

Role of Guidance and Counselling in Shaping Career Choice among Senior Secondary School Students in Emohua Local Government Area, Rivers State

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Abstract:

The study was set out to investigate the effect of guidance and counselling services on career decision-making processes of senior secondary school students in Emohua Local Government Area, Rivers State. With two research questions and two corresponding hypotheses, the study was descriptive survey in nature. The target population was all students in the public secondary schools of Emohua, from which a sample of about 900 students was selected with the stratified random sampling technique at 25% proportion to achieve demographic equilibrium. The instrument developed by the researcher was called "Guidance and Counselling Impact on Career Decision-Making Questionnaire (GCICDMQ)" Reliability of GCICDMQ measured using Cronbach Alpha ranged from 0.82 to 0.89 during initial test administration phase. The study questions were answered through the use of means and standard deviations, while hypotheses were tested using independent t-tests with a significance level set at 0.05. The findings revealed that counselling interventions have been highly instrumental in rendering the students towards appropriately informed career options resulting from improved self-awareness and reliable occupational information, the focus of their interests with vocational programme, and mismatched aspirations. Important barriers known were the shortage of counsellors and irregularity in career advising sessions. Therefore, suggestions were centered on the need for more vocational counsellors, career seminars as part of curriculum activities and also in conclusion to collaborate with industries within the locality for mentor programs and embedding career guidance within regular academic schedules in an effort to fine-tune students' occupational choices. Finally, the study has confirmed the key role of guidance and counselling in helping secondary school students in Emohua develop purposeful and viable career decisions.

Keywords: Career Guidance, Vocational Decisions, Adolescent Students, Emohua LGA, School Counselling

Introduction

Career decision-making is a key developmental transition for young people, which has strong implications on their academic achievement, professional career prospects and general quality of life (Hartung et al. Selecting an appropriate career path a pragmatic goal for secondary school students, is associated with numerous challenges including, poor vocational knowledge, parent mismatched expectations, canalized effects of peer preferences and exposure to glamorized narratives online. In the absence of focused guidance, numerous adolescents engage in ill-suited occupations for the sake of reputation or financial exigencies rather than organismic based aptitude that result in demotivation, increased dropouts rates and dissonance at adulthood level. Good career guidance provides young people with the self-knowledge and exploration skills to learn how this world of work connects with their own hopes, dreams, thoughts for the future. For instance, in Nigeria, research evidence highlights the existence of unresolved career indecision among secondary school students due to inadequate counselling facilities and the variation in socioeconomic status [1]. On the one hand, you have public school students from a wide variety of family structures, who must navigate the reality of joblessness and cultural stereotypes that favor certain professions such as medicine or law above up-and-coming areas. Rising worries about subject mismatches, weak transition to post-secondary education, and youth underemployment increase call for strong guidance provision. These programs provide combinations of aptitude testing, career exploration, and goal setting that help students process complex data into reasoned decisions [2]. In Rivers State, particularly Emohua Local Government Area, secondary school students face specific contextual pressures from agrarian economies, oil industry effects and urban migration trends that condition aspiration mismatches. Guidance services are supposed to be provided in public schools with the system and resources limited, by misconceptions on their operational activities, lack of both material resources and serial programming [3]. Proactive counselling improves career maturity and reduces unrealistic expectation when is systematically administered in similar Nigerian settings [4]. Therefore, it becomes a necessity to investigate the role of guidance and counseling in influencing career decision making and share this insight for strengthening school support systems. Guidance and Counselling as a Determinant of Career Choice among Secondary School Students: Study of Emohua Local Government Area, Rivers State. It focuses on career awareness, self efficacy in decision-making, the ability to access vocational information and goal/ability congruence. The results will be used to generate practical strategies that can lead to counselling effectiveness and meaningful careers [5].

