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PERCEIVED EFFECT OF COUNSELLING-BASED CONFLICT

RESOLUTION STRATEGIES AMONG PUBLIC SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN OWERRI METROPOLIS, IMO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated the perceived effect of counselling-based conflict resolution strategies among senior secondary school students in public schools in Owerri metropolis, Imo state, Nigeria. Prompted by the growing incidence of student conflicts that disrupt school harmony, the research investigated senior secondary school students' perception in the effect of the use of structured counselling interventions to resolve conflicts among students. The study population comprised three thousand and twenty three (3,023) senior secondary school students in the Owerri metropolis that have been exposed to at least 3 sessions of counselling relationships. A sample of three hundred (300) students was selected from the target population using a simple random sampling technique. The study made use of descriptive survey design. Three research questions guided the study. Data collection involved a validated instrument, the Counselling-Based Conflict Resolution Strategy Questionnaire (CBCRSQ). The instrument was administered twice to a similar sample with a two weeks interval. The data collected yielded a reliability value of 0.83 correlation coefficient using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation (PPMC). Results revealed that counselling strategies such as peer mediation, active listening, and nonviolent communication can significantly enhance students' conflict resolution abilities. Based on the results, implications were highlighted. The study recommends integrating structured counselling programmes within schools, and curriculum-based conflict resolution education.

Keywords: Interpersonal conflict management, Counselling-based strategies, Peer mediation, Active listening, Nonviolent communication.

Introduction

Individuals are social beings and as long as there is social interaction between people, conflict is inevitable. Interpersonal conflicts among students in secondary schools are common

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problems which can negatively impact the school in attaining its set objectives and goals and advertently affect the school climate.

Education lies at the heart of social and economic development and one of the ultimate aims of education is to strengthen the individuals and the society's problem-solving capacity and ability so that people can solve different problems using education (Mukhtar, Salisu, Jagula, Salisu & Umar, 2022). Education improves economy, promotes health, democracy and more, within a given society. Secondary education is received after primary education and before tertiary education, and it prepares an individual for meaningful and productive living, and also equips one for tertiary education (Mbah, Oluka & Alio, 2021). To gain these benefits from education, the role of the professional counsellor is highly significant in managing conflict-generating practices within the school and among students. Secondary schools as part of the social system and an integral part of development, training and socialization of children who transit to adolescence becomes a focal point due to students' behavioural problems and abnormalities in schools which are not new phenomena.

Conflict resolutions need counselling services and the current rate of school-based conflict among senior secondary school students should be attended to through counselling-based conflict resolution strategies. This process is to ensure that students maintain discipline, and to safeguard lives and properties within the school system. The National Policy of Education (NPE, 2004) clearly states that counselling services should be rendered to students in secondary schools in Nigeria. The policy makes clear on the fact that counsellors can be appointed to schools to assist learners or students in academic and personal adjustments for a more rounded outcome (NPE, 2004). Therefore, professional counsellor provides services to students beyond ensuring quality education to include, but not limited to assisting students in skill and knowledge acquisition. No doubt, Abdullahi and Abubakar (2018) noted that counsellors assist individuals acquire skills and experiences necessary to identify opinions, explore alternatives and succeed in life peacefully.

In maintaining discipline, peaceful interaction and co-existence among students, most students use educational approach in addressing and solving conflicts among students (Latipun, Nasir, Zainah & Khairudin, 2012). Counselling-based conflict resolution strategies are rarely put into practice in secondary schools. According to Theberge and Karan (2004), only 8% of students involved in conflict resolution programmes actually apply what they learned in the programme. For discipline and improved cordial behaviour and discipline within the school among the senior secondary students, it becomes imperative to use appropriate counselling-based conflict resolution strategies. A study done in Indonesia found that most of the school principals (97%) believed that counselling was one of the strategies that was effective in preventing and solving conflict among peers (Latipun, 2005). It also believed that counselling is able to improve the relationship among students and promote peace in the school (Latipun, et al, 2012). It was reported by Latipun (2005) that 80% of school principals in Indonesia assumed that school counsellors were responsible for handling students' social and psychological problems.

