

EFFECT OF PEER-MEDIATED COUNSELLING ON RESILIENCE AND SCHOOL ADJUSTMENT AMONG ORPHANED AND VULNERABLE ADOLESCENTS IN JOS METROPOLIS, PLATEAU STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined the effect of peer-mediated counseling on resilience and school adjustment among orphaned and vulnerable adolescents in Jos metropolis, Plateau State, Nigeria. The study was motivated by the increasing psychosocial and academic challenges faced by orphaned and vulnerable children, which often result in low resilience and poor adjustment to school environments. A quasi-experimental research design, specifically the pretest, posttest control group design was adopted. The population of the study consisted of all orphaned and vulnerable adolescents in public secondary schools in Jos metropolis. The sample consisted of 96 adolescents selected from public secondary schools using a multi-stage sampling, purposive sampling and simple random sampling techniques assigned to experimental and control groups, over a period of 8 weeks. Data were collected using a structured instrument titled "Peer-Mediated Counselling on Resilience and School Adjustment Questionnaire (PMCRSAQ)" which was validated by experts in Counselling, Educational Psychology, and Research, Measurement and Evaluation in Faculty of Education, University of Jos. The reliability was ensured through Cronbach Alpha method, which gave an index of 0.78. Data collected were analysed using mean, standard deviation, and t-tests at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that peer-mediated counselling had a significant positive effect on both resilience and school adjustment among the students. There were significant differences between the experimental and control groups in favour of the students who participated in the intervention. The study concluded that peer-mediated counselling is an effective and practical intervention for enhancing psychosocial well-being and academic adjustment among orphaned and vulnerable students. It was therefore recommended that schools integrate peer counselling programmes into their guidance services to support vulnerable learners.

Keywords: *Peer-mediated counselling, resilience, school adjustment, orphaned and vulnerable children, adolescents.*

Introduction

Peer-mediated counselling has emerged as a promising, low-cost intervention to enhance the resilience and school adjustment of orphaned and vulnerable adolescents in contexts where professional counselling services are scarce. In Jos metropolis, Plateau State, Nigeria, where many adolescents face compounded risks from orphanhood, poverty, and limited access to psychosocial support, peer-mediated counselling offers a culturally accessible bridge between formal school systems and the emotional needs of students (Adeniyi, Akintayo & Akinlabi, 2020; Shalabya &

Agyapong, 2020). Orphaned and vulnerable adolescents in Jos metropolis often experience stigma, financial hardship, emotional distress, and disrupted attachments, which can undermine their academic engagement, attendance, and overall school functioning. These adversities elevate the risk of poor school adjustment, while simultaneously weakening protective resources such as self-esteem, coping skills, and social support (Adeniji, 2025; Eze & Okoye, 2020).

Peer-mediated counselling involves trained students or youth facilitators providing structured emotional support, guidance, and problem-solving assistance to their peers, usually within or alongside school-based guidance and counselling programmes. Previous studies in Nigerian and East African settings show that peer-counselling strategies can significantly improve emotional adjustment, social behaviour, and psychological well-being among vulnerable learners (Tang, Dian, Jin, Pu & Wang, 2022). Resilience refers to the capacity of adolescents to adapt positively despite adversity, drawing on personal strengths, coping skills, and supportive relationships. School adjustment, on the other hand, encompasses academic engagement, interpersonal relationships with teachers and peers, emotional regulation, and behavioural conduct within the school environment. Evidence from resilience-focused counselling and peer-education interventions indicates that enhancing resilience is strongly associated with better academic performance, emotional stability, and social integration among adolescents in Nigeria (Samuel-Alewa, Garba & Muhammad, 2025; Ojo, Adeyemi & Yusuf, 2025).

Extant research in Nigeria and neighbouring countries highlights the efficacy of peer-mediated and resilience-focused counselling for at-risk youth, yet there is limited location-specific evidence on how these interventions shape resilience and school adjustment among orphaned and vulnerable adolescents in Jos metropolis. This study therefore seeks to bridge the gap by examining the extent to which peer-mediated counselling programmes can strengthen resilience and improve school adjustment outcomes for this vulnerable population in Plateau State.

