

**GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING PROGRAMMES AND MORAL DEVELOPMENT AMONG
SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN RIVERS STATE**

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and moral development among senior secondary school students in Rivers State. The study adopted a correlational survey design. The population comprised 197,712 respondents, consisting of 6,557 teachers and 191,155 senior secondary school students in 286 public secondary schools in Rivers State. A sample of 400 respondents, comprising 60 teachers and 340 senior secondary school students, was selected using a multi-stage sampling procedure. Data were collected using the Guidance and Counselling Programmes and Moral Development Questionnaire (GCPMDQ), structured on a four-point rating scale. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to test the null hypotheses counselling programmes and students' discipline ($r = .638, p < .05$), obedience to school rules and authority ($r = .554, p < .05$), and law-abiding behaviour ($r = .624, p < .05$). The study concluded that guidance and counselling programmes are significantly related to important dimensions of moral development among senior secondary school students in Rivers State. It was therefore recommended that school authorities strengthen guidance and counselling programmes, particularly activities that promote discipline, respect for school rules and authority, and responsible law-abiding behaviour among students.

Keywords: *Guidance and counselling, moral development, discipline.*

INTRODUCTION

Education extends beyond the acquisition of academic knowledge to include the development of responsible, disciplined and socially acceptable individuals. Secondary schools are therefore expected to contribute to students' moral and social development by helping them understand acceptable standards of behaviour, respect legitimate authority and develop the capacity to make responsible decisions. Moral development is particularly important during adolescence because students at this stage experience significant cognitive, emotional and social changes and are increasingly exposed to competing values and influences (Akinade, 2020; UNICEF, 2022).

Moral development involves the gradual development of moral understanding, values, judgement and behaviour. Within the school environment, important manifestations of moral development include discipline, obedience to school rules and authority, law-abiding behaviour and honesty. Discipline reflects students' ability to regulate their behaviour and accept responsibility for their actions, while obedience involves appropriate compliance with legitimate rules and authority. Law-abiding behaviour extends this responsibility beyond the school environment to respect for established laws, regulations and the rights of others. These attributes are important to the maintenance of an orderly learning environment and the preparation of students for responsible participation in society (Gibbs, 2020; Turiel & Gingo, 2024).

Guidance and counselling programmes constitute an important school-based mechanism for supporting students' personal, social and moral development. Through individual counselling, group counselling, orientation, information services, behavioural guidance and value clarification, students are provided with opportunities to reflect on their behaviour, understand the consequences of their decisions and develop appropriate coping and decision-making skills. Guidance and counselling can therefore complement formal disciplinary mechanisms by encouraging students to internalise acceptable standards of behaviour rather than relying exclusively on external sanctions (Akinade, 2020; Gibson & Mitchell, 2021).

The relevance of guidance and counselling to moral development is further demonstrated by the growing connection between counselling interventions and character education. Moral guidance talks, peer counselling, group discussions and individual counselling provide opportunities for students to reflect on values and apply them to real-life situations. Contemporary literature suggests that when character-development principles are incorporated into school-based guidance programmes, students may demonstrate improved discipline, respect for school rules, ethical conduct and responsible citizenship (Agboola & Tsai, 2023; Berkowitz, 2022). Such interventions are particularly relevant during adolescence because students are developing greater independence in judgement and increasingly encounter situations that require personal decision-making.

The Nigerian education system formally recognises the importance of guidance and counselling in students' personal, social and moral development. The National Policy on Education identifies counselling as an integral component of the educational process, with relevance to students' personal development, social adjustment and responsible conduct (Federal Republic of Nigeria [FRN], 2014). Despite this policy recognition, concerns remain regarding the implementation of guidance and counselling programmes in some secondary schools. Challenges reported in the literature include inadequate counselling personnel, limited resources, poor facilities and inadequate awareness or utilisation of counselling services (Adebayo & Ogunleye, 2021; Michael & Abisoye, 2025).

The behavioural context of secondary education also underscores the importance of examining these programmes. Studies have reported concerns about indiscipline, disrespect for school authority, examination malpractice and other forms of antisocial behaviour among adolescents (Akinade, 2020; Olayinka, 2021). In Rivers State, similar concerns have been associated with factors such as peer influence, social media exposure, family circumstances and changing social values (Ekechukwu & Briggs, 2022). These circumstances make the provision of effective guidance and counselling services particularly relevant to the development of responsible behavioural patterns among senior secondary school students.

