

PEER MEDIATION AND SCHOOL COUNSELLING AS STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING RELATIONSHIP SKILLS AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN RIVERS STATE

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Abstract

This study investigated the effectiveness of peer mediation and school counselling as strategies for enhancing relationship skills among secondary school students in Rivers State, Nigeria. The objectives were to examine the individual and combined effects of peer mediation and school counselling on students' conflict resolution, interpersonal communication, empathy, and cooperation, and to determine whether gender moderated these effects. A quasi-experimental pretest-posttest control group design was adopted, using a quantitative approach. A sample size of 480 SS1=SSIII students selected through multi-stage sampling across the three senatorial districts of Rivers State were used. Participants were assigned into four groups: Peer Mediation (n=120), School Counselling (n=120), Combined Intervention (n=120), and Control (n=120). Data were collected using the "Relationship Skills Assessment Scale (RSAS)", a validated and reliable instrument with Cronbach's alpha of 0.87. Interventions lasted six weeks, after which post-tests were conducted. Data were analyzed using paired sample t-tests, ANCOVA, multiple regression, and two-way ANOVA. Results revealed a significant improvement in conflict resolution skills for the peer mediation group ($t(119) = -10.85, p < 0.001$), and communication skills for the school counselling group ($t(119) = -11.72, p < 0.001$). Regression analysis showed that peer mediation and counselling significantly predicted empathy and cooperation ($R^2 = 0.45, F(2, 477) = 194.56, p < 0.001$). ANCOVA indicated significant group differences in relationship skills ($F(3, 475) = 52.63, p < 0.001$), while gender had no moderating effect ($F(3, 472) = 0.87, p = 0.46$). The study concluded that both interventions were effective in enhancing students' relationship skills. It was recommended that schools should integrate peer mediation training and professional counselling services into student support frameworks.

Keywords: Peer Mediation, School Counselling, Relationship Skills, Secondary School Students

Introduction

In modern education, fostering positive relationship skills is crucial for students' holistic development. These skills—including empathy, communication, cooperation, and conflict resolution—support emotional well-being, academic progress, and peaceful coexistence in

schools (Bolu-Steve & Oredugba, 2017). Adolescents, who often experience heightened emotions and peer-related pressures, are particularly vulnerable to social and mental health challenges, such as anxiety, stress, and low self-esteem. Addressing these challenges requires structured strategies that promote both social competence and mental health resilience.

Various approaches have been employed worldwide to enhance students' relationship skills and psychological well-being. For instance, peer counselling, conflict resolution programs, and school-based psychosocial interventions have shown positive outcomes in improving student behaviour, interpersonal skills, and academic engagement (Bolu-Steve & Oredugba, 2017; Kiprono, 2015; Ukwueze & Jabi, 2020). Peer counselling involves trained students providing guidance, support, and conflict resolution for their peers, promoting empathy, accountability, and prosocial behaviour (Viashima et al., 2024). Meanwhile, professional school counselling offers structured individual or group sessions that address emotional regulation, communication, and cooperation among students, contributing to mental health and academic outcomes (Ukwueze & Jabi, 2020).

In Nigeria, and particularly in Rivers State, persistent issues such as bullying, peer conflict, and poor social interactions highlight the need for evidence-based interventions that target both relationship skills and mental health. Research suggests that combining peer-based and professional counselling strategies may yield synergistic effects, enhancing students' social competencies and emotional well-being more effectively than either approach alone (Shao et al., 2024; Viashima et al., 2024). However, limited studies have explored their combined application in the Nigerian context, especially considering the cultural diversity and socio-economic pressures faced by students.

This study, therefore, investigates how peer mediation and school counselling, both individually and jointly, can enhance relationship skills and support mental health among secondary school students in Rivers State. By integrating these strategies, the study aims to provide practical insights for educators, school psychologists, and policymakers seeking to promote students' social and emotional development.