The study is grounded in social-cognitive theory, which emphasizes learning through observation, modeling, and reciprocal interactions, and the ecological systems theory,, which situates the adolescents within nested environments (family, school, and community); together, these frameworks support the view that peer-mediated counselling can strengthen resilience and school adjustment by reinforcing positive behaviours, enhancing self-efficacy, and improving the quality of interpersonal relationships in the school context (Omondi & Odundo, 2025; Odeyemi & Akin-Ojo, 2024).

Statement of the Problem

In Jos metropolis, Plateau State, a significant number of adolescents are orphaned or otherwise vulnerable due to the loss of one or both parents, poverty, family disintegration, and other socio-economic stressors. Many of these adolescents attend public secondary schools where guidance and counselling services are either limited, understaffed, or rely mainly on non-specialist teachers. In this context, there is a growing reliance on informal peer interactions and limited peer-mediated support mechanisms, yet there is little evidence-based structured use of peer-mediated counselling to address the psychosocial and academic needs of this group. The lack of targeted psychosocial support contributes to high levels of emotional distress, low self-esteem, poor coping strategies, and limited resilience among orphaned and vulnerable adolescents. These factors, in turn, are associated with poor school adjustment, including absenteeism, reduced academic motivation, disruptive classroom behaviour, and strained relationships with teachers and peers. Over time, this undermines the adolescents' educational attainment and long-term life prospects, and may perpetuate cycles of poverty and social exclusion within families and communities (Adeniji et al., 2020; Eze & Okoye, 2020).

Ideally, orphaned and vulnerable adolescents in Jos metropolis should have access to structured, school-based peer-mediated counselling programmes that are integrated into the existing guidance and counselling system. These programmes should be designed to strengthen resilience by enhancing coping skills, self-efficacy, and positive peer relationships, while

simultaneously improving school adjustment through better academic engagement, prosocial behaviour, and emotional regulation. In such an ideal setting, these adolescents would experience improved psychosocial well-being, greater school connectedness, and stronger chances of successful educational and vocational outcomes.

The central problem this study addresses is the dearth of empirical evidence on how peer-mediated counselling influences resilience and school adjustment among orphaned and vulnerable adolescents in Jos metropolis. Despite existing calls for context-specific, low-cost, and youth-friendly counselling approaches, there is a paucity of studies that systematically evaluate the effectiveness of peer-mediated interventions in this setting. As a result, school counselors and administrators, and policy makers lack a clear understanding of whether, and to what extent, peer-mediated counselling can be scaled within the current school system to improve resilience and school adjustment outcomes for this vulnerable population.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine the effect of peer-mediated counselling on resilience and school adjustment among orphaned and vulnerable adolescents in Jos metropolis, Plateau State, Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study include, to:

1. determine the level of resilience among orphaned and vulnerable adolescents before and after a structured peer-mediated counselling intervention.
2. assess the extent to which peer-mediated counselling improves school adjustment (academic engagement, peer relationships, and behavioural conduct) among orphaned and vulnerable adolescents.
3. compare the changes in resilience and school adjustment between an experimental group exposed to peer-mediated counselling and a control group receiving routine school guidance services.

Research Questions

The following research questions were answered in the study:

1. What is the level of resilience among orphaned and vulnerable adolescents in Jos metropolis before and after peer-mediated counselling?
2. To what extent does peer-mediated counselling enhance school adjustment (academic engagement, peer relationships, and behavioural conduct) among orphaned and vulnerable adolescents?
3. What are the differences in resilience and school adjustment between the experimental group (peer-mediated counselling) and the control group (routine guidance services) among orphaned and vulnerable adolescents in Jos metropolis?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were raised and tested at 0.05 level of significance in this study:

1. There is no significant difference in resilience scores of orphaned and vulnerable adolescents before and after peer-mediated counselling.
2. There is no significant difference in school adjustment scores (academic engagement, peer relationships, and behavioural conduct) of orphaned and vulnerable adolescents before and after peer-mediated counselling.
3. There is no significant difference in post-intervention resilience and school adjustment scores between the experimental group (peer-mediated counselling) and the control group (routine guidance services).