Hence, as far as students' learning and social interactions are concerned, guidance and counselling remains a fundamental and important component of the educational system in Nigeria.

Agreeably so, counselling as a helping profession is a process of assisting an individual to develop and accept an integrated picture of his aptitude, abilities, interest and interpersonal needs to achieve maximum adjustment to the environment of which school is one of them, so that he can be more effective, satisfied and useful to the society in which he lives (Abdullahi & Abubakar, 2018), and devoid of interpersonal conflict.

Interpersonal conflict refers to a disagreement or discord between two or more people, often stemming from incompatible goals, values or viewpoints. It is a natural part of human interaction which can occur in various settings and social situations. According to Abdullahi and Abubakar (2018), interpersonal conflict also refers to clashes that involves two or more individuals, who perceive each other as being in opposition to preferred outcomes (goals) and or attitudes. While Nelson-Jones (1990) in Abdullahi and Abubakar (2018) sees it as a situation in which one or both individuals in a relationship are experiencing difficulty in working or living with each other. Schools are not immune to this and it can have deleterious impacts on the environment and on school success (Sompa, 2015; Kalagbor & Nnokam, 2015).

Shindlers (2008) views inter-personal conflict as a natural part of any functional class. Conflicts can manifest in verbal or physical violence, riots, lack of participation in class programmes or activities, disturbance for other students, destruction of school facilities and equipment, physical beating/harming of one another, boycotting classes, harassment, and more, which leads to students' poor academic performance, as such, this problem needs to be addressed. Therefore, interpersonal conflict in secondary school today remains a focal point for concern in Nigeria, as students' revolts, unrest and violence have gradually become frequent among students, most especially the senior students in Nigerian secondary schools today.

Accordingly, Mc Namara (2007) Fidelis and Emmanuel (2023) expressed the view that conflict hinders productivity, lowers morale and stimulates inappropriate behaviours in individuals. As such, conflict among students in the school should be managed and curbed to its barest minimum, and which can be actualized through counselling-based conflict resolution strategies. In maintaining peaceful behaviour among students, schools frequently apply strict control over the students (Bennett-Johnson, 2004). Not many schools use counselling-based conflict resolution strategies on interpersonal conflict management among senior secondary school students in Nigeria, which is the thrust of this work.

Conflict resolution is conceptualized as the methods and process involved in facilitating the peaceful ending of conflict and retribution. This is the process two or more individuals apply to find amiable solution to a crisis situation or problem. Mukhtar, et al (2022) asserted that conflict resolution can be considered as the process of removing barriers to something for agreement. Conflict resolution and/or management is a process of limiting the negative aspects of conflict while increasing its positive aspects (Rahim, 2018).

Counselling-based conflict resolution strategies focuses on helping individuals develop the skills and mindset to navigate disagreement constructively. It involves understanding different

perspectives, communicating effectively and working collaboratively to reach a mutually acceptable agreement. Abdullahi and Abubakar (2018) advanced that counselling for conflict resolution are strategies designed to prevent and manage violence in school through counselling, so that students can learn and teachers can perform their jobs in a positive, healthy and safe environment for education and development.

There are different counselling-based strategies for conflict resolution in secondary schools, which includes peer mediation, active listening, nonviolent communication, assertive communication, individual counselling, group therapy, organized interaction session with parents to create enlightenment on school rules and regulation, organized seminar/workshop on what constitutes violence and its consequences, orientation services to create awareness for adjustment within the school environment through which the school's do and do-not are explained, information services that provides students with necessary information to assist students thrive within the school and beyond (Abdullahi & Abubakar, 2018).

One of the oldest counselling-based conflict resolution strategy is peer mediation, which involves the student (disputants) taking command of adversarial situations, listen, rely on the problem-solving format, maintain control of disruptions, explore hidden agendas that hinder resolution, and reach an agreement (Testamark, 2007). Peer mediation as a counselling-based conflict resolution strategy is used to address misunderstands or disputes between school mates or peers. It involves using an individual who is usually a peer or fellow student to stand as a third party in order to assist the disputants resolve their problems. The peer mediator aids the individuals involved in conflict to have a better understanding of themselves and the issue they are at variance, thereby amplifying positive communication, promoting and stimulating empathy.