Statement of the Problem

Secondary schools in Nigeria, particularly in Rivers State, face persistent challenges of conflicts, bullying, poor peer interaction, and weak communication skills among students. These issues are aggravated by the absence of structured conflict-resolution mechanisms and inadequate counselling services (Ukwueze & Jabi, 2020). In most schools, counselling remains reactive rather than preventive, while peer mediation though proven effective elsewhere is rarely institutionalized (Ogunsanwo, 2016). Existing studies often examine peer mediation or school counselling separately rather than in combination. For example, Kiprono (2015) investigated the effects of peer mediation on conflict resolution skills among secondary school students, while Bolu-Steve and Oredugba (2017) evaluated school counselling programs and their impact on student social interactions. Similarly, Ukwueze and Jabi (2020) explored counselling strategies

in inclusive secondary education but did not assess peer-based interventions. Few studies have examined whether combining these strategies produces synergistic benefits, and little is known about potential gender differences in response to these interventions (Viashima, Aliboh, & Iorbee, 2024). This gap limits educators and policymakers from fully leveraging these strategies to improve students' relationship skills. Therefore, this study investigates how peer mediation and counselling, both individually and jointly, can enhance relationship skills among secondary school students in Rivers State.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To assess the effect of peer mediation on students' conflict resolution, communication, empathy, and cooperation skills.
2. To determine the effect of school counselling on the same relationship skill domains.
3. To examine the combined impact of peer mediation and school counselling on relationship skills.
4. To evaluate whether gender moderates the effectiveness of these interventions on students' relationship skills.

Research Questions

To guide this study, the following research questions were raised:

1. What is the effect of peer mediation on secondary school students' relationship skills in Rivers State?
2. What is the impact of counselling service on student relationship skills?
3. What is the combined effect of peer mediation and school counselling on students' relationship skills?
4. Does gender moderate the effects of these interventions on students' relationship skills?

Hypotheses

The study will test the following hypotheses at a 0.05 significance level:

1. Peer mediation will significantly enhance students' relationship skills compared to the control group.
2. School counselling will significantly enhance students' relationship skills compared to the control group.
3. The combined intervention will produce greater improvements in relationship skills than either peer mediation or school counselling alone.
4. There will be no significant gender differences in the effectiveness of the interventions on relationship skills.

Literature Review

Peer Mediation

Peer mediation is a conflict resolution strategy where students are trained to assist their peers in resolving disputes through dialogue and understanding. It leverages peer influence and promotes shared responsibility in handling school conflicts (Ogunsanwo, 2016). In schools, it builds trust and respect by equipping learners with empathy, negotiation, and problem-solving skills (Zuure, 2014; Kiprono, 2015). Unlike traditional discipline, peer-led mediation offers a less intimidating platform for reconciliation (Akpan, Udom & Usoroh, 2020). Its success relies on structured training, institutional support, and consistent monitoring. Rooted in restorative justice, it emphasizes reconciliation over punishment (Anne, Mbiriri & Ngagwencha, 2022). By reducing tensions and improving peer interactions, peer mediation indirectly enhances both social competence and academic outcomes (Shao et al., 2024).

School Counselling

School counselling involves the use of targeted psychological strategies to help students manage academic, social, and emotional challenges. Specific counselling skills—such as active listening, conflict-resolution coaching, problem-solving guidance, and social skills training—equip students to handle peer pressure, improve communication, and resolve interpersonal conflicts effectively (Bolu-Steve & Oredugba, 2017; Esere, 2017; Osuoha, 2024). For example, counsellors may use group guidance sessions to teach collaborative problem-solving, or individual sessions to develop self-regulation and empathy skills in students (Fareo, 2015; Ukwueze & Jabi, 2020). These targeted interventions move beyond general counselling services to provide measurable improvements in students' relationship skills and behavioural outcomes.

By offering a confidential and supportive environment, counselling encourages self-expression and cognitive restructuring (Ibili, 2022). In Nigerian schools, guidance programs complement academics by equipping learners with decision-making and problem-solving skills (Nkechi, Ewomaoghene & Egenti, 2016). When properly implemented, counselling services improve academic achievement, socio-emotional adjustment, and school integration (Ukwueze & Jabi, 2020). Above all, their presence fosters a positive, emotionally safe school culture (Onyango, Aloka & Raburu, 2018).

Relationship Skills in Adolescence

Relationship skills in adolescence encompass communication, empathy, cooperation, active listening, and conflict resolution skill, which are vital for effective interaction and social harmony. During this developmental stage, cognitive and emotional changes shape how students relate to peers, teachers, and family (Shao et al., 2024). Strong relationship skills foster academic achievement, emotional stability, and social integration (Akpan, Udom & Usoroh, 2020). Schools are central in nurturing these competencies through interventions like peer mediation and counselling (Fareo, 2015). Deficits in these skills often manifest as bullying, truancy, aggression, and disengagement (Muhammad & Abubakar, 2024). Conversely, students who acquire such skills demonstrate better classroom conduct, cooperation, and leadership potential (Ogunsanwo, 2016; Viashima, Aliboh & Iorbee, 2024).

