

## **EXPLORING THE PERCEIVED IMPACT OF SCHOOL-BASED COUNSELING PROGRAMMES ON SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT AMONG EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN NIGERIAN**

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### **Abstract**

This study investigated the perceived impact of school-based counseling programmes on the social-emotional development of early childhood education in Nigeria, addressing a notable gap in empirical research specific to the Nigerian context. Three research questions were formulated to guide the study. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population of the study comprised 139 pupils at Diogukwu Memorial School in Arochukwu Local Government Area, Abia State, Nigeria. This population was chosen due to its representative nature of primary education in Nigeria and the socio-cultural diversity of the area. Non-sampling methods were utilized due to the manageable population size, ensuring equal opportunity for all caregivers to participate. This approach enhanced the practicality of data collection while maintaining methodological rigor. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher, titled: School-based Counseling Programmes on Social-emotional Development Questionnaire (SCPSDQ). The instrument was face validated by three experts, two from Department of Childhood and Primary Education and one from Measurement and Evaluation Unit, Department of Science Education, all from the Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient was used to determine the instruments that yielded reliability coefficients of 0.82. The research questions were answered using the mean and standard deviation. The findings of the study identified critical factors influencing the implementation of counseling interventions in Nigerian primary schools, emphasizing the need to address systemic barriers for effective programme delivery. Based on the findings, it was recommended among that continuous training and professional development opportunities should be provided for school counsellors to enhance their skills in delivering effective counseling interventions.

**Keywords:** School-based counseling programmes, social-emotional development, early Childhood education, socio-emotional skills

### **Introduction**

In Nigeria, as in many parts of the world, the well-being and academic success of early childhood education are influenced not only by their cognitive abilities but also by their social and emotional development (Denham, Bassett & Wyatt, 2007). The recognition of this holistic aspect of child development has led to the implementation of various support systems within the educational framework, with school-based counseling programmes emerging as a critical component (Dahir & Stone, 2018). Nigerian early childhood education faces a multitude of challenges that can impact their social and emotional development. These challenges may stem from familial dynamics, societal pressures, economic disparities, or academic stressors (Baker & Gerler, 2018). Moreover, Nigeria's diverse cultural landscape adds layers of complexity to the social and emotional experiences of its young learners. Against this backdrop, the role of school-based counseling programmes in fostering social-emotional development becomes increasingly significant

The effectiveness of school-based counseling programmes in promoting social-emotional development among Nigerian early childhood education is a topic of growing

interest and importance (Sink, Edwards, & Eppler, 2012). Understanding how these programmes impact pupils' socio-emotional well-being is essential for shaping educational policies and practices that better support the needs of young learners. However, by investigating the effectiveness of these programmes and identifying factors that contribute to their success or limitations, the study sought to inform evidence-based practices and interventions that can positively influence the lives of young learners across the country. Through rigorous empirical research, this study seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on education and child development in Nigeria, ultimately striving to create a more inclusive and supportive educational environment for all primary school pupils. In educational contexts worldwide, School-Based Counseling programmes are recognized for their crucial role in supporting students' holistic development. These programmes, which are integrated within school settings, provide essential services to address the diverse needs of students, ranging from academic challenges to socio-emotional issues (Dahir & Stone, 2018). By offering counseling services directly within schools, these programmes ensure accessibility for students and facilitate collaboration among stakeholders, including counselors, educators, parents, and communities (Baker & Gerler, 2018).

School-Based Counseling Programmes encompass a wide range of interventions and support services tailored to meet the specific needs of students. These may include individual counseling sessions, group therapy sessions, classroom guidance lessons, and crisis intervention services (Edwards & Eppler, 2012). Through these initiatives, school counselors aim to foster a positive school climate, enhance students' overall well-being, and promote academic success. On the other hand, social-Emotional Development is a fundamental aspect of pupils' growth and success in both academic and personal domains. This developmental process encompasses the acquisition of skills such as self-awareness, self-regulation, social competence, and empathy (Denham, Bassett & Wyatt, 2007). Effective social-emotional development equips students with the ability to manage their emotions, build positive relationships, and navigate social situations successfully.

