

Promoting Peaceful and Non-Violent Lifestyle Among Tertiary Education Students in Bayelsa State: The Case of Guidance and Counselling

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Abstract

This study explored the role of guidance and counselling in promoting peaceful and non-violent lifestyles among tertiary education students in Bayelsa State. A descriptive survey research design was employed. The study targeted students across various tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State, with a sample of 407 respondents selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire, "Guidance and Counselling Programs for Peaceful Coexistence Questionnaire" developed and validated by experts, and found to have a reliability coefficient of 0.85 via the Cronbach Alpha Formula. Mean and standard deviation was used to answer the research questions. The findings indicated that while students frequently engage in non-violent practices and recognize the positive influence of counselling programs, challenges such as insufficient resources, low participation, and limited awareness hinder the full effectiveness of these services. The study recommended that increasing funding for counselling units and integrating peace education into counselling programs, are initiatives in promoting peaceful coexistence.

Keywords: *Guidance and Counselling, Peaceful Lifestyle, Non-Violence, Tertiary Education Students*

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Background to the Study

In recent years, the need to foster peaceful and non-violent lifestyles among tertiary education students has become a critical area of focus in educational discourse. Higher education institutions are expected to produce well-rounded individuals who excel academically and contribute positively to society. However, with the increasing prevalence of violence, conflicts, and aggression among students in various institutions, it has become essential to explore practical strategies to promote peace and non-violence within these academic environments (Taiwo & Agwu, 2017; Balongo et al., 2019). In Bayelsa State, the rising concerns regarding student unrest, bullying, and violent behaviours have necessitated investigating the role of guidance and counselling services in promoting peaceful coexistence among students.

A peaceful academic environment is crucial for effective learning and personal development, as it encourages open dialogue, respect for differing opinions, and harmonious relationships. In this context, guidance and counselling services have been identified as key interventions aimed at fostering non-violent behaviours by addressing conflicts, promoting healthy communication, and enhancing emotional well-being (Rosen, 2013; Korikiye, 2017; Olufemi, 2019; Alhassan et al., 2017; Kolawole, 2014). These services are critical in tertiary institutions, where students often face numerous challenges, such as academic stress, interpersonal conflicts, and societal pressures, all of which can contribute to negative behaviours if not effectively managed (Efuntade, 2023; Aduwari, 2022).

Guidance and counselling programs in higher education institutions are designed to support students in managing their academic, personal, and social challenges. These programs typically include one-on-one counselling, group therapy sessions, conflict resolution workshops, and mental health seminars. These programs aim to equip students with the skills and knowledge to resolve conflicts peacefully, manage their emotions, and develop positive peer relationships (Chukwu & Molokwu, 2022). Given the diverse cultural, social, and academic backgrounds of students, these services must be adaptable to meet the varied needs of the student population.

Despite the promising potential of guidance and counselling services, their effectiveness in promoting peaceful coexistence and reducing violence among students in Bayelsa State has not been extensively explored. This study seeks to address this gap by examining the role of guidance and counselling in promoting a peaceful and non-violent lifestyle among tertiary education students in the state. The study aims to assess students' perceptions of the impact of guidance and counselling programs on their behaviour and the challenges counselling units face in achieving their objectives.

This study is anchored on Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977), which posits that individuals learn behaviors, attitudes, and emotional responses through observation, imitation, and modeling. The theory emphasizes that human behavior is shaped by environmental influences, particularly through interactions with role models and reinforcement mechanisms. In the context of this study, guidance and counselling programs serve as structured interventions that model and reinforce non-violent behaviors, teaching

students conflict resolution skills, emotional regulation, and interpersonal communication. By providing a supportive environment where students can observe and practice peaceful conflict resolution strategies, counselling services align with Bandura's assertion that positive behavioral change occurs through guided learning and social reinforcement. Therefore, the Social Learning Theory provides a strong theoretical basis for understanding how guidance and counselling can be effectively utilized to promote peaceful and non-violent lifestyles among tertiary education students in Bayelsa State.

