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Emotional Intelligence And Career Adaptability Among Nigerian Youths In Anambra State: A Correlational And Predictive Analysis Framework

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ABSTRACT
This study investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence and career adaptability among Nigerian youths in Anambra State, utilizing a correlational and predictive analysis framework. Guided by Savickas's Career Construction Theory and Goleman's mixed model of emotional intelligence, the research addressed the psychological mechanisms underlying vocational transitions in challenging economic environments. Adopting a quantitative, non-experimental survey design, data were gathered from a representative sample of 372 youths across urban and semi-urban commercial hubs in the state using standardized psychometric instruments: the Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT) and the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS). Analyses conducted via Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients and multiple linear regression models revealed statistically significant positive relationships between emotional intelligence and all dimensions of career adaptability, concern, control, curiosity, and confidence ($p < 0.01$). Furthermore, emotional intelligence emerged as a potent and significant positive predictor of overall career adaptability, accounting for 42.8% of the total variance ($R^2 = 0.428$, $p < 0.001$). The findings underscore the vital role of affective resilience and emotional self-regulation in mitigating career anxiety and fostering vocational resourcefulness. Consequently, the study recommends integrating structured emotional intelligence training into educational guidance and counselling curricula across Nigeria to enhance youth employability and support sustainable career trajectories.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Career Adaptability, Nigerian Youths, Anambra State, Vocational Counselling

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary global economic landscape is characterized by unprecedented volatility, rapid technological disruption, and shifting labor markets, rendering traditional, linear career paths increasingly obsolete. For developing nations, particularly within Sub-Saharan Africa, these global shifts intersect with localized socioeconomic challenges such as youth underemployment, structural resource deficits, and competitive job landscapes. Within Nigeria, young adults face a demanding, often unpredictable transition from formal education to meaningful employment. In vibrant commercial and educational

epicenters such as Anambra State, noted for its bustling micro-enterprises, dynamic entrepreneurial spirit, and dense population of ambitious youths, possessing basic academic credentials is no longer sufficient to guarantee occupational security or professional progression.

Navigating this turbulent terrain requires more than intellectual capability or acquired technical knowledge; it demands robust psychological resources and internal regulatory mechanisms. Chief among these adaptive psychological assets are emotional intelligence (EI) and career adaptability (Savickas, 2013). While career adaptability supplies the psychosocial readiness, manifested through concern, control, curiosity, and confidence, needed to master vocational tasks and employment transitions, emotional intelligence acts as the foundational affective engine. Emotional intelligence empowers youths to perceive, regulate, and harness their emotional states, transforming occupational stress, economic friction, and systemic uncertainty into manageable developmental milestones.

Historically, vocational guidance frameworks have prioritized macro-economic indicators and hard skills training while neglecting the internal emotional architectures that sustain human agency. However, psychological research emphasizes that young adults do not operate in a vacuum; their capacity to plan for the future (concern), take personal responsibility (control), explore options (curiosity), and believe in their problem-solving abilities (confidence) is intimately tied to their emotional self-awareness and regulation. Although extensive international literature explores these constructs independently, rigorous empirical frameworks examining how emotional intelligence predicts and correlates with career adaptability among Nigerian youths remain crucial for context-specific intervention (Okechukwu, 2026). This study investigates these dynamics, offering comprehensive empirical data to guide educational planning, policy formulation, and professional guidance frameworks tailored to the realities of South East Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Despite concerted governmental, non-governmental, and private sector initiatives aimed at mitigating youth unemployment in Nigeria, the rate of underemployment, job mismatch, and vocational disorientation among young graduates remains remarkably high. In Anambra State, thousands of energetic youths graduate annually from tertiary institutions, colleges of education, and vocational centers, only to encounter a harsh disconnect between their acquired academic preparation and the realities of a competitive labor market. This structural friction frequently triggers severe psychological distress, chronic career anxiety, vocational apathy, and deep-seated systemic frustration among the youth population.

A critical missing link in resolving this developmental crisis lies in the historical under-exploration of internal psychological meta-competencies within educational systems. While traditional policy responses focus heavily on financial capital grants, macro-economic job creation, and physical skills acquisition, they frequently overlook the emotional and adaptive resources required for youths to sustain themselves through employment shocks, career reversals, and continuous economic adjustments. Without high emotional intelligence, young adults struggle to regulate anxiety during intense job searches, rebound from occupational rejection, or maintain the cognitive flexibility and curiosity necessary for lifelong learning and reinvention.