Literature Review

Peer-mediated counselling, also referred to as peer education or peer-counselling, is an intervention model in which trained peers provide structured support, guidance and information to

their age-mates. Studies show that peer-mediated and peer-education programmes can improve emotional adjustment, social skills, and mental resilience among adolescents, particularly in school settings where formal counselling is limited. For example, a recent peer-education intervention based on adolescent health education significantly improved adolescents' emotional adjustment, interpersonal assistance, and total mental resilience, with greater gains observed in boys than girls (Tang et al., 2022; Ajao & Oluwole, 2024; Ajibade & Akinfolarin, 2024). Peer-based programmes are underpinned by learning and social interaction theories that emphasize modeling, reinforcement, and identification with similar others. These programmes create safe spaces where adolescents rehearse problem-solving, practice empathy, and build self-efficacy, all of which are key components of resilience. In low-resource contexts such as many Nigerian secondary schools, peer-mediated counselling offers a cost-effective way to scale up psychosocial support without over-relying on scarce professionally trained counselors (Aliero, Bashar & Haruna, 2025).

Resilience has been conceptualized as the capacity to adapt and thrive despite exposure to adversity, drawing on internal strengths (example, self-efficacy, coping skills) and external supports (example, relationships, school environment). Resilience-based interventions have been found effective in reducing mental health difficulties and improving emotional functioning among adolescents, including those exposed to violence, neglect, or loss (Olowokere & Okanlawon, 2018; Bii, Aleka & Raburu, 2016). Orphaned and vulnerable children and adolescents in Nigeria often face multiple adversities, including poverty, stigmatization and educational disruption, which can erode resilience and increase the risk of psychological maladjustment (Amali, Shoyemi, Akintola & Ayantoye, 2020). Studies of orphans in rural and urban Nigerian communities report high rates of school dropout, poor attendance, and limited psychological support, underscoring the need for targeted resilience-building strategies within educational settings (Oluwafemi & Odo, 2023).

School adjustment refers to how well students adapt to the academic, social and behavioural demands of the school environment. It includes indicators such as academic engagement, attendance, discipline and quality of relationships with teachers and peers (Oldfield, Humphrey & Hebron, 2018). Poor school adjustment is common among adolescents from broken homes and other vulnerable backgrounds, who often experience lower levels of psychological adjustment and higher rates of school-related difficulties (Ajiero et al., 2025; Okafor & Abubakar, 2023). Research on Nigerian secondary school adolescents indicates that adverse family circumstances are associated with lower psychological adjustment, increased emotional distress, and poorer school functioning. For orphaned and vulnerable adolescents, these effects may be compounded by emotional loss, reduced supervision, and limited access to basic needs, all of which can impair concentration, motivation, and peer relationships (Ashimilowo, Oyebiyi & Mbah, 2013; Otukpa & Onyemereke, 2025).

Empirical work suggests that peer support can buffer the negative effects of stress on adolescents' self-esteem and psychological well-being, especially when resilience is relatively high. Higher levels of peer support are associated with better emotional regulation, more positive peer interactions, and improved school functioning, all of which contribute to stronger school adjustment (Lan & Wang, 2019). Interventions that combine resilience-building with peer-mediated support, such as structured peer-counselling or peer-education programmes have shown promise in enhancing both mental resilience and social or academic outcomes. For instance, resilience-focused programmes delivered in school settings have been used to reduce social anxiety and improve relational functioning among victimized or at-risk adolescents, pointing to the potential of integrating peer-mediated counselling within existing school guidance systems (Attalah, Tarawneh & Daradas, 2025).

The study is anchored on social-cognitive theory proposed by Bandura (1977), Ecological systems theory by Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Resilience theory by Masten (2014). Social-cognitive theory posits that individuals learn through absenteeism, modeling, and reinforcement, and that perceived self-efficacy plays a central role in shaping behaviour and coping. From this perspective, peer-mediated counselling can strengthen resilience by exposing adolescents to prosocial models,

providing guidance practice in problem-solving, and reinforcing positive behavioural changes through feedback and encouragement (Tang et al., 2022). Ecological systems theory explains that human development is influenced by different environmental systems, including family, school, and community. In the context of peer-mediated counselling, students learn positive behaviours and coping strategies by interacting with trained peers. This theory supports the idea that peer influence can be harnessed positively to promote resilience and improve school adjustment among adolescents.