Hence, peer mediation involves constructively managing conflicts. The disputants are shown how to de-escalate conflicts through the use of peer mediation. These strategies can be role played to help them (students) improve their problem-solving skills. Given that 95% of agreements are reached in peer mediation, students are shown how to achieve a reasonable agreement between disputants (Daunic, Smith, Robinson, Miller, Landry, 2000). Alan (2016) observed that students who have taken part in peer mediation work at resolving conflict in a more constructive manner rather than relying on authority. They are more self-controlled, can give non-discriminative decisions and show positive development in various other areas. Tastan (2004) also agrees that conflict is usually at a decline in schools where peer mediation is practiced. Peer mediation as a counselling-based conflict resolution strategy can be effective towards solving students disputes without disrupting their learning and the learning environment (Testamark, 2007), and which can significantly reduce aggression and violence among students, focusing on the senior secondary school students.

The International Listening Association (ILA, 2012) defines active listening as the process of receiving, constructing meaning, and responding to spoken and/or nonverbal messages. According

to Jonsdottir and Fridriksdottir (2020), active listening is the conscious effort to hear and understand both the verbal and non-verbal messages conveyed by another person. It includes paraphrasing the message, asking questions when appropriate, and maintaining moderate to high non-verbal involvement in the conversation (Marija, Davorka, Iko, Anelka & Andrea, 2024). Furthermore, it involves fully engaging with the speaker, processing their message, and responding thoughtfully. This practice goes beyond mere hearing; it requires the listener to interpret emotional cues, clarify understanding and provide feedback that encourages further dialogue (Paramole, Adeoye, Arowosaye & Ibikunle, 2024).

Active listening in counselling-based conflict resolution, is a strategy that can de-escalate interpersonal conflict among students as it impacts uncertainty reduction and can also produce rewarding interactions during conflict resolutions (Paramole, et al, 2024). Senior secondary school students are usually within their adolescence stage and still navigating through their stress and storm, which most likely impedes their interpersonal relationship with peers, especially within the school environment. Active listening, being two-way communication technique demands empathy, attention, practice and a lot of conscious effort. It reflects one's ability to build trust, establish a rapport and demonstrate concern about one's school mates or friends (Pooja, 2020). Active listening makes the speaker feel cared for and understood. A student's willingness to listen, especially during conflict resolution is a mark of emotional regulation, asserts Yuangang (2022).

Non-violent communication (NVC) is a counselling strategy that promotes and amplifies interpersonal communication and understanding. Nonviolent communication is also known as compassionate and collaborative communication with focus on three aspects that include self-empathy, empathy and honest self-expression (Dzaferovic, 2018; Little 2008; Rosenberg, 2006;). It is not necessarily an end to a misunderstanding, rather it helps develop empathic understanding, which improves relationship, interpersonal communication and promotes peaceful coexistence at the long run. Rosenberg (2006), points out that the "extraordinary language of nonviolent communication modifies the relationships between parents and children, teachers and students and all of us, and even the way we treat ourselves".

Violent communication occurs through speaking (how words are used) and listening (how expressions are understood), which can emanate through thinking, self-talk or conversations that are imagined. As such, our thinking, intentions, assumptions, use of power and nonverbal language are just as important, as they highly influence how we listen, express ourselves and interdependently engage with ourselves and with others (Finkelstein, 2016). Studies have shown that the frequency, duration and intensity of peer conflicts decrease with age and experience (Dzaferovic, 2018; Petrovic, 2010;).

Nonviolent communication (NVC) is a model of communication approach, a method,

process, mindset and a way of life (Baturaite-Bunka, Jureviciene, & Skoczowsky-Danielsen, 2024). The use of communication as a skill in the educational environment, specifically schools

play an important role in maintaining peaceful co-existence for optimal learning. As communication involves two or more persons expressing and exchanging thoughts and words actively, it becomes germane for counsellors to focus on nonviolence in communication as a counselling strategy to breed peace and unity which culminates to achieving set academic objectives within the educational system.

