

EFFECTS OF COUNSELLING THERAPY ON SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' CAREER CHOICE AND SELF-EFFICACY IN BAUCHI STATE, NIGERIA

Dauda Lumana Bani¹, Dr S. S. Sara², Dr A. Adam³ & Prof. A. Ibrahim⁴

^{1,2,3,4}Faculty of Technology Education, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi, Nigeria

Corresponding Author: Dauda Lumana Bani: Email: lumanadauda350@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effects of counselling therapy on the career choices and career decision-making self-efficacy of secondary school students in Bauchi State, Nigeria. It examines how structured career counselling interventions influence students' confidence in their ability to make informed career decisions and the clarity of their career aspirations. Employing a quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test research design, the study involved 264 senior secondary school students. Data were collected using the Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale (CDMSE) and a structured questionnaire on career choices. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (paired-sample t-tests). The findings reveal a statistically significant increase in students' career decision-making self-efficacy and greater clarity in their career choices following the counselling intervention. The mean self-efficacy score improved significantly from pre-test to post-test, and the percentage of students with definitive career goals increased. These results underscore the critical role of counselling therapy in enhancing students' career self-efficacy and decision-making capabilities. The study recommends the formal integration of evidence-based career counselling programs into the secondary school curriculum and continuous professional development for school counsellors.

Keywords: Career Counselling, Career Choice, Self-Efficacy, Secondary School Students, Bauchi State.

Introduction

The transition from secondary education to higher learning and the workforce is a critical developmental stage for adolescents. In Nigeria, the complexity of this transition is heightened by a dynamic job market and diverse educational pathways, making informed career decision-making a crucial determinant of future success (Oye, 2021). Career decision-making self-efficacy (CDMSE), defined as an individual's belief in their ability to successfully complete tasks necessary to make career decisions, is a key psychological construct in this process (Dostanic, Suvajdžić, & Krpović-Bojanić, 2021). In the context of Bauchi State, socio-economic factors and limited access to career information can impede students' ability to make choices that align with their interests and aptitudes. This study, therefore, aims to investigate the impact of structured counselling therapy on the career choices and self-efficacy of secondary school students in this region.

In recent years, the importance of career counselling has gained global recognition as an integral component of comprehensive education. Adolescence is often marked by uncertainty and anxiety regarding career decisions, and CDMSE has been shown to be a significant predictor of positive career outcomes (Chudari, Mashudi, & Fatihaturasyidah, 2020). Despite this, career counselling services in many Nigerian secondary schools are either non-existent or inadequately implemented, particularly in northern states like Bauchi (Isah, 2024). Students' career decisions are often influenced by a combination of factors including academic performance, parental expectations, and peer pressure, rather than a systematic exploration of personal interests and strengths (Kaplan, Karaman, & Eşici, 2025).

Research has consistently demonstrated the positive relationship between counselling interventions and career self-efficacy. Structured interventions, such as group counselling and psychoeducation programs, have been found to significantly enhance students' confidence and ability to make sound career decisions (Afasli, Netrawati, & Karneli, 2024). This study seeks to contribute to this body of knowledge by providing empirical evidence on the effectiveness of a targeted counselling therapy program in improving career decision-making and self-efficacy among secondary school students in the specific socio-cultural context of Bauchi State.

Statement of the Problem

A significant number of secondary school students in Bauchi State exhibit career indecision, which is often linked to low self-efficacy and anxiety about their future. This problem is compounded by the general lack of structured career guidance and counselling programs in schools, leaving students to navigate this critical life stage with little professional support (Adamu & Bello, 2023). Without adequate guidance, students are more likely to make suboptimal career choices based on limited information, societal stereotypes, or external pressures, leading to potential future job dissatisfaction and underemployment.

Furthermore, the unique socio-economic landscape of Bauchi State presents additional barriers. Limited access to career information, a lack of role models in diverse professions, and financial constraints can restrict students' awareness of and belief in their ability to pursue a wide range of career options. The absence of tailored counselling programs that address these contextual challenges leaves a significant gap in the educational support system. This research addresses this gap by investigating the extent to which a structured counselling therapy

intervention can mitigate these issues by enhancing students' career decision-making self-efficacy and promoting more informed career choices.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to determine the effect of counselling therapy on the career choices and career decision-making self-efficacy of secondary school students in Bauchi State. The specific objectives are:

1. To determine the mean difference in the career decision-making self-efficacy scores of students before and after exposure to counselling therapy.
2. To ascertain the mean difference in the clarity of students' career choices before and after exposure to counselling therapy.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. What is the mean and standard deviation of students' career decision-making self-efficacy scores before and after the counselling therapy intervention?
2. What is the mean and standard deviation of students' career choice clarity scores before and after the counselling therapy intervention?

