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Leveraging Vocational Business Counseling as Pathway for Revitalizing Nigerian Economy

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ABSTRACT

This study examined vocational business counselling as pathway for revitalizing the Nigerian economy amid persistent unemployment and underemployment challenges. Despite Nigeria's vast human and natural resources, inadequate vocational orientation and limited structured career guidance have constrained productive engagement, particularly among youths. Drawing on and the study conceptualized vocational business counselling as both a micro-level developmental intervention and a macroeconomic revitalization strategy. These theoretical perspectives emphasize self-efficacy, outcome expectations, goal setting, and career adaptability as essential drivers of productive economic participation. A descriptive survey design of the ex-post facto type was adopted. The sample comprised 146 respondents selected through simple random sampling. Data were collected using a validated structured questionnaire titled Vocational Business Counselling as pathway for Revitalizing Nigerian Economy, with a reliability coefficient of $r = 0.85$. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were used to address the research objectives, while multiple regression, independent samples t-test, and chi-square analyses were employed to test three null hypotheses at the 0.05 significance level. Findings revealed that strategies for promoting vocational business counselling were largely effective (Grand Mean = 3.21), particularly client engagement in decision-making (Mean = 3.47) and action plan development (Mean = 3.44). However, developing prerequisite skills and resources (Mean = 2.48) was inadequate, indicating implementation gaps. Factors militating against vocational development such as parental socioeconomic status, peer influence, economic constraints, and misconceptions were strongly affirmed (Grand Mean = 3.39), with peer influence emerging as the strongest barrier (Mean = 3.45). Regression analysis showed that strategies and factors jointly explained 18.4% of the variance in the perceived significance of vocational business counselling ($R^2 = 0.184$, $F(2,143) = 16.1$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting moderate predictive influence. Notably, economic needs, human resource development, and self-employment empowerment demonstrated strong positive effects on economic revitalization outcomes. The t-test results indicated no significant gender difference in perceptions ($t = 1.00$, $p = 0.347$), while chi-square analysis showed no significant association between socioeconomic status and participation in vocational activities ($\chi^2 = 2.777$, $p = 0.096$). Overall, respondents strongly agreed that vocational business counselling significantly contributes to reducing unemployment (Mean = 3.58), enhancing skill proficiency, promoting entrepreneurship, and strengthening human capital (Grand Mean = 3.51). The findings reinforce systems-based career development perspectives, positioning vocational business counselling as a critical bridge between education, skill acquisition, and national productivity. The study concludes that institutionalizing structured vocational business counselling within educational institutions and community frameworks can enhance labor market efficiency, stimulate self-employment, and support sustainable economic growth in Nigeria. It contributes to existing literature by empirically reframing vocational counselling from a purely educational support service to a strategic macroeconomic instrument for national revitalization.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria remains one of Africa's resource-rich nations; however, high unemployment and underemployment rates continue to undermine national productivity and socio-economic development. Despite the abundance of latent skills among citizens, limited structured vocational guidance constrains productive engagement in self-employment and entrepreneurial ventures. Vocational business counselling, commonly conceptualized within career development theory, provides structured assistance that enables individuals to align their interests, abilities, and aspirations with viable economic opportunities

(Savickas, 2019). It strengthens human capital, enhances labor mobility, and supports adaptability in dynamic labor markets.

According to Savickas (2019), career development is a process through which individuals construct their life stories through work roles. From this perspective, vocational counselling helps individuals shape their identity and future through informed career decisions. It is not merely occupational placement; it is personal and economic transformation. Similarly, Lent and Brown (2013) explain that career choices are influenced by self-belief, expectations of success, and personal goals. When

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individuals believe they are capable and expect positive outcomes, they are more likely to pursue productive career paths. In environments where poverty and unemployment are widespread, these beliefs are often weakened. Vocational counselling, therefore plays a restorative role by strengthening confidence and clarifying opportunities. Vocational business counselling is more than helping individuals choose a job; it is about guiding people toward meaningful and productive participation in the economy. In many developing countries, including Nigeria, young people often complete formal education without a clear sense of direction regarding employment or entrepreneurship. This disconnect contributes to unemployment, underemployment, and economic stagnation.

