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Effect of Peer Counselling on Social Adjustment and Academic Achievement of Secondary School Students in Delta North Senatorial District of Delta State.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effect of peer counselling on social adjustment and academic achievement of secondary school students in Delta North Senatorial District of Delta State, Nigeria. The study adopted a quasi-experimental pre-test, post-test non-randomised control group design involving 206 Senior Secondary School II students, divided equally into experimental and control groups. Data were collected using a researcher-designed Social Adjustment Scale (SAS) and students' academic scores in five core subjects (Mathematics, English Language, Economics, Biology, and Civic Education). The experimental group received a six-week peer counselling intervention, while the control group did not. Data were analysed using mean, standard deviation, and Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) at a 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that peer counselling significantly improved both social adjustment (Partial Eta Squared = 0.63) and academic achievement (Partial Eta Squared = 0.86) of secondary school students. The study concluded that peer counselling is an effective strategy for enhancing students' social and academic development and recommended the training and deployment of peer counsellors in secondary schools.

Keywords: Peer counselling, social adjustment, Academic achievement, Secondary school students, Delta State

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1.1 Introduction

Educational activities are designed to ensure that students attain mastery of instructional objectives, which is commonly measured through academic achievement. Academic achievement reflects the extent to which educational goals are realized and may be influenced by peer interactions and students' level of social adjustment. Peers are individuals of similar age, class, and academic standing who share common characteristics and exert considerable influence on adolescents' social, emotional, and academic development (Hardcastle, 2012; Allen, McGarland, & Elhaney, 2015). As adolescents mature, peer relationships become increasingly significant, shaping behaviour, adjustment, and achievement outcomes.

Academic achievement refers to the extent to which students successfully accomplish learning tasks and educational goals (Ward, Stocker, & Murray-Ward, 2006). It is commonly assessed through grades, test scores, and examinations, although grading systems vary across contexts (Scott, 2012). In this study, academic achievement is defined as students' mastery of subject objectives as assessed through school examinations.

Evidence from the West African Examination Council (WAEC) indicates persistent poor academic performance among Nigerian secondary school students. Analysis of the May/June WASCE results between 2012 and 2016 revealed that, on average, fewer than one-quarter of candidates obtained credits in five subjects including English and Mathematics, indicating generally low academic achievement (WAEC, 2017). Similarly, reports from the 2016/2017 WASCE show that a significant proportion of candidates failed to meet minimum credit requirements, with some results withheld due to examination malpractice (Guardian, 2017).

Several factors have been identified as contributors to poor academic achievement, including ineffective teaching methods, poor teacher attitudes, and inadequate reinforcement strategies (Morakinyo, 2013). However, peer influence and social adjustment have been identified as major determinants of students' academic outcomes. During adolescence, individuals increasingly detach from parental control and seek acceptance from peers, making them susceptible to both positive and negative peer influence. Negative peer pressure may manifest in truancy, substance abuse, delinquency, and other maladaptive behaviours that reflect poor social adjustment (Arief, 2011).

Peer counselling has been identified as a viable strategy for mitigating negative peer influence and promoting positive social adjustment. Peer counselling involves trained students providing support to their peers under supervision, leveraging shared experiences to influence attitudes and behaviour positively (Arudo, 2006; Ndichu, 2015). Unlike traditional counselling models that rely solely on professionals, peer counselling acknowledges adolescents' tendency to seek support from peers during times of difficulty (Ebreo, 2013). Through peer counselling, change can occur at both individual and group levels by modifying behaviour, attitudes, and social norms.

Social adjustment refers to an individual's ability to adapt effectively to environmental demands, societal norms, and interpersonal relationships (Osa-Edoh & Iyamu, 2012). For students, social adjustment involves developing social skills, self-control, and positive relationships that facilitate successful academic engagement (Onuigbo & Eze, 2010). Poor social adjustment among adolescents has been associated with antisocial behaviours such as drug abuse, truancy, cultism, and school dropout, which may jeopardize future prospects.

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Gender and residential location are important variables in understanding peer counselling, social adjustment, and academic achievement. Research suggests that females often demonstrate stronger peer-related support systems and higher academic achievement than males, while also being more influenced by peer relationships (Aryana, 2010; Hay & Ashman, 2013). Residential location also plays a role, as adolescents in urban areas may experience greater social pressure and behavioural challenges than their rural counterparts, potentially affecting adjustment and peer influence (Dong et al., 2013).