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

The study is primarily anchored in Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), developed by Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994). SCCT provides a robust framework for understanding how individuals develop career interests, make career choices, and achieve career success. The theory posits that career development is a product of the interplay between three key variables: self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and personal goals. Self-efficacy beliefs—an individual's confidence in their ability to perform specific tasks—are central to this model. According to SCCT, individuals are more likely to develop interests in, and pursue careers related to, activities for which they have high self-efficacy (Dahlan, Idris, & Susanto, 2020). Counselling interventions are therefore critical for bolstering students' self-efficacy by providing them with successful performance experiences, vicarious learning, and positive reinforcement.

The study also draws upon Holland's Theory of Career Choice (1997), which emphasizes the importance of congruence between an individual's personality type and their work environment. Holland identified six personality types (Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional), suggesting that career satisfaction and success are more likely when a person's work environment aligns with their personality. Career counselling can facilitate this alignment by helping students identify their personality type and explore corresponding career options, thereby enhancing their self-efficacy and confidence in their choices (Akhsania et al., 2021).

Review of Empirical Studies

A substantial body of research supports the positive impact of career counselling on student outcomes. Adhikari & Thapa (2025), in a study of 300 undergraduate students, found that career decision self-efficacy played a crucial mediating role in the effectiveness of career coaching. Similarly, Afasli, Netrawati, & Karneli (2024) utilized a pre-test/post-test design to demonstrate that group counselling with Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) significantly improved the self-efficacy of 150 high school students. Çelik & Pütüm (2025) employed a quasi-experimental design and found that a reality therapy-based psychoeducation program led to marked improvements in the career decision-making self-efficacy of 160 secondary school students.

Studies have also highlighted the link between career knowledge and self-efficacy. Akhsania et al. (2021), in a cross-sectional survey of 500 junior high school students, found a strong positive correlation between students' understanding of various career options and their level of career decision-making self-efficacy. In a similar vein, Anindya et al. (2024) used a mixed-methods approach with 200 high school students and concluded that guidance and counselling interventions significantly reduced career choice anxiety while improving self-efficacy. These studies collectively suggest that interventions that provide both information and psychological support are most effective.

Gap in Literature

While the existing literature provides strong evidence for the effectiveness of career counselling, there is a notable scarcity of research conducted within the specific socio-cultural context of Northern Nigeria, particularly Bauchi State. Most of the reviewed studies were conducted in different cultural settings or other parts of Nigeria, and their findings may not be directly generalizable. Students in Bauchi State face unique challenges, and there is a need for research that examines the effectiveness of counselling interventions tailored to this context. This study aims to fill this gap by providing empirical data on the effects of counselling therapy on the career choices and self-efficacy of secondary school students in Bauchi State.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test design. This design was chosen because it allows for the assessment of the impact of an intervention (counselling therapy) by comparing participants' scores before and after its implementation, without the random assignment of participants to control and experimental groups, which was not feasible in the school setting.

Population and Sample

The population for this study comprised all senior secondary school (SS2) students in public schools in Bauchi metropolis. The sample consisted of 264 SS2 students selected from four intact classes in two schools, chosen through purposive sampling based on the schools' willingness to participate and the availability of a school counsellor to facilitate the intervention.

Instrumentation

Two instruments were used for data collection:

1. Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale (CDMSE-SF): The short form of the CDMSE, developed by Betz, Klein, & Taylor (1996), was adapted for this study. It consists of 25 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = No Confidence, 5 = Complete Confidence). The instrument measures confidence in five domains: accurate self-appraisal, gathering occupational information, goal selection, making plans for the future, and problem-solving. A Cronbach's alpha of 0.89 was obtained for the adapted scale, indicating high internal consistency.
2. Career Choice Clarity Questionnaire (CCCQ): This was a researcher-developed, 5-item questionnaire designed to measure the clarity and certainty of students' career choices, also rated on a 5-point Likert scale.

Procedure

After obtaining ethical approval and informed consent, the pre-test was administered to all participants using both instruments. The participants then underwent a six-week career counselling intervention program. The program consisted of weekly sessions covering topics such as self-assessment (interests, values, and skills), career exploration, goal setting, and decision-making strategies. Following the intervention, the post-test was administered using the same instruments.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data collected were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. The research questions were answered using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation). The hypotheses (implied by the objectives) were tested using paired-sample t-tests at a 0.05 level of significance to determine if the mean differences between the pre-test and post-test scores were statistically significant.

Results and Discussion

Presentation of Findings

This section presents the descriptive and inferential statistical analyses of the data collected to answer the research questions and test the study's hypotheses.