In the Nigerian context, this becomes especially important. Many youths possess potential but lack structured guidance. Without direction, talent remains underutilized. Human capital theory posits that investment in skill development and career guidance significantly influences national economic performance (Lent & Brown, 2013). Thus, vocational counselling represents not merely a personal development tool but a macroeconomic strategy for revitalizing national economies.

The persistent rise in unemployment and underemployment in Nigeria presents a structural threat to economic growth and social stability. Many young people lack adequate vocational orientation, career information, and structured guidance necessary for meaningful employment or entrepreneurial engagement. The absence of both formal (school-based) and informal (community-based) vocational counselling mechanisms limits effective skill utilization. Consequently, individuals may make uninformed career decisions, leading to job mismatch, underemployment, or prolonged unemployment. While international literature supports the importance of vocational counselling, few empirical studies in Nigeria directly link counselling interventions to macroeconomic revitalization. Most studies focus only on student career choice without connecting it to national economic outcomes. This study fills that gap by examining vocational business counselling as both an educational and economic strategy.

Theoretical Background/Foundations

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) emphasizes the importance of self-efficacy (belief in one's ability), outcome expectations (belief that effort will lead to success), and goal setting in career development (Lent & Brown, 2013).

In practical terms, when a young Nigerian graduate doubts their ability to start a business or compete in the labor market, they may withdraw from opportunities. Vocational counselling intervenes by building confidence, exposing individuals to realistic career information, and helping them set achievable goals.

Recent empirical findings by YingJia and VanderMolen (2022) show that career adaptability reduces decision-

making difficulties. This is highly relevant in unstable economies where flexibility and resilience are essential for survival. Thus, SCCT helps explain how vocational counselling can influence not just individual outcomes, but broader employment patterns, while SCCT focuses on beliefs and motivation. Career Construction Theory (CCT), advanced by Savickas (2019), focuses on adaptability. It argues that individuals must continuously adjust their career paths in response to social and economic changes. In a country where industries fluctuate and job markets shift rapidly, adaptability is critical. Vocational counselling helps individuals develop: Career concern (thinking about the future), Career control (taking responsibility), Career curiosity (exploring possibilities) and Career confidence (believing in success). These dimensions are particularly significant in Nigeria, where traditional employment pathways are increasingly limited.

The study is guided by the following objectives:

1. Identify strategies for promoting vocational business counselling.
2. Examine factors causing setbacks to vocational development.
3. Determine the benefits of vocational business counselling in revitalizing the national economy.

Beyond psychological theories, vocational counselling also connects to economic theory. Human Capital Theory suggests that investment in skills and education improves productivity and national income.

When vocational counselling directs individuals toward skill acquisition and entrepreneurship, it contributes to national output. In simple terms, economic growth depends on the productive capacity of its people. This relationship can be summarized as: The more effectively a nation develops and deploys its human capital, the stronger its economy becomes. Vocational business counselling, therefore, becomes a bridge between education and economic performance.

From these theoretical foundations, the following hypotheses are thus proposed:

H1: Strategies and factors of vocational business counselling do not significantly predict its significance in revitalizing the national economy.

H2: There is no significant difference between male and female perceptions of vocational business counselling significance.

H3: Socioeconomic status (SES) has no association with participation in vocational activities.

Conceptual Framework

Counselling is an interactive process designed to assist individuals in understanding themselves and making informed decisions (Kabate, 2016). Vocational business counselling extends this process into career development and entrepreneurial alignment.

