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**CAREER COUNSELLING AS A TOOL FOR ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT  
AMONG THE YOUTHS IN NSUKKA ZONE**

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**Abstract**

This paper investigated career counselling as a tool for economic empowerment among the youth in Nsukka Zone, Enugu State. A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised 1,520 youths while the sample size was 300 male and female youth obtained through simple random sampling technique using balloting without replacement. A researcher-designed questionnaire titled Career counseling as a Tool for Youth Empowerment Questionnaire (CCTYEQ) was used for data collection. The reliability of the instrument was ascertained using Cronbach Alpha method, which yielded 0.85. The data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions while t-test analysis was used in testing the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Based on the data analyzed, the study identified the role of career counseling for economic empowerment among the youth to include giving youth information about the labour market, building human capital, helping youth to realize their goals, teaching the youth how to plan and make decisions among others. The study revealed the challenges to include inadequate resource center, training and retraining of career counselors, lack of supports from stakeholders for career counseling programme and poor relationship between career counselors and parents. Results of hypotheses revealed no significant differences in ratings of the youth on the role of career counseling and its challenges as a tool for youth economic empowerment

**Keywords:** Career counseling, youth, economic empowerment, education, career choices,

**Introduction**

The development and progress of any nation heavily rely on its ability to effectively utilize its human resources to meet the needs and aspirations of its citizens. In particular, the youth of a nation should be equipped with adequate information on skill development and acquisition to ensure their survival and development. This provision of information is crucial in helping the youth make appropriate career choices as they become the leaders of tomorrow. Career counseling plays a vital role in guiding individuals to choose, prepare for, enter, and progress in an occupation, serving as a necessary step

toward their productive work life (Alao, 2015). Career counseling encompasses a range of services designed to develop an individual's skills and abilities to enable them to perform a specific vocation in a productive manner (Blustein, 2019). It involves activities such as job analysis to gather information and recommend suitable work accommodations based on individual capabilities. To assist in career counseling, counselors must assess an individual's abilities, aptitudes, and skills (Baba & Nasir, 2018). This process takes into account various aspects of an individual's needs, including family, work, personal concerns, and leisure, recognizing them as integral parts of career decision-making and planning.

The primary goal of career counseling is to identify suitable career options based on an individual's preferences, interests, and aptitudes for training. Over the years, the field of career counseling has faced new challenges, prompting the reconstruction of career counseling models and assessment methods (Busacca, 2017). One major challenge in recent decades has been the rapid and sustained pace of change in social and work contexts. In this context, career counseling, with its wide range of services, plays a crucial role in equipping youth with information about job requirements, opportunities, and the necessary skills needed for their survival and contribution to national growth and development. Unfortunately, in many Nigerian schools and society, career counseling does not receive the attention it deserves. This raises important questions for career counselors both within and outside educational institutions (VuThuy, 2014). Currently, in Nigeria, particularly in Nsukka, Enugu State, the youth lack information about job requirements and necessary skills. This applies to both rural and urban areas, contributing to the challenges and obstacles faced by career counseling in Nigerian schools while the number of unemployed youths continues to rise.

With rapid technological advances, new career opportunities are being created at an accelerated pace, and many jobs today did not exist a decade ago (Cassery, 2012). Therefore, today's youth need to be equipped to navigate a complex future, where they are likely to change jobs multiple times, often in entirely different sectors. Lifelong learning and skills updating have become essential. Thus, career counseling in Nigeria needs to enhance the quality of future career opportunities for the youth by introducing innovative approaches focused on substantive development, encompassing values, attitudes, and practical actions (Loan & Van, 2015). Without clear and detailed career counseling, it is unlikely that Nigerian youth will choose careers aligned with future job market demands (Nguyen-Thao, 2014). Currently, in Nigeria, parents often perceive enrolling their children in colleges and universities as the only path to wealth and success. This perception highlights the inadequate career counseling services provided in Nigerian schools and society for the youth.

