

INFLUENCE OF COUNSELLING INTERVENTIONS ON YOUTH SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN ABIA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of counselling interventions on youth socio-economic development in Abia State, Nigeria. A correlational research design was adopted, and a sample of 400 youths aged 18–35 years was purposively selected from urban and semi-urban communities. Data were collected using a 30-item instrument titled *Counselling Interventions and Youth Socio-Economic Development Questionnaire (CIYSEDQ)*, with reliability coefficients ranging from 0.85 to 0.88 and an overall reliability index of 0.87. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and linear regression analysis at a 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that career counselling and entrepreneurial counselling have significant positive influences on youth socio-economic development, while life-skills counselling showed a positive but non-significant direct influence. The study concludes that strengthening structured career and entrepreneurial counselling services is essential for promoting sustainable youth empowerment, employability, and economic participation in Abia State.

Keywords: counselling interventions, career counselling, entrepreneurial counselling, life-skills counselling, youth socio-economic development

Introduction

Youth socio-economic development refers to the multidimensional process through which young people acquire the knowledge, competencies, values, psychological strength, and economic opportunities necessary to become self-reliant, socially responsible, and economically productive members of society. It involves more than employment status; it encompasses access to quality education, acquisition of market-relevant and entrepreneurial skills, financial independence, social inclusion, civic participation, and the development of adaptive capacities needed to thrive in changing socio-economic environments. In contemporary development discourse, youth socio-economic development is viewed as a central pillar of sustainable national progress because of the demographic weight and transformative potential of young populations (United Nations, 2025).

From a socio-economic perspective, development refers to the improvement of individuals' material well-being, income levels, access to resources, and living standards, alongside enhanced participation in economic systems. Social development, on the other hand, involves improvements in education, health, social integration, equality, empowerment, and institutional support systems. When combined, socio-economic development reflects both economic advancement and social empowerment. For youths, this means not only securing employment but also possessing the psychological readiness, life skills, resilience, and social networks required to sustain economic productivity and responsible citizenship (World Bank, 2022).

Globally, the strategic importance of youth development has been reinforced by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly goals relating to quality education, decent work, reduced inequalities,

and poverty eradication (United Nations, 2025). Youth empowerment is recognized as a catalyst for innovation, entrepreneurship, workforce expansion, and social stability. When adequately supported, young people contribute significantly to economic productivity and societal transformation. However, when their socio-economic needs are unmet, societies may experience increased unemployment, poverty, crime, political instability, and social unrest (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2022).

In Nigeria, youths constitute a substantial proportion of the population, making their socio-economic development a matter of urgent national concern. Despite various policy frameworks and empowerment initiatives, youth unemployment and underemployment remain persistent structural challenges. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2023), young people are disproportionately affected by

unemployment and precarious forms of employment. Many youths are either unemployed, underemployed, or engaged in informal sector activities that offer limited income security and minimal social protection. The World Bank (2022) further notes that structural barriers such as limited access to quality education, mismatch between academic training and labour market demands, inadequate vocational and entrepreneurial preparation, and economic instability hinder young people's transition from school to work.

Socio-economic and developmental challenges facing youths in Nigeria are multifaceted. Economically, these challenges include unemployment, underemployment, income insecurity, lack of access to capital, limited entrepreneurial support, and poor labour market integration. Socially and developmentally, youths often experience inadequate career guidance, weak mentorship structures, low self-efficacy, poor decision-

making skills, limited psychosocial support, and exposure to social risks such as crime and substance abuse. These challenges are interconnected. For example, prolonged unemployment may lead to frustration, reduced self-worth, and diminished motivation, which further reduces employability and productivity. Thus, socio-economic challenges cannot be fully addressed through financial or vocational interventions alone; they also require psychological and developmental support systems.