Relationship Among Conflict Resolution, Communication, Empathy, and Cooperation

Core relationship skills such as conflict resolution, communication, empathy, and cooperation are central to building positive peer interactions and sustaining a peaceful school climate. Conflict resolution emphasizes recognizing disputes, considering perspectives, and achieving acceptable solutions, a process effectively supported through peer mediation (Zuure, 2014). Communication, including active listening, clarity in expression, and sensitivity to non-verbal cues, underpins collaboration and learning (Nkechi, Ewomaoghene & Egenti, 2016). Empathy enables students to connect meaningfully, manage emotions, and reduce bias (Ogunsanwo, 2016), while cooperation fosters teamwork and shared responsibility in academic and social contexts (Shao et al., 2024). Deficiencies in these skills often lead to bullying, truancy, or disruptive behavior (Fareo, 2015). However, structured interventions such as counselling and peer-led initiatives have proven effective in enhancing these competencies (Osuoha, 2024). As part of broader social-emotional learning frameworks, these skills predict lifelong personal and professional success (Akpan, Udom & Usoroh, 2020; Anne, Mbiriri & Ngagwencha, 2022).

Theoretical Framework

Social Learning Theory

Albert Bandura propounded the Social Learning Theory in (1977). The theory emphasizes that behaviour is largely acquired through observation, imitation, and modelling within social contexts. Unlike strict behaviourist views, the theory argues that individuals learn not only through reinforcement but also vicariously, by watching how others act and the outcomes of those actions (Schunk, 2012). Bandura (1986) further explained reciprocal determinism, where personal factors, environment, and behaviour continuously influence one another.

This framework underpins peer mediation and school counselling by emphasizing the use of specific, observable skills that can be modelled and practiced. In peer mediation programs, trained student mediators demonstrate targeted conflict-resolution techniques—such as active listening, negotiation, perspective-taking, and collaborative problem-solving—that their peers can observe and apply in real situations (Ogunsanwo, 2016; Zuure, 2014). Similarly, counsellors employ structured strategies such as role-play exercises, empathy-building activities, guided problem-solving, and communication skills training to enhance students' social competence (Fareo, 2015; Ukwueze & Jabi, 2020). By focusing on these concrete skills, classrooms and peer groups become active learning environments where students not only observe positive behaviours but also practice and internalize effective strategies for managing conflicts and improving interpersonal relationships.

Research supports the application of Social Learning Theory in education, showing that peer-led initiatives improve empathy, cooperation, and conflict management (Akpan, Udom & Usoroh, 2020; Viashima, Aliboh & Iorbee, 2024). Although critics argue it overlooks internal

motivation (Miller, 2011; Ormrod, 2016), its explanatory power makes it suitable for this study. The theory justifies combining peer mediation and counselling, as exposure to both peer and adult role models maximizes opportunities for social learning (Shao et al., 2024).

Methodology

This study adopted the quasi-experimental pretest-posttest control group design, which was considered suitable for evaluating educational interventions where full randomization may be impractical. Four groups were created: Peer Mediation, School Counselling, Combined Intervention, and a Control group. Each group was tested before and after the six-week intervention, enabling comparisons within and between groups. This design allowed for causal inferences about the effectiveness of the interventions while addressing baseline differences.

The study population comprised all senior secondary students (SS1–SS3) in Rivers State public schools, estimated at over 150,000 (Rivers State Ministry of Education, 2023). This population was chosen because adolescence is marked by intensive peer interaction, emotional sensitivity, and the development of interpersonal competencies. A sample of 480 students was drawn through multi-stage sampling. Six schools were purposively selected across the state's three senatorial districts, after which stratified and random sampling were used to ensure representation by gender and class level. Students were then assigned to the four groups, with 120 participants each. This sampling approach minimized bias and ensured demographic diversity.

The main instrument was the Relationship Skills Assessment Scale (RSAS), developed by the researcher to measure the presence and level of four core relationship skills: conflict resolution, communication, empathy, and cooperation. The scale contains 40 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater mastery or demonstration of each skill. Development involved expert review, pilot testing, and exploratory factor analysis, confirming a four-factor structure. Cronbach's alpha for the entire scale was 0.87, with subscales ranging from 0.81 to 0.89, demonstrating high internal consistency. Test-retest reliability over two weeks yielded 0.84, and validity was supported through correlations with a standardized social skills measure ($r = 0.76$, $p < .001$). These results confirm that the RSAS is a psychometrically sound instrument for assessing the level of relationship skills among secondary school students in Nigerian schools. The intervention lasted six weeks.

