

# EFFECTIVENESS OF COUNSELLING SERVICES IN REDUCING ACADEMIC STRESS, AND PROMOTING CRITICAL THINKING AMONG JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ANAMBRA STATE

Chinwe Augustina Enwere<sup>1</sup>, Uchenna Fidelia Mbakwe<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Educational Psychology/Guidance and Counselling, Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe, Anambra State, Nigeria

<sup>2</sup> Federal Government Girls' College, Onitsha, Anambra State, Nigeria

\*Corresponding author, email: chinweenwere@yahoo.com

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## Keywords

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Student support

## Abstract

Academic stress is a prevalent challenge among junior secondary school students, often affecting their cognitive abilities and overall academic performance. Consequently, this study examined the effectiveness of counselling services in reducing academic stress and promoting critical thinking among junior secondary school students in Anambra State. A descriptive survey design was adopted, and data were collected from 72 respondents, comprising junior secondary school teachers and school counsellors who interact with students and provide counselling support. A structured questionnaire served as the instrument for data collection, ensuring comprehensive insight into the role of counselling services. Experts in the field validated the instrument, and its reliability was established using Cronbach's alpha. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and regression analysis to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that counselling services significantly reduce academic stress and enhance critical thinking skills among students. The study underscores the necessity of strengthening counselling services within schools to support students' academic and personal development. It recommends that policymakers and school administrators integrate more structured counselling interventions to foster resilience and cognitive skills among students.

## 1. Introduction

Academic stress and the development of critical thinking skills are pivotal concerns in the educational journey of junior secondary school students. Counselling services have been recognized as instrumental in addressing these issues. Academic stress can significantly impede students' educational achievements and overall well-being. High levels of school-related distress are common, particularly as students approach high-stakes assessments (Shewa & Moses, 2024). Counselling services, especially those grounded in cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), have been effective in mitigating academic stress. A systematic review highlighted that school-based programs utilizing CBT significantly reduced academic stress among high school students (Fadele et al, 2024). These programs focus on restructuring negative thought patterns and enhancing coping strategies, thereby alleviating stress.

In the Nigerian context, interventions such as study skills counselling have shown promise. A study by Ekoh et al, (2024) investigated the effect of study skills counselling on self-efficacy and academic achievement among secondary school students in Ibadan-North, Oyo State. The study employed a pretest-posttest experimental design with 150 participants divided into treatment and control groups. The findings revealed that study skills counselling significantly improved academic achievement and self-efficacy, suggesting its potential in reducing academic stress (Gyasewaa et al, 2023). Similarly, cognitive restructuring techniques have been effective in addressing test anxiety, a specific form of academic stress. Asiegbo (2023) conducted a study in Anambra State, Nigeria, where secondary school students underwent cognitive restructuring interventions. The results indicated a

significant reduction in test anxiety levels among participants, highlighting the efficacy of counselling techniques in managing academic stress (Fakunmoju, 2023).

Critical thinking is essential for students to navigate complex information and make informed decisions. Counselling services play a crucial role in fostering these skills. Educational reforms in the United Kingdom have emphasized the integration of critical thinking into the curriculum to combat misinformation and enhance analytical skills among students (The Times, 2024). Schools have adopted various strategies, including incorporating critical thinking across subjects and educating students on responsible use of information technology. In Nigeria, counselling interventions have been tailored to promote critical thinking by addressing behaviors that hinder academic performance. For instance, Ekwelundu et al. (2022) explored the effectiveness of cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) in reducing academic procrastination among secondary school students in Delta State. The study involved 80 junior secondary school students identified with academic procrastination behaviors. The findings demonstrated that CBT significantly reduced procrastination, thereby encouraging proactive learning and critical engagement with academic tasks (Ekwelundu et al., 2022).

Furthermore, resilience interventions that teach coping strategies have been linked to improved mental health and critical thinking. A report highlighted that programs focusing on self-compassion and understanding brain malleability can enhance resilience and critical analysis skills among students (Haruna et al, 2024). These interventions align with counselling objectives to equip students with tools to critically assess and respond to challenges. The need for this study arises from the increasing levels of academic stress among junior secondary school students in Anambra State and the growing recognition of critical thinking as a crucial skill for academic and personal success. Research has shown that academic stress negatively affects students' mental health, leading to anxiety, depression, and poor academic performance (Adewusi et al, 2023; Enwere & Chijioke, (2024). However, while counselling services have been widely implemented in developed countries to address these issues, there is limited empirical research on their effectiveness in the Nigerian educational context, particularly in Anambra State (Cobbina, 2025).

Additionally, studies highlight that many students in Nigeria struggle with rote learning rather than developing critical thinking skills, which are essential for problem-solving and independent reasoning (Ekwelundu et al., 2022). Despite global educational reforms emphasizing critical thinking, Nigerian schools still face challenges in integrating effective strategies (Michael & Abisoye, 2025). This study seeks to fill these gaps by assessing the role of counselling interventions in mitigating academic stress and fostering critical thinking among junior secondary school students in Anambra State. Understanding these impacts will provide evidence-based recommendations for policymakers and educators to enhance the effectiveness of school counselling programs.