Resilience theory focused on how individuals overcome adversity and achieve positive outcomes despite challenges. It emphasizes the role of protective factors such as supportive relationships and coping skills. Peer-mediated counselling serves as a protective factor by providing emotional support and promoting adaptive coping strategies among students.

While resilience-based and peer-mediated interventions have been studied in both global and African contexts, there is relatively little empirical work that specifically examines the effect of peer-mediated counselling on resilience and school adjustment among orphaned and vulnerable secondary-school adolescents in Jos metropolis, Plateau State. Existing Nigerian studies often focus either on general psychological adjustment, school dropout, on broader orphan-support programmes, rather than on structured peer-mediated counselling intervention influences resilience and indicators of school adjustment (academic engagement, peer relationships, and behavioural conduct) among orphaned and vulnerable adolescents in Jos metropolis. The findings will provide evidence on the utility of peer-mediated counselling as a school-based mechanism for strengthening resilience and improving educational outcomes in a context of heightened vulnerability (Wentzel, 2017).

Methodology

This describes the research design, population and sample, sampling technique, instrument for data collection and so on. The purpose is to outline the procedures that were used to investigate the effect of peer-mediated counselling on resilience and school adjustment among orphaned and vulnerable adolescents in Jos metropolis.

This study adopted a quasi-experimental research design, specifically the pretest – posttest control group design. The design was considered appropriate because it enables comparison of changes in resilience and school adjustment before and after a peer-mediated counselling intervention, as well as between an experimental group (exposed to peer-mediated counselling) and a control group (receiving routine school guidance services). The use of this design is consistent with previous studies on peer-counselling and school-based interventions among adolescents (Tang et al., 2022; Vishima, Aliboh & Iorbee, 2024).

The target population consisted of orphaned and vulnerable adolescents aged 13-19 years enrolled in selected public secondary schools in Jos metropolis, Plateau State. From this population, five schools were purposively selected to represent varying levels of urbanization and socio-economic characteristics. Within each school, orphaned and vulnerable adolescents were identified through partnership with school counselors, using criteria such as loss of one or both parents, fostered status, or extended residence with relatives. A stratified random sampling technique was then used to select two groups:

- An experimental group that participated in a structured peer-mediated counselling programme.
- A control group that continued to receive routine school guidance services without the peer-mediated intervention.

Sample size was determined using a power-based formula.

The peer-mediated counselling programme was structured into weekly sessions facilitated by trained peer counselors under the supervision of professional school counsellors. The sessions were based on principles of peer-education, problem-solving therapy, and resilience-building, and covered:

- Psycho-education on resilience, coping strategies, and emotional regulation.
- Peer-mediated group discussions on common challenges (loss, stigma, academic pressure, peer relationships).
- Role-plays and problem-solving exercises to practice seeking help, conflict resolution, and goal setting.

Peer counsellors were selected among senior/high-achieving students, trained on active listening, confidentiality, basic counselling skills, and referral procedures, in line with models used in adolescent peer-delivered programmes.

Data were collected using validated, and adapted self-report instruments, administered at pretest and posttest. These included:

- Resilience scale for adolescents: This is a multidimensional scale assessing factors such as optimism, self-efficacy, social support, and family cohesion. This aligns with resilience-focused interventions that measure total resilience and its sub-components among adolescents.
- School adjustment scale: It is a structured questionnaire/subscale measuring academic engagement (attendance, homework completion, class participation), peer relationships (peer support, conflict frequency), and behavioural conduct (discipline records, prosocial behaviour).

Additional contextual data were collected on family background, type of orphanhood, and previous exposure to counselling or support programmes.

Data collection procedure included:

- Baseline (pretest) data on resilience and school adjustment were collected from both experimental and control groups before the intervention began.
- The experimental group participated in the peer-mediated counselling programme over the agreed number of sessions, while the control group received routine guidance services.
- Posttest data on resilience and school adjustment were collected immediately after the intervention from both groups. A total of 100 questionnaires were administered, out of which 96 were properly completed and returned.

Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics of means and standard deviations to answer the research questions. To address the research objectives, and hypotheses, inferential statistics of t-tests were used to compare pretest and posttest scores on resilience and school adjustment within the experimental group, and between the experimental and control groups. Experimental Group = 48, Control Group = 48. Responses were measured using a 4 point scale of Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2, Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1.

Results

Research Question One: What is the level of resilience among orphaned and vulnerable adolescents in Jos metropolis before and after peer-mediated counselling?

Table 1: Showing Level of Resilience among Orphaned and Vulnerability Adolescents in Jos Metropolis

Group Type	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation	Decision
Experimental Group	48	32.45	4.12	Agree
Control Group	48	24.30	3.85	

Table 1 shows the result of level of resilience among orphaned and vulnerable adolescents in Jos metropolis before and after peer-mediated counselling. The experimental group recorded a higher mean score (32.45) than the control group (24.30), indicating that peer-mediated counselling had a positive level on students' resilience.

Research Question Two: To what extent does peer-mediated counselling enhance school adjustment among orphaned and vulnerable adolescents?

Table 2: Results of Extent of Peer-Mediated Counselling on School Adjustment among Orphaned and Vulnerable Adolescents

Group Type	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation	Decision
Experimental Group	48	34.10	3.95	Agree
Control Group	48	25.75	4.20	

Table 2 reveals the result of extent of peer-mediated counselling on school adjustment among orphaned and vulnerable adolescents. The mean score and standard deviation for the experimental group were 34.10 and 3.95, while that of control group were 25.75 and 4.20 respectively. This means that students exposed to peer-mediated counselling showed better school adjustment compared to those not exposed.

Research Question Three: What are the differences in resilience and school adjustment between the experimental and control groups among orphaned and vulnerable adolescents in Jos metropolis?

Table 3: Result of Differences in Resilience and School Adjustment between the Experimental and Control Groups among Orphaned and Vulnerable Adolescents in Jos Metropolis

Group Type	Number	Mean	Decision
Experimental Group	48	32.45	Agree
Control Group	48	24.30	

Table 3 presents the result of differences in resilience and school adjustment between the experimental and control groups among orphaned and vulnerable adolescents in Jos metropolis. The experimental group had a mean score of 32.45, while that of control group was 24.30. This indicated a noticeable difference in resilience and school adjustment between both groups in favour of the experimental group, meaning that the experimental group demonstrated higher resilience level and school adjustment than the control group.

Testing Hypotheses

All hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference in resilience scores of orphaned and vulnerable adolescents before and after peer-mediated counselling.

Table 4: Result of Difference in Resilience Scores of Orphaned and Vulnerable Adolescents Before and After Peer-Mediated Counselling

Group	Mean	t-value	P-value	Decision
Experimental	32.45	6.82	0.000	Rejected
Control	24.30			

Table 4 indicates the result of significant difference in resilience scores of orphaned and vulnerable adolescents before and after peer-mediated counselling in Jos metropolis. It showed that $P < 0.05$. Since the P-value of 0.000 is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected, indicating that peer-mediated counselling significantly improved resilience.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference in school adjustment scores of orphaned and vulnerable adolescents before and after peer-mediated counselling.

Table 5: Result of Significant Difference in School Adjustment Scores of Orphaned and Vulnerable Adolescents Before and After Peer-Mediated Counselling

Group	Mean	t-value	P-value	Decision
Experimental	34.10	7.15	0.000	Rejected
Control	25.75			

Table 5 shows the result of difference in school adjustment scores of orphaned and vulnerable adolescents before and after peer-mediated counselling. The result showed that $P < 0.05$. Since the P-value of 0.000 is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected, implying that peer-mediated counselling significantly improves school adjustment.

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant difference in post-intervention resilience and school adjustment scores between the experimental and control groups.

