
Impact of Counselling Interventions in Strengthening School Security for Educational Sustainable Development in Aba, Education Zone, Abia State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study investigated the impact of counselling interventions in strengthening school security for sustainable educational development in Aba Education Zone, Abia State, Nigeria. The population comprised 4,177 teachers across 119 secondary schools in the zone. Using a simple random sampling technique without replacement, a sample of 137 teachers was drawn from secondary schools located in the five Local Government Areas of the zone, namely Aba South, Aba North, Obingwa, Isiala Ngwa North, and Isiala Ngwa South. Data were collected using a researcher-developed attitude questionnaire titled Impact of Counselling Interventions in Strengthening School Security for Sustainable Development Questionnaire (ICISSSSDQ). The study was guided by two research purposes and two corresponding research questions. To establish the reliability of the instrument, a pilot study was conducted outside the study area, and data obtained were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.81, which indicates satisfactory internal consistency. Data generated from the main study were analysed using mean and standard deviation statistics to answer the research questions. The findings revealed that secondary schools in Aba Education Zone are confronted with various security challenges, including bullying, cult activities, gang disruption, and threats from the surrounding environment. The results further indicated that counselling interventions play a significant role in strengthening school security, particularly by promoting

emotional stability, positive peer relationships, and supportive learning environments. The study therefore concludes that counselling interventions are essential for strengthening school security and promoting sustainable educational development in secondary schools in Aba Education Zone. Based on the findings, it is recommended that counselling services be strengthened and made an integral part of school safety and student welfare programmes in secondary schools across Abia State to foster peaceful relationships and enhance students' academic, social, and emotional development.

Keywords: Counselling Interventions, Security, Sustainable Development, Secondary School.

Introduction

The most valuable investment any society can make is investment in human development, and such investment must begin from early childhood. For this investment to be meaningful and sustainable, adequate security must be ensured within the home, the school, and all social institutions that contribute to the growth and development of the child. Security therefore should be regarded as a fundamental requirement for children's development and wellbeing. In this context, security refers to a state in which individuals feel safe, protected, and free from danger or harm. Amadi, Abiahu, and Anoruo (2012) describe security as a condition that promotes happiness and stability, while it also involves protection from external threats such as unauthorized intrusion, violence, or distraction. More broadly, security implies freedom from fear, deprivation, and uncertainty and the assurance that one's life and property are protected.

When security is lacking, insecurity becomes prevalent. Insecurity represents a state of fear, uncertainty, and constant exposure to physical or psychological threats. The consequences of insecurity are evident in Nigeria's education sector, where insecurity has contributed to declining school enrolment, particularly in the northern regions of the country. Abdullah and Terhemba (2014) reported that insecurity accounted for a significant reduction in school enrolment in the region. Incidents such as the abduction of schoolgirls from Chibok in Borno State in 2014 and the kidnapping of students from Government Secondary School, Mamudo, in Yobe State illustrate how insecurity directly threatens students' lives and disrupts educational continuity. Some of these learners remain in captivity, underscoring the long-term impact of insecurity on education. Insecurity is not confined to conflict zones alone. Poorly regulated school environments, unsafe infrastructure, and inadequate supervision also pose serious risks. The tragic collapse of a school building in Jos, Plateau State, in July 2024, which claimed young lives and left many students injured, highlights the dangers associated with unsafe learning environments. Similar concerns exist in both private and public schools across Abia State, where some schools operate without adequate safety standards, prioritizing profit over student welfare.

Secondary school education occurs during a critical developmental stage between childhood and adolescence. At this stage, learners are expected to internalize societal values, develop social competence, and acquire habits that support healthy living and responsible citizenship. However, insecurity—manifesting through poverty, child labour, violence, kidnapping, and sexual abuse—undermines this developmental process. Child labour, in

particular, remains a major impediment to students' participation in education for sustainable development. Without adequate protection, students are unable to fully actualize their potential during this formative stage of life.

Education is widely recognized as an instrument for achieving national goals, including the creation of a free and democratic society (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014). For education to fulfil this role, learning must take place in an environment that is safe, stable, and supportive. Counselling services therefore play a critical role in ensuring school security by providing learners with emotional support, behavioural guidance, and coping strategies. Through structured counselling programmes and safety education, schools can help students navigate insecure environments, develop resilience, and grow into productive and responsible citizens. As noted by Iwuanyanwu, Osuji, and Nege (2020), education and counselling together are essential tools for building enlightened citizens capable of contributing to social order and sustainable national development.