## 2. Method

The study adopted a descriptive survey design, which was deemed appropriate for gathering data from teachers and school counsellors regarding their perceptions of counselling services in junior secondary schools. This design allowed for a structured approach to collecting and analyzing data on the effectiveness of counselling in addressing academic stress and advancing critical thinking skills among students. The study was conducted in Anambra State, Nigeria, covering junior secondary schools across various local government areas. The population of the study comprised junior secondary school teachers and school counsellors who interact with students and provide counselling support. These individuals were chosen because of their direct involvement in students' academic and personal development, making them valuable sources of information on the impact of counselling services. From this population, a total of 72 respondents were selected using a combination of stratified, simple random, and purposive sampling techniques. First, stratified sampling was used to categorize schools into urban and rural settings. Simple random sampling was then employed to select specific schools from each category. Finally, purposive sampling was used to identify teachers and school counsellors who actively engage in counselling services, ensuring that the selected participants were well-equipped to provide relevant information.

To collect data, a structured questionnaire titled "Counselling Services, Academic Stress, and Critical Thinking Questionnaire (CSASCTQ)" was developed. The questionnaire was designed to capture information on the effectiveness of counselling services in reducing academic stress and

promoting critical thinking among students. It included sections on demographic information, the impact of counselling on stress reduction, and its role in advancing critical thinking skills. A four-point Likert scale was used to measure responses, ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree, allowing respondents to express their level of agreement with each statement. To ensure the validity of the questionnaire, three experts from the fields of educational psychology, guidance and counselling, and measurement and evaluation reviewed the instrument. They assessed the clarity, relevance, and alignment of the items with the study’s objectives, making necessary modifications to enhance the quality of the instrument. Following this, a pilot study was conducted in a junior secondary school outside the study area to test the reliability of the instrument. The test-retest method was applied, and the responses were analyzed using Cronbach’s Alpha, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.78. This high reliability index confirmed the consistency and dependability of the instrument for data collection.

The process of data collection involved distributing the questionnaires to the selected respondents. Participants were given one week to complete the questionnaire, after which the completed copies were retrieved. This approach ensured a high response rate and allowed for clarifications where needed, thereby enhancing the quality of the collected data. For data analysis, both descriptive and inferential statistics were employed. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, providing information into general response patterns. To test the hypotheses, Regression Analysis was conducted.

### Research Questions

1. What is the effect of counselling services in Reducing Academic Stress, and promoting Critical Thinking among Junior Secondary School Students in Anambra state?
2. What is the contribution of counselling services in the reduction of academic stress among Junior Secondary School Students in Anambra state?
3. What is the contribution of counselling services in development of Critical Thinking among Junior Secondary School Students in Anambra state?

### 3. Results and Discussion

**Table 1. Distribution of Respondents Based on Location**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Urban	51	70.8	70.8	70.8
	Rural	21	29.2	29.2	100.0
	Total	72	100.0	100.0	

Table 1 shows that a majority of respondents (51, 70.8%) are from urban areas, while (21, 29.2%) are from rural areas. This suggests that counselling services, academic stress, and critical thinking among junior secondary school students may have more urban-centered influences due to higher representation in the sample.

**Research question 1:** what is the effect of counselling services in Reducing Academic Stress, and promoting Critical Thinking among Junior Secondary School Students in Anambra state?

**Table 2. Descriptive Statistics on the Effect of Counselling Services in Reducing Academic Stress, and Promoting Critical Thinking**

Item statements	Mean	Std. Deviation
Academic counselling services enhance study habits and learning skills, helping students manage academic stress while developing problem-solving and analytical thinking.	3.49	.503
Career counselling services reduce uncertainty about the future, alleviating academic stress and encouraging critical thinking in career decision-making.	3.35	.508
Personal development counselling services build students’ confidence and resilience, reducing stress while fostering independent and reflective thinking.	3.64	.564
Conflict resolution counselling services equip students with problem-solving strategies, minimizing interpersonal stress and enhancing critical thinking in decision-making.	3.46	.502
Mental health counselling services provide coping strategies to manage stress effectively, creating a stable mindset that supports logical reasoning and critical thinking.	3.04	.830
Valid N (listwise)		

The results indicate that personal development counselling had the highest mean score (3.64, SD = 0.564), suggesting a strong impact on students' confidence and growth. Academic guidance (3.49, SD = 0.503) and conflict resolution (3.46, SD = 0.502) were also highly rated. Career counselling (3.35, SD = 0.508) was slightly lower, while mental health support had the lowest mean (3.04, SD = 0.830), indicating relatively weaker perceived effectiveness in addressing stress and anxiety.