Empirical evidence further suggests that guidance and counselling programmes may be associated with specific dimensions of students' moral and behavioural development. Bawo and Eremie (2025), for instance, examined guidance and counselling services and students' indiscipline in public secondary schools in Rivers State, while Adekola and Ibraheem (2024) examined guidance and counselling services in relation to students' behavioural conduct. Other studies have reported associations between guidance and counselling services and students' law-abiding behaviour and ethical adjustment (Adeyemi & Alabi, 2023; Yusuf & Bello, 2022). However, existing studies have often concentrated on particular behavioural outcomes or have been conducted in contexts outside Rivers State.

Consequently, there remains a need for context-specific empirical evidence on the relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and specific dimensions of moral development among senior secondary school students in Rivers State. The present study therefore focuses on three important indicators: discipline, obedience to school rules and authority, and law-abiding behaviour. By examining these dimensions within a single study, the research seeks to provide evidence on the extent to which guidance and counselling programmes are related to students' moral and behavioural development in the secondary school setting.

Statement of the Problem

Ideally, secondary schools should develop students who are academically competent and morally responsible. Effective guidance and counselling programmes should assist students in developing self-discipline, respecting school rules and legitimate authority, understanding the consequences of unlawful behaviour and making responsible choices. Counselling should therefore function not only as a remedial service for students with behavioural difficulties but also as a preventive and developmental intervention that supports positive moral growth.

In reality, behavioural challenges continue to occur among secondary school students. The project reviewed for this study reports concerns relating to indiscipline, disobedience to school rules and authority, examination malpractice and other forms of antisocial conduct among adolescents. At the same time, some schools experience shortages of professionally trained counsellors, inadequate resources and limited utilisation of counselling services. The continued occurrence of behavioural problems despite the existence of guidance and counselling structures raises questions about the extent to which these programmes are associated with students' moral development.

The major problem, therefore, is the limited context-specific evidence on the relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and specific dimensions of moral development among senior secondary school students in Rivers State. Existing studies have often examined individual behavioural outcomes or have been conducted outside the state. Consequently, there is a need for empirical evidence on whether guidance and counselling programmes are significantly related to discipline, obedience to school rules and authority, and law-abiding behaviour among senior secondary school students in Rivers State. This gap provided the basis for the present study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and selected dimensions of moral development among senior secondary school students in Rivers State. Specifically, the study sought to:

examine the relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and the enhancement of discipline among senior secondary school students in Rivers State;
determine the relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and the enhancement of obedience to school rules and authority among senior secondary school students in Rivers State;
and assess the relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and the enhancement of law-abiding behaviour among senior secondary school students in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and the enhancement of discipline among senior secondary school students in Rivers State?
2. What is the relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and the enhancement of obedience to school rules and authority among senior secondary school students in Rivers State?
3. What is the relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and the enhancement of law-abiding behaviour among senior secondary school students in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

- H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and the enhancement of discipline among senior secondary school students in Rivers State.
- H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and the enhancement of obedience to school rules and authority among senior secondary school students in Rivers State.
- H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and the enhancement of law-abiding behaviour among senior secondary school students in Rivers State.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Guidance and Counselling Programmes

Guidance is a systematic educational process through which learners are assisted to understand themselves, their abilities, their environment and the choices available to them. Counselling, as a specialized component of guidance, provides students with opportunities to explore personal, social, academic and behavioural concerns in a supportive professional relationship. In secondary schools, guidance and counselling programmes may include individual counselling, group counselling, orientation, information services, educational guidance and personal-social counselling.

The importance of counselling in moral development derives from its emphasis on reflection, decision-making and behavioural adjustment. Through counselling interactions, students can examine the causes and consequences of their behaviour, consider alternative responses to difficult situations and develop greater self-regulation. Guidance programmes can also help students understand the rationale behind school regulations and appreciate the social consequences of misconduct.