Counselling is a developmental, preventive, and educational process that provides students with structured opportunities to discuss their personal concerns, emotions, and life challenges with trained professionals in a confidential, supportive, and dependable environment. Within the school system, counselling is not merely a remedial service but an essential component of students' holistic development. A school counsellor is professionally prepared to listen with empathy, sensitivity, and understanding, while also demonstrating high moral standards and ethical conduct. Beyond individual counselling, the counsellor provides dynamic leadership in the planning, coordination, and execution of guidance programmes that address academic, personal–social, and career-related needs of learners. Through counselling, students are assisted to develop self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and social competence, enabling them to understand themselves, relate positively with others, interpret their environment, and manage the challenges they encounter in daily life. Counselling therefore facilitates healthy adjustment by helping learners identify personal strengths, recognise limitations, and adopt constructive coping strategies. The fundamental aim of counselling is to help students cope with and overcome issues that cause emotional distress, discomfort, anxiety, fear, or other psychosocial difficulties that may hinder effective learning and personal growth (Ikediashi & Iwuanyanwu, 2017).

Counselling assumes even greater importance during crisis situations and emotionally significant periods, when students are vulnerable to poor decision-making and emotional instability. In such contexts, counselling supports reflective thinking, problem-solving, and emotional regulation, which are essential for maintaining psychological balance and academic focus (Okezie & Maduka, 2018). Within the framework of school security, counselling interventions are particularly critical because they aim to protect students' lives and wellbeing while promoting resilience and adaptive functioning. Given that today's students represent the future leadership of society, safeguarding their physical and psychological safety becomes a moral and developmental priority.

Counselling strategies targeted at school security may take diverse forms, including conferences, seminars, workshops, group guidance sessions, and structured wellbeing programmes. These interventions are designed to promote students' awareness of security risks,

strengthen coping skills, and foster safe and supportive school climates. Effective counselling for security also involves preventive education and awareness-raising on the consequences of insecurity and behaviours that threaten healthy development, such as poor parenting practices, unsafe school environments, negative peer influence, and antisocial behaviour. By addressing these issues proactively, counselling helps reduce students' vulnerability to fear, trauma, violence, and exploitation. Counselling for security therefore refers to a purposeful and supportive form of guidance that provides students with emotional support, behavioural direction, and practical coping skills, particularly for those experiencing anxiety, fear, trauma, or other insecurity-related challenges (United Nations, 2020). This type of counselling strengthens students' sense of safety, self-confidence, and psychological readiness to learn, thereby contributing to sustainable educational development.

School counselling practice is grounded in relevant psychological theories; consequently, this study adopts Social Learning Theory and Reality Therapy as its theoretical foundations. Social Learning Theory emphasizes observational learning, modelling, and reinforcement as key mechanisms through which behaviour is acquired and sustained. In the school context, this theory underscores the importance of positive role models—such as counsellors, teachers, and peers—in shaping students' behaviours and attitudes toward security, discipline, and social responsibility. Through observation and guided reinforcement, students learn appropriate responses to security challenges and develop constructive patterns of behaviour.

Reality Therapy, on the other hand, is anchored in the principle of personal responsibility, which promotes order, self-discipline, emotional balance, and social harmony—essential conditions for healthy mental development and national progress. Reality Therapy enables students to examine their behaviours critically and determine whether such behaviours contribute to autonomy, responsibility, and personal success. According to Nwazue and Okoiye (2018), behavioural challenges often arise when individuals fail to meet basic needs—such as safety, belonging, and self-worth—in socially acceptable ways. Given that personal safety and freedom from danger are fundamental human needs, behaviours that compromise school security inevitably undermine both individual development and educational success.

Reality Therapy therefore serves as a practical instructional and behavioural framework not only for counsellors, but also for teachers, parents, and school administrators in promoting security consciousness within and beyond the school environment. Any behaviour that obstructs students' safety, autonomy, and achievement must be discouraged and replaced with actions that promote holistic development, secure learning spaces, responsible citizenship, and sustainable personal and national growth.