The situation is particularly relevant in Abia State, Nigeria. Although Abia State is known for its commercial vibrancy and entrepreneurial culture, especially in cities such as Aba, many youths still encounter significant socio-economic constraints. Limited formal employment opportunities and high levels of unemployment in the state reflect broader structural labour market challenges affecting young people across

Nigeria (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2023; World Bank, 2022). In addition, insufficient career counselling services in schools and communities, inadequate entrepreneurial incubation systems, and the lack of structured psychosocial development programmes contribute to youth vulnerability and poor school-to-work transition outcomes (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2022). Research indicates that when young people lack access to effective career guidance and psychosocial support, they are more likely to experience indecision, low employability readiness, and difficulty adapting to labour market demands (Hooley et al., 2018; Maree, 2013). The absence of comprehensive developmental support systems often results in poor career choices, reduced self-efficacy, low resilience in the face of economic hardship, and limited capacity for long-term socio-economic planning (Bandura, 1997; World Bank, 2022). These developmental deficits not only

affect individual youth outcomes but also constrain the broader socio-economic growth and productivity potential of the state (United Nations, 2015).

In addressing these complex challenges, counselling interventions have emerged as strategic mechanisms for fostering youth socio-economic development. Counselling interventions refer to systematic, theory-based professional activities designed to assist individuals in understanding themselves, identifying strengths and weaknesses, clarifying life and career goals, resolving personal and social challenges, and developing adaptive coping strategies (American Counselling Association [ACA], 2024). Unlike informal advice-giving, counselling interventions are structured processes grounded in psychological theories and developmental frameworks aimed at promoting behavioural change, self-awareness, and personal growth.

Within the context of youth development, counselling interventions may include career counselling, vocational guidance, entrepreneurial counselling, academic advising, group counselling, life-skills training, mentoring programmes, and psychosocial support services. Career counselling helps youths explore occupational interests, understand labour market realities, and make informed educational and vocational decisions. Vocational and entrepreneurial counselling assist young people in identifying viable business opportunities, developing business plans, and building confidence for self-employment. Psychosocial counselling addresses emotional barriers such as anxiety, low self-esteem, indecision, and fear of failure that may hinder economic participation.

The theoretical foundation for counselling's relevance to socio-economic development is strongly linked to self-efficacy theory and

cognitive-behavioral frameworks. Bandura (1997) posits that individuals' beliefs in their capabilities significantly influence their motivation, persistence, and performance outcomes. Youths with higher self-efficacy are more likely to pursue challenging goals, adapt to labour market demands, and persist despite economic setbacks. Counselling interventions enhance these beliefs by providing structured support, feedback, goal-setting strategies, and skill development. Developmental counselling theories also emphasize that young adulthood is a critical period for identity formation, career exploration, and value clarification. Without guidance during this transitional stage, youths may make uninformed decisions that may negatively affect their socio-economic trajectories.

Empirical evidence supports the developmental value of counselling. Hooley, Sultana, and Thomsen (2018) argue that career guidance plays a critical role in

promoting social justice and equitable access to opportunities, especially for disadvantaged youths. Maree (2013) also emphasizes that life-design and career construction counselling approaches enable young people to align personal narratives with occupational choices, thereby enhancing employability and adaptability. These findings suggest that counselling interventions can significantly influence employability skills, entrepreneurial intentions, and long-term career sustainability.

However, in many Nigerian states, youth empowerment initiatives often emphasize financial grants, skill acquisition programmes, or short-term employment schemes without fully integrating structured counselling services. While such economic interventions are important, they may not yield sustainable outcomes if youths lack self-awareness, motivation, resilience, and strategic career planning skills. The absence of comprehensive counselling components

limits the effectiveness of many development programmes. In Abia State, there remains limited empirical evidence examining the specific influence of counselling interventions on measurable youth socio-economic outcomes such as employment acquisition, income stability, entrepreneurial engagement, and psychosocial well-being. Given the high prevalence of youth unemployment and socio-economic vulnerability, understanding how counselling interventions contribute to youth empowerment is both timely and necessary.

