was the questionnaire developed by Walter W. Hudson (1982) and re-standardized for Nigerian use by Omoluabi (1997). The instrument is titled "Index of Self-Esteem (ISE). It served as a dialogistic (pre-test) and evaluative (post-test) instrument. The scale consists of 25-Items with statements which deal with general feeling about oneself. The items were patterned on a five-point scale, ranging from rarely or none of the time, a little of the time, some of the time, to a good part of the time most or all of the time.

Rarely or none of the time

- 1 A little of the time
2. Some of the time
3. A good part of the time
4. Most or all of the time

5. According to Omoluabi (1997) the norms for the scale are 30.89 for males and 32.04 for females. Any score higher than the norms for the males and females are considered to imply that the student has low self-esteem.

The instrument (Index of Self-Esteem) (ISE) is an adopted instrument which has already been standardized. It is developed by Walter W. Hudson (1982) and revalidated by Omoluabi (1997) for Nigerian use.

Reliability is a standardized instrument. There is no reliability index based on Omoluabi's revaluation. (See Appendix 'C') Hudson (1982) had reliability co-efficient of 0.92). The data were collected using "Index of Self-Esteem" (ISE). This was administered on both those in experimental and control groups. The students were given the pretest questions first before the training proper started and after the treatment. The data were collected by the two counsellors and two form teachers who were used as research assistants (one from each of the two schools respectively). They were trained on how the instrument would be used by the researcher and were used as research assistants.

The research assistants after instructing the students on how to fill the questionnaire "Index of Self-Esteem" (ISE). The distribution was done and collected on the spot by them. The instrument now reshuffled was re-administered after the treatment to both groups and analyzed by the researcher to determine the mean scores on their self-esteem.

### **Training the Research Assistants**

The researcher's trained two research assistants (who were the counsellors and two form teachers for the two classes) one in the experimental school used for the assertive training and the control school placed on placebo condition). So each school had one counsellor, one form teacher. They were given copies of the questionnaires and training instructional programme to study. The training was a two-day activities. The researchers used the two days to meet with two research assistants in each of the two separate schools (one counsellor and one teacher). On each of these days, the researcher deliberated with the assistants step by step on the nature of the programme. This is to expose them to the necessary skills to be involved in the training so as to ensure mastery of what is expected of them. They were given guide on the students activities, the time table, incentives to be used on the student during the training. The content of the training were also written out as following:

- Meaning of assertive Training and Effects
- Assertive components
- Reduction of Anxiety and Tension exercises.
- Difference between aggressive and assertive behaviour
- Difference between assertive, passive and unassertive behaviours.
- Coaching them on how to refuse unreasonable Requests, Dealing with criticism, giving and receiving compliments.

The researchers explained vividly to the assistants the importance of the programme to the students, teachers, counsellors and the society at large. The research assistants asked questions and they were all cleared by the researcher. This is done to ensure their thorough understanding of what is involved in the programme. After the meeting they agreed on the date and she urged them to get the venue set. For the control group, the counsellor of the school was given the procedure and a form teacher appointed to assist her. The counsellor is a regular school guidance counsellor and so possesses the experience to handle those in the control group with the help of the appointed form teacher. The students were given group guidance on the general counselling services and the need to visit a counsellor whenever they have need, such as on poor study habit and other psychological problems.

### **Experimental Procedures**

The students were given the pre-test questions first before the training proper started. Those in the control group were also given the pre-test in their own school. The training exercise was only for the senior secondary students two (SS II) students with low self-esteem in the experimental group. The training lasted for 6 weeks of 12 sessions, two sessions per week, each session lasted for 40 minutes. Assertive training was used in each session with the present researcher taking the lead in teaching and the modelling of the alternative desired behaviours. The students were expected to observe the researcher and the research assistants, rehearse and role plays the modelled behaviour after the researcher and be able to perform them in real life.

All those in the conventional group were given conventional guidance. They were not involved in the training. At the end, post-test (reshuffled pre-test questions) were administered to both the experimental and control groups by the researcher and the research assistants in their different schools.

The data was collected by administering the instrument which was analyzed in line with the research questions and hypotheses, statistical mean were used to answer the research questions while Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was used to test the hypotheses at 0.5 level of significance. It was used to determine if there is any significant difference in the mean scores of the two groups. Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was used in testing the null hypotheses for the study. 250 copies of the questionnaires were printed and distributed, but 10 were not well filled, 15 were not used, two were not returned.

