

# Investigating Barriers to Effective Career Counseling Services in Taraba State's Secondary Education

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**Abstract:** Amidst the backdrop of today's interconnected global economy, the significance of career counseling at all stages of life is universally acknowledged as a fundamental pillar for individuals across a wide spectrum. At the core of career counseling and guidance principles lies the belief that individuals are better prepared to formulate career plans after assessing their attributes, examining the requirements of different professions, and seamlessly integrating these factors with the guidance of a skilled counselor. Regrettably, in developing nations, the effectiveness of career counseling in aiding individuals to navigate the intricate realm of work is hindered by certain factors. This research delves into the obstacles faced by career counseling services within secondary schools of Taraba State. Employing a survey research design, the study encompassed a population of 108,643 individuals, including 103,641 students and 5,002 teachers. Utilizing Yamane's (1967) sampling method, a sample size of 399 respondents was selected from all ten educational zones within the state. Questionnaires were distributed to the chosen participants and collected with a 100% response rate. Data was presented through tables utilizing frequency distributions, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviations, which effectively illustrated the perspectives of the respondents. The findings unveiled that deficiencies in political support or enabling legislation, underutilization of media resources, insufficiently trained counselors, inadequate funding, and confidentiality concerns are primary factors impeding the effectiveness of career counseling services in senior secondary schools of Taraba State.

**Keywords:** career, counseling, development, services, challenges, education.

## INTRODUCTION

In today's dynamic global context, career counseling has evolved beyond job placement, becoming a transformative process of self-discovery and strategic planning (Stauffer, 2022; ILO, 2010). The transformation of the world of work from analog to digital has been the hallmark of the 21st century. Conversely, the growing application of technology in the world of work requires the acquisition of skill sets and competencies (Stauffer, 2022; Rotatori, 2020), harnessing and pooling the talents of the younger generation towards disciplines that will make them competitive and relevant after graduation require career counseling. Career education and training enhance the skilled workforce and promote economic growth (O'Lawrence, 2017). Across Africa, including Nigeria, career counselors are pivotal in equipping individuals with adaptable skills to embrace emerging opportunities in diverse industries and innovation-driven economies. Taraba State, although possessing abundant human and material resources, confronts a significant challenge in its agrarian economy's ability to adequately equip its workforce for the ever-changing demands of the 21st-century global job market. The state's current trajectory indicates an apparent lack of readiness to effectively compete with emerging global trends in workforce development owing to several challenges. One of these challenges that have received less attention in the literature is career counseling, especially at the secondary school level which dovetails into three interconnected issues. Firstly, limited Career awareness restricts secondary school student's understanding of various career opportunities, constraining their aspirations and hindering informed career decisions. Secondly, the absence of Structured Career Counseling exacerbates the challenge by lacking comprehensive and well-organized career counseling programs within secondary education. Effective career counseling

necessitates substantial resources, well-equipped facilities, and skilled professionals capable of guiding students toward suitable career paths that align with the demands of the modern workforce. These are lacking in many secondary schools across the state.

This deficiency leaves students unprepared for the evolving job market, ultimately impeding their ability to contribute meaningfully to Taraba State's economic progress (Brandford, 2019). Despite having numerous graduates, the state faces a shortage of qualified or skilled personnel due to a mismatch between graduates' skills and the demands of the dynamic job market. Sadly, many of them are in the job market but are not offering any value. Addressing this issue demands a heightened focus on career counseling in Taraba State's secondary schools. This involves identifying and overcoming the barriers that hinder the achievement of effective career counseling that is in tandem with the changing times. In light of these challenges, this study aims to explore the obstacles encountered in delivering effective career counseling services within Taraba State's secondary schools. The research employs a survey design method and concentrates on all educational zones in Taraba State hosting government-owned senior secondary schools.

## **CONCEPTUAL LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **CAREER COUNSELING**

Career counseling is a comprehensive and systematic process that assists individuals in navigating the complex landscape of work and personal development. It involves aiding individuals in understanding their unique strengths, interests, skills, and abilities, as well as facilitating their exploration of educational and occupational opportunities (Arora, 2022; Coursera, 2023). This guidance encompasses various dimensions, including self-awareness, decision-making, and the implementation of effective career plans, while also considering the evolving cultural, social, and work environments (Borgen & Bryan, 2006). Moreover, career counseling seeks to equip individuals with the competencies needed to adapt to changing circumstances, relate their abilities to the world of work, and ultimately sustain fulfilling careers (United States Department of Education, 2012; UNESCO, 2004). By fostering self-awareness, providing insights into available educational paths, and cultivating essential skills for career planning, this process aims to empower individuals to make informed choices and successfully navigate their career trajectories.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

