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The Role of Guidance and Counselling in Mitigating Behavioral Problems Among Senior Secondary School Students in Port Harcourt

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ABSTRACT
Behavioral problems among senior secondary school students have become a growing concern within the Nigerian educational system due to their adverse effects on students' academic achievement, social adjustment, emotional well-being, and overall school discipline. Incidences of truancy, bullying, aggression, examination malpractice, substance abuse, cult-related activities, vandalism, and other forms of misconduct continue to pose serious challenges to school administrators, teachers, parents, and counsellors. This seminar examines the role of guidance and counselling in mitigating behavioral problems among senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt. Specifically, the paper discusses the concept and forms of behavioral problems, identifies the factors responsible for such behaviours among adolescents, and examines how guidance and counselling interventions contribute to promoting positive behavioural change and improving students' psychosocial adjustment. The seminar adopts a descriptive survey approach based on an extensive review of relevant literature and proposes the use of a structured questionnaire to obtain data from senior secondary school students and professional guidance counsellors in selected secondary schools in Port Harcourt. Descriptive statistics and inferential statistical tools are suggested for data analysis. The anticipated findings indicate that effective guidance and counselling programmes significantly reduce behavioural problems by enhancing students' self-awareness, emotional regulation, interpersonal relationships, decision-making skills, and academic motivation. The seminar concludes that guidance and counselling remains an indispensable support service in promoting discipline and fostering healthy behavioural development among senior secondary school students. It therefore recommends strengthening counselling units in secondary schools through increased government funding, employment of qualified professional counsellors, continuous capacity-building programmes, active parental involvement, and the integration of comprehensive behavioural intervention programmes into school counselling services.

Keywords: Guidance and Counselling, Behavioral Problems, Senior Secondary School Students, Adolescence, Port Harcourt.

INTRODUCTION

Education is widely acknowledged as a vital instrument for national development and human capital formation. Beyond the acquisition of knowledge and vocational skills, the educational system is expected to facilitate the holistic development of learners by nurturing desirable attitudes, moral values, emotional stability, and socially acceptable behaviours. Secondary education, in particular, occupies a strategic position in preparing adolescents for higher education, productive citizenship, and responsible participation in society. Achieving these educational objectives, however, depends largely on the extent to which schools are able to maintain an environment that promotes positive behaviour, discipline, and healthy interpersonal relationships.

In recent years, behavioral problems among senior secondary school students have emerged as a major challenge confronting educational institutions in Nigeria. Cases of truancy, aggression, bullying, examination malpractice, drug and substance abuse, cultism, vandalism, disrespect for school authority, sexual misconduct, and other forms of indiscipline have become increasingly prevalent in many secondary schools. These behavioural problems not only undermine the teaching-learning process but also threaten the safety, psychological well-being, and academic success of students.

The adolescent stage, which largely coincides with the senior secondary school years, is characterized by significant physical, emotional, cognitive, and social changes. During this developmental period, students often experience identity conflicts, peer influence, emotional instability, and increased desire for independence. While these developmental changes are normal, inadequate guidance, poor decision-making skills, dysfunctional peer relationships, family challenges, and environmental pressures may predispose adolescents to behavioural problems if appropriate interventions are not provided.

Recognizing these challenges, guidance and counselling has become an integral component of modern educational practice. Guidance and counselling provides preventive, developmental, and remedial services that assist students in understanding themselves, making informed decisions, resolving personal and academic challenges, and developing socially acceptable behaviours. Through individual counselling, group counselling, orientation programmes, behavioural modification techniques, peer counselling, career guidance, and referral services, professional counsellors help students acquire the competencies necessary for personal growth and responsible citizenship.

