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COUNSELLING SERVICES FOR ENHANCING SKILL ACQUISITION AND ECONOMIC STABILITY AMONG IN-SCHOOL ADOLESCENTS IN EBONYI STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study focused on "Counselling Service for Enhancing Skill Acquisition and Economic Stability among in-school Adolescents in Ebonyi state, Nigeria. The study used mixed method research design that includes Qualitative and Quantitative research designs. The participants were made up of sixty (60) in-school adolescents randomly selected from three (3) junior secondary schools in the three educational zones in Ebonyi State and three Senior secondary schools in each of the three educational zone. Ten students were randomly selected from each of the school (nine (9) responded to the Questionnaire, one (1) were interviewed) Four research questions were used for the study. Data were collected through interview questions and Questionnaire titled: "Skill Acquisition for Economic Stability Among Adolescents Questionnaire (SAESAQ)". The research questions were answered using frequency distribution and percentages. Results indicated that, most of the public secondary schools in the State do not have functional Counselling services to encourage skill acquisition. The study recommended, among other things, that the Government should employ Counsellors for Counselling services in all schools in the State; adjust the curriculum and time tables to incorporate skill acquisition. It also recommended that the Philanthropists' in various communities should also assist in providing the basic funds and materials for in-school adolescents skill acquisition.

Keywords: Counselling, Counselling Services, Skill acquisition, Economic stability, in-school Adolescents.

Introduction

In Nigeria, a country grappling with high unemployment rates and economic instability among the adolescents, youths and others, skill acquisition has emerged as a crucial strategy for enhancing economic stability among adolescents. The economic challenges faced by Nigerian youths, includes limited job opportunities and a lack of vocational training, have led to increased interest in interventions that can improve their economic prospects and personal development (Adewale & Ojo, 2020). The issue of unemployment and economic instability remains a pressing concern, with significant implications for national development and individual well-being. The adolescents and youth population, which constitutes a substantial portion of the country's demographic structure, faces numerous challenges, including inadequate vocational training, a lack of job opportunities and limited access to resources that facilitate career advancement (Adewale & Ojo, 2020). These challenges underscore the need for effective counselling interventions that can equip in-school adolescents with practical skills and improve their economic prospects.

Counselling is an interactional process meant to enhance redefinition of stand for positive adjustment on all issues of life. It is aimed at helping individuals towards overcoming obstacles in their personal growth wherever they may be encountered and towards achieving optimum development of their personal resources. Ojukwu (2008) in Obidoa and Ifelunni, (2010), noted that the aim of Counselling is to assist the individual to understand himself and his environment, in order to make and carry out decisions and plans that hold potentials for the achievement of satisfactory life goals. Egbochukwu (2018), opined that counselling is an in-depth interaction between the professional Counsellor and counselee that focuses basically on areas of nurturing and healing emotionality, problems, management, decision making, crises management including support and life skill training. Ogunyemi and Alabi (2021) emphasized that counseling provides personalized guidance, helping adolescents make informed career choices and set realistic goals. This support can significantly improve the outcomes of skill acquisition programs by addressing individual needs and challenges.

The role of counseling in career development is well-documented. Super's (1990) Career Development Theory, which suggests that structured guidance is crucial for helping individuals navigate their career paths and make informed decisions. This ideation calls for counselling intervention.

Counselling Services in improving in-school adolescents' employability and economic stability are a need in the face of economic downturn in the nation. According to a study by Ndou and Mlambo (2022), counselling interventions enhance adolescents' career planning, self-confidence, and motivation, leading to better career outcomes and economic stability. It has been observed that many in-school adolescents are seriously engaged in `academic pursuit without any employability skill The State is

no longer providing white collar jobs in commensurate with the teeming population of the young ones graduating from school. The situation is growing so bad by the passage of the day, calling for an urgent attention to rescue the future generation from economic extinction. The most needed service to assist the adolescents is through counselling, to change their psychic structures from "government work syndrome to skill acquisition for self-reliant syndrome" No wonder, in the views of Adewale and Ojo (2020), targeted vocational training programs led to increased job placement rates among Nigerian youth. In the same vein, Ogunyemi and Alabi (2021) demonstrated that counselling support significantly enhanced the effectiveness of skill acquisition programs.

Skill Acquisition

Skill acquisition also known as motor learning and control means is the process of learning and mastering a particular skill to earn a living. Skill acquisition programs, designed to equip adolescents with practical and marketable skills, have been identified as effective tools in bridging the gap between education and employment. These programs are intended not only to foster employability but also to encourage entrepreneurial ventures, which are essential for economic sustainability in a developing country (Ezeani, 2018). Skill acquisition programmes will assist them not only to earn a living but to be self-employed, self-dependent and reduce the stress of seeking for a job over the place, Counselling services play a critical role in this context by providing guidance and support tailored to the individual needs of adolescents.

