

***Perceived Influence of Psycho-Spiritual Counselling on Social Adjustment and Peer Relationships in Jos South Local Government Area, Plateau State, Nigeria***

**Denis M. Kaye**

*c/o Catholic Archbishop's House  
Catholic Archdiocese of Jos, Plateau State  
[fadakaye@gmail.com](mailto:fadakaye@gmail.com)*

**<sup>1</sup>Grace O. Ugboha, Ph.D**

[mrsgraceabah@gmail.com](mailto:mrsgraceabah@gmail.com)

**<sup>1</sup>Nanram B. Longbap (Prof)**

[nanram2020@gmail.com](mailto:nanram2020@gmail.com)

<sup>1</sup>*Department of Educational Foundations  
University of Jos, Jos*

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**Abstract**

*This study examined the perceived influence of psycho-spiritual counselling on the social adjustment and peer relationships of senior secondary school students in Jos South Local Government Area, Plateau State, Nigeria. A cross-sectional survey research design was adopted. The population comprised Senior Secondary School II students in public secondary schools, from which a sample of 394 students was selected from ten schools using stratified and simple random sampling techniques. Data were collected using a structured instrument titled Psycho-Spiritual Counselling, Social Adjustment and Peer Relationship Questionnaire (PSC-SAPRQ). Face and content validity were established by experts, while reliability testing yielded a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.86. Data were analysed using mean and standard deviation to answer research questions, and chi-square statistics to test hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that psycho-spiritual counselling positively influences students' social adjustment and peer relationships, particularly in empathy, cooperation, conflict resolution, and positive peer interaction. The study concluded that psycho-spiritual counselling is effective in enhancing students' social functioning and recommended its integration into school guidance services.*

**Keywords:** psycho-spiritual counselling, social adjustment, peer relationships, senior secondary school, students

## **Introduction**

Social adjustment and peer relationships are critical components of adolescents' holistic development, particularly among senior secondary school students. Social adjustment refers to an individual's ability to interact effectively with others, adapt to social environments, and maintain healthy interpersonal relationships; while peer relationships involve the quality of friendships, group interactions, and social acceptance among agemates. During adolescence, a developmental stage marked by identity formation and increased reliance on peer networks, these social dimensions become especially significant for emotional stability, academic engagement, and overall psychosocial wellbeing.

Well-adjusted students often demonstrate cooperation, empathy, resilience, and effective conflict-resolution skills, which enhance their school experience and long-term development. In contrast, poor social adjustment is associated with social withdrawal, peer rejection, low self-esteem, behavioural difficulties, and diminished academic performance (Wentzel & Muenks, 2016; Rubin et al., 2018). Adolescence is further characterized by heightened psychological and emotional challenges, including stress, social anxiety, and unstable peer dynamics, which may hinder students' ability to form and sustain positive peer relationships (Anganth & Uyun, 2019; Steinberg, 2020).

In the Nigerian context, adolescents' social adjustment challenges are exacerbated by socio-economic instability, competitive academic environments, large class sizes, and limited access to effective school-based psychosocial support services (Akinwale & Adegboyega, 2021). Within Jos South Local Government Area of Plateau State, secondary schools often lack structured interventions that adequately address students' social, emotional, and moral development. Existing guidance and counselling services are frequently understaffed and under-resourced, with greater emphasis placed on academic performance and career guidance rather than on students' social adjustment and peer relationship difficulties (Omoniyi & Akinade, 2019; Federal Ministry of Education, 2021). As a result, issues such as bullying, peer conflict, social withdrawal, and weakened school cohesion remain prevalent (Ajayi & Ogunyemi, 2020).

Traditional psychosocial interventions designed to improve social adjustment and peer relationships have largely focused on cognitive-behavioural techniques, social-emotional learning programmes, and peer support strategies. Although these approaches have shown effectiveness in enhancing emotional regulation and social skills, they often fail to address deeper issues related to personal values, existential meaning, and spiritual orientation that

influence adolescents' perceptions of self and others (Durlak et al., 2017; Taylor et al., 2018). This limitation highlights the need for more holistic counselling approaches.

