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Correlation Between Life Skills Counselling and Youth Empowerment among Secondary School Students in Maiduguri Metropolis, Borno State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between life skills counselling and youth empowerment among secondary school students in Maiduguri Metropolis, Borno State, Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population comprised Senior Secondary School II (SS II) students in public secondary schools in Maiduguri Metropolis, while a sample of 400 students was selected through a multistage sampling procedure. Data were collected using a researcher-developed instrument titled Life Skills Counselling and Youth Empowerment Questionnaire (LSCYEQ). The instrument was subjected to face and content validation by experts, while a reliability coefficient of 0.87 was obtained using Cronbach's Alpha. Data collected were analysed using mean, standard deviation, and Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC), with the hypotheses tested at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that secondary school students reported a generally favourable level of life skills counselling, particularly in evaluating alternatives before acting, making better academic decisions, and developing confidence in making choices. The findings also indicated a generally high level of youth empowerment, particularly in leadership skills, employment-related skills, goal attainment, independent decision-making, and management of personal and academic life. Furthermore, the findings established a significant positive relationship between decision-making skills counselling and youth empowerment ($r = .531$, $p < .05$), communication skills counselling and youth empowerment ($r = .679$, $p < .05$), and overall life skills counselling and youth empowerment ($r = .547$, $p < .05$). The study concluded that life skills counselling is significantly associated with youth empowerment among secondary school students in Maiduguri Metropolis. It was recommended that school authorities and educational policymakers strengthen guidance and counselling services by providing adequate professional counsellors, functional counselling facilities, and structured life skills programmes focusing on decision-making, communication, interpersonal relations`hips, problem-solving, resilience, and leadership development.

Keywords: Life skills counselling; youth empowerment; decision-making skills; communication skills

Introduction

Education in the twenty-first century, the purpose, extends beyond academic achievement to include the acquisition of knowledge, values, attitudes, and practical competencies that enable individuals to function effectively in an increasingly complex and dynamic society. Adolescents in secondary schools are expected to develop the cognitive, emotional, social, and vocational competencies necessary to become productive citizens. Consequently, educational systems worldwide have increasingly integrated life skills education and counselling into school programmes to equip students with the competencies required to navigate personal, academic, and societal challenges (World Health Organization [WHO], 1997). Life skills counselling refers to a structured counselling intervention designed to equip individuals with psychosocial competencies and adaptive behaviours that enable them to effectively manage the demands and challenges of everyday life. These skills include self-awareness, empathy, effective communication, interpersonal relationship skills, decision-making, problem-solving, creative thinking, critical thinking, emotional regulation, and stress management. The World Health Organization (WHO, 1997) identifies life skills education as a framework for developing psychosocial competencies among children and adolescents. Through counselling sessions, students learn how to evaluate alternatives, solve problems rationally, manage interpersonal conflicts, regulate emotions, communicate effectively, and make responsible decisions. These competencies are increasingly recognised as essential for academic success, career

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development, psychological well-being, and social adjustment (Botvin & Griffin, 2014). In Nigeria, the importance of life skills development is reflected in the National Policy on Education, which recognizes guidance and counselling as an essential educational service for facilitating students' academic, vocational, personal, and social development (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014). Despite the policy provisions, many secondary schools continue to experience inadequate counselling services, limited counselling personnel, poor counselling facilities, and insufficient implementation of life skills programmes (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014). The need for life skills counselling is particularly evident in Maiduguri Metropolis, Borno State, where years of insurgency have significantly disrupted educational activities and adversely affected the psychosocial well-being of adolescents. Many students have experienced displacement, trauma, bereavement, insecurity, poverty, interruption of schooling, and psychological distress arising from armed conflict. These experiences often contribute to low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, poor decision-making, aggressive behaviour, and limited educational aspirations (UNICEF Nigeria, 2019). Without effective counselling interventions, such challenges may hinder students' capacity to develop resilience, confidence, leadership skills, and positive life outcomes. The relationship between life skills counselling and youth empowerment is supported by Bandura's (1986, 1997) Social Cognitive Theory, which emphasises that individuals develop competence and self-efficacy through observation, learning, and successful experiences. Life skills interventions are intended to strengthen personal and social competence. Botvin and Griffin (2014) discuss life skills training as an approach to preventing substance misuse and enhancing individual and social competence. Nasheeda et al. (2019) reviewed life skills education research and identified both promising contributions and important gaps in the evidence. Life skills counselling is founded on the belief that many adolescent behavioural problems—including substance abuse, examination malpractice, school violence, cultism, risky sexual behaviour, bullying, and poor career decisions—can be prevented through early acquisition of psychosocial competencies. Research has consistently shown that students who participate in life skills counselling programmes demonstrate higher levels of self-esteem, resilience, leadership ability, emotional intelligence, and academic engagement (Botvin & Griffin, 2014; WHO, 1997).

