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IMPACT OF PEER COUNSELLING ON BEHAVIOUR CHANGE AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN FEDERAL CAPITAL TERRITORY, ABUJA-NIGERIA

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Abstract

Peer counselling is the encouraging concerted effort to harness the capacity which group members sharing common interests may console, appease, be friend, mediate and reconcile those who are alienated from one another. This study therefore examined the impact of peer counselling on behaviour change of secondary school students in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The research adopted a descriptive survey design. The study was guided by three research questions and three hypotheses. A sample of 378 secondary school students was drawn from the population of 39,872 students in public Senior Secondary Schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja using multi-stage sampling procedure. The sampling procedure involved the use of cluster sampling, purposive sampling, proportionate stratified random sampling and simple random sampling techniques. A structured questionnaire titled: Peer Counselling and Students' Behaviour Change Scale (PCSBCS) developed by the researchers with reliability coefficient of 0.82 was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by two experts from the department of Guidance and Counselling. The average validity index of 0.78 was obtained. Mean and standard deviations were used to answer the research questions while the null hypotheses were tested using Chi-square goodness of fit at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of

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the study revealed that peer counselling has a significant impact on students' academic behaviour change, social behavior change and emotional behavior change of secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. Based on the findings of the study it was recommended among others that there should be sensitization of principals, teachers and heads of guidance and counselling on the benefits of peer counselling on learners' social adjustment is necessary.

Introduction

Peer counselling is the encouraging concerted effort to harness the capacity which group members sharing common interests may console, appease, be friend, mediate and reconcile those who are alienated from one another. This is done informally without resorting to discipline or depending on professionals or those in authority within the organization or institution (Arudo, 2016). Peer counsellors are paraprofessionals selected from the group to be trained, and given ongoing supervision to perform some key functions generally performed by a professional (Ndichu, 2015). While the traditional paradigm held that people are to be treated by professionals, this is no longer the prevailing conception. It is widely accepted that a person naturally tends to turn, in time of trouble, to a friend or to someone he/she knows rather than to a professional. Peer counselling typically involves the use of members of a given group to effect change among other members of the same group. It addresses change both at the individual level by attempting to modify a person's knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, or behaviour and at the group or societal level by modifying norms and stimulating collective action that leads to changes in programmes and policies (Varenhost, 2017).

Based on these considerations, the use of peer counselling programmes in schools for prevention purposes has greatly expanded. Peer counsellors in secondary schools are students appointed by their mates or the school administration in an effort to open greater links between individual students. It is based on the assumption that individuals as natural helpers provide spontaneous and informal support to peers experientially (Arudo, 2016). When supported and developed, they may become the best group to reach out to the needy students. Such natural helpers when provided with counselling skills may be of greatest assistance where authority and professional services may be inadequate or not readily available. It is for that reason that in school situation, students are likely to contact fellow students when they are experiencing problems and concerns before they approach their teachers especially on matters they consider embarrassing such as rape, STIs among others (Arudo, 2016). It is easy for them because of their closeness to their mates to notice stress symptoms and refer such cases to the counselling department before it is too late. Cases of substance abuse and mental ill health would be apprehended long before they become indiscipline cases where peer counsellors are empowered. Emotional problems and family conflicts disturb students a lot. Students who have issues

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of concern may be easily identified by a counsellor who mingles with them during co-curricular activities. The point is, if the students cannot come to you, so go to them! They cannot resist their mates (Ndichu, 2015).

Peer counselling has become an important and integral part of our secondary schools owing to the dynamism of education and the many problems facing secondary school students. The large number of students in secondary schools, limited number of trained teacher counsellors, heavy workload, socio-economic and technological challenges all put pressure on teachers counsellors, students, parents and society. Government of Nigeria in National Policy on Education (2014) recommended the strengthening of the existing teacher counselling in schools and the introduction of peer counselling to help schools cope with the indiscipline problems. It recommended inauguration of peer-counselling groups in every school and for peer counsellors to receive training to empower them to perform their role. More recently, peer counselling has gained support for a practical reason. The demand for guidance and counselling services now far exceeds the supply of professional school counsellors. Peer counselling though a relatively new concept in most secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja is gaining ground because it bridges the gap between teachers and students. This will help the secondary school students to change their academic behaviour, social behaviour and emotional behaviour. Santrock (2018) summits that, a school with well-developed peer counselling programme would provide a valid setting to influence students' academic, social and emotional behaviour change.