In the field of career counseling, several theories offer insights into understanding and guiding individuals along their career paths, yet these theories also come with their limitations. The Trait-Factor Theory, as advocated by scholars such as Holland (1985), emphasizes assessing individuals' traits and matching them with the demands of occupations to achieve career satisfaction and success. While this theory simplifies career decision-making, it overlooks the complexity of individuals, their values, and evolving career landscapes (Lenz et al., 2013; Chartrand & Robbins, 2016). The Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) takes a more dynamic approach by considering personal, cognitive, and environmental factors that shape career choices. SCCT, supported by Lent & Brown (2020), highlights self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and personal goals as key drivers. Nevertheless, it falls short of recognizing cultural contexts and subjective experiences. Developmental theories, including Super's Life-Span, Life-Space Theory, and Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development (Super, 1990; Erikson, 1963), underscore career development as a lifelong process influenced by cognitive, emotional, and social growth. These theories, though insightful, oversimplify stages and disregard external factors like economic conditions (Lerner, 2006).

To enhance the Trait-Factor Theory, career counselors should adopt a holistic approach that includes values, interests, and career adaptability (Whiston & Brecheisen, 2020). Integrating elements from other theories, such as Holland's and Super's, can provide a more comprehensive framework. For SCCT, addressing cultural sensitivity and integrating narrative approaches, like the Career Construction

Theory, can overcome its shortcomings (Savickas, 2020). In the context of developmental theories, counselors should recognize non-linear development and incorporate socio-economic realities and social justice perspectives (Baltes et al., 2006). By addressing these limitations, career counselors can provide more effective guidance to individuals navigating their career journeys. In this context, to explore obstacles that hinder successful career counseling in secondary education within Taraba State, the Trait-Factor Theory is relevant as it underscores the importance of matching individuals' traits with occupational demands for career success. However, the oversimplification of this theory might contribute to barriers by overlooking individual complexity and the evolving career landscape. The Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) also pertains to the title of this paper as it highlights the role of personal beliefs and contextual factors in career choices. The limited cultural context of SCCT could potentially create barriers in a diverse setting like Taraba State, where cultural influences on career decisions may be significant. Lastly, developmental theories, such as Super's and Erikson's, offer insights into lifelong career development and can shed light on barriers arising from oversimplified developmental stages that do not account for the unique challenges and cultural influences in Taraba State's secondary education system. Investigating these theoretical limitations within the context of Taraba State will contribute to understanding and addressing the barriers to effective career counseling services in secondary education.

## **BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE CAREER COUNSELING**

Barriers to effective career counseling are multifaceted and encompass various dimensions. Heppner & Hendricks (2020) highlight several obstacles, including limited resources, time constraints, counselor competencies, client resistance, and systemic barriers. Hirschi & Herrmann (2019) identify barriers such as lack of awareness, stigma, counselor-client fit, and structural challenges in educational or organizational settings, which can impede effective career counseling outcomes. Hartung and Subich (2018) acknowledge potential challenges in the evolving work environment, technological advancements, and diverse client needs. While Fouad & Bingham (2015) focus on case studies illustrating the application of career theory in practice, these cases indirectly underscore challenges like resistance to change or limited resource access, portraying the complex nature of career counseling.

Collectively, these works reveal barriers including resource limitations, time constraints, client-related hurdles, systemic challenges, lack of awareness or stigma, and inadequate counselor-client fit. These constraints hinder the efficacy of guidance and counseling, particularly in schools. The National Teacher's Institute identifies problems such as a shortage of trained counselors, doubt about counseling's effectiveness, blurred counselor roles, resistance by colleagues and principals, lack of confidentiality, inadequate funding, and insufficient counseling resources as challenges facing effective guidance and counseling in schools.

Furthermore, Ruth (2005) highlights a disconnect between teachers/counselors and students, exacerbated by divergent backgrounds and the prevalence of social problems among youths. This results in inadequate skills to manage complex issues. The societal impact of issues such as juvenile delinquency, HIV/AIDS, and cultural clashes also weighs heavily on effective guidance and counseling. In response, systematic and deliberate intervention programs are necessary to provide trained support within the educational sector to address these challenges and effectively offer guidance and counseling services.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study aims to investigate the barriers to effective career counseling across senior secondary schools in Taraba State. The target population comprises 103,641 students and 5,002 teachers from 309 senior secondary schools, distributed across ten educational zones (Taraba State teaching service board, May 2022). To ensure an appropriate sample size, the Yamane (1967) formula was employed, utilizing a 95% confidence level and a 0.05% allowed error. The sample size was 399, which allows for a comprehensive representation of the population. The sampling technique adopted was stratified random sampling, as

suggested by Gauru (2005). This approach ensures representation from the ten educational zones, given their heterogeneity. Eight schools from each zone, totaling 80 schools, were purposively selected based on accessibility. Within these schools, a simple random sampling technique was used to select respondents, ensuring equal chances of selection (Gauru, 2005).