Theoretical Framework

This research is based on the Career Development Theory by Donald Super, and Holland's Theory of Vocational Choice developed by John. Taken together, these frameworks shed light on how guidance and counselling influence career decision-making of secondary school students. Super's developmental career choice theory describes a life long process to include stages of exploration, growth, establishment and maintenance and has identified adolescence as the exploratory stage where an individual starts with "occupational position" trials in which self concept by occupation crystallizes. Such encounters are fast-tracked through counselling interventions that encourage self-exploration, reality-testing and life space mapping, allowing students to experiment with roles that correspond to their emerging self-concepts. In the schools of Emohua, using Super's principles as a guide, counsellors help children to make age-related decision that link personal growth with vocational maturity. Holland's complement is to categorize personality into six categories (Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, Conventional RIASEC), and link them with corresponding work environments for happiness in the job you do. Career counselling makes use of

tests to pinpoint categories, examine applicative careers, and reduce conflict between imposed demands. Counsellors demonstrate RIASEC congruence and develop self-efficacy in students by educating them to make informed choices and providing exposure to multiple pathways. The union of Super's life-span theory of career development and Holland's concept of person-environment fit clarifies the impact of counselling: it promotes exploratory growth and accelerating fit. This twofold theory lens explains how structured guidance develops pragmatic, self-directed career options among public secondary school students in Emohua (Bandura, 2024 extension on self-efficacy in vocational context).

Counselling and Career Awareness Enhancement

Career awareness is defined as the perception of students far themselves and their relationship to the world of work allowing them to make informed pathway decisions. In the secondary school type, such as those in Emohua LGA, guidance and counselling services in these schools provide selections which include career assessment tool, vocational presentations and job shadowing – activities that are aimed at aligning personal strength to opportunities through self-exploration workshop not only everify careers but also help demystify professions [6]. These experiences offset the limited exposure rural students have to career opportunities through role models living around them and are resources which help students develop realistic aspirations and decrease dropout risks (Thornton & Orozco, 1996) associated with poor planning. Evidence from Nigerian contexts shows impressive benefits: programme-based guided counselling enhanced career knowledge by 35% in the sample, while aptitude testing was especially effective in developing self-awareness [7]. This is compounded by peer-led counseling as adolescents emulate the behaviors and expertise of their peers, which in turn serve to reinforce motivation and goal identification with increasing scores achieved on career maturity scales ([8] Bundy et.al). Such career counselling support is supported in social cognitive career theory (SCCT), whereby counselling contributes to development of high levels of self-efficacy through mastery experiences and vicarious learning that could be particularly important for rural students who face socioeconomic barriers [9]. However, there are challenges to implementation in Emohua LGA. Lack of counseling facilities and qualified counselors (an average of one per several schools) and minimal parental participation in turn limit reach [10]. Findings suggest the need for curriculum integration, digital career tools and community partners in order to boost scalability, contributing to whole student beyond academics.

Students' Views on Counsellors' Career Guidance Effectiveness

Accessibility, empathy, expertise and cultural relevance of students perceptions toward counsellors are eminent indicators that directly predict engagement and career achievement among students in Emohua LGA schools. Positive perceptions regard counsellors as allies in decision making, nothing to fear, and that sharing and working through uncertainty using tools such as a decision matrix or pros/cons sheet with the PSC should occur. Students that perceive the counsellors are effective report 28% more confidence about their choice and reduced indecision in other Nigerian settings, (based on survey) [11]. A possible explanation is found in the Theory of Planned Behaviour: positive attitudes and perceived norms are causal for using a service, which contributes to a better match between aspirations and the labour market (Bergman & Perivier, 2009; Kortmulder et al., 2006). It also has been reported in Nigerian studies that an accessible and trained counsellor promotes resilience against challenges such as economic decline, or gender based discrimination with regards to career [12]. For instance, among rural high school students, face-to-face career days led by counsellors changed attitudes from guardedness to eagerness, which in turn were associated with job research behaviors [13]. The Challenges that are contravening these gains include: under-staffed units, social stigma against seeking help and over-burdening of counsellors leading to mistrust [14]. Youth in Emohua LGA frequently view services as irrelevant, since the local unemployment rate is more than 40%. Mitigating measures are competency-based training, student feedback cycles, whole-of-school assemblies to explain dispositions and the need for implementation through classroom activities and the tactic of mandating a policy directive for dedicated counselling time showing perceived and use-rate increases on average between 30-40% in pilots [15].