**Research question 2:** What is the contribution of counselling services in the reduction of academic stress among Junior Secondary School Students in Anambra state?

**Table 3. Descriptive Statistics on Contribution of Counselling Services in the Reduction of Academic Stress**

Item statements	Mean	Std. Deviation
Counselling services help mitigate the negative impact of academic stress on students' mental health and performance.	3.42	.599
Through counselling, students learn effective strategies to manage the pressure caused by excessive homework.	3.35	.508
Counselling services provide support to help students cope with anxiety and stress resulting from high expectations.	3.64	.564
Counselling helps students balance tight schedules and relaxation through effective time management and stress reduction techniques,	3.46	.502
Counselling interventions equip students with coping mechanisms to handle challenges posed by difficult subjects.	3.04	.830
Valid N (listwise)		

The findings reveal that high expectations had the highest mean score (3.64, SD = 0.564), indicating significant anxiety among students. Tight schedules (3.46, SD = 0.502) and academic stress affecting mental health (3.42, SD = 0.599) were also notable. Excessive homework (3.35, SD = 0.508) contributed to pressure, while difficult subjects had the lowest mean (3.04, SD = 0.830), suggesting a relatively lower perceived impact.

**Research question 3:** What is the contribution of counselling services in development of Critical Thinking among Junior Secondary School Students in Anambra state?

**Table 4. Descriptive Statistics on Contribution of Counselling Services in Development of Critical Thinking**

Item statements	Mean	Std. Deviation
Counselling services enhance critical thinking, strengthening students' problem-solving and decision-making skills.	3.42	.599
Guided analysis of information in counselling fosters critical thinking, helping students develop logical reasoning abilities.	3.47	.604
Counselling encourages critical thinking by prompting students to question assumptions and strengthen independent thinking skills.	3.26	.731
Critical thinking develops through counselling, supporting students in exploring multiple solutions to problems.	3.22	.736
Counselling services promote critical thinking, aiding students in evaluating evidence effectively and improving judgment and reasoning skills.	3.10	.653
Valid N (listwise)		

The results indicate that analyzing information had the highest mean score (3.47, SD = 0.604), highlighting its role in developing logical reasoning. Problem-solving and decision-making (3.42, SD = 0.599) were also significant. Questioning assumptions (3.26, SD = 0.731) and creative thinking (3.22, SD = 0.736) showed moderate impact. Evaluating evidence had the lowest mean (3.10, SD = 0.653), suggesting room for improvement in judgment skills.

### 3.1. Null Hypothesis

**H<sub>0</sub>:** Counselling services have no significant effect on reducing academic stress and promoting critical thinking among junior secondary school students in Anambra State.

**Table 5. Regression Analysis on the Effectiveness of Counselling Services in Reducing Academic Stress and Promoting Critical Thinking**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	.756	.571	.559	1.58682	Regression	231.245	2	115.622	.000b
					Residual	173.741	69	2.518	
					Total	404.986	71		

Dependent Variable: (A) Counselling Services in Junior Secondary School Students  
 Predictors: (Constant), (C) Critical Thinking among Junior Secondary School Students, (B) Academic Stress among Junior Secondary School Students.

$$\text{Counselling Services} = 2.554 + 0.666 \text{ Academic Stress} + 0.193 \text{ Critical Thinking} \quad (1)$$

The regression analysis shows a strong relationship between counselling services and the predictors, with an R value of (0.756) and an R Square of (0.571), indicating that (57.1%) of the variance in counselling services is explained by academic stress and critical thinking. The F-statistic (45.918, p = 0.000) confirms that the model is statistically significant. Since the p-value is less than (0.05), the null hypothesis is rejected, affirming that counselling services significantly influence academic stress reduction and critical thinking enhancement. The regression equation, Counselling Services = 2.554 + 0.666(Academic Stress) + 0.193(Critical Thinking), suggests that a unit increase in academic stress support enhances counselling effectiveness by (0.666), while critical thinking contributes (0.193). This implies that while both factors are essential, academic stress support has a greater impact. The results underscore the paramount role of counselling in improving students' academic and cognitive well-being.

**Table 6. Coefficients of the Regression Model on Counselling Services**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.554	1.528		1.672	.099
	(B) Academic Stress among Junior Secondary School Students	.666	.134	.587	4.987	.000
	(C) Critical Thinking among Junior Secondary School Students	.193	.108	.210	1.781	.079

a. Dependent Variable: (A) Counselling Services in Junior Secondary School Students