Insufficient career counseling services hinder the ability of youths to make appropriate career choices that align with their skills and interests. To address this, career counseling programs should be developed to enable youth to make informed occupational decisions (Al-Sawat, 2008). Choosing the right profession is a major challenge for the youth, as it is crucial to select a career that aligns with their interests and abilities. Making the wrong occupational decision can lead to mal-adaptation and low levels of satisfaction. Schools play a vital role in providing a suitable educational environment for youth development. They should offer appropriate opportunities, especially in the field of career

development. School counselors have the responsibility to help youth choose their future professions by identifying their capabilities, aptitudes, interests, and achieving vocational maturity. This guidance helps youth avoid the negative consequences of making the wrong career decisions. It is a crucial step for youth as they enter the real world and need to identify their goals, potentials, and values to make the right career choices (Zunker, 2012).

The National Policy on Education in Nigeria, revised in 2014, recognizes the importance of providing career counseling to university students. It emphasizes the need for high-quality career counseling and lifelong learning programs that equip youth with the knowledge and skills for self-reliance and the world of work. The policy also highlights the continuous training of teachers in general guidance and career counseling concepts and the establishment and equipping of counseling clinics in schools to ensure effective delivery of career counseling services. The government is committed to providing training for career counselors and establishing and equipping counseling clinics, career resource centers, and information centers. Traditionally in Nigeria, youth have had limited occupational options, often influenced by family or societal vocations, such as agrarian occupations. However, for a country to adequately develop its human capital, there is a need to strengthen and invest in their development to achieve meaningful living for themselves, their families, and society as a whole. Providing career information becomes crucial in guiding youth to explore a wide range of occupational options from which they can choose appropriately (Oyinloye, 2015).

Career counseling aims to eliminate the ignorance and maladjustments that many youth face when it comes to career prospects and personal development. Through the dissemination of information, career counselors empower youth to make effective career choices (Oye, Obi, Mohd, & Bernice, 2012). The development of youth is a high priority in human resource development, as it involves mobilizing their talent and potential through learning. In the era of rapid technological advancement, nations must develop their workforce to meet the challenges posed by these advancements. Career counselors play a vital role in assisting youth in making educational, training, and occupational choices and managing their careers. Career counseling serves as the missing link for youth economic empowerment (Ajufo, 2012). Many youth choose their professions based on advice from relatives, friends, or individuals practicing those professions. Others succumb to parental pressure or adhere to family traditions. These decisions are often driven by the belief that the chosen profession will enable them to achieve their ambitions. However, in such cases, individuals may overlook their own interests, capabilities, aptitudes, and personality traits. Considering these factors is essential for achieving professional success in the future. Proper career choice-making depends on an individual's knowledge of available career counseling services in society.

Career counseling is a process that aims to provide individuals with a clearer understanding of themselves and their potential for future career development. It helps youth clarify their goals, assess their career development needs at different stages of their lives, understand the career decision-making process, and take appropriate measures to implement their objectives. The main purpose of career counseling is to assist individuals in exploring their complex needs, making sense of their current situations, and building confidence in their ability to review and move forward (Watts, 2015). This requires a rethinking of the relationship between different components of education and the nature of

career counseling services and roles in guiding youth career choices. Socio-economic changes occurring worldwide pose challenges to many nations, including rising unemployment rates, a lack of skilled workers, high dropout rates, and shifting demographics in the workforce. In this context, career counseling plays a crucial role in meaningful national development (Comfort, 2013). The provision of career counseling services is essential for addressing these challenges and ensuring the political and economic stability of nations. Economic empowerment relies on human capital development, making career counseling a vital component of achieving this goal (Okolocha, 2016). By providing career information and guidance, career counselors contribute to empowering youth with the knowledge and resources needed to make informed career decisions.