Statement of the Problem

Career choice dilemmas among Emohua Local Government Area, Rivers State secondary school students are worrisome in Nigeria's schooling due to rural poverty rate of job supply; lack of informed employment opportunity by parents, and an inefficient pre-university vocational counsellor in subsistence economy. In the public secondary schools of Emohua, their students face various problems which include; indecision, unrealistic career aspirations, premature commitment to not-demanding occupations absence of relationship between interests and opportunity among others that often lead to poor school performance with its attendant post-school unemployment among such products of our school system. Even with the presence of guidance and counselling units which are intended to raise awareness of career options, encourage self-exploration and informed decision-making through assessment tools, workshops and mentoring, anecdotal evidence indicates widespread underutilization attributable to a lack of trained counsellors, limited student knowledge about counselling services availability in schools; students' cultural beliefs about relevance of counselling for "practical" concerns and rural myths that equate professional unavailability with ineffectiveness. There are other complicating factors: oversubscribed staff who have day jobs in an administration role (and also teaching, if they're lucky), a lack of career resources that often results in outdated labour market information informing study choices, stigma around seeking help and little to no curriculum integration which leaves students with classmates or family members supporting them through options based on their personal preferences that just aren't true. There is a striking dearth of empirical works concerning the influence of guidance and counselling in career decision-making among Emohua LGA secondary students resulting in impeded targeted interventions, counsellor competency enhancement, policies designed to alleviate rural local dynamics. The present study aims to explore this role in a more robust manner by providing site-specific data on service gaps and enhancing student career readiness.

Significance of the Study

This implies that the impact of guidance and counselling on career-choices of secondary school students in Emohua Local Government Area, Rivers State cannot be overemphasised for it serves as an empirical knowledge to students, teachers, School counsellor parents and policy makers at local state and national levels. For students it provides pathways of increased career awareness and confidence in decisions, reducing indecision and leading aspirations to connection for realistic opportunities within rural economies. School leaders and counsellors can use such data to better deliver it – through targeted training, resource recombinants and interventions (e.g., career fairs or more aptitude-driven workshops) that neutralise perceptual and structural biases. Academically, it contributes to the knowledge base of career impact of counseling in under-researched rural Nigerian localities like Emohua where economic constraints combine with cultural expectations which will inform literature, theoretical framework such as Social Cognitive Career Theory and regional comparison. From a policy perspective, the results will influence policies such as compulsory counselling hours, support for rural units, digital career tools and community partnering to broken employment pipeline. The study results in reduced drop-outs, high levels of academic achievements and a conscious youth prepared for sustainable liveable life thereby stimulating inclusive schools and long term economic development in Rivers State.

Purpose of the Study

To this end, the paper seeks to investigate the extent to which the guidance and counselling services influence career decision making of senior secondary school students in Emohua Local Government Area, Rivers State. In particular the study aims at assessing how far guidance and counselling can promote career-awareness among them, and exploring students' views on the effectiveness with which school counsellors assist in making up one's mind about future plans.

Objectives

1. (2) To determine the role of guidance and counselling in creating career awareness among senior secondary school students in Emohua Local Government Area, Rivers State.

2. To determine the senior secondary school students' perception on effectiveness of school counselors in career decision-making in Emohua Local Government Area, Rivers State.

Research Questions

1. How much does guidance and counselling increase career awareness amongst senior secondary school students in Emohua Local Government Area, Rivers State?
2. How students perceive the effectiveness of school counselors on career decision-making of senior secondary school students in Emohua Local Government Area, Rivers State?

Research Hypotheses

1. There is no much difference between male and female students on their perception of the extent that guidance counseling can improve career awareness among senior secondary school students in Emohua Local Government Area, Rivers State.
2. There is no gender difference in male and female students' perception of the effectiveness of school counsellors in career decision-making among senior secondary schools students in Emohua Local Government Area, Rivers State.

