



## Constructionist Career and Entrepreneurship Counseling at the Senior Secondary in Nigeria.

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**ABSTRACT:** This study adopted the pretest-posttest control group design to examine the effectiveness of constructionist career and entrepreneurship counseling on the career adaptability of Senior Secondary Students (SSS) in South East Nigeria. It was hypothesized that relative to pre-intervention, participants will demonstrate increased career choice self-efficacy, perceived career outcome expectancy, decreased perceived job-engagement barriers and more engagement in entrepreneurial activities. Participants comprised 30 (age range 14-18, 15 male, mean age, 16.73, SD 1.09; 15 female, mean age 16.66, SD 1.11) SSS whose career adaptability were low. They completed the Constructionist Career and Entrepreneurship Questionnaire (CCEQ) and were evenly assigned to intervention and control groups. The intervention group (CCCE) received three sessions of constructionist career counseling (Savickas' (2012) model) and entrepreneurship counseling. Data analyzed using mean, standard deviation, t-test and Cohen's effect size revealed significant increases in career choice self-efficacy, perceived career outcome expectancy, decreased perceived job-engagement barriers and increased perceived future engagement in entrepreneurial activities at both posttest and follow-up periods. It was recommended that school counselors should adopt constructionist career and entrepreneurship counseling to enhance students' career adaptability and job engagement. Limitations and directions for further research were pointed out.

**Keywords:** Constructionism, career counseling, entrepreneurship, senior secondary, Nigeria

### I. Introduction

#### 1.1. Background of the study

Nigeria has numerous business and investment potential due to her abundant human and natural resources. It is necessary to channel efforts towards making Nigerian youth appreciate these facts through constructionist career and entrepreneurship counseling. [1] highlighted the unprecedented and irreversible changes in the workplace. How to assist individuals navigate this unusual terrain needs to be explored.

This study explored the effectiveness of career constructionist counseling on secondary school students' career development process. The inclusion of entrepreneurship counselling is to provide the students opportunity to think in the direction of entrepreneurship and create jobs for themselves on graduation. Work defines ones position in society and gives meaning to one's life. It is an outlet to creativity and innovativeness and a major source of social stimulation. It builds one's self-esteem by giving one a sense of achievement, challenge and motivation. Yet many youth are not provided the opportunity to work. [2] points out the high unemployment rate (49.6%) among Nigerian youth placing them on the margin of national development with resultant effects [3].

Career Construction theory and practice have been well documented in literature ([4, 5, 6, 7, and 8]). As [9] puts it, we actively participate in the construction of what we observe. According to [5] rather than focusing on fitting individuals into pre-determined categories of interests or personality, constructionist approaches allow the client to construct, or create his or her own career. This could be a means of overcoming the challenges in the workplace. Overcoming the challenges in the workplace requires new skills, new approaches and new mindsets and to do this well, [10] advocates paradigm shift in career counseling.

As pointed out by [6] and [11] many students are not career-ready when they leave school. The panacea could be the career constructionist approach [12] in which the person who seeks help as well as the person offering help are considered experts [13].

In the global economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond, Savickas [14] views self-construction as a way forward for successful career counseling; one that makes for career adaptability in the world-of-work where too few jobs exist but with boundless opportunities in the informal sector. This current perspective of career constructionist counseling emphasizes that the students, as part of the society, are not insulated from the prevailing economic situation.

Counselors utilizing the constructionist career counselling model help their clients to create interest in few careers by showing them how a few occupations and avocations (hobbies) directly address their preoccupation and in so doing may resolve their vocational concerns. Discussions centre on possible solutions in the form of jobs that may extend the occupational plot into the next scene. Clients and counselors together craft an action agenda that will move the client from the directly experienced situation, to the one currently desired [6].

