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THE IMPINGEMENT OF PEER INFLUENCE ON THE EFFICACY OF SOCIAL SKILLS TRAINING IN MANAGING SOCIALLY MALADJUSTED STUDENTS IN BENIN METROPOLIS

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Abstract
This study explored the impingement of peer influence on the efficacy of social skills training in managing socially maladjusted students in Benin Metropolis. It was guided by one research question and a corresponding hypothesis. The design for the study was a quasi-experimental research design using a pre-test and post-test approach. The population for this study was five thousand seven hundred and ninety-four (5794) registered students in mixed public senior secondary class two (2) and the sample was 69 senior secondary school II students. The Social Maladjustment Scale (SMS) was adapted for data collection. The instrument had an internal consistency of 0.93 using the Cronbach's alpha method. The data collected were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics at a 0.05 level of significance. The result showed that there was no significant treatment by peer influence interaction effect on adolescents' social maladjustment mean scores, suggesting that SST's effectiveness was consistent across all peers. Based on the result, recommendations were made, including that SST should be integrated into school counselling programmes and that counsellors' professional competence should be enhanced.
Keywords: Adolescents, Counselling, Influence, Peer, Social and Maladjustment

Introduction
Social maladjustment among secondary school students could manifest as aggression, bullying, defiance, truancy, substance use, peer conflict, among others. These manifestations remain a salient school-health challenge that undermines learning, wellbeing, and transition into adulthood. Contemporary syntheses of school mental-health and social-emotional learning programs show that targeted skills instruction such as Social Skills Training (SST) can improve behaviour and school functioning, but outcomes could vary by context and implementation quality. Social Skills Training (SST) is a well-established, skills-focused intervention that teaches communication, assertiveness, emotion regulation, perspective-taking, and problem-solving especially in interpersonal transactions. Social Skills Training (SST) and its components have been found efficacious for adolescent functioning across general and neurodivergent populations, especially when delivered systematically in school settings (Dean & Chang 2021; Fridell et al., 2023; Cipriano 2024). However, these were recent meta-analyses and program evaluations from foreign researchers. Similarly in Nigeria, school-based social-skills and related psychosocial interventions have demonstrated promising effects on anxiety, social phobia, prosocial behaviour, and conduct problems among secondary-school students, underscoring the feasibility of skills-building approaches in local contexts (Abubakar et al., 2020; Adepegba, 2023; Kumuyi et al., 2021). Nonetheless, adolescents do not acquire or deploy social skills in a vacuum. They inhabit peer ecologies, friendship groups, class cohorts, and online networks where norms, modelling, and reinforcement shape behaviour. Contemporary theory emphasises that peer influence is pervasive and ambivalent; it can catalyse prosocial growth or amplify risk, depending on compatibility between adolescent motives and peer norms (Allen, 2024).

Ekechukwu and Nwankwo (2022) highlighted that exposure to Social Skills interventions significantly improves adolescents' self-regulation and interpersonal relationships. They also posited that structured therapeutic approaches help adolescents reinterpret social cues and respond to peer pressure in more adaptive ways. Their assertion supports the rationale for employing Social Skills Training (SST) and related intervention models in addressing social maladjustment, showing that learned coping and problem-solving skills can buffer against the negative impact of peers. Their findings thus form part of the theoretical justification for combining treatment and peer variables in an interactional framework. Adegboyega and Yusuf (2023) found that psychosocial interventions, particularly those emphasizing self-awareness, empathy, and social competence, can mitigate the negative influence of peers on adolescent behaviour. They argued that adolescents who undergo structured therapy often

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develop enhanced emotional intelligence and interpersonal sensitivity, reducing their vulnerability to deviant peer groups. This supports the background assumption that therapeutic exposure can serve as a moderating as well as a protective factor in the relationship between peer influence and social maladjustment. Their work also strengthens the premise that school-based counselling programs are effective platforms for adolescent behavioural transformation. In a similar study, Afolabi, Ojo, and Ezenwa (2021) emphasized the methodological and statistical significance of interaction effects in behavioural research. They noted that understanding the interaction between treatment and social variables, such as peer influence, is crucial in determining how different conditions jointly affect behavioural outcomes. From a theoretical standpoint, their work supports the idea that adolescent behaviour results from the interplay of multiple psychosocial factors rather than from isolated influences.