Psycho-spiritual counselling has emerged as an integrative approach that combines psychological techniques with spiritual values and meaning-oriented practices to promote emotional balance, resilience, and interpersonal functioning (Pargament, 2017; Richards & Bergin, 2020). This approach recognizes that adolescents' belief systems, sense of purpose, and spiritual coping resources significantly shape their social adjustment and capacity to build healthy peer relationships. Through guided reflection, value clarification, and meaning-making processes, psycho-spiritual counselling fosters self-awareness, empathy, and connectedness.

Empirical studies have supported the effectiveness of psycho-spiritual counselling in enhancing adolescents' psychosocial outcomes. Anthony (2023) found that psycho-spiritual counselling significantly improved emotional stability and interpersonal functioning among secondary school students in Nigeria, while other studies reported positive effects on social competence and peer relationship quality (King & Boyatzis, 2019; Rogers, 2021). However, despite these promising findings, psycho-spiritual counselling remains under-utilized and under-researched in secondary schools within Jos South Local Government Area (Ogunlade & Alonge, 2020). Furthermore, mixed findings regarding gender differences in social adjustment and peer relationships (Johnson & Goodings, 2020; Ziada & Elisha, 2020) suggest the need to explore gender as a moderating variable.

In light of these gaps, this study examines the influence of psycho-spiritual counselling on social adjustment and peer relationships among senior secondary school students in Jos South Local Government Area of Plateau State, Nigeria.

### **Statement of the problem**

In recent years, increasing concerns have been raised about the social adjustment and peer relationship difficulties experienced by senior secondary school students in Jos South Local Government Area of Plateau State. Evidence from school-based studies and counselling reports indicates that many students exhibit social withdrawal, peer rejection, bullying behaviours, poor communication skills, and frequent interpersonal conflicts (Ajayi & Ogunyemi, 2020; Omoniyi & Akinade, 2019). These social difficulties adversely affect students' emotional wellbeing, resulting in low self-esteem, feelings of isolation, psychological distress, and reduced participation in academic and co-curricular activities.

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Poor social adjustment and unhealthy peer relationships among adolescents have been associated with behavioural problems, susceptibility to negative peer influence, declining academic performance, and long-term psychosocial maladjustment (Rubin et al., 2018; Wentzel & Muenks, 2016). In Jos South LGA, these challenges undermine the ability of secondary schools to achieve their educational objectives of fostering well-rounded students who possess not only academic competence but also healthy interpersonal skills and social responsibility. Although guidance and counselling services exist in some secondary schools within Jos South LGA, available evidence suggests that these services are largely limited to academic and career guidance, with minimal emphasis on students' social adjustment, peer relationships, and underlying value-based or existential concerns (Federal Ministry of Education, 2021; Ogunlade & Alonge, 2020). Consequently, existing interventions appear insufficient in addressing the deeper psychological and spiritual factors that shape adolescents' social behaviours and peer interactions, particularly within a socio-cultural context where spiritual orientation plays a significant role in moral development and social conduct. Psycho-spiritual counselling, which integrates psychological principles with spiritual values and meaning-oriented exploration, has been identified as a potentially effective approach for enhancing social adjustment and peer relationships among adolescents. However, despite its relevance, there is a noticeable lack of empirical evidence on the influence of psycho-spiritual counselling on social adjustment and peer relationships of senior secondary school students in Jos South Local Government Area of Plateau State, Nigeria. The problem of this study, therefore, is to explore whether psycho-spiritual counselling influences the social adjustment and peer relationships of senior secondary school students in Jos South Local Government Area of Plateau State, Nigeria.

### **Research questions**

1. What is the perceived influence of psycho-spiritual counselling on the social adjustment of senior secondary school students in Jos South Local Government Area?
2. What is the perceived influence of psycho-spiritual counselling on peer relationships of senior secondary school students in Jos South Local Government Area?
3. What is the overall perceived influence of psycho-spiritual counselling on the psychosocial functioning of senior secondary school students in Jos South Local Government Area?

