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Guidance Services and Moral Development Among Senior Secondary School Students in Rivers State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Moral development is an important aspect of adolescent education because it influences how students make decisions, regulate their behaviour, and relate to others. Although school guidance services are intended to support students' educational, personal, social, and developmental needs, limited empirical attention has been given to their relationship with moral development in the Nigerian secondary school context. This study examined the relationship between guidance services and moral development among senior secondary school students in Rivers State, Nigeria. Guidance services were examined through orientation, information, and appraisal services. A cross-sectional correlational survey design was adopted, involving 397 senior secondary school students. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire measured on a five-point Likert scale. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 significance level. The findings showed significant positive relationships between orientation services and moral development ($r = .730$, $p < .001$), information services and moral development ($r = .807$, $p < .001$), and appraisal services and moral development ($r = .822$, $p < .001$). Appraisal services recorded the strongest relationship with moral development. The findings indicate that guidance services are an important school-based resource for strengthening students' moral development. The study recommends that schools should deliberately integrate moral-development objectives into guidance and counselling programmes, particularly through systematic orientation, relevant information provision, and appropriate student appraisal.

Keywords: Guidance Services, Orientation Services, Information Services, Appraisal Services, Moral Development

INTRODUCTION

Education is concerned not only with what students know but also with how they use knowledge, relate to others, and conduct themselves within society. For adolescents, the school is an important setting for developing values, judgement, responsibility, empathy, and self-regulation. These qualities are central to moral development and have implications for students' relationships, academic engagement, and future

participation in society. Guidance services provide one avenue through which schools can support this broader development. Traditionally, guidance has focused on helping students understand themselves and their environment and make appropriate educational, vocational, and personal-social decisions. In practice, this responsibility is expressed through services such as orientation, information, appraisal, counselling, placement, referral, and follow-up. The present study concentrates on orientation, information, and appraisal services because these activities directly expose students to school expectations, relevant knowledge, and opportunities for self-understanding.

Evidence from the wider school-counselling literature supports the developmental value of such interventions. Whiston et al. (2011), for example, reported a positive overall effect of school counselling interventions on student outcomes. Durlak et al. (2011), in a large-scale review of school-based social and emotional learning programmes involving more than 270,000 students, found improvements in social-emotional skills, attitudes, behaviour, and academic performance. More recent evidence involving hundreds of studies and students from different countries has similarly demonstrated that school-based social-emotional interventions can improve behaviour, peer relationships, school functioning, and school climate (Cipriano et al., 2023). Lemberger-Truelove et al. (2025) also reported a positive effect of school-counsellor-led social-emotional learning interventions.

These findings are relevant to moral development because students' values and conduct are shaped partly by the information they receive, the expectations communicated to them, the behaviours they observe, and the opportunities they have to reflect on their own characteristics and choices. However, much of the Nigerian literature on guidance and counselling has focused on academic achievement, career choice, adjustment, and general behavioural outcomes. The specific relationship between individual guidance services and students' moral development has received comparatively less attention.

This gap is particularly relevant in the context of secondary education in Rivers State, where schools must respond to various forms of student misconduct, including indiscipline, examination malpractice, peer pressure, and other behaviours that may undermine students' educational and social development. While these challenges cannot be attributed solely to deficiencies in guidance provision, they reinforce the need to examine school-based mechanisms that may contribute to students' moral growth. Accordingly, this study examined the relationship between three guidance services orientation, information, and appraisal and moral development among senior secondary school students in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Operational Conceptual Framework