Academic behaviour change can be defined as guiding students to stop engaging in behaviours that have negative consequences on their academic performance. A frequent theme seems to be that students may want to change their academic behaviour, but do not actually do so because they lack someone that will encourage them. Therefore peer counseling is a vital tool that can help students change their negative attitudes towards academics. According to Arudo (2016), students who have negative attitudes towards academics usually record poor performances in their results. Academic behaviour change is about altering poor habits and behaviours for the long term. This refers to any transformation or modification of students' behaviours in order to excel academically. A sudden and rapid physical change that secondary school students experience makes them very self-conscious, sensitive, and invariably affects their academic behaviour. Baginsky (2015) submits that peer counselling contribute to an overall improvement of behaviour of secondary school students. Academic performance is an area where peer counselling has considerable influence. The author states that peer counseling has positive influence on students' academic performance and higher test scores.

Social behaviour change can be seen as the changes that occur in beaviours among two or more students within the same class and school, and encompasses any behaviour in

which one student affects the other. This is due to an interaction among those students. This behaviour can be affected by both the qualities of the individual and the environmental (situational) factors. Therefore, social behaviour arises as a result of an interaction between two or more students and the school environment. This means that, in regards to secondary school students, social behaviour can be determined by both the students' characteristics and the situation they are in (Homans & George, 2018).

A major aspect of social behaviour change according to Snyder, Mark and Ickes (2015) is communication, which is the basis for survival and reproduction. Social behaviour change is said to be determined by two different processes that can either work together or oppose one another. The dual-systems model of reflective and impulsive determinants of social behaviour change came out of the realization that behaviour cannot just be determined by one single factor. Instead, behaviour can arise by those consciously behaving (where there is an awareness and intent), or by pure impulse. These factors that determine behaviour can work in different situations and moments, and can even oppose one another. While at times one can behave with a specific goal in mind, other times they can behave without rational control, and driven by impulse instead.

Social behaviour constantly changes as one continues to grow and develop, reaching different stages of life. The development of behaviour is deeply tied with the biological and cognitive changes one is experiencing at any given time (Strack, Fritz; Deutsch & Roland, 2016). This creates general patterns of social behavior development in humans. Just as social behavior is influenced by both the situation and an individual's characteristics, the development of behaviour is due to the combination of the two as well as the temperament of the child along with the settings they are exposed to.

Emotional experiences are ubiquitous in nature and important and perhaps even critical in academic settings, as emotion modules virtually every aspect of cognition. Tests, examinations, homework and deadlines are associated with different emotional states that encompass frustration, anxiety and boredom. Even subject matter influences emotions that affect one's ability to learn and remember. Hence, emotional behaviour change impact should be carefully considered in educational courses design to maximize learner engagement as well as improve learning and long-term retention of the material (Shen, Wang & Shen, 2019). Jung, Wranke, Hamburger and Knauff (2019) assert that human processes are affected by emotional behaviour change, including attention, learning and memory, reasoning, and problem-solving. These factors are critical in educational domains because when students face such difficulties, it defeats the purpose of schooling and can potentially render it meaningless.

The work of peer counsellors can assist in broadening the impact counsellors can have on the students, families and the education system. It is against this background that the

impact of peer counselling on the behaviour change of secondary school students is of interest.

Statement of the Problem

Students while at school do require some assistance from trained personnel assigned to help them overcome school difficulties in the form of counselling. The positive note is that, peer counselling influences changes in students' academic behaviour and competencies. Peer counsellors are students appointed by their mates or the school administration in an effort to open greater link between individual students. It is based on the assumption that individuals as natural helpers provide spontaneous and informal support to peers experientially. When supported and developed they may become the best group to reach out to the needy students. In spite of the facts that peer counselling is established in many secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja its contribution to behaviour change in secondary schools has not been documented through research in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. Also, a wealth of research has been done on peer counselling and how it influences behaviour change among secondary school students. However, few studies have been done in the geographical area of Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. Therefore, the question is how would the behaviours of secondary school students in this geographical area be changed? The study therefore sought to establish whether peer counselling will have impact on students' behaviour change in secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

Research Questions

The study was guided by following research questions:

i. To what extent does peer counselling impact on students' academic behaviour change in secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja?
ii. To what extent does peer counselling impact on students' social behaviour change in secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja?
iii. To what extent does peer counselling impact on students' emotional behaviour change in secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja?

Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of peer counselling on the behaviour change of secondary school students in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The specific objectives of the study were to:

i. Establish the impact of peer counselling on students' academic behaviour change in secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.
ii. Determine the impact of peer counselling on students' social behaviour change of secondary school students in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

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iii. Find the impact of peer counselling on students' emotional behaviour change in secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

Statement of Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated and were tested at 0.05 level of significance**.**

i. There is no significant impact of peer counselling on students' academic behavior change in secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.
ii. There is no significant impact of peer counselling on students' social behavior change in secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.
iii. There is no significant impact of peer counselling on students' emotional behavior change in secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