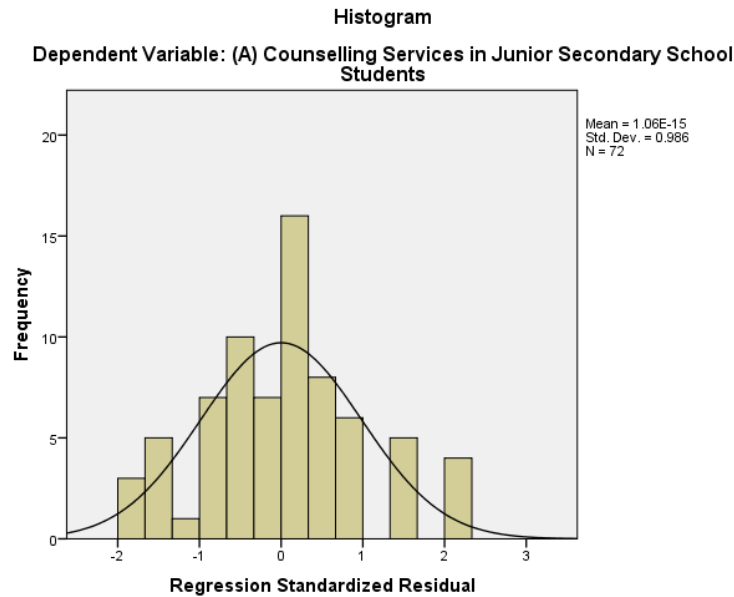
The regression results indicate that academic stress has a significant effect on counselling services (B = 0.666, t = 4.987, p = 0.000), while critical thinking shows a weaker, non-significant effect (B = 0.193, t = 1.781, p = 0.079). The constant term (B = 2.554, p = 0.099) is not statistically significant. These findings suggest that counselling services primarily address academic stress rather than significantly influencing critical thinking.

**Table 7. Residuals Statistics for the Regression Model on Counselling Services**

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	12.8589	19.7287	16.9861	1.80471	72
Std. Predicted Value	-2.287	1.520	.000	1.000	72
Standard Error of Predicted Value	.193	.527	.314	.082	72
Adjusted Predicted Value	12.7456	19.7154	16.9773	1.80976	72
Residual	-3.15250	3.56494	.00000	1.56431	72
Std. Residual	-1.987	2.247	.000	.986	72
Stud. Residual	-2.002	2.276	.003	1.001	72
Deleted Residual	-3.19989	3.65917	.00881	1.61204	72
Stud. Deleted Residual	-2.047	2.349	.005	1.016	72
Mahal. Distance	.066	6.857	1.972	1.546	72
Cook's Distance	.000	.046	.010	.014	72
Centered Leverage Value	.001	.097	.028	.022	72

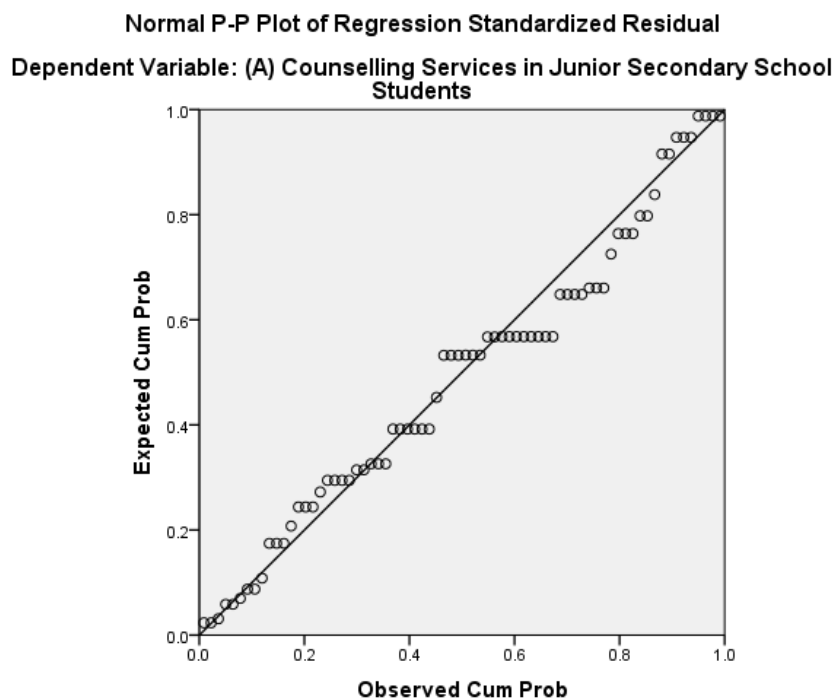
a. Dependent Variable: (A) Counselling Services in Junior Secondary School Students

The residuals statistics indicate that the predicted values range from (12.8589) to (19.7287), with a mean of (16.9861)  $\pm$  (1.80471). The standard residuals range from (-1.987) to (2.247), suggesting no severe outliers. Cook's Distance values remain low (Max = 0.046), indicating no influential cases affecting the model. The Mahalanobis Distance (Mean = 1.972) falls within an acceptable range, confirming no significant leverage points. These results suggest a well-fitted model with minimal violations of regression assumptions.