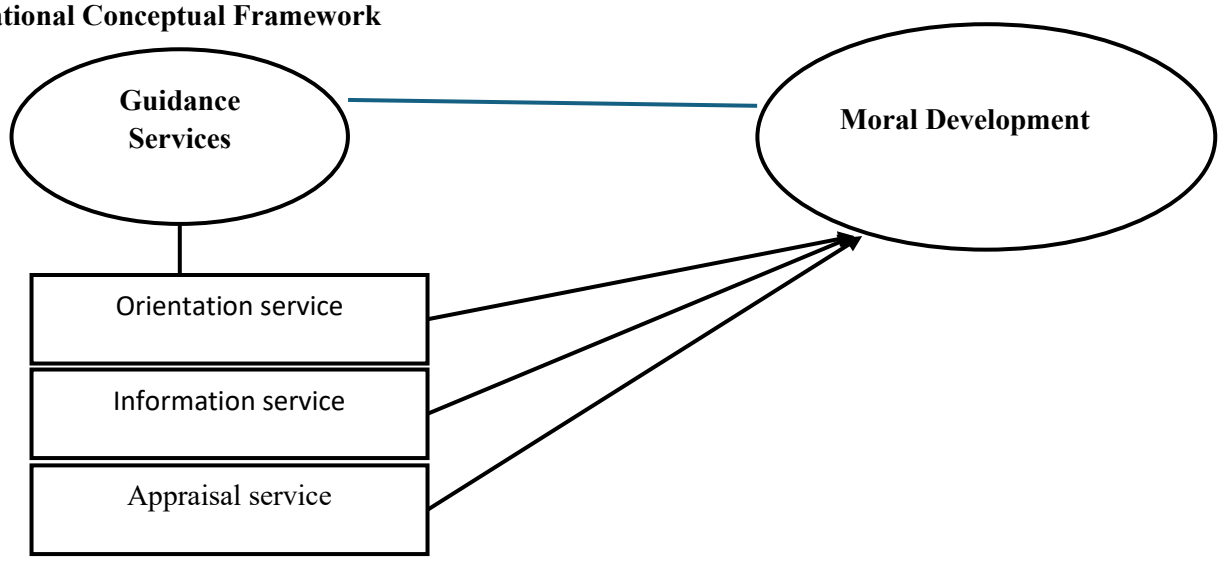

Figure 1: Conceptual framework of guidance services and moral development
Source: Researchers Conceptualization from review of literature, 2026

Based on the study, the following hypothesis was stated;

H01: There is no significant relationship between Orientation services and student moral development in senior secondary school in Rivers state.

H02: There is no significant relationship between information services and student moral development in senior secondary school in Rivers state.

H03: There is no significant relationship between appraisal services and student moral development in senior secondary school in Rivers state.

Theoretical Framework

Social Learning Theory

The study is anchored in Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977), subsequently developed within his broader social-cognitive perspective (Bandura, 1986). The theory holds that behaviour is learned through the interaction of observation, modelling, reinforcement, environmental influences, and cognitive processes. Individuals do not learn solely from direct experience; they can also learn by observing others and evaluating the consequences associated with particular behaviours.

The theory provides a useful explanation for the possible connection between guidance services and moral development. Students observe teachers, counsellors, peers, and other significant individuals and interpret the expectations communicated within their environment. Orientation services make school expectations explicit; information services provide knowledge that can assist judgement and decision-making; while appraisal services promote greater understanding of students' individual characteristics and developmental needs. Together, these processes can create conditions that support responsible behaviour and moral growth. The theory therefore provides a logical basis for expecting guidance services to be associated with students' moral development, while recognising that guidance is only one of several influences on adolescent behaviour.

Guidance Services

Guidance services comprise organised professional activities designed to help students understand themselves, interpret their environment, and make appropriate educational, personal, social, and vocational decisions. They are not limited to responding to problems after they occur; rather, effective guidance is developmental and preventive. Orientation services introduce students to the school environment, its rules, expectations, resources, and patterns of social interaction. Effective orientation can help students understand what constitutes acceptable conduct and why particular standards exist. It therefore provides an early framework for adjustment and responsible behaviour.