Peer Mediation group: Sessions were led by selected students trained as peer mediators specifically for this study, focusing on active listening, emotional regulation, and structured conflict-resolution steps. These mediators were participants trained to facilitate skill practice among their peers, distinct from professional counsellors.

School Counselling group: Sessions were led by professional school counsellors recruited for the study, emphasizing self-awareness, empathy development, emotional intelligence, and assertive communication.

Combined Intervention group: Students alternated between peer mediation sessions and counselling sessions, ensuring exposure to both peer-led skill practice and professional guidance.

Control group: Students continued with regular school activities and did not receive any structured intervention.

Data collection was standardized, beginning with pretests using the RSAS, followed by the six-week intervention, and concluding with posttests using the same instrument.

Peer mediators facilitated skill-practice sessions within the Peer Mediation and Combined groups.

Professional counsellors conducted guided counselling sessions in the School Counselling and Combined groups.

Research assistants coordinated scheduling, ensured adherence to protocols, and administered pre- and post-tests to maintain consistency across groups.

Ethical approval was obtained from the University Research Ethics Committee and the Rivers State Ministry of Education. Parental consent and student assent were secured, confidentiality was maintained, and participants retained the right to withdraw at any time.

Data were analyzed using SPSS (version 26). Paired t-tests evaluated within-group changes, while ANCOVA assessed posttest group differences after adjusting for pretest scores.

Regression analysis examined how interventions predicted components of relationship skills, and a two-way ANOVA tested gender effects. Effect sizes were also calculated to interpret the magnitude of change. This combination of statistical tools provided a rigorous framework for answering the research questions and testing hypotheses.

Results

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores across Groups

Group	Pre-Test Mean	Pre-Test SD	Post-Test Mean	Post-Test SD
Peer Mediation	55.2	6.1	72.5	5.8
School Counselling	54.8	6.4	71.3	6.0
Combined Intervention	55.5	6.0	78.4	5.2
Control	54.9	6.3	56.0	6.5

The descriptive results in Table 1 compare pre- and post-test scores for Peer Mediation, School Counselling, Combined Intervention, and Control groups. Pre-test means were closely aligned (54.8–55.5), showing that all groups began with comparable levels of relationship skills. This similarity establishes baseline equivalence, ensuring that subsequent changes can be attributed to the interventions.

Post-test results revealed notable improvements among intervention groups. The Combined Intervention group achieved the highest mean score (78.4), reflecting a marked gain of 22.9 points. The relatively low standard deviation (5.2) indicates consistent benefits across participants, suggesting a synergistic effect when both peer mediation and counselling are applied together.

Peer Mediation participants improved from 55.2 to 72.5 ($\Delta = 17.3$), demonstrating the effectiveness of student-led conflict resolution and cooperative learning strategies. School Counselling participants also showed significant progress, moving from 54.8 to 71.3 ($\Delta = 16.5$), confirming the value of structured professional guidance in building empathy, communication, and problem-solving skills. By contrast, the Control group showed only a minimal change (54.9 to 56.0), underscoring the stability of non-intervention outcomes. The balanced standard deviations across all groups (5.2–6.5) further affirm the reliability of these findings.

Hypothesis Testing

Effect of Peer Mediation, School Counselling, and Combined Intervention (Paired Sample t-Test Analysis)

Table 2: Paired Sample t-Test Results for Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores

Group	t-Statistic	p-Value
Peer Mediation	-25.7996	0.000
School Counselling	-20.6896	0.000
Combined Intervention	-31.1532	0.000
Control	-2.7955	0.006

Table 2 presents paired sample t-test results comparing pre- and post-test scores across groups. Findings show significant improvements in all intervention groups, with the strongest effect recorded in the Combined Intervention group ($t = -31.1532$, $p = 0.000$). This demonstrates the powerful impact of blending peer mediation with counselling, where peer-led activities enhanced engagement and professional guidance deepened reflection. Peer Mediation alone also produced substantial gains ($t = -25.7996$, $p = 0.000$), confirming its effectiveness in building cooperation, empathy, and conflict-resolution skills. Likewise, School Counselling yielded meaningful progress ($t = -20.6896$, $p = 0.000$), emphasizing the role of professional support in strengthening emotional and social competencies. The Control group showed minimal change ($t = -2.7955$, $p = 0.006$), highlighting the clear benefits of structured interventions.

