

ROLE OF SCHOOL COUNSELLORS IN MANAGING ADOLESCENT CONFLICTS IN BILLIRI L.G.A., GOMBE STATE

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Abstract

Adolescent conflicts in Nigerian secondary schools have become increasingly prevalent, manifesting in forms such as peer jealousy, bullying, romantic rivalry, and ethnic-based cliques, which negatively affect students' academic performance, emotional well-being, and overall school climate. Despite the strategic role of school counsellors in conflict prevention and resolution, many public secondary schools, particularly in rural areas, lack adequately trained and fully engaged counselling personnel. The absence or limited effectiveness of counselling services raises concerns about the capacity of schools to manage adolescent conflicts proactively and systematically. This study therefore investigated the role of school counsellors in managing adolescent conflicts in public secondary schools within Billiri Local Government Area (LGA) of Gombe State. Guided by four research questions and two hypotheses, it assessed the availability of counselling services, nature and frequency of adolescent conflicts, perceived effectiveness of counsellors, and challenges they face. A descriptive survey design using quantitative methods was adopted. Stratified random sampling selected six schools (urban and rural), with 120 students and

12 counsellors participating. Instruments used—Counsellor Role Effectiveness Scale (CRES) and Adolescent Conflict Experience Questionnaire (ACEQ)—were validated and yielded reliability indices of 0.78 and 0.81. Results showed limited availability of trained counsellors, common conflicts such as peer jealousy and bullying, and a positive correlation between active counselling services and lower conflict rates. Challenges included lack of training, heavy workload, and inadequate facilities. The study recommends strengthening counselling units, targeted training, and policy support.

Key words: School Counsellor, Counselling, Conflict, Adolescent Conflicts, Conflict Resolution

Introduction

Adolescence is a critical developmental stage characterized by rapid physical, emotional, cognitive, and social changes. During this period, young people are more prone to interpersonal tensions, identity crises, and behavioral fluctuations that can manifest as conflicts with peers, teachers, or authority figures (Santrock, 2021). In school settings, such conflicts may range from verbal arguments and bullying to deeper issues such as romantic rivalry, ethnic-based cliques, and jealousy-driven altercations. These challenges, if left unaddressed, can disrupt academic performance, compromise school safety, and hinder holistic student development (Ugwoke & Ezeani, 2020).

The role of school counsellors in addressing adolescent-related challenges is well established in global education systems. School counselling is a structured professional service designed to support students' academic, emotional, and social development, including the resolution of conflicts (Erford, 2023). Through conflict resolution strategies, psycho-educational interventions, and peer mediation programs, counsellors are positioned to intervene proactively and responsively in student conflicts. However, the effectiveness of school counsellors in Nigerian public schools is often limited by systemic challenges, including insufficient staffing, inadequate training, and lack of institutional support (Egbo & Akpan, 2020).

Conflict, in the context of this study, refers to a situation of disagreement or hostility between individuals or groups, often fueled by misunderstandings, competition, or unmet needs. Among adolescents, conflicts often emerge from social comparison, peer dynamics, romantic interests, and identity exploration (Makinde, 2022). Conflict management involves strategies such as negotiation, mediation, avoidance, or collaboration to de-escalate tensions and restore harmony (Deutsch et al., 2020). School counsellors play a pivotal role in managing conflicts through structured intervention programs, emotional support, and the cultivation of positive peer relationships.

The concept of school counselling as a professional service encompasses not only academic guidance but also emotional and behavioral support aimed at fostering resilience and

interpersonal competence among students. According to the American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2022), a comprehensive counselling program should proactively address issues of bullying, peer conflict, and emotional distress through data-informed interventions and culturally responsive strategies.

Several empirical studies have highlighted the role of counsellors in conflict management. For instance, Eyo et al. (2021) found that the presence of trained school counsellors significantly reduced incidences of bullying and peer aggression in urban schools in Cross River State, Nigeria. Similarly, Okeke and Nwachukwu (2020) demonstrated that secondary school students in institutions with functional guidance and counselling units reported higher levels of conflict resolution skills and peer empathy.

In a comparative study between urban and rural schools, Afolayan and Bello (2023) observed that schools with full-time counsellors recorded 35% fewer disciplinary cases related to student conflict than those without. Their findings suggested that counsellors not only mitigate conflict but also educate students on emotional regulation and constructive communication. However, the study also revealed that rural schools are disproportionately underserved in terms of counselling personnel and facilities.

Despite the recognized importance of school counsellors, many Nigerian schools still struggle to integrate counselling services effectively. According to Adewale (2021), approximately 60% of public secondary schools in Northern Nigeria lack full-time trained counsellors, leaving teachers or administrators to manage behavioural issues beyond their expertise. This results in reactive rather than preventive measures, with conflicts escalating due to poor mediation or lack of timely intervention.