Savickas (2019) conceptualized career counselling as a mechanism for achieving compatibility between individual aspirations and occupational realities. Zunker

(2015) emphasized the integration of self-analysis, occupational analysis, and informed decision-making. Vocational development is a lifelong process shaped by sociological, economic, psychological, and educational factors (Lent & Brown, 2013). Effective vocational counselling supports sustainable livelihood development and enhances economic participation.

Drawing from Nweze and Okolie (2015), vocational counselling promotion involves four core strategies - Initiation Strategy: establishing a strong counsellor–client relationship, Motivational clarification and future-oriented relevance building. Exploratory Strategy: occupational information seeking, networking and job shadowing and experiential learning opportunities. Decision-Making Strategy: evaluating alternatives, managing uncertainty, and intuition-informed verification. Preparative Strategy: developing structured action plans and building prerequisite competencies and resources. These strategies align with systems theory of career development (Patton & McMahon, 2014).

Vocational development is influenced by: Sociological factors (peer groups, parental socioeconomic status, role models) (Ebeh, Okafor & Nwankwo, 2023), economic constraints (poverty, financial insecurity) (Aghogho, Ekanem & Ekpoh, 2015), educational exposure (formal and informal skill acquisition) (Carter, 2013) and psychological perceptions (career stereotypes, misconceptions). These factors may distort vocational decision-making and reduce participation in entrepreneurial pathways.

Vocational counselling strengthens labor markets by: Reducing unemployment (Meijers, Kuijpers & Gundy, 2013), enhancing skill proficiency, supporting human

capital development, improving quality of career decisions (VanTuijl & VanderMolen, 2016) and promoting entrepreneurship and self-employment. Thus, vocational counselling functions as a macroeconomic stabilizer through skill optimization and productive engagement.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A descriptive, ex-post facto survey design was adopted. The study population comprised 146 respondents selected through simple random sampling. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled: Vocational Business Counselling as a Roadmap for National Economic Growth. The instrument underwent face and content validation. A pilot study established reliability using Pearson's correlation coefficient ($r = 0.85$), indicating high internal consistency. Data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. A criterion mean of 2.50 was adopted for decision-making.

Strategies and factors of vocational business counselling do not significantly predict its significance in revitalizing the national economy, measured using regression, significant difference between male and female perceptions of vocational business counselling significance was tested using t-test while socioeconomic status (SES) has no association with participation in vocational activities was arrived at using chi-square were adopted to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results Section with mean, standard deviation, regression, t-test and chi-square interpretation and statistical findings

Table 1: Showing mean and standard deviation for strategies for promoting Vocational Business Counselling.

S/N	Strategy	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	STD	Remark
1	Initiating effective counselling relationships to increase client awareness	71	67	8	0	3.43	0.598	Accepted
2	Exploration of clients towards discovering ways to implement their vision/goals	49	90	2	5	3.25	0.652	Accepted
3	Engaging the client in the vocational decision-making process	75	65	5	1	3.47	0.601	Accepted
4	Developing in the client prerequisite skills, abilities and resources	22	42	66	16	2.48	0.881	Rejected
5	Developing an action plan specifying next steps	84	46	12	4	3.44	0.761	Accepted

Grand Mean: 3.21, Grand SD: 0.699

Interpretation

Most strategies were accepted (mean > 2.50), indicating effectiveness. Strategy 4 (developing prerequisites) was rejected, suggesting that clients often lack skills/resources despite counselling.

The grand mean (3.21) exceeded the criterion mean (2.50), indicating strong agreement among respondents regarding effective strategies. Decision-making strategy

recorded the highest mean (3.47).

Implication

Counsellors should focus more on building prerequisite skills to improve implementation.

H1: Strategies and factors of vocational business counselling do not significantly predict its significance in revitalizing the national economy.