According to Zimmerman (2000), empowerment is a multidimensional construct involving psychological competence, perceived control, critical awareness, and active participation in community development. Empowered youths possess confidence in their abilities, believe they can influence their environment, and actively contribute to solving societal problems. The Commonwealth Secretariat (2016) published the Global Youth Development Index and Report, which provides a comparative framework for considering youth development. For the present study, youth empowerment is discussed as a multidimensional process involving perceived competence, control and participation (Zimmerman, 2000). Youth empowerment can be understood as a process involving competence, confidence, participation and the ability to influence decisions affecting one's life (Zimmerman, 2000). These components collectively prepare young people for productive adulthood and national development. Decision-making is one of the psychosocial competencies included in the WHO's (1997) life skills framework. Decision-making counselling encourages critical reflection, responsibility, self-control, and accountability. Hargie (2021) reviews research, theory and practice concerning interpersonal communication. Effective communication is relevant to students' ability to express ideas, develop relationships, seek assistance and participate in group activities.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Life Skills Theory (WHO, 1997). The principal theory underpinning this study is the Life Skills Theory, developed by the World Health Organization in 1993 and formally articulated in 1997 to promote psychosocial competence among adolescents. The theory was developed in response to increasing global concerns regarding adolescent health, substance abuse, violence, HIV/AIDS, and other behavioural challenges. The theory posits that individuals who possess essential life skills are better equipped to make healthy decisions, solve problems effectively, manage emotions, communicate successfully, and establish positive interpersonal relationships. According to WHO (1997), psychosocial competence refers to an individual's ability to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. Nasheeda et al. (2019) investigated the effectiveness of life skills education among secondary school students in the Maldives using a mixed-method research design. The study involved 450 students selected through stratified random sampling. Data were collected using questionnaires, focus group discussions, and classroom observations. The findings indicated that life skills

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programmes significantly improved students' communication abilities, emotional regulation, critical thinking, decision-making, and interpersonal relationships. Students also demonstrated increased self-confidence and greater participation in school leadership activities. The empirical literature supports the relevance of life skills education to adolescent psychosocial development, although findings should be interpreted in light of differences in programme design and research quality. Nasheeda et al. (2019), in a systematic narrative review, identified life skills education as an important area for adolescent development and highlighted the need for stronger evaluation and more consistent research. Botvin and Griffin (2014) also describe life skills training as an approach intended to strengthen personal and social competence and prevent substance misuse. Evidence from north-eastern Nigeria underscores the need to consider students' psychosocial context when planning school-based support. UNICEF Nigeria's (2019) rapid needs assessment documented substantial psychosocial distress among children affected by conflict in the region, including anxiety-related concerns, irritability, sleep difficulties, withdrawal and problems with concentration. This report establishes a contextual need for appropriate psychosocial support; it should not be interpreted as an evaluation proving that a particular life skills counselling programme improved outcomes. The present study therefore addresses a local evidence gap by examining the association between life skills counselling and youth empowerment among secondary school students in Maiduguri Metropolis. Its correlational findings can indicate whether the measured variables are related, but they cannot by themselves establish that counselling caused changes in empowerment.