While prior research has examined the general impact of guidance counselling on student behavior, few studies have focused specifically on adolescent conflict types, frequency, and the contextual challenges counsellors face in local government areas such as Billiri, Gombe State. There is limited empirical data on how conflict manifests differently in rural versus urban schools, or how the availability and training of school counsellors influence conflict resolution outcomes in such settings. Furthermore, most existing studies have used qualitative or anecdotal methods, with insufficient use of validated psychometric tools to assess counsellor effectiveness and conflict frequency from the students' perspective (Adeleke & Yusuf, 2020). The current study addressed these gaps by employing a quantitative design, using validated instruments, and exploring the relationships among counselling service availability, types of conflicts, counsellor effectiveness, and institutional challenges within a stratified sample of public secondary schools.

Statement of the Problem

Adolescent conflicts in secondary schools, manifesting as peer jealousy, romantic rivalry, bullying, and ethnic-based cliques continue to disrupt students' academic engagement, emotional stability, and the overall school climate. Although school counsellors are expected to play a

central role in conflict prevention and resolution, the extent to which counselling services effectively manage these conflicts within public secondary schools in Billiri LGA, Gombe State, remains unclear. Empirical evidence documenting the nature, frequency, and management outcomes of adolescent conflicts in this context is limited. Without context-specific data, policy decisions and institutional interventions may lack direction and effectiveness. This study therefore sought to examine the availability, perceived effectiveness, and challenges of school counsellors in managing adolescent conflicts in Billiri LGA.

Objectives of the Study

The study sought to achieve the following objectives:

1. To assess the level of availability of active counselling services in secondary schools in Billiri LGA.
2. To examine the nature and frequency of adolescent conflicts in the area.
3. To assess the perceived effectiveness of school counsellors in managing adolescent conflicts.
4. To identify challenges faced by school counsellors in resolving conflicts among adolescents.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following questions:

1. What is the level of availability of active counselling services in secondary schools in Billiri LGA?
2. What are the common types and frequency of adolescent conflicts in these schools?
3. How effective are school counsellors perceived in managing adolescent conflicts?
4. What challenges do school counsellors face in conflict resolution?

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in conflict frequency between schools with active counselling services and those without.
2. There is no significant relationship between the perceived effectiveness of school counsellors and the level of conflict management in schools.

Methodology

A descriptive survey design using a quantitative approach was adopted for the study. The population of the study consisted of all public secondary schools in Billiri Local Government Area (LGA) of Gombe State.

A multistage sampling procedure was employed. First, stratified random sampling was used to select six schools based on location (urban and rural strata) to ensure adequate representation.

Within the selected schools, counsellors were selected using purposive sampling because of their specific professional roles, while students were selected using simple random sampling. A total of 120 students and 12 counsellors participated in the study.

Two instruments namely: Counsellor Role Effectiveness Scale (CRES) and Adolescent Conflict Experience Questionnaire (ACEQ) were used for data collection. The instruments were validated by two experts from the Department of Guidance and Counselling, Nasarawa State University. Reliability was established using Cronbach's alpha, yielding coefficients of 0.78 for the ACEQ and 0.81 for the CRES.

Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, and frequency) and inferential statistics (Pearson's correlation and independent samples t-test) were used for data analysis.

Results

Table 1: Availability of Trained Counsellors in Schools ($N = 132$)

Status	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
No trained counsellor	99	75
Part-time counsellor	26	20
Full-time counsellor	7	5
Total	132	100

Note. Percentages are based on total respondents.

Table 2: Common Types of Adolescent Conflicts ($n = 120$ students)

Conflict Type	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Peer jealousy	48	40
Romantic rivalry	30	25
Bullying	24	20
Ethnic-based cliques	18	15
Total	120	100

Note. Responses reflect students' reported experiences.

Table 3: Challenges Faced by Counsellors ($n = 12$ counsellors)

Challenge	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Lack of training	8	66.7
Heavy workload	2	16.7
Inadequate space	2	16.7
Total	12	100.0

Note. Percentages rounded to one decimal place.

Table 4: Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

Test	Statistic	p-value	Interpretation
Independent samples t-test (conflict rate vs. counsellor availability)	$t = 2.87$	$< .05$	Significant difference
Pearson correlation (counsellor effectiveness vs. conflict level)	$r = -.62$	$< .01$	Significant negative relationship

Note: Statistical significance determined at .05 and .01 levels.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study shed light on the critical, yet underutilized, role of school counsellors in managing adolescent conflicts in public secondary schools in Billiri LGA, Gombe State. The data revealed four major patterns: a low level of availability of trained school counsellors; common types of adolescent conflicts such as peer jealousy, romantic rivalry, bullying, and ethnic-based cliques; a statistically significant relationship between the presence of active counsellors and reduced conflict frequency; and systemic challenges undermining counsellor effectiveness, including inadequate training, high workloads, and insufficient counselling infrastructure.