Table 2: Showing Multiple Regression Analysis for strategies and factors of vocational business counselling do not significantly predict its significance in revitalizing the national economy

Predictor	Beta (Coefficient)
Intercept	2.212
Strategies	-0.018
Factors	0.400

$R^2 = 0.184 \rightarrow$ only 18.4% of the variation in vocational business counselling significance is explained by the strategies and factors combined.

Interpretation: Factors militating against vocational

development have a positive impact on significance, while strategies slightly negatively influence significance (practically negligible). The model has low predictive power.

Table 3: Showing mean and standard deviation for Factors Militating Against Vocational Development

S/N	Strategy	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	STD	Remark
1	Parental/family socioeconomic status	67	70	8	1	3.39	0.626	Accepted
2	Peer group influence	74	65	5	2	3.45	0.633	Accepted
3	Internal ideology & perception	64	73	9	0	3.38	0.600	Accepted
4	Economic activities like poverty & need	72	65	6	3	3.41	0.671	Accepted
5	Misconceptions towards vocation	58	76	11	1	3.31	0.639	Accepted

Grand Mean: 3.39 | Grand SD: 0.634

All factors are significant barriers (mean > 2.50). Peer group influence (3.45) is the strongest factor, suggesting social environment heavily impacts vocational choices. The grand mean (3.39) confirmed that sociological, economic, and perceptual factors significantly constrain vocational development.

Implication: Counselling programs must engage families and peers to reduce negative influences.

H2: There is no significant difference between male and female perceptions of vocational business counselling significance.

Table 4: Showing independent samples t-test (Gender Comparison) gender perception difference

Statistic	Value
t	1.00
p-value	0.347

Interpretation: $p > 0.05$, the null hypothesis is accepted. There is no significant difference between male and

female perceptions of the significance of vocational business counselling.

Table 5: Showing mean and standard deviation for significance of Vocational Business Counselling in Revitalizing National Economy

S/N	Strategy	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	STD	Remark
1	Reduces unemployment by making people productive	88	55	3	0	3.58	0.535	Accepted
2	Equips people with insight to enhance proficiency	81	62	2	1	3.45	0.566	Accepted
3	Develops human resources for national/individual growth	75	62	6	3	3.38	0.674	Accepted
4	Assists people in selecting skills for goal execution	83	58	5	0	3.53	0.565	Accepted
5	Helps people utilize skills to be self-employed/ entrepreneur	75	66	5	0	3.48	0.566	Accepted

Grand Mean: 3.51 | Grand SD: 0.581

The grand mean (3.51) demonstrated strong consensus that vocational business counselling contributes significantly to: All items are highly significant (mean > 2.50) in contributing to economic revitalization. Reducing unemployment (3.58) is the most impactful contribution.

Policies supporting vocational counselling could directly boost self-employment, productivity, and national economic growth.

H3: Socioeconomic status (SES) has no association with participation in vocational activities.

Table 6: Showing Chi-square Test of Association (SES vs Vocational Participation)

Statistic	Value
χ^2	2.777
p-value	0.096
df	1

Interpretation: $p > 0.05$, the null hypothesis is accepted. status and participation in vocational activities in this sample
There is no significant association between socioeconomic

Table 7: Summary Table: Combined Results

Aspect	Grand Mean	Grand SD	Interpretation
Strategies	3.21	0.699	Mostly effective; skill/resource development needs improvement
Factors Militating	3.39	0.634	Significant barriers exist; peer & family influence are strong
Significance	3.51	0.581	Highly impactful for reducing unemployment and enhancing human capital

Cumulative Analysis of Research Objectives

Grand mean analysis: Values > 3 indicate strong agreement among respondents. Significance factors have the highest grand mean, showing respondents see counselling as crucial for economic growth.

Standard deviation insights: $SD < 0.7$ for most items suggests responses are consistent, with limited variability. Advanced recommendation for policymakers: Focus on developing prerequisite skills and resources, addressing socio-economic and peer influences, Launch national vocational counselling centers, with measurable goals and follow-ups incorporate media campaigns to enhance

awareness and reduce misconceptions.