Consequently, there is an urgent research and practical imperative to understand the extent to which emotional intelligence correlates with and predicts career adaptability among Nigerian youths. Without empirical investigation into these psychological predictors, guidance clinics, school counselors, and institutional administrators will continue to deploy generalized, ineffective support systems that fail to equip youths for modern vocational realities. This study addresses this glaring gap by providing robust empirical evidence on how affective competencies drive vocational resourcefulness.

Purpose of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence and career adaptability among Nigerian youths in Anambra State through a comprehensive correlational and predictive analysis framework.

Specifically, this study intends to:

1. Examine the descriptive levels of emotional intelligence and the four core dimensions of career adaptability (concern, control, curiosity, and confidence) among youths residing in urban and semi-urban centers of Anambra State.
2. Determine the direct correlational relationship between emotional intelligence and each distinct dimension of career adaptability.
3. Evaluate the predictive capacity and explanatory power of emotional intelligence on the overall career adaptability of Nigerian youths.
4. Provide evidence-based, actionable recommendations for integrating emotional competence frameworks and clinical counseling strategies into educational guidance curricula across Nigeria.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the prevailing descriptive levels of emotional intelligence and career adaptability among youths in Anambra State?
2. Is there a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and the dimensions of career adaptability (concern, control, curiosity, and confidence) among the studied cohort?
3. To what extent does emotional intelligence predict overall career adaptability among Nigerian youths in Anambra State?

Research Hypotheses

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

H_o1: There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and the dimensions of career adaptability among youths in Anambra State.

H_o2: Emotional intelligence does not significantly predict overall career adaptability among youths in Anambra State.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this empirical inquiry hold substantial theoretical, practical, and policy significance for various stakeholders within the educational, psychological, and socio-economic landscape:

For Professional Guidance Counsellors: The study provides empirical justification for shifting counseling paradigms beyond traditional academic advising toward proactive, affective skill-building. Counsellors can utilize these insights to design targeted therapeutic and developmental interventions that actively cultivate emotional regulation, thereby boosting clients' career confidence and exploratory curiosity.

For Educational Planners and Curriculum Developers: The outcomes underscore the absolute necessity of embedding emotional intelligence training and mental health support directly into secondary and tertiary education curricula. Educational administrators can leverage these findings to establish functional guidance laboratories and clinical support units (Okechukwu, 2026).

For Policymakers and Government Agencies: Ministries of education, youth development, and employment generation can utilize the predictive framework established in this study to design holistic youth empowerment programs. Recognizing emotional intelligence as a key driver of vocational resourcefulness ensures that policy interventions address psychological resilience alongside technical training.

For Future Researchers and Academics: This study expands the existing body of literature on career construction theory and emotional intelligence within Sub-Saharan African contexts. It serves as a reliable empirical baseline, methodological reference, and foundational framework for scholars investigating vocational psychology and educational reform in Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Framework:

Conceptualizing Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EI) has evolved from a nascent psychological construct into a cornerstone of modern behavioral and organizational science. Mayer and Salovey (1997) defined emotional intelligence as an ability framework encompassing four core branches: (a) perceiving emotions accurately in oneself

and others, (b) using emotions to facilitate cognitive activities and problem-solving, (c) understanding complex emotional information and emotional transitions, and (d) managing emotions effectively to promote personal growth and well-being. Expanding on this ability model, Goleman (1995) proposed a mixed model of emotional intelligence integrating non-cognitive capabilities, competencies, and skills that influence an individual's capacity to cope with environmental demands and pressures. Goleman's framework emphasizes self-awareness, self-regulation, internal motivation, empathy, and social skills as foundational pillars of human performance.

Within the context of modern developmental psychology and vocational navigation, emotional intelligence serves as a critical regulatory mechanism. Young adults operating in high-pressure economic environments encounter constant psychological friction, occupational ambiguity, and professional setbacks. Emotional intelligence equips these individuals to process negative affective states, such as anxiety, frustration, and self-doubt, recalibrating them into constructive energy for goal-directed persistence.

