

Peer Counselling and Study Habits Among Public Junior Secondary School Students in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Nigeria

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Abstract: This study examined the relationship between peer counselling and study habits among public junior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Nigeria. A correlational survey design was adopted with 340 students selected through multi-stage sampling from ten public schools. Data were collected using standardised Study Habit Questionnaire and researcher-developed Peer Counselling Questionnaire. Seven hypotheses were tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation at 0.05 significance level. Results revealed strong positive correlations between all peer counselling indices and corresponding study habit dimensions: confidentiality and time management ($r=0.612$), trust and concentration/attention ($r=0.587$), empathetic listening and motivation/attitude ($r=0.601$), goal setting/action planning and exam preparation ($r=0.624$), academic mentoring and note-taking ($r=0.598$), positive reinforcement/motivation and study environment/material use ($r=0.583$), and psycho-social support and time management ($r=0.567$). All null hypotheses were rejected. The study concludes that peer counselling significantly enhances study habits and recommends institutionalising peer counselling programmes in public junior secondary schools to promote quality education aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 4.

Keywords: *Peer Counselling, Study Habits, Junior Secondary School, Port Harcourt, Quality Education.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Education remains fundamental to social mobility and national development globally. Sustainable Development Goal 4 aims to provide inclusive and equitable quality education, particularly in developing nations like Nigeria (United Nations, 2015). Persistent poor student performance at Nigeria's basic education level has raised concerns about learning behaviours and support systems (Federal Ministry of Education, 2022). Junior secondary school represents a critical transition period where study habits are established and maintained throughout senior secondary education (Huunipuo, 2025). Weak study patterns manifest as concentration difficulties, poor time management, and inadequate exam preparation (Odebode et al., 2025). Students in Port Harcourt metropolis face environmental and socioeconomic pressures that disrupt effective study engagement (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023).

While infrastructure issues receive considerable attention, relational support networks shaping learning habits remain underexplored (Fannami, 2023). Peer counselling—where students assist peers academically and emotionally—offers a promising intervention (Viashima, 2024). Students

often disclose more readily to peers than adults, suggesting peer-based support can transform study attitudes and learning management (Omebe, 2022). Study habits encompass consistent practices including time management, note-taking, concentration, exam strategies, and learning motivation (Huunipuo, 2025). African studies confirm that students with well-developed study habits outperform peers lacking such routines (Odebode et al., 2025). However, these habits require instruction and support to develop (Omebe, 2022).

Professional counselling units in Nigerian public schools remain understaffed and underutilised (Fannami, 2023), emphasising the need for peer-driven interventions within existing structures (Viashima, 2024). Although curriculum quality and teacher competence are frequently cited as primary academic determinants, student discipline and peer influence are equally important (Huunipuo, 2025). In Nigeria's crowded classrooms, peer counselling can provide personalised attention beyond teachers' capacity (Federal Ministry of Education, 2022). Yet questions persist whether peer counselling genuinely improves study habits or merely provides emotional relief (Odebode et al., 2025). Empirical evidence remains mixed: Viashima documented significant behavioural change from structured peer

counselling in Abuja schools, while Fannami found counselling units ineffective unless properly utilised. Omebe demonstrated cognitive restructuring improved study habits with active student engagement, though these improvements require regular reinforcement (Omebe et al., 2022).

Sub-Saharan Africa continues registering lower secondary completion rates globally, partly attributable to poor learning backgrounds (UNESCO, 2023). This raises whether foundation study behaviours can be strengthened through internal school support mechanisms like peer counselling. Odebode's brain-based counselling research focused on senior rather than junior students (Odebode, 2025), creating a gap regarding younger adolescents whose study habits remain formative. Adolescence is characterised by identity development and peer influence. Early teens' attitudes, discipline, and motivation are significantly peer-influenced (Huunipuo, 2025). Organised peer relationships foster positive study behaviours, while unstructured peer pressure may encourage distraction (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). Peer counselling effectiveness depends on confidentiality and trust; without these elements, students may withhold academic concerns (Viashima, 2024). Trust alone proves insufficient without effective mentoring and goal-setting approaches (Odebode et al., 2025). This multidimensional interaction of emotional safety and structured academic mentorship frames peer counselling as both emotional support and behavioural influence mechanism.