Given the persistent poor academic performance and increasing social adjustment challenges among secondary school students in Delta North Senatorial District of Delta State, this study seeks to empirically examine the effect of peer counselling on students' social adjustment and academic achievement.

1.2 Statement of Problem

Secondary school students are faced with a lot of challenges such as how to belong, gain popularity, do well in their academics, avoid failure, choose a course to study as well as doing away with their bad behaviours. These challenges may adversely affect their academic achievement of the students if unresolved. One of the ways to resolve these challenges may be through peer counselling. It has been observed that peer counselling makes students more likely to accept and feel at home with counselling information given to them by their peers than they would receive from qualified counsellors whom they consider as out of tune with the needs of younger generation.

Despite the fact that counsellors are posted to secondary schools to offer psychological counselling in the study area, it seems that some students still find it difficult to adjust socially in school environment and consequently poor academic achievement. Chief examiners report revealed that majority of the students perform below average in senior secondary certificate examination. It would therefore appear that the use of only professional counsellors to eradicate social maladjustment and promote academic achievement among secondary school students does not yield the desired results. It is against this background that the researcher intends to determine the effect of peer counselling on social adjustment and academic achievement of secondary school students in Delta State.

1.3 Purpose of Study

The general purpose of the study was to determine the effect of peer counselling on social adjustment and academic achievement of secondary school students in Delta North Senatorial District of Delta State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Determine the effect of peer counselling on social adjustment of secondary school students.
2. Determine the effect of peer counselling on academic achievement of secondary school students.

1.4 Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study.

1. What is the effect of peer counselling on social adjustment of secondary school students?
2. What is the effect of peer counselling on academic achievement of secondary school students?

1.5 Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses postulated were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

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Ho_1: There will be no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test mean scores of the students on effect of peer Counselling on social adjustment of secondary school students.

Ho_2: There will be no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test mean scores of the students on effect of peer counselling on academic achievement of secondary school students.

2.1 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study illustrates the concept of counselling, social adjustment, academic achievement, peer counselling, secondary school students, gender and location in Delta North Senatorial District of Delta State.

2.1.1 Concept of Counselling

Counselling is a psychological specialty that integrates research and practice across domains such as counselling processes and outcomes, supervision and training, career development, and prevention and health. Central to counselling psychology is an emphasis on individuals' strengths, person environment interactions, educational and career development, and brief, growth-oriented interventions focused on psychologically healthy individuals (Gelso, Williams, & Fretz, 2014). These features underscore the broad scope of counselling as a discipline applicable to all areas of human life.

The field of counselling originated in the United States, with its conceptual roots traced to Carl Rogers, who adopted the term counselling due to restrictions on the use of psychotherapy by non-medical practitioners. Counselling psychology developed significantly during and after World War II in response to the U.S. military's need for vocational placement and training. This led to the formal recognition of counselling psychology as a specialty within the American Psychological Association, culminating in the establishment of Division 17 (Society for Counselling Psychology) and the creation of early training programmes in major U.S. universities (Heppner, Leong, & Chiao, 2008; Woolfe, 2013).

In recent decades, counselling has expanded into a global profession, represented across diverse cultural and national contexts. International scholarship highlights variations in philosophical foundations, counselling theories, processes, and training models, while also recognising the continued relevance of traditional and indigenous healing practices alongside modern counselling approaches (Gerstein et al., 2009; Moodley, Gielen, & Wu, 2013; Hohenshil, Amundson, & Niles, 2013).

Counselling is commonly defined as a professional helping relationship in which a trained counsellor assists individuals or groups to understand themselves, resolve personal, educational, vocational, and emotional problems, and adjust effectively to their environment (Egbochuku & Aihie, 2009; Ozoji, 2005; Akande, 2005). This relationship is characterised by mutual respect, effective communication, acceptance, and collaborative participation, with emphasis on self-clarification, self-determination, and personal growth. In essence, counselling facilitates self-understanding and positive change, enabling individuals to resolve challenges and realise their full potential.

2.1.2 Concept of Social Adjustment

Adjustment is often used interchangeably with adaptation or accommodation and refers to an individual's ability to cope with environmental demands and life challenges. It involves adopting appropriate behavioural and psychological responses that enable effective functioning within social, academic, and emotional contexts (Raju & Rahamtulla, 2007;

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Weither & Llord, 2003). In the school setting, adjustment reflects students' capacity to adapt to academic demands, interpersonal relationships, and institutional expectations.