Within the educational context, School-Based Counseling programmes play a crucial role in promoting social-emotional development among students. By providing interventions and support systems that target socio-emotional skills, counselors contribute to the overall well-being and success of students in school and beyond (Brackett et al., 2012). Through targeted counseling interventions, students can develop the necessary skills and resilience to thrive academically and socially. School-based counseling programmes, as delineated by Jones, Bailey and Jacob (2015), refer to structured interventions designed to support the socio-emotional development of students within the educational setting. These programmes typically involve the provision of counseling services by trained professionals or personnel within the school environment, aimed at addressing students' emotional, social, and behavioral needs. In the context of the study, school-based counseling programmes specifically target early childhood education in Nigeria, focusing on enhancing their social-emotional skills and overall well-being. Hence, these interventions, as highlighted by Wilson, Lee and Kim (2017), may encompass various activities and strategies, including individual counseling sessions, group therapy, classroom-based interventions, workshops on social skills development, and outreach initiatives to involve families and communities. By integrating counseling services into the school curriculum and daily routines, school-based programmes create accessible and supportive environments where students can receive the assistance they need to thrive socially, emotionally, and academically.

The effectiveness of school-based counseling programmes in promoting positive social-emotional outcomes has been widely documented in research literature. Studies conducted by Jones, Bailey and Jacob (2015) have shown that such interventions can lead to improvements in students' self-awareness, emotional regulation, interpersonal skills, and

overall mental health. Moreover, school-based counseling programmes have been linked to enhanced academic performance, reduced behavioral problems, and increased school engagement among students, as supported by empirical evidence presented by Wilson, Lee and Kim (2017). In the context of the study, examining the impact of school-based counseling programmes on the social-emotional development of early childhood education in Nigeria is essential for understanding how these interventions contribute to the well-being and academic success of students within the Nigerian educational system. By evaluating the effectiveness and implementation of such programmes, policymakers, educators, and stakeholders can make informed decisions to enhance support services for students and promote positive youth development across the country.

Social-emotional development plays a pivotal role in the overall well-being and success of primary school pupils, as emphasized by Denham, Bassett and Wyatt (2012). During their formative years, pupils undergo significant cognitive, emotional, and social growth, laying the foundation for their future development and achievements highlight the importance of social-emotional skills such as self-regulation, perseverance, and goal-setting, which is closely linked to academic achievement. Pupils who possess strong social-emotional competencies, as noted by the authors are better equipped to focus on tasks, manage their time effectively, and engage in cooperative learning activities, ultimately leading to improved academic performance. Moreover, social-emotional development enables pupils to build and maintain positive relationships with peers, teachers, and other adults, as discussed by Denham, Bassett and Wyatt (2012). Hence, by developing empathy, communication skills, and conflict resolution abilities, pupils can navigate social interactions more effectively, fostering a sense of belonging and support within their school community. Additionally, the ability to recognize, understand, and manage emotions, as highlighted by Denham, Bassett, and Wyatt (2007), is essential for promoting mental health and well-being in pupils.

Through social-emotional development, pupils learn to express their feelings constructively, cope with stress and adversity, and develop resilience in the face of challenges, as emphasized by Brackett et al. (2012). Furthermore, social-emotional skills contribute to the development of self-control, impulse regulation, and decision-making abilities in pupils, as discussed by Eisenberg, Spinrad, and Eggum (2004). By internalizing social norms and ethical principles, pupils can make responsible choices and behave in prosocial ways, reducing disruptive behaviors and promoting a positive learning environment. In the long term, the social-emotional competencies acquired during childhood serve as essential building blocks for success in adulthood, as highlighted by Jones, Bailey, and Jacob (2015). Pupils who develop strong interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, and self-confidence are better equipped to navigate diverse social and professional contexts, leading to enhanced career prospects and overall life satisfaction. In summary, social-emotional development, as emphasized by various researchers, is integral to the holistic growth and well-being of primary school pupils, impacting various aspects of their academic, social, and emotional lives.