Statement of the Problem

The development of young people into responsible, productive, and self-reliant citizens remains a major objective of secondary education in Nigeria. Beyond academic achievement, schools are expected to equip students with the psychosocial competencies, decision-making abilities, interpersonal skills, and resilience required to cope with the complexities of modern society. However, despite the recognized importance of life skills counselling, many secondary school students continue to experience challenges that undermine their personal and social development. In recent years, adolescents in Nigerian secondary schools have been confronted with numerous developmental challenges, including poor decision-making, low self-esteem, peer pressure, substance abuse, examination malpractice, violence, bullying, emotional instability, unemployment anxiety, and poor career planning. These challenges are more pronounced in conflict-affected areas such as Maiduguri Metropolis, Borno State, where prolonged insurgency has exposed many students to trauma, displacement, poverty, family disruption, loss of educational opportunities, and psychological distress. Such experiences may weaken students' confidence, resilience, leadership abilities, interpersonal relationships, and capacity to make informed life choices, thereby limiting their overall empowerment. Several empirical studies have examined guidance and counselling services in relation to academic achievement, career choice, behavioural adjustment, mental health, and students' attitudes. However, there is a paucity of empirical studies that specifically investigate the relationship between life skills counselling and youth empowerment among secondary school students, particularly within the unique socio-economic and post-conflict context of Maiduguri Metropolis. This represents a significant gap in the literature. Furthermore, despite government policies advocating the integration of guidance and counselling services into the educational system, there is limited empirical evidence on the extent to which life skills counselling contributes to empowering secondary school students in Maiduguri Metropolis. It is against this background that this study seeks to investigate the relationship between life skills counselling and youth empowerment among secondary school students in Maiduguri Metropolis, Borno State.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are to determine the:

1. level of life skills counselling received by secondary school students in Maiduguri Metropolis.
2. level of youth empowerment among secondary school students in Maiduguri Metropolis.
3. relationship between life skills counselling and youth empowerment among secondary school students in Maiduguri Metropolis.
4. influence of decision-making skills counselling on youth empowerment among secondary school students in Maiduguri Metropolis.

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5. influence of communication and interpersonal relationship skills counselling on youth empowerment among secondary school students in Maiduguri Metropolis.

Research Questions

The following research question guided the study:

1. what is the level of life skills counselling received by secondary school students in Maiduguri Metropolis?
2. What is the level of youth empowerment among secondary school students in Maiduguri Metropolis?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses was tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between decision-making skills counselling and youth empowerment among secondary school students in Maiduguri Metropolis.

H_{02}: There is no significant relationship between Communication skills counselling and youth empowerment among secondary school students in Maiduguri Metropolis.

H_{03}: there is no significant relationship between life skills counselling and youth empowerment among secondary school students in Maiduguri Metropolis.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. A descriptive survey design is appropriate because it enables the researcher to collect data from a representative sample of respondents and describe existing conditions regarding the influence of life skills counselling on youth empowerment among secondary school students without manipulating any variables. Creswell and Creswell (2023) describe survey research as a quantitative approach for collecting data from a sample to describe trends, attitudes or opinions in a population. The design is considered appropriate for this study because it enables the researchers to examine the influence of the independent variable (life skills counselling) on the dependent variable (youth empowerment) among secondary school students in Maiduguri Metropolis.

Population and Sample Size of the Study

The target population for this study comprises all Senior Secondary School II (SS II) students enrolled in public secondary schools in Maiduguri Metropolis during the 2026/2027 academic session. According to records obtained from the Borno State Ministry of Education, there are approximately 8,540 SS II students distributed across 32 public secondary schools in Maiduguri Metropolitan Council (MMC) and Jere Local Government Area. SS II students are selected because they are developmentally mature, have had sufficient exposure to school guidance and counselling services, and are actively making academic and career decisions. The sample size for the study was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) Sample Size Determination Table. Given a population of approximately 8,540 students, a minimum sample size of 367 respondents is adequate. To improve representativeness and account for possible non-response or incomplete questionnaires, the researcher increased the sample size to 400 students. A multistage sampling technique was employed. Stage One: Selection of Local Government Areas. Stage Two: Selection of Schools: Simple random sampling using the ballot method was employed to select 10 public secondary schools from the list of eligible schools within the metropolis. Proportionate sampling was used to allocate the number of respondents to each selected school based on student population. Finally, simple random sampling was used to select the required number of SS II students from each school.