The problem is that despite ongoing educational reforms, junior secondary students demonstrate poor academic performance (Federal Ministry of Education, 2022). Standardised assessments reveal widespread difficulties in comprehension, systematic note-taking, and exam preparation (UNESCO, 2023). In Rivers State, anecdotal evidence suggests students resort to last-minute reading rather than systematic study planning (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). Government efforts have prioritised infrastructure and teacher recruitment, with minimal investment in peer-based academic support structures (Fannami, 2023). Adolescents may develop poor study discipline due to this neglect. While Viashima reported positive behavioural outcomes from peer counselling in Abuja, comparable empirical evidence for Port Harcourt is lacking (Viashima, 2024). Odebode highlighted systematic counselling's role in academic achievement but focused on older students without isolating peer counselling indices (Odebode, 2025). The relationship between specific factors like confidentiality, trust, and academic mentoring and younger students' study habits remains unclear. Moreover, Omebe demonstrated positive study habit changes through counselling methods but in geographically and culturally different contexts (Omebe, 2022). These gaps necessitate examining whether peer counselling significantly influences study habits among public junior secondary students in Port Harcourt. If effective, peer counselling represents a cost-efficient quality education strategy; if ineffective, resources can be redirected to alternative interventions.

➤ *Purpose of the Study*

This study examined the relationship between peer counselling and students' study habits in promoting quality education aligned with SDG 4. Specific objectives were to:

- Examine confidentiality in peer counselling and students' time management
- Determine trust in peer counselling and students' concentration/attention
- Assess empathetic listening and students' motivation/attitude towards study
- Investigate goal setting/action planning and students' exam preparation strategies
- Examine academic mentoring and students' note-taking skills
- Determine positive reinforcement/motivation and students' study environment/material use
- Examine psycho-social support and students' time management

➤ *Research Questions*

- What relationship exists between confidentiality and time management?
- What relationship exists between trust and concentration/attention?
- What relationship exists between empathetic listening and motivation/attitude?
- What relationship exists between goal setting/action planning and exam preparation?
- What relationship exists between academic mentoring and note-taking?
- What relationship exists between positive reinforcement/motivation and study environment/material use?
- What relationship exists between psycho-social support and time management?

➤ *Research Hypotheses*

- H0₁: No significant relationship between confidentiality and time management
- H0₂: No significant relationship between trust and concentration/attention
- H0₃: No significant relationship between empathetic listening and motivation/attitude
- H0₄: No significant relationship between goal setting/action planning and exam preparation
- H0₅: No significant relationship between academic mentoring and note-taking
- H0₆: No significant relationship between positive reinforcement/motivation and study environment/material use
- H0₇: No significant relationship between psycho-social support and time management

➤ *Significance of the Study*

This study addresses practical challenges in Port Harcourt's public junior secondary schools. Many students

struggle not from inability but from lack of structure, encouragement, and guidance. Findings may help school leaders determine whether organised peer support enhances discipline, concentration, and study habits. Teachers may recognise that academic performance involves modelling learning-conducive behaviours alongside content delivery. Guidance counsellors gain evidence on which peer counselling aspects matter most: trust, confidentiality, or academic mentoring. Policy makers in Rivers State can design affordable, scalable student support programmes. Parents may understand how positive peer relationships foster time management and motivation. Students themselves recognise peer counselling's value beyond mere activity.

➤ *Scope of the Study*

This research focuses on peer counselling effects on study habits among public junior secondary students in Port Harcourt metropolis. Peer counselling indices examined: confidentiality, trust, empathetic listening, goal setting/action planning, academic mentoring, positive reinforcement/motivation, and psycho-social support. Study habit indices include: time management, note-taking, exam preparation, concentration/attention, study environment/material use, and motivation/attitude. The study excludes private schools, senior secondary schools, parental background, teacher competence, and school funding factors.

II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This framework conceptualises peer counselling across seven indices and study habits across six dimensions, explaining how each peer counselling element potentially affects specific study behaviours toward quality education (SDG 4).

Confidentiality enables students to disclose academic/emotional problems without fear, fostering openness and self-regulation (Anyamene, 2021). Students confident in privacy allocate time to revision and assignments, improving time management. Research confirms confidentiality reduces anxiety and increases study habit reliability (Evelyn, 2022; Ibe et al., 2020). Effectiveness depends on peer reliability perceptions and institutional culture (Adeniyi & Jinadu, 2021).