Statement of Problem

Inadequate counselling services for security in secondary schools poses a big threat to the students' emotional, physical well-being and psychological balance. All these challenges undermine the students' ability to learn and achieve academic success and contribute to sustainable development. This situation concerns schools in Nigeria where secondary school students' are faced with various security challenges such as kidnapping, child abuse, violence

and bullying. The absence of adequate counselling intervention has eaten deep into the culture of our society. Thus insecurity, fear and violence in turn mar the achievement of sustainable development goals (SDG-4) peace, justice and strong institutions. The Nigerian environment as a whole is full of insecurity challenges. The school environments are worst hit as a result of kidnapping and security issues like herdsmen attacks and Boko Haram insurgences. These harmful scenarios face secondary school students and hinder them from educational development for sustainable development in Nigeria.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to examine the impact of counselling interventions in strengthening school security for educational sustainable development in Aba, Abia State, Nigeria. Subsequently, the study sought to:

1. examine the security challenges among the secondary schools students for sustainable development in Aba Education zone.
2. ascertain the impact of counselling interventions in strengthening school security among the secondary schools students for sustainable development in Aba Education zone.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study :

1. to what extent does security challenges impact on secondary school students sustainable development in Aba Education Zone.
2. to what extent does counselling interventions strengthen secondary school students for sustainable development in Aba Education zone.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory and William Glasser's Reality (Choice) Theory. Together, these theories provide complementary explanatory lenses for understanding how counselling interventions can influence students' security-related behaviours and promote sustainable development within secondary school environments, particularly in contexts affected by insecurity.

Social Learning Theory (Albert Bandura, 1977)

Social Learning Theory posits that human behaviour is learned primarily through observation, modelling, and reinforcement within social contexts. Bandura argues that individuals do not acquire behaviours solely through direct experience; rather, they learn by observing the actions of others, interpreting the consequences of those actions, and deciding whether to imitate them. This learning process is mediated by cognitive factors such as attention, retention, motivation, and perceived self-efficacy. Within secondary school environments, this theory is particularly relevant to security-related behaviours. Students observe the behaviours of peers, teachers, school counsellors, and other authority figures, and these observations shape norms around aggression, compliance, conflict resolution, and responsibility. Where violence, bullying, cultism, or disrespect for rules are modelled or left unaddressed, such behaviours may be normalised. Conversely, when positive behaviours—such as peaceful conflict resolution, empathy, emotional regulation, and respect for rules—are

consistently modelled and reinforced, students are more likely to internalise and reproduce them (Bandura, 1977).

In relation to counselling interventions, Social Learning Theory explains why school counsellors and teachers function as behavioural models. Through counselling sessions, group guidance, and everyday interactions, counsellors demonstrate adaptive coping strategies and pro-social behaviours that students may adopt. The theory therefore justifies counselling approaches that emphasise role modelling, peer influence, behavioural reinforcement, and positive school climate as mechanisms for strengthening security and reducing maladaptive behaviour in schools.

Reality (Choice) Theory (William Glasser, 1965)

Reality Theory, later developed into Choice Theory, proposes that individuals are internally motivated and responsible for their behavioural choices. Glasser argues that behaviour is purposeful and driven by attempts to satisfy five basic needs: survival, love and belonging, power, freedom, and fun. Psychological difficulties arise not from pathology alone, but from ineffective choices and unmet needs, particularly in relationships and social environments. In the secondary school context, Reality Theory provides a framework for understanding students' involvement in insecurity-related behaviours such as truancy, aggression, cult activities, or defiance of school rules. Such behaviours can be interpreted as maladaptive attempts to meet needs for power, belonging, or autonomy. Counselling interventions grounded in Reality Theory therefore focus on helping students evaluate their current behaviour, recognise its consequences, and make more responsible choices that align with personal and collective wellbeing. For school security, Reality Theory supports counselling practices that promote personal responsibility, self-regulation, goal setting, and problem-solving. Rather than relying on punitive or externally controlled measures, counsellors help students develop internal control and accountability for their actions, reducing the likelihood of behaviours that threaten school safety.

Relevance of the Theories to the Study

Together, Social Learning Theory and Reality Theory offer a robust theoretical foundation for this study. While Social Learning Theory explains how security-related behaviours are acquired and reinforced within school environments, Reality Theory explains how students can be guided to make responsible behavioural choices through counselling interventions. The integration of both theories supports the study's emphasis on counselling as both a preventive and restorative mechanism for improving school security and promoting sustainable educational development.