Skill acquisition programs have been identified as vital in bridging the gap between education and employment. According to Ezeani (2018), vocational training programs significantly enhance job readiness and entrepreneurial skills among youth, contributing to improved employment outcomes. The importance of such programs is further supported by Adewale and Ojo (2020), who found that targeted vocational training can lead to increased job placement rates and income levels for Nigerian youth. Skill acquisition programs are crucial in enhancing employability and fostering economic stability. Ezeani (2018) highlights that vocational training programs significantly boost job readiness and entrepreneurial capabilities among youth, leading to improved employment outcomes. Adewale and Ojo (2020) further support this by demonstrating that targeted vocational training can lead to increased job placement rates and income levels for Nigerian youth. Akinyemi and Oni (2019) provide evidence that practical skills acquired through vocational training are linked to better financial stability and reduced unemployment rates. These suggest that skill acquisition programs effectively address the skills gap and improve economic conditions for in-school adolescents.

In- school adolescents are the adolescents between the ages of 13 and 19 who are either in secondary school or tertiary institutions. Iwu (2021) emphasizes that young ones with specific skills are more likely to achieve

economic independence and stable employment. Further research by Akinyemi and Oni (2019) demonstrated that practical skills gained through vocational training are linked to better financial stability and reduced unemployment rates. In-school adolescents can learn varieties of skills such as, bakery, sewing, hair dressing, brick-laying, barbing etc The Counsellors should solicit that the government should incorporate these skills in their curriculum. This study seeks to unveil counselling service needed to enhance skill acquisition and economic stability among in-school adolescents in Ebonyi State.

Theoretical Framework

This study is underpinned with two primary theoretical frameworks: Human Capital Theory and Career Development Theory.

Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory, as articulated by Becker (1993), posits that, investments in education and skill acquisition lead to increased economic returns. This theory supports the notion that acquiring skills through vocational training and counselling interventions enhances individuals' productivity and earning potential. According to Becker, skills and education are forms of capital that contribute to economic development by improving job performance and career prospects.

In the context of this study, Human Capital Theory provides a basis for understanding how counselling interventions and skill acquisition can lead to improved economic stability. By investing in counselling for skill development, in-school adolescents are expected to gain valuable skills that will enhance their employability and economic outcomes.

Career Development Theory

Career Development Theory, proposed by Super (1990), emphasizes the importance of structured guidance in career planning and development. This theory suggests that career development is a lifelong process involving self-assessment, goal setting, and decision-making. Counseling interventions play a crucial role in this process by providing personalized support and helping individuals navigate their career paths effectively. Super's theory highlights the role of counselling in enhancing career prospects and aspirations. By providing tailored guidance, counselling interventions can help adolescents develop a clearer understanding of their career goals, improve their self-confidence, and enhance their motivation to pursue further education or employment opportunities.

Problem Statement

The high levels of youth unemployment and economic instability pose significant challenges to national development and individual prosperity. Despite the increasing number of skill acquisition programs aimed at improving employability and fostering entrepreneurial endeavors, many adolescents continue to face difficulties in securing stable economic opportunities. This issue is compounded by inadequate vocational training and limited access to effective career guidance, which hinder the ability of adolescents to successfully transition from education to the workforce. Counselling

interventions, which provide personalized support and guidance, have the potential to enhance the effectiveness of skill acquisition programs. In Ebonyi State, there are no skill acquisition programmes embedded in the curriculum for in-school adolescents Without a clear understanding of how counselling can influence these outcomes, it is challenging to design and implement effective strategies that address the needs of adolescents which will promote sustainable skill acquisition for economic development.

The problem, therefore, is twofold: first, the provision of counselling interventions in inculcating skill acquisition among in-school adolescents has not been documented; and second, the relationship between enhanced skill acquisition through counselling and economic stability remains unclear. Addressing this problem requires an investigation into the specific ways in which counselling interventions can contribute to better skill acquisition outcomes and greater economic stability among in-school adolescents. By providing empirical evidence on these aspects, the study aims to inform the design of more effective programs and policies that can support the economic empowerment of adolescents. By addressing this gap, the research aims to provide evidence-based recommendations for policy and practice to better support in-school adolescents' skill acquisition for better economic development.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study are to:

- Ascertain the availability of Counselling interventions for Skill Acquisition among in-school adolescents in Ebonyi State
- Analyzing the role of Counselling in promoting skill acquisition among in-school adolescents in Ebonyi State
- Examining the impact of counselling interventions for skill Acquisition among in-school adolescents in Ebonyi State.
- Identifying the Challenges involved in Counselling Intervention programmes for skill acquisition among in-school adolescents in Ebonyi State.