Trust represents confidence that peers are responsible, truthful, and constructive. Trust reduces distractions and anxiety, enabling full commitment to study activities (Mkem, Audu, & Emmanuel). Assertiveness training fostering trust improved attentional focus (Ekwelundu, 2022), with trust-building activities decreasing procrastination (Anyamene, 2021). Trust enhances self-regulated learning as students internalise guidance (Evelyn, 2022).

Empathetic Listening involves understanding and responding with emotional sensitivity, increasing motivation by offering emotional support and reducing isolation (Ibe et al., 2020). Programmes with empathetic listening showed increased task persistence and self-motivation (Anyamene, 2021). Students feeling understood established higher

learning expectations (Evelyn, 2022). Empathetic listening builds resilience against academic stress (Adeniyi & Jinadu, 2021).

Goal Setting and Action Planning involves students mutually establishing and achieving academic goals. This focused approach creates control, motivating effective time allocation across subjects (Mtemeri, 2020). Students setting attainable goals show higher motivation and engagement (Šao et al., 2024), with action plans improving timetable compliance (Aljaffer et al., 2024). Accountability and peer feedback maintain commitment (Lei et al., 2021; Omopo, 2025).

Academic Mentoring involves experienced peers providing advice, modelling strategies, and constructive feedback. Mentoring bridges knowledge gaps, provides alternative perspectives, and promotes self-regulated study (Ossai et al., 2023). Organised mentoring programmes improved note-taking, material organisation, and lesson participation (Shao et al., 2024). Mentors providing empathetic, practical assistance foster commitment and academic self-efficacy (Lei et al., 2021; Omopo, 2025).

Positive Reinforcement and Motivation involves peers encouraging, rewarding, and recognising achievements, increasing intrinsic motivation and proactive attitudes (Shao et al., 2024). Students receiving positive feedback show better learning space organisation and textbook use (Aljaffer et al., 2024), with motivated learners demonstrating better goal commitment (Lei et al., 2021). Consistent reinforcement with academic goals strengthens study schedule compliance (Mtemeri, 2020; Omopo, 2025).

Psycho-Social Support involves emotional, social, and psychological help decreasing stress, anxiety, and isolation through understanding communication and reassurance (Omopo, 2025). This support counteracts stress's negative impacts, enabling focus and time management (Shao et al., 2024; Aljaffer et al., 2024). Supportive peer networks enhance academic self-efficacy and concentration (Lei et al., 2021; Mtemeri, 2020).

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Three complementary theories explain how peer counselling affects study habits.

Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) posits learning occurs through observation and modelling. Students learn by observing peers' behaviours and outcomes, with self-efficacy mediating observed behaviour and actual performance. Peer counselling provides settings where students observe organised study habits, time management, and resource use, then emulate these strategies (Anyamene, 2021). Theory strengths include integrating cognitive and social learning aspects; limitations include underemphasising intrinsic motivation and individual cognitive differences.

Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) focuses on intrinsic/extrinsic motivation, proposing three innate psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Environments meeting these needs yield higher intrinsic motivation. Peer counselling fulfilling relatedness through trust/confidentiality, competence through empathetic listening/positive reinforcement, and autonomy through goal setting enables students to internalise productive study behaviours (Mtemeri, 2020; Shao et al., 2024). Theory integrates individual and social motivation but critics suggest it lacks specificity on translating need satisfaction into behavioural outcomes (Aljaffer et al., 2024).

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978) emphasises socially mediated cognitive development through interaction with more knowledgeable others. The Zone of Proximal Development identifies tasks students can complete with assistance. Peer counselling provides scaffolding where more competent students instruct peers in problem-solving, study material organisation, and time management strategies. Theory highlights social/cultural mediation but critics note lack of specific instructional techniques (Akuiyibo et al., 2021).