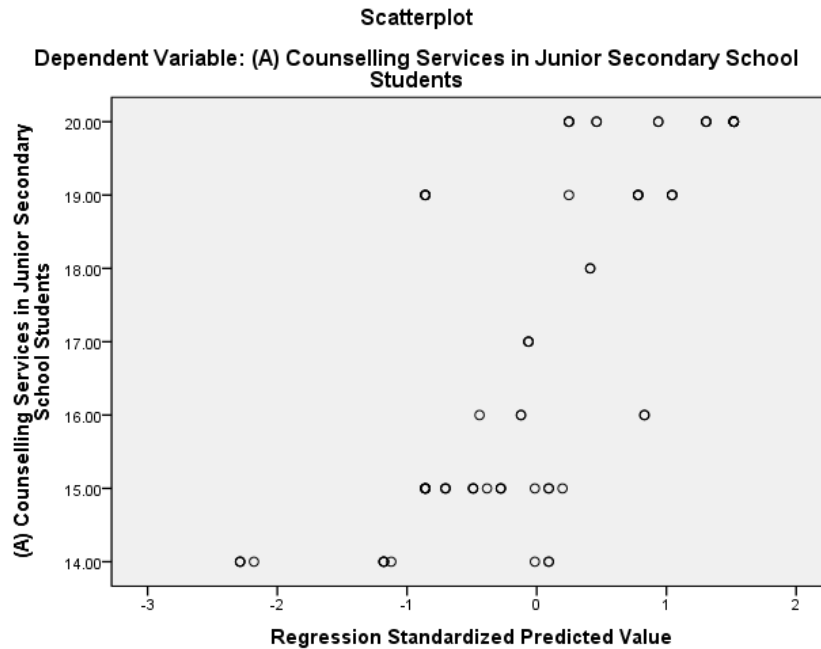
**Figure 1. Histogram of Regression Standardized Residuals for Counselling Services**

The histogram in Figure 1 shows a near-normal distribution of residuals, with a mean of (1.06E-15) and a standard deviation of (0.986). Most values cluster around (0), indicating minimal skewness. The absence of extreme deviations suggests that the regression model meets the normality assumption. With (N = 72), the model's residuals appear well-distributed, supporting its reliability.



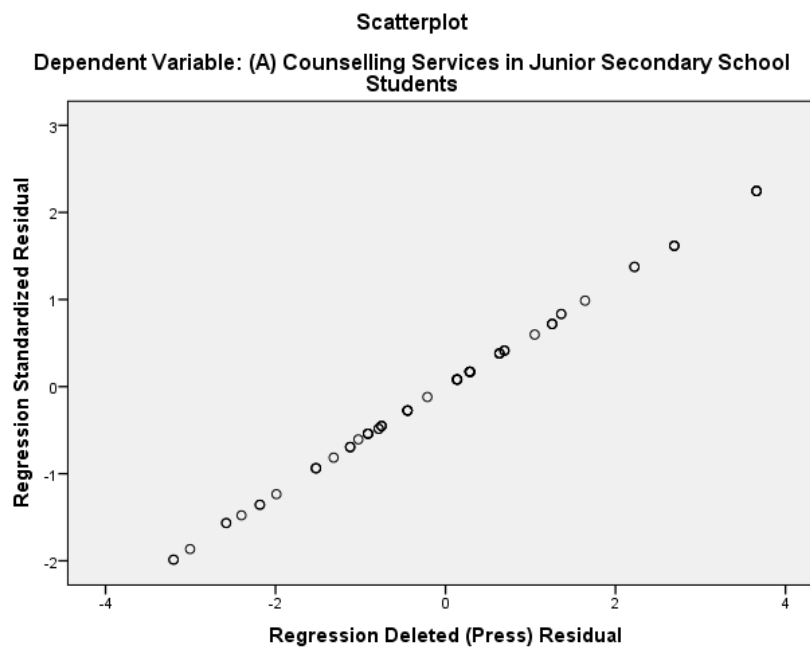
**Figure 2. Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residuals for Counselling Services**

The P-P plot in Figure 2 shows that the residuals align closely with the diagonal reference line, indicating that the assumption of normality is largely met. Minor deviations appear at the tails, but overall, the distribution is approximately normal. This suggests that the regression model appropriately fits the data, supporting the reliability of predictions related to counselling services for junior secondary school students.