Data collection employed a self-designed questionnaire, utilizing a Likert scale with options ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. This method is consistent with the study's survey research design (Likert, 1932) and is suitable for cross-sectional studies (Gauru, 2005). After administering and retrieving the questionnaire, data screening was conducted to identify and manage outliers, which can distort results. The collected responses were then analyzed using descriptive statistical tools, including frequency distributions, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviation, facilitated by STATA statistical software. These tools were chosen for their suitability in analyzing Likert scale data and to enhance result reliability (Gail & Anthony, 2013). This approach, in line with the suggestions of various authors including Marley (2017) and Gauru (2005), ensures the robustness of the study's findings.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **DECISION RULE**

To capture the objectives for which the study was poised to achieve, descriptive statistical tools were employed in analyzing the data collected during the study; this involved the use of tools like frequency distribution tables, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviations. Descriptive statistics are best placed to give accurate summaries of the distribution of data. It's also a term normally given to the analysis of data that helps show, describe, and summarize data in a meaningful way such that patterns might emerge from the data (Lee and Lee, 2000). For the mean score ( $\bar{X}$ ), the decision rule that served as the basis for acceptance or rejection was determined based on the decision rule of a 4-point rating scale  $(4+3+2+1)/4 = 2.5$ ; therefore responses with mean score ( $\bar{X}$ ) up to the above 2.5 were regarded as good while those mean scores ( $\bar{X}$ ) below 1.9 were regarded as not so strong or good. For the standard deviation ( $\sigma$ ) which measures the amount of variation of values from its mean score, the decision rule is that the deviation of actual data from their mean values should be very small (Agung 2004 in Bubari & Salisu, 2019).

### **RESPONSE RATE AND OUTLIER**

A total of 399 copies of questionnaires have been distributed, filled out, and returned. Specifically, after the data collection, outliers caused 4 copies of the questionnaires to be excluded. This exclusion is important because such questionnaires do not represent the sample. Outliers are those scores that are significantly dissimilar from all others in a given set of data (Bryne, 2010; Hair, Black, and Babin 2010). Out of 399 questionnaires as envisaged in table 1 below, 395 copies of the questionnaires were considered and finally retained for further analysis. Therefore, a total of 395 respondents constitute the sample for this study, this shows a good response rate of 99% that covers a wide range of responses. This rate is considered sufficient and is within the guidelines of Sekran (2003), Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2003) which state that a response rate of at least 50% in survey research is practical to meet research analysis and thus acceptable. This response rate indicates that the researcher collected adequate data to proceed to analysis.

### **CATEGORY OF THE RESPONDENTS**

The category of the respondents must be determined based on the factors. This would ensure that the population of the study is well represented. As such, the category that was captured and analyzed was students and teachers in the Taraba State senior secondary schools. From Table 1, the category of the respondents was dominated by the students representing 67% while the remaining 33% were represented by the teachers.

Table1: Descriptive Category of the Respondents

Item	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Students	264	67
Teachers	131	33

Source: Field Survey, 2023

## FINDINGS ON CHALLENGES OF CAREER COUNSELING SERVICES IN TARABA STATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS

From the data table 2 below, the responses and findings on barriers to career counseling services in Taraba State Secondary Schools as perceived by both students and teachers are discussed below;

First, lack of political will and enabling legislation: Both students and teachers agree that there is a lack of political will and enabling legislation to support effective career counseling services. This challenge is perceived more strongly by students (50% Strongly Agree, 34.1% Agree) than by teachers (41.9% Strongly Agree, 37.4% Agree). The mean ( $\bar{X}$ ) values for both groups indicate a relatively high agreement with this challenge.

Second, inadequate use of media resources for effective counseling: Both students and teachers agree that there is inadequate use of media resources for effective counseling. Students' responses (44.3% Strongly Agree, 37.5% Agree) are slightly higher compared to teachers' responses (47.3% Strongly Agree, 29.0% Agree). The mean values again suggest a significant agreement among both groups.

Third, lack of trained counselors: Both students and teachers perceive a challenge in terms of a lack of trained counselors. Students' responses (40.2% Strongly Agree, 37.1% Agree) are similar to teachers' responses (41.2% Strongly Agree, 35.9% Agree). The mean values show a notable level of agreement in both cases.

Fourth, lack of funding: Both groups agree that there is a lack of funding for effective career counseling services. Students (44.3% Strongly Agree, 38.6% Agree) and teachers (40.5% Strongly Agree, 32.1% Agree) both express significant agreement. The mean values indicate a substantial alignment with this challenge.