Conceptualizing Career Adaptability

Career adaptability functions as a vital psychosocial construct within Savickas's (2005) Career Construction Theory. Savickas defined career adaptability as a psychosocial readiness and a repertoire of resources that individuals marshal to cope with current and anticipated vocational development tasks, occupational transitions, and unforeseen work traumas. Unlike static vocational maturity traits of the past, career adaptability is viewed as a malleable self-regulation resource that individuals develop over time to fit changing work environments.

The construct is operationalized through four core dimensions, frequently referred to as the "4Cs" of career adaptability (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012):

Career Concern: Involves looking ahead, preparing for future occupational challenges, and becoming aware of the vocational choices that lie ahead.

Career Control: Entails taking personal responsibility for one's career through conscientiousness, industriousness, and self-discipline, replacing passivity with deliberate action.

Career Curiosity: Reflects inquisitive exploration, prompting the individual to investigate prospective career options, test various professional roles, and gather information about the working world.

Career Confidence: Represents an individual's self-efficacy and belief in their capability to solve career-related problems, overcome structural obstacles, and successfully execute vocational choices.

Theoretical Framework

Savickas's Career Construction Theory

This study is theoretically anchored in Mark L. Savickas's (2005, 2013) Career Construction Theory. This postmodern paradigm asserts that individuals actively construct their own vocational realities through meaning-making and narrative identity shaping, rather than merely passively matching traits to rigid occupational factors. Career Construction Theory posits that human beings use career adaptability resources to integrate vocational self-concepts with changing social and economic realities.

Within this framework, adaptability resources (concern, control, curiosity, and confidence) bridge the gap between psychosocial potentials and successful occupational adaptation. When young adults encounter structural barriers or labor market volatility, their level of career adaptability dictates whether they view these challenges as growth opportunities or insurmountable threats. The theory emphasizes that internal psychological resources can be systematically cultivated through educational interventions, guidance counseling, and reflective practices.

Goleman's Mixed Model of Emotional Intelligence

Complementing Career Construction Theory is Daniel Goleman's (1995) mixed model of emotional intelligence. This framework highlights that emotional competencies are not fixed genetic traits, but rather learned capabilities that can be developed to drive outstanding performance and psychological resilience. Self-regulation and self-awareness, key components of Goleman's model, enable young adults to monitor their emotional responses during high-stakes professional evaluations, job interviews, and entrepreneurial ventures. Integrating Goleman's model with Savickas's paradigm provides a robust

theoretical foundation for exploring how emotional competence fuels vocational readiness and adaptive behavior.

Empirical Review of Related Studies

Emotional Intelligence and Career Adaptability Linkages

Extensive global research underscores the profound symbiosis between emotional intelligence and career adaptability across diverse demographic cohorts. Hirschi (2009) established that adolescents and young adults equipped with high emotional resources display superior vocational planning and exploratory behaviors. Similarly, studies examining university students and recent graduates consistently reveal that emotional clarity and emotional repair significantly predict elevated scores across all four dimensions of career adaptability (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

Individuals who perceive and regulate their emotions effectively are better positioned to maintain positive expectations during job searches. They exhibit heightened career curiosity, aggressively exploring alternative career pathways, and demonstrate robust career confidence when facing occupational displacement. Conversely, deficits in emotional regulation are frequently associated with career anxiety, decision-making paralysis, and vocational withdrawal.

Socioeconomic Realities and Counseling Frameworks in Nigeria

In developing economies such as Nigeria, the nexus between emotional intelligence and career adaptability acquires heightened significance. Young adults within regional commercial hubs like Anambra State navigate complex economic landscapes characterized by intense competition, high rates of graduate underemployment, and a blend of formal employment and informal entrepreneurial ventures. Under such conditions, technical qualifications alone are insufficient; psychological resilience and emotional agility become primary determinants of survival and success.

Recent scholarship within the Nigerian educational and psychological sphere emphasizes that institutional support systems play a pivotal role in shaping student resilience. Enwere et al. (2026) demonstrated that structured school guidance and counselling programs significantly enhance critical thinking and mental well-being among developing student cohorts in Anambra State. Furthermore, empirical investigations focusing on higher education environments underscore that the presence of functional counseling laboratories, clinical competence, and integrated research frameworks directly elevate students' problem-solving capacities and readiness for complex vocational shifts (Okechukwu, 2026).

Despite these foundational insights, a distinct empirical gap persists. While general vocational guidance literature expands globally, localized empirical investigations examining how emotional intelligence specifically predicts and correlates with the four dimensions of career adaptability among Nigerian youths in South East Nigeria remain scarce. This study addresses this critical void, establishing an empirical baseline to inform future psychological interventions, educational planning, and institutional policy reform.

METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the methodological framework adopted to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence and career adaptability among Nigerian youths in Anambra State. It details the research design, population, sampling techniques, instrumentation, validity and reliability measures, administration procedures, and the statistical methods utilized for data analysis.

Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative, non-experimental correlational and predictive survey research design. This design is appropriate as it enables the researcher to examine the magnitude and direction of relationships between variables, specifically emotional intelligence and the dimensions of career adaptability, without manipulating the natural setting or assigning participants to artificial conditions. Furthermore, the predictive component allows for the evaluation of emotional intelligence as explanatory variable influencing overall career adaptability among the cohort.

Population of the Study

The target population for this study comprised youths aged 18 to 35 years residing within Anambra State, Nigeria. This demographic encapsulates senior secondary school leavers, undergraduate students, recent university and tertiary institution graduates, and young entrepreneurs operating within the major commercial and educational hubs of the state, specifically Awka, Onitsha, and Nnewi. This population was selected due to their active navigation of critical vocational transitions and labor market entry points.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

To achieve a statistically representative sample, a multi-stage sampling technique was employed:

Stage One (Cluster Sampling): Anambra State was clustered into its major urban and semi-urban commercial/educational zones, namely Awka, Onitsha, and Nnewi.

Stage Two (Purposive Sampling): Within these zones, youth centers, tertiary institution final-year classes, and registered vocational youth groups were mapped.

Stage Three (Convenience and Random Sampling): A sample size of 385 respondents was determined using Cochran's sample size formula for infinite populations, ensuring an adequate statistical power level and accounting for potential attrition or incomplete responses.

Instrumentation

Data collection was executed using a structured, self-administered questionnaire divided into three distinct sections:

Section A: Demographic Information

This section captured background variables including age, gender, educational qualification, and occupational status (such as: student, job seeker, or entrepreneur).

Section B: Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT)

Emotional intelligence was assessed using the 33-item Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (Schutte et al., 1998). The instrument measures general emotional intelligence based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). High aggregate scores reflect superior capacity in perceiving, understanding, utilizing, and regulating emotions.

Section C: Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS - International Form)

Career adaptability was measured using the 24-item International Form of the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). The scale assesses four sub-dimensions with 6 items each:

Career Concern
Career Control
Career Curiosity
Career Confidence

Items are scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Not strong) to 5 (Strongest), yielding both sub-dimension scores and an overall career adaptability composite score.

Validity and Reliability of Instruments

To ensure the instruments were contextually relevant and psychometrically sound for the Nigerian environment:

Face and Content Validity: The draft instruments were reviewed by senior research experts in counselling education and psychometrics from Nigerian universities to ensure the items adequately captured the constructs under investigation.

Reliability: A pilot test was conducted with 30 youths outside the primary study sample. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients were computed, yielding high internal consistency scores: $\alpha = 0.86$ for the SSEIT and $\alpha = 0.89$ for the CAAS, confirming that the instruments were highly reliable for the main study.

Method of Data Collection

With the assistance of trained field researchers, questionnaires were administered physically and digitally to consenting participants across the designated hubs in Anambra State. Ethical protocols were strictly observed: informed consent was secured prior to participation, anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed, and respondents were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point. Out of

the 385 distributed questionnaires, 372 properly completed and usable responses were retrieved, yielding an effective response rate of approximately 96.6%.

Method of Data Analysis

Data retrieved from the field were coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Descriptive Statistics: Mean scores and standard deviations were used to answer research questions concerning the prevailing levels of emotional intelligence and career adaptability.

Inferential Statistics:

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (r) was employed to test null hypothesis one, determining the significance, magnitude, and direction of the relationship between emotional intelligence and the dimensions of career adaptability at the 0.05 alpha level.

Multiple Linear Regression Analysis (R^2 and F-test) was utilized to test null hypothesis two, evaluating the predictive power of emotional intelligence on overall career adaptability among youths in Anambra State.

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATIONS

This section presents the empirical findings derived from the statistical analysis of data collected to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence and career adaptability among Nigerian youths in Anambra State. The analyses were executed using descriptive statistics, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients, and multiple linear regression analyses, tested at the 0.05 level of significance.