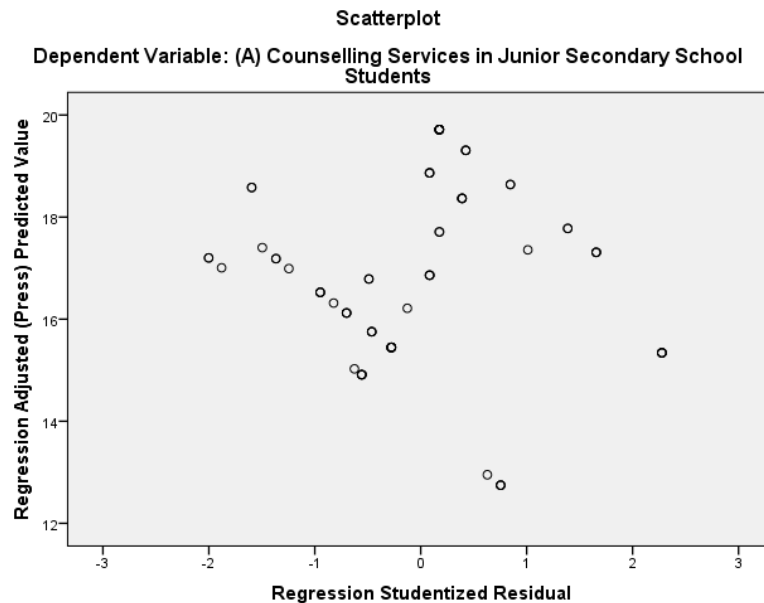
**Figure 3. Scatterplot of Regression Standardized Predicted Values for Counselling Services**

The scatterplot in Figure 3 illustrates the relationship between predicted values and counselling services scores, ranging from (14.00) to (20.00). The spread of points suggests some clustering, indicating potential heteroscedasticity. However, no clear pattern emerges, implying that residuals may be randomly distributed. This suggests that while the regression model provides predictions, some variability in counselling services remains unexplained.



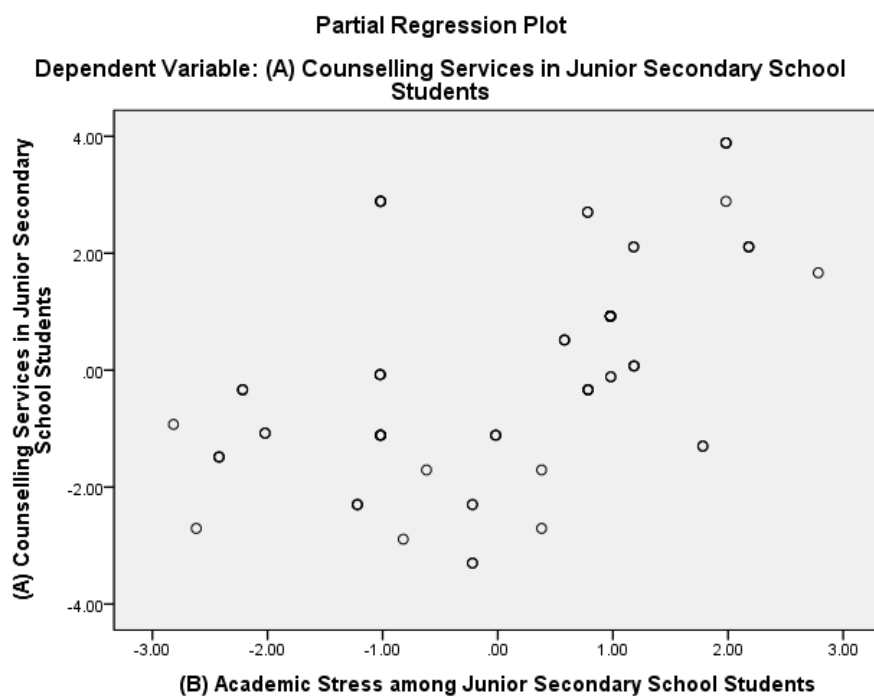
**Figure 4. Scatterplot of Regression Standardized Residuals vs. Deleted (Press) Residuals**

The scatterplot in Figure 4 shows a strong linear relationship between regression standardized residuals and deleted (Press) residuals, ranging from (-4.00) to (4.00). The alignment along a diagonal suggests that the residuals are well-distributed, indicating no significant outliers. This implies that the regression model is stable, with minimal undue influence from individual data points, thereby supporting model reliability.



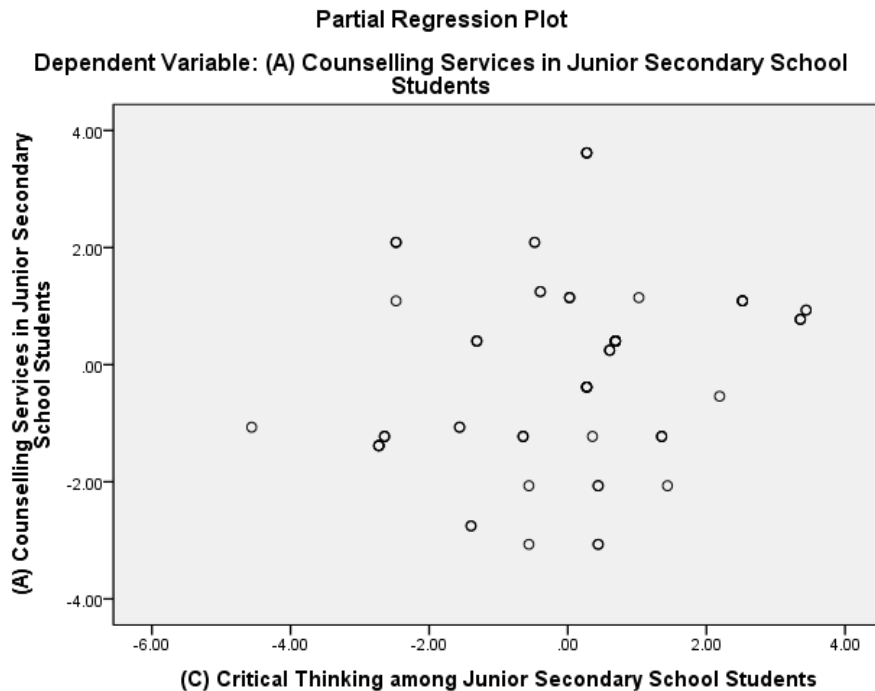
**Figure 5. Scatterplot of Regression Adjusted (Press) Predicted Values vs. Studentized Residuals**