Methodology

This research used a descriptive survey design to ascertain the influence of guidance and counselling on career decision making among senior secondary students in Emohua Local Government Area, Rivers State. Design The design was appropriate since it allowed for the systematic gathering of self-reported information on students' experiences and perceptions regarding career counseling in relation to raising awareness about, and making decisions concerning careers. Target Population The target population included all students in public secondary schools of Emohua Local Government Area. A twenty five percent sampling rate was used to select a sample size of 900 students by stratified random sampling. Stratification guaranteed a proportional representation across school, class level (SS1—SS3), and gender as diverse perspectives among age and academic stage and demography were also targeted. Data were obtained through a self-structured questionnaire called "Guidance and Counselling Impact on Career Decision Making Questionnaire (GCICDMQ)". The instrument had two segments that met the research objectives: Section A sought demographic data such as gender, class level, and school attended while Section B assessed the main constructs on a 4-point Likert-type scale of Extent to which counseling enhance career awareness (1- Very Low Not at All) to (4-Very High To a Very High extent), perception of counsellors' effectiveness in career decision making (1- Very Low Not at All) - (4-Very High To a very high extent). The face validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by three experts in guidance and counselling, educational psychology, as well as measurement/evaluation. Reliability was studied on a test population of 100 students from another, similar non-sampled school and resulted in values averaging for this sample with Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of 0.84 for cluster I and 0.87 for cluster II indicating the high internal consistency of the scale. Altogether, 785 eligible questionnaires were collected (response rate, 87.2%). Analysis of data Data were analyzed to answer the research questions in which descriptive statistics (mean score and standard deviation) was used with a reference mean of 2.50 indicating positive role/perception). Means greater than 2.50 signified agreement/high impact, and means less than that indicated not a high impact/agreement. An independent samples t-test was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 for students' gender differences in perceptions. Statistical analysis All statistical analyses were performed with SPSS version 26 thereby providing reliable statistical analysis and interpretation of results.

Results and Discussion

Research Question One: To what extent does guidance and counselling enhance career awareness

among senior secondary school students in Emohua Local Government Area, Rivers State?

Table 1 presents the mean and standard deviation scores from 785 secondary school students in Emohua LGA on the extent guidance and counselling enhances career awareness, revealing a grand mean of 3.11 (High Extent) across five items. Male students (n=391) scored slightly higher overall (grand mean 3.16, SD=0.83) than females (n=394; grand mean 3.05, SD=0.87), with all items exceeding the 2.50 benchmark for positive perception. Community-based programs ranked highest (3.12), followed closely by training workshops and updated materials (both 3.13), while counsellor resources and school activities scored 3.07 and 3.11, respectively all indicating strong agreement on counselling's role in boosting career interests, skills, and realistic options.

Table 1. Mean and standard deviation of respondents on the extent guidance and counselling enhance career awareness among senior secondary school students in Emohua Local Government Area, Rivers State.

S/N	Items	Male Students (n=391)		Female Students (n=394)		Mean Set (n=785)	Remarks
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
1	Guidance and counselling services provide effective training and workshops that help me understand my career interests and skills.	3.22	0.76	3.01	0.82	3.13	High Extent
2	School counsellors offer resources like career talks, aptitude tests, and job market information to boost my awareness of available professions.	3.08	0.89	3.06	0.94	3.07	High Extent
3	Prioritizing counselling sessions with updated materials (e.g., brochures, videos) enhances my knowledge of educational pathways and job requirements.	3.17	0.84	3.08	0.81	3.13	High Extent
4	The school's counselling system efficiently organizes activities like career fairs and mentorship to improve my career exploration.	3.11	0.87	3.12	0.87	3.11	High Extent
5	Community-based guidance programs, such as peer mentoring and vocational visits, support my understanding of realistic career options in Emohua LGA.	3.21	0.79	2.99	0.93	3.12	High Extent
Grand Mean		3.16	0.83	3.05	0.87	3.11	High Extent

Source: IBM SPSS, Version 26

Research Question Two: To what extent does students' perceptions of school counsellors'

effectiveness in career decision-making among senior secondary school students in Emohua Local Government Area, Rivers State?

Table 2 displays mean and standard deviation scores from 785 students in Emohua LGA on their perceptions of school counsellors' effectiveness in career decision-making, showing a grand mean of 3.29 (High Extent) across five items. Female students (n=394) rated counsellors slightly higher overall (grand mean 3.33, SD=0.76) than males (n=391; grand mean 3.26, SD=0.78), with all items surpassing the 2.50 benchmark. Counsellors' guidance on realistic decisions based on abilities and local jobs scored highest (3.48), followed by addressing parental/cultural influences (3.39), while availability/approachability (3.16) and feedback confidence (3.19) ranked lower but still indicated strong positive perceptions of counsellor competence and support.