The rationale for studying school-based counseling programmes in Nigeria is multifaceted and significant, driven by various factors that underscore the importance of addressing the socio-emotional needs of students within the Nigerian educational system. **Unique Socio-Cultural Context:** Nigeria is a culturally diverse nation with a complex social fabric. Understanding the socio-cultural context is crucial for effective implementation of school-based counseling programmes. Factors such as family dynamics, community values, and cultural beliefs influence students' experiences and well-being, highlighting the need for culturally sensitive counseling interventions (Adeyemo & Fasokun, 2015). **Growing Awareness of Mental Health Issues:** There is a growing recognition of the importance of mental health and well-being in Nigeria, particularly among pupils and adolescents. Issues

such as anxiety, depression, and stress are increasingly prevalent among Nigerian students, necessitating the implementation of supportive interventions within the school environment (Atilola, 2013). **Enhancing Academic Performance:** Research suggests that socio-emotional factors significantly impact academic performance. School-based counseling programmes have the potential to improve students' socio-emotional skills, leading to enhanced academic outcomes (Sink, Edwards, & Eppler, 2012). Given the importance placed on academic excellence in Nigeria, exploring the role of counseling in improving academic performance is essential. **Addressing Behavioral Challenges:** Nigerian schools often face challenges related to student behavior, including aggression, substance abuse, and disciplinary issues. School-based counseling programmes can play a vital role in addressing these challenges by promoting positive behavior and providing interventions for at-risk students (Adeyemo & Fasokun, 2015).

**Promoting Holistic Development:** The Nigerian educational system increasingly emphasizes the importance of holistic development, encompassing academic, social, and emotional domains. School-based counseling programmes align with this holistic approach by addressing the diverse needs of students and fostering their overall well-being (Atilola, 2013). Hence, studying school-based counseling programmes in Nigeria is essential for addressing the socio-emotional needs of students within the unique socio-cultural context of the country. By understanding the rationale behind these programmes, stakeholders can advocate for their implementation and ensure that they effectively support the holistic development and well-being of Nigerian students.

Previous research on school-based counseling programmes and social-emotional development has yielded valuable insights into the effectiveness of such interventions in promoting the socio-emotional well-being of students. **Effectiveness of Interventions:** Numerous studies have demonstrated the positive impact of school-based counseling programmes on students' social-emotional development. Research by Sink, Edwards, and Eppler (2012) conducted a meta-analysis of school counseling interventions and found significant improvements in students' social-emotional skills, including self-awareness, self-regulation, and interpersonal relationships. **Role of Counseling in Academic Success:** School-based counseling programmes have been shown to enhance academic performance by addressing socio-emotional barriers to learning. For example, Brackett et al. (2012) conducted a study on the RULER feeling words curriculum, which integrates social-emotional learning into the academic curriculum. They found that students who participated in the program showed improvements in academic performance and social-emotional competence. **Long-Term Benefits:** Research suggests that the benefits of school-based counseling programmes extend beyond the immediate intervention period. Jones, Bailey, and Jacob (2015) conducted a longitudinal study on social-emotional learning interventions and found that students who participated in such programmes demonstrated higher levels of emotional intelligence, improved social skills, and greater resilience over time.

**Addressing Behavioral Challenges:** School-based counseling programmes have also been effective in addressing behavioral challenges among students. Studies have shown reductions in disciplinary referrals, aggression, and antisocial behavior following the implementation of counseling interventions (Sink, Edwards, & Eppler, 2012). **Cultural Considerations:** Adeyemo and Fasokun (2015) emphasize the importance of cultural responsiveness in school counseling interventions. They argue that interventions must take into account the cultural beliefs, values, and practices of students and their families to be effective in promoting social-emotional development. Moreso, previous research provides robust evidence supporting the effectiveness of school-based counseling programmes in promoting social-emotional development among students. These interventions have been

shown to enhance academic success, improve social skills, and address behavioral challenges, highlighting their importance in supporting the holistic development of students.

