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Perceived Influence of Behavioral Counselling on Deviant Behaviours of Boarding Secondary Schools Students in Nasarawa State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the perceived influence of behavioural counselling on deviant behaviours of boarding secondary school students in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. Three specific objectives with corresponding research questions guided the study and three hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance. The study adopted a survey research design. The population of the study was 771 comprising 11 principals, 749 teachers and 11 counsellors in the eleven boarding secondary schools in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. The sample size for the study was 263 respondents, including 4 principals, 255 teachers, and 4 counsellors selected using proportionate stratified and convenience sampling techniques. The instrument for data collection was self-structured questionnaire developed by the researcher titled "Behavioural Counselling and Deviant Behaviours Questionnaire" (BCDBQ). The questionnaire was validated by three experts. The reliability of the questionnaire was established using Cronbach Alpha method and an overall reliability coefficient of 0.83 was obtained. While 263 copies of the questionnaire were administered to the respondents, 255 copies were retrieved. Mean and Standard Deviation were used to answer research questions while Chi-Square Goodness of fit was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Findings of the study revealed that behavioural counselling has significant influence on drug and substance abuse, examination malpractice and bullying among boarding secondary school students in Nasarawa State. The study concluded that behavioural counselling serves as a highly effective intervention strategy for addressing critical behavioural challenges among boarding secondary school students, operating as a comprehensive therapeutic approach that addresses underlying psychological, social, and environmental factors contributing to maladaptive behaviours in residential school settings. The study therefore recommended among others that schools should establish comprehensive substance abuse prevention programmes that integrate behavioural counselling techniques with regular screening and peer support groups.

INTRODUCTION

Globally, behavioural counselling has garnered global acknowledgment as a pivotal intervention for tackling diverse manifestations of deviant behaviours among adolescents. Its application is on the rise within educational environments as a means to address such behaviours. Hatcher and Lassiter (2016) highlight this trend, emphasizing the necessity for tailored counselling interventions to suit the distinctive challenges encountered by students across various cultural and societal landscapes. This recognition underscores the imperative of adopting effective counselling strategies that are sensitive to the needs of adolescents navigating different contexts. The prevalence of deviant behaviours on a global scale accentuates the urgency for implementing targeted interventions in educational settings. Hence, by integrating behavioural counselling into these environments, educators seek to proactively address and mitigate the underlying causes of deviance among adolescents. Such an approach acknowledges the complexities inherent in adolescent behaviour and strives to provide support that is responsive to individual circumstances. As such, the evolving landscape of behavioural counselling in education reflects a concerted effort to foster healthier developmental trajectories for adolescents worldwide.

Behavioural counselling involves the application of psychological principles and techniques to modify behaviours that are causing distress or impairing functioning (Corey, 2016). It encompasses a range of therapeutic techniques aimed at modifying problematic behaviours by identifying underlying causes and implementing strategies for change. It is rooted in behavioural theories, such as social learning theory and cognitive-behavioural therapy, which emphasize the role of environmental influences, cognitive processes, and learned behaviours in shaping human actions. In educational settings, behavioural counselling typically aims to achieve several objectives. According to Corey (2016), these objectives include promoting self-awareness, enhancing problem-solving skills, improving interpersonal relationships, fostering positive attitudes and behaviours, and facilitating personal growth and development. Through individual counselling, group therapy, psycho-education, and behaviour modification techniques, counselors work collaboratively with students to identify maladaptive behaviours, explore underlying factors, and develop coping strategies and alternative responses. The ultimate goal is to empower students to make positive choices, build resilience, and thrive academically and socially within their school communities (Oberle Guhn, Gadermann, Thomson & Schonert-Reichl, 2020). In educational settings, the aim of behavioural counselling is to foster a supportive and conducive learning environment by addressing deviant behaviours of students and promoting their academic success and personal development. Despite the potential benefits of behavioural counselling, deviant behaviours remain prevalent in secondary schools in Nigeria and particularly in Nasarawa State, posing significant challenges to the well-being and academic success of students.