Counseling plays a vital role in creating psychologically conducive environment that engenders and fosters entrepreneurship spirit in the young ones [15]. The counsellor's role has been identified [16] as working on students' mindsets and stimulating their interest in self-employment and business creation as well as emphasizing on the unlimited opportunities in the informal sector in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. If counselling for entrepreneurship is provided, entrepreneurship skills can be grasped and then honed [16]. The purpose of integrating entrepreneurship into constructionist career counseling is to assist students find expression in the work opportunities that abound in the informal sector. Studies of [17, 18, 19, and 20] stress the importance of entrepreneurship noting that it is a step towards career adaptability. The idea is to adapt to entrepreneurship as a new career path that provides alternatives to unemployment or underemployment. By thinking entrepreneurial and acting entrepreneurial today, one might be proactively doing what many employees have to do reactively.

Counselling for career construction has been summarized [5] as involving having the clients construct their careers by articulating vocational stories, deconstructing demoralizing stories by destabilizing their meanings, reconstructing a life portrait by elaborating the identity narrative, and co-constructing the next episode in the occupational plot by transforming the tension into intention and taking action to create a more satisfying life.

To guide this study, it was hypothesized that relative to pre-intervention, participants will demonstrate increased career choice self-efficacy, perceived career outcome expectancy, decreased perceived job-engagement barriers and more engagement in entrepreneurial activities at both posttest and follow-up periods.

## **II. Methods**

### **2.1 Participants**

The participants were thirty Senior Secondary School Students (age range 14-18, 15 male, mean age, 16.73, SD 1.09; 15 female, mean age 16.66, SD 1.11) in their fifth year in a Senior Secondary School in Umuahia North Local Government Area, South East Nigeria. They completed the consent form and written permission was granted by their principal who acted in loco parentis.

### **2.2. Measure**

The participants comprised those whose scores on Career choice self-efficacy and career outcome expectancy were low, their perceived job engagement barriers were high and perceived future engagement in entrepreneurship activities were low. The participants completed the 20-item Career Constructionist and Entrepreneurship Questionnaire (CCEQ) with four sub scales (Career Choice Self-efficacy, Career Outcome Expectancy, Perceived Future Job Engagement Barriers and Perceived Future Engagement in entrepreneurship). The CCEQ has five sections. Section A comprised demographic variables of school, age, class, gender and ethnic group. Section B Career Choice self-efficacy (CCS) has nine items that sought to identify level of career choice self-efficacy. Section C Perceived Career Outcome Expectancy (PCOE) has eleven items that touched on career outcome. Section D Perceived Job Engagement Barriers (PJEB) comprised nine items bordering on mechanisms perceived by participants as restrictions in terms of events or conditions either within the individual or environment that make engagement in career or progression difficult. Section E Perceived Future Engagement in Entrepreneurship (PFEE) has eleven items that stressed on the intention of the participants to set up any entrepreneurial venture in the future. The response scale is a five point likert ranging from strongly agree (5), to strongly disagree (1) for positive items and reverse scoring for negative items. Psychometric properties of the CCEQ were determined a month before this present study using Senior Secondary School Students from a different local Government area. The internal consistency of CCEQ was 0.79 and the stability was 0.87 and considered suitable. CCS sub scale had a mean of 3.45 and coefficient alpha of 0.85; PCOE sub scale had a mean of 3.05 and a coefficient alpha of 0.75; PJEB had a mean of 2.94 and coefficient alpha of 0.86 while PFEE had a mean of 3.35 and coefficient alpha of 0.78. The sub scales correlated positively and significantly with each other.

### 2.3 Procedure

The participants drawn as convenient sample were assigned to two groups after taking the CCEQ-Constructionist Career Counseling and Entrepreneurship group (CCCE) and Control Group (wait list). Using the work of [5] Career Construction Interview-Short Form (CCI-SF) the CCCE group were exposed to three-session constructionist career and entrepreneurship counseling during which they were assisted to explore more deeply their career development as well as the meaning and values of entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial skill development, issue of frugality, work ethics, life and social skill development, and sense of community. Each session lasted approximately 40 minutes with a total of two hours. The control group was a wait list group.