In Nigeria, nurturing the socio-emotional development of early childhood education is paramount for their holistic growth and academic success. As the study embarks on this journey, it recognizes the pivotal role that school-based counseling programmes play in supporting students as they navigate the complexities of their emotions, relationships, and self-awareness. Today, the study stands at the forefront of understanding three critical dimensions within the realm of school-based counseling programmes: their effectiveness, the factors shaping their implementation, and the strategies essential for their successful deployment. There is empirical evidence that underscores the transformative impact of school-based counseling programmes on the social-emotional development of early childhood education in Nigeria. Studies, such as those conducted by Jones, Bailey and Jacob (2015), vividly depict the significant improvements in students' self-awareness, emotional regulation, and social skills following participation in similar initiatives. Furthermore, meta-analyses, such as those led by Smith and Jones (2020), consistently unveil positive outcomes in students' overall well-being and academic performance as a direct result of school-based counseling interventions. These findings underscore the urgency of exploring the effectiveness of such programmes in addressing the socio-emotional needs of Nigerian primary school pupils.

Guided by empirical research, it is recognizing the importance of evidence-informed strategies in ensuring the effective implementation of school-based counseling programmes. Wilson et al. (2017) advocate for capacity building, stakeholder collaboration, and curriculum integration as linchpins of successful program delivery. Similarly, findings from Lee and Kim (2019) underscore the effectiveness of regular monitoring and evaluation in assessing program outcomes and guiding improvement efforts. These insights underscore the significance of evidence-informed practices in promoting the successful implementation of school-based counseling programmes. The successful implementation of school-based counseling programmes hinges on a myriad of factors deeply rooted in organizational structures, resource availability, stakeholder involvement, and cultural norms. Research, as highlighted by Brown et al. (2018), illuminates the critical role these elements play in determining program success. Similarly, insights from Garcia and Martinez (2021) shed light on the profound impact of cultural norms and counselor qualifications on the delivery of counseling services in primary schools. Understanding these factors is imperative to surmounting barriers and challenges that may impede the effective delivery of counseling services.

As the study embarks on this endeavour and as well poised to delve deeper into the impact of school-based counseling programmes on the socio-emotional development of early childhood education in Nigeria. By scrutinizing their effectiveness, exploring implementation factors, and identifying essential strategies, aim to pave the way for evidence-based interventions that support the holistic well-being and academic success of Nigerian primary school pupils. Through collaborative efforts and evidence-informed practices, strive to create nurturing educational environments that empower students to thrive socially, emotionally, and academically. However, while there is substantial research on school-based counseling programmes and their impact on social-emotional development globally, there is a notable gap in research specific to Nigeria. Existing studies predominantly focus on Western countries, leaving a dearth of empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of counseling interventions tailored to the Nigerian context. Additionally, there is limited research exploring the mechanisms through which these interventions influence social-emotional development in Nigerian primary school pupils. Furthermore, there is a lack of systematic investigation into the factors influencing the successful implementation of school-based

counseling programmes in Nigerian primary schools, highlighting the need for targeted research to address this gap.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The general purpose of the study is to investigate the impact of school-based counseling programmes on the social-emotional development of early childhood education in Nigeria, addressing a notable gap in empirical research specific to the Nigerian context. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. investigate the school-based counselling programmes in enhancing social-emotional development among early childhood education in Nigeria.
2. examine the factors influence the implementation of school-based counseling programmes among early childhood education in Nigeria?
3. identify strategies for effective implementation of school-based counseling programmes among early childhood education in Nigeria?

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study.

1. What are the roles of school-based counselling programmes in enhancing social-emotional development among early childhood education in Nigeria?
2. What factors influence the implementation of school-based counseling programmes among early childhood education in Nigeria?
3. What are the strategies for effective implementation of school-based counseling programmes among early childhood education in Nigeria?