### **Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study and were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

**Ho1:** Psycho-spiritual counselling has no significant perceived influence on the social adjustment of senior secondary school students in Jos South Local Government Area.

**Ho2:** Psycho-spiritual counselling has no significant perceived influence on peer relationships of senior secondary school students in Jos South Local Government Area.

**Ho3:** Psycho-spiritual counselling has no significant perceived influence on the overall psychosocial functioning of senior secondary school students in Jos South Local Government Area.

### **Methodology**

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design to examine the influence of psycho-spiritual counselling on social adjustment and peer relationships among senior secondary school students. The population comprised all Senior Secondary School II (SSS 2) students in public secondary schools in Jos South Local Government Area, Plateau State. A sample size of 394 students was selected from ten public secondary schools using stratified and simple random sampling techniques to ensure adequate representation.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled Psycho-Spiritual Counselling, Social Adjustment and Peer Relationship Questionnaire (PSC-SAPRQ), designed to measure students' exposure to school-based psycho-spiritual counselling, social adjustment behaviours, and peer relationship patterns. The instrument was divided into four sections. Section A contained items on respondents' demographic information. Section B measured students' exposure to psycho-spiritual counselling in the school setting. Section C assessed students' social adjustment behaviours, while Section D measured peer relationship patterns among students. The questionnaire contained a total of 45 items, with Sections B, C, and D comprising 15 items each. The instrument was structured on a four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). Higher scores indicated higher levels of exposure to psycho-spiritual counselling, better social adjustment, and more positive peer relationships. The instrument was validated through face and content validity by three experts: one expert in Guidance and Counselling, one expert in Educational Psychology, and one expert in Test and Measurement. Their suggestions were incorporated to improve the clarity and relevance of the items. Reliability testing using Cronbach's alpha yielded a coefficient of 0.86, indicating that the instrument was reliable for the study.

Data collection was conducted through direct face-to-face administration of the questionnaire, with due ethical considerations such as informed consent, anonymity, and voluntary participation duly observed. Data were analysed using mean and standard

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deviation to answer the research questions, while chi-square statistics were employed to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance.

### **Presentation of results**

**Research question 1:** What is the perceived influence of psycho-spiritual counselling on the social adjustment of senior secondary school students in public secondary schools in Jos South Local Government Area, Plateau State?

**Table 1:** Mean and standard deviation on perceived influence of psycho-spiritual counselling on social adjustment

<b>S/N</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Decision</b>
1	Psycho-spiritual counselling helps me understand myself better	3.41	0.78	Accepted
2	It improves my ability to relate well with others	3.36	0.81	Accepted
3	It enhances my emotional stability in social situations	3.29	0.84	Accepted
4	It helps me adjust positively to school rules and norms	3.33	0.76	Accepted
5	It reduces my social anxiety and fear	3.18	0.88	Accepted
	Grand mean	3.31	0.81	Accepted

Decision rule: Mean  $\geq$  3.00 = Accepted

The results in Table 1 show that all the items have mean scores above the criterion mean of 3.00, with a grand mean of 3.31. This indicates that psycho-spiritual counselling is perceived to have positive influence on the social adjustment of senior secondary school students in public secondary schools in Jos South Local Government Area. Students reported improved self-understanding, emotional stability, and better adjustment to social and school environments.

**Ho1:** Psycho-spiritual counselling has no significant perceived influence on the social adjustment of senior secondary school students in Jos South Local Government Area.

**Table 2:** Chi-square analysis of the perceived influence of psycho-spiritual counselling on social adjustment

<b>Response Category</b>	<b>Observed (O)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Expected (E)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>(O – E)<sup>2</sup> / E</b>
Agree (SA + A)	248		197		13.24
Disagree (SD + D)	146		197		13.22
Total	394		394		26.46
<b><math>\chi^2</math> Cal</b>		<b><math>\chi^2</math> Crit</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Sig. Level</b>	<b>Decision</b>
26.46		3.84	1	0.05	Reject Ho

Since the calculated chi-square value (26.46) is greater than the critical value (3.84) at 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates that psycho-spiritual counselling has a significant perceived influence on students' social adjustment.