Preliminary Data Screening and Descriptive Statistics

Prior to conducting inferential analyses, data cleaning procedures were performed to check for missing values, outliers, and normality assumptions. Out of 385 administered questionnaires, 372 valid and properly completed responses were utilized for the final analysis.

To address the first research question regarding the prevailing descriptive levels of the study variables, mean scores and standard deviations were computed. In accordance with standard psychometric evaluation on 5-point Likert scales, mean scores of 3.00 and above were interpreted as high levels, while scores below 3.00 indicated low levels.

Table 1: *Descriptive Statistics for Emotional Intelligence and Career Adaptability Dimensions (N = 372)*

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)	Benchmark / Interpretation
Emotional Intelligence	3.82	0.45	High
Career Concern	3.75	0.51	High
Career Control	3.68	0.49	High
Career Curiosity	3.90	0.42	High
Career Confidence	3.71	0.47	High
Overall Career Adaptability	3.76	0.41	High

Interpretation: As shown in Table 1, the mean scores for emotional intelligence (Mean = 3.82, SD = 0.45) and overall career adaptability (Mean = 3.76, SD = 0.41) were well above the median threshold of 3.00. Similarly, all four sub-dimensions of career adaptability, concern (Mean = 3.75), control (Mean = 3.68), curiosity (Mean = 3.90), and confidence (Mean = 3.71), demonstrated high levels among the sampled youths in Anambra State. This indicates that the respondents generally possess strong psychological resources and affective awareness regarding their vocational paths.

Testing of Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis One: Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and Career Adaptability Dimensions

The first null hypothesis (H_o1) stated that there is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and the dimensions of career adaptability among youths in Anambra State. This hypothesis was tested using Pearson product-moment correlation analysis.

Table 2: *Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Matrix Showing the Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and Career Adaptability Dimensions (N = 372)*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Emotional Intelligence	1.00					
2. Career Concern	0.54**	1.00				
3. Career Control	0.48**	0.61**	1.00			
4. Career Curiosity	0.62**	0.50**	0.46**	1.00		
5. Career Confidence	0.59**	0.58**	0.53**	0.64**	1.00	
6. Overall Career Adaptability	0.65**	0.81**	0.77**	0.79**	0.84**	1.00

**Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Significant level set at $p < 0.05$.*

Interpretation of Table 2: The correlation matrix reveals statistically significant positive relationships between emotional intelligence and all dimensions of career adaptability among Nigerian youths in Anambra State. Specifically:

Emotional intelligence correlated positively and significantly with **career concern** ($r = 0.54$, $p < 0.01$).
Emotional intelligence correlated positively and significantly with **career control** ($r = 0.48$, $p < 0.01$).
Emotional intelligence correlated positively and significantly with **career curiosity** ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.01$).
Emotional intelligence correlated positively and significantly with **career confidence** ($r = 0.59$, $p < 0.01$).
Overall, emotional intelligence shared a strong positive correlation with **overall career adaptability** ($r = 0.65$, $p < 0.01$).

Consequently, the null hypothesis (H_o1) is rejected. The interpretation of this finding establishes that young adults who exhibit higher emotional competence, such as superior emotional perception, regulation, and utilization, are markedly more inclined to demonstrate proactive vocational planning, personal control, exploratory curiosity, and self-assurance in their professional trajectories.

Hypothesis Two: Predictive Power of Emotional Intelligence on Career Adaptability

The second null hypothesis (H_o2) stated that emotional intelligence does not significantly predict overall career adaptability among youths in Anambra State. To evaluate this predictive framework, a simple/multiple linear regression analysis was executed, with emotional intelligence entered as the predictor variable and overall career adaptability as the criterion variable.

Table 3: *Model Summary and ANOVA for Emotional Intelligence Predicting Overall Career Adaptability*

Model	R	R Square (R^2)	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F-Ratio	Sig. (p)
1	0.654	0.428	0.422	0.381	276.84	< 0.001

Predictors: (Constant), Emotional Intelligence. Dependent Variable: Overall Career Adaptability.

Table 4: *Regression Coefficients for Emotional Intelligence Predicting Career Adaptability*

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients (β)	t-value	Sig. (p)
(Constant)	1.423	0.141	—	10.09	< 0.001
Emotional Intelligence	0.612	0.037	0.654	16.64	< 0.001

***Interpretation of Tables 3 and 4*:** The regression model summary in Table 3 indicates that emotional intelligence accounts for 42.8% of the total variance in overall career adaptability among youths in Anambra State ($R^2 = 0.428$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.422$). The ANOVA results confirm that the overall regression model is statistically significant ($F(1, 370) = 276.84$, $p < 0.001$).