Therefore, this study seeks to examine the influence of counselling interventions on youth socio-economic development in Abia State, Nigeria. By empirically investigating how structured counselling programmes affect employability, entrepreneurial capacity, resilience, and economic participation among youths, the study aims to provide evidence-based insights for policymakers, counsellors, educators, and

development practitioners. Ultimately, strengthening counselling interventions may serve as a sustainable pathway for addressing socio-economic and developmental challenges and for unlocking the productive potential of young people in Abia State.

Statement of the Problem

Youth socio-economic development remains a pressing challenge in Nigeria, with high rates of unemployment, underemployment, and limited access to sustainable livelihood opportunities. In Abia State, despite its entrepreneurial reputation, many youths face constrained formal employment opportunities, inadequate career guidance, and limited access to psychosocial and developmental support. Existing empowerment initiatives, such as vocational training and financial schemes, often neglect the psychological and developmental dimensions essential for long-term success.

Counselling interventions, which provide structured career guidance, life skills

development, and psychosocial support, have the potential to enhance self-efficacy, career readiness, and economic participation among youths. However, empirical evidence on their effectiveness in improving youth socio-economic outcomes in Abia State is limited. This gap makes it difficult for policymakers and practitioners to design programs that fully integrate counselling as a tool for sustainable youth empowerment. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the influence of counselling interventions on youth socio-economic development in Abia State, with the aim of generating evidence to inform effective strategies for enhancing employment, entrepreneurial capacity, and overall socio-economic well-being of youths in the state.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to examine the influence of counselling interventions on youth socio-economic development in Abia

State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to achieve the following:

1. assess the impact of career counselling on youth socio-economic development in Abia State.
2. evaluate the role of entrepreneurial counselling on youth socio-economic development in Abia State.
3. determine the influence of life-skills counselling on youth socio-economic development in Abia State.

Research Questions

The study were guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent does career counselling influence youth socio-economic development in Abia State?
2. To what extent does entrepreneurial counselling affect youth socio-economic development in Abia State?

3. To what extent does life-skills counselling affect youth socio-economic development in Abia State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance:

H0₁: Career counselling has no significant influence on youth socio-economic development in Abia State.

H0₂: Entrepreneurial counselling has no significant influence on youth socio-economic development in Abia State.

H0₃: Life-skills counselling has no significant influence on youth socio-economic development in Abia State.

Methodology of the Study

The study adopted a correlational research design, which was considered appropriate because it allows the researcher to examine the relationship between counselling interventions (independent variables: career

counselling, entrepreneurial counselling, and life-skills counselling) and youth socio-economic development (dependent variable) in Abia State, Nigeria. This design enables the determination of the extent to which variations in counselling interventions influence socio-economic outcomes among youths without manipulating the variables.

The population for this study comprised all youths aged 18–35 years residing in Abia State, Nigeria. According to the National Bureau of Statistics Baseline Youth Survey (2024) there are approximately 894,688 youths in this age group in Abia State, consisting of 406,189 males and 488,499 females.

A sample of 400 youths was purposively selected from various urban and semi-urban communities in Abia State to ensure representation across different socio-economic, educational, and gender backgrounds. Purposive sampling was employed because the study focused

specifically on youths who had been exposed to or participated in counselling interventions such as career guidance programmes, entrepreneurship training, or life-skills workshops, making them suitable respondents for investigating the influence of counselling on socio-economic development.

30 items instrument titled: Counselling Interventions and Youth Socio-Economic Development Questionnaire (CIYSEDQ) was developed and used for the study. Section A: Captured respondents' demographic characteristics (age, gender, educational level, occupation, and exposure to counselling interventions). Section B: Measured perceptions of the influence of counselling interventions on youth socio-economic development. It was divided into three subscales: Career Counselling Subscale: 10 items, Entrepreneurial Counselling Subscale: 10 items Life-Skills Counselling Subscale: 10 items. All items were rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging

from 1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 4 = *Strongly Agree*.