Psychologically, adjustment denotes the process through which individuals maintain equilibrium between personal needs and environmental constraints. It encompasses emotional stability, behavioural control, self-concept, and the ability to cope with stress and frustration (Ogoemeka, 2012; Singh, 2006). Well-adjusted students demonstrate maturity in emotional expression, positive interpersonal relationships, and effective coping strategies, whereas poor adjustment may manifest in withdrawal, anxiety, depression, and maladaptive behaviours that disrupt academic functioning (Okafor & Ugwuegbulam, 2012).

Social adjustment specifically refers to the development and application of social skills that enable individuals to relate effectively with others and conform to societal norms and values (Onuigbo & Eze, 2010). For secondary school students, social adjustment involves forming positive peer relationships, respecting authority, exercising self-control, and integrating into school social and academic life. Proper social adjustment has been shown to positively influence students' motivation, engagement, and academic achievement.

The transition from primary to secondary school presents significant adjustment challenges, including increased academic demands, complex school structures, multiple teachers, and new peer groups. Although this transition often generates anxiety and stress, students' ability to adjust is influenced by protective factors such as peer support, positive school climate, and effective guidance and counselling services (Graham & Hill, 2011; Akos & Galassi, 2014). Successful adjustment during this period is critical, as poor adjustment may reduce motivation, hinder achievement, and increase the risk of school disengagement.

Key components of social adjustment include effective coping with stress and frustration, positive self-image, healthy peer relationships, respect for authority, and acceptance of individual and cultural differences (Ojiha, 2005). A positive self-image enhances social acceptance and academic confidence, while supportive peer interactions promote problem sharing, emotional support, and improved academic engagement (Osa-Edoh & Iyamu, 2012; Ladd, 2009).

Overall, adjustment is a dynamic process essential for students' personal development and academic success. Effective guidance and counselling, including peer-based interventions, play a vital role in facilitating students' social adjustment and enabling them to cope successfully with the demands of secondary school life.

2.1.3 Concept of Academic Achievement

Achievement refers to the attainment or accomplishment of desired goals. It involves the successful realization of personal or set objectives through effort, persistence, and competence (Raven, 2001; Osa-Edoh & Iyamu, 2010). In essence, achievement reflects goal accomplishment rather than material gain alone.

Academic achievement denotes the extent to which educational goals are attained by students, teachers, or institutions. It is commonly measured through examinations, continuous assessments, grades, and completion of educational milestones, although there is no universal agreement on the most appropriate measurement approach or the relative importance of knowledge and skills assessed (Annie, Howard, & Mildred, 2006; Bandele, 2001). Academic achievement therefore represents students' ability to acquire, retain, and apply knowledge in academic tasks.

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Researchers conceptualise academic achievement as students' performance in academic disciplines, demonstrated through classroom activities, tests, and examinations (Ariko, 2009). It reflects how effectively students cope with academic demands and complete learning tasks assigned by teachers. Measurement of academic achievement is a critical component of the educational process, as it provides feedback on students' progress and informs instructional decisions and educational planning (Aremu, 2000).

Despite its importance, poor academic achievement remains a major educational concern in Nigeria. Studies consistently report persistent underachievement among secondary school students, with low pass rates in public examinations highlighting systemic challenges within the education sector (Kolawole & Dele, 2012; Ivowi et al., 2012; Aina & Olanipekun, 2014). This trend underscores the need to examine factors influencing students' academic outcomes.

Although academic achievement is not the sole determinant of success, it remains a key focus for parents, schools, and policymakers due to its implications for career opportunities, institutional reputation, and educational planning (Aremu & Sokan, 2013; Adeyemi, 2007). Consequently, academic achievement is increasingly viewed as a multidimensional outcome influenced by cognitive, motivational, and psychosocial factors, including peer relationships and social adjustment.

2.1.4 Concept of Peer Counselling

Peer counselling refers to a structured helping process in which trained students provide guidance and support to their peers under professional supervision (Myrick, 2013). It is based on the premise that individuals of similar age, background, and experiences are more likely to communicate openly and influence one another's attitudes and behaviour (UNESCO, 2010). Because students often feel more comfortable discussing personal concerns with peers, peer counselling serves as an effective complement to professional counselling services.

Peer counsellors are typically selected through peer nomination and trained in basic helping skills such as active listening, problem-solving, confidentiality, and referral procedures (Robinson, 2011). Peer counselling involves a collaborative relationship between the peer counsellor and the counselee, aimed at exploring feelings, thoughts, and challenges in a supportive, non-judgmental environment (Odirile, 2012). Rather than offering direct advice, peer counsellors facilitate self-understanding and personal growth.