Deviant behaviours among adolescents encompass a spectrum of actions that deviate from societal norms or expectations. These behaviours can manifest in various forms, including delinquency, substance abuse, aggression, and risky sexual behaviours (Burt, Barnes, McGue, & Iacono, 2020). Deviant behaviours often represent a departure from typical developmental trajectories and can result from a multitude of influences, including peer pressure, family dynamics, and socio-economic disparities (Frodigh, Modecki & Hines, 2019). Moreover, they may serve as expressions of underlying emotional distress or coping mechanisms in response to environmental stressors (Gomez-Baya, Rubio-Gonzalez & Gaspar de Matos, 2017, 2017). Deviant behaviours among secondary school students are a prevalent concern globally, with various forms of misconduct posing significant challenges to the educational system. According to a report by UNESCO (2017), deviant behaviours such as drug and substance abuse, examination malpractice, bullying, cultism, and aggressiveness are widespread in secondary schools, impacting students' academic performance, well-being, and social interactions. These behaviours (drug and substance abuse, examination malpractice, bullying, cultism, and aggressiveness among others) not only undermine the integrity of the educational system but also pose risks to the safety and security of students. This study focused on the aforementioned behaviours due to their prevalence in secondary schools.

Drug and substance abuse refers to the habitual or excessive use of psychoactive substances, including illicit drugs and alcohol, which can lead to physical, psychological, and social harm (World Health Organization, 2018). Drug and substance abuse among secondary school students is a growing problem that has serious implications for their health, academic performance, and future prospects (UNODC, 2018). Substance abuse not only impairs cognitive functioning and academic achievement but also increases the risk of physical and mental health problems, including addiction, overdose, and psychiatric disorders. The accessibility of drugs and the influence of peer pressure contribute to the prevalence of substance abuse among adolescents, highlighting the need for preventive and intervention measures, including behavioural counselling. Behavioural counselling interventions aim to mitigate these risk factors by providing students with coping mechanisms and decision-making skills to resist substance use temptations (Bello & Nwosu, 2019). Hence, by fostering a supportive environment and promoting positive peer interactions, counselling programs can empower students to make informed choices regarding drug and substance use.

Another deviant behaviour exhibited by students is examination malpractice. Examination malpractice encompasses various dishonest or fraudulent behaviours aimed at gaining an unfair advantage during academic assessments (Okebukola & Jegede, 2018). This phenomenon extends beyond cheating on exams to include actions such as plagiarism, impersonation, collusion, and bribery. In educational settings, examination malpractice undermines the integrity of assessment processes and erodes trust in academic qualifications. Examination malpractice is a pervasive issue in secondary schools, undermining the credibility and fairness of academic assessments (Olatoye & Olatoye, 2019). The pressure to excel academically, combined with inadequate supervision and weak enforcement of regulations, contributes to its

prevalence. In the boarding school environment, where students often face heightened pressure to perform, examination malpractice presents significant challenges to maintaining academic integrity and upholding ethical standards. To address this issue, effective interventions, including behavioural counselling, are essential to deter students from engaging in such misconduct.

The rising incidence of deviant behaviours among boarding secondary school students in Nasarawa State, Nigeria—such as drug and substance abuse, examination malpractice, bullying, cultism, and aggressive conduct—has become a source of serious concern for educators, parents, and policymakers. These behaviours not only disrupt the learning environment but also pose long-term risks to students' academic and personal development. While behavioural counselling has been identified as a potential tool for addressing such challenges, there remains a significant gap in understanding its perceived effectiveness in the unique context of boarding schools, where students may face heightened peer pressure, reduced parental supervision, and other situational stressors. This study was therefore warranted to investigate how behavioural counselling is perceived to influence the reduction or management of these specific deviant behaviours.

Statement of the Problem

Boarding secondary schools are structured to offer not only academic learning but also moral development and socialisation in a controlled and supportive environment. Students in such settings are expected to adhere to school rules, engage positively with peers, and develop the discipline needed for academic and personal success. However, recent trends in Nasarawa State, Nigeria, reveal a growing prevalence of deviant behaviours among boarding students, threatening the effectiveness of these educational settings in fulfilling their roles.

Emerging reports and school records have identified a troubling increase in behaviours such as drug and substance abuse, examination malpractice, bullying, cultism, and aggressive conduct. Drug and substance abuse among adolescents impairs cognitive development and academic performance, while examination malpractice erodes the integrity of the school system. Bullying and aggressiveness foster unsafe environments, often resulting in psychological distress for victims. Cultism, perhaps the most alarming, introduces fear and violence, creating serious security risks within school communities (Ola & Osho, 2018).