Fifth, confidentiality concerns: Students and teachers both agree that there are confidentiality concerns in career counseling services. Interestingly, students express even higher agreement (63.4% Strongly Agree) compared to teachers (28.2% Strongly Agree). The mean values suggest a strong perception of this challenge among both groups.

Sixth, doubt about the efficacy of guidance and counseling: Both groups express doubts about the efficacy of guidance and counseling services, with students' doubts (28.4% Strongly Agree, 38.3% Agree) being slightly stronger than teachers' doubts (23.7% Strongly Agree, 44.3% Agree). The mean values indicate a substantial level of agreement with this challenge.

The overall implications of the above findings suggest that both students and teachers in Taraba State Secondary Schools perceive various challenges in the career counseling services provided. These challenges include issues related to political will, legislation, resource utilization, availability of trained counselors, funding, confidentiality, and doubts about the effectiveness of counseling.

The agreement levels are generally significant, as indicated by the relatively high mean values. The finding is consistent with the findings of Akinade (2023), Makinde (2022), Ogunyemi (2022), Oladejo (2021), and Whiston (2021) who investigated the problems militating against guidance and counseling services in secondary schools. Their results equally established that lack of political will, trained counselors, and financial in-capabilities amongst others are the challenges deviling career counseling services.

**Table 2:** Responses on Challenges of Career Counseling Services in Taraba State Secondary Schools

S/ N	Item Statement	STUDENTS (N=264)							TEACHERS (N=131)						
		SA	A	NA D	D	SD	$\bar{X}$	*	SA	A	NAD	D	SD	$\bar{X}$	*
1	Lack of political will and enabling legislation	132 (50)	90 (34.1)	19 (7.2)	20 (7.6)	3 (1.1)	1.91 6*	0.90 2	55 (41.9)	49 (37.4)	7 (5.3)	16 (12.2)	4 (3.1)	2.01 5*	1.09 5
2	Inadequate use of media resources for effective counseling.	117 (44.3)	99 (37.5)	16 (6.1)	27 (10.2)	5 (1.9)	1.94 6*	1.00 8	62 (47.3)	38 (29.0)	11 (8.4)	19 (14.5)	1 (0.8)	2.10 6*	1.00 9
3	Lack of trained counselors	106 (40.2)	98 (37.1)	14 (5.3)	36 (13.6)	10 (3.8)	2.03 7*	1.15 9	54 (41.2)	47 (35.9)	13 (9.9)	15 (11.5)	2 (1.5)	1.96 1*	1.05 5
4	Lack of funding	117 (44.3)	102 (38.6)	14 (5.3)	25 (9.5)	6 (2.3)	1.96 7*	1.03 2	53 (40.5)	42 (32.1)	16 (12.2)	18 (13.7)	2 (1.5)	2.03 8*	1.10 8
5	Confidentiality concerns	96 (63.4)	106 (40.2)	27 (10.2)	21 (7.9)	14 (5.3)	2.05 6*	1.12 3	37 (28.2)	59 (45.0)	17 (12.9)	15 (11.5)	3 (2.3)	2.14 5*	1.03 1
6	Doubt about the efficacy of guidance and counseling.	75 (28.4)	101 (38.3)	33 (12.5)	40 (15.1)	15 (5.7)	2.31 4*	1.19 7	31 (23.7)	58 (44.3)	14 (10.7)	17 (12.9)	11 (8.4)	2.38 1*	1.21 8

**Source:** Computed and Compiled by the Researchers using STATA 14 (2023)

**Note:** \*, denotes means score acceptance, Figures in ( ) are percentages

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study delved into the challenges faced by career counseling services in Taraba State secondary schools. The research employed a survey design method, targeting a population of 108,643 individuals comprising 103,641 students and 5,002 teachers. Utilizing Yamane's (1967) sample size technique, 399 respondents were carefully selected and administered with questionnaires, all of which were diligently completed and returned, representing a comprehensive response rate of 100%. The data collected was presented in tabular format using frequency distributions, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviations to vividly portray the viewpoints of the participants. The findings of the study revealed that crucial obstacles to effective career counseling include the absence of trained counselors, insufficient funding, and confidentiality concerns. To enhance the caliber of career counseling services in Taraba State secondary schools, actionable steps are recommended. These include advocating for policy reforms to embed comprehensive career counseling, establishing a counselor proficiency enhancement program through specialized training, ensuring dedicated budget allocation for counseling resources, optimizing their deployment through digital platforms, and implementing a robust confidentiality framework. By pursuing these specific measures, the goal is to empower students with effective support, enabling them to make informed decisions about their future career paths with confidence and clarity.

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