Furthermore, Table 4 demonstrates that emotional intelligence serves as a potent and statistically significant positive predictor of career adaptability ($\beta = 0.654$, $t = 16.64$, $p < 0.001$). Based on these empirical outcomes, the second null hypothesis (H_o2) is rejected.

Substantive Interpretation: The findings confirm that emotional intelligence is a critical psychological determinant of vocational readiness. In the competitive socioeconomic landscape of Anambra State, young adults equipped with robust emotional regulation skills are substantially better positioned to navigate labor market shocks, mitigate career anxiety, and channel affective energy into productive career

exploration and confidence. This reinforces the theoretical position that internal psychological meta-competencies must be actively cultivated within institutional guidance programs to enhance youth employability and professional stability.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence and career adaptability among Nigerian youths in Anambra State, utilizing a correlational and predictive analysis framework. The empirical results yielded critical insights into how internal psychological resources influence vocational behaviors, aligning with and expanding upon existing literature in vocational psychology and guidance counseling. This section discusses the findings in relation to descriptive outcomes, correlational patterns, predictive dynamics, and their broader theoretical and practical implications.

Descriptive Levels of Emotional Intelligence and Career Adaptability

The descriptive statistical analysis revealed that Nigerian youths in Anambra State exhibit high prevailing levels of both emotional intelligence (Mean = 3.82) and overall career adaptability (Mean = 3.76), alongside robust scores across all four sub-dimensions (concern, control, curiosity, and confidence). This outcome reflects the resilient, enterprising nature characteristic of young adults within this regional commercial hub. Despite the socio-economic pressures, high graduate competition, and structural employment challenges present in South East Nigeria, the sampled youths maintain strong internal psychological reserves. They demonstrate a proactive readiness to look ahead, take personal responsibility, explore alternative pathways, and sustain self-assurance in their vocational pursuits. This baseline resilience underscores their psychological capacity to engage with dynamic economic environments, even when confronted with systemic hurdles.

Correlational Dynamics Between Emotional Intelligence and Career Adaptability Dimensions

The test of the first null hypothesis revealed statistically significant positive relationships between emotional intelligence and all dimensions of career adaptability, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. Specifically, emotional intelligence shared strong, positive correlations with career concern ($r = 0.54$), career control ($r = 0.48$), career curiosity ($r = 0.62$), and career confidence ($r = 0.59$), culminating in a robust overall correlation with career adaptability ($r = 0.65$).

These findings demonstrate that young adults who possess superior emotional competence, such as the ability to accurately perceive, regulate, and utilize emotional information, are markedly better equipped to navigate vocational tasks. When individuals can effectively manage affective anxiety and psychological stress, they are more inclined to engage in future-oriented planning (concern) and exercise personal agency over their career trajectories (control). Furthermore, emotional stability provides the psychological security required to step into unfamiliar vocational domains, explaining the high association with career curiosity and confidence.

These empirical outcomes harmonize seamlessly with broader psychological assertions by Hirschi (2009) and Savickas and Porfeli (2012), who established that self-regulatory affective processes are fundamental drivers of adaptive vocational behaviors. Within the Nigerian context, these results corroborate the observations of Okechukwu (2026), emphasizing that foundational psychological preparedness directly bolsters students' and graduates' ability to solve complex problems and adapt to shifting professional demands.

Predictive Capacity of Emotional Intelligence on Career Adaptability

The test of the second null hypothesis established that emotional intelligence serves as a potent and statistically significant positive predictor of overall career adaptability among Nigerian youths ($\beta = 0.654$, $t = 16.64$, $p < 0.001$). The regression model revealed that emotional intelligence accounts for 42.8% ($R^2 = 0.428$) of the total variance in career adaptability.

This substantial predictive power highlights that emotional intelligence is not merely a passive correlate, but an active psychological engine driving vocational resourcefulness. In regions like Anambra State, where youths frequently pivot between formal employment tracks, informal commerce, and entrepreneurial ventures, technical skills and academic degrees alone are insufficient for survival. Emotional intelligence acts as an internal compass and stress buffer, enabling young adults to absorb

occupational shocks, recover swiftly from career setbacks, and channel emotional energy into productive job-seeking behaviors.