The persistence of these behaviours has both immediate and long-term consequences. Academically, affected students often perform poorly and undermine the credibility of the school system. Socially, a climate of mistrust, fear, and anxiety emerges, impacting student mental health and well-being. These outcomes diminish public confidence in the boarding school system and may lead to broader societal issues if students carry such behaviours into adulthood.

Despite the availability of school counselling services, there is limited empirical understanding of how behavioural counselling is perceived in terms of its effectiveness in addressing these specific deviant behaviours within boarding schools in Nasarawa State. Existing research supports the role of behavioural counselling in modifying adolescent behaviour (Okobiah & Okorodudu, 2006), but there remains a contextual gap concerning how such interventions are perceived and utilised in Nigerian boarding school environments. Given the escalating nature of the problem, this study sought to examine the perceived influence of behavioural counselling on deviant behaviours among boarding secondary school students in Nasarawa State.

Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceived influence of behavioural counselling on deviant behaviours of boarding secondary school students in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to achieve the following objectives:

1. Determine the perceived influence of behavioural counselling on drug and substance abuse of boarding secondary school students in Nasarawa State

2. Ascertain the perceived influence of behavioural counselling on examination malpractice among boarding secondary school students in Nasarawa State
3. Find out the perceived influence of behavioural counselling on bullying among boarding secondary school students in Nasarawa State

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a survey research design. The study was carried out in Boarding Secondary Schools in Nasarawa State. The population for the study is 771 comprising 11 principals, 749 teachers and 11 counsellors in the eleven (13) boarding secondary schools in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. The sample size for the study consists of 263 respondents, including principals, teachers, and counselors, determined using Taro Yamane's Sample Size Determination Formula. The instrument for data collection was a self-structured questionnaire titled "Behavioural Counselling and Deviant Behaviours Questionnaire (BCDBQ)". The instrument was subjected to face and content validation by three experts, two from Guidance and Counselling, and one from Measurement and Evaluation. The instrument yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.83 using the Cronbach alpha method. Data for the study was collected by the researcher in collaboration with a team of five research assistants. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics of Means and Standard Deviation to answer the research questions while Chi-square goodness of fit was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question 1: What is the perceived influence of behavioural counselling on drug and substance abuse among boarding secondary school students in Nasarawa State?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation Analysis of the perceived influence of behavioural counselling on drug and substance abuse among boarding secondary school students in Nasarawa State, Nigeria

S/N	Item Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	St.D	Remark
1	Helping students understand and change their behaviors has significantly reduce their interest in using drugs and substances.	92	102	32	29	3.01	.97	Agree
2	Counselling sessions where students are guided to understand and change harmful habits helped them recognize the dangers of drug and substance abuse.	89	90	42	34	2.92	1.02	Agree
3	Students feel more confident in resisting peer pressure to use drugs after attending sessions focused on building positive behaviors.	98	89	43	25	3.02	.97	Agree
4	Guiding students to develop healthier habits has helped provide them with effective strategies to avoid drug and substance abuse	94	108	37	16	3.10	.87	Agree
5	Noticeable decrease is achieved in drug and substance abuse among students who participate in sessions that teach them better ways to manage challenges.	102	80	52	21	3.03	.97	Agree

S/N	Item Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	St.D	Remark
6	Teaching students how to replace harmful behaviors with positive ones has made make them more aware of the support systems available for dealing with drug and substance abuse.	97	100	39	19	3.08	.91	Agree
Cluster Mean						3.03	.95	Agree

The findings presented in Table 1 reveal that behavioural counselling is perceived to have a positive influence on reducing drug and substance abuse among boarding secondary school students in Nasarawa State. All six items assessing different aspects of behavioural counselling—such as helping students understand and change harmful habits, resist peer pressure, develop healthier coping strategies, and become more aware of support systems—received mean scores ranging from 2.92 – 3.08 which are above the benchmark of 2.50, indicating agreement among respondents. The overall cluster mean of 3.03 with a standard deviation of 0.95 further confirms a consistent perception that behavioural counselling effectively contributes to minimizing drug and substance abuse.