### Control of Extraneous Variables

The researcher took the following steps to prevent or at least minimize the incidence of extraneous variables in the experiment that may affect the result. Some of these steps were:

1. To avoid the effect of using schools from different socio-economic and socio-geographic locations, students in the secondary schools in Awka metropolis were used for the study. The researcher avoided the subjects interaction by not having the control group and the experimental groups in the same school.
2. When the gap between the pre-test was too short, the effect of remembering would confound the result of the study and when the gap is too long, the effect of forgetting would be significant. To avoid these extraneous variables, the researcher made sure that the gap between the two testing was moderate by using six weeks gap. This did not only help to control the pre-test sensitization, but also minimized the effect of maturation and history. Again the posttest was reshuffled to confuse the subjects from knowing that they were responding to the same instrument.
3. ANCOVA was used to take care of any differences in the groups for the study. It was used to ensure that any group difference is controlled.

### Research Question 1

What is the difference in the mean self-esteem score of secondary school students in the experimental group who received assertive training and those in the control group who received conventional counselling.

**Table 3: Pre-test and Post-test Self-esteem Mean Scores of Students who Received Assertive Training and those in the Control Group.**

Source of Variation	N	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Loss in the Mean Score	Remark
Assertive Training	25	40.68	26.56	14.12	Has Effect
Control Group	22	42.45	35.82	6.63	
Norm 31.47					

Table 3 shows that assertive training has effect on the low self-esteem of the students in the experimental group, since their mean post-test score was below the norm of 30.89 and 32.04 which is the baseline for those with low self-esteem.

Those treated with assertive training had a pre-test mean score of 40.68 and post-test mean score of 26.56 with a difference in mean score of 14.12 against a pre-test mean score of 42.45 and post-test mean score of 35.82 showing a difference in loss mean of 6.63 for those in the control group. The post-test self-esteem scores of those in the experimental group dropped from 40.68 to 26.56. Therefore assertive training has effect on low self-esteem of the students because their post-test scores were below the baseline or norm of 30.89 for males and 32.04 for the females being the score considered as score for students with low self esteem. Since it is below the norm or baseline, the training has effect because the lower the mean from the baseline the better the self-esteem. Although the low self-esteem of the students in the control group improved from 42.45 to 35.82, their post-test mean score is still above the norm depicting low self-esteem. Those in the experimental group mean scores were superior to those in the control group.

## Research Question 2

What is the difference in the mean self-esteem scores of male and female secondary school students exposed to assertive training?

**Table 4: Students' Pre-test and Post-test self-esteem mean scores of Male and Female secondary school students who received Assertive Training**

Source of Variation	N	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Loss in the Mean Score	Remarks
Males	14	38.64	26.43	12.21	
Females	11	43.27	26.73	16.54	

Norm: 31.47

Table 4 shows that the males treated with assertive training had a pre-test mean self-esteem score of 38.64 and a post-test mean score of 26.43, indicating a mean loss of 12.21 while the female treated with assertive training had a pre-test mean self-esteem score of 43.27 and post-test mean score of 26.73 indicating a loss in the mean of 16.54. The females' mean score is higher than the males' (males 12.21, females 16.54). Therefore assertive training has more effect on low self-esteem of the female secondary school students than on low self-esteem of the males by comparison. The lower mean scores indicated increase in the self-esteem levels of both the males and females. Both indicated scores below the baseline or norm of 30.89 and 32.04, showing that the training has effect on both but more on the females.

## Null Hypothesis I

There is no significant difference in the mean self-esteem scores of secondary school students with low self-esteem who are exposed to assertive training and those who are in the control group.

**Table 5: Analysis of Covariance on the mean self-esteem scores of secondary school students with Assertive training and those in the control group.**

Source of Variation	SS	df	Ms	Cal.f	Crit.F	P>0.05
Corrected Model	1097.459	2	548.729			
Intercept	462.285	1	462.285			
Pretest Scores	94.423	1	94.423			
Treatment Models	897.060	1	897.060	55.51	4.07	S
Error	711.009	44	16.159			
Residual	46666.000	47				
Corrected Total	1808.468	46				

In table 5, it was observed that at 0.05 level of significance, 1 df numerator and 46df denominator, the calculated F55.51 is greater than the critical F4.07, the first null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, assertive training has significant effect on the self-esteem of secondary school students with low self-esteem.

### Null Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference in the mean self-esteem scores of male and female, secondary school students who received assertive training.

**Table 6: Analysis of covariance of the mean self-esteem scores of male and female secondary school students who received assertive training.**

Source of Variation	SS	df	Ms	Cal.f	Crit.F	P>0.05
Corrected Model	2.239	2	1.119			
Intercept	340.139	1	340.139			
Pretest Scores	1.689	1	1.689			
Treatment Models	.057	1	0.57	0.003	4.26	NS
Error	445.921	22	20.269			
Residual	18084.000	25				
Corrected Total	448.160	24				

Table 6 shows that at 0.05 level of significance, 1df numerator and 24df denominator, the calculated F0.003 is less than the critical F4.26. The second null hypothesis is accepted. Therefore, there is no significant difference in the effect of assertive training on low self-esteem of male and female secondary school students.