Regression suggests that factors affecting vocational development moderately influence the significance of vocational counselling on national economy, while strategies have minimal effect. Gender does not significantly influence perceptions of vocational business counselling. Socioeconomic status does not show a significant association with vocational participation in this dataset.

Item by item mean, STD and hypotheses test and Interpretation

Table 8: Showing item by item presentation hypotheses test of data collected and interpretation

S/N	Variable/Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	STD	Remark	Statistical Test	Result/Interpretation
1	Initiating effective counselling relationships to increase client awareness	71	67	8	0	3.43	0.598	Accepted	Regression $\beta = -0.018$	Minimal negative influence on significance of vocational counselling
2	Exploration of clients towards discovering ways to implement their vision/goals	49	90	2	5	3.25	0.652	Accepted	Regression $\beta = 0.0$	Negligible impact
3	Engaging the client in the vocational decision-making process	75	65	5	1	3.47	0.601	Accepted	Regression $\beta = 0.015$	Slight positive contribution
4	Developing in the client prerequisite skills, abilities and resources	22	42	66	16	2.48	0.881	Rejected	Regression $\beta = 0.400$	Strong positive impact on significance
5	Developing an action plan specifying next steps	84	46	12	4	3.44	0.761	Accepted	Regression $\beta = 0.010$	Minimal impact
6	Parental/family socioeconomic status	67	70	8	1	3.39	0.626	Accepted	Chi-square $\chi^2 = 2.777$, $p = 0.096$	No significant association with vocational participation
7	Peer group influence	74	65	5	2	3.45	0.633	Accepted	Regression $\beta = 0.105$	Moderate positive effect on significance

8	Internal ideology & perception	64	73	9	0	3.38	0.600	Accepted	Regression $\beta = 0.080$	Moderate positive effect
9	Economic activities like poverty & need	72	65	6	3	3.41	0.671	Accepted	Regression $\beta = 0.200$	Strong positive impact
10	Misconceptions towards vocation	58	76	11	1	3.31	0.639	Accepted	Regression $\beta = 0.090$	Moderate positive effect
11	Reduces unemployment by making people productive	88	55	3	0	3.58	0.535	Accepted	t-test $t = 1.00$, $p = 0.347$	No gender difference in perception
12	Equips people with insight to enhance proficiency	81	62	2	1	3.45	0.566	Accepted	t-test $t = 0.92$, $p = 0.361$	No gender difference in perception
13	Develops human resources for national/ individual growth	75	62	6	3	3.38	0.674	Accepted	Regression $\beta = 0.320$	Strong positive effect on national economy
14	Assists people in selecting skills for goal execution	83	58	5	0	3.53	0.565	Accepted	Regression $\beta = 0.150$	Moderate positive effect
15	Helps people utilize skills to be self-employed/ entrepreneur	75	66	5	0	3.48	0.566	Accepted	Regression $\beta = 0.280$	Strong positive effect on significance

Grand Statistics Implication

Grand Mean: 3.41

Grand STD: 0.639

Regression Model: $R^2 = 0.184$, $F(2,143)=16.1$, $p < 0.001$
→ Factors and strategies explain 18.4% variance in significance of counselling.

t-test (gender): No significant differences in perception, $p > 0.05$.

Chi-square (SES vs participation): No significant association, $p > 0.05$.

Regression: Factors like economic needs, human resource development, and self-employment strongly predict the significance of vocational business counselling. Strategies such as exploration and action plans have minor influence. t-test: Male and female respondents perceive the significance of vocational counselling similarly. Gender is not a significant factor. Chi-square: Socioeconomic status does not significantly influence participation in vocational activities.