Research Question 2: What is the perceived influence of behavioural counselling on examination malpractice among boarding secondary school students in Nasarawa State?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation Analysis of the perceived influence of behavioural counselling on examination malpractice among boarding secondary school students in Nasarawa State, Nigeria

S/N	Item Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	St.D	Remark
7	Sessions that help students understand and change harmful behaviors has helped them recognize the consequences of engaging in examination malpractice.	92	112	22	29	3.05	.95	Agree
8	Students are less inclined to participate in examination malpractice after attending counselling sessions focused on building positive behaviors.	89	100	32	34	2.96	1.00	Agree
9	Counselling sessions that emphasize ethical behavior are expected to reinforce the importance of academic integrity among students.	98	89	43	25	3.02	.97	Agree
10	Guiding students to develop better study habits has reduced the temptation to engage in examination malpractice.	94	78	67	16	2.98	.94	Agree
11	A decline in examination malpractice is achieved among students who participate in counselling sessions aimed at promoting positive behaviors.	102	80	52	21	3.03	.97	Agree

S/N	Item Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	St.D	Remark
12	Teaching ethical principles through counselling sessions influences students' perspectives on academic honesty.	97	70	69	19	2.96	.97	Agree
Cluster Mean						3.00	.97	Agree

The data in Table 2 indicate that behavioural counselling is perceived to positively influence the reduction of examination malpractice among boarding secondary school students in Nasarawa State. All six items assessed received mean scores ranging from 2.96 – 3.05 which are above the benchmark of 2.50, signifying that respondents generally agree that counselling interventions—especially those focusing on behavioural change, ethical awareness, academic integrity, and improved study habits—help curb examination malpractice. The highest-rated item (Mean = 3.05) shows that sessions guiding students to understand the consequences of malpractice are particularly effective. With a cluster mean of 3.00 and a standard deviation of 0.97, the responses reflect a moderate but consistent agreement across the board.

What is the perceived influence of behavioural counselling on bullying among boarding secondary school students in Nasarawa State?

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation Analysis of the perceived influence of behavioural counselling on bullying among boarding secondary school students in Nasarawa State, Nigeria

S/N	Item Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	St.D	Remark
12	Counselling sessions that help students understand and change harmful behaviors increase their awareness of the negative impacts of bullying.	92	82	52	29	2.93	1.02	Agree
14	Students are less inclined to engage in bullying behavior after attending sessions focused on promoting positive and respectful actions.	89	90	42	34	2.92	1.01	Agree
15	Counseling sessions that teach strategies for addressing bullying empower students to stand up against it.	98	89	43	25	3.02	.97	Agree
16	Guiding students to adopt respectful and inclusive behaviors foster a more welcoming and supportive environment among peers.	94	98	47	16	3.06	.90	Agree
17	A reduction in bullying incidents is achieved among students who participate in sessions aimed at encouraging positive interactions.	102	80	52	21	3.03	.97	Agree
18	Activities that promote empathy during counseling sessions has helped students	97	80	59	19	3.00	.96	Agree

S/N	Item Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	St.D	Remark
	better understand the feelings of those who experience bullying.							
	Cluster Mean					2.99	.97	Agree

The results presented in Table 3 demonstrate that behavioural counselling is perceived to have a positive impact on reducing bullying among boarding secondary school students in Nasarawa State. All six items assessing this influence received mean scores ranging from 2.92 – 3.03, all above the threshold of 2.50, indicating general agreement among respondents. Key aspects such as promoting empathy, teaching respectful behavior, and empowering students to address bullying were positively acknowledged, with the highest mean (3.03) indicating that sessions aimed at encouraging positive interactions are particularly effective. The overall cluster mean of 2.99 and standard deviation of 0.97 suggest consistent agreement across the responses, implying that behavioural counselling contributes to increasing students' awareness of the consequences of bullying, encouraging respectful peer interactions, and fostering a more supportive school environment.

Hypothesis 1: Behavioural counselling has no significant influence on drug and substance abuse among boarding secondary school students in Nasarawa State

Table 4: Chi-Square Goodness of fit test of significance of the perceived influence of behavioural counselling on drug and substance abuse among boarding secondary school students in Nasarawa State

Response Options	Observed N	Expected N	Df	χ^2_{cal}	Sig	α – level	Remark
SA	95	63.75					
A	106	63.75					
D	31	63.75					
SD	24	63.75					
Total	255		3	140.177	.000	.05	Significant

Df = Degree of Freedom; χ^2_{cal} = Chi-Square Calculated Value; Sig = P-Value, $P < 0.05$

Table 4 shows the Chi-square calculated value of 140.177, degree of freedom (df) =3 and a sig (P-value=.000) which is less than the alpha value (α) of 0.05. Since $P < 0.05$, the result is significant, therefore the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that, behavioural counselling has significant influence on drug and substance abuse among boarding secondary school students in Nasarawa State