Review of Related Literature

School Security Challenges in Secondary Education

School security is increasingly conceptualised in contemporary research as a multidimensional condition encompassing physical protection, emotional safety, psychological wellbeing, and social stability within the school environment. Rather than being limited to the prevention of overt violence, school security involves the existence of systems and practices that enable learners to feel safe, supported, and protected from harm, allowing teaching and

learning to take place without fear or disruption. In this context, insecurity refers to conditions in which learners and school personnel experience threats—actual or perceived—that undermine trust, stability, and normal educational functioning. In Nigeria, security challenges affecting secondary schools reflect broader national insecurity and social instability. Empirical and policy-oriented studies identify manifestations such as bullying, cultism, sexual harassment, gang violence, drug abuse, vandalism, and exposure to external threats including kidnapping, armed robbery, and communal violence. These challenges do not occur in isolation; rather, they interact with weak institutional safeguards, limited pastoral support systems, and community-level insecurity. Consequently, schools become permeable spaces where external violence and social disorder spill into learning environments.

From a developmental and educational psychology perspective, exposure to insecurity has far-reaching implications for adolescents. Persistent fear and unpredictability impair students' emotional regulation, concentration, motivation, and peer relationships. When insecurity becomes normalised within school environments, students are more likely to exhibit withdrawal, aggressive behaviour, poor attendance, or disengagement from learning. Over time, such conditions threaten sustainable educational development, defined not only in terms of academic achievement, but also students' psychosocial adjustment, resilience, and future productivity.

Counselling Interventions as Preventive, Protective, and Restorative Strategies

Counselling interventions in secondary schools represent structured professional efforts designed to prevent security-related risks, respond to crisis situations, and restore psychological stability among learners. Modern counselling frameworks emphasise that schools are not only academic institutions but also psychosocial environments where emotional wellbeing and safety are prerequisites for effective learning. As such, counselling interventions address both immediate security-related concerns (such as fear, trauma, or peer conflict) and longer-term developmental needs including self-control, decision-making, and social competence. Within insecure contexts, counselling serves a protective function by equipping students with coping skills, conflict-resolution strategies, emotional regulation techniques, and help-seeking behaviours. Counselling also plays a preventive role by identifying at-risk students early and addressing behaviours that may escalate into security threats. Importantly, counselling does not replace formal security measures; rather, it complements them by addressing the psychosocial drivers of insecurity within schools.

Collaboration as a Core Dimension of Effective Counselling

A central assumption of this study's conceptual framework is that counselling interventions are most effective when delivered through structured collaboration. Contemporary school mental health and guidance literature increasingly highlights that isolated counselling efforts are insufficient in complex and high-risk environments. Collaboration among school counsellors, teachers, administrators, families, and community stakeholders enhances coordination, information flow, and consistency in intervention strategies. Collaborative counselling practices allow for shared understanding of security challenges, coordinated responses to incidents, and continuity of support for affected students. By working collectively, counsellors can move from reactive crisis management to systematic prevention

and recovery planning. Collaboration also strengthens institutional capacity, ensuring that counselling interventions are embedded within broader school policies and routines rather than dependent on individual goodwill.

Role of Family Relationships and School Climate

The effectiveness of counselling interventions is further shaped by family dynamics and school climate. Secure child–parent relationships provide emotional foundations that help students cope with stress and insecurity. Children who experience consistent care and support at home tend to develop stronger self-esteem, emotional control, and empathy, which enhance their responsiveness to counselling interventions. Similarly, school climate—characterised by supportive teacher–student relationships, fairness, clear norms, and trust—reinforces counselling outcomes. Schools function as agents of socialisation, transmitting values, behaviours, and norms through daily interactions. Where positive role models and supportive relationships prevail, counselling interventions are more likely to translate into lasting behavioural and emotional change.

Linking Counselling, Security, and Sustainable Development

Within this framework, psycho-social counselling and collaborative practices are positioned as mechanisms linking school security to sustainable educational development. By promoting safety, emotional wellbeing, and social stability, counselling interventions support continuous learning, reduce dropout, and foster resilience. Sustainable educational development, therefore, depends not only on curriculum delivery and infrastructure, but also on the presence of intentional psychosocial systems that protect learners in insecure environments.

