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**PSYCHO-SOCIAL COUNSELLING AND EDUCATIONAL RECOVERY FOR  
CHILDREN IN NIGERIA'S SECURITY-CHALLENGED ENVIRONMENTS IN THE  
SOUTH-EAST ZONE, NIGERIA**

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**ABSTRACT**

The study examined the role of psycho-social counselling in promoting educational recovery for children in Nigeria's security-challenged environments, with particular focus on private secondary schools in the South-East Zone of Nigeria. The population consisted of 12,200 teachers drawn from 2,284 approved private secondary schools across the 21 education zones in the South-Eastern States. A proportionate stratified random sampling technique was employed to select a sample of 1,220 teachers from 114 approved secondary schools, representing approximately 5% of schools and 10% of teachers in each state, thus ensuring adequate representation of the study area. Data were collected using a researcher-developed instrument titled Psycho-Social Counselling and Educational Recovery for Children in Nigeria's Security-Challenged Environments Questionnaire (PSCERCNSCEQ). The study was guided by two research purposes, two research questions, and two null hypotheses, which were tested at the 0.05 level of significance. Instrument reliability was established through a pilot study conducted outside the study area, using a two-week interval, which yielded a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.79, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. Data were analysed using simple linear regression to answer the research questions, while the t-test associated with regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses. The findings revealed that school counsellors' collaboration and psycho-social counselling each showed strong, positive, and statistically significant relationships with educational recovery, accounting for a

substantial proportion of variance in recovery outcomes. This indicates that structured psycho-social support and collaborative counselling practices play a critical role in enabling children to re-engage with schooling in insecurity-affected contexts. The study therefore concludes that psycho-social counselling interventions, particularly when implemented through structured collaboration among school counsellors, are central to educational recovery, addressing the academic, emotional, and social disruptions experienced by learners exposed to insecurity.

**KEYWORDS:** Educational recovery; Psycho-social counselling; School counsellors' collaboration; Security-challenged environments.

## Introduction

Psycho-social counselling and educational recovery constitute a critical foundation for the security, wellbeing and sustainable development of children, who are widely recognised as the major stakeholders in the security enterprise of any nation (Okujagu & Okujagu, 2015). Children are human beings in their early formative and developmental stages, a period characterised by rapid growth in language acquisition, cognitive functioning, motor coordination, social interaction, emotional regulation and perceptual development. This stage of life is particularly sensitive because experiences encountered during childhood often shape attitudes, behaviours and coping mechanisms that persist into adulthood. Consequently, children's experiences must be handled with deliberate care, sensitivity and professionalism to ensure balanced and wholesome development. Scholars such as Estes (2004) and Oduolowu and Olowe (2011) have observed that childhood is not only a remarkable phase of growth, development and stimulation, but also a period marked by extreme exposure and enormous potential. While children possess the capacity to learn, adapt and thrive, they are equally vulnerable to environmental stressors, especially those associated with insecurity, violence and instability. This reality underscores the need for adequate protection, emotional support and purposeful stimulation to enable children to realise their full developmental potential.

In the Nigerian context, especially in the South-Eastern Region, persistent and escalating security challenges have significantly disrupted social life and educational systems. These challenges have manifested in economic hardship, internal displacement, forced migration and refugee situations across several regions of the country. In all such circumstances, children remain the most affected segment of the population, as their access to quality education, healthcare, safety and emotional support is often severely compromised. As a result, children's rights to care, protection, support and development are routinely violated, thereby threatening their educational recovery and long-term psychosocial wellbeing. Hence, addressing these challenges requires a holistic understanding of security beyond the deployment of military hardware. Ajibade (2018) posited that effective security management begins with the acceptance that arms, ammunition and security personnel alone cannot produce the desired outcomes. Rather, the cultivation of the right attitudes, values, commitment and collective responsibility towards security plays a crucial role. This perspective aligns with Nigeria's evolving approach to security, which increasingly incorporates non-kinetic strategies such as counselling, community engagement and education.

In line with this approach, the Federal Government of Nigeria has implemented various security and peace-building initiatives involving schools, security agencies and the military. According to Okujagu (2020), such initiatives include Operation Crocodile Smile in the South-South region, Operation Python Dance in the South-East, Operation Lafiya Dole in the North-East and Operation Harbin Kunama in the North-West. These interventions reflect efforts to restore peace and stability, yet their effectiveness can be significantly enhanced when complemented with structured psycho-social counselling programmes targeted at children and adolescents affected by insecurity. Furthermore, the landmark address by Alli (1976) during the launching ceremony of the Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON), as well as the provisions of the National Policy on Education (1981), represent notable educational innovations aimed at supporting Nigerian children in distress. These policy frameworks emphasise guidance and counselling as essential components of the educational system. Although these initiatives have yielded commendable outcomes, the dynamic and complex nature of contemporary security challenges necessitates continuous strengthening of counselling services within the school system.