Information services provide students with relevant educational, occupational, personal-social, and developmental information. Access to reliable information can help students assess alternatives, anticipate consequences, and make more considered decisions. In moral development, this is important because responsible decision-making often requires knowledge of available choices and their likely consequences. Appraisal services involve the systematic collection and interpretation of information about students' abilities, interests, aptitudes, personality characteristics, and developmental needs. Through appropriate appraisal, counsellors can better understand individual differences and provide guidance suited to particular students. Appraisal may therefore support self-awareness, which is an important component of responsible decision-making and behavioural regulation.

Moral Development

Moral development concerns the gradual development of values, moral judgement, empathy, and self-regulatory capacities that guide individuals in distinguishing appropriate from inappropriate conduct. During adolescence, students increasingly encounter situations requiring them to make independent decisions rather than simply follow instructions from adults. In the school environment, moral development may be expressed through honesty, respect, responsibility, fairness, empathy, compliance with legitimate rules, and consideration of the consequences of one's actions. Consequently, moral development should not be viewed simply as obedience to school regulations. It also involves the development of internal judgement that enables students to make responsible choices when external supervision is absent.

Empirical Review

Orientation Services and Moral Development

Ajayelami and Emme (2015) examined orientation programmes and students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Ogun State using a descriptive survey design. The study found that effective orientation programmes significantly improved students' academic performance, suggesting that orientation can facilitate students' adjustment to school expectations. Adamu (2024) examined the role of Islamic guidance and counselling in promoting moral development among students in higher institutions in Nigeria. The study conceptualised guidance and counselling as a helping relationship capable of directing students towards desirable values, responsible conduct and socially acceptable behaviour. The paper argued that educational attainment without corresponding moral development may have limited social value and identified behaviours such as dishonesty, stealing, obscene language, violation of institutional rules and other forms of misconduct as indicators of moral deterioration among students. The study therefore positioned guidance and counselling as an important intervention for promoting virtues such as honesty, responsibility, respect and self-discipline. Although Adamu's study provides a strong conceptual connection between guidance and counselling and moral development, its major limitation for the present study is its focus on higher-institution students and its emphasis on an Islamic counselling perspective. Moreover, the study is essentially a conceptual/discursive examination rather than an empirical test of the statistical relationship between specific guidance-service dimensions and students' moral development. Nevertheless, its central argument is highly relevant because it establishes that counselling can serve not merely academic or vocational purposes but also the development of students' moral values and socially responsible behaviour. Michael and Abisoye (2025) provided more direct empirical evidence by investigating the effectiveness of guidance and counselling programmes in reducing ethical decline among secondary school students in Kwara State. Using a descriptive survey design, the researchers selected 300 SS3 students from a population of 3,780 students across six secondary schools. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire with a reported Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of .75, while descriptive statistics and Pearson's product-moment correlation were employed for analysis. The findings indicated that ethical problems, including dishonesty and violence, were prevalent among the students. However, the existing guidance and counselling programmes were considered insufficient because of inadequate resources, shortage of qualified counsellors and weak implementation structures. Other constraints included stigma associated with counselling, limited parental involvement and counsellors' competing responsibilities. This study is particularly relevant to the present investigation because both studies focus on secondary school students and examine guidance and counselling in relation to students' ethical or moral behaviour. The study demonstrates that the availability and effectiveness of counselling services may have implications for students' behavioural and ethical development. However, Michael and Abisoye concentrated broadly on the effectiveness and implementation challenges of guidance and counselling programmes rather than examining specific guidance-service dimensions and their relationship with moral development. The present study consequently extends this line of inquiry by examining guidance services through identifiable dimensions and relating them specifically to the moral development of senior secondary school students in Rivers State. Yakubu (2026) investigated the influence of guidance services on career decision-making among senior secondary school students in Paikoro Local Government Area of Niger State. The study adopted a descriptive survey design and sampled 384 students from public secondary schools using stratified random sampling. Data were collected through a four-point Likert-type questionnaire and analysed using descriptive statistics and chi-square at the .05 significance level. The findings showed that students generally regarded counselling and information services as useful for career decision-making, while the inferential analysis established a statistically significant influence of counselling services on students' career decision-making. The study consequently recommended strengthening counselling services through professionally trained counsellors and improved career-information delivery. Yakubu's study is relevant to the present research because it confirms that guidance services constitute an important component of students' development at the senior secondary school level. It also provides methodological support for investigating specific guidance-service dimensions rather than treating guidance as a single