Nowadays, children and young people (students) often use the language of violent communication (Maksimovic, Milanovic & Zajic, 2022). These various expressions of violence that results in violent problems show that young people today (who are the students), are less able to feel what others feel (Qudsyi, Trimulyaningsih, Novitasari & Stueck, 2018). Hence, nonviolent communication as a counselling-based conflict resolution strategy, aims to foster connection and understanding through the communication of judgment-free observations, greater recognition of people's feelings, needs and values (Baturaite-Bunka, et al, 2024), resulting in reduced interpersonal conflict and improved interaction between students, especially in senior secondary schools in Nigeria.

Johnson and Johnson (2000), emphasize the necessity to train learners on how to manage conflicts in positive ways in the school. Conflict is an indispensable and normal part of life and without it, improvement and alteration cannot be lived. For this reason, it is very important to gain the ability to use constructive conflict solving methods (Alan, 2016). Students many a times use violence as a way of resolving conflicts among themselves. Studies in America showed that 90% of adolescents could not solve their conflicts, 25% preferred using force, violence and fights to solve their conflicts (Winter, Neal & Waner, 2005). This shows a low preference for conflict resolution as a strategy to addressing and resolving interpersonal issues among students. Therefore, in view of the fact that counselling strategies are techniques and approaches to assist individuals in trouble, this study investigated perceived effects of counselling-based conflict resolution strategies in interpersonal conflict management among senior secondary school students in Owerri metropolis of Imo State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Conflict is a recurrent issue in Nigerian secondary schools, especially in urban centres like Owerri metropolis. Students frequently engage in disputes that disrupt academic progress and affect the overall school climate. Despite existing disciplinary measures, conflicts persist, often escalating into violence or long-term animosities. This raises concern about the effect of traditional disciplinary approaches in managing students' behaviour. There is a pressing need to explore sustainable and educationally sound alternatives such as counselling-based strategies that emphasize conflict resolution, emotional intelligence, peer mediation, active listening, nonviolent communication, among others. Out of these myriads of strategies, it is not certain which of the

strategies the students perceive as being effective in conflict resolution. This gap is a knowledge gap in counselling and this study filled it in by investigating the extent to which counselling-based

approaches, such as, peer mediation, active listening and nonviolent communication, can resolve conflicts and foster a conducive learning environment.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: What is senior secondary school students' perceived effect of peer mediation in counselling-based conflict resolution strategy?

Research Question 2: What is senior secondary school students' perceived effect of active listening in counselling-based conflict resolution strategy?

Research Question 3: What is senior secondary school students' perceived effect of nonviolent communication in counselling-based conflict resolution strategy?

Methodology

Design and Participants

This study adopted an exploratory research design. This is the type of design that is used to gain deeper understanding of a phenomenon (Asika, 2006). The population comprised the three thousand and twenty three (3,023) senior secondary school students in Owerri metropolis, Imo State, that have been exposed to at least three sessions of counselling relationships (Counselling Office, Zonal Education Management Board Owerri, 2025).

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample of the study consists of three hundred (300) senior secondary school students, selected from the population of the study. This sample is drawn from five secondary schools with high number of clients that may have had counselling sessions at least three times. The counsellors in the schools used in this study were requested to nominate clients that have been exposed to at least three sessions in conflict resolution of their challenges. The counsellors nominated five hundred and one (501) qualified clients using the above criteria. Simple random sampling was adopted to obtain three hundred (300) clients used for the study. The essence of using simple random sampling is to give every member of the qualified population equal and independent chance of being selected.

Instrumentation

The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire designed by the researchers and named Counselling-Based Conflict Resolution Strategies Questionnaire (CBCRSQ). The instrument has two sections, A and B. section A elicits the biographic data of the respondents, while section B contains three sub-sections labelled B1, B2 and B3. B1 addressed issues of student's perceived effect of peer mediation in counselling-based conflict resolution strategy, B2 deals with student's perceived effects of active listening in counselling-based conflict resolution strategy, while B3 solicits for perceived effects of nonviolent communication in counselling-

based conflict resolution strategy. Each of these sub-sections contains four items. The response pattern adopted was a modified four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree

(2) and Strongly Disagree (1).