It has therefore become imperative to equip children with the psychosocial skills, resilience and adaptive capacities required for adulthood, particularly within a security-challenged environment such as the South-Eastern Region. This goal can be achieved through meaningful childhood education supported by comprehensive psycho-social counselling programmes. Such programmes should be anchored on three primary variables: adequate curriculum provisions that explicitly integrate counselling services, the availability of qualified teachers and professionally trained counsellors, and sufficient funding for child development and educational recovery programmes. Accordingly, worthwhile and appropriate learning experiences, activities and content related to security awareness, peace education and emotional wellbeing must be deliberately incorporated into the children's education curriculum. In addition, mechanisms for the regular upgrading of teachers' professional competencies should be institutionalised through continuous capacity-building programmes. This will enable teachers to effectively translate curriculum objectives into practical classroom experiences that promote care, support, protection and resilience in the face of security challenges within school environments.

The provision of functional guidance and counselling centres within schools is equally essential. Such centres should cater for both teachers and children by addressing academic, emotional, behavioural and security-related concerns. Through professional counselling support, schools can proactively mitigate security risks and foster a safe, supportive learning environment. Moreover, adequate financial investment has become indispensable for the establishment, maintenance and sustainability of children's educational facilities and programmes. This necessitates consistent and realistic annual budgetary allocations to children's education.

Conceptually, security has been defined in various ways. Usman and Mathew (2014) described security as efforts aimed at avoiding, reducing, preventing or resolving violence and conflict while promoting the absence of civil disorder, kidnapping, insurgency and other forms of criminality. Similarly, Adebakin (2012) and Ihedioha (2025) viewed security as a state of

freedom from threats or danger and a nation's capacity to protect itself, develop sustainably and enhance the wellbeing of its citizens. Nwagbaoso (2012) further emphasised that security entails safety from harm, the defence and preservation of national values and the absence of threats to such values. Taken together, these definitions suggest that security implies harmonious living in an environment devoid of violence, rancour, crime and conflict, as well as the preservation and transmission of cultural heritage from one generation to another. The absence of these conditions, according to Okujagu (2020), poses serious threats to societal stability. Factors such as poor governance, injustice, nepotism and widespread unemployment have been identified by Okereke (2012) as major contributors to insecurity in society. Exposing children to appropriate remedies through quality childhood education, sound curriculum practices and effective guidance and counselling services will therefore enable the nation to more effectively address and manage security challenges within its environment.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Nigeria's persistent security challenges have reached alarming proportions and now pose a grave threat to children's safety and educational recovery nationwide. Recent national and international reports indicate that between January 2023 and December 2025, no fewer than 816 pupils were abducted in at least 22 school-related attacks across Nigeria, highlighting the increasing vulnerability of educational institutions to insecurity (Save the Children, 2025). Furthermore, a national crime survey by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) revealed that between May 2023 and April 2024, over 2.2 million Nigerians were kidnapped, with children and adolescents accounting for a substantial proportion of victims, particularly in rural and conflict-affected communities (NBS, 2024). In addition, Nigeria currently hosts over 3.3 million internally displaced persons, more than 50% of whom are children under the age of 18, many of whom have experienced prolonged disruption to schooling due to armed conflict, banditry and insurgency (IDMC, 2024; IOM, 2024). These statistics underscore the scale and severity of insecurity in Nigeria and reveal its profound implications for children's psychosocial wellbeing and educational recovery in security-challenged environments.

The impact of these security challenges on children's education has been profound. Insecurity has disrupted schooling through displacement, fear, trauma, school closures and unstable learning environments, thereby frustrating efforts at educational recovery in security-challenged environments. Many children have been forced out of school due to violence, forced migration and economic hardship resulting from insecurity. Where schools continue to operate, learners are often exposed to anxiety, emotional distress and insecurity-induced trauma, which negatively affect concentration, attendance, academic achievement and retention. These conditions undermine the ability of children to fully benefit from educational opportunities and compromise their holistic development. Beyond the individual level, persistent insecurity has weakened public confidence in the education system, discouraged both local and foreign investment in education and dampened overall socio-economic development. Parents increasingly perceive schools as unsafe spaces, while teachers and school administrators struggle to function effectively in environments characterised by fear and uncertainty. Consequently, efforts aimed at rebuilding learning

outcomes and restoring educational continuity for children in security-challenged environments remain largely ineffective when adequate psycho-social support mechanisms are absent.