Hypothesis 2: Behavioural counselling has no significant influence on examination malpractice among boarding secondary school students in Nasarawa State

Table 5: Chi-Square Goodness of fit test of significance of the perceived influence of behavioural counselling on examination malpractice among boarding secondary school students in Nasarawa State

Response Options	Observed N	Expected N	Df	χ^2_{cal}	Sig	α - level	Remark
SA	100	63.75					
A	90	63.75					
D	45	63.75					
SD	20	63.75					
Total	255		3	127.919	.000	.05	Significant

Df = Degree of Freedom; χ^2_{cal} = Chi-Square Calculated Value; Sig = P-Value, $P < 0.05$

Table 5 shows the Chi-square calculated value of 127.919, degree of freedom (df) =3 and a sig (P-value=.000) which is less than the alpha value (α) of 0.05. Since $P < 0.05$, the result is significant, therefore the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that, behavioural counselling has significant influence on drug and substance abuse among boarding secondary school students in Nasarawa State

Hypothesis 3: Behavioural counselling has no significant influence on bullying among boarding secondary school students in Nasarawa State

Table 6: Chi-Square Goodness of fit test of significance of the perceived influence of behavioural counselling on bullying among boarding secondary school students in Nasarawa State

Response Options	Observed N	Expected N	Df	χ^2_{cal}	Sig	α - level	Remark
SA	96	63.75					
A	83	63.75					
D	53	63.75					
SD	23	63.75					
Total	255		3	123.794	.000	.05	Significant

Df = Degree of Freedom; χ^2_{cal} = Chi-Square Calculated Value; Sig = P-Value, $P < 0.05$

Table 6 shows the Chi-square calculated value of 123.794, degree of freedom (df) =3 and a sig (P-value=.075) which is greater than the alpha value (α) of 0.05. Since $P < 0.05$, the result is not significant, therefore the null hypothesis is not

rejected. This implies that, behavioural counselling has significant influence on bullying among boarding secondary school students in Nasarawa State

Discussion of Findings

The first finding of the study revealed that behavioural counselling has significant influence on drug and substance abuse among boarding secondary school students in Nasarawa State. The finding shows that behavioural counselling is perceived to have a positive influence on reducing drug and substance abuse among boarding secondary school students in Nasarawa State. This suggests that counselling sessions that help students understand harmful behaviors, resist peer pressure, and develop healthier habits effectively contribute to decreasing substance abuse and increasing awareness of support systems. This finding aligns strongly with several empirical studies in the literature. Okonkwo et al. (2023) demonstrated that Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT) had a significant effect on methamphetamine use among youths in Anambra State, showing a significant difference between experimental and control groups. Similarly, Saaondo (2020) found that REBT was significantly effective in helping students overcome substance abuse challenges, with significant differences between experimental and control groups. These findings consistently support the present study's conclusion that behavioural counselling interventions are effective in addressing substance abuse. The alignment across these studies suggests that cognitive-behavioural approaches, whether through general behavioural counselling or specific REBT interventions, share common mechanisms of effectiveness in substance abuse treatment.

Several factors might contribute to the effectiveness of behavioural counselling in reducing substance abuse among boarding school students. The residential nature of boarding schools creates a controlled environment where intensive counselling interventions can be implemented consistently, allowing for better monitoring and support of students' progress. Additionally, behavioural counselling techniques that focus on identifying triggers, developing coping strategies, and building resistance to peer pressure are particularly relevant in the adolescent boarding school context where peer influence is heightened. The implications of this finding are significant for educational policy and practice, suggesting that schools should invest in comprehensive behavioural counselling programs as a preventive and therapeutic intervention. This finding also implies that early intervention through structured counselling can prevent the escalation of substance abuse problems, potentially reducing long-term health, social, and academic consequences for students.

The second finding of the study revealed that behavioural counselling has significant influence on examination malpractice among boarding secondary school students in Nasarawa State. The finding indicates that behavioural counselling is perceived to have a positive influence on reducing examination malpractice among boarding secondary school students in Nasarawa State. This suggests that counselling sessions that promote ethical principles, positive behaviour, and academic integrity help students become more aware of the consequences of malpractice and discourage such behaviour. This finding demonstrating that behavioural counselling significantly influences examination malpractice among boarding secondary school students finds substantial support in the empirical literature. Oguzie et al. (2019) investigated group counselling effects on examination malpractice tendency among secondary school students in Imo State and found that group counselling was significantly effective in reducing such tendencies. The study also revealed that group counselling was more effective among female students than males, indicating gender-sensitive responses to counselling interventions. Mopelola and Ayodeji (2017) similarly found significant effects of group counselling on youths' attitudes toward examination malpractices in Lagos State, with no significant gender differences in treatment response. Egbo (2015) identified multiple counselling strategies that could effectively address examination malpractice, emphasizing the need for comprehensive approaches involving personal/social, educational, and teacher sensitization strategies.