Research Questions

1. Are counselling interventions for skill acquisition available for in-school adolescents in Ebonyi State?
2. What role do Counselling interventions play in promoting skill acquisition programmes among in-school adolescents in Ebonyi State?
3. What is the impact of skill acquisition through counseling interventions on the economic stability of in-school adolescents in Ebonyi State?
4. What are the challenges of implementing counseling intervention programmes for skill acquisition among in-school adolescents in Ebonyi State?

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods research design to comprehensively examine how counselling interventions in advocating

for skill acquisition programs can impact on the economic stability of in-school adolescents in Ebonyi State. The mixed-methods approach allows for a combination of qualitative and quantitative research designs. The research was a qualitative research method which is largely an investigative process that, involves collecting and analyzing data through interviews, audio-visual, audio and records to assist in understanding a concept or experiences.

The research was a quantitative study because it involves collecting and analyzing numerical data (figures) for statistical analysis (Pritha 2023). The research was conducted in different secondary schools in Ebonyi State, South East of Nigeria. Its central thrust is in line with Creswell, (2014) who opined that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone.

Population: The target population for the study consists of sixty (60) participants. The participants were made up ten (10) students per school, randomly selected from three Junior Secondary schools, in the three educational zones and ten (10) students per school were randomly selected from three senior secondary schools in each of the three educational zones of Ebonyi State.

Method of Data Collection: A semi-structured questionnaire was used to collect data from 54 in-school adolescents. Interview guides were used to collect data from (6 in-school adolescents. Qualitative data collection took place between April and June 2024; the researchers sought for permission and consent from the participants and used professional interviewing skills while conducting the interviews. to record all conversations on an audiotape. The major questions posed during the interviews include the following:

- Do you have counsellors in your school?
- Do you have interactions with counsellors in your school?
- Do Counsellors encourage you to learn any skill?
- Do you have periods for learning any skill in school?
- What do you recommend should be done to address your challenges so that skill acquisition should be practiced in your school?
- Do you think you can be economically stable through skill acquisition?

Quantitative data was also collected through researchers self-developed instrument titled " Skill Acquisition for Economic Stability Among Adolescents Questionnaire (SAESAQ)".The instrument was face-validated by three experts from the Departments of Guidance and Counselling, Educational Management and Measurement and Evaluation, Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-Alike Ikwo (AE-FUNAI). The experts' views and corrections were carefully incorporated in the study. The reliability of the instruments was established through trial testing among students of twenty students from two different secondary schools in Enugu metropolis, Enugu State which is outside the study area. The trial testing method adopted Cronbach alpha method which yielded coefficient value of 0.82 that was considered good because it is

appropriate and adequately achieved what the study purports to measure. The researchers and two research assistants administered all the copies of the (SAESAQ) instruments to the respondents. The purpose of the study was explained to the respondents before giving the instruments and those students responded out of self-volition. The (SAESAQ) instruments were retrieved from the respondents on the spot which ensured 100% retrieval. The Quantitative data generated were analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequency counts and percentages. The descriptions of findings that were obtained from the interviews were integrated with the relevant literature to add to the body of knowledge. The findings of the study were shown in themes as presented in the tables below:

Results

1. **Research Question 1:** Are counselling interventions for skill acquisition available for in-school adolescents in Ebonyi State?

Table 1: Responses of students on the availability of Counselling interventions for Ski Acquisition among in-school adolescents in Ebonyi State

S/N	Item Statements	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	There are counsellors in my school	20	37%
2.	The counsellors encouraged me to learn a skill	10	19%.
3.	I have not seen any Counsellor in my school	34	63%
4.	The Counselling unit in my school is not functioning.	40	74%
5.	Counsellors in my school do not have time for counselling, but serve as teachers only	40	74%

Table 1 showed that, only 37% of the participants had Counsellors in their schools. 19% agreed that Counsellors had encouraged them to acquire skills. Also 63% of in-school adolescents have not seen any Counsellor in their schools. 74% of the participants noted that there is no functioning counselling centre (unit) in their schools while 74% of the participants also agreed that Counsellors in their schools serve only as teachers since they do not have time for rendering counselling services.

Research Question 2: What role do Counselling interventions play in promoting skill acquisition programmes among in-school adolescents in Ebonyi State?