## **Discussion**

### **Male and Female Differences in the Experimental and Control Groups**

The result of the study indicated that assertive training has effect on the low self-esteem of the secondary school students. This shows that the practical assertive skills which the training offered to those in the experimental group were learnt and it also shows that the students interacted and imbibed the numerous incorporated skills displayed within the training period. Hence they are affected more by the training than those in the control group who did not receive the training.

The present finding corresponds with the results of Nnodum, (2001), Pope et al (2006), Yen-Ru et al (2004) which indicated that assertive training was effective in enhancing social skills of primary school isolates, significantly improved the self-esteem and assertiveness of nursing and medical students treated with assertive training. It enabled the students' communication skill to increase and so express their feelings and needs in ways that do not violate the rights of others while asserting their own rights.

### **Effect of Assertive training on the self-esteem of secondary school students with low self-esteem**

On the analysis of the covariance between the students with low self-esteem who were exposed to assertive training and those who received conventional counselling? The result reveals that there is significant difference between the two groups (See Table 5). This means that assertive training has significant effect on the students who were exposed to the training. The hypothesis is therefore rejected. It shows that the training has effect because it incorporated various skills in the training which the students imbibed and actively practised during the training. The students, who could not express themselves before the training improved in their expressive skills, make request without demeaning themselves. The researcher opines that guidance counsellors should use assertive training in helping students with low self-esteem, as the intervention has proved its efficacy over conventional counselling. Students have learnt to interact in a relationship with reduced anxiety and can express their needs, opinions and interest without violating the rights of others. The present result is also in consonance with Eskin (2003) who stated that assertive training enables one to acquire new social skills through provision of adequate information and considerable practice offered by a professional.

### **Differences between the Male and Female Students with Low Self-Esteem Exposed to Assertive Training**

The result reveals that assertive training has more effect on the self-esteem of the female students with low self-esteem than on the males with low self-esteem. This shows that the females adjusted more positively than their male counterparts, indicating that the females have higher self-esteem than the males exposed to the training. It also shows that the females exhibited special interest hence the excessive attention being paid on their self-image by the females. It can also be due to chance because both the males and females benefited equally from the technique.

The present finding is in line with the studies carried out by Danahue and Benson (2000), Erol and Orth (2008) which reported a higher self-esteem on the females than the males. Contrary to the widespread belief of gender gap reported by some studies in which they found out that the males have higher self-esteem than the females (Kostanski, 2004, Oyesejo and Zacheaus, 2000; Lawal, 2000 and Krueger, 2004). Wesley and Mattaini (2008), also reported that both boys and girls have similar levels of self-esteem during childhood but that gender gap emerges by adolescence when the boys reported higher self-esteem, while others believed that the girls self-esteem plummets in adolescence and never recovers. The present finding is difference from other findings.

The difference may be as a result of the design, population, sample, treatment duration, location and other factors. The students in the present study were secondary school students who are also adolescents showed a higher self-esteem on the females. However, it is suggested that the higher self-esteem shown in the females than in the males may have been as a result of an individual process in which one's personal distinguishing interest is emphasized. Females are believed to have lower self-esteem during adolescents, emanating from physical changes being experienced during the stage of life, excessive attention being paid to their self-image enabled them to be enthused during the training, having been exposed to the benefits in the package. This interests and enthusiasm must have triggered the higher level witnessed. This interest corresponds with self-determination theory because they were determined to better their lives, they were provided with the social support and the relatedness made them to experience better well being.

### **Differences between (ANCOVA) for the Male and Female Secondary School Students Exposed to Assertive Training**

In the Analysis of Covariance of the mean self-esteem scores of male and female secondary school students who received assertive training, the mean self-esteem scores of the male and the female students with low self esteem exposed to assertive training has no significant difference between the two genders (males and females). Therefore the hypothesis is accepted. There is no significant difference. It is therefore, opined that both the males and females should be given such training to help in enhancing their self-esteem since it is beneficial to both groups. It also means that from the result that self-esteem is gender depending and not gender specific, so it is beyond gender variable. Further studies could be done on assertive training with more participants, in a new location and on gender to generate more evidence.

### **Conclusion of the Study**

Evidence abounds in this study that assertive training has significant effect in enhancing the secondary school student's self-esteem. Though the self-esteem of the female students with low self-esteem exposed to assertive training is higher than their male counterparts exposed to the same training, however sex has no significant effect on their self-esteem, finally assertive training has proved to be suitable in enhancing the self-esteem of secondary school students with low self-esteem for a better interaction with people and themselves.

### **Recommendations**

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

1. Having seen that the secondary school students with low self-esteem who received assertive training had enhanced self-esteem, other counsellors can help students with the use of this intervention to enhance students' self-esteem, in their own schools.
2. Counsellors should always expose every student to assertive training irrespective of their gender so as to help them interact better with themselves and others. The training is effective for both sexes, so awareness of this training should be created for parents in Parents Teachers Association (PTA) on the need to encourage their wards at home to practise the skills.

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