Hence, career counseling is essential for the development and progress of any nation. It helps youth acquire the necessary skills, make appropriate career choices, and navigate the challenges of a rapidly changing job market. However, in Nigeria, career counseling services are often inadequate, leading to a lack of information and guidance for the youth. To address this issue, career counseling programs should be developed and strengthened; empowering youth to make informed career decisions that align with their interests, capabilities, and aspirations. By investing in career counseling, Nigeria can enhance the quality of future career opportunities for its youth, leading to their economic empowerment and contributing to national growth and development. It also against this background, this study examines the role of career counseling as a tool for economic empowerment among the youth in Nsukka Zone, Enugu State.

#### **Statement of the problem**

In the Nsukka zone of Nigeria, the economic empowerment of the youth is a critical concern for sustainable development and growth. As the youth represent the future leaders and workforce of the region, it is essential to equip them with the necessary skills, knowledge, and guidance to make informed career choices. Career counseling serves as a valuable tool in this regard, providing guidance and support to the youth in exploring their interests, identifying suitable career paths, and acquiring the skills required for economic empowerment. However, the current state of career counseling in the Nsukka zone falls short of meeting the needs and aspirations of the youth. This has created a significant problem that impedes their ability to achieve economic empowerment and contribute effectively to the development of the region. However, the inadequate provision of career counseling services in the Nsukka zone poses a significant challenge to the economic empowerment of the youth. Despite the recognized importance of career counseling in guiding individuals towards suitable career choices and skill development, the current situation in the Nsukka zone reflects a lack of attention and resources dedicated to career counseling. As a result, the youth in this region face numerous obstacles and difficulties in making informed career decisions that align with their interests, abilities, and the demands of the job market. Limited access to information about available career options, job requirements, and necessary skills further exacerbates the problem, leaving the youth ill-equipped to navigate the complex landscape of the workforce. This mismatch between their aspirations, skills, and available opportunities hinders their economic empowerment and creates a pressing need to address the insufficient provision of career counseling services in the Nsukka zone.

### Purpose of the study

The general purpose of the study is to investigate career counseling as a tool for economic empowerment among the youth in Nsukka Zone, Enugu State. Specifically, the study intended to determine the:

1. role of career counseling as a tool for economic empowerment among the youth in the area
2. challenges facing career counseling as a tool for economic empowerment among the youth

### Research questions

The following research questions guided the study

1. What are the roles of career counseling as a tool for economic empowerment among the youth?
2. What are the challenges facing career counseling as a tool for economic empowerment among the youth in Nsukka Zone?

### Hypotheses

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

1. There is no significance difference between male and female youth on the role of career counselling as a tool for economic empowerment among the youth
2. There is no significance difference between male and female youth on the challenges facing career counseling as a tool for economic empowerment among of the youth in Nsukka Zone

### Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The area of the study was Nsukka Zone, Enugu State. Two research questions and two null hypotheses tested at 0.05 level of significance guided the study. The population comprised 1520 youth in selected ten communities in Nsukka Education Zone, while the sample size was 300 youths obtained through simple random sampling techniques using balloting without replacement. This figure comprises 215 male and 95 female youths. The instrument for data collection was researcher-designed titled Career Counseling as a Tool for Youth Empowerment Questionnaire (CCTYEQ). The questionnaire items were structured on 4 points rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The instrument was validated by three experts from Guidance and Counseling unit of the Department of Educational Foundations, University of Nigeria Nsukka; with a reliability estimate value of 0.85 obtained using Cronbach Alpha method. Mean and standard deviation were used in answering the research questions while t-test analysis was used in testing the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

## Results

**Research question 1:** What are the roles of career counseling as a tool for economic empowerment among the youth?

**Table 1:** Mean responses and standard deviation of the youth on the roles of career counseling as a tool for economic empowerment among of the youth