Instrument for Data Collection

Data was collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire titled: Life Skills Counselling and Youth Empowerment Questionnaire (LSCYEQ). The questionnaire consisted of two sections. Section A obtained respondents' demographic information, including: Gender, Age, School and Class. Section B was measured the major variables of the study. The questionnaire contained 40 items. Responses will be measured on a four-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2 and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1. The instrument undergone face and content validation. One expert in Educational Psychology, and Measurement and Evaluation, all from University of Maiduguri. A pilot study was conducted using 40 SS II students from a public secondary school outside the selected sample but with similar characteristics. The collected data was analysed using Cronbach's Alpha to determine the internal consistency of the instrument. A reliability coefficient of 0.87 was obtained.

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Method of Data Analysis

Data collected was coded, entered, cleaned, and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 29 (or a comparable current version). Descriptive statistics, including: frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, was used to answer the research questions. Inferential statistics was used to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. The analyses include: Test H01–H03 using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC).

Presentation of Results

Research questions one: what is the level of life skills counselling received by secondary school students in Maiduguri Metropolis?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation distribution of the participants' responses on the level of life skills counselling received by secondary school students in Maiduguri Metropolis.

S/N	Statement	N	Mean	Std.D
1	Life skills counselling helps me make informed decisions.	400	1.07	.282
2	Counselling improves my ability to evaluate alternatives before acting.	400	3.27	.892
3	I can make better academic decisions because of counselling.	400	3.01	.778
4	Counselling has improved my confidence in making choices.	400	3.08	.765

Table the means ranged from 1.07 to 3.27. The statement that counselling improves students' ability to evaluate alternatives before acting recorded the highest mean of 3.27 with a standard deviation of 0.892. This indicates that students generally agreed that counselling had enhanced their ability to consider different alternatives before making decisions. The item "Counselling has improved my confidence in making choices" recorded a mean of 3.08 and standard deviation of 0.765. This suggests that counselling contributed positively to students' confidence in making choices. The statement "I can make better academic decisions because of counselling" obtained a mean of 3.01 and standard deviation of 0.778. This indicates general agreement that counselling assists students in making better academic decisions. It suggests that life skills counselling may have practical relevance to students' academic planning and adjustment.

Research questions two: What is the level of the youth empowerment among secondary school students in Maiduguri Metropolis?

Table 2: Mean and Standard deviation distribution of the participants' responses on the youth empowerment among secondary school students in Maiduguri Metropolis.

S/N	Statement	N	Mean	Std.D
1	I understand my goals and aspirations better.	400	3.05	.949
2	I feel capable of achieving my goals.	400	3.11	.877
3	I possess leadership skills needed for societal development.	400	3.47	.929
4	I actively participate in community and campus activities.	400	2.79	.688
5	I can independently make important life decisions.	400	3.04	.791
6	I am confident in my ability to overcome challenges.	400	2.69	1.082
7	I possess skills necessary for future employment.	400	3.33	.783
8	I feel empowered to contribute positively to society.	400	2.90	.804
9	I can effectively manage my personal and academic life.	400	3.01	.859

Table two indicates the highest mean was obtained for the statement "I possess leadership skills needed for societal development" (M = 3.47, SD = 0.929). This indicates a high level of perceived leadership competence among the students. The item "I possess skills necessary for future employment" recorded a mean of 3.33 (SD = 0.783), indicating that students generally perceived themselves as having relevant skills for future employment. Students also reported that they felt capable of achieving their goals (M = 3.11, SD = 0.877) and understood their goals and aspirations better (M = 3.05, SD = 0.949). These results suggest positive levels of goal orientation and self-efficacy. The mean of 3.04 for the ability to independently make important life decisions also indicates a generally favourable perception of personal autonomy. Similarly, students reported that they could effectively manage their personal and academic lives (M = 3.01, SD = 0.859). However, confidence in the ability to overcome challenges had the lowest mean (M = 2.69, SD = 1.082), followed by active participation in community and campus activities (M = 2.79, SD = 0.688). These results suggest that, although students

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generally perceive themselves as empowered, resilience in overcoming challenges and active participation may require additional attention.