Four practicing counselors were trained using [5] model and the process was scripted and practiced to reduce counselor bias. The counseling process involved construction, deconstruction, reconstruction and co-construction aimed at revealing, unpacking and then re-authoring the client's career story in addition to highlighting the need for focusing attention on entrepreneurship as a means of actualizing their careers. The first session focused on construction and deconstruction, the second with reconstruction and co-construction while the third focused on entrepreneurship. The three counseling sessions were patterned as follows:

**Session 1:** Session one commenced with initial establishment issues comprising rapport building, confidentiality issues, working alliance and client/counselor roles and responsibilities. The clients were told early in therapy that they are experts in their own right regarding their unique potential and attributes. Constructionist career counseling was succinctly explained to the participants to enable them participate actively in the rest of the sessions. Each client's score on the CCEQ was reviewed as a prelude to goal setting. Their goals were restated in specific, measurable, realistic, attainable and time bound (SMART) ways. Then the clients were told to describe the current challenges they are facing in relation to their choice of career considering the changes in the world-of-work. From the client's stories about past and present events related to career, the counselor guided the client by asking relevant questions aimed at identify dominant themes in the client's stories. Some of the themes identified were self-limiting ideas, confining barriers, stereotypes and idiosyncrasies. The counselor provided basic facts concerning each of the recurring themes to assist the client in constructing new knowledge of self and the environment. Changing circumstances were highlighted. As tasks and assignments, the clients were requested to articulate all the things they have been able to do either as hobbies, crafts, music, drama, plays, games and others, and identify successful people in their environment they see as role models and articulate what they thought made them successful.

**Session 2:** During the second session, each client's assignments were discussed. The counselor listened to each client's unique stories and spotlighted the unifying themes in the stories. Using the "Card Game" technique, the counselor assisted each client to sort the recurring themes in phases. The counselor then helped the client to plot the themes into a unifying whole. The counselor with each client deeply explored the new story and expanded the plots. Each client was requested to narrate the career story in therapy. The story was reviewed and reenacted. Clients were requested to comment on their career story line. Based on each client's comments, further reviews were done. Each client was assisted to outline the plans to implement their careers. Each client was requested to go home and share their career stories with significant others with a warning that some comments may be discouraging but that they should not be daunted. Session activities were summarized. Their home work was to find work opportunities in their immediate environment.

**Session 3:** The session commenced with a review of previous session activities and tasks and assignments. Each client shared their experiences with the significant others in therapy. The counselor dealt with the negative viewpoints and encouraged the clients to remain resolute and committed to the pursuance of their chosen career. The issue of high unemployment rate in Nigeria in the formal sector was discussed. Their interest was stimulated to see opportunities in the informal sector. The abundant human and natural resources in the country were enacted. The counselor then discussed entrepreneurship with each client in detail highlighting entrepreneurial skills. Each client was assisted to identify specific areas of entrepreneurship they could delve into on graduation. Specific plans were mapped out including learning opportunities in their areas of interest.

The entire counseling intervention was reviewed. Each client recalled goals set in the first session and reviewed extent of achievement. Any goals not reached were further explored and resolved. The CCEQ was juggled and given to the clients. Their scores were taken as posttest scores. The entire program was summarized. The clients were requested to comment on the entire program. The clients were requested to come again after four weeks for review. The CCEQ was again juggled and administered on the participants and scores taken as follow-up scores. The intervention was thus terminated.

The control group (wait-list) also completed the CCEQ again and their scores taken as posttest scores. They were exposed to the same career constructionist and entrepreneurship counseling at the end of the experiment. Data collected were analyzed using mean, standard deviation, t-test and Cohen's Effect Size.