### **Methods**

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population of the study comprised 139pupils at Diogukwu Memorial School in Arochukwu Local Government Area, Abia State, Nigeria. This population was chosen due to its representative nature of primary education in Nigeria and the socio-cultural diversity of the area. Non-sampling techniques were utilized due to the manageable population size, ensuring equal opportunity for all caregivers to participate. This approach enhanced the practicality of data collection while maintaining methodological rigor, as supported by Creswell (2014). The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher, titled: School-based Counseling Programmes on Social-emotional Development Questionnaire (SCPSDQ). The instrument was face validated by three experts, two from Department of Childhood and Primary Education and one from Measurement and Evaluation Unit, Department of Science Education, all from the Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient was used to determine the instruments that yielded reliability coefficients of 0.82. The research questions were answered using the mean and standard deviation. The scales used for the questionnaire were Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree with values of 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. These responses were based on positively worded items, while the reverse was true for negatively worded items.

### **Results**

**Research Question One:** What are the roles of school-based counselling programmes in enhancing social-emotional development among early childhood education in Nigeria?

**Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Responses on the effectiveness of school-based counselling programmes in enhancing social-emotional development among early childhood education in Nigeria**

S/N	Item Statement	M	SD	Decision
1	School-based counseling enhances emotional regulation in primary school pupils.	2.56	0.16	A
2	Through counseling interventions, pupils develop increased self-awareness.	2.66	0.15	A
3	Through counseling interventions, pupils develop increased self-confidence.	2.67	0.14	A
4	Improved interpersonal skills facilitate better communication and relationships among students.	2.88	0.11	A
5	Implementation of counseling programmes correlates with a reduction in behavioural problems, including aggression.	2.77	0.13	A
6	Academic performance shows improvement as social-emotional issues are effectively addressed through counseling.	2.83	0.12	A
7	School-based counseling significantly boosts overall mental health and well-being.	2.71	0.14	A
<i>Aggregate Mean Score</i>		<b>2.73</b>	<b>0.13</b>	<b>A</b>

Table 1 revealed the mean ratings and standard deviation of responses on the effectiveness of school-based counselling programmes in enhancing social-emotional development among early childhood education in Nigeria. Item 1 – 7 met the standard mean score of 2.50 and above which indicate acceptance according to decision rule. Respondents' compliance with the statements is based on the aggregate mean score of 2.73 and standard deviation of 0.13 respectively. The following statements were considered as the effectiveness of school-based counseling programme in enhancing social-emotional development among early childhood education in Nigeria: school-based counseling enhances emotional regulation in primary school pupils; through counseling interventions, pupils develop increased self-awareness; through counseling interventions, pupils develop increased self-confidence; improved interpersonal skills facilitate better communication and relationships among students, among others.

**Research Question Two:** What factors influence the implementation of school-based counseling programmes among early childhood education in Nigeria?

**Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Responses on factors influencing the implementation of school-based counseling programmes among early childhood education in Nigeria**

S/N	Item Statement	M	SD	Decision
8	Socio-cultural beliefs influence mental health perceptions in the community.	2.91	0.10	A
9	Counseling professionals' availability impact programme implementation.	2.88	0.11	A
10	Adequate resources are crucial for supporting counseling programmes.	2.77	0.13	A
11	Collaboration among school staff and administration is	2.76	0.13	A

	necessary.			
12	Government policies and regulations dictate the integration of counseling services.	2.52	0.16	A
13	Parental involvement promotes the uptake of counseling services for pupils.	2.50	0.16	A
14	Stigma surrounding mental health affects willingness to seek counseling.	2.67	0.14	A
15	Socio-economic factors impact the implementation of counseling programmes.	2.50	0.16	A
16	Perception of effectiveness influences support for counseling initiatives.	2.79	0.13	A
17	Infrastructure and logistical challenges affect the delivery of counseling services.	2.70	0.14	A
<b>Aggregate Mean Score</b>		<b>2.70</b>	<b>0.14</b>	<b>A</b>

Results in Table 2 shows the mean ratings and standard deviation of responses on the factors influence the implementation of school-based counseling programmes among early childhood education in Nigeria. Above-listed items met the criterion mean score of 2.50 and above which indicate acceptance according to decision rule. Respondents' compliance with the statements is based on the aggregate mean score of 2.70 and standard deviation of 0.14 correspondingly. Thus, the factors influencing the implementation of the school-based counseling programmes include: socio-cultural beliefs influence mental health perceptions in the community; counseling professionals' availability impact programme implementation; adequate resources are crucial for supporting counseling programmes; Collaboration among school staff and administration is necessary, etc.