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design, which was appropriate for examining teachers' perceptions of school security challenges and the role of counselling interventions in promoting sustainable development among secondary school students in Aba Education Zone, Abia State, Nigeria. The design enabled the collection of quantitative data from a defined population without manipulation of variables.

Area of the Study

The study was conducted in five Local Government Areas within Aba Education Zone, namely Aba South, Aba North, Obingwa, Isiala Ngwa North, and Isiala Ngwa South, selected from the nine Local Government Areas in the zone. These areas were chosen due to their high concentration of secondary schools and reported security-related challenges affecting school environments.

Population of the Study

The population comprised 2,993 teachers across all public secondary schools in the five selected Local Government Areas. Teachers were considered appropriate respondents because of their continuous interaction with students and their direct exposure to school security issues and counselling-related interventions.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A sample of 137 teachers, representing approximately 9.1% of the population, was selected using a stratified random sampling technique. The population was first stratified by Local Government Area to ensure proportional representation. Teachers were then randomly selected from each stratum based on staff strength. While the sample size is modest, it meets acceptable thresholds for descriptive survey studies and allows for preliminary generalisation within the study area.

Instrument for Data Collection

Data were collected using a 33-item researcher-developed questionnaire titled *Impact of Counselling Interventions in Strengthening School Security for Sustainable Development Questionnaire (ICISSSDQ)*. The instrument consisted of two sections: Section A assessed security challenges in secondary schools, and Section B examined the role of counselling interventions in strengthening school security and supporting sustainable development. Items were structured on a four-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1).

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

The instrument was subjected to face validation by three experts in Guidance and Counselling and one expert in Measurement and Evaluation. Their suggestions informed item clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study objectives. Reliability was established through a pilot study conducted in three Local Government Areas outside the study area, solely for the purpose of testing internal consistency and avoiding sample contamination. Data from the pilot study were analysed using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.74, which is acceptable for social science research. It is important to clarify that this procedure was not a pre-test/post-test of outcomes, but a trial test of the instrument.

Procedure for Data Collection

The researcher administered the questionnaire with the assistance of trained research assistants. Completed questionnaires were retrieved using the on-the-spot method, ensuring a high response rate and minimal data loss.

Analyses of Result

Research Question 1

To what extent do insecurity challenges impact secondary school students' sustainable development in Aba Education Zone?

Decision rule: A mean score of 2.50 and above indicates agreement (the item is perceived as a prevailing security challenge), while a mean score below 2.50 indicates disagreement.

Table 1: Teachers' perceptions of insecurity challenges in secondary schools in Aba Education Zone (n = 137)

S/N	Item statement	n	Mean (\bar{x})	SD	Decision
1	Incidence of bullying	137	3.45	1.04	A
2	Senior students tampering with junior students' property	137	3.89	0.86	A
3	Open school environments (uncontrolled access)	137	3.40	1.04	A
4	Sexual harassment	137	3.07	1.04	A

S/N	Item statement	n	Mean (\bar{x})	SD	Decision
5	Cases of rape	137	3.08	1.03	A
6	Reports of students carrying dangerous weapons	137	3.42	0.92	A
7	Sound of gunshots in/around the school environment	137	3.24	0.18	A
8	Cult activities in the environment	137	3.64	0.92	A
9	Student gang activity disrupting classes	137	3.21	0.76	A
10	Kidnapping attacks in/around the school environment	137	3.20	0.76	A
11	Herdsmen attacks in/around the school environment	137	2.62	0.74	A
12	Violent attacks by “bad boys”	137	3.42	0.72	A
13	Armed robbery attacks in/around the school environment	137	3.01	0.61	A
	Pooled mean		3.28	0.82*	A

*Pooled SD presented here is the average of item SDs (descriptive summary), not the sum.