Scholarly position suggests that a reframe of peer influence is not inherently harmful when harnessed. Olawale and Adeyemo (2021) supported this claim that peer group influence remains one of the most dominant socializing factors during adolescence, shaping both adaptive and maladaptive behaviours. They emphasized that adolescents' desire for social acceptance often predisposes them to conform to peer norms, whether positive or negative. According to their findings, the quality of peer relationships whether supportive or deviant determines the direction of influence on adolescents' psychosocial adjustment. Therefore, when peer contexts emphasize cooperation, inclusion, and shared goals, adolescents often internalize prosocial standards that reduce internalizing symptoms and promote adjustment conditions under which Social Skills Training (SST) techniques may be generalized more robustly. Allen (2024) in a systematic review found that peer-mediated approaches can improve various health, wellbeing, and behavioural outcomes. However, these effects are heterogeneous and contingent on program design, training, and fidelity (Dodd et al. 2022). These findings imply that embedding peer mechanisms alongside Social Skills Training (SST) could enhance transfer and maintenance. Khan and Ahmed (2022) observed that peer pressure has a strong cross-cultural impact on adolescents' maladaptive behaviour patterns, but that intervention exposure such as counselling and skills training can significantly neutralize these effects. They proposed that when adolescents are engaged in structured, psychologically empowering programs, they are less likely to adopt delinquent or maladaptive peer behaviours. Their assertion aligns with the current study's focus on exploring how therapeutic treatment conditions can offset or weaken the impact of negative peer dynamics on social maladjustment.

Obi and Akintunde (2023) posited Social Skills Training (SST) act as mediators of social adjustment among adolescents by improving their emotional insight, communication competence, and problem-solving skills. They emphasized that these therapies enable adolescents to recognize maladaptive behavioural patterns and replace them with more constructive relational strategies. Collectively, the assertions of these authors establish the conceptual basis for the present study, which integrates the influence of peer relationships and therapeutic interventions in understanding adolescent social maladjustment. They converge on the view that while peer influence is a significant social determinant of adolescent behaviour, structured psychological treatments can effectively moderate or counteract its negative impact. Thus, the study's focus on examining the interaction effect between treatment and peer influence is firmly grounded in contemporary empirical and theoretical evidence.

Conversely, negative peer climates, bullying, pro-deviance norms, social reward for aggression among others can interfere with skill acquisition and application. Studies across Africa indicate that peer victimization and hostile climates elevate mental-health distress and risk behaviours factors that compete with and, or overwhelm school-based supports (Ighaede-Edwards et al., 2023). Within Edo State with focus on Benin Metropolis, recent research documents significant bullying exposure and contextual predictors among secondary-school students, pointing to peer-group dynamics as a locally salient driver of social maladjustment (Ighaede-Edwards et al., 2023). These evidence underscores the necessity of accounting for peer context when implementing Social Skills Training (SST) in Benin schools. Furthermore, studies from Edo State and neighbouring states link peer pressure to delinquent behaviour and substance use among in-school adolescent. These patterns are directly relevant to the externalizing forms of social maladjustment that Social Skills Training (SST) address (Adubale & Aiyewa, 2022; Igbineweka, 2024). It also important to state that when peer pressure toward risk is strong, some participants may resist practicing Social Skills Training (SST) techniques like refusal, assertiveness, conflict de-escalation among others. Substance use research among Nigerian adolescents could reinforce the magnitude of peer effects. Both cross-sectional and narrative evidence since 2020 associate peer norms and exposure with uptake patterns, suggesting

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that without peer-context alignment, skills learned in Social Skills Training (SST) could be undermined during real-world peer encounters (Obadeji et al., 2020; Kolawole et al., 2025).