H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between decision-making skills counselling and youth empowerment among secondary school students in Maiduguri Metropolis.

Table 3: Result of Persons Product Moment Correlation on the relationship between decision-making skills counselling and youth empowerment among secondary school students in Maiduguri Metropolis.

Variable	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	DF	R	P-Value
Youth empowerment	400	24.22	3.93	1		
					.531	.000
Decision-making skills counselling	400	12.22	2.29	400		

The result in Table 3 revealed a positive and statistically significant relationship between decision-making skills counselling and youth empowerment. The correlation coefficient was r = .531 with p = .000, based on 216 respondents. Since p < .05, the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant relationship between decision-making skills counselling and youth empowerment is rejected. The positive coefficient indicates that higher levels of decision-making skills counselling are associated with higher levels of youth empowerment. The magnitude of r = .531 represents a moderate-to-strong positive relationship. Thus, students who receive greater decision-making counselling tend to report greater empowerment.

H_{02}: Communication skills counselling has no significant relationship between communication skills and youth empowerment among secondary school students in Maiduguri Metropolis.

Table 4: Result of Persons Product Moment Correlation on the relationship between and Communication skills counselling on youth empowerment among secondary school students in Maiduguri Metropolis.

Variable	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	DF	R	P-Value
Youth Empowerment	400	24.22	3.93	1		
					.679	.000
Communication skills counselling	400	11.73	1.90	400		

Table 4 shows a positive and statistically significant relationship between communication skills counselling and youth empowerment (r = .679, p = .000). Because p < .05, the null hypothesis is rejected. The result demonstrates that communication skills counselling is significantly associated with youth empowerment. The coefficient of .679 indicates a relatively strong positive relationship. This suggests that communication skills counselling may be particularly important in enhancing students' confidence, interpersonal competence, participation, leadership and perceived ability to contribute to society.

H_{03}: There is no significant relationship between life skills counselling and youth empowerment among secondary school students in Maiduguri Metropolis.

Table 5: Result of Persons Product Moment Correlation on the relationship between and Life skills counselling on youth empowerment among secondary school students in Maiduguri Metropolis.

Variable	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	DF	R	P-Value
Youth empowerment	400	24.22	3.93	1		
					.547	.000
Life Skills counselling	400	11.90	2.30	400		

Table 5 indicates a statistically significant positive relationship between overall life skills counselling and youth empowerment, with r = .547 and p = .000. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected. The finding means that higher levels of life skills counselling are significantly associated with higher levels of youth empowerment among secondary school students. The correlation coefficient of .547 represents a moderate-to-strong positive relationship. This provides empirical support for the central proposition of the study that life skills counselling is related to youth empowerment.

Discussion of Findings

The finding that students generally reported favourable exposure to life skills counselling suggests that counselling services are contributing to students' development of important psychosocial competencies. This finding is consistent with the position of the World Health Organization that life skills enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and