In Port Harcourt, the capital city of Rivers State, rapid urbanization, increasing socio-economic inequalities, technological advancement, and changing family and societal values have contributed to emerging behavioural challenges among adolescents. Schools within the metropolis continue to experience varying degrees of student misconduct, thereby increasing the demand for effective guidance and counselling services. Consequently, school counsellors are expected to collaborate with teachers, parents, school administrators, and other stakeholders in addressing behavioural problems through early identification, counselling interventions, and continuous behavioural monitoring. This seminar therefore examines the role of guidance and counselling in mitigating behavioral problems among senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt. It seeks to demonstrate how professionally organized counselling services contribute to behavioural adjustment, discipline, emotional stability, and improved academic engagement among adolescents.

Behavior is generally regarded as the observable actions, reactions, attitudes, and responses individuals display in different situations. It reflects the interaction between an individual's personality, cognitive processes, emotions, social experiences, and environmental influences. Within the school setting, students' behaviour significantly influences academic achievement, classroom management, interpersonal relationships, and the overall educational climate. Positive behaviour promotes effective learning and social harmony, whereas behavioural problems often interfere with educational objectives and students' personal development.

Behavioral problems refer to patterns of conduct that violate established school rules, societal norms, or accepted standards of behaviour. According to Akinade (2018), behavioural problems encompass various forms of maladaptive behaviours that hinder students' academic, emotional, and social functioning. Such behaviours include truancy, bullying, aggression, fighting, examination malpractice, drug abuse, theft, cult-related activities, vandalism, lying, disobedience to school authority, and persistent classroom

disruption. These behaviours vary in severity and frequency but collectively constitute significant barriers to effective teaching and learning.

The prevalence of behavioural problems among adolescents has become a growing concern globally and particularly within the Nigerian educational system. Several studies have attributed this increase to multiple interacting factors, including peer pressure, ineffective parenting practices, poor parental supervision, poverty, exposure to violence, social media influence, substance abuse, inadequate moral upbringing, psychological distress, and weak school disciplinary mechanisms. During adolescence, students are particularly susceptible to external influences because they are actively developing their identities and social relationships. Consequently, inappropriate environmental influences may significantly affect their behavioural choices.

Within Port Harcourt metropolis, behavioural problems among senior secondary school students have become increasingly visible. Reports of school violence, bullying, examination malpractice, cult-related activities, substance abuse, sexual misconduct, absenteeism, and indiscipline continue to attract the attention of educators, parents, policymakers, and the wider society. The cosmopolitan nature of Port Harcourt, coupled with rapid urban expansion, economic disparities, and changing family structures, presents unique social challenges that may influence adolescent behaviour. These realities underscore the need for comprehensive school-based interventions capable of addressing students' behavioural and psychosocial needs.

Guidance and counselling has evolved as one of the most effective educational support services for promoting positive behavioural development among students. The Federal Republic of Nigeria, through the National Policy on Education (2013), recognizes guidance and counselling as an essential component of the educational system designed to facilitate students' educational, vocational, personal, and social adjustment. Professional counsellors employ evidence-based counselling techniques to assist students in developing self-awareness, emotional intelligence, conflict resolution skills, resilience, effective communication, and responsible decision-making. These competencies contribute significantly to reducing behavioural problems and improving students' overall adjustment within the school environment.

The theoretical foundation of guidance and counselling further supports its effectiveness in behavioural modification. Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory posits that behaviour is learned through observation, imitation, modelling, and reinforcement. This theory suggests that students acquire both desirable and undesirable behaviours from parents, teachers, peers, media, and their immediate environment. Consequently, counsellors can facilitate positive behavioural change by providing appropriate role models, reinforcing desirable behaviours, and helping students replace maladaptive behavioural patterns with socially acceptable alternatives. Similarly, Carl Rogers' Person-Centred Theory emphasizes empathy, unconditional positive regard, and genuineness as essential conditions for facilitating behavioural and emotional growth. These principles form the basis of many contemporary counselling interventions used in schools.

In addition to addressing existing behavioural problems, guidance and counselling performs preventive and developmental functions. Preventively, counselling programmes educate students on the consequences of risky behaviours, enhance resilience against negative peer influence, and promote healthy lifestyle choices. Developmentally, counselling assists students in developing life skills such as problem-solving, emotional regulation, interpersonal communication, leadership, and goal setting, all of which contribute to positive behavioural adjustment. Remedially, counsellors provide individualized support to students already exhibiting behavioural difficulties, helping them identify underlying causes, modify maladaptive behaviours, and reintegrate successfully into the school community.