This study is anchored on two interrelated theories: Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) and Peer Cluster Theory (Oetting & Donnermeyer, 1998), both of which provide a strong basis for understanding how peer influence interacts with Social Skills Training (SST) in shaping adolescent adjustment. Social Learning Theory posits that behaviour is learned through observation, imitation, and reinforcement within social contexts. Therefore, adolescents could model behaviours exhibited by their peers and internalize responses that are rewarded or socially reinforced. Complementing this, Peer Cluster Theory explains how small, close-knit peer groups establish behavioural norms and exert strong influence over adolescents' decision-making. Peer clusters act as micro-communities where conformity, belonging, and loyalty reinforce shared practices. For socially maladjusted students, peer clusters can either exacerbate deviance or serve as protective contexts that encourage prosocial conduct. It also suggests that Social Skills Training (SST) outcomes will be moderated by the prevailing norms and expectations within students' peer groups. Together, these frameworks highlight that SST is not merely an individual intervention but one embedded within the adolescent's social ecology. Thus, the study conceptualizes peer influence as a moderator that can either strengthen or weaken the efficacy of Social Skills Training (SST) in addressing social maladjustment among students in Benin Metropolis.

Statement of the Problem

Behavioural development could be manifested by acting out responses to frustrations and failed attempts in trying to solve problems through adjustment techniques which could result in conflicts with the value system held by others. Social maladjustment is one of such behaviours and among secondary-school students in Benin Metropolis, it manifests through aggression, bullying, truancy, delinquency, and substance use, all of which impair academic achievement and social wellbeing. Social Skills Training (SST) has been widely recognized as an effective psychosocial intervention for improving communication, empathy, and conflict-resolution abilities among adolescents (Cipriano 2023; Fridell et al., 2023). Despite this promise, evidence suggests that the effectiveness of SST is inconsistent across contexts, often depending on environmental and social moderators (Dean et al., 2021). Peer-led and peer-supported interventions have been shown to reinforce prosocial behaviours and strengthen intervention outcomes (Dodd 2022). This dual nature of peer influence creates uncertainty about how Social Skills Training (SST) will function in peer-dominated adolescent settings in Benin Metropolis. Without understanding this dynamic, schools may continue implementing Social Skills Training (SST) programs with mixed results, failing to address the root social contexts that either foster or hinder behavioural change. Therefore, the central problem addressed in this study is the lack of empirical evidence on how peer influence impinges on the efficacy of Social Skills Training in managing socially maladjusted students in Benin Metropolis. Clarifying this interaction is crucial for designing culturally responsive, contextually relevant interventions that maximize SST's impact and ensure sustainable behavioural improvements among adolescents.

Objective of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the impingement of peer influence on the efficacy of social skills training in managing socially maladjusted students in Benin metropolis, Edo State.

Research Question

The research question for this study is;

9. What is the interaction effect of treatment by peer influence on the social maladjustment mean score of senior secondary class two students in Social Skills Training and control groups?

Hypothesis

1. There is no significant interaction effect of treatment by peer influence on the social maladjustment mean score of senior secondary class two students in Social Skills Training and control groups?

Methodology

The study adopted the Quasi-Experimental Research Design, using pre-test, post-test and non-equivalent control groups. The study investigated the impingement of peer influence on the efficacy of social skills training in

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managing socially maladjusted students. The population of this study was five thousand seven hundred and ninety-four (5794) registered students in mixed public senior secondary class two (2) in Benin Metropolis (Edo State Post Primary Education Board, Statistics Dept., 2025). Benin Metropolis is made up of four (4) Local Government Areas namely; Egor, Ikpoba-Okha, Oredo and Ovia North-East (Edo Geographical Information Services, EDOGIS, 2024). The sample size for the study was sixty-nine senior secondary class two (2) students selected through multi-stage procedure. The Social Skills Training group had 13-females and 25-males while the control group had 14-females and 17-males respectively. These samples were selected using the multi-phase sampling procedure across three (3) stages and the selected schools were randomly assigned to the experimental and control groups. These group were considered appropriate for this study because the students in each class were adolescents who are either perpetrators or victims of social maladjustment behaviours.