Table 1 indicates that teachers agreed with all 13 items as security challenges affecting secondary schools in Aba Education Zone, since each item recorded a mean score above the 2.50 cut-off. The highest-rated challenge was *senior students tampering with junior students' property* ($\bar{x} = 3.89$), followed by *cult activities in the environment* ($\bar{x} = 3.64$) and *bullying* ($\bar{x} = 3.45$). Even the lowest-rated item—*herdsmen attacks* ($\bar{x} = 2.62$)—still exceeded the benchmark, indicating that respondents perceived it as a notable security concern. Overall, the pooled mean of 3.28 suggests that insecurity challenges are perceived to affect secondary schools in Aba Education Zone to a high extent, with implications for students' stable schooling experiences and sustainable development outcomes.

Research Question 2

To what extent do counselling interventions strengthen school security for sustainable development among secondary school students in Aba Education Zone?

Decision rule: A mean score of 2.50 and above indicates agreement (the item is perceived as strengthening school security), while a mean score below 2.50 indicates disagreement.

Table 2: Teachers' perceptions of counselling interventions for strengthening school security and sustainable development (n = 137)

S/N	Item statement	n	Mean (\bar{x})	SD	Decision
14	Supportive counselling for security enhances effective learning	137	3.03	0.61	A
15	Counselling for security is a sine qua non for effective teaching and learning	137	2.92	0.87	A
16	Counselling for security enables students to have a supportive learning environment	137	3.57	0.60	A
17	Counselling for security arouses students' interest in learning	137	3.39	0.75	A

S/N	Item statement	n	Mean (\bar{x})	SD	Decision
18	Counselling for security supports lesson delivery that improves students' critical thinking	137	3.16	0.61	A
19	Effective counselling for security creates a fearless teaching-learning environment	137	3.44	0.54	A
20	Counselling for security helps develop students' social skills	137	3.16	0.61	A
21	Counselling for security addresses students' emotional needs and prepares them to learn without fear	137	3.16	0.70	A
22	Counselling for security helps students develop respectful relationships with peers and adults	137	3.59	0.87	A
23	Counselling for security creates a harmonious learning environment	137	2.98	0.78	A
24	Counselling for security enables teachers to control their classes effectively	137	3.30	0.75	A
25	Counselling for security reduces cultism in schools	137	2.94	0.98	A
26	Counselling for security reduces the likelihood of corruption among students	137	3.20	0.82	A
27	Counselling for security reduces sexual harassment among secondary school students	137	2.30	0.75	D
28	Counselling for security sensitises curriculum planners and administrators to advocate for school counsellors in all secondary schools	137	3.44	0.54	A
	Pooled mean		3.22	0.73*	A

*Pooled SD is presented as the average of item SDs (descriptive summary).

Table 2 shows that teachers agreed with 14 of the 15 items indicating that counselling interventions strengthen school security and support sustainable development in secondary schools in Aba Education Zone, as these items recorded mean scores above the 2.50 cut-off. The highest-rated contributions of counselling were fostering respectful relationships ($\bar{x} = 3.59$), enabling supportive learning environments ($\bar{x} = 3.57$), and encouraging administrative advocacy for counsellors ($\bar{x} = 3.44$). Only one item—reduction of sexual harassment ($\bar{x} = 2.30$)—fell below the benchmark, indicating teachers' reservations about counselling alone being sufficient to curb this issue. This suggests that while counselling is widely perceived as strengthening school security and learning conditions, some security concerns may require additional systemic or enforcement-based measures alongside counselling. Overall, the pooled mean of 3.22 indicates that counselling interventions strengthen school security and contribute to students' sustainable development to a high extent in Aba Education Zone.

Discussion

Findings indicate that secondary schools in Aba Education Zone are affected by multiple forms of insecurity, including bullying, cult activities, gang disruptions, sexual harassment, kidnapping threats, and armed robbery, all of which recorded mean scores above the 2.50 benchmark. This pattern suggests that insecurity is not episodic but rather a systemic challenge within the school environment. Consistent with school climate research, an unsafe school environment undermines teaching and learning by creating fear, anxiety, and emotional instability among both students and teachers (Mayer, Nickerson, & Jimerson, 2021). When students perceive their schools as unsafe, academic engagement and motivation tend to decline. The findings align with Nigerian-based studies that report a significant relationship between school insecurity and students' academic performance and motivation. Ojukwu (2017) found that insecurity within the school environment significantly affected secondary school students' academic performance in Imo State, particularly through exposure to gangsterism, cultism, and violence.