Research Question 1: *What is the mean and standard deviation of students' career decision-making self-efficacy scores before and after the counselling therapy intervention?*

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy (N = 264)

Test	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Pre-Test	60.25	12.45
Post-Test	95.88	10.12

Research Question 2: *What is the mean and standard deviation of students' career choice clarity scores before and after the counselling therapy intervention?*

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Career Choice Clarity (N = 264)

Test	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Pre-Test	10.55	3.15
Post-Test	20.75	2.50

Inferential Statistics: *To determine if the improvements observed in the descriptive statistics were statistically significant, paired-sample t-tests were conducted.*

Table 3: Paired-Sample t-Test Analysis of Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores (N = 264)

Variable	Test	M	SD	Mean Difference	df	T	p
Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy	Pre-Test	60.25	12.45	-35.63	263	-35.67	< .001*
	Post-Test	95.88	10.12				
Career Choice Clarity	Pre-Test	10.55	3.15	-10.20	263	-42.50	< .001*
	Post-Test	20.75	2.50				

*p < .05 (Statistically significant)

Discussion

The analysis presented in Table 3 provides compelling evidence of the effectiveness of the counselling therapy intervention in enhancing students' career decision-making self-efficacy and career choice clarity. The results demonstrate statistically significant improvements in both measured outcomes, supporting the study's hypotheses and affirming the theoretical underpinnings of career development frameworks.

The paired-sample t-test yielded a t-value of -35.67 with 263 degrees of freedom, and a p-value below .001 ($p < .001$), which is far below the conventional alpha level of 0.05. This indicates that the 35.63-point mean increase in students' self-efficacy scores from the pre-test to the post-test is highly significant and unlikely to have occurred by chance. The rejection of the null hypothesis underscores the intervention's substantial impact on students' perceived ability to make effective career decisions. These findings are consistent with previous research, which shows that structured counselling interventions can significantly boost self-efficacy in adolescents by providing targeted guidance and career exploration activities (Lent & Brown, 2019; Olamide & Olawaiye, 2021). Furthermore, improved self-efficacy has been linked to better academic engagement, persistence, and decision-making confidence, which are critical factors in long-term career success (Bandura, 2020).

Similarly, the paired-sample t-test analysis for career choice clarity produced a t-value of -42.50 ($df = 263$), with a p-value also below .001, confirming a statistically significant difference between pre- and post-test scores. The 10.20-point mean increase suggests that students gained a clearer sense of direction regarding their career paths following the

intervention. This finding resonates with previous studies demonstrating that career counselling can reduce vocational indecision, enhance clarity of occupational goals, and improve overall career maturity (Hirschi et al., 2020; Nauta, 2021). Career choice clarity is a strong predictor of academic motivation and future goal attainment, implying that students who participated in the intervention are better positioned to make informed decisions about their education and career trajectories (Gati & Levin, 2019).

The observed improvements align closely with the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), which posits that self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and goal-setting are central to career development (Lent, 2020). By equipping students with tools for self-assessment, career exploration, and goal formulation, the counselling therapy addressed key determinants of career indecision. Enhanced self-efficacy, as demonstrated in this study, increases individuals' perceived control over their career development process, motivating them to explore a wider range of career options and persist despite challenges (Sheu et al., 2021).

Beyond statistical significance, the results highlight the practical value of integrating structured counselling programs into the school curriculum. Such interventions have been shown to foster students' confidence, decision-making skills, and psychological preparedness for future career challenges (Patton & McMahon, 2022). Schools that adopt similar counselling initiatives can expect not only improvements in students' career-related outcomes but also broader benefits in mental well-being and academic performance.

Overall, these findings provide strong empirical support for the inclusion of systematic, theory-driven career counselling in secondary schools as a means of preparing students for the transition to post-secondary education and the labour market.

Conclusion

This study concludes that structured counselling therapy is a highly effective intervention for enhancing career decision-making self-efficacy and promoting career choice clarity among secondary school students in Bauchi State. The significant positive changes observed between the pre-test and post-test scores provide robust empirical support for the value of formal guidance and counselling services within the educational system. The intervention successfully equipped students with the psychological confidence and clarity needed to make more informed and self-aligned career decisions. The findings unequivocally underscore the indispensable role of professional school counsellors in facilitating the positive career development of adolescents.

Recommendations

Based on the compelling findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. The government should mandate the integration of a standardized, evidence-based career guidance and counselling curriculum into the senior secondary school syllabus nationwide. This should be treated as a core subject, not an extracurricular activity.
2. School principals and administrators must prioritize and allocate specific budget lines for career counselling services. This includes establishing dedicated, well-equipped

counselling offices and providing necessary resources like career assessment tools and access to online career information portals.

3. Professional bodies should organize regular workshops and training programs for practicing school counsellors on modern, evidence-based therapeutic techniques like Reality Therapy, REBT, and the application of SCCT in practice.
4. Future research should conduct longitudinal studies to track the long-term impact of such interventions on students' actual career paths, job satisfaction, and career adaptability post-graduation.

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