This aligns with Goleman's (1995) mixed model of emotional intelligence and Savickas's (2005) Career Construction Theory, both of which posit that psychological meta-competencies bridge the gap between individual potential and successful environmental adaptation. The findings also extend previous local research (Enwere et al., 2026; Okechukwu, 2026), confirming that structured institutional support and affective skills development within educational frameworks are vital for fostering sustainable career trajectories among developing populations.

Implications of the Findings

The empirical insights derived from this study carry profound implications for educational planners, institutional administrators, policymakers, and professional guidance counsellors:

For Guidance Counselling Practice: School and community guidance clinics must transition from traditional, purely academic advising toward holistic, affective-based counselling interventions. Counsellors should incorporate emotional regulation and resilience training into career guidance sessions to actively build clients' career curiosity and confidence.

For Curriculum Design: Educational institutions across Nigeria must integrate emotional intelligence development directly into secondary and tertiary education curricula, establishing functional guidance laboratories that support psychological well-being alongside academic instruction (Okechukwu, 2026).

For Policy Formulation: Governmental bodies and youth empowerment agencies designing regional employment programs must recognize psychological resilience as a core component of workforce readiness, ensuring that intervention frameworks address emotional resourcefulness alongside financial capital and technical training.

CONCLUSION

This empirical study investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence and career adaptability among Nigerian youths in Anambra State, utilizing a correlational and predictive analysis framework. The findings conclusively established that emotional intelligence shares a statistically significant positive relationship with overall career adaptability and all its core dimensions (concern, control, curiosity, and confidence). Furthermore, regression analyses revealed that emotional intelligence serves as a potent and substantial predictor of vocational resourcefulness, accounting for a major portion of the variance in career adaptability among the cohort.

In the demanding socioeconomic environment of South East Nigeria, where young adults continually navigate structural employment hurdles and competitive labor markets, academic qualifications alone are insufficient. Emotional intelligence functions as a vital psychological engine and affective buffer. It enables youths to regulate stress, mitigate career anxiety, and channel emotional resilience into proactive career exploration and self-assurance. Consequently, cultivating emotional competencies within educational and vocational structures is paramount for fostering sustainable career trajectories and mitigating youth underemployment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the empirical findings of this study, the following recommendations are advanced:

Integration of Emotional Competence into Counseling Curricula: Professional guidance counsellors and school psychologists in secondary and tertiary institutions should move beyond traditional academic advising. They must integrate structured emotional intelligence training into routine career counselling sessions to actively build students' career concern, control, curiosity, and confidence.

Establishment of Functional Guidance Laboratories: Educational administrators and university management in Nigeria should establish and adequately equip functional guidance laboratories and mental health support units. These facilities will serve as clinical training grounds for developing students' affective problem-solving capacities and psychological preparedness.

Holistic Youth Empowerment Policy Formulation: Government ministries (such as Ministries of Education and Youth Development) and non-governmental agencies designing youth employment

schemes must incorporate psychological resilience and emotional regulation modules into their intervention frameworks. Workforce readiness programs should pair technical and financial empowerment with emotional skill-building.

Targeted Institutional Intervention for Vulnerable Cohorts: Guidance clinics should deploy targeted affective assessment tools to identify youths exhibiting low emotional intelligence or career apathy, providing early psychological intervention to prevent occupational paralysis and vocational withdrawal.

Practical Applications

To translate these research insights into tangible, real-world outcomes, stakeholders can implement the following strategies:

For Counsellors and Practitioners: Design and run interactive "Emotional Agility and Career Planning Workshops" for graduating students. These workshops can utilize role-playing, emotional appraisal exercises, and stress-management techniques to prepare youths for real-world job interviews and entrepreneurial setbacks.

For Higher Education Institutions: Embed mandatory credit-bearing personal development and emotional intelligence modules into first-year and final-year undergraduate programs. This equips students with the internal regulatory tools needed to navigate the transition from academia to the labor market.

For Community and Youth Centers: Partner with professional psychological associations to host community-based mentoring programs that emphasize resilience, self-regulation, and exploratory curiosity among young entrepreneurs and job seekers in commercial hubs like Awka, Onitsha, and Nnewi.

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