Okoro and Adebayo (2020) submitted that tertiary institutions' cultural and institutional environment heavily influences the prevalence of peaceful and non-violent behaviours among students the cultural and institutional environment of tertiary institutions influence the prevalence of peaceful and non-violent behaviours among students. Using a descriptive survey, their study revealed that students exposed to conflict resolution workshops and peace education programs exhibited significantly fewer incidences of violent behaviour. The findings align with the importance of understanding the prevalence of such behaviours to design effective interventions. Also, the study highlighted that many students viewed peaceful practices as essential for academic success and personal well-being, suggesting that monitoring these behaviours is critical in tertiary education.

Adebisi and Olajide (2018) investigated the impact of guidance and counselling programs on fostering harmonious relationships among university students in Southern Nigeria. Through a mixed-method approach involving surveys and interviews, the study found that students who regularly participated in counselling sessions developed better conflict resolution skills and showed a greater inclination toward peaceful coexistence. The researchers emphasized that guidance and counselling programs provided students practical tools for managing stress and interpersonal conflicts. Their findings underline the relevance of assessing the perceived impact of these programs on students' abilities to engage in peaceful practices.

Chukwuma and Ibrahim (2021) explored the challenges counselling units face in promoting non-violent behaviour among Nigerian tertiary students. Using a qualitative case study method, they identified several key barriers, including insufficient funding, lack of professional counselors, and limited student awareness about the benefits of counseling services. Also, cultural stigmas and administrative bottlenecks were found to hinder the effectiveness of these units. The study concluded that addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort by institutional stakeholders to prioritize and adequately support counselling services. These findings underscore the need to identify and address specific counselling units' challenges to maximize their impact on student behaviour.

Hence, the research questions formulated to guide this study are;

1. What is the prevalence of non-violent and peaceful lifestyle practices among tertiary education students in Bayelsa State?
2. What is the perceived impact of guidance and counselling programs on promoting peaceful coexistence among tertiary education students?
3. What challenges do guidance and counselling units face in fostering non-violent behaviour among tertiary education students?

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to investigate the case of guidance and counselling programs in promoting peaceful and non-violent lifestyles among tertiary education students in Bayelsa State. The population of the study comprised all students enrolled in all the 8 tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State.

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select 407 students from four major tertiary institutions in the state who had participated in guidance and counselling programs. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled “Guidance and Counselling Programs for Peaceful Coexistence Questionnaire” (GCPCQ), developed by the researchers. This questionnaire consisted of four sections: Section A measured the demographic variables of the respondents, including age, gender, institution, and academic year.

Section B comprised 10 items focusing on the prevalence of peaceful and non-violent lifestyle practices among the students, measured on a 4-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). Section C included 10 items assessing the perceived impact of guidance and counselling programs on peaceful coexistence, also structured on a 4-point rating scale. Section D included 10 items assessing the challenges do guidance and counselling units face in fostering non-violent behaviour among tertiary education students, also structured on a 4-point rating scale.

The content and face validity of the instrument were ensured by experts in Guidance and Counselling as well as Measurement and Evaluation, whose corrections and suggestions contributed to the final draft used in the study. A trial test was conducted with 15 students from a tertiary institution not included in the main study, and the reliability coefficient was calculated as 0.85 using the Cronbach Alpha formula, indicating that the instrument was highly reliable. Data collected through the questionnaires were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions. The decision rule for interpreting the results was based on the average of the 4-point scale, where any item with a mean score of 2.50 and above was considered agreed (major for research question 3), while a mean score below 2.50 was considered disagree (minor for research question 3).

Results

Research Question 1

What is the prevalence of non-violent and peaceful lifestyle practices among tertiary education students in Bayelsa State?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of responses on the prevalence of non-violent and peaceful lifestyle practices among tertiary education students in Bayelsa State

S/N	Statement	X	SD	Remark
1	I avoid engaging in physical fights or violent behavior within the school environment.	2.88	.85	A
2	I resolve conflicts with fellow students through dialogue and mutual understanding.	2.64	.74	A
3	I discourage my peers from using violent means to address disagreements.	2.34	.50	D
4	I actively promote harmony and cooperation among my classmates.	2.43	.53	D
5	I respect the opinions and rights of others, even when they differ from mine.	2.40	.48	D
6	I refrain from using offensive language or gestures during disagreements.	2.18	.53	D
7	I participate in school activities that promote peace and unity among students.	2.51	.5	A
8	I believe in settling disputes through proper channels, such as mediation or counselling.	2.89	.34	A
9	I actively seek peaceful solutions when faced with conflicts in my academic or social life.	2.06	.74	D
10	I am willing to report incidents of violence or bullying to appropriate authorities.	2.65	.37	A
GRAND MEAN		2.48	.56	D