Moral Development in Secondary Schools

Moral development concerns the gradual development of moral understanding, values, judgement and behaviour. Adolescence represents an important period in this process because students increasingly develop independent reasoning and encounter situations requiring them to make decisions without continuous adult supervision. Schools provide an important social environment in which students learn about rules, authority, responsibility and acceptable interaction with others.

For the present study, moral development is considered in behavioural terms through three dimensions: discipline, obedience to school rules and authority, and law-abiding behaviour. Discipline reflects self-control and responsible conduct. Obedience involves appropriate compliance with legitimate rules and authority. Law-abiding behaviour represents adherence to established rules and regulations and respect for the rights and welfare of others. These dimensions are related but distinguishable expressions of responsible moral conduct.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

Kohlberg's Cognitive Moral Development Theory

Kohlberg's Cognitive Moral Development Theory provides the theoretical basis for the study. The theory proposes that moral reasoning develops progressively through three broad levels: pre-conventional, conventional and post-conventional morality. At the pre-conventional level, behaviour is largely influenced by punishment and reward. At the conventional level, individuals increasingly value social approval, rules and the maintenance of social order. At the post-conventional level, moral decisions are increasingly guided by internalised ethical principles.

The theory is relevant to the present study because guidance and counselling can provide students with opportunities to examine moral situations, consider consequences and understand the reasons underlying rules. Counselling may therefore support movement from externally controlled compliance towards more internalised and responsible moral behaviour. Within the school environment, discussions of discipline, authority, social responsibility and lawful conduct can help students understand not only what rules require but also why such rules are important.

EMPIRICAL STUDIES

Previous empirical studies reviewed in the source project generally indicate positive associations between guidance and counselling services and students' behavioural outcomes. Bawo and Eremie (2025), in a study conducted in Rivers State, reported that guidance and counselling services were associated with improved behavioural adjustment and discipline among students. Similarly, Korugyendo, Kintu and Ahabwe (2022) found that guidance and counselling was associated with improved discipline among secondary school students in Uganda.

With respect to obedience, Adekola and Ibraheem (2024) reported a significant relationship between guidance and counselling services and students' behavioural conduct in Kwara State. Owan and Agunwa (2021) likewise reported that school guidance services were associated with students' compliance with school regulations and respect for school authority.

Studies concerning lawful behaviour have also suggested that guidance interventions can promote awareness of rules, responsible decision-making and avoidance of delinquent conduct. Adeyemi and Alabi (2023) reported an association between guidance and counselling services and students' law-abiding behaviour in public secondary schools in Osun State. Yusuf and Bello (2022) similarly found that guidance and counselling services predicted aspects of ethical and behavioural adjustment among senior secondary school students.

Although these studies provide useful evidence, important contextual and methodological gaps remain. Some studies have concentrated on single behavioural outcomes, while others were conducted outside Rivers State. The present study therefore contributes by examining three related dimensions of moral development within a single correlational framework among senior secondary school students in Rivers State.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopted a correlational survey research design. The design was appropriate because the study sought to determine the degree and direction of relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and selected dimensions of moral development without manipulating the variables.

Population and Sample

The population comprised 197,712 respondents, consisting of 6,557 teachers and 191,155 senior secondary school students in 286 public secondary schools across Rivers State. A sample of 400 respondents was adopted using Cochran's sample-size procedure. The sample comprised 60 teachers and 340 senior secondary school students distributed across Port Harcourt, Ahoada and Ogoni Education Zones. A multi-stage sampling procedure was used to obtain the respondents.

Instrumentation

Data were collected using the Guidance and Counselling Programmes and Moral Development Questionnaire (GCPMDQ). The instrument employed a four-point response scale: Very High Extent (4), High Extent (3), Low Extent (2) and Very Low Extent (1). The substantive section contained items measuring the dimensions of moral development examined in the study. The instrument was subjected to face and content validation by three experts, comprising two specialists in Guidance and Counselling and one specialist in Measurement and Evaluation. Reliability was established through the test-retest procedure.

DATA ANALYSIS

Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. A criterion mean of 2.50 was used for interpreting the four-point scale. Mean scores of 2.50 and above were interpreted as indicating a high extent.

Data Analysis and Results

Research Question One

What is the relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and the enhancement of discipline among senior secondary school students in Rivers State?