undifferentiated construct. However, its outcome variable was career decision-making rather than moral development. Thus, while Yakubu establishes the developmental value of counselling and information services, it leaves an important empirical question unanswered: whether and to what extent these services contribute to students' moral development. Furthermore, the study was conducted in Niger State, whereas the present study focuses on senior secondary school students in Rivers State, thereby providing a different geographical and educational context. Chronologically, the reviewed studies demonstrate a progressive development in the literature. Adamu (2024) established the conceptual and value-based connection between guidance and counselling and moral development among Nigerian students, arguing that counselling can promote desirable moral virtues and reduce socially undesirable conduct. Michael and Abisoye (2025) subsequently provided empirical evidence at the secondary-school level, showing that ethical decline remains a concern among students and that weaknesses in guidance and counselling provision can constrain the capacity of schools to address such problems. Yakubu (2026) further demonstrated that specific guidance services, particularly counselling and information services, have measurable developmental implications for senior secondary school students, although the outcome examined was career decision-making rather than morality.

Information Services and Moral Development

Gacohi et al. (2017) investigated information services and behaviour development among university students in Kenya and found a significant influence of information services on behavioural development. Kingsley (2017), working with senior secondary school students in Edo State, reported that educational information services significantly improved students' academic performance and decision-making. Chireshe (2019) further found that information and other guidance services contributed to students' personal-social adjustment and educational development in Zimbabwean secondary schools. These findings suggest that access to relevant information can facilitate informed decision-making and behavioural adjustment, both of which are relevant to moral development. However, the studies did not directly establish the influence of information services on moral development among senior secondary school students in Rivers State.

Appraisal Services and Moral Development

Evidence on appraisal services remains limited. Ifejiofor (2023) included appraisal services among the guidance interventions examined among secondary-school students in Anambra State and found that the counselling services significantly influenced students' developmental decision-making. Although the study did not directly measure moral development, its finding suggests that appraisal may help counsellors identify students' developmental needs and provide appropriate interventions. The limited empirical attention to appraisal services therefore constitutes an important gap addressed by the present study.

Purwasih et al. (2020) found that guidance and counselling strategies, including individual and group counselling, strengthened moral awareness among senior high school students. Goshwe and Adejoh (2023) reported that counselling-driven value reorientation could address moral decadence among Nigerian university students. Oyenike and Pariola (2024) provided more direct Nigerian evidence, finding that counselling services contributed to reducing moral decadence among secondary-school students in Ondo State. Okolo et al. (2024) similarly linked counselling interventions with students' moral development. Samanyanga and Ncube (2024) demonstrated the relevance of guidance and counselling to moral and personal-social development among secondary-school students in Zimbabwe, while Adamu (2025) further associated counselling with moral-value formation and behavioural regulation in Nigeria.

The reviewed evidence provides a clear justification for the present study on guidance services and moral development of senior secondary school students in Rivers State. First, the literature establishes that guidance and counselling can influence important dimensions of students' personal and social development. Second, evidence from Kwara State indicates that secondary school students experience ethical challenges for which guidance and counselling may constitute an important institutional intervention. Third, evidence from Niger State confirms that specific guidance services can produce measurable developmental outcomes among senior secondary school students. These contributions, there remains a contextual, conceptual and empirical gap. Contextually, the reviewed studies were conducted in