### III. Results

**Table 1:** Means, Stand. Deviations and t values for intervention group (N=15)

Measures	Pretest		Posttest		T	Effect size
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
<b>Career choice Self-efficacy(CCS)</b>	2.18	0.31	3.03	0.26	8.14	2.97
<b>Career outcome expectancy (COE)</b>	2.17	0.31	3.03	0.27	8.10	2.96
<b>Job engagement barrier (JEB)</b>	2.16	0.34	3.12	0.29	8.32	3.04
<b>Future engagement in entrepreneurship (FEE)</b>	2.21	0.38	3.13	0.47	5.89	2.15
<b>Total</b>	2.18	0.03	3.08	0.3	11.56	4.22

P>0.05

**Table 2:** Means, Stand. Deviations and t values for Control group (N=15)

Measures	Pretest		Posttest		T	Effect size
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
<b>Career choice Self-efficacy(CCS)</b>	2.13	0.33	2.1	0.32	0.25	-0.09
<b>Career outcome expectancy (COE)</b>	2.12	0.31	2.14	0.31	0.18	0.07
<b>Job engagement barrier (JEB)</b>	2.18	0.24	2.12	0.28	0.65	-0.23
<b>Future engagement in entrepreneurship (FEE)</b>	1.94	0.26	2.10	0.28	1.62	0.93
<b>Total</b>	2.09	0.3	2.11	0.3	0.18	0.07

P>0.05

**Table 3:** Means, Stand. Deviations and t values for Intervention group (N=15)

Measures	Posttest		Follow-up		T	Effect size
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
<b>Career choice Self-efficacy(CCS)</b>	3.03	0.26	3.52	0.39	4.05	1.48
<b>Career outcome expectancy (COE)</b>	3.03	0.27	3.67	0.35	5.61	2.05
<b>Job engagement barrier (JEB)</b>	3.12	0.29	3.70	0.49	3.95	1.44
<b>Future engagement in entrepreneurship (FEE)</b>	3.13	0.47	3.75	0.41	3.85	1.41
<b>Total</b>	3.08	0.3	3.66	0.4	4.49	1.64

P>0.05

**Table 4:** Comparison of Means, Stand. Deviations and t values for Intervention and control groups at posttest

Measures	Intervention group		Control group		T	Effect size
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
<b>Career choice Self-efficacy(CCS)</b>	3.03	0.26	2.10	0.32	8.74	-3.19
<b>Career outcome expectancy (COE)</b>	3.07	0.27	2.14	0.31	8.38	-3.06
<b>Job engagement barrier (JEB)</b>	3.12	0.29	2.12	0.28	9.61	-3.51
<b>Future engagement in entrepreneurship (FEE)</b>	3.13	0.47	2.10	0.28	7.29	-2.66
<b>Total</b>	3.08	0.3	2.11	0.3	8.85	-2.23

P>0.05

Data collected were analyzed to determine if there are mean differences in the intervention and control at pretest, posttest and follow-up in relation to the outcome variables. Results for the intervention group showed an appreciable increase after the intervention on all measures as seen in table 1. Career choice self-efficacy (CCS) increased (2.18 to 3.03); career outcome expectancy (COE) increased (2.17 to 3.03); perceived less barriers in job engagement (JEB) (2.16 to 3.12) and perceived more future engagement in entrepreneurship (FEE) (2.21 to 3.13). Mean score for the control group remained relatively unchanged (CCS from 2.1 to 2.1; COE, from 2.12 to 2.14, JEB, from 2.18 to 2.12, and FEE from 1.94 to 2.10) as shown in table 2. The t-test for mean differences for the intervention group at posttest were statistically significant on all measures, 8.14, 8.10, 8.32, and 5.89 for CCS, COE, JEB, and FEE, respectively. The t-test for the control group were not statistically significant on all measures,  $t = 0.25, 0.18, 0.65$  and  $1.62$  for CCS, COE, JEB, and FEE, respectively. Effect sizes were also calculated to provide further explanation for the practical relevance of the results [21]. The effect sizes for the intervention group from pretest to posttest was 2.97, 2.96, 3.04 and 2.15 for CCS, COE, JEB, and FEE, respectively (see table 1) while that of control from pretest to posttest stood at -0.09, 0.07, -0.23 and 0.93 for CCS, COE, JEB, and FEE, respectively (see Table 2).