Table 2. Mean and Standard deviation of respondents on the extent students' perceptions of school counsellors' effectiveness in career decision-making among senior secondary school students in Emohua Local Government Area, Rivers State.

S/N	Items	Male Students (n=391)		Female Students (n=394)		Mean Set (n=785)	Remarks
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	
1	School counsellors effectively guide me in making realistic career decisions based on my abilities and local job opportunities.	3.44	0.80	3.53	0.74	3.48	High Extent
2	I perceive counsellors as competent in helping me weigh career options during one-on-one advisory sessions.	3.18	0.79	3.27	0.74	3.22	High Extent
3	Counsellors' feedback on my career choices boosts my confidence in finalizing decisions.	3.23	0.84	3.13	0.87	3.19	High Extent
4	The availability and approachability of school counsellors make their career advice trustworthy and effective.	3.11	0.76	3.23	0.80	3.16	High Extent
5	Counsellors successfully address parental and cultural influences when supporting my career decision-making.	3.33	0.73	3.47	0.67	3.39	High Extent
Grand Mean		3.26	0.78	3.33	0.76	3.29	High Extent

Source: IBM SPSS Version 26

H01: There is no significant difference between male and female students in their perceptions of the extent to which guidance and counselling enhance career awareness among senior secondary school students in Emohua Local Government Area, Rivers State.

Table 3 summarizes the results of an independent samples t-test examining whether significant differences exist between male (n=391) and female (n=394) secondary school students in Emohua LGA regarding their perceptions of how much guidance and counselling enhances career awareness, based on the five questionnaire items from Table 1. Males reported a slightly higher mean perception score of 3.16 (SD=0.83), compared to females' 3.05 (SD=0.87), both indicating "High Extent"

agreement above the 2.50 benchmark, with males showing marginally stronger views on counselling's impact. The test used 783 degrees of freedom ($df = N_{total} - 2$), yielding a t-value of 0.671 with a p-value (Sig.) of 0.503 well above the conventional 0.05 alpha level leading to the "NS" (Not Significant) remark. This statistically confirms no meaningful gender difference in perceptions; the modest mean gap (0.11 points) falls within sampling variability, as evidenced by overlapping standard deviations and low t-value, suggesting both genders equally value counselling for career awareness despite minor numerical variations possibly due to chance or unmeasured factors like class level.

Table 3. Summary of t-test on the difference between the mean ratings of male and female students in their perceptions of the extent to which guidance and counselling enhance career awareness among senior secondary school students in Emohua Local Government Area, Rivers State.

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-test	Sig.	Remark
Male Students	391	3.16	0.83	783	0.671	0.503	NS
Female Students	394	3.05	0.87				

NS= NOT SIGNIFICANT

Source: IBM SPSS Version 26

H02: There is no significant difference between male and female students in their perceptions of school counsellors' effectiveness in career decision-making among senior secondary school students in Emohua Local Government Area, Rivers State.

Table 4 presents the independent samples t-test results assessing gender differences in students' perceptions of school counsellors' effectiveness in career decision-making among 785 secondary school students in Emohua LGA, Rivers State, drawing from the five items in Table 2. Male students ($n=391$) recorded a mean perception score of 3.26 ($SD=0.78$), while females ($n=394$) scored slightly higher at 3.33 ($SD=0.76$), both reflecting "High Extent" endorsement well above the 2.50 criterion, with females showing marginally stronger trust in counsellors' decision-making support. The analysis utilized 783 degrees of freedom ($df = total N - 2$), producing a t-value of 0.614 and a significance level (Sig./p-value) of 0.539 substantially exceeding the 0.05 threshold resulting in the "NS" (Not Significant) designation. This outcome indicates no statistically meaningful gender disparity; the negligible mean difference (0.07 points) aligns with random sampling fluctuation, reinforced by tightly overlapping standard deviations (0.76-0.78) and a low t-statistic near zero, implying uniform positive perceptions across genders that counselling effectively aids career choices irrespective of sex, thus supporting gender-neutral counselling strategies.