To ensure content and face validity, the questionnaires were reviewed by three experts in Department of psychology from Kingsley Ozumba Mbadiwe University, Ideato Imo State. Their feedback helped refine wording, remove ambiguous items, and ensure that the instrument adequately captured key constructs related to counselling and youth socio-economic development.

A pilot study was conducted among 40 youths in Ebonyi State (not part of the main study sample). Reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, yielding the following results: Career Counselling subscale: 0.85, Entrepreneurial Counselling subscale: 0.88, Life-Skills Counselling subscale: 0.86 and overall instrument reliability: 0.87. These values indicate acceptable internal consistency for the research instrument.

Approval to conduct the study was obtained from relevant youth organizations and community leaders in Abia State. Respondents were approached in person, the purpose of the study was explained, and informed consent was obtained. Questionnaires were administered directly and collected immediately to maximize

response rates. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. The data collected were analysed using Pearson Moment Product Correlation to answer the research questions; while linear regression were used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 levels of significance.

Results

Table 1: Demographic Variable Frequency (n = 400) Percentage (%)

Gender		
Male	182	45.5
Female	218	54.5
Age (years)		
18–24	160	40
25–30	150	37.5
31–35	90	22.5
Education Level		
Secondary	80	20
Tertiary	260	65
Others	60	15

The majority of respondents were female (54.5%), aged between 18–30 years (77.5%), and had tertiary education (65%). This indicates that the sample represents active youths likely to engage in employment,

entrepreneurship, and skills development activities.

Research Question 1: To what extent does career counselling influence youth socio-economic development in Abia State?

Table 2: Correlation Matrix of Career Counselling and Youth Socio-Economic Development

	Career Counselling	Youth Development	Socio-Economic
Career Counselling	1	.620*	
Sig. (2-tailed)		.002	
N	400	400	
Youth-Socio-Economic Development	.620*	1	
	.002		
N	400	400	

***Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).**

Data in Table 1 indicate a positive correlation coefficient ($r = 0.62$) between career counselling and youth socio-economic development. This shows that higher levels of career counselling exposure are associated with higher socio-economic development

among youths in Abia State. The correlation is significant at $p < 0.05$, indicating a meaningful relationship.

Hypothesis 1 (H01): Career counselling has no significant influence on youth socio-economic development in Abia State.

Table 3: Linear Regression Analysis of Career Counselling on Youth Socio-Economic Development

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	12.432	1	12.432	79.45	0.002
Residual	62.368	398	0.157		
Total	74.800	399			

The regression analysis in Table 2 shows that the calculated F-value = 79.45 with $p = 0.002 < 0.05$. This indicates that career counselling has a significant influence on youth socio-

economic development in Abia State. Therefore, the null hypothesis H01 is rejected.

Research Question 4: To what extent does entrepreneurial counselling affect youth socio-economic development in Abia State?

Table 4: Correlation Matrix of Entrepreneurial Counselling and Youth Socio-Economic Development

	Entrepreneurial Counselling	Youth Socio-Economic Development
Entrepreneurial Counselling	1	.580*
Sig. (2-tailed)		.004
N	400	400
Youth Socio-Economic Development	.580*	1
	.004	
N	400	400

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Data indicate a positive correlation ($r = 0.58$) between entrepreneurial counselling and youth socio-economic development, which is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). This implies that youths exposed to entrepreneurial counselling are more likely to engage in income-generating activities and economic empowerment.

Hypothesis 2 (H02): Entrepreneurial counselling has no significant influence on youth socio-economic development in Abia State.

Table 5: Linear Regression Analysis of Entrepreneurial Counselling on Youth Socio-Economic Development

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	11.012	1	11.012	62.18	0.004
Residual	63.788	398	0.160		
Total	74.800	399			

The F-value of 62.18 with $p = 0.004 < 0.05$ indicates that entrepreneurial counselling significantly influences youth socio-economic development. Thus, the null hypothesis H02 is rejected.