Similarly, Ojukwu and Nwanna (2015) reported that students who perceive stronger security support and a caring school environment are more likely to demonstrate higher academic motivation and positive learning behaviour. These studies reinforce the present finding that insecurity challenges constrain students' sustainable educational development in Aba Education Zone. Further supporting this position, Ojukwu and Onuoha (2017) argued that the goals of education cannot be achieved in a vacuum but require a peaceful and conducive school environment. Their study demonstrated that persistent insecurity generates fear among students and teachers, discouraging participation in school activities and limiting academic achievement. Empirical evidence also indicates that insecurity is associated with heightened anxiety and reduced academic motivation among secondary school students, which further threatens learning continuity and emotional wellbeing (Gadzama, Bala, & Jibrin, 2024).

Findings also show that counselling interventions are perceived by teachers as strengthening school security and supporting students' sustainable development to a high extent. Most counselling-related items recorded mean scores above the acceptance level, indicating agreement that counselling promotes emotional stability, supportive learning environments, respectful peer relationships, and fear-free classrooms. These outcomes are consistent with psychosocial research showing that school-based counselling interventions enhance emotional regulation and social competence, both of which are essential for learning in high-stress environments (van IJzendoorn, 2012; Iwuanyanwu, Osuji, & Nege, 2020). Okezie and Maduka (2018) further emphasized that counselling plays a critical role in crisis situations by assisting individuals to make informed decisions during emotionally significant experiences. This supports the present finding that counselling interventions help mitigate the effects of insecurity by fostering coping skills, emotional support, and constructive behaviour among students. However, one item, relating to the reduction of sexual harassment, fell below the benchmark mean, suggesting that counselling alone may be insufficient to address this issue fully. This aligns with broader literature indicating that certain forms of school violence, particularly sexual harassment, require complementary institutional policies, reporting

mechanisms, and enforcement structures alongside counselling support (Baumgarten & Simmonds, 2022).

Overall, the findings suggest that while counselling interventions significantly strengthen school security and psychosocial readiness for learning, their effectiveness is greatest when integrated within broader school safety frameworks. Counselling therefore functions as both a preventive and supportive mechanism, contributing meaningfully to safer school climates and sustainable educational development.

Conclusion

The study established that insecurity constitutes a significant challenge to secondary school students' sustainable development in Aba Education Zone. Teachers identified multiple manifestations of insecurity, such as bullying, cult activities, gang disruptions, kidnapping threats, and armed robbery, as prevalent within and around school environments. These challenges were perceived to adversely affect students' sense of safety, emotional stability, and engagement with learning.

The findings further revealed that counselling interventions play a substantial role in strengthening school security, particularly by improving students' emotional wellbeing, fostering positive peer relationships, promoting supportive and fear-free learning environments, and reducing behaviours such as cultism. However, the study also showed that counselling alone may be insufficient to address certain sensitive security concerns, notably sexual harassment, indicating the need for complementary institutional safeguards. Overall, the study concludes that counselling interventions are a vital component of school-based responses to insecurity and should be regarded as a core educational support service rather than a peripheral activity. When effectively implemented, counselling contributes meaningfully to safer school climates and supports students' academic, social, and emotional development, which are essential for sustainable educational outcomes in Aba Education Zone.

Recommendations

- Based on the findings of the study, the following two major recommendations are made:
1. **Addressing Insecurity Challenges in Secondary Schools:** Given the high extent to which insecurity challenges, such as bullying, cultism, gang activities, kidnapping threats, and armed robbery were found to affect students' sustainable development, school administrators and education authorities should prioritise the provision of safe and secure school environments. This can be achieved through the enforcement of clear school safety policies, improved supervision within and around school premises, and the promotion of a school climate that discourages violence and antisocial behaviour. Addressing these challenges is essential for enhancing students' emotional wellbeing, academic engagement, and overall development in Aba Education Zone.
 2. **Strengthening School Security through Counselling Interventions:** In view of the strong contribution of counselling interventions to school security and sustainable development, school counselling services should be institutionalised and strengthened in all secondary schools in Aba Education Zone. Qualified guidance counsellors should be employed and

supported through regular professional development to address students' emotional, social, and behavioural needs effectively. Counselling interventions should be integrated into school safety and welfare programmes to foster peaceful relationships, emotional stability, and fear-free learning environments, while being complemented by appropriate school policies for managing sensitive security issues.

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