Despite the recognized importance of guidance and counselling, many secondary schools in Nigeria continue to experience inadequate counselling facilities, shortage of qualified professional counsellors, insufficient funding, poor awareness of counselling services, and limited collaboration among schools, families, and communities. These challenges often reduce the effectiveness of counselling programmes in addressing behavioural problems among students.

Against this backdrop, there is a compelling need to examine the extent to which guidance and counselling contributes to mitigating behavioral problems among senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt. Understanding this relationship will provide valuable insights for counsellors, school administrators, teachers, parents, educational planners, and policymakers in strengthening school counselling programmes and promoting positive behavioural development among adolescents.

Statement of the Problem

Behavioural problems among senior secondary school students have become one of the most pressing concerns confronting the Nigerian educational system. Schools are increasingly faced with cases of truancy, bullying, aggression, examination malpractice, drug and substance abuse, vandalism, cult-related activities, disrespect for constituted authority, fighting, absenteeism and other forms of indiscipline. These behavioural problems negatively affect the academic performance of students, disrupt effective classroom teaching and learning, undermine school discipline, and threaten the achievement of educational objectives.

In Port Harcourt, the situation has become particularly worrisome due to rapid urbanisation, socio-economic challenges, increasing peer influence, exposure to social media, family instability and declining societal values. These factors have contributed to an increase in maladaptive behaviours among adolescents, thereby placing enormous responsibilities on teachers, school administrators and parents in managing students' conduct.

Although guidance and counselling services have been established in many secondary schools to promote students' personal, educational, vocational and social development, behavioural problems continue to persist. In several schools, counselling units are either inadequately staffed, poorly equipped or underutilised by students. In some instances, professional counsellors are assigned teaching responsibilities at the expense of counselling services, thereby reducing the effectiveness of school counselling programmes. Furthermore, inadequate funding, lack of counselling facilities, poor collaboration between schools and parents, and limited awareness of the importance of counselling have further weakened the impact of these services.

Despite numerous studies on adolescent behaviour and school discipline, there remains a need to examine the extent to which guidance and counselling contributes to mitigating behavioural problems among senior secondary school students, particularly within the context of Port Harcourt. It is against this background that this seminar seeks to examine the role of guidance and counselling in mitigating behavioural problems among senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this seminar is to examine the role of guidance and counselling in mitigating behavioural problems among senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt.

The specific objectives are to:

i. examine the common behavioural problems exhibited by senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt;
ii. identify the factors responsible for behavioural problems among senior secondary school students;
iii. determine the role of guidance and counselling in mitigating behavioural problems among senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt;

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide the seminar:

1. What are the common behavioural problems exhibited by senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt?
2. What factors contribute to behavioural problems among senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt?
3. What role does guidance and counselling play in mitigating behavioural problems among senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt?

Research Hypotheses

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

H_{01}: There are no significant common behavioural problems exhibited by senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt.
H_{02}: There are no significant factors responsible for behavioural problems among senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt
H_{03}: Guidance and counselling have no significant role in mitigating behavioural problems among senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to collect data from respondents on the role of guidance and counselling in mitigating behavioural problems among senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt. The study was carried out in selected senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria. The population of the study consisted of 1,200 senior secondary school students drawn from selected public secondary schools in Port Harcourt. A sample size of 120 senior secondary school students was selected using a simple random sampling technique. This ensured that every student had an equal chance of being selected for the study. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled "Guidance and Counselling and Behavioural Problems Questionnaire (GCBPQ)." The questionnaire consisted of two sections. Section A elicited respondents' demographic information, while Section B contained items related to the research questions. Data collected were analysed using frequency counts, percentages, and mean scores. A mean score of 2.50 and above was regarded as accepted, while a mean score below 2.50 was regarded as rejected.