Although Nigeria has deployed military, paramilitary and law-enforcement strategies to address insecurity, these measures alone have proven insufficient in addressing the emotional, psychological and behavioural consequences of insecurity on children. The absence or inadequacy of structured psycho-social counselling services in schools limits children's capacity to cope with trauma, develop resilience and re-engage meaningfully with learning. Without effective counselling interventions, children exposed to insecurity remain at risk of long-term psychological damage, poor educational outcomes and social maladjustment. If this situation persists, the consequences for children and the education system are severe. Continued exposure to insecurity without appropriate psycho-social counselling support will further impede educational recovery, increase school dropout rates and undermine national efforts towards sustainable development. Addressing this problem through effective psycho-social counselling interventions is therefore imperative. School-based counselling services can provide emotional support, trauma management, coping skills and adaptive strategies that enable children to recover educationally and psychologically. Strengthening psycho-social counselling in Nigeria's security-challenged environments is essential for restoring children's wellbeing, promoting safe learning spaces and supporting sustainable educational recovery nationwide.

### **Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The aim of the study was to examine psycho-social counselling and educational recovery for children in Nigeria's security-challenged environments in the South-East Zone. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. determine the relationship between school counsellors' collaboration and psycho-social counselling in promoting educational recovery for children in South-Eastern Zone Nigeri.
2. examine the relationship between psycho-social counselling and educational recovery for children in South-Eastern Zone.

### **Research Questions**

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What relationship exists between school counsellors' collaboration and psycho-social counselling for educational recovery of children in South-Eastern Zone?
2. What relationship exists between psycho-social counselling and educational recovery of children in South-Eastern Zone?

### **Hypotheses**

The study was guided by these hypotheses tested at 0.05 level of significance

1. There is no significant relationship between school counsellors' collaboration and psycho-social counselling for the educational recovery of children in the South-Eastern Zone of Nigeria.
2. There is no significant relationship between psycho-social counselling and educational recovery of children in the South-Eastern Zone of Nigeria.

**Literature Review****Educational Recovery for Children in Nigeria**

Education is widely recognised as both a fundamental human right and a strategic driver of national development, social cohesion and economic transformation. In contemporary scholarship, education is no longer viewed solely as a mechanism for transmitting knowledge and skills but as a social institution that shapes identity, resilience and civic responsibility, particularly among children and adolescents living in fragile contexts. In Nigeria, education has historically occupied a central position in national development planning, with policy frameworks consistently emphasising its role in producing socially responsible, skilled and productive citizens (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014). Earlier definitions of education, such as Jimoh's conceptualisation of education as a process through which individuals are exposed to experiences that equip them with useful knowledge, skills and values, remain relevant but are increasingly considered insufficient in isolation. Recent studies argue that such functional definitions overlook the emotional, psychological and contextual dimensions of learning, especially in environments characterised by instability and violence (Aremu & Abayomi, 2024). Consequently, education is increasingly framed as an integrative process that encompasses cognitive development, emotional wellbeing and social adjustment.

The Nigerian education system is organised into Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), primary, secondary and tertiary levels. ECCE has been widely acknowledged as foundational for lifelong learning and development. While early literature predominantly highlighted its contribution to school readiness and long-term economic outcomes, contemporary research places greater emphasis on its role in psychosocial development and trauma buffering, particularly in contexts of poverty, displacement and conflict (UNICEF, 2022). ECCE is now viewed not only as preparatory schooling but as an early intervention platform capable of fostering emotional regulation, social competence and learning resilience.

Primary education builds upon this foundation, aiming to inculcate basic literacy, numeracy and communication skills. However, it is at the secondary education level—particularly senior secondary school—that vulnerabilities intensify. Adolescence represents a critical developmental period marked by identity formation, heightened emotional sensitivity and increasing academic and social demands. Senior secondary education in Nigeria is designed to prepare students for higher education and productive adulthood under the 6–3–3–4 or 9–3–4 system. Despite these intentions, evidence suggests that the ability of secondary education to fulfil this mandate has been severely compromised by persistent insecurity, infrastructural constraints and weak student support systems.

Insecurity has emerged as one of the most significant barriers to educational continuity and recovery in Nigeria. Since 2009, armed insurgency, banditry, kidnapping and communal violence have escalated in intensity, frequency and geographical spread. Unlike earlier periods of conflict, current insecurity is protracted and normalised, producing chronic educational disruption rather than temporary setbacks. Schools have been attacked, destroyed or closed indefinitely; teachers have been displaced; and students have experienced prolonged interruptions to learning (UNICEF, 2025). These conditions have contributed to Nigeria having one of the highest numbers of out-of-school children globally.