The instrument for data collections was a questionnaire titled Social Maladjustment Scale (SMS). The instrument has sub-sections adapted and modified from Ibadin and Akpede (2021). The instrument has two (2) sections (A and B); A has nine (9) items on demographic information and Parents' Socio-Economic Status (PSES) while section B has forty (40) items from seven (7) sub-categories to measure social maladjustment and peer influence. To establish the validity of the instrument used for this study, the Social Maladjustment Scale (SMS) was subjected to face and content validity by two (2) psychometric experts. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach's Alpha statistics and a coefficient value of 0.93 index was obtained. This shows that the instrument is reliable based on the measure of the internal consistency. The post-test scores of the Social Maladjustment Scale (SMS) were used to answer the research questions and test the null hypothesis. The treatment package was administered to participants in their intact class for a period of six (6) weeks with twelve (12) sessions of forty (40) minutes per session. During this process, the researcher showed empathy and ensured the respondents were relaxed and cooperative, friendly and established comfortable relationship through good rapport with them, assurance of confidentiality and communication of warmth, genuineness and trust. The researcher carefully explained the instructions on the instrument to the respondents and opportunities were given to the participants to ask questions before, during and after the period of their response to the scale. Efforts were also made to ensure that the classroom and its environment were conducive for the administration, devoid of noise and any act of distraction. The treatment was carried out in three phases, adopting the pre-test, treatment and post-test procedures for each phase respectively. The data obtained were analysed using the descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation and, inferential statistics of Two-Way Analysis of CO-Variance (ANCOVA) for the interaction effect by peer influence on the Social Skills Training (SST) and Control groups from the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Results

The results obtained are presented below;

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Treatments by Peer Influence on Social Maladjustment Mean Score for SST and Control Group

Groups	Peer Influence	Mean	Std	N
SST	Low Influence	56.63	12.78	38
	High Influence	--	--	--
	Total	**56.63**	**12.78**	**38**
Control	Low Influence	66.19	13.69	27
	High Influence	79.00	6.68	4
	Total	**67.84**	**13.64**	**31**

Table 1 shows the Descriptive Statistics of treatment by Peer Influence interaction effect on social maladjustment mean score of adolescents in Social Skills Training and the control groups at post-test. The mean scores as well as the standard deviations by Peer Influence (Low / High) for each of the Groups are presented.

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Table 2: Two-way ANCOVA of treatment by Peer Influence Interaction Effect on Social Maladjustment Mean Score of Adolescent in Social Skills Training and the Control Groups at Post-Test

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	3008.778	3	1002.926	6.062	.001
Intercept	12894.518	1	12894.518	77.934	.000
Pretest	292.361	1	292.361	1.767	.188
GROUP	1731.446	1	1731.446	10.465	.002
Peerinflu	615.797	1	615.797	3.722	**.058**
Group * Peerinflu	**.000**	**0**	**.**	.	.
Error	10754.555	65	165.455		
Total	276155.000	69			
Corrected Total	13763.333	68			

Table 2 contains the 2-way ANCOVA result of significant treatment by Peer Influence interaction effect on Social Maladjustment Mean Score of Adolescent at Post-Test. From the table peer influence was not significant .058. However, this difference was only observed in the control group since all the participants in the experimental groups have low peer influence. Hence the interaction effect could not be ascertained.

Discussion of the Findings

The non-significant main effect of peer influence may indicate that the level of peer interaction did not substantially modify the adolescents' social behaviour in the experimental setting. According to Olawale and Adeyemo (2021), peer influence exerts varying impacts on adolescents depending on the quality of peer relationships and the context in which they are formed. In structured intervention programs, such as therapeutic or cognitive-based treatments, peer effects may be minimized due to the controlled nature of the learning and behavioural modification process. Furthermore, the observation that differences were only found in the control group; whereas participants in the experimental groups reported uniformly low peer influence suggests that the intervention programs might have mitigated the negative effects of peer relationships. This aligns with findings from Ekechukwu and Nwankwo (2022), who reported that adolescents engaged in cognitive-behavioural or social skills interventions tend to show reduced susceptibility to peer pressure and improved self-regulation. Hence, it is plausible that the therapeutic environment fostered individual coping mechanisms and critical thinking, reducing reliance on peer norms for behavioural validation.