The scatterplot in Figure 5 presents a random dispersion of points between regression studentized residuals (-3.00 to 3.00) and adjusted (Press) predicted values (12.00 to 20.00). The lack of a clear pattern suggests homoscedasticity, indicating that residual variance remains consistent across predictions. This supports the assumption of equal variance, reinforcing the reliability of the regression model in predicting counselling services for junior secondary school students.



**Figure 6. Partial Regression Plot of Counselling Services vs. Academic Stress**

The scatterplot in Figure 6 illustrates a positive linear relationship between academic stress (-3.00 to 3.00) and counselling services (-4.00 to 4.00) among junior secondary school students. The upward trend suggests that as academic stress increases, the demand for counselling services also rises. The spread of points indicates variability, but the general pattern supports the influence of academic stress on the need for counselling interventions.



**Figure 7. Partial Regression Plot of Counselling Services vs. Critical Thinking**

The scatterplot in Figure 7 depicts the relationship between critical thinking (-6.00 to 4.00) and counselling services (-4.00 to 4.00) among junior secondary school students. The dispersed points suggest a weak or no clear linear trend, indicating that critical thinking skills may not strongly influence the demand for counselling services. The variability implies that other factors might contribute to students' need for counselling.

Counselling services play a paramount role in the academic and personal development of junior secondary school students in Anambra State. These services encompass various aspects, including academic guidance, career counselling, personal development, conflict resolution, and mental health support. Each of these components contributes significantly to improving students' overall well-being, academic success, and future prospects. Academic guidance in junior secondary schools is essential in enhancing students' study habits and learning skills. According to a study by Michael and Abisoye (2025), academic guidance helps students develop effective study techniques, improve time management, and refine their learning strategies. In contrast, a study by Cobbina (2025) found that students without academic counselling services tend to struggle with poor study habits and low academic performance. This finding agrees with the view that structured academic counselling can positively impact students' learning processes. In a related study, Kahu and Nelson (2018) emphasize that academic guidance enables students to stay focused on their studies, ultimately boosting their academic performance.

Career counselling, another significant aspect of counselling services, helps students explore potential job opportunities and career paths. This is paramount in shaping students' future aspirations and providing clarity about career options. Adah & Ekweani (2025) noted that career counselling allows students to identify their interests and strengths, which can guide their future educational and career choices. In contrast, a study by Otu and Sefotho (2025) highlighted the challenges faced by students without career guidance, including confusion about future career paths and lack of motivation. This finding agrees with the view that career counselling provides students with essential information and direction, which reduces uncertainty and anxiety about the future.

Personal development counselling focuses on building students' confidence and supporting their emotional growth. Personal development programs help students become self-aware and develop positive self-esteem, which is paramount during the transitional phase of adolescence. According to Ugwu et al, (2024), personal development counselling has been found to improve students' self-confidence and emotional intelligence, thereby aiding in their overall growth. This finding agrees with the work of Tjimuku et al, (2025), who observed that students who participate in personal development programs exhibit greater emotional resilience and better interpersonal relationships. In contrast, a lack of such counselling programs often leads to students experiencing low self-esteem and emotional instability, which affects their academic performance.

Conflict resolution counselling also plays a pivotal role in promoting a peaceful and conducive learning environment. Peer disputes are common in secondary schools, and unresolved conflicts can negatively impact students' mental well-being and academic performance. A study by Egbunike-Umegbolu (2024) found that conflict resolution counselling helps students settle disputes amicably, advancing positive relationships among peers. This finding agrees with Shewa and Moses (2024), who asserted that conflict resolution counselling significantly reduces instances of bullying and violence, contributing to a safer and more supportive school environment. Mental health support is another critical component of counselling services, particularly in addressing academic stress and anxiety among junior secondary school students. Academic stress can negatively affect students' mental health, leading to poor academic performance and emotional distress. According to Fadele et al, (2024), mental health support services are paramount for addressing the psychological needs of students experiencing stress and anxiety. In contrast, a study by Ekoh et al, (2024) found that students without adequate mental health support services tend to experience higher levels of anxiety, which impairs their academic performance. This finding highlights the importance of mental health support in reducing stress and enhancing students' well-being (Enwere & Iloakasia, 2024).