Table 2: Roles of counsellors in promoting skill acquisition programmes for in- school adolescents in Ebonyi State

S/N	Item Statements	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	My school counsellors organizes career training for students	12	22%
2.	My school counselors organizes career conventions for students.	10	19%
3.	My school counsellors always organizes Artisans to teach us some skills to students,	12	22%
4.	Counsellors create skill acquisition awareness Using posters and flex banners	20	37%
5.	My school counsellors promote skills to earn a Living instead of looking for non-existing white collar jobs.	22	41%

Table 2 showed that, 22% of the participants agreed that Counsellors organizes career training programmes for them. Also 19% of the participants noted that counsellors organizes career conventions for students. Also 22% of the in-school adolescents admitted that their school counsellors always organize artisans to teach some basic economic skills to them. In the same vein, 37% of the participants admitted that counsellors creates skill acquisition awareness through posters and flex banners in their schools while 41% of the participants agreed that their school Counsellors encouraged them to pursue skills that will earn them economic advantage against non-existing secular jobs.

Research Question 3: What is the impact of skill acquisition through counseling interventions on the economic stability of in-school adolescents in Ebonyi State?

Table 3: Impact of skill acquisition programmes on economic stability of in-school adolescents in Ebonyi State.

S/N	Item Statements	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	I learnt few entrepreneurial skills like Soap-making, bakery, etc. in school.	30	55%
2.	I am satisfied with the skills I learnt from school	32	59%
3.	I make money from the sills I learnt from school	25	46%
4.	I support my education with the money I make	20	37%
5.	I support my family from my little income	15	28%
6.	I will continue with my skill after school	18	33%
7.	I am economically stable through my skills	10	18%
8.	Learning a skill from school has boosted my Self-confidence.		

Table 3 showed that, 55% of the participants learnt few entrepreneurial skills like soap-making, and bakery in the school. 59% of the participants were satisfied with the skills they acquired from school while 46% of them were excited that they make money from the skills they have acquired.

Furthermore, 37% of the participants, supports their educational pursuit with the money they make while 28% of the in-school adolescents supported their families with their little income. 33% of the participants wish to continue learning their skills in schools as 18% of the participants were able to sustain themselves economically.

Research Question 4: What are the challenges of implementing skill acquisition programmes among in-school adolescents in Ebonyi State?

Table 4: Challenges facing the implementation of skill acquisition programmes among secondary school students in Ebonyi State.

S/N	Item Statements	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	There is insufficient time in school for skill acquisition	51	94%
2.	Skill acquisition is not incorporated in the learning Curriculum.	53	98%
3.	Lack of specialist to teach those skills	45	83%
4.	Lack of funds to buy the needed materials for learning the skills.	52	96%
5.	Lack of interest by some students	47	87%
6.	Uncondusive learning environment	40	74%

Table 4 showed that, (94%) of in-school adolescents have insufficient time during school periods for acquiring skills. The participants also stated skill acquisition is not incorporated in the school curriculum and 83% of them said that, there are no specialists (artisans) to teach those skills in the school. Meanwhile, 96% of the participants decried lack of fund to buy the needed materials for acquiring the desired skills. 87% of the participant declared lack of interest in skill acquisition while 74% of the in-school adolescents complained that skill acquisition in school was difficult because the environment was not conducive.

Discussion of Finding

From the responses gotten from the instrument, the reports indicated that, skill acquisition is rarely practiced among in-schools adolescents in Ebonyi State. The responses showed that, skill acquisition for economic sustainability among in-school adolescents will not be practically realistic until some necessary things are put in place. Such things include employment of counsellors in all the Government-owned secondary schools, adjusting the curriculum to accommodate skill acquisition programmes, adjusting the school timetable to have periods for skill acquisition etc.

Some descriptions of the findings that were obtained from the interviews were summarized in relation to the responses gotten from the instruments. The counselling unit in my school is not functioning (74%), Counsellors do not have time for counselling (74%), I have not seen any Counsellor in my school (63%), the qualitative data also supported the results. Two in-school adolescents said:

"How I wish the government will send Counsellors to my school, I believe they will help a lot of students to make a better plan for the future."

"Ma, I know that I need Counsellors in my school, Sometimes, I become confused and seriously needs to be directed aright and encouraged to face realities. I wish the counsellors will be working in my school so that I can easily consult them when needed"

The finding is in line with Ndou and Mlambo (2022), which suggested that counselling in schools will enhance adolescents' career planning, self-confidence, and motivation, leading to better career outcomes and economic stability. Also, Ojukwu (2008) in Obidoa and Ifelunni, (2010), stated that the aim of Counselling is to assist the individual to understand himself and his environment, in order to make and carry out decisions and plans that hold potentials for the achievement of satisfactory life goals. This implies that, in-school adolescents need Counselling for positive redirection in life.