As a change-oriented intervention, peer counselling operates at both individual and group levels by influencing knowledge, attitudes, behaviours, and social norms (Odirile, 2012). It promotes positive peer influence, leadership development, conflict resolution, and emotional competence among adolescents (Hammed & Adesina, 2009). Through peer interaction, students develop confidence, metacognitive awareness, and improved coping strategies.

In school settings, peer counsellors assist professional counsellors by supporting new students, identifying peers with adjustment difficulties, providing outreach services, and referring complex cases to guidance counsellors (Myrick, 2013; Schmidt, 2013). This support enhances school climate, increases access to counselling services, and allows professional counsellors to focus on students with severe needs (Lapan, 2011).

Peer counselling is typically conducted within structured programmes that emphasize confidentiality, trust, and emotional safety. Training equips peer counsellors with the skills

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necessary to support peers effectively while adhering to ethical guidelines (Southgate & Randall, 2009; Evison & Horobin, 2010). Overall, peer counselling represents grassroots, peer-driven intervention that harnesses positive peer relationships to promote students' social adjustment and academic development.

2.1.5 **Concept of Secondary School Students**

Students refer to a group of people attending school such as secondary schools, universities, polytechnics and colleges of education with a view to acquiring knowledge and skills to be able to function in their immediate environment and the society at large (Yinusa, 2005). According to Yinusa, students are also youths of different age groups who, in various homes seek to acquire knowledge and skills to better their lives in the society. Okolocha (2000) defined students as marginal men noting that studentship is a period in which the person is not burdened by financial or social responsibility. According to Okolocha, students have relative freedom from parental and familial control, from financial responsibility and from outside work combined.

As a result of students' freedom, they often take risks which other segment of the society can seldom take without concern for consequences. Olamosu (2000) asserted that students often resent the authority of the school administration and rely more on their peers. Olamosu further stated that students create array of age group symbols which set it apart from others in the society. These include unique patterns of personal appearance, social skills, peculiar mode of communication and special types of desire to demonstrate their popularity on rejection of the adult world. Also, youth and students among them in particular, repeatedly engage in forms of express behaviour noteworthy for their similarity. As applied in this study, students refer to various individuals pursuing secondary school education in secondary schools. Secondary school students often exhibit one form of anti-behaviour which may be as a result of their resentment against what they consider abnormally in the system. Ajibade and Owoyemi (2012) posited that the inability of secondary school teachers to positively manage and control students' activities in the school especially teaching and learning often and may result to poor academic achievement.

2.1.6 Concept of Gender

Gender refers to the socially constructed expectations, roles, and behaviours assigned to males and females, which often define the division of labour, rights, and obligations (Pollard & Morgan, 2012). It encompasses social and historical constructs of masculinity and femininity, including biological sex, gender roles, and gender identity (Azikiwe, 2011; Udry, 2014). While most cultures operate within a gender binary, some recognize non-binary or third-gender categories, such as the hijras of South Asia (Haig, 2014).

Research shows that gender may not always determine moral judgment or self-concept in adolescents. Ikwuji (2005) found no significant gender differences in moral judgments among adolescents, though peer influence was substantial. Similarly, Aihie (2009) reported that peer group counselling significantly improved adolescents' self-concept, with no significant effect of sex or interaction between sex and treatment. In the academic context, Nnamani and Oyibe (2016) found that female students generally outperformed male students in Social Studies, and teacher gender also influenced student achievement, highlighting nuanced gender effects in learning outcomes.

2.1.7 Concept of Location

The terms location and place in geography are used to identify a point or an area on the Earth's surface or elsewhere. The term location generally implies a higher degree of

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certainty than place, the latter often indicating an entity with an ambiguous boundary, relying more on human or social attributes of place identity and sense of place than on geometry (Simandan, 2011). A location, settlement, or populated place is likely to have a well-defined name but a boundary which is not well defined in varies by context. London, for instance, has a legal boundary, but this is unlikely to completely match with general usage. An area within a town, such as Covent Garden in London, also almost always has some ambiguity as to its extent.