Methodology

The study was conducted in public secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. An ex-post-facto research design was adopted for the study. A sample of 396 students was selected from the population of 39,872 secondary school students. The study employed a multi-stage sampling procedure for the selection of sample size. The first stage involved the use of cluster sampling technique where the population was clustered around the six Area Councils in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. At the second stage, purposive sampling technique was applied where six schools were selected. One school was selected from each Area Council. At the third stage, the researcher employed proportionate stratified random sampling technique to randomly select the required number of SS II students in each of the sampled secondary schools. The selection of the final respondents was done using simple random sampling which allowed every SS II student an equal opportunity to participate in the study. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled: "Peer Counselling and Students' Behaviour Change Scale (PCSBCS)" developed by the researcher. The instrument was subjected to content and construct validity by two experts from the department of Guidance and Counselling, Nasarawa State University, Keffi. The experts determined the appropriateness, wording, suitability of items and content coverage. A validity index of 0.78 was obtained. Cronbach Alpha method of estimating reliability was employed to determine the internal consistency of the instrument. This yielded the reliability index of 0.82. The data collected were subjected to descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. Mean and standard deviations were used to answer the research questions chi-square statistic was employed to test all the null hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance.

Results

The results of the study are presented according to the research questions and research hypotheses.

Research Question 1: To what extent does peer counselling impact on students' academic behaviour change in secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of the extent does peer counselling impact on students' academic behaviour change in secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja

S/NO	ITEMS	$\overline{x}$	SD	DECISION
1.	Peer counseling assists students to develop good study skills and habits	3.17	.77	VHE
2.	Peer counseling guides students to study difficult topics	3.07	.73	VHE
3.	Peer counseling assists in doing all class assignments within the stipulated time	2.96	.84	HE
4.	Peer counseling assists students to actively participate in class during lessons	2.95	.78	HE
5.	Peer counseling assists in setting realistic academic goals with chances of succeeding	2.94	.87	HE
	Cluster Mean/SD	**3.01**	**0.79**	**HE**

Table 1 presents the results of the analysis on the extent to which peer counselling impact on students' academic behaviour change in secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The table revealed that the respondents agreed on the items 1 and 2 with the mean scores of 3.17 and 3.07, and standard deviations of .77 and .73 respectively for having impact on students' academic behaviour change in secondary schools to a very high extent. However, they agreed with items 3, 4 and 5 with mean scores of 2.94, 2.96 and 2.95, and corresponding standard deviations of .87, .84 and .78 respectively for having impact on students' academic behaviour change in secondary schools to a high extent. The table also reveals a cluster mean a of 3.01 and standard deviation of 0.79 which is above the benchmark of 2.50 and this indicates that peer counselling have impact on students' academic behaviour change in secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja to a high extent.

Research Question 2: To what extent does peer counselling impact on students' social behaviour change in secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of the extent does peer counselling impact on students' social behaviour change in secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja

S/NO	ITEMS	$\overline{x}$	SD	DECISION
6.	Peer counseling helps me to choose friends wisely	3.19	.72	VHE
7.	Peer counseling helps me to relate well with fellow students	3.18	.67	VHE
8.	Peer counseling helps me to abstain from alcohol/drug abuse	3.14	.74	VHE

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9.	Peer counseling helps me to respect other people's opinions	3.11	.72	VHE
10.	Peer counseling assists me to have a balance between academic work and my social life	3.08	.78	VHE
	Cluster Mean/SD	**3.14**	**0.72**	**VHE**

Table 2 presents the results of the analysis on the extent to which peer counselling impact on students' social behaviour change in secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The table revealed that all the respondents agreed on the items for having impact on students' social behaviour change in secondary schools to a very high extent with a cluster mean of 3.14 and standard deviation of 0.72 which is above the benchmark of 2.50 and indicates that peer counselling have impact on students' social behaviour change in secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja to a very high extent.

Research Question 3: To what extent does peer counselling impact on students' emotional behaviour change in secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja?

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation of the extent does peer counselling impact on students' emotional behaviour change in secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja

S/NO	ITEMS	$\overline{x}$	SD	DECISION
11.	Peer counseling assists me in handling loneliness and lack of friends	3.18	.62	VHE
12.	Peer counseling assists me to become more confident and relaxed	3.16	.73	VHE
13.	Peer counseling helps me on how to make decisions and solve problems	3.11	.74	VHE
14.	Peer counseling assists me in dealing with feeling of low esteem	3.06	.70	VHE
15.	Peer counseling assists me in controlling emotional conflicts	3.13	.70	VHE
	Cluster Mean/SD	**3.22**	**0.69**	**VHE**

Table 3 presents the results of the analysis on the extent to which peer counselling impact on students' emotional behaviour change in secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The table revealed that all the respondents agreed on the items for having impact on students' emotional behaviour change in secondary schools to a very high extent with a cluster mean of 3.22 and standard deviation of 0.69 which is above the