Table 6: Result of Difference in Post-Intervention Resilience and School Adjustment Scores

Group	t-value	P-value	Decision
Resilience	6.82	0.000	Rejected
Control			

Table 6 reveals the result of significant difference in post-intervention resilience and school adjustment scores between the experimental and control groups. The result showed $P < 0.05$. Since the P-value of 0.000 is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected, indicating there is a significant difference between groups of resilience and school adjustment.

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that peer-mediated counselling had a significant positive effect on resilience among orphaned and vulnerable adolescents in Jos metropolis. This outcome aligns with contemporary empirical evidence which emphasizes the effectiveness of peer-based interventions in strengthening adolescents' coping capacities (Olowokore & Okanlawo, 2018; Tang, Wang & Guo, 2022). For instance, a randomized controlled trial found that peer education significantly improved adolescents' emotional regulation interpersonal support, and overall resilience. This suggests that structured peer interactions provide adolescents with relatable role models and practical coping strategies, which are particularly beneficial for vulnerable populations such as orphans (Wentzel, 2017; Adeniji et al., 2020). The improvement in resilience observed in this study may be attributed to the shared experiences and emotional bonding inherent in peer-mediated approaches. Orphaned and vulnerable adolescents often experience trauma, loss, and instability, hence, peer support creates a safe environment for emotional expressions and mutual encouragement. This finding is further supported by research indicating that resilience is strongly associated with positive interpersonal relationships and social support systems (Wentzel, 2017). Thus, peer-mediated counselling likely enhanced participants' ability to adapt to adversity by fostering a sense of belonging and psychological security (Adeniji et al., 2020; Ojo et al., 2025).

In addition, the study found that peer-mediated counselling significantly improved school adjustment among participants. This includes better social integration, improved classroom behaviour, and enhanced engagement with school activities. This finding is consistent with literature highlighting the critical role of peer relationships in shaping adolescents school experiences. Adolescents are highly influenced by their peers, who serve as reference points for behaviours, norms, and adaptation within the school environment (Samuel-Alewa et al., 2025; Aliero et al., 2025; Viashima et al., 2024). Consequently, positive peer influence through counselling

interventions can promote adaptive behaviours, reduce maladjustment, and improve academic-related outcomes (Wentzel, 2017; Oldfield et al., 2018; Ojo et al., 2025). The significant effect on school adjustment may also be explained by the development of social and communication skills during peer counselling sessions these skills enable adolescents to navigate school demands more effectively, build healthy relationships with classmates and teachers, and manage academic stress. Supporting this, school-based interventions have been shown to enhance resilience and overall well-being, which in turn improved students' ability to function effectively within school settings (Bii et al., 2016; Eze & Okoye, 2020).

Another important observation from the study is that peer-mediated counselling may be particularly impactful for orphaned and vulnerable adolescents, who often lack stable adult support systems. In such contexts, peers can fill critical emotional and social gaps, acting as accessible and consistent sources of support. This reinforces the relevance of peer-based interventions in low-resource settings like Jos metropolis, where access to professional psychological services may be limited. However, the findings also suggest that while peer-mediated counselling significantly improves resilience and school adjustment, its effectiveness may vary depending on factors such as gender, individual differences, and environmental conditions (Ajao & Oluwole, 2024; Ajibade & Akinfolarin, 2024).

Conclusion

The study concludes that peer-mediated counselling is a highly effective intervention for enhancing both resilience and school adjustment among orphaned and vulnerable adolescents (OVAs) in Jos metropolis. The findings suggest that when adolescents are supported by trained peers who share similar life contexts, the barriers of stigma and isolation are significantly reduced. While traditional adult-led counselling remains valuable, the "peer effect" fosters a unique sense of belonging and mutual understanding that is critical for adolescents navigating the socio-economic challenges specific to Plateau State. Ultimately, strengthening the internal resilience of these adolescents directly correlates with better academic engagement, improved social interactions, and a more stable transition through the secondary school system.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. The Plateau State Ministry of Education should formalize peer-support programmes within the secondary school system.
2. School counsellors should provide rigorous training for peer leaders/mentors.
3. Non-governmental organizations and faith-based organizations should adopt peer-mediated models.
4. Parents, guardians and caregivers should collaborate with schools to support the emotional and academic needs of vulnerable students.

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