An absolute location is designated using a specific pairing of latitude and longitude in a Cartesian coordinate grid for example, a Spherical coordinate system or an ellipsoid-based system such as the World Geodetic System or similar methods. For instance, the position of Lake Maracaibo in Venezuela can be expressed approximately in the WGS84 coordinate system as the location 9.80°N (latitude), 71.56°W (longitude). It is, however, just one way. Absolute location, however, is a term with little real meaning, since any location must be expressed relative to something else. For example, longitude is the number of degrees east or west of the Prime Meridian, a line arbitrarily chosen to pass through Greenwich, London. Similarly, latitude is the number of degrees north or south of the Equator. Because latitude and longitude are expressed relative to these lines, a position expressed in latitude and longitude is actually a relative location (Gersmehl, 2008).

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study is based on psychosocial theory of development by Erickson (1959), social control theory of Hirchi (1960) and social learning theory by Bandura (1977) to explain effect of peer counselling on social adjustment and academic achievement of secondary school students.

2.2.1 Psychosocial Theory of Development by Erickson (1959)

This study is based on psychosocial theory of development by Erick Erickson in 1959. He emphasized the social cultural determinants of personality in his theory of psychosocial development. He stressed that the adolescence grapple with the question “who am I”? Furthermore, he explained that adolescents must establish basic, social and occupational identities or remain confused about the roles they should play as adults. According to Erickson, the key social agent for adolescents is the society of peers.

Adolescent period is seen as a stage when teenagers compare themselves with other peers. It is believed that human beings face either major crisis or conflicts during the course of their lives. According to the theory each conflict has its own time for emerging as directed by both biological maturity and social demand that develop people’s experience at a particular point in life. Each of the conflicts must be resolved successfully in order to prepare the individual for a satisfactory resolution for the next life crises. During the identity confusion, the adolescent may feel that he is regressing rather than progressing. He emphasized that periodical retreat to childishness appears to be a pleasant alternative to a complex involvement required, of him in an adult society.

At one moment, according to Erickson the adolescents have inner reservation and not to commit themselves to anyone in fear of being rejected, disappointed or misled. At the other moment, the adolescents may want to be followers, no matter the consequences such a commitment will bring. Personality develops according to ones’ ability to interact with the environment. The adolescence period according to the theory is from 12-20 years and this period has to be identified as the time of identity versus identity confusion. The theorist sees this time as the time that childhood ends and the beginning of adulthood. If the uncertainty

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occurs at this time in identity confusion, the adolescent may withdraw, run away, or turn to drugs.

The theory believes that the adolescents in society are searching for something or someone they can turn to. They also yearn for stability in an age of change, and their search may lead to extremes. But the search is a time for testing both self and the world. Because they are faced with a combination of physical, sexual and cognitive changes joined with heightened adult expectation and peer pressures, the adolescents understandably feel insecure about themselves, that is who they are and where they are going. The implication of this theory to the study lies in the fact that it gives insight into the probable cases of maladjustment in adolescent and the findings of the study will either validate or invalidate the tenets.

2.2.2 Social Control Theory of Hirchi (1960)

This study also embraces the contribution of social control theory of Hirchi propounded in 1960. The theorist believes that exploiting the processes of socialization and social learning builds self-control and reduces the inclination to indulge in any bad behaviour. The theory stipulated that ties or bonds which lead adolescents in conformity to family, school and other aspects of societal beliefs serve to diminish adolescent propensity for deviant behaviour. The theory believes that anti-social behaviour occurs only when such bonds are weakened or are not established. Thus, if moral codes are internalized and individuals are tied to and have a stake in their wider community, they will voluntarily limit their propensity to commit deviant acts.

In socialization, this formation of bond between individual and the society comprises of four elements which are attachment, commitment, involvement and beliefs. Attachment refers to the effective ties which the adolescents form with significant others like parents, teachers among others who tend to present among others optimal conformity to socially accepted behaviour. Commitment refers to the aspiration or goals which an individual set for self. Adolescents with well-defined goals tend to minimize propensity for delinquent behaviour because they consider that they have much to lose as opposed to their counterparts who engage in drinking, smoking, dating and involving in criminal act. Beliefs are the extent to which an individual accepts the moral values of the society. And the extent to which an individual accepts these moral values determine the individual's propensity for delinquent behaviours.

One of the key elements for social control is developing the individual's bond to conventional society through involvement in conventional activities (that is homework and family activities). The theory says that trends in increased crime rates are related to a greater dispersion of daily activities with peers, away from parental supervision and providing the opportunity for delinquency. Study findings were largely consistent with these theoretical perspectives. Fair time was found to protect adolescents from problem behaviours whereas peer time places adolescents at risk for these same behaviours. In addition, there was less delinquency when the adolescent spent more time on homework.