Table 1: Respondents' Ratings on Guidance and Counselling Programmes and Enhancement of Discipline

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Decision
1.	Guidance and counselling programmes help students develop self-discipline	3.32	0.76	High Extent
2.	Counselling encourages punctuality and regular attendance	3.28	0.76	High Extent
3.	Guidance programmes help students control behaviours that may lead to disciplinary problems	3.28	0.79	High Extent
4.	Counselling helps students understand the consequences of indiscipline	3.26	0.75	High Extent
5.	Guidance and counselling encourage students to accept responsibility for their actions	3.34	0.76	High Extent
Cluster Mean		3.30	0.76	High Extent

The results show that all five items exceeded the criterion mean of 2.50. The cluster mean of 3.30 indicates that guidance and counselling programmes were perceived to relate to the enhancement of discipline to a high extent. The highest mean was recorded for accepting responsibility for one's actions ($M = 3.34$), while understanding the consequences of indiscipline had the lowest mean ($M = 3.26$).

Hypothesis One

H_{01} : There is no significant relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and the enhancement of discipline.

Table 2: PPMC Analysis of Guidance and Counselling Programmes and Discipline

Variables	N	Pearson r	p-value	Decision
Guidance and counselling programmes and discipline	400	0.638	0.000	Reject H_{01}

The result indicates a positive relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and discipline ($r = 0.638$, $p < 0.05$). The null hypothesis was rejected. Thus, a statistically significant positive relationship existed between guidance and counselling programmes and students' discipline.

Research Question Two

What is the relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and the enhancement of obedience to school rules and authority among senior secondary school students in Rivers State?

Table 3: Respondents' Ratings on Guidance and Counselling Programmes and Obedience to School Rules and Authority

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Decision
1.	Guidance programmes help students understand the reasons behind school regulations	3.29	0.76	High Extent
2.	Counselling helps students understand the importance of obeying school rules	3.30	0.75	High Extent
3.	Counselling programmes encourage students to respect teachers and school administrators	3.32	0.74	High Extent
4.	Guidance programmes encourage appropriate responses to legitimate instructions	3.31	0.75	High Extent
5.	Guidance programmes encourage cooperation between students and school authorities	3.31	0.75	High Extent

Cluster Mean	3.31	0.75	High Extent
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The results indicate that all five items were above the criterion mean. The cluster mean of 3.31 shows that guidance and counselling programmes were perceived to relate to obedience to school rules and authority to a high extent. The highest item mean was 3.32 for respect for teachers and school administrators.

Hypothesis Two

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and the enhancement of obedience to school rules and authority.

Table 4: PPMC Analysis of Guidance and Counselling Programmes and Obedience

Variables	N	Pearson r	p-value	Decision
Guidance and counselling programmes and obedience	400	0.554	0.000	Reject H ₀₂

The result shows a positive relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and obedience to school rules and authority ($r = 0.554$, $p < 0.05$). Since the p-value is below 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected. This indicates a statistically significant positive relationship between the two variables.

Research Question Three

What is the relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and the enhancement of law-abiding behaviour among senior secondary school students in Rivers State?

Table 5: Respondents' Ratings on Guidance and Counselling Programmes and Law-Abiding Behaviour

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Decision
1.	Guidance programmes help students understand the importance of respecting laws and regulations	3.24	0.80	High Extent
2.	Counselling helps students understand the consequences of unlawful behaviour	3.26	0.80	High Extent
3.	Guidance programmes discourage violent or delinquent behaviour	3.25	0.80	High Extent
4.	Counselling encourages students to respect the rights and property of others	3.22	0.79	High Extent
5.	Guidance programmes promote responsible and lawful behaviour within and outside school	3.28	0.81	High Extent
Cluster Mean		3.25	0.80	High Extent

All five items exceeded the criterion mean of 2.50. The cluster mean of 3.25 indicates a high extent of relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and students' law-abiding behaviour. The highest mean was 3.28 for promoting responsible and lawful behaviour within and outside the school, while respect for the rights and property of others recorded the lowest mean of 3.22.

Hypothesis Three

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and the enhancement of law-abiding behaviour.