Kano/Nigeria at the higher-institution level, Kwara State and Niger State, with none directly examining senior secondary school students in Rivers State. Conceptually, previous studies have either examined guidance and counselling generally or focused on outcomes such as career decision-making and ethical decline. Empirically, limited evidence is available on the relationship between specific guidance-service dimensions and moral development among senior secondary school students. The present study addresses this gap by examining the extent to which guidance services are associated with moral development among senior secondary school students in Rivers State. It therefore moves the literature from a general assertion that counselling is beneficial towards a more specific examination of the relationship between identifiable guidance services and students' moral development. The evidence indicates that guidance services contribute to students' academic, behavioural, personal-social and moral development. However, most studies examine counselling services generally or focus on outcomes other than moral development. Evidence on the independent contribution of orientation, information and particularly appraisal services to moral development is limited. Moreover, relatively few studies have focused on senior secondary school students in Rivers State. The present study therefore addresses these conceptual, population and geographical gaps by examining orientation, information and appraisal services as distinct dimensions of guidance services and their influence on moral development among senior secondary school students in Rivers State, Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research design adopted in this study was cross-sectional correlational survey design.

Population of the Study

The targeted population was obtained from public senior secondary school in Rivers State. The population comprised senior secondary school students in three senatorial districts of Rivers state.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

The study adopted a multistage sampling technique to ensure adequate representation of senior secondary school students across the three Senatorial Districts of Rivers State, namely Rivers East, Rivers West, and Rivers South-East. In the first stage, a purposive sampling technique was employed to select nine (9) government senior secondary schools from each senatorial district, resulting in a total of twenty-seven (27) participating schools. In the second stage, stratified proportional random sampling was used to select students from the sampled schools. A total sample of 450 students was proportionately distributed across the 27 schools, yielding an average of approximately 16 to 17 respondents per school: [\frac{450}{27}=16.67 \approx 17 \text {students per school}]

This procedure ensured that each selected school contributed fairly to the study while maintaining balanced representation across the three senatorial districts. The 450 questionnaires administered, 397 were correctly completed and retrieved, representing a response rate of 88.2%, computed as: [\text{Response Rate} =\frac {397} {450}\times100=88.2%]. The 397 valid questionnaires constituted the final dataset used for statistical analysis, while unreturned and improperly completed questionnaires were excluded from the study. The multistage sampling approach enhanced the representativeness of the sample by ensuring equitable participation of students from the different senatorial districts and selected schools in Rivers State. Distribution of selected schools and allocated student respondents across the three senatorial districts of Rivers State.

Table 1 Summary of Sample Size

S/N	Selected Senatorial Districts	Questionnaires Distributions to school in the district	Average number of student per school	Total student respondents
1.	Rivers East	9	16-17	150
2.	Rivers West	9	16- 17	150
3.	Rivers South-East	9	16- 17	150
	Total	27	16.67	450

Data Analysis

The data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) was used to test the three null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. The decision rule was to reject a null hypothesis where the probability value was less than .05.

RESULTS

Table 2. Pearson Product Moment Correlation between Guidance Services and Moral Development

Hypothesis	Variables	N	r	p-value	Decision
H01	Orientation Services relate with Moral Development	397	.730	< .001	Rejected
H02	Information Services relate with Moral Development	397	.807	< .001	Rejected
H03	Appraisal Service relate with Moral Development	397	.822	< .001	Rejected

Table 2 shows significant positive relationships between each dimension of guidance services and students' moral development. Orientation services had a strong positive relationship with moral development ($r = .730$, $p < .001$). Information services demonstrated a stronger positive relationship ($r = .807$, $p < .001$), while appraisal services recorded the strongest relationship ($r = .822$, $p < .001$). Since all three p-values were below .05, H01, H02, and H03 were rejected. The results indicate that higher levels of orientation, information, and appraisal services were associated with higher levels of students' moral development. Among the three dimensions, appraisal services demonstrated the strongest association.