The effectiveness of behavioural counselling in reducing examination malpractice can be attributed to several interconnected factors. Boarding school environments often create intense academic pressure and competition, which can lead students to consider unethical academic practices. Behavioural counselling interventions that address underlying anxiety, teach effective study strategies, and promote academic integrity help students develop healthier approaches to academic challenges. The counselling process likely works by helping students understand the long-term consequences of academic dishonesty while building their confidence in legitimate academic achievement. The implications of this finding

extend beyond individual student outcomes to institutional integrity and educational quality. Schools implementing comprehensive behavioural counselling programs can expect to see improvements in academic culture, reduced incidents of examination malpractice, and enhanced student character development. This finding suggests that addressing examination malpractice requires more than punitive measures; it necessitates supportive interventions that address the root causes of such behaviour.

The third finding of the study revealed that behavioural counselling has significant influence on bullying among boarding secondary school students in Nasarawa State. The finding reveals that behavioural counselling is perceived to have a positive influence on reducing bullying among boarding secondary school students in Nasarawa State. This suggests that counselling sessions which focus on promoting empathy, respectful behaviour, and anti-bullying strategies help students become more aware of the negative effects of bullying and reduce their engagement in such behaviour. This finding is strongly supported by empirical evidence focusing on cognitive-behavioural interventions for bullying. Williford et al. (2012) evaluated the KiVa anti-bullying program, which utilizes cognitive-behavioural techniques and computer-based scenarios to address bullying behaviour. Their results demonstrated that the program significantly reduced depression and anxiety symptoms among bullying victims while improving their peer perceptions. The cognitive-behavioural approach used in KiVa proved effective in mitigating the negative consequences of bullying for victims. Similarly, Leff et al. (2010) found that the PRAISE program, which employed cognitive-behavioural approaches, significantly reduced relational aggression and peer victimization among intervention participants compared to control groups. These studies consistently demonstrate that structured behavioural interventions can effectively address various forms of bullying and aggressive behaviour in school settings.

The effectiveness of behavioural counselling in reducing bullying among boarding school students can be attributed to the intensive nature of residential school environments and the specific mechanisms of behavioural interventions. Boarding schools present unique challenges where students live in close proximity, potentially intensifying interpersonal conflicts and power dynamics that contribute to bullying. Behavioural counselling interventions that focus on empathy development, conflict resolution skills, and prosocial behaviour modification are particularly effective in these settings because they address both the perpetrators' behaviour patterns and the environmental factors that sustain bullying. The residential context also allows for more comprehensive intervention implementation and monitoring. The implications of this finding are substantial for creating safer school environments and promoting positive school climate. Effective behavioural counselling programs can break cycles of victimization and aggression, leading to improved mental health outcomes for all students, enhanced academic performance, and stronger school community relationships. This finding suggests that schools should prioritize comprehensive anti-bullying strategies that include individual and group behavioural counselling components rather than relying solely on disciplinary measures.

Conclusion

Based on this study, it can be concluded that, behavioural counselling serves as a highly effective intervention strategy for addressing critical behavioural challenges among boarding secondary school students in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. The study demonstrates that behavioural counselling significantly influences and reduces three major problematic behaviours: drug and substance abuse, examination malpractice and bullying. These findings collectively indicate that behavioural counselling operates as a comprehensive therapeutic approach that addresses the underlying psychological, social, and environmental factors contributing to maladaptive behaviours in residential school settings.

Recommendations

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

1. Schools should establish comprehensive substance abuse prevention programmes that integrate behavioural counselling techniques, including regular screening for at-risk students and implementation of peer support groups.

2. Educational institutions should develop structured behavioural counselling programmes specifically targeting examination malpractice, incorporating stress management techniques and study skills training.
3. Boarding schools should implement comprehensive anti-bullying programmes that utilize behavioural counselling approaches, including both individual and group counselling sessions for perpetrators and victims.

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