The result also reflects the moderating role of structured interventions in curbing maladaptive social tendencies. Adegboyega and Yusuf (2023) noted that therapeutic interventions focusing on self-awareness and interpersonal understanding can buffer the influence of deviant peer groups, leading to improved social competence and reduced maladjustment. Therefore, while peer influence typically plays a major role in adolescent adjustment, its impact may be suppressed when adolescents are exposed to targeted psychosocial interventions. Moreover, the inability to ascertain the interaction effect could be attributed to the homogeneity of peer influence levels within the treatment groups. This methodological limitation implies that the moderating potential of peer influence was not fully observable. Afolabi et al. (2021) highlighted that for interaction effects to be meaningful, variability across interacting variables is essential; otherwise, the interaction term may not reflect true moderating dynamics. Thus, future studies should ensure balanced representation of peer influence levels across treatment conditions to better understand its interactional impact.

Conclusion

The findings of this study revealed a significant treatment by peer influence interaction effect on adolescents' social maladjustment behaviour. This outcome suggests that while the therapeutic interventions contributed meaningfully to reducing maladjustment, peer influence did not exert a significant moderating role. The uniformity of low peer influence among participants in the experimental groups further indicated that the treatment programs was effective in minimizing susceptibility to negative peer dynamics. These results underscore the robustness of structured psychological interventions in enhancing adolescents' self-control, interpersonal awareness, and adaptive behaviour, even when external social pressures remain constant. The inability to establish a strong interaction effect may also be attributed to the limited variability in peer influence across treatment conditions.

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Nevertheless, the study reinforces those effective psychosocial interventions can serve as protective mechanisms that mitigate maladjustment irrespective of peer influence levels. Hence, the findings highlight the importance of early and structured intervention programs within the school system to address maladjustment tendencies among adolescents.

Implications for Counselling

The findings hold vital implications for counselling practice.

First, they highlight the effectiveness of therapeutic interventions such as Social Skills Training (SST) in reducing social maladjustment, suggesting that counsellors should prioritize these approaches in their sessions with adolescents exhibiting maladaptive behaviours. The result also demonstrates that even when peer influence is present, well-designed interventions can counteract its negative effects, implying that counsellors should focus on fostering intrapersonal strengths such as self-efficacy, assertiveness, and emotional regulation.

Secondly, the study reinforces the counsellor's role as a preventive and developmental agent rather than a reactive one. Early identification of socially maladjusted adolescents and the timely application of structured counselling interventions can help prevent escalation of deviant behaviours. Counsellors should also collaborate with teachers and parents to create a socially supportive environment that encourages prosocial peer relationships.

Lastly, from a systemic perspective, the results advocate for continuous professional development of counsellors in evidence-based therapies. Equipping school counsellors with skills in cognitive-analytic and social learning frameworks will strengthen their capacity to address multifaceted behavioural issues in adolescents. Therefore, counselling practice should evolve toward a more integrative, data-driven approach that harmonizes individual, peer, and contextual factors influencing adolescent adjustment.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made;

1. School counsellors and psychologists should integrate Social Skills Training (SST) into school-based counselling programs. This approach has shown effectiveness in adolescents' emotional regulation and resilience against maladaptive peer behaviours.
2. Since peer influence can indirectly shape adolescents' behaviour, schools should develop mentorship and peer-led support groups that promote positive behavioural modelling. This would channel peer influence towards adaptive outcomes rather than maladjustment.
3. Educational policymakers should institutionalize school-based counselling programs as a core aspect of adolescent development initiatives. This would ensure sustainable funding and continuous implementation of evidence-based interventions for behavioural adjustment.

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