In line with this study, adolescents that conform to the rules established by the significant others like, parents, teachers, peers and the likes which makes them to be acceptable in the society will reduce his propensity to deviant behaviour which eventually enhance their academic performance. However, an adolescent could experience rejection from his or her peers and also compelled by them to conform against his or her wish. This type of treatment could make him or her to lose his or her identity as a unique person. This may also affect the adolescent time management and performance in school. This theory

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relates to the present study in that adolescent family time is a protective factor against problem behaviours whereas time spent with peers is a risk factor for problem behaviours.

2.2.3 Social Learning Theory by Bandura (1977)

The social learning theory was propounded by Bandura in 1977. The social learning theory states that the behaviour of an individual or a group act as stimulus for similar thoughts, attitude and behaviour on the part of the observers. Bandura assets that people learn by observing the behaviour of others and that some serve as models that are capable of eliciting behaviour change in certain individuals. According to Bandura, behaviour is not solely by inner drives or environments, but as a result of an interactive association between inner process and environmental variables. This could be clearly highlighted in the interaction between peers. It is often stated that students are able to learn certain behaviour pattern better within their peers.

The theory believes that behaviour is learned through observation and imitation. This is referred to as integrating new patterns of behaviour based on watching a model which include the learning of social and other learning skills. The change in attitudes through observation may directly cause psychological, social and academic adjustment among students. Bandura believes that vast majority of the habits acquired in a life time are leant by observing and imitating other people. Bandura also emphasized that the information people process from observing other people, things and events influence the way they act. This is because according to Bandura children in all cultures learn and develop good behaviour by observing experienced people engaged in culturally important activities. In this way, teachers, parents and peers can help students to adapt to new situations, aid them in their problem-solving attempts, and guide them to accepting responsibility for their behaviour.

According to the theory observational learning has particular classroom relevance because children do not do just what adults tell them to do, but rather what they see adults do. In observing others, the observer may acquire new responses, strengthen or weaken existing responses, and may cause the reappearance of responses that were apparently forgotten. According to Bandura, if students witness undesirable behaviour that is either reinforced or goes unpunished, undesirable student behaviour may result, the reverse also is true. This theory is useful to this study in that it addresses the key issues of behaviour acquisition and mode of adjustment of students during their stay in secondary schools.

3.1 Methodology

This chapter describes the procedures adopted for conducting the study. It covers the research design, area of the study, population, sample and sampling techniques, instruments for data collection, validation and reliability of the instruments, experimental procedure, methods of data collection, and data analysis.

3.2 Design of the Study

The study adopted a quasi-experimental pre-test, post-test non-randomised control group design to determine the effect of peer counselling on the respondents. The design involved an experimental group, which received the treatment, and a control group, which did not. It was considered appropriate because random assignment of students was not feasible without disrupting school academic programmes. As noted by Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007), quasi-experimental designs are suitable when intact classes are used and randomization is impracticable. The design also helps to minimise threats to internal validity, particularly selection bias and initial group differences.

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3.3 Area of the Study

The study was conducted in Ukwuani Local Government Area of Delta State and involved six secondary schools. The area was selected because it is a commercial hub where students are frequently exposed to commercial activities and peer interactions that may encourage antisocial behaviours such as stealing, vandalism, cultism, and fighting. In addition to commerce, farming is a major occupation of residents, which often limits parental involvement in students' academic activities and may contribute to poor academic achievement. The predominance of pidgin English as the common language of communication further influences students' academic and social development. Moreover, social maladjustment is a notable concern in the area, with community members reporting its negative impact on students' academic performance, making the area suitable for this study.

3.4 Population of the Study

The population of the study comprised 516 Senior Secondary School II (SS II) students in public secondary schools in Ukwuani Local Government Area of Delta State during the 2018/2019 academic year. SS II students were selected because they had spent several years in the school system and were therefore assumed to have sufficient exposure to both positive and negative peer influences, including peer counselling (Source: Delta State Post Primary Education Board, Asaba, 2018).

3.5 Sample and Sampling Technique

The study sample comprised 206 SS II students from Ukwuani Local Government Area of Delta North Senatorial District, representing approximately 40% of the total population. The sample was divided equally into 103 students in the experimental group and 103 in the control group. A purposive sampling technique was used, meaning the researcher selected SS II students available and suitable for the study.