Academic stress itself is a pervasive issue among junior secondary school students in Anambra State. Academic stress affects students' mental health and performance, often resulting in burnout and low self-esteem. The study by Gyasewaa et al, (2023) revealed that students often feel overwhelmed by excessive homework and tight academic schedules, leading to increased stress levels. This finding agrees with that of Asiegbu (2023), who found that students with high academic stress tend to perform poorly in their studies. In contrast, students with effective stress management strategies and mental health support were observed to perform better academically. Furthermore, the increasing pressure from high expectations and demanding subjects exacerbates academic stress. According to Okafor et al, (2024), unrealistic academic expectations placed on students by teachers and parents create a cycle of anxiety and stress.

Critical thinking skills are essential for junior secondary school students as they prepare for higher education and the workforce. These skills enable students to analyze information, make informed decisions, and solve problems creatively. According to Adewusi et al, (2023), critical thinking enhances students' problem-solving abilities and helps them think independently. In contrast, a study by Haruna et al, (2024) found that students who lack critical thinking skills tend to rely heavily on rote memorization, which limits their academic potential. Critical thinking allows students to question assumptions and evaluate evidence, thereby improving their judgment and reasoning.

### **3.2. Strategies for improving the effectiveness of counselling services in addressing academic stress and fostering critical thinking**

Counselling services are essential for helping students navigate academic stress while also developing critical thinking skills. But to truly make a difference, these services need to be engaging, accessible, and tailored to students' needs. Here are some key ways to make counselling more effective in supporting students.

#### **3.2.1. Making Counselling More Personal**

Every student faces different challenges, so a one-size-fits-all approach doesn't work. Counsellors should take time to understand individual stressors and strengths, offering customized support. One-on-one sessions, personalized strategies, and targeted problem-solving plans can help students manage stress while also developing their ability to think critically.

### **3.2.2. Bringing Counselling into the Classroom**

Students benefit most when counselling is a regular part of their learning experience. Schools should integrate counselling into the curriculum, offering workshops, group discussions, and stress management techniques alongside academics. When teachers and counsellors work together, students get consistent support in handling pressure and improving their reasoning skills.

### **3.2.3. Giving Counsellors the Right Tools and Training**

For counsellors to effectively help students, they need ongoing training in modern stress management techniques, cognitive behavioral strategies, and ways to develop critical thinking. Investing in professional development ensures that counsellors can provide relevant, practical guidance that truly helps students thrive.

### **3.2.4. Encouraging Peer Support Systems**

Sometimes, students find it easier to open up to their peers rather than adults. Schools can establish peer mentoring programs where students help each other handle academic stress and develop problem-solving skills. Group discussions and collaborative thinking exercises can also strengthen students' ability to reason, question, and evaluate different perspectives.

### **3.2.5. Teaching Practical Stress-Relief Methods**

Stress can cloud judgment and hinder learning. Counsellors should introduce students to practical ways to reduce stress, such as mindfulness, deep breathing, structured time management, and goal-setting exercises. These techniques not only lower anxiety but also create the mental space needed for effective decision-making and critical thinking.

### **3.2.6. Using Technology to Reach More Students**

Digital tools can make counselling services more engaging and accessible. Online platforms, chat services, and interactive self-help resources allow students to seek guidance whenever they need it. Schools can also use technology to introduce fun, interactive critical thinking exercises and stress-relief activities, making support available beyond traditional face-to-face sessions.

### **3.2.7. Involving Parents and Teachers in the Process**

For counselling to be truly effective, support needs to extend beyond school walls. Parents and teachers should be equipped with the knowledge to recognize signs of academic stress and encourage students to develop problem-solving skills. Schools can organize workshops and resources to help families and educators work together in creating a supportive environment for students.

## **4. Conclusion**

This study examined the effectiveness of counselling services in reducing academic stress and promoting critical thinking among junior secondary school students in Anambra State. The findings revealed that counselling services play a significant role in alleviating academic stress by providing students with coping strategies, emotional support, and problem-solving skills. Furthermore, the study established that counselling interventions contribute to the enhancement of critical thinking skills by encouraging analytical reasoning, self-reflection, and decision-making abilities among students. In general, the results indicate that well-structured counselling services positively impact students' academic well-being and cognitive development. Schools that integrate effective counselling programs are better positioned to support students in managing stress while advancing intellectual growth. Based on these findings, it is recommended that school administrators strengthen counselling services by increasing the availability of trained counsellors, ensuring adequate resources, and integrating counselling sessions into the school curriculum. Additionally, policymakers should prioritize the development of student-centered counselling frameworks to improve academic outcomes and overall student well-being in junior secondary schools.

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