S/N	Item statements	$\bar{X}$	SD	Decision
1.	Career counseling gives youth information about the labour market	3.21	0.72	Agree
2.	It allows people to build human capital	3.39	0.65	Agree
3.	It helps the youth to meet their goals	3.12	0.90	Agree
4.	It teaches the youth how to plan and make decisions	3.20	0.93	Agree
5.	Its enables youths to reflects and ambitions	2.84	0.86	Agree
6.	It offers the youths a wide range of choices	3.08	0.89	Agree
7.	It helps the youth to make appropriate decisions on choice of vocation	3.28	0.84	Agree
8.	It offers the youth wide range of skills	3.17	0.73	Agree
	Grand mean	3.21	0.98	Agree

Table 1 above reveals that all the items 1-8 had their mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50. This implies that the respondents are in agreement that all the listed items are the roles of career counselling as a tool for economic empowerment among the youth in Nsukka Zone. The above was supported with their grand mean which is 3.21.

**Research question 2:** What are the challenges facing career counseling as a tool for economic empowerment among the youth in Nsukka Zone?

**Table 2:** Mean responses and standard deviation of the youth on the challenges facing career counseling as a tool for economic empowerment among youth

S/N	Item statements	$\bar{X}$	SD	Dec
9.	Inadequate resource center	2.98	0.88	Agree
10.	Inadequate training and retraining of career counselors	3.11	0.86	Agree
11.	Lack of supports from stakeholders for career counseling programmes	3.33	0.71	Agree
12.	Poor relationship between career counselors and parents	3.07	0.96	Agree
13.	High job duties	3.35	0.69	Agree
14.	Ignorance among the youth about career choices	3.03	0.88	Agree
15.	Increasingly diverse youth population in the area	2.80	0.97	Agree
16.	Lack of funds	3.40	0.89	Agree
	Grand mean	3.05	0.82	Agree

The data on table 2 above show that the mean values of the youth on the challenges facing career counseling as a tool for economic empowerment among the youth items 9-16 are above 2.50 benchmark for acceptance level of an item as agreement. This is an indication

that the youth are in agreement that the items are the challenges facing career counseling as a tool for economic empowerment among the youth in the area.

**Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female youths on the role of career counseling as a tool for economic empowerment of the youth

**Table 3:** *t-test analysis of male and female youth on the role of career counseling as a tool for economic empowerment among the youth*

S/N	Group	n	$\bar{X}$	SD	df	t-cal value	t-critical value	Level of sign	Dec
1	Male	215	3.09	0.72	298	0.312	1.69	0.05	Accept
2	Female	95	3.22	0.66					(NS)

Table 3 presents the results of the t-test analysis, which indicates that the calculated t-value of 0.312 is less than the critical t-value of 1.69 at 298 degrees of freedom and a significance level of 0.05. As the t-calculated value is lower than the t-critical value, the null hypotheses of no significant difference in the study are accepted. This suggests that there is no statistically significant difference between male and female youth in their opinions regarding the role of career counseling as a tool for economic empowerment among the youth in the area.

**Hypothesis 2:** There is no significant difference between male and female youth on the challenges facing career counseling as a tool for economic empowerment among the youth

**Table 4:** *t-test analysis of male and female youth on the role of career counseling as a tool for economic empowerment among the youth*

s/n	Group	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	df	t-cal value	t-critical value	Level of signifi	Dec
1	Male	215	3.11	0.83	298	0.613	1.89	0.05	Accept
2	Female	95	3.20	0.78					(NS)

Table 4 indicates that the calculated t-value of 0.613 is less than the critical t-value of 1.89 at 298 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance. Since the t-calculated value is less than t-critical value, the second hypothesis of no significant difference of the study is accepted. This implies that both male and female youth did not differ in their views on the challenges facing career counseling as a tool for economic empowerment among the youth in the area.