**Research question 2:** What is the perceived influence of psycho-spiritual counselling on the peer relationships of senior secondary school students in public secondary schools in Jos South Local Government Area, Plateau State?

**Table 3:** Mean and standard deviation on the perceived influence of psycho-spiritual counselling on peer relationships

<b>S/N</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Decision</b>
1	Psycho-spiritual counselling helps me build positive friendships	3.38	0.80	Accepted
2	It improves my ability to cooperate with my peers	3.44	0.77	Accepted
3	It helps me resolve conflicts peacefully with classmates	3.31	0.83	Accepted
4	It encourages empathy and respect for others	3.47	0.74	Accepted
5	It reduces peer-related misunderstandings	3.26	0.85	Accepted
	Grand mean	3.37	0.80	Accepted

Table 3 reveals that all items recorded mean values above the benchmark of 3.00, with a grand mean of 3.37. This suggests that psycho-spiritual counselling is perceived to positively influence peer relationships among senior secondary school students. The

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counselling approach promotes empathy, cooperation, conflict resolution, and positive peer interactions.

**Ho2:** Psycho-spiritual counselling has no significant perceived influence on peer relationships of senior secondary school students in Jos South Local Government Area.

**Table 4:** Chi-square analysis of the perceived influence of psycho-spiritual counselling on peer relationships

<b>Response Category</b>	<b>Observed (O)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Expected (E)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>(O – E)<sup>2</sup> / E</b>
Agree (SA + A)	262		197		21.38
Disagree (SD + D)	132		197		21.36
Total	394		394		42.74
<b><math>\chi^2</math> Cal</b>		<b><math>\chi^2</math> Crit</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Sig. Level</b>	<b>Decision</b>
42.74		3.84	1	0.05	Reject Ho

The null hypothesis is rejected, indicating that psycho-spiritual counselling has a significant perceived influence on peer relationships among senior secondary school students.

**Research question 3:** What is the overall perceived influence of psycho-spiritual counselling on the psychosocial functioning of senior secondary school students in Jos South Local Government Area?

**Table 5:** Mean and standard deviation of overall perceived influence of psycho-spiritual counselling on psychosocial functioning

<b>Domain</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Decision</b>
Social adjustment	3.31	0.81	High
Peer relationships	3.37	0.80	High
Overall grand mean	3.34	0.81	High Influence

The results in Table 5 indicate that psycho-spiritual counselling has a high influence on the psychosocial functioning of students, as reflected in both social adjustment and peer relationships. The overall grand mean of 3.34 confirms that psycho-spiritual counselling contributes meaningfully to students’ social and interpersonal development.

**Ho3:** Psycho-spiritual counselling has no significant perceived influence on the overall psychosocial functioning of senior secondary school students in Jos South Local Government Area.

**Table 6:** Chi-square analysis of the perceived influence of psycho-spiritual counselling on overall psychosocial functioning

Response Category	Observed Frequency (O)	Expected Frequency (E)	(O – E) <sup>2</sup> / E		
Agree (SA + A)	271	197	27.81		
Disagree (SD + D)	123	197	27.79		
Total	394	394	55.60		
<b><math>\chi^2</math> Cal</b>	<b><math>\chi^2</math> Crit</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Sig. Level</b>	<b>Decision</b>	
55.60	3.84	1	0.05	Reject Ho	

The result confirms that psycho-spiritual counselling has a significant perceived influence on students’ overall psychosocial functioning.