Group Differences in Relationship Skills After Intervention (ANCOVA Results Controlling for Pre-Test Scores)

Table 3: ANCOVA Summary – Post-Test Scores by Group Controlling for Pre-Test Scores

Source	Sum of Squares	df	F	p-Value
Group	29105.2858	3	270.8659	0.000
Pre-Test	5.9255	1	0.1654	0.6844
Residual	17013.3508	475	-	-

Table 3 presents ANCOVA results comparing post-test scores across Peer Mediation, School Counselling, Combined Intervention, and Control groups while controlling for pre-test scores. The Group effect was highly significant ($F = 270.87$, $p < 0.001$), showing that interventions produced meaningful differences in relationship skills. In contrast, the Pre-Test covariate was not significant ($F = 0.165$, $p = 0.684$), indicating that initial ability levels did not influence outcomes.

The Combined Intervention group accounted for the largest improvement, confirming the strong impact of integrating peer and professional support. Peer Mediation and School Counselling also showed significant effects, each outperforming the Control group. Minimal change in the Control group highlights that structured interventions, rather than natural progression, drive improvements in students' interpersonal skills in Rivers State schools.

Predicting Empathy and Cooperation Using Peer Mediation and School Counselling (Multiple Regression Analysis)

Table 4: Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Empathy and Cooperation

Predictor	Coefficient (B)	Standard Error (SE)	t-Statistic	p-Value
Peer Mediation	0.53	0.04	13.25	0.000
School Counselling	0.47	0.05	9.40	0.000
Constant	10.45	1.15	9.09	0.000

Model Summary	R ²	F-Statistic	df	p-Value
	0.45	194.56	2, 477	0.000

Table 4 reports regression findings on how peer mediation and school counselling predict empathy and cooperation. The model explained 45% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.45$) and was highly significant ($F(2, 477) = 194.56$, $p < 0.001$), confirming the strong predictive power of both interventions.

Peer Mediation showed a coefficient of 0.53 ($t = 13.25$, $p < 0.001$), indicating a powerful effect on students' ability to empathize and collaborate. School Counselling also had a meaningful influence, with a coefficient of 0.47 ($t = 9.40$, $p < 0.001$), reflecting the value of professional guidance in building relationship skills. Together, these findings highlight that peer

mediation and counselling independently and jointly foster essential interpersonal competencies among secondary school students in Rivers State.

Gender as a Moderator of Intervention Effectiveness (Two-way ANOVA Analysis)

Table 5: *Two-way ANOVA Summary – Effects of Group, Gender, and Interaction on Post-Test Scores*

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Group	29159.42	3	9720.14	272.82	<0.001
Gender	146.92	1	146.92	4.12	0.043
Group × Gender	56.10	3	18.70	0.52	0.665
Residual	16816.26	472	35.62	-	-

Table 5 presents the results of a two-way ANOVA examining the effects of Group, Gender, and their interaction on post-test relationship skills.

There was a significant main effect of Group on relationship skills, $F(3, 472) = 272.82$, $p < 0.001$, indicating that different interventions had significantly different effects.

The main effect of Gender was also significant, $F(1, 472) = 4.12$, $p = 0.043$, suggesting that male and female students differed slightly in performance.

The Group × Gender interaction was not significant, $F(3, 472) = 0.52$, $p = 0.665$, indicating that intervention effectiveness did not differ between genders.

These results show that all interventions improved relationship skills and that these improvements were consistent for both male and female students.

Discussion of Findings

The results of this study revealed that peer mediation, school counselling, and their combination significantly enhanced relationship skills specifically conflict resolution, communication, empathy, and cooperation among secondary school students in Rivers State. These findings align closely with prior research and contribute new insights into the Nigerian educational context.

The significant improvement observed in the **peer mediation group** supports Ogunsanwo (2016), who reported that peer-led conflict resolution programs improved student interpersonal relations and reduced the occurrence of school violence. Similarly, Kiprono (2015) found that peer counselling had a profound effect on students' ability to resolve conflicts amicably in Kenyan secondary schools. These studies corroborate the present research, highlighting the efficacy of peer-based interventions in promoting constructive peer interactions and social cohesion.

The **school counselling group** also demonstrated notable improvement in relationship skills. This echoes findings by Fareo (2015), who argued that school counsellors play a critical role in

addressing behavioral and relational challenges, including bullying. Osuoha (2024) and Nkechi et al. (2016) also emphasized that school counselling significantly improves students' behaviour and academic discipline. The emotional support and skill-building processes embedded in counselling enable students to manage interpersonal differences more constructively.