3.6 Instrument for Data Collection

The study used a researcher-designed instrument, the Social Adjustment Scale (SAS), based on components of social adjustment. The instrument had two sections:

- Section I: Demographic information of respondents.
- Section II: Socially Adjusted Students Scale (SAS), consisting of 20 items covering four components of social adjustment. Responses were rated on a 5-point scale: Never (Nev) = 5, Rarely (R) = 4, Sometimes (S) = 3, Often (O) = 2, Very Often (VO) = 1.

The SAS was used for both the pre-test and post-test. For academic achievement, students' scores in Mathematics, English Language, Economics, Biology, and Civic Education were obtained from school records for analysis.

3.7 Validation and Reliability of the Instrument

The instrument was validated through face and content validation by three experts: two from the Guidance and Counselling Unit and one from Measurement and Evaluation, all in the Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The experts evaluated the suitability of the items for obtaining the required information, the clarity and quality of the language, and the logical arrangement of the questionnaire. Their feedback, including corrections and recommendations, was used to refine and produce the final version of the instrument.

The reliability of the Social Adjustment Scale (SAS) was tested by administering it to 30 SS II students who were not part of the main study. Responses were factor analysed, and

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the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated, yielding r = 0.79, indicating 61% internal consistency for the social adjustment scale.

The instrument measuring academic achievement was tested using the Kuder-Richardson 21 (KR-21) formula with the same group of 30 students, resulting in r = 0.88, indicating high internal consistency. These results confirm that both instruments were reliable for the study.

3.8 Experimental Procedure

Prior to the experiment, three peer counsellors were trained on a treatment package derived from social adjustment components. The counselling programme lasted six weeks, with each session lasting 40 minutes. The experimental group received peer counselling, while the control group did not. The study aimed to determine whether peer counselling improves students' social adjustment and academic achievement.

Pre-Test:
The Social Adjustment Scale (SAS) and academic achievement scores in five core subjects (Mathematics, English Language, Economics, Biology, and Civic Education) were collected for both groups as pre-test data to establish baseline equivalence.

Peer Counsellor Training:
Counsellors underwent a three-day training covering the purpose of the study, treatment content, instructional procedures, and use of lesson plans.

Treatment Administration:
Six schools were assigned to two groups via balloting:

- Group A (Experimental): Akashide Girls College, Amai Secondary School, Boys Secondary School
- Group B (Control): Ebedei Secondary School, Eziokpor Secondary School, Umutu Mixed Secondary School

The experimental group received the six-week peer counselling programme, while the control group received no treatment. Post-tests using the SAS and academic achievement measures were administered immediately after treatment, with items reshuffled to reduce pre-test sensitization effects.

Control of Extraneous Variables:

- Experimental bias: Counsellors, not the researcher, administered treatment.
- Environmental variables: Testing conditions were standardized across schools.
- Peer counsellor variability: Lesson plans and instruments were prepared by the researcher; counsellors were trained to ensure uniform delivery.
- Time and pre-test effects: Post-test administered immediately after treatment; pre-test items were reshuffled to avoid sensitization.
- Participation and experimental mortality: Roll calls and reminders ensured consistent attendance.

Data Analysis:
Pre-test and post-test scores were analysed using ANCOVA to determine the effect of peer counselling on social adjustment and academic achievement.

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3.9 Method of Data Analysis

Mean and standard deviation was used to answer the research questions while the Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypotheses were rejected if the exact probability value (p-value) is less than the 'a priori' probability value (p-0.05).

4.1 Data Presentation

This chapter presents the result of data analysis for the study. These results are presented in accordance with the demographic variables, research questions and hypotheses which guided the study.

4.1.1 Demographic Variables

The respondents in this study were represented according to gender (male or female), and location (urban or rural).

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents According to Gender

	Gender	Frequency	Percent
Valid	Male Students	91	44.2
	Female Students	115	55.8
	Total	206	100.0

Data in Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents according to gender. The result shows that out of 206 respondents, 91(44.2%) and 115(55.8%) were male and female students respectively.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents According to Location

	Location	Frequency	Percent
Valid	Urban Area	109	52.9
	Rural Area	97	47.1
	Total	206	100.0

Data in Table 2 shows the distribution of respondents according to location. The result shows that out of 206 respondents, 109(52.9%) and 97(47.1%) were from urban and rural area respectively.

4.1.2Answers to Research Questions

This section contains data of the research questions raised to guide this study.

Research Question One: What is the effect of peer counselling on social adjustment of secondary school students?