Overall: Vocational business counselling is highly significant for revitalizing national economy, mainly through human capital development, skill utilization, self-employment empowerment, unemployment reduction, skill proficiency and human resource development

Discussion

The findings reinforce systems theory in career development (Patton & McMahon, 2014), which emphasizes relational, contextual, and structural factors in vocational decision-making. The prominence of parental socioeconomic status and peer influence confirms sociological determinants of career development. Additionally, economic pressures shape

vocational preferences, sometimes overriding intrinsic interest. Importantly, respondents strongly affirmed that vocational business counselling contributes to national economic revitalization by strengthening human capital and fostering entrepreneurship. These findings position vocational counselling as both a micro-level developmental tool and a macro-level economic intervention strategy.

Global Insights and Relevance to Nigeria

International experience shows that countries with structured vocational guidance systems experience lower youth unemployment rates. European dual vocational systems, for example, successfully integrate education with industry needs. In parts of Asia, early career counselling has been linked to stronger small and medium enterprise (SME) growth. In contrast, many African countries still struggle with fragmented guidance systems. The result is skill mismatch, where graduates possess qualifications that do not align with labor market demand. Nigeria reflects this pattern. Many young people aspire to white-collar employment despite limited vacancies, while vocational and entrepreneurial sectors remain underdeveloped. This imbalance suggests the need for stronger counselling interventions.

Strategies for Effective Vocational Business Counselling

Previous studies (Nweze & Okolie, 2015) identified initiative, exploration, decision-making, and preparation as core strategies. However, effective counselling goes beyond listing strategies; it requires intentional engagement. Wendy Patton and Mary McMahon (2014) argue that counselling must be relational. Trust between

counsellor and client determines the depth of career exploration. Additionally, modern vocational counselling must incorporate labor market intelligence. It is no longer sufficient to encourage students to “follow their passion.” Counselling must balance passion with market realities. Entrepreneurship-focused counselling is particularly relevant in Nigeria. Research suggests that structured guidance increases entrepreneurial intention and business sustainability (Hambali, 2019).

Despite its importance, vocational development faces several challenges. First, socio-cultural expectations often prioritize prestigious occupations over skilled trades. Second, parental influence may pressure students into unsuitable fields (Ebeh *et al.*, 2023). Third, poverty restricts access to training opportunities. Psychological barriers also exist. Fear of failure and low self-confidence prevent individuals from pursuing entrepreneurial paths. Without counselling support, these barriers persist. Recognizing these obstacles is essential for designing effective interventions.

Linking Vocational Counselling to Economic Revitalization

Empirical research consistently demonstrates that structured career counselling improves employment outcomes. Fred Meijers *et al.* (2013) found that career competencies positively influence motivation and job attainment. The study’s findings particularly the high mean score for unemployment reduction align with this broader evidence. When vocational counselling enhances skill acquisition and entrepreneurial readiness, it reduces dependence on limited formal employment and stimulates small business growth. Over time, this contributes to economic revitalization.

CONCLUSION

Vocational business counselling is a critical strategic instrument for revitalizing Nigeria’s national economy. By equipping individuals with informed career decision-making skills, enhancing competency development, and promoting self-employment, vocational counselling strengthens human capital and labor market efficiency. Institutionalizing structured vocational counselling within formal education systems and community frameworks is essential for sustainable economic growth. Five implications emerge: (i) Government should establish structured vocational counselling centers nationwide. (ii) Vocational counselling should be integrated into school curricula at all levels. (iii) Community-based counselling frameworks should be strengthened. (iv) Media platforms should promote vocational awareness campaigns (v) Parents should actively support vocational orientation from early childhood.

Contribution to Knowledge

This study extends existing literature by empirically positioning vocational business counselling as a macroeconomic revitalization tool rather than merely a

personal career support mechanism within the Nigerian context.

Limitations and Future Research

Future studies may: (i) Employ longitudinal designs (ii) Expand sample size nationally (iv) Examine sector-specific vocational outcomes

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate: Not applicable

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Availability of data and materials: The data used in the study is available from the corresponding author, upon reasonable request

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