**Research Question Three:** What are the strategies for effective implementation of school-based counseling programmes in Nigerian primary schools?

**Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation of Responses on strategies for effective implementation of school-based counseling programmes among early childhood education in Nigerian**

S/N	Item Statement	M	SD	Decision
18	Infrastructure and logistical challenges affect the delivery of counseling services.	2.66	0.15	A
19	Collaborating with local communities and stakeholders to create a supportive environment for counseling programmes.	2.90	0.11	A
20	Integrating counseling services into the school curriculum to make them accessible to all students.	3.00	0.08	A
21	Providing ongoing supervision and support for counselors to ensure quality service delivery.	3.11	0.05	A
22	Implementing evidence-based counseling interventions tailored to the needs of Nigerian primary school pupils.	3.04	0.07	A
23	Utilizing technology and innovative approaches to reach a wider audience and enhance program effectiveness.	3.02	0.08	A
24	Establishing partnerships with mental health professionals and agencies to provide comprehensive support to students.	3.01	0.08	A
25	Conducting regular evaluations and assessments to monitor the progress and effectiveness of counseling programmes	2.99	0.09	A
26	Promoting awareness and education about the importance	2.88	0.11	A



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of mental health and counseling services in schools.

**Aggregate Mean Score 2.96 0.09 A**

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Results in the above table summarized the mean scores and standard deviation of responses on strategies for effective implementation of school-based counseling programmes in Nigerian primary schools. Item 18 – 26 items met the criterion mean score of 2.50 and above which indicate acceptance according to decision rule. Respondents' compliance with the statements is based on the aggregate mean score of 2.96 and standard deviation of 0.09 accordingly. Therefore, the strategies for effective implementation of school-based counseling programmes in Nigerian primary schools include: infrastructure and logistical challenges affect the delivery of counseling services; collaborating with local communities and stakeholders to create a supportive environment for counseling programmes; integrating counseling services into the school curriculum to make them accessible to all students; providing ongoing supervision and support for counselors to ensure quality service delivery, among others.

### Discussions

The findings of the study indicate that school-based counseling programmes are effective in enhancing social-emotional development among early childhood education in Nigeria. This assertion is supported by empirical evidence from longitudinal studies such as Jones, Bailey and Jacob (2015), which have shown significant improvements in students' self-awareness, emotional regulation, and social skills following participation in similar programmes. Additionally, meta-analyses conducted by Smith and Jones (2020) consistently demonstrate positive outcomes in students' overall well-being and academic performance as a result of school-based counseling interventions. These findings affirm the importance of school-based counseling programmes in addressing the socio-emotional needs of Nigerian primary school pupils.

The findings of the study indicate that several factors influence the implementation of school-based counseling programmes among early childhood education in Nigeria. Empirical research, as highlighted in studies such as that of Brown et al. (2018), underscores the significance of organizational structures, resource availability, and stakeholder involvement in determining program success. Similarly, Garcia and Martinez (2021) emphasize the impact of cultural norms and counselor qualifications on the delivery of counseling services in primary schools. These findings underscore the necessity of addressing systemic barriers to ensure effective implementation of school-based counseling programmes.

The findings of the study indicate that empirical research offers evidence-based strategies for the effective implementation of school-based counseling programmes. The findings of the study is in consonance with the study of study of Wilson et al. (2017) who posited that capacity building, stakeholder collaboration, and curriculum integration are essential components of successful programme delivery. Furthermore, Lee and Kim (2019) illustrate the effectiveness of regular monitoring and evaluation in assessing program outcomes and guiding improvement efforts. These findings highlight the importance of evidence-informed practices in promoting successful implementation of school-based counseling programmes.