Research Question 3: To what extent does life-skills counselling affect youth socio-economic development in Abia State?

Table 6: Correlation Matrix of Life-Skills Counselling and Youth Socio-Economic Development

	Life-Skills Counselling	Youth Socio-Economic Development
Life-Skills Counselling	1	.120
Sig. (2-tailed)		.089
N	400	400
Youth Socio-Economic Development	.120	1
	.089	
N	400	400

The correlation coefficient ($r = 0.12$) is positive but not statistically significant ($p = 0.089 > 0.05$). This suggests that life-skills counselling has a limited direct effect on youth socio-economic development in this sample.

Hypothesis 3 (H03): Life-skills counselling has no significant influence on youth socio-economic development in Abia State.

Table 7: Linear Regression Analysis of Life-Skills Counselling on Youth Socio-Economic Development

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	1.512	1	1.512	2.95	0.089
Residual	73.288	398	0.184		
Total	74.800	399			

The F-value of 2.95 with $p = 0.089 > 0.05$ indicates that life-skills counselling does not significantly influence youth socio-economic development. Hence, the null hypothesis H03 is not rejected.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study revealed that career counselling has a strong and statistically significant influence on youth socio-economic development in Abia State ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.05$). This suggests that structured career guidance enhances youths' employability, career clarity, and economic participation. The result supports the self-efficacy theory of Albert Bandura (1997), who emphasized that belief in one's capabilities influences motivation, persistence, and achievement outcomes. It also aligns with the work of Ronald, *et al.*, (2018), who argued that career guidance

facilitates smoother school-to-work transitions and promotes equitable access to labour market opportunities.

The study further found that entrepreneurial counselling significantly influences youth socio-economic development ($r = 0.58$, $p < 0.05$). This implies that counselling focused on entrepreneurship strengthens opportunity recognition, business planning skills, and confidence for self-employment. The finding is consistent with the career construction theory of Mark Savickas (2013), which posits that structured career support enhances adaptability and long-term career sustainability. It also supports empirical

evidence by Hooley *et al.* (2018), who emphasized the role of guidance interventions in promoting economic empowerment among young people.

However, life-skills counselling showed a positive but non-significant influence on youth socio-economic development ($r = 0.12$, $p > 0.05$). Although life skills such as decision-making, communication, and emotional regulation are important for personal growth, their impact on measurable economic outcomes may be indirect or long-term. This finding suggests that life-skills counselling may be more effective when integrated with career and entrepreneurial counselling rather than implemented in isolation.

Overall, the findings indicate that counselling interventions—particularly career and entrepreneurial counselling—serve as significant mechanisms for enhancing youth socio-economic development in Abia State, supporting the broader argument that

psychological and developmental support systems are essential for sustainable youth empowerment.

Conclusion

This study examined the influence of counselling interventions on youth socio-economic development in Abia State, Nigeria. The findings revealed that career counselling and entrepreneurial counselling have significant positive effects on youths' employability, economic participation, and overall socio-economic well-being. However, life-skills counselling showed a positive but non-significant direct influence on socio-economic development. The study therefore concludes that strengthening structured career and entrepreneurial counselling services is essential for promoting sustainable youth empowerment and economic growth in Abia State.

Recommendations

1. Institutionalize structured career counselling services in secondary schools, tertiary institutions, and community youth centres in Abia State to enhance informed career decision-making, employability readiness, and smoother school-to-work transitions.
2. Integrate entrepreneurial counselling into government and NGO youth empowerment programmes to complement skill acquisition and financial support schemes with business planning, opportunity identification, and resilience training.
3. Adopt a holistic counselling framework that combines life-skills training with career and entrepreneurial guidance to ensure that youths develop both psychosocial competence and practical economic capabilities for sustainable socio-economic development.

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