IV. METHODOLOGY

A correlational survey research design examined relationships between peer counselling and study habits without variable manipulation (Bhattacharyya, 2006). Survey method enabled structured responses from large populations (Goundar, 2012), using questionnaires to record student opinions and experiences. Design supported Pearson Product Moment Correlation for hypothesis testing. Research conducted in Port Harcourt metropolis, Rivers State, Nigeria—an urban area with diverse public junior secondary schools representing varied socio-economic and educational backgrounds. Sampled schools: Federal Government Girls

College Abuloma, Government Girls Secondary School Igbo Diobu, Government Girls Secondary School Harbour Road, Government Secondary School Borokiri, Holy Rosary Secondary School Ogbunabali, National Professional Secondary School, Niger Grammar School, Starlets Academy (public section), Enitonna High School Borikiri, and Community Secondary School Abuloma Road. Selection based on accessibility, population density, and suitability to study objectives (Goddard & Melville, 2004). Population comprised all JSS 1-3 students in selected public schools in Port Harcourt metropolis (Daniel & Sam, 2011). Focusing on adolescence—where study habits and peer associations develop—was appropriate for examining long-term learning behaviour implications (Saharan et al., 2024).

➤ Sampling Technique and Sample

Multi-stage sampling selected 340 students. Stage 1: Ten schools purposively sampled for accessibility and relevance (Noor, 2008). Stage 2: JSS 1, 2, and 3 students proportionately selected using stratified random sampling based on school populations (Goundar, 2012). Stage 3: Simple random sampling within strata minimised bias (Kothari, 2004). Sample size of 340 provided adequate power for correlational analysis.

➤ Instrument for Data Collection

Two questionnaires collected data: Standardised Study Habit Questionnaire (time management, note-taking, concentration, exam preparation, study environment, motivation) and researcher-developed Peer Counselling Questionnaire (confidentiality, trust, empathetic listening, goal setting, academic mentoring, positive reinforcement, psycho-social support). Both used four-point Likert scales (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree). Combining standardised and researcher-developed measures ensured validated constructs and context-specific factors (Patel & Patel, 2019).

V. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
10-12	103	30.3%
13-15	178	52.4%
16-18	59	17.3%
Gender		
Male	157	46.2%
Female	183	53.8%
Class		
JSS 1	112	32.9%
JSS 2	118	34.7%
JSS 3	110	32.4%

Majority of respondents (52.4%) were aged 13-15 years, reflecting typical junior secondary age range. Females (53.8%) slightly outnumbered males (46.2%). Class

distribution was fairly even, ensuring insights from all JSS levels. Most respondents (43.2%) had spent 1-2 years in their current school.

➤ *Peer Counselling and Study Habit Responses*

Table 2 Summary of Peer Counselling Responses

Variable	Mean Range	SD Range	Interpretation
Confidentiality	3.00-3.03	0.88-0.95	Moderate-high agreement
Trust	3.00-3.02	0.90-0.93	Moderate-high agreement
Empathetic Listening	3.01-3.02	0.89-0.92	Moderate-high agreement
Goal Setting/Action Planning	3.01-3.02	0.91-0.93	Moderate-high agreement
Academic Mentoring	3.01-3.02	0.91-0.92	Moderate-high agreement
Positive Reinforcement	3.01-3.02	0.91-0.92	Moderate-high agreement
Psycho-Social Support	3.01-3.02	0.91-0.92	Moderate-high agreement

Mean scores exceeding 3.0 on a 4-point scale indicate students generally agreed that peer counselling positively

influenced their study habits. Low standard deviations suggest consistent perceptions across schools.

Table 3 Summary of Study Habit Responses

Variable	Mean Range	SD Range	Interpretation
Time Management	3.00-3.01	0.91-0.92	Moderate-high adherence
Note-Taking	3.00-3.01	0.91-0.92	Moderate-high adherence
Exam Preparation	3.00-3.01	0.91-0.92	Moderate-high adherence
Concentration/Attention	3.00-3.01	0.91-0.92	Moderate-high adherence
Study Environment/Material Use	3.00-3.01	0.91-0.92	Moderate-high adherence
Motivation/Attitude	3.00-3.01	0.91-0.92	Moderate-high adherence

Students demonstrated moderate to high levels of effective study habits across all dimensions.

Table 4 Pearson Correlation between Peer Counselling and Study Habits

Hypothesis	Peer Counselling Index	Study Habit Index	r	p-value	Decision
H0 ₁	Confidentiality	Time Management	0.612	0.000	Rejected
H0 ₂	Trust	Concentration/Attention	0.587	0.000	Rejected
H0 ₃	Empathetic Listening	Motivation/Attitude	0.601	0.000	Rejected
H0 ₄	Goal Setting/Action Planning	Exam Preparation	0.624	0.000	Rejected
H0 ₅	Academic Mentoring	Note-Taking	0.598	0.000	Rejected
H0 ₆	Positive Reinforcement	Study Environment/Material Use	0.583	0.000	Rejected
H0 ₇	Psycho-Social Support	Time Management	0.567	0.000	Rejected

All seven null hypotheses were rejected at $p < 0.001$, indicating statistically significant positive relationships between each peer counselling index and its corresponding study habit dimension. Correlation coefficients ranged from 0.567 (moderate-strong) to 0.624 (strong), demonstrating that peer counselling consistently enhances study habits across all measured dimensions.