Source: Fieldwork (2024) *A=Agree D=Disagree

Table 1 above presents the mean and standard deviation of responses on the prevalence of non-violent and peaceful lifestyle practices among tertiary education students in Bayelsa State. Out of the ten items, five had mean values above the cut-off value of 2.50, indicating that respondents agreed on the prevalence of some peaceful and non-violent lifestyle practices. The statement with the highest mean (2.89), “I believe in settling disputes through proper channels, such as mediation or counselling,” shows a strong consensus among students on the importance of resolving conflicts through formal and peaceful avenues. Similarly, “I avoid engaging in physical fights or violent behaviour within the school environment” recorded a mean of 2.88, further highlighting that many students refrain from physical altercations.

Other items with agreement include “I resolve conflicts with fellow students through dialogue and mutual understanding” (mean = 2.64) and “I am willing to report incidents of violence or bullying to appropriate authorities” (mean = 2.65), indicating that some students actively promote non-violent solutions. However, statements such as “I discourage my peers from using violent means to address disagreements” (mean = 2.34) and “I actively promote harmony and cooperation among my classmates” (mean = 2.43) recorded mean values below the cut-off, suggesting a lack of consensus or practice in these areas.

The grand mean of 2.48 indicates an overall disagreement on the prevalence of peaceful and non-violent lifestyle practices among tertiary students in Bayelsa State, with responses showing varied levels of agreement. The relatively low standard deviation (0.56) signifies that the students' perceptions on the prevalence of these practices are moderately consistent. This result implies that while certain peaceful behaviours are practiced by a portion of the students, there is room for significant improvement in fostering a widespread non-violent and harmonious lifestyle within these institutions.

Research Question 2

What is the perceived impact of guidance and counselling programs on promoting peaceful coexistence among tertiary education students?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of responses on the perceived impact of guidance and counselling programs on promoting peaceful coexistence among tertiary education students

S/N	STATEMENT	X	SD	REMARK
1	Guidance and counselling programs in my institution promote awareness of peaceful conflict resolution strategies.	2.12	.38	A
2	Counsellors provide effective support to students in managing interpersonal conflicts.	2.21	.89	D
3	The counselling unit regularly organizes seminars and workshops on peaceful coexistence.	2.08	1.52	D
4	Counselling sessions have helped me develop better communication skills for resolving disagreements.	2.03	.35	D
5	Guidance and counselling programs encourage tolerance and understanding among students of different backgrounds.	2.33	.30	D
6	I have learned techniques for anger management through counselling activities.	2.14	.35	D
7	The counselling services have positively influenced my ability to handle peer pressure non-violently.	3.12	.38	A
8	Guidance and counselling programs create a safe environment for discussing issues that could lead to violence.	2.78	1.52	A
9	Counselling initiatives in my school emphasize the importance of respecting others' opinions and rights.	2.56	.35	A
10	Guidance and counselling services have reduced the prevalence of violent behaviors among students in my institution.	2.47	.30	D
	Grand Mean	2.38	0.63	A

Source: Fieldwork (2024) *A=Agree D=Disagree

Table 2 above presents the mean and standard deviation of responses regarding the perceived impact of guidance and counselling programs on promoting peaceful coexistence among tertiary education students in Bayelsa State. Out of the ten items, only four had mean values above the cut-off of 2.50, indicating agreement that specific guidance and counselling efforts positively influence peaceful coexistence. The statement with the highest mean (3.12), “The

counselling services have positively influenced my ability to handle peer pressure non-violently,” highlights a significant positive impact in this area. Similarly, “Guidance and counselling programs create a safe environment for discussing issues that could lead to violence” recorded a mean of 2.78, underscoring the value of counselling services in fostering open communication.