Face and content validity of the instrument were ensured by giving three copies of the drafts to specialists in psychometrics. Similarly, the reliability of the instrument was also ensured by administering the instrument to a group of fifty students from similar schools not used for the study. The instrument was given to them twice with a time interval of two weeks. The data collected from the first and second administration were correlated using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation formular which yielded a value of 0.83. The instrument was administered on the respondents and data collected and used for analysis.

Administration of the Instrument

The researchers approached the resident counsellors in the schools from where the subjects were drawn, and solicited for their cooperation in administering the instruments to the qualified clients in their schools. The researchers worked with the school counsellors. In all, a total of three hundred (300) copies of the questionnaire were produced and administered to the clients on face to face basis and all were retrieved after the clients responded to them. Three hundred copies of the administered questionnaire were retrieved; there was no instrument mortality.

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected for the study were analyzed using mean score and standard deviation.

Results

Research Question 1: What is senior secondary school students' perceived effect of peer mediation in counselling-based conflict resolution strategy?

Table 1: *Mean responses on perceived effect of peer mediation in counselling-based conflict resolution strategy*

S/N	ITEM STATEMENTS	X	SD	REMARKS
1.	I use peer mediation in resolving misunderstanding with school mates.	3.24	0.83	Strongly Agree
2.	I find it easy to use peer mediation to resolve conflicts with my friends in school.	2.91	0.97	Agree
		2.73	1.02	Agree
3.	There's reduction in conflicts when peer mediation is used to resolve issues between my friends and I.	2.85	0.80	Agree
4.	Peer mediation is effective in resolving conflicts with friends.			
	Grand Mean	2.93	0.91	Agree

Table 1 shows that item No. 1 had a mean score of 3.24 and a standard deviation of 0.83, indicating that respondents strongly agree that they use peer mediation in resolving

misunderstanding with their school mates. Furthermore, items No. 2, 3, and 4 had the respective mean scores of 2.91, 2.73 and 2.85, and their corresponding standard deviations 0.97, 1.02 and 0.08 showing agreement to the respective item statements. The grand mean score of 2.93 with its average standard deviation of 0.91 indicates that the respondents were not far from the mean and from one another in their responses to the item on research question one. To conclude therefore, the respondents agreed that peer mediation is an effective strategy in counselling-based conflict resolution.

Research Question 2: What is senior secondary school students' perceived effect of active listening in counselling-based conflict resolution strategy?

Table 2: *Mean responses on students' perceived effect of active listening in counselling-based conflict resolution strategy*

S/N	ITEM STATEMENTS	X	SD	REMARKS
5.	I pay close attention to what is being said in conflict situation.	2.74	1.01	Agree
6.	I observe non-verbal cues like facial expressions and other body gestures in conflict situation.	2.83	0.88	Agree
7.	I have more lasting friendships since I started practicing active listening with friends.	2.75	1.10	Agree
8.	Active listening is helpful in resolving conflicts with my school mates.	2.85	0.81	Agree
	Grand Mean	2.79	0.72	Agree

Table 2 shows items No. 5 to 8 had mean scores of 2.74, 2.83, 2.75 and 2.85 respectively with their corresponding standard deviation of 1.01, 0.88, 1.10 and 0.81 all indicating agreement to the item statements therein. However, the grand mean score of 2.79 which is greater than the reference mean of 2.50 implies that respondents were not far from the mean and from one another in their responses to the items in research question two. To conclude therefore, the respondents agreed that non-verbal cues and active listening are very effective strategies in counselling-based conflict resolution.

Research Question 3: What is senior secondary school students' perceived effect of nonviolent communication in counselling-based conflict resolution strategy?