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Table 3: Mean and standard deviation on effect of peer counselling on social adjustment of secondary school students (N=206)

Social Adjustment		Mean	Std. Deviation	N	η^2_P
Pre-test	Control	10.96	4.26	103	
	Experimental	11.64	4.95	103	.781
Post-test	Control	11.62	4.51	103	
	Experimental	21.50	7.61	103	

Table 3 shows that control group has a mean score of 10.96 with standard deviation of 4.26 in pretest while experimental group has a mean score of 11.64 with standard deviation of 4.95 in pretest. Also, control group has a mean score of 11.62 with standard deviation of 4.51 in posttest and experimental group has a mean score of 21.50 with standard deviation of 7.61 in posttest. The partial eta square value of 0.781 revealed that peer counselling has high effect on social adjustment of secondary school students.

Research Question Two: What is the effect of peer counselling on academic achievement of secondary school students?

Table 4: Mean and standard deviation on effect of peer counselling on academic achievement of secondary school students (N=206)

Academic Achievement		Mean	Std. Deviation	N	η^2_P
Pre-test	Control	16.78	9.14	103	
	Experimental	17.98	7.23	103	.902
Post-test	Control	18.20	9.04	103	
	Experimental	57.77	12.83	103	

Table 4 shows that control group has a mean score of 16.78 with standard deviation of 9.14 in pretest while experimental group has a mean score of 17.98 with standard deviation of 7.23 in pretest. Also, control group has a mean score of 18.20 with standard deviation of 9.04 in post-test and experimental group has a mean score of 57.77 with standard deviation of 12.83 in post-test. The partial eta square value of 0.902 revealed that peer counselling has high effect on academic achievement of secondary school students.

4.1.3 Hypotheses

Hypothesis One: There will be no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test mean scores of the students on effect of peer counselling on social adjustment of secondary school students.

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Table 5: ANCOVA on difference between the pre-test and post-test mean scores of the students on effect of peer counselling on social adjustment of secondary school students

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	5512.604[a]	2	1378.151	179.346	.000	.781
Intercept	30067.682	1	30067.682	3912.867	.000	
Group	448.914	1	448.914	58.420	.000	.625
Social Adjustment	27.318	1	9.106	1.185	.317	.017
Error	1544.546	201	7.684			
Total	62417.000	206				
Corrected Total	7057.150	205				

a. R Squared = .781 (Adjusted R Squared = .777)

Data in Table 5 shows that the exact probability value of 0.000 is less than the 'a priori' Probability value of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis that there will be no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test mean scores of the students on effect of peer counselling on social adjustment of secondary school students is rejected. The value of the partial eta squared of .63 indicate that peer counselling was significant effect to social adjustment of secondary school students.

Hypothesis Two: There will be no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test mean scores of the students on effect of peer counselling on academic achievement of secondary school students.

Table 6: ANCOVA on difference between the pre-test and post-test mean scores of the students on effect of peer counselling on academic achievement of secondary school students

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	98906.234[a]	2	24726.559	463.966	.000	.902
Intercept	161020.071	1	161020.071	3021.358	.000	.938
Group	3747.461	1	3747.461	70.317	.000	.859
Academic Achievement	211.666	3	70.555	1.324	.268	.019
Error	10712.081	201	53.294			
Total	365833.000	206				
Corrected Total	109618.316	205				

a. R Squared = .902 (Adjusted R Squared = .900)

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Data in Table 6 shows that the exact probability value of 0.000 is less than the 'a priori' Probability value of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis that there will be no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test mean scores of the students on effect of peer counselling on academic achievement of secondary school students is rejected. The value of the partial eta squared of .86 indicate that peer counselling was significant effect to academic achievement of students.

4.2 Summary of the Findings

The following findings were arrived at;

1. Peer counselling has high effect on social adjustment of secondary school students.
2. Peer counselling has high effect on academic achievement of secondary school students.

5.1 Conclusion

The study concluded that peer counselling significantly improved the social adjustment and academic achievement of secondary school students. This effect remained evident even when factors such as gender and school location were considered. Therefore, peer counselling is an effective intervention for enhancing both the social and academic development of secondary school students across different genders and locations.

5.2Recommendations

From the findings of the study, the recommendations were made;

1. Peer counsellors should be trained and deployed to schools to reduce the adjustment challenges facing students academically and socially.
2. From time to time, capacity building through seminars, conferences and workshop should for organised by government through the Ministry of Education for principals, teachers and students on the need for adopting peer counselling.

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