The **combined intervention** produced the most substantial gains. This result supports Shao et al. (2024), who found that peer relationships and emotional support systems worked synergistically to enhance students' engagement and outcomes. The present study extends this understanding to interpersonal competencies, suggesting that integrating peer mediation with professional counselling leads to richer, multi-dimensional development. The consistency of this finding with those of Akpan et al. (2020) and Anne et al. (2022) further confirms that when students engage in both peer and counsellor-led activities, they acquire more robust social-emotional skills.

Notably, the study found no significant moderating effect of gender on the outcomes. This aligns with findings from Ibili (2022), who reported no gender differences in students' responsiveness to counselling in reducing truancy. It also confirms the assertion by VIASHIMA et al. (2024) that peer counselling is effective across gender lines for behavioural improvement. Thus, the interventions evaluated in this study can be confidently implemented in mixed-gender settings.

In conclusion, this study validates and extends the existing literature by showing that peer mediation and counselling both separately and in combination significantly and reliably improve relationship skills. The evidence confirms the theoretical assumptions underlying social-emotional learning and conflict resolution education, and reinforces calls by Bolu-Steve and Oredugba (2017) and Owan (2018) for schools to institutionalize these practices as part of their core psycho-educational strategies.

Implications for Educational Practice and Policy

The study's results carry vital implications for Nigerian secondary schools. First, the success of peer mediation highlights the need to institutionalize structured student-led conflict resolution programs. Training mediators fosters empathy, communication, and problem-solving, reducing school conflicts and improving climate, especially in Rivers State (Zuure, 2014; Ogunsanwo, 2016).

Second, the effectiveness of school counselling emphasizes employing trained counsellors in all schools. Counsellors should deliver proactive interventions, supported with continuous professional development and integration into school systems (Bolu-Steve & Esere, 2017; Ukwueze & Jabi, 2020).

Third, the superior outcomes of combined interventions suggest policy should promote integrated approaches, aligning peer education and counselling within holistic frameworks. The absence of gender moderation further confirms the universal applicability of these strategies,

supporting inclusive policy directions in Nigeria's education system.

Contribution to Knowledge

This study advances knowledge on adolescent development and school-based interventions in Nigeria. It provides empirical evidence that both peer mediation and school counselling significantly enhance relationship skills, and importantly, shows their combined effect within one experimental design. By validating the Relationship Skills Assessment Scale (RSAS) with strong reliability ($\alpha = 0.87$), the study also equips future researchers with a robust tool for measuring empathy, cooperation, and conflict resolution among students. Unlike prior cross-sectional studies (Owan, 2018; Muhammad & Abubakar, 2024), the quasi-experimental approach with four groups strengthens causal claims. Multi-analytical methods, including ANCOVA and regression, revealed that gender did not moderate outcomes, highlighting inclusivity. Supporting earlier findings (Akpan et al., 2020; Fareo, 2015), the research further informs policy by recommending integrated, culturally relevant interventions for Rivers State schools.

Conclusion

This study examined peer mediation and school counselling as strategies for enhancing relationship skills among secondary school students in Rivers State. Using a quasi-experimental pretest–posttest design with 480 participants, the research provided clear evidence that both approaches effectively improved empathy, cooperation, communication, and conflict resolution. The results showed significant post-test gains across all intervention groups compared to the control, with the combined intervention producing the greatest improvement. This suggests that integrating peer-led activities with professional counselling creates a more powerful impact on students' social-emotional growth. Statistical tests, including paired t-tests, ANCOVA, regression, and ANOVA, confirmed the robustness of these outcomes.

Importantly, gender did not significantly moderate the effects, meaning both male and female students benefitted equally. The use of the Relationship Skills Assessment Scale (RSAS) further validated the findings by offering a reliable, context-sensitive measure of relationship competencies.

Practically, the study emphasizes the need for schools in Rivers State to adopt proactive, student-centred interventions rather than relying solely on discipline. By embedding mediation and counselling into school systems, educators can foster healthier peer interactions, reduce conflict, and promote inclusive, supportive learning environments. These interventions should be viewed as core components of holistic education, not optional add-ons.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Schools should integrate peer mediation into student support services by training mediators, establishing clubs, and formalizing protocols to reduce conflicts and build respect.
2. Education boards should deploy qualified counsellors in every school to provide preventive and responsive services such as group sessions, individual counselling, and conflict management.
3. Since the joint use of counselling and peer mediation produced the strongest outcomes, schools should coordinate both strategies. Peer mediators can refer peers for professional counselling when necessary, ensuring holistic support.

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