### Discussion

This study identified the role of career counseling as a tool for economic empowerment among the youth to include: giving youth information about the labour

market, building human capital, helping youth to realize their goals, teaching the youth how to plan and make decisions and enabling the youths to reflect on their ambitions. Others include offering the youth a wide range of vocational choices and offering the youth wide range of skills. The findings of the study above are in line with the results of Amao- Kehinde (2015) and Durojaiye (2015) who in their views pointed out that career counseling provides information on the world of work to the youth, helping them to achieve their goals and to make wide range of career choices in the society.

The findings of the study revealed the following as the challenges facing career counseling as a tool for economic empowerment among the youth to include inadequate resource center, training and retraining of career counselors, lack of supports from stakeholders for career counseling programmes, poor relationship between career counselors and parents and high job duties. Other challenges include ignorance among the youth about career choices, diverse population of youth in the area and lack of funds. The above are in consonance with the observations of Nyamwange, Nyakan and Ondima (2012) who observed that there are lack of counseling resources, poor stakeholders' supports, high job duties as well as tainting and retraining of career counselors. The findings are also in line with the observation made by Ifeoma (2012) that ignorance among the youth and poor parental supports are among the problems facing career counselors.

The two hypotheses of no significant differences of the study were accepted indicating that male and female youth did not differ in their opinions on the role of career counseling and challenges facing career counseling as a tool for economic empowerment among the youth in the area.

### **Conclusions**

In conclusion, the inadequate provision of career counseling services in the Nsukka zone of Nigeria poses a significant barrier to the economic empowerment of the youth. Without proper guidance and access to relevant information, the youth face challenges in making informed career choices that align with their interests and the demands of the job market. This mismatch between aspirations, skills, and available opportunities hinders their ability to contribute effectively to the development of the region. To address this issue, there is a pressing need to prioritize and invest in comprehensive career counseling programs that provide the necessary guidance, support, and resources to the youth. By equipping them with the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to make informed career decisions, we can empower the youth in the Nsukka zone to pursue sustainable and fulfilling career paths, leading to their economic empowerment and contributing to the overall development of the region. It is imperative that stakeholders, including educational institutions, government agencies, and community organizations, collaborate to establish robust career counseling initiatives that cater to the specific needs and aspirations of the youth in the Nsukka zone. By doing so, we can create a conducive environment for their growth, success, and economic empowerment.

### **Contribution to knowledge**

The study on career counseling as a tool for economic empowerment among the youth in the Nsukka zone contributes to knowledge by emphasizing the importance of career counseling in guiding individuals towards suitable career choices and skill



development. It identifies the challenges faced by the youth in accessing career information and advocates for collaborative efforts among stakeholders to address the issue. The research also establishes a direct link between career counseling and economic empowerment, highlighting the positive impact on employment opportunities and overall well-being. Overall, the study provides valuable insights for policymakers and practitioners to enhance career counseling services and promote economic empowerment among the youth in the Nsukka zone.

#### **Educational implication for career counsellors**

Career counseling as a tool for economic empowerment among youth in the Nsukka zone necessitates specific educational measures for counselors. This includes comprehensive training programs covering theories, counseling techniques, and practical experience. Specialized training reflecting the local job market is vital, alongside continuous professional development to stay current with trends. Collaboration with industry professionals and networking is essential to guide youth effectively, aligning their career choices with economic opportunities. Hence, by implementing these measures, career counselors can play a crucial role in empowering youth for success in the job market.

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#### **Recommendations**

Based on the conclusions, the following recommendations were made:

1. Efforts should be made to increase awareness and encourage youth to embrace career counseling services for self-empowerment and economic contribution.
2. Parents and other stakeholders should partner with career counselors to support youth in making appropriate career choices for their own benefits and that of society.
3. Continuous professional development opportunities should be provided for career counselors to enhance their counseling techniques and stay updated with job market trends.
4. Collaborative partnerships should be established with local employers to bridge the gap between education and employment, offering internships and job placement opportunities for youth.
5. Career counseling programs should be regularly evaluated and improved based on feedback from youth, educators, parents, and employers.

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