Other areas of agreement include “Counselling initiatives in my school emphasize the importance of respecting others' opinions and rights” (mean = 2.56) and “Guidance and counselling programs in my institution promote awareness of peaceful conflict resolution strategies” (mean = 2.12). However, items such as “The counselling unit regularly organizes seminars and workshops on peaceful coexistence” (mean = 2.08) and “Counsellors provide effective support to students in managing interpersonal conflicts” (mean = 2.21) fell below the cut-off, indicating limited effectiveness or engagement in these areas. The grand mean of 2.38 suggests that, on average, students perceive the impact of guidance and counselling programs on peaceful coexistence as moderate, with varied effectiveness across different aspects of the programs. The relatively low standard deviation (0.63) indicates consistency in responses among the students. These findings imply that while certain aspects of guidance and counselling programs have positively impacted students, there is a need to strengthen efforts in areas such as conflict management support, regular workshops, and skills development to enhance their overall effectiveness.

Research Question 3

What challenges do guidance and counselling units face in fostering non-violent behaviour among tertiary education students?

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation of responses on the challenges guidance and counselling units face in fostering non-violent behaviour among tertiary education students

S/N	STATEMENT	X	SD	REMARK
1	Inadequate funding limits the effectiveness of guidance and counselling programs in my institution.	3.12	.38	M
2	There are insufficient counsellors to address the needs of all students.	3.21	.89	M
3	Lack of professional training and development opportunities for counsellors affects service delivery.	3.08	.52	M
4	Students are often reluctant to seek guidance and counselling services for conflict resolution.	3.03	.35	M
5	Counselling units lack adequate facilities and resources to promote non-violent behavior.	3.03	.30	M
6	Cultural and social stigmas hinder students from engaging with counselling services.	3.14	.35	M
7	Heavy workloads and administrative duties reduce counsellors' availability for student support.	3.12	.89	M
8	There is a lack of institutional support for guidance and counselling programs aimed at fostering peace.	3.21	.72	M
9	Poor awareness of the role of counselling services limits student participation in non-violence initiatives.	3.08	.35	M
10	Miscommunication or mistrust between students and counsellors affects the effectiveness of counselling programs.	3.03	.30	M
	GRAND MEAN	3.10	0.50	M

Source: Fieldwork (2024) *M=Major, Mi=Minor

Table 3 above presents the mean and standard deviation of responses regarding the challenges faced by guidance and counselling units in fostering non-violent behaviour among tertiary education students in Bayelsa State. All the items recorded mean values above the cut-off point of 2.50, indicating that respondents perceive these challenges as major. The statement with the highest mean (3.21), “There is insufficient counsellors to address the needs of all students,” emphasizes the significant challenge of inadequate staffing in counselling units. Similarly, “There is a lack of institutional support for guidance and counselling programs aimed at fostering peace” (mean = 3.21) highlights the critical need for institutional backing to enhance program effectiveness.

Other prominent challenges include “Cultural and social stigmas hinder students from engaging with counselling services” (mean = 3.14) and “Inadequate funding limits the effectiveness of guidance and counselling programs in my institution” (mean = 3.12), both pointing to systemic and social barriers that restrict the reach and impact of counselling services. Additional concerns, such as “Lack of professional training and development opportunities for counsellors” (mean = 3.08) and “Heavy workloads and administrative duties reduce counsellors' availability for student support” (mean = 3.12), further demonstrate operational and professional constraints faced by counselling units.

The grand mean of 3.10 indicates that these challenges are perceived as major across the board, with a relatively low standard deviation (0.50) showing consistency in the respondents' views. These findings suggest that guidance and counselling units require enhanced funding, institutional support, staffing, and professional development opportunities to effectively foster non-violent behaviour among students. Addressing cultural and social stigmas and raising awareness about the importance of counselling services are also essential steps to maximize their impact.