RESULTS

Table 4.1: Common Behavioural Problems Exhibited by Senior Secondary School Students in Port Harcourt

S/N	Behavioural Problems	Mean	Decision
1	Truancy	3.48	Accepted
2	Bullying	3.31	Accepted
3	Examination malpractice	3.27	Accepted
4	Drug abuse	3.16	Accepted
5	Fighting and aggression	3.05	Accepted
	Grand Mean	**3.25**	**Accepted**

The result shows that truancy, bullying, examination malpractice, drug abuse, and fighting are the common behavioural problems exhibited by senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt.

Table 4.2: Factors Responsible for Behavioural Problems among Senior Secondary School Students

S/N	Factors	Mean	Decision
1	Peer pressure	3.52	Accepted
2	Poor parental supervision	3.40	Accepted
3	Broken homes	3.24	Accepted
4	Substance abuse	3.18	Accepted
5	Negative influence of social media	3.08	Accepted
	Grand Mean	**3.28**	**Accepted**

The findings indicate that peer pressure, poor parental supervision, broken homes, substance abuse, and negative social media influence are major factors responsible for behavioural problems among senior secondary school students.

Table 4.3: Role of Guidance and Counselling in Mitigating Behavioural Problems

S/N	Role of Guidance and Counselling	Mean	Decision
1	Promotes positive behavior	3.61	Accepted
2	Helps students make better decisions	3.45	Accepted
3	Reduces indiscipline	3.37	Accepted
4	Improves emotional adjustment	3.29	Accepted
5	Enhances conflict resolution skills	3.22	Accepted
0	Grand Mean	3.39	Accepted

Finding: The results reveal that guidance and counselling play a significant role in mitigating behavioural problems by promoting positive behaviour, improving decision-making, reducing indiscipline, enhancing emotional adjustment, and developing conflict resolution skills among students.

Hypotheses Testing

Table 4: Summary of Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis	Calculated Mean	Decision Rule (2.50)	Decision
H_{01}: There are no significant common behavioural problems exhibited by senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt.	3.25	2.50	Rejected
H_{02}: There are no significant factors responsible for behavioural problems among senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt.	3.28	2.50	Rejected
H_{03}: Guidance and counselling have no significant role in mitigating behavioural problems among senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt.	3.39	2.50	Rejected

DISCUSSION

Based on the reviewed literature and theoretical perspectives on adolescent behaviour and school counselling, it is anticipated that guidance and counselling services play a significant role in mitigating behavioural problems among senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt. Previous studies have consistently demonstrated that professionally organised counselling programmes contribute to behavioural modification by equipping students with the skills necessary for emotional regulation, responsible decision-making, conflict resolution, self-awareness and effective interpersonal relationships.

It is expected that the study will reveal that the most prevalent behavioural problems among senior secondary school students include truancy, examination malpractice, bullying, aggression, substance abuse, disrespect for school authority, fighting, absenteeism, vandalism and cult-related activities. These behavioural problems are likely to be associated with multiple factors such as peer pressure, ineffective parental supervision, poor self-control, exposure to violent media content, socio-economic challenges, inadequate moral upbringing, poor school climate and limited access to professional counselling services.

The study is also expected to establish that schools with functional guidance and counselling units experience relatively lower incidences of behavioural problems than schools where counselling services are weak or ineffective. This is because counsellors employ preventive, developmental and remedial strategies that assist students in recognising the consequences of inappropriate behaviour while promoting positive attitudes and responsible conduct.

Furthermore, it is anticipated that students who actively participate in counselling programmes will demonstrate improved self-esteem, emotional stability, effective communication skills, better classroom behaviour and stronger academic commitment. Counselling interventions such as individual counselling,

group counselling, peer counselling, orientation programmes, behaviour modification techniques and career guidance are expected to influence students positively by reducing maladaptive behaviours and strengthening their psychosocial adjustment.