### Educational Implications

The study holds significant educational implications for counseling practices in Nigerian primary schools. Firstly, it underscores the necessity of integrating socio-emotional learning (SEL) components into the curriculum. Counseling practices should prioritize evidence-based interventions that explicitly teach social and emotional skills, aligning with students' developmental needs. This integration can enhance students' overall well-being and academic success by addressing their socio-emotional needs within the school setting. Secondly, the

study emphasizes the importance of comprehensive training and professional development programmes for school counselors in Nigeria. Counselors should receive specialized training in evidence-based counseling interventions, cultural responsiveness, and trauma-informed practices to effectively support the socio-emotional development of primary school pupils. Thirdly, collaboration and partnerships among school counselors, educators, parents, and community stakeholders are crucial. Effective communication and collaboration can facilitate the implementation of holistic support systems that address the socio-emotional needs of students. Additionally, counseling practices should prioritize cultural responsiveness and contextual adaptation to meet the unique needs of Nigerian primary school pupils. This includes understanding the cultural beliefs, values, and practices of students and their families and tailoring counseling approaches accordingly. Lastly, advocacy for policy changes to support the integration of counseling services within Nigerian primary schools is essential. Policymakers and education authorities should prioritize the allocation of resources and support for school counseling programmes, ensuring accessibility, equity, and high quality for all early childhood education across Nigeria. In summary, the study highlights the importance of integrating SEL into the curriculum, providing training and professional development for counselors, fostering collaboration among stakeholders, promoting cultural responsiveness, and advocating for policy changes to support counseling services in Nigerian primary schools.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the impact of school-based counseling programmes on the social-emotional development of Nigerian early childhood educationist substantial. Research indicates that these programmes play a crucial role in addressing the diverse socio-emotional needs of students within the educational context. Therefore, by focusing on interventions that promote self-awareness, interpersonal skills, and emotional regulation, counselors can contribute significantly to the overall well-being and academic success of young learners. The findings underscore the importance of integrating socio-emotional learning into the curriculum, providing specialized training for counselors, and fostering collaboration among stakeholders. Additionally, recognizing the cultural nuances and contextual factors that shape students' experiences is essential for the effective delivery of counseling services. Moving forward, it is imperative for educational policymakers and practitioners to prioritize the implementation and evaluation of evidence-based counseling interventions to ensure that Nigerian early childhood education receive the support they need to thrive emotionally and academically.

### **Contribution to Knowledge**

The study makes significant contributions to educational knowledge. It fills a gap in the literature by providing empirical evidence of the effectiveness of such interventions in the Nigerian context, highlighting their role in promoting socio-emotional skills alongside academic learning outcomes. Moreover, the study emphasizes the importance of cultural responsiveness in counseling practices, considering Nigeria's diverse socio-cultural context. By offering practical implications for policymakers and educators, the study provides actionable recommendations for integrating counseling programmes into school settings, training counselors, and fostering collaboration among stakeholders. Overall, the study contributes valuable insights into the holistic well-being of Nigerian early childhood education and informs efforts to support their socio-emotional development within the educational system.

## Recommendations

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

1. Continuous training and professional development opportunities should be provided for school counsellors to enhance their skills in delivering effective counseling interventions.
2. Counselors and educators should be culturally responsive in their practices, recognizing and respecting the cultural diversity within the Nigerian context.
3. Education policymakers should prioritize the allocation of resources and support for school-based counseling programmes. This includes advocating for policy changes to ensure adequate funding, staffing, and infrastructure for counseling services in Nigerian primary schools.
4. School authorities should prioritize the integration of socio-emotional learning components into the primary school curriculum. This can be achieved by incorporating Social-Emotional Learning activities and lessons into existing subjects, promoting the development of skills such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

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