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benchmark of 2.50 and indicates that peer counselling having impact on students' emotional behaviour change in secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja to a very high extent.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant impact of peer counselling on students' academic behavior change in secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

Table 4: Chi-Square analysis of the impact of peer counselling on students' academic behaviour change in secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja

Response	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency	df	Level of Sig	χ^2_{cal}	p.val	Decision
SA	126	126	3	0.05	147.947[a]	.000	H_O Rejected
A	180	126					
D	76	126					
SD	14	126					

χ^2cal = 147.947[a], df=3, P=0.05>0.000

Table 4 reveals the Chi-square value of the impact of peer counselling on students' academic behaviour change in secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The calculated value of Chi-square (χ^2) = 147.947[a] at df = 3 and P = 0.000. Since P < 0.05, the result is significant therefore, the null hypothesis which states that no significant impact of peer counselling on students' academic behavior change in secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja is rejected. This implies that peer counselling has a significant impact on students' academic behavior change of secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant impact of peer counselling on students' social behaviour change in secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

Table 5: Chi-Square analysis of the impact of peer counselling on students' social behavior change in secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja

Response	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency	df	Level of Sig	χ^2_{cal}	p.val	Decision
SA	137	126	3	0.05	136.082[a]	.000	H_O Rejected
A	192	126					

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D	61	126
SD	6	126

χ^2cal = 136.082[a], df=3, P=0.05>0.000

Table 5 reveals the Chi-square value of the impact of peer counselling on students' social behavior change in secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The calculated value of Chi-square (χ^2) = 136.082[a] at df = 3 and P = 0.000. Since P < 0.05, the result is significant therefore, the null hypothesis which states that no significant impact of peer counselling on students' social behavior change in secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja is rejected. This implies that peer counselling has a significant impact on students' social behavior change of secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant impact of peer counselling on students' emotional behavior change in secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

Table 6: Chi-Square analysis of the impact of peer counselling on students' emotional behavior change in secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja

Response	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency	df	Level of Sig	χ^2_{cal}	p.val	Decision
SA	129	126	3	0.05	124.534[a]	.000	H_0 Rejected
A	202	126					
D	63	126					
SD	2	126					

χ^2cal = 124.534[a], df=3, P=0.05>0.000

Table 6 reveals the Chi-square value of the impact of peer counselling on students' emotional behavior change in secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The calculated value of Chi-square (χ^2) = 124.534[a] at df = 3 and P = 0.000. Since P < 0.05, the result is significant therefore, the null hypothesis which states that no significant impact of peer counselling on students' emotional behaviour change in secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja is rejected. This implies that peer counselling has a significant influence on students' emotional behavior change of secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study are discussed based on the research questions and hypotheses that guided the study.

The findings from research question one revealed that peer counselling impact on students' academic behaviour change in secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja to a high extent. The corresponding hypothesis to the above research question

revealed that peer counselling has a significant impact on students' academic behaviour change of secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. This implies that when students are involved in peer counselling, it impacts on their academic behaviour. The finding is in agreement with Akinyi (2018) who examined the impact of peer counselling on the behaviour change of secondary school students in Nakuru Municipality and revealed that peer counselling has impact on students' academic performance however it does not impact on their social and emotional behaviour.

The findings from research question two revealed that peer counselling impact on students' social behaviour change in secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja to a very high extent. The corresponding hypothesis to the above research question revealed that peer counselling has a significant impact on students' social behavior change of secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. This implies that when students are involved in peer counseling, it impact on their social behaviour. This finding is in consonance with Andoh-Robertson, Kwofie and Kploanyi (2021) who investigated the impact of peer counselling on social adjustment and academic achievement of students of University of Mines and Technology, Tarkwa in the Western Region of Ghana and found that peer counselling improves social adjustment and academic achievement of students', peer counselled students had increased academic achievement than their non-peer counselled counterparts.

The findings from research question three revealed that peer counselling impact on students' emotional behaviour change in secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja to a very high extent. The corresponding hypothesis to the above research question revealed that peer counselling has a significant impact on students' emotional behaviour change of secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. This implies that when students are involved in peer counseling, it impact on their social behaviour. This finding is in line with Bii, Aloka and Oginga (2016) who conducted a study on the efficacy of peer counseling on emotional adjustment among orphaned learners in Kenyan Schools and established that there was a strong positive correlation between peer counselling and emotional adjustment.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that peer counselling has a significant impact on students' academic behaviour change, social behavior change and emotional behavior change of secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made.

1. Students should continuously be involved and be given a major role to play during peer counselling services.

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2. There should be a regular training of both teachers and peer counsellors and allocation of adequate funds and resources to school peer counselling programmes.
3. Ministry of Education should enact policies regarding the provision of Guidance and Counselling services, care and support of secondary school students with the aim of helping them attain appropriate emotional adjustment.

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