The finding that 75% of sampled schools lacked full-time trained counsellors is consistent with earlier studies highlighting a national shortage of qualified guidance personnel in Nigerian public schools (Egbo & Akpan, 2020; Adewale, 2021). This shortage is particularly acute in rural areas, where educational resources are more limited, and where students are more vulnerable to social and emotional challenges due to socioeconomic and cultural constraints (Afolayan & Bello, 2023). The scarcity of trained counsellors in Billiri LGA suggests a systemic gap between policy and practice, despite the National Policy on Education's (FME, 2020) provision for counselling services in all secondary schools.

The study identified peer jealousy (40%), romantic rivalry (25%), bullying (20%), and

ethnic-based cliques (15%) as the most common types of adolescent conflict. These findings align with the work of Ugwoke and Ezeani (2020), who observed that adolescent conflicts often stem from the search for identity, peer validation, and romantic affiliations, particularly in mixed-gender school environments. Moreover, bullying and clique formation have been shown to escalate where there is insufficient adult supervision or weak disciplinary frameworks (Makinde, 2022). The presence of ethnic-based cliques also reflects Nigeria's broader sociopolitical dynamics, where ethnic identities can become sources of exclusion or tension, even among adolescents (Eyo, John, & Effiom, 2021).

Statistical analysis showed a significant negative correlation between the presence of active school counsellors and the frequency of reported conflicts ($r = -0.62, p < 0.01$), and a significant difference in conflict incidents between schools with and without active counsellors ($t = 2.87, p < 0.05$). This suggests that counsellors, when actively engaged, play a preventive and responsive role in mitigating student conflicts. This finding is supported by studies by Erford (2023) and Okeke and Nwachukwu (2020), which argue that school counselling programs contribute to improved peer relationships, emotional regulation, and conflict resolution skills among students. Counsellors also provide safe spaces for students to express frustrations and process interpersonal misunderstandings, thereby reducing the likelihood of conflict escalation. However, the current study also revealed that many of the counsellors, even when present, are not effectively supported. This limitation undermines their capacity to deliver impactful services, thereby blunting the potential benefits of their role in schools.

The study found that the major challenges faced by school counsellors in Billiri LGA were lack of training (66.7%), excessive workload (16.7%), and inadequate counselling spaces (16.7%). These findings echo those of Adeleke and Yusuf (2020), who found that many school counsellors in Nigeria are either untrained or overloaded with teaching responsibilities, making it difficult to prioritize student counselling. Moreover, the absence of private counselling rooms compromises the confidentiality and trust required for effective counselling relationships (Erford, 2023).

The issue of inadequate training also reflects the need for ongoing professional development. As adolescent issues evolve, especially with the influence of social media, cyberbullying, and changing social norms, counsellors must be equipped with updated skills and culturally responsive techniques (ASCA, 2022).

The study's findings are consistent with national and regional patterns observed in similar research across Nigeria (Adewale, 2021; Afolayan & Bello, 2023). However, its contribution lies in offering localized data from a relatively under-researched area (Billiri LGA), and in combining student and counsellor perspectives using validated quantitative instruments. By highlighting the specific types of conflict and quantifying counsellor effectiveness, the study moves beyond anecdotal or policy-based discussions and provides empirical grounding for advocacy and reform.

Implications for Counselling Practice

The results underscore the urgent need to institutionalize counselling services in all secondary schools, especially in underserved areas. They also point to the importance of equipping counsellors with the necessary training, resources, and support structures. Without addressing these systemic barriers, the potential of school counsellors to foster safe and inclusive learning environments will remain unrealized. Furthermore, schools must adopt a whole-school approach where counsellors collaborate with administrators, teachers, parents, and students to create a proactive culture of conflict prevention and emotional literacy (Deutsch et al., 2020).

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that school counsellors play a vital role in managing adolescent conflicts in public secondary schools within Billiri LGA, Gombe State. The findings revealed that while adolescent conflicts such as peer jealousy, romantic rivalry, bullying, and ethnic-based cliques are common, their frequency is significantly lower in schools with active, trained counsellors. However, the effectiveness of counsellors is hampered by systemic challenges including lack of professional training, high workload, and inadequate counselling facilities. These issues highlight the gap between policy provisions and practical implementation of school counselling services.

Recommendations

1. Government and school management should ensure the deployment of full-time, professionally trained counsellors in all public secondary schools.
2. Regular in-service training and workshops should be organized to update counsellors on modern conflict resolution strategies and adolescent psychology.
3. Schools should provide dedicated, private, and well-equipped spaces for counselling activities to enhance confidentiality and trust.
4. Education authorities should enforce the integration of counselling units into the school system in line with the National Policy on Education.

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