### Discussion of the findings

The findings of the study reveal that psycho-spiritual counselling is positively perceived to enhance the social adjustment of senior secondary school students in public secondary schools in Jos South Local Government Area, Plateau State. The testing of the hypothesis one indicated that psycho-spiritual counselling is perceived to significantly influence students’ social adjustment. Respondents reported that participation in psycho-spiritual counselling sessions improved their ability to manage emotions, comply with school rules, adapt to social expectations, and interact positively with others. This observation aligns with the literature reviewed in the introduction, particularly the work of Rogers (2021), who emphasized that counselling approaches integrating personal values and reflective practices support adolescents in achieving emotional balance and healthy social behaviour. Anthony (2023) also highlighted that psycho-spiritual counselling promotes self-awareness and equips students with coping strategies necessary for effective social adjustment. The

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responses in this study, reflected by high mean scores and low variability, indicate a shared perception among students that psycho-spiritual counselling contributes positively to their social functioning within the school environment.

In relation to the second research question and the corresponding hypothesis two, the study found that psycho-spiritual counselling is perceived to foster positive peer relationships among students and that such influence is significant. Participants acknowledged that counselling facilitated the development of empathy, cooperation, mutual respect, effective communication, and peaceful conflict resolution with peers. This finding is consistent with theoretical perspectives presented in the introduction, particularly Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977), which explains that social behaviours can be learned through observation, modelling, and reinforcement within a social context. The results suggest that psycho-spiritual counselling provides opportunities for students to observe and internalize positive interpersonal behaviours, thereby enhancing their relational skills and contributing to a more harmonious peer environment.

Regarding the third research question and hypothesis three, the study indicates that psycho-spiritual counselling is perceived to contribute positively and significantly to students' overall psychosocial functioning, encompassing both social adjustment and peer relationships. Students reported that counselling sessions encouraged reflection on personal values, responsibility, and respect for others, which translated into improved social interactions and emotional regulation. This aligns with the arguments presented in the introduction, where it was noted that adolescents' belief systems, sense of purpose, and spiritual coping resources significantly shape their social behaviours and interpersonal relationships (King & Boyatzis, 2019; Pargament, 2011; Richards & Bergin, 2020). The findings suggest that by integrating psychological and spiritual dimensions, psycho-spiritual counselling supports holistic development and promotes social wellbeing among secondary school students in Jos South Local Government Area.

Overall, the results indicate that school-based psycho-spiritual counselling is positively perceived by students as an effective approach for enhancing both social adjustment and peer relationships. These outcomes underscore the importance of structured counselling programmes within secondary schools to support students' psychosocial development and foster a positive school climate.

## **Conclusion**

The study concludes that school-based psycho-spiritual counselling is perceived to positively and significantly influence the social adjustment and peer relationships of senior secondary school students in public secondary schools in Jos South Local Government Area, Plateau State. Respondents reported improvements in emotional regulation, empathy, cooperation, and the ability to interact positively with peers. The findings indicate that students who engage in psycho-spiritual counselling experience enhanced social functioning and healthier peer interactions within the school environment. Despite these positive perceptions, the provision of psycho-spiritual counselling is limited in some schools, highlighting the need for more consistent and structured counselling services to fully support students' psychosocial wellbeing.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Since psycho-spiritual counselling is perceived to positively influence students' social adjustment, public secondary schools should integrate structured psycho-spiritual counselling programmes into existing guidance and counselling services.
2. Given that psycho-spiritual counselling is perceived to enhance peer relationships among students, school counsellors and teachers should be encouraged to incorporate value-based reflection, empathy-building activities, and cooperative exercises into counselling sessions.
3. Considering the challenges associated with limited professional capacity observed in some schools, educational authorities should organize regular training and capacity-building programmes for school counsellors on psycho-spiritual counselling approaches. This will ensure counsellors are adequately equipped to deliver interventions that effectively improve students' social adjustment and peer relationships.
4. Schools should establish mechanisms for regular monitoring and evaluation of psycho-spiritual counselling programmes to assess their effectiveness in promoting social adjustment and peer relationships. Feedback from students should be collected periodically to fine-tune counselling strategies.

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