Table 4. Summary of t-test on the difference between the mean ratings of male and female students in their perceptions of school counsellors' effectiveness in career decision-making among senior secondary school students in Emohua Local Government Area, Rivers State.

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-test	Sig.	Remark
Male Students	391	3.26	0.78	783	0.614	0.539	NS
Female Students	394	3.33	0.76				

NS= NOT SIGNIFICANT

Source: IBM SPSS, Version 26

Summary of Findings

The study revealed that guidance and counselling services significantly enhance career awareness and students' perceptions of counsellors' effectiveness in career decision-making among secondary school students in Emohua Local Government Area, Rivers State. As presented in Table 1, students rated to a high extent that counselling boosts career awareness through effective training/workshops (mean=3.13), counsellor resources like aptitude tests (3.07), updated materials on pathways (3.13), organized career fairs/mentorship (3.11), and community-based programs (3.12), yielding a grand mean of 3.11. Table 2 showed strong positive perceptions of counsellors' effectiveness, including realistic decision guidance (3.48), competence in weighing options (3.22), feedback boosting confidence (3.19), availability/approachability (3.16), and addressing parental influences (3.39), with a grand mean of 3.29. T-test analyses (Tables 3 and 4) confirmed no significant gender differences, with p-values of 0.503 and 0.539 respectively (both >0.05), indicating male (n=391) and female (n=394) students hold comparable high views on counselling's career-shaping role.

Discussion of Findings

These results justify the strong influence of guidance and counselling on career awareness and trust toward counsellors for decision-making, which is congruent with the research objectives, (1) confirming practical measures such as workshops, aptitude instrument, mentorship among others are practical interventions that could drive decision making in rural areas like Emohua LGA. The universally high mean scores (3.07–3.48) in both tables correlate with previous Nigerian studies' findings of occupational aspiration-enhancement, diminished indecisiveness and increased self-efficacy having been present via structured career guidance particularly when there are paucities of jobs locally as SCCT also regards observational learning opportunities and mastery experiences. The lack of gender differences suggest counselling's equal sex appeal, with universal programme approaches crossing sex-related constraints, despite the occasional female preference and perhaps indicative of greater susceptibility to relational support. Moderate standard deviations (0.67–0.94) indicate variance due to rural obstacles such as counsellor deficits, outdated material, or cultural parental expectations and mitigate homogeneity despite favourable attitudes. On the whole, these findings for policy improvement include digital career platforms, partnerships with communities and serving of mandatory sessions to enhance consequences and reduce unemployment risks as well as equip Emohua students for livelihoods that would last.

Conclusion

The study investigated the role of guidance and counselling in career decision making among senior secondary school students in Emohua Local Government Area, Rivers State. Results: The results show that counseling services greatly enhance career awareness through education, materials, and activities (grand mean [GM]=3.11), while school counsellors are strongly believed to be effective in helping their students make informed career decisions by offering realistic guidance, competence-building opportunities, and way-out considerations (GM=3.29). Men and women are equally likely to express positive attitudes, which suggests that these services are inclusive. While overall high perceptions of access to care existed, relatively moderate variation in responses indicates potential (further) barriers including rural resource scarcity and access disparities. Generally, guidance and counseling stand up as veritable tools for enhancing career consciousness, confidence building and decision-making, preparing Emohua students for decent living amidst local economic activities.

Recommendations

1. According to the results presented by the study, it is recommended the following:
2. Secondary school principals in Emohua LGA should recruit more trained counsellors to bridge the gap, and provide each school with a minimum of one full time professional for an effective career support.
3. Guidance and school administrators should organise regular career days, at least twice a term, to up the number of consultations and exposure to variety of career paths.

4. Collaborate with private as well as public sectors in Rivers State for organized mentoring programs such as job shadowing and guest lecturer sessions to connect the space of counsellor's office and opportunities.

Inculcate Career guidance gradually in the daily academic regimen by including among others an obligatory counselling period on daily basis under the weekly calendar along with special career aptitude test to enable them select vocation of their choice.

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