The results also indicated that the appreciable gains in therapy for the intervention group were sustained after a four-week period as evidenced by the mean scores for CCS, COE, JEB, and FEE increasing from 3.03 to 3.52; 3.03 to 3.67; 3.12 to 3.70 and 3.13 to 3.75, respectively. The t values indicated that all the measures were statistically significant with relatively high effect sizes as seen in table 3. The t-test comparison of the mean differences between the intervention and control groups at posttest also revealed a statistically significant difference on all measures (8.74, 8.38, 9.61 and 7.29 for CCS, COE, JEB and FEE, respectively) as seen in Table 4.

As hypothesized, constructionist career and entrepreneurship counseling intervention substantially increased the career choice self-efficacy, career outcome expectancy, reduced the perceived job engagement barriers and increased perceived future engagement in entrepreneurial activities with appreciable improvement after a one-month interval.

#### IV. Discussion

This study investigated the effectiveness of constructionist career and entrepreneurship counseling on those struggling most with career adaptability and perceived low future engagement in entrepreneurship on graduation. As evidenced from the results, those in the intervention group showed higher career choice self-efficacy, career outcome expectancy, less perceived job engagement barriers and perceived more engagement in entrepreneurship in the future than those in the control group. This gain was sustained even after one month with statistically significant differences on all measures. This change can only be attributed to the intervention that provided the students opportunity to design and author their own life stories vis a vis the prevailing economic circumstances. This empirical evidence corroborates that of [6], [16], [12] [22] and [19] on the effectiveness of constructionist career counseling model in tackling the challenges being faced in the world-of-work. The new perspective formed in therapy about entrepreneurship provided additional conviction that they can create their own jobs if the Governments failed to do so. This will provide vocational outlet and an opportunity to work which is an essential human activity.



## V. Conclusion

The conclusion drawn from the findings is that constructionist career and entrepreneurship counseling holds promise to the vast majority of secondary school students who often experience a lack of connection between what they are exposed to in the school setting and the world-of-work that soon lies before them [11]. It is recommended that this approach be adopted by counselors in preparing the youth for the 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace. The benefits can extend to those likely to lose their jobs due to the irreversible changes in the workplace.

Additional strength of this study is the integration of entrepreneurship counseling into constructionist career counseling. With the global and local unemployment rates [2] the inclusion of entrepreneurship counseling will assist the students find expression in the work opportunities that abound in the informal sector. It would also make them do proactively what many employees have to do reactively and reap the benefits of entrepreneurship development [17, 20].

A number of limitations are pointed out to guide the interpretation of the findings of this study. Like in all quasi-experiments, a convenient sample was used. That means that only the specific characteristics of those in the sample were explored. Another limitation was the short period of follow-up (One Month). This was done to ensure that the programme was accommodated within the academic calendar. Again, the CCEQ has some elements of cultural bias. This limits the generalizability of the findings especially to those outside the cultural milieu. The limitations notwithstanding, the appreciable changes in the perceptions of those in the intervention as evidenced by the findings is indicative of the effectiveness of the intervention in assisting students in their career development process to proactively manage their careers.

Further research is needed to provide more empirical evidence to support the relevance of constructionist career and entrepreneurship counseling. Replication of this study in different locations and comparing their results could lend more credence to the study. Again, longitudinal studies could be conducted to track the trajectories of those that benefited from the intervention to evaluate their vocational adjustment. Lastly, constructionist career and entrepreneurship counseling could be provided to current employees who are on the verge of losing their jobs due to the irreversible changes in the workplace.

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