Table 3: *Mean responses on students' perceived effect of nonviolent communication in counselling-based conflict resolution strategy*

S/N	ITEM STATEMENTS	X	SD	REMARKS
9.	Non-violent communication is effective in resolving conflicts with my school mates.	3.07	0.93	Strongly Agree
10.	Conflict situation with friends gets easily resolved whenever our communication is not violent.	3.01	1.21	Strongly Agree
11.	Communication with my friends in school has improved since I apply non-violent communication strategy.	2.95	0.98	Agree
12.	Non-violent communication strategy helps me manage my emotions better in conflict situations.	2.81	0.92	Agree
	Grand Mean	2.96	1.20	Agree

Table 3 shows that items No. 9 – 12 had the following mean scores of 3.07, 3.01, 2.95 and 2.81 with their corresponding standard deviations of 0.93, 1.21, 0.98 and 0.92. Mean scores for items 9 and 10 indicates Strongly Agree while items 11 – 12 indicates Agreed. However, the grand mean of 2.96 with its standard deviation of 1.20 implies that respondents agreed to all the item statements made in research question three. To conclude therefore, the result of the above analysis reveals that respondents agreed that nonviolent communication is a very effective strategy in counselling-based conflict resolution.

Discussion of Findings

The results are discussed in line with the research questions, incorporating insights from recent and related studies.

The findings of the study on Table 1 show that peer mediation is an effective strategy on conflict resolution among secondary school students. This is in line with Alan Cansu (2016), who in his study observed that students who have taken part in peer mediation try to resolve conflict in a more constructive manner rather than relying on school authority, they are more self-controlled, they can give non-discriminative decisions and have shown a positive development in various other areas. Still in agreement with the result of the study, Taştan (2004), maintained that in schools where students have been given peer mediation training, there has been a decline in conflict issues among students. Overall, peer mediation is a valuable strategy for resolving interpersonal conflicts among adolescent students, promoting a positive school climate and fostering social-emotional learning.

The result of the study on table 2 shows that non-verbal cues and active listening are very effective counselling-based conflict resolution strategies. This aligns with Yuangang (2022) who

asserts that building relationship is paramount to ensuring effective communication and collaboration among students. By teaching students active listening strategy, educators can empower them to navigate conflicts constructively and foster a positive learning environment.

This agrees with Paramole, et al (2024), who averred that active listening involves the speaker processing their message and responding thoughtfully. Thus, active listening promotes clear and respectful communication which is essential for resolving conflict effectively, helping students understand different perspectives and develop empathy leading to more constructive conflict resolution.

The findings of the study on table 3 shows that the students perceived nonviolent communication conflict resolution strategy as very effective in conflict resolution among senior secondary school students. This aligns with the findings of Dzaferovic (2018), and Rosenberg (2006), who asserts that nonviolent communication (NVC) modifies the relationship between parents and children, teachers and students, and even the way one treats himself. Rosenberg (2006), in his assertion maintained that the goal of the process of nonviolent communication is to have people clearly and compassionately listen to one another, so that they can clearly perceive their own need as well as the needs of others, and communicate their needs in such a manner that others want to keep them.

However, from the result of findings, all the three counselling-based conflict resolution strategies were perceived to be effective by senior secondary school students in resolving conflict, with nonviolent communication strongly perceived as the most effective followed by peer mediation and active listening respectively. This goes to showcase that nonviolent communication has been perceived to enhance greater conflict resolution skills, promoting more effective and peaceful communication.

Conclusion

The study concluded that all the three counselling-based conflict resolution strategies (peer mediation, active listening and nonviolent communication) are perceived to be effective in promoting peaceful coexistence and effective conflict resolution among senior secondary school students, with nonviolent communication perceived to be most effective, followed by peer mediation and active listening respectively. This study's findings have implications for educators, policy makers and counsellors seeking to promote positive relationships and academic performance among students.

Recommendations

Educators and policy makers should consider incorporating counselling-based conflict resolution strategies into school curricula.

Counsellors should provide training and support to students on effective conflict resolution skills.

Implementing peer-mediation, active listening and nonviolent communication in conflict resolution programmes, should be an effective strategy in curbing violence presently experienced in most secondary schools as a means of resolving conflicts.

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