The findings demonstrated consistently strong positive relationships between each of the three guidance services and students' moral development. Orientation services had a strong positive relationship with moral development ($r = .730$, $p < .001$). This result indicates that students who reported greater exposure to orientation services also tended to report higher levels of moral development. Information services demonstrated an even stronger positive relationship with moral development ($r = .807$, $p < .001$). The finding suggests that access to relevant and timely information may be particularly important in helping students understand alternatives, consequences, responsibilities, and appropriate courses of action.

Appraisal services recorded the strongest relationship among the three dimensions ($r = .822$, $p < .001$). This indicates a very strong positive association between systematic appraisal and students' reported moral development. Since all three probability values were below .05, the three null hypotheses were rejected. Thus, orientation, information, and appraisal services were each significantly related to students' moral development.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that orientation, information and appraisal services were positively associated with the moral development of senior secondary school students in Rivers State, although the strength of the relationships varied. This finding is consistent with empirical evidence that guidance and counselling contribute to students' behavioural, personal-social and moral development. Purwasih et al. (2020) found that counselling strategies strengthened moral awareness among senior high school students, while Oyenike and Pariola (2024) reported that counselling services contributed to reducing moral decadence among secondary school students. The present study extends these findings by examining specific guidance-service dimensions in relation to moral development. The significant relationship between orientation services and moral development suggests that exposure to school rules, expectations, values and responsibilities may help students internalise acceptable standards of conduct. This finding aligns

with Ajayelami and Emme (2015), who found that effective orientation programmes improved students' adjustment to school expectations. Although their study focused on academic performance, its finding supports the behavioural relevance of orientation. Michael and Abisoye (2025) further reported that inadequate guidance provision constrained schools' ability to address ethical problems among secondary school students. The present study therefore extends earlier evidence by linking orientation directly with moral development.

Information services showed a stronger relationship with moral development, highlighting the importance of relevant information in students' judgement and decision-making. This finding agrees with Gacohi et al. (2017), who found that information services significantly influenced behavioural development, and Kingsley (2017), who reported that information services improved decision-making among senior secondary students. Chireshe (2019) similarly linked information services with personal-social adjustment. The present study extends these findings by demonstrating their relevance to moral development.

Appraisal services recorded the strongest relationship with moral development. This may reflect the value of assessing students' individual characteristics and developmental needs to facilitate appropriate interventions. Ifejiofor (2023) found that guidance interventions involving appraisal significantly influenced students' developmental decision-making. The present finding extends this evidence by establishing a stronger connection between appraisal and moral development. The findings support Bandura's Social Learning Theory: orientation communicates behavioural standards, information facilitates informed choices, and appraisal provides feedback for self-reflection and behavioural adjustment. Thus, strengthening these complementary guidance services may promote morally responsible behaviour among senior secondary school students in Rivers State.

CONCLUSION

The study established significant positive relationships between orientation, information, and appraisal services and moral development among senior secondary school students in Rivers State. Among the three dimensions, appraisal services demonstrated the strongest association, followed by information services and orientation services. The findings reinforce the view that school guidance should not be treated merely as a remedial service for students experiencing academic or behavioural difficulties. It has a broader developmental role that includes helping young people understand themselves, interpret their environment, make responsible decisions, and develop appropriate standards of conduct.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the study recommends that:

School counsellors should strengthen orientation programmes by incorporating explicit discussions of values, responsibility, respect, integrity, school expectations, and the consequences of misconduct. Schools should improve the provision of student-centred information, particularly information that helps adolescents understand the social, academic, personal, and behavioural consequences of their choices.

Appraisal services should be systematically implemented to identify students' individual developmental needs and provide more responsive guidance interventions. Moral-development objectives should be integrated into school guidance programmes rather than treated as a separate disciplinary concern. Education policymakers should strengthen guidance and counselling provision through adequate staffing, professional development, appropriate assessment resources, and institutional support.

Future studies should employ longitudinal or mixed-method designs to examine how guidance interventions contribute to changes in students' moral reasoning and conduct over time.

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