Discussion of Findings

The findings from Research Question 1 revealed that the prevalence of non-violent and peaceful lifestyle practices among tertiary education students in Bayelsa State is relatively low, as indicated by the grand mean of 2.48. These findings suggest that although there is some level of peaceful conduct among students, significant gaps remain in fostering a culture of non-violence and mutual respect in tertiary institutions. The results align with the findings of Ndungu (2015) and Kairiza et al. (2017), who emphasized the importance of structured interventions to promote harmonious relationships and reduce violence within academic environments. Ndungu (2015) highlighted that resource-intensive strategies, such as targeted awareness programs and counseling services, are crucial in reducing conflict and fostering student peace. Similarly, Kairiza et al. (2017) noted that despite institutions' efforts, unresolved gaps in effective conflict resolution mechanisms can impede the development of peaceful coexistence.

The findings from Research Question 2 indicate that the perceived impact of guidance and counseling programs on promoting peaceful coexistence among tertiary education students in Bayelsa State is generally low, with a grand mean of 2.38, which is slightly below the cut-off value of 2.50. These findings align with previous research by Taiwo and Agwu (2017) and Rosen (2013), highlighting the significant potential of guidance and counselling programs to reduce violent behaviours and promote peaceful interactions. However, the mixed responses observed in the present study suggest that while counseling services may have some positive influence, they may not be fully effective in instilling lasting changes in students' conflict-resolution behaviours. As suggested by Efuntade (2023), the success of such programs largely depends on the quality and frequency of their delivery and students' willingness to engage with these services.

The results suggest that tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State should enhance the visibility and accessibility of their counseling services. This can be achieved by increasing the frequency of counseling programs, providing targeted workshops on non-violence, and ensuring students are more informed about available services. Moreover, it is crucial for guidance and counseling units to employ a more personalized and proactive approach to addressing the unique needs of students, as these strategies foster greater student engagement and more effective promotion of peaceful coexistence. In addition, continued advocacy for the importance of guidance and counseling, as noted by Chukwu and Molokwu (2022), can further elevate students' participation and benefit from these essential services.

The findings from Research Question 3 reveal that guidance and counseling units in tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State face several significant challenges in fostering non-violent behaviour among students, with a grand mean of 3.10, indicating a significant impact of these challenges. These results resonate with the findings of Ndungu (2015) and Kairiza et al. (2017), emphasizing the importance of adequate resources, trained professionals, and institutional backing in successfully implementing guidance and counseling programs. The lack of sufficient funding and support can prevent counseling units from organizing regular programs and providing adequate resources to reach all students effectively. Additionally, the challenges of stigmatization and reluctance to seek counselling services echo the findings of Chukwu and Molokwu (2022), who highlighted the importance of breaking down barriers to accessing mental health support in educational settings.

Conclusion

This study examined the role of guidance and counselling programs in promoting peaceful and non-violent lifestyles among tertiary education students in Bayelsa State. Specifically, it seeks to assess the prevalence of peaceful practices, evaluate the perceived impact of counselling services, and identify challenges faced by counselling units in fostering non-violent behaviors among students. The findings revealed that while students engage in some non-violent and peaceful practices, such as resolving conflicts through dialogue and avoiding physical fights, there are notable areas where improvement is needed. Guidance and counselling programs have a perceived positive impact on students' ability to manage conflicts peacefully; however, the effectiveness of these programs is significantly hindered by challenges such as inadequate funding, insufficient counselling staff, and cultural stigmas. The results underscore the need for strategic interventions to enhance the overall impact of counselling programs in fostering peaceful coexistence.

The implications of the study highlight the critical role that both individual and institutional efforts play in promoting a non-violent and peaceful culture within tertiary institutions. The prevalence of non-violent behaviours, although notable, suggests that more could be done to encourage and institutionalize peaceful conflict resolution practices. This study emphasizes the need for robust guidance and counselling services that not only address students' psychological needs but also foster a culture of peace. Additionally, the identified challenges in the delivery of guidance and counselling services point to the necessity of strengthening institutional support and providing adequate resources to meet the growing demands of students.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Tertiary institutions should increase funding and resources for guidance and counselling programs to improve their capacity in promoting peaceful coexistence among students.
2. Universities should hire more trained counsellors to adequately address the needs of students and ensure effective conflict resolution support.
3. Institutions should implement awareness campaigns to reduce stigma and encourage

student participation in guidance and counselling programs aimed at fostering non-violent behaviour.

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