Confidentiality and Time Management ($r = 0.612$, $p < 0.001$): Students who felt counselling was confidential showed better study schedule planning and assignment completion. Confidentiality provides psychological safety enabling self-control and better study scheduling. This aligns with Bamise (2023) who found trust and discretion explained reading behaviour, and Anierobi et al. (2020) who established confidential peer interactions reduced procrastination.

Trust and Concentration/Attention ($r = 0.587$, $p < 0.001$): Students trusting counsellors demonstrated deeper engagement and sustained focus. Trust creates psychological safety facilitating self-regulation and concentration. Orluwene and Ekim (2020) found self-regulated learning enhanced when students trusted peer feedback; Ibrahim

(2022) established peer-assessment incorporating mutual trust created greater engagement.

Empathetic Listening and Motivation/Attitude ($r = 0.601$, $p < 0.001$): Students experiencing empathetic listening showed higher intrinsic motivation and positive study attitudes. Peer recognition and validation increased study time investment. Yusuf et al. (2021) found positive peer influence with active listening reduced disengagement; Akuiyibo et al. (2021) showed understanding interactions enhanced learning interest.

Goal Setting/Action Planning and Exam Preparation ($r = 0.624$, $p < 0.001$): Students with structured goal-setting showed better revision schedules, practice question use, and study guide utilisation. Offordile et al. (2021) demonstrated guided goal-setting activities enhanced low-achieving students' performance; Ojonuba et al. (2023) found empowerment interventions with goal-setting principles facilitated learning strategies.

Academic Mentoring and Note-Taking ($r = 0.598$, $p < 0.001$): Mentored students demonstrated stronger

systematic note-taking skills. Nwokolo (2021) found mentoring strategies improved study-related skills; Omebe and Nwigwe (2025) concluded modelling and mentoring positively impacted organisational skills.

Positive Reinforcement and Study Environment/Material Use ($r=0.583$, $p<0.001$): Students receiving encouragement showed better study space organisation and material utilisation. Bamise (2023) observed peer influence with positive feedback enhanced material engagement; Offordile et al. (2021) reported reinforced students showed greater preparation and sustained effort.

Psycho-Social Support and Time Management ($r=0.567$, $p<0.001$): Students receiving emotional/social support demonstrated better schedule planning and task prioritisation. Anierobi et al. (2020) described peer support increasing engagement and decreasing procrastination; Akuiyibo et al. (2021) found organised peer support improved time allocation and schedule adherence.

VI. CONCLUSION

Peer counselling significantly and positively impacts study habits among public junior secondary students in Port Harcourt metropolis. Confidentiality enables freer academic discussion, improving time management and study organisation. Trust enhances concentration and sustained attention. Empathetic listening fosters positive study attitudes and motivation. Goal setting/action planning provides structured exam preparation frameworks. Academic mentoring promotes note-taking skills. Positive reinforcement supports study environment and material use. Psycho-social support facilitates time management and reduces academic stress.

These findings demonstrate peer counselling is not merely supportive but a strategic learning tool achieving tangible academic performance changes. Interventions are flexible across school settings, classes, and demographics, suggesting generalisability for educational policy and practice. Enhancing peer counselling programmes can achieve SDG 4 goals—inclusive, equitable, quality education—through long-term changes in study habits and self-regulated learning.

➤ Recommendations

Institutionalise peer counselling programmes into regular academic and guidance services to improve study habits and promote quality education.

- Train peer counsellors in confidentiality, trust-building, empathetic listening, goal setting, and motivational techniques.
- Promote mentorship systems providing structured advice on note-taking, study techniques, and examination strategies.
- Incorporate positive reinforcement through effort/achievement recognition to enhance motivation and material use.

Strengthen psycho-social support systems ensuring uninterrupted emotional and academic support to improve time management and study effectiveness.

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