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challenges of everyday life. It also agrees with Nasheeda et al. (2019), who reported improvements in decision-making, communication, emotional regulation and interpersonal relationships following life skills education. The finding that students reported improved confidence in making choices is particularly important for youth empowerment. Confidence is closely associated with self-efficacy and personal agency. Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory explains that successful learning experiences can strengthen individuals' beliefs in their ability to perform tasks and overcome challenges. Therefore, counselling that provides students with opportunities to analyse problems, consider alternatives and practise responsible decision-making can contribute to stronger perceptions of competence and control. The finding that youth empowerment was generally high is also noteworthy. Students reported particularly high levels of leadership competence and possession of skills necessary for future employment. This finding is consistent with the conceptualisation of youth empowerment as a multidimensional process involving competence, confidence, leadership, participation and perceived control. Zimmerman (2000) argues that empowered individuals develop psychological competence, critical awareness and active participation. Similarly, Jennings et al. (2006) emphasise supportive environments that enable young people to develop leadership, critical awareness and self-efficacy. This is particularly relevant within the conflict-affected context described in the study, where students may have experienced significant social and educational disruption. The finding is consistent with UNICEF Nigeria (2019) and the UNICEF Nigeria (2019), which reported the importance of psychosocial and life skills interventions for resilience, emotional regulation and social participation among conflict-affected adolescents. The significant positive relationship between decision-making skills counselling and youth empowerment ($r = .531$, $p < .001$) indicates that students who receive stronger decision-making counselling tend to demonstrate higher levels of empowerment. This finding supports Nasheeda et al. (2019), who found a significant positive relationship between decision-making competence and career preparedness among secondary school students. It also agrees with Botvin and Griffin (2014), who reported that decision-making counselling improved responsible decision-making and students' independence. The significant positive relationship between communication skills counselling and youth empowerment ($r = .679$, $p < .001$) was the strongest relationship identified in the study. This finding suggests that communication competence is a particularly important component of youth empowerment. Effective communication enables students to express ideas, negotiate, seek assistance, build interpersonal relationships, resolve conflicts and participate in leadership activities. The finding supports Hargie (2021), who reported that communication competence significantly predicted leadership development among secondary school students. The significant positive relationship between overall life skills counselling and youth empowerment ($r = .547$, $p < .001$) provides direct support for the central proposition of the study. The result suggests that life skills counselling is an important psychosocial resource for developing empowered young people. The finding is consistent with the Life Skills Theory, which proposes that psychosocial competencies such as decision-making, problem-solving, communication, interpersonal relationships, emotional regulation and stress management enable individuals to cope effectively with life's challenges. The finding also supports the Positive Youth Development perspective, which emphasises competence, confidence, connection, character and caring as important dimensions of healthy adolescent development. School-based counselling provides an institutional context in which these competencies can be intentionally developed.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. School authorities should strengthen life skills counselling programmes by integrating structured sessions on decision-making, communication, problem-solving, emotional regulation, interpersonal relationships and stress management into the secondary school guidance and counselling programme.
2. The Borno State Ministry of Education should ensure that public secondary schools have adequate numbers of professionally trained guidance counsellors to provide regular individual, group and classroom-based life skills counselling.
3. Counselling programmes should give particular attention to decision-making skills because the study established a significant positive relationship between decision-making counselling and youth empowerment.

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4. Communication skills training should be given priority because communication counselling recorded the strongest relationship with youth empowerment. Counsellors should employ role-play, group discussion, debates, peer mentoring, public-speaking exercises and conflict-resolution activities.
5. Schools should develop resilience-building programmes that help students strengthen their confidence in overcoming personal, academic and social challenges in Maiduguri Metropolis.
6. Schools should create opportunities for students to practise leadership and civic participation through student clubs, peer counselling, community service, entrepreneurship activities and school leadership programmes.

Conclusion

The study concludes that life skills counselling is significantly and positively related to youth empowerment among secondary school students in Maiduguri Metropolis, Borno State. Students generally reported favourable experiences of counselling, particularly in relation to evaluating alternatives, making academic decisions and developing confidence in making choices. The students also demonstrated generally positive levels of youth empowerment, especially in leadership competence, employment-related skills, goal attainment and independent decision-making. The study further established significant positive relationships between decision-making skills counselling and youth empowerment, communication skills counselling and youth empowerment, and overall life skills counselling and youth empowerment. These findings indicate that life skills counselling constitutes an important developmental component of secondary education. It can provide students with psychosocial competencies that support personal agency, leadership, communication, responsible decision-making and preparation for future employment.

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