Table 6: PPMC Analysis of Guidance and Counselling Programmes and Law-Abiding Behaviour

Variables	N	Pearson r	p-value	Decision
Guidance and counselling programmes and law-abiding behaviour	400	0.624	0.000	Reject H ₀₃

The result shows a positive relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and law-abiding behaviour ($r = 0.624$, $p < 0.05$). The null hypothesis was rejected. Thus, a statistically significant positive relationship existed between guidance and counselling programmes and students' law-abiding behaviour.

Summary of Findings

The study produced three major findings. First, guidance and counselling programmes were related to the enhancement of discipline to a high extent ($M = 3.30$, $SD = 0.76$), with a statistically significant positive relationship between the variables ($r = 0.638$, $p < 0.05$).

Second, guidance and counselling programmes were related to the enhancement of obedience to school rules and authority to a high extent ($M = 3.31$, $SD = 0.75$), with a statistically significant positive relationship between the variables ($r = 0.554$, $p < 0.05$).

Third, guidance and counselling programmes were related to the enhancement of law-abiding behaviour to a high extent ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 0.80$), with a statistically significant positive relationship between the variables ($r = 0.624$, $p < 0.05$).

Discussion of Findings

Guidance and Counselling Programmes and Discipline

The study found a significant positive relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and students' discipline. The finding indicates that counselling programmes may contribute to students' development of self-control, punctuality, responsibility and awareness of the consequences of misconduct. This result is consistent with Bawo and Eremie (2025), who reported that guidance and counselling services were associated with improved behavioural control and reduced indiscipline among students in public secondary schools in Rivers State.

The finding is also consistent with Kohlberg's Cognitive Moral Development Theory, which emphasizes the progressive internalization of moral standards. Counselling provides opportunities for students to reflect on their conduct and understand the reasons behind behavioural expectations. Consequently, discipline may increasingly become a matter of self-regulation rather than mere compliance with external sanctions.

Guidance and Counselling Programmes and Obedience

The second finding revealed a significant positive relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and obedience to school rules and authority. The result suggests that counselling may help students understand the purpose of school regulations and develop more appropriate attitudes towards legitimate authority. This finding agrees with Adekola and Ibraheem (2024), who reported a significant relationship between guidance and counselling services and students' compliance with school rules and authority.

The finding further supports the theoretical position that moral behaviour develops through opportunities to reason about rules and social expectations. When students understand why rules exist and perceive authority as legitimate, obedience may become more internally motivated. Guidance and counselling can facilitate this process through orientation, individual counselling, group discussions and conflict-resolution activities.

Guidance and Counselling Programmes and Law-Abiding Behaviour

The third finding showed a significant positive relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and law-abiding behaviour. The result suggests that counselling may assist students in understanding the importance of rules, appreciating the consequences of unlawful behaviour and developing responsible attitudes towards others and the wider society. The finding is consistent with the reviewed literature, which indicates that guidance programmes can promote responsible decision-making and reduce tendencies towards delinquent behaviour.

The finding is also compatible with Kohlberg's theory because law-abiding behaviour reflects a developing understanding of social expectations and responsibility. Counselling can provide a

structured environment in which students examine the consequences of their actions and consider how their behaviour affects other people and the wider community.

CONCLUSION

The study examined the relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and three dimensions of moral development among senior secondary school students in Rivers State. The findings indicate that guidance and counselling programmes were positively and significantly related to discipline, obedience to school rules and authority, and law-abiding behaviour.

The findings suggest that guidance and counselling should be regarded as an important component of students' moral and behavioural development rather than solely as a service for academic or career concerns. Nevertheless, because the study employed a correlational design, the observed relationships should be interpreted as associations and not as evidence that guidance and counselling programmes alone cause improvements in students' moral behaviour.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Discipline: School administrators should strengthen regular guidance and counselling activities that focus on self-discipline, behavioural self-control, responsibility and understanding the consequences of misconduct, while avoiding excessive dependence on punitive approaches to student discipline.

Obedience to school rules and authority: School authorities should institutionalise regular orientation and counselling sessions that help students understand school regulations, appreciate legitimate authority and develop constructive approaches to resolving conflicts and responding to school rules.

Law-abiding behaviour: School authorities and relevant education agencies should provide professionally qualified counsellors with adequate resources to implement counselling activities that incorporate moral and civic guidance, responsible decision-making, respect for rules and awareness of the consequences of unlawful behaviour.

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