Also disheartening to mention in the rating of the participants are organizing of career training programmes (22%), organizing career conventions (19%), organizing artisans to teach some basic economic skills and creating skill acquisition awareness by Counsellors and 41% of the participants agreed that their school Counsellors encouraged them to pursue skills that will earn them economic advantage against non-existing secular jobs. This report supports the interview response of a student who said:

"*I enjoyed career convention programme when counsellors visited my school. Though some teachers use to tell us that they are counsellors, but they hardly organize the programmes for learning any skill for the students*"

This report negates the assertion by Ezeani (2018) highlights that vocational training programs significantly boost job readiness and entrepreneurial capabilities among youth, leading to improved employment outcomes. Iwu (2021) emphasizes that young ones with specific skills are more likely to achieve economic independence and stable employment and Akinyemi and Oni (2019) provided evidence that practical skills acquired through vocational training are linked to better financial stability and reduced unemployment rates. These suggest that skill acquisition programs enhanced through school counselling services can effectively address the skills gap and improve economic conditions for in-school adolescents

The findings from the study explored challenges to skills acquisition among in-school adolescents as insufficient time during school periods for acquiring skills (94%) not incorporated in the school curriculum (83%), no specialist (artisans) to

teach those skills (86%), lack of fund to buy the needed materials for acquiring the desired skills (96), 87% of the participant declared lack of interest in skill acquisition and 74% complained that skill acquisition in school was difficult because the environment were not conducive. These assertions were in line with the qualitative responses from two students:

" I am want to learn a skill, but there is no money to buy materials they require"

"My timetable does not have any period for skill learning, besides there are no experts to train students in their field. My teachers are always busy"

The findings support the views of Ogunyemi and Alabi (2021) who demonstrated that counselling support significantly enhance the effectiveness of skill acquisition programs. This implies that if counselling services are firmly supported, it can offer assistance that will help in-school adolescents to overcome their individual challenge in skill acquisition.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, Counselling services intends to lead to substantial increases in skill acquisition among in-school adolescents in Ebonyi State. The secondary schools are yet to have sufficient Counsellors to fill these needs. Many Government-owned schools do not have functional counselling services. Participants look forward to increased self-confidence and motivation as a result of counselling, which may be gotten through personalized guidance and goal-setting support.

Some adolescents mentioned that counseling helped them gain clarity about their career goals and made them more focused on their skill acquisition. Others look forward to having Counsellors in their schools so as to enjoy their services.

Participants highlighted challenges too skill acquisition including non-incorporation of skill acquisition in school curriculum, insufficient fund to purchase skill learning material, It is concluded that the Government should encourage students by employing Professional Counsellors for proper Counselling services that will enhance skill acquisition to the in-school adolescents. The philanthropists and kind hearted individuals in the various communities should also wake up to assist the Government in providing the needed materials and funds for skill acquisition.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, several recommendations can be made to enhance the effectiveness of counselling in skill acquisition programs and improve economic stability among Nigerian adolescents:

Employment of School Counsellors: employ Professional Counsellors for proper Counselling services that will enhance skill acquisition to the in-school adolescents. The philanthropists and kind hearted individuals in the various communities should also assist the Government in employing more counsellors.

Adjusting School Curriculum and Time Table

The Government should adjust the curriculum to incorporate skill acquisition on

the time table and/or make the course compulsory for all students.

Enhance Career Counseling: Counsellors should emphasize career counselling as part of the skill acquisition program to help adolescents set realistic career goals, develop action plans, and build self-efficacy. Providing clear career guidance can improve motivation and achievement of in-school adolescents. They should also customize counselling services to meet the diverse needs of in-school adolescents based on their socio-economic backgrounds and career aspirations.

Address Resource Limitations:

Allocate Adequate Resources: Ensure that counseling programs are adequately funded and equipped with necessary resources, such as training materials, career exploration tools, and technology. This will support effective delivery of counselling services.

Develop Partnerships: Government and Counsellors stablish partnerships with local businesses, educational institutions, and non-governmental organizations to provide additional resources and support for skill acquisition programs.

Build Self-confidence: Counsellors should incorporate strategies to build self-confidence and resilience among adolescents. Activities that promote self-awareness, goal setting, and problem-solving skills can enhance their overall effectiveness in skill acquisition and employment.

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