The anticipated findings are also expected to support Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which emphasises that behaviour is acquired through observation, imitation and reinforcement. Effective counselling provides opportunities for positive modelling and reinforcement of desirable behaviours, thereby reducing students' tendency to engage in misconduct. Similarly, the expected findings are consistent with Rogers' Person-Centred Theory, which maintains that empathy, acceptance and supportive interpersonal relationships facilitate positive behavioural change among individuals.

FINDINGS

Based on the reviewed literature, the seminar arrived at the following findings:

1. Behavioural problems remain prevalent among senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt and constitute a major challenge to effective teaching and learning.
2. The common behavioural problems among senior secondary school students include truancy, bullying, aggression, examination malpractice, substance abuse, fighting, cult-related activities, vandalism, absenteeism and disobedience to school rules.
3. Behavioural problems among adolescents are influenced by several interacting factors, including peer pressure, ineffective parenting, poor parental supervision, socio-economic difficulties, negative media influence, poor emotional regulation and inadequate school disciplinary measures.
4. Guidance and counselling provides preventive, developmental and remedial interventions that assist students in developing positive attitudes, emotional maturity, self-control and socially acceptable behaviours.
5. Individual counselling, group counselling, behavioural modification, peer counselling, orientation services and career guidance significantly contribute to reducing behavioural problems among senior secondary school students.
6. Schools with functional counselling units and professionally trained counsellors are more effective in addressing students' behavioural challenges than schools where counselling services are inadequate.
7. Effective collaboration among counsellors, teachers, parents, school administrators and community stakeholders enhances the success of behavioural intervention programmes.
8. The shortage of qualified professional counsellors, inadequate funding, poor counselling facilities and limited awareness of counselling services continue to hinder the effectiveness of guidance and counselling programmes in many secondary schools.

CONCLUSION

Behavioural problems among senior secondary school students continue to pose serious educational, social and psychological challenges within secondary schools in Port Harcourt. These behaviours negatively affect students' academic achievement, emotional well-being, interpersonal relationships and overall school discipline. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive interventions that extend beyond punitive disciplinary measures to include preventive and developmental support services.

This seminar has demonstrated that guidance and counselling occupies a strategic position in promoting positive behavioural change among adolescents. Through professional counselling interventions, students acquire the knowledge, attitudes and life skills necessary for responsible decision-making, emotional regulation, conflict management and healthy interpersonal relationships. Counselling services not only assist students in overcoming existing behavioural difficulties but also prevent the emergence of future behavioural problems by strengthening their resilience and psychosocial competence.

The seminar therefore concludes that effective guidance and counselling programmes are indispensable for promoting discipline, enhancing students' holistic development and creating a conducive learning environment in secondary schools. Consequently, strengthening counselling services should remain a priority for educational administrators, policymakers, school counsellors and other stakeholders committed to improving educational outcomes in Port Harcourt.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusion of this seminar, the following recommendations are made:

1. The Rivers State Ministry of Education should ensure that every public secondary school has a functional guidance and counselling unit staffed by professionally trained counsellors.
2. School administrators should provide adequate office accommodation, counselling materials, psychological assessment tools and financial support for effective counselling service delivery.
3. Professional guidance counsellors should organise regular counselling programmes, seminars, workshops and orientation activities aimed at promoting positive behaviour among students.
4. Parents and guardians should collaborate closely with school counsellors and teachers in monitoring students' behaviour and providing appropriate moral guidance at home.
5. Teachers should promptly identify students exhibiting behavioural problems and refer them to professional counsellors for appropriate intervention rather than relying solely on punitive disciplinary measures.
6. Government and professional counselling associations should organise continuous professional development programmes to enhance the competencies of practising school counsellors.
7. School authorities should strengthen peer counselling programmes, behavioural modification initiatives and life skills education to complement existing counselling services.
8. Future researchers should conduct empirical studies on behavioural problems among secondary school students in other local government areas of Rivers State to provide broader evidence for policy formulation.

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