Scholars differ in their interpretations of how insecurity undermines education. Structural and political economy perspectives argue that insecurity is deeply intertwined with weak governance, economic inequality and long-standing educational neglect. From this standpoint, insecurity both reflects and reinforces systemic failures, and educational recovery requires large-scale policy reform, improved security architecture and sustained public investment (Aremu & Abayomi, 2024). In contrast, psychosocial and educational psychology perspectives focus on the immediate lived experiences of learners, emphasising fear, trauma and chronic stress as key mechanisms through which insecurity disrupts learning.

Empirical studies among Nigerian secondary school students demonstrate that exposure to insecurity is strongly associated with elevated anxiety, depression, emotional instability and academic disengagement. Alhassan and Mohammed (2025), for example, found that insecurity significantly predicts emotional distress and reduced academic engagement among students in north-western Nigeria. These findings align with broader international evidence showing that learning outcomes deteriorate when students' basic sense of safety and emotional stability is compromised. Therefore, educational recovery cannot be reduced to reopening schools or restoring enrolment figures; it must also address learners' psychological readiness to learn. A critical tension within the literature concerns prioritisation. Some scholars argue that Nigeria's educational crisis is fundamentally infrastructural and that emphasis on psycho-social dimensions risks diverting attention from core issues such as school security, funding and teacher supply. Others counter that ignoring students' mental health undermines the effectiveness of any structural intervention, as traumatised learners are less able to benefit from improved facilities or instructional quality. Increasingly, the literature supports an integrated approach that combines physical reconstruction with psycho-social recovery.

### **Psycho-Social Counselling and Educational Recovery**

Psycho-social counselling has gained prominence as a central component of educational recovery, particularly in conflict-affected and high-risk environments. Traditionally, guidance and counselling in Nigerian schools focused largely on academic guidance and vocational choice. However, contemporary frameworks adopt a holistic orientation, addressing emotional wellbeing, coping skills, self-concept and social relationships in addition to educational planning.

Ihedioha and Ituen conceptualised counselling as a professional process aimed at helping individuals develop into integrated and harmonious personalities. While this perspective was initially criticised for being idealistic, recent research has revitalised its relevance by demonstrating that personality development, emotional regulation and coping competence are essential for academic persistence under stress. Adolescents who experience insecurity are particularly vulnerable to maladjustment, making psycho-social support a critical protective factor.

National policy frameworks recognise this importance. The National Policy on Education mandates guidance and counselling services across all levels of education, and successive policy revisions have reaffirmed the role of counselling in addressing personality maladjustment and career ignorance. Despite this policy commitment, implementation gaps persist. Studies report shortages of trained counsellors, high counsellor-to-student ratios,

limited funding and weak institutional support, especially in public secondary schools (Enokela & Enwa, 2022). In some cases, counselling units exist only in name, with minimal impact on students' lived experiences.

Critics further argue that traditional counselling models may be ill-suited to contemporary challenges. Large class sizes, stigma surrounding mental health, cultural norms discouraging emotional disclosure and limited confidentiality have reduced students' willingness to seek help from school counsellors. Research conducted among secondary school students indicates that fear of judgement, lack of trust and concerns about privacy significantly inhibit help-seeking behaviour. In response to these limitations, recent scholarship advocates innovative and scalable counselling approaches. School-based psychological interventions grounded in cognitive behavioural principles have shown promising results across sub-Saharan Africa, including Nigeria. A recent systematic review found that structured interventions targeting anxiety, depression and trauma can be effectively delivered within school settings, even by non-specialists, leading to significant improvements in psychological outcomes (Tareke et al., 2023). These findings challenge the assumption that effective counselling must rely exclusively on highly specialised personnel.

From a critical standpoint, psycho-social counselling should not be positioned as a panacea for Nigeria's educational challenges. Rather, it should be understood as a complementary strategy that strengthens students' capacity to cope with adversity, remain engaged in school and benefit from broader educational reforms. When embedded within supportive school environments and aligned with national policy objectives, psycho-social counselling plays a vital role in restoring not only learning continuity but also hope, agency and future orientation among adolescents. In sum, the literature increasingly supports the view that educational recovery in Nigeria's insecurity-prone contexts requires a multidimensional approach. Addressing access and infrastructure alone is insufficient without parallel investment in learners' mental health and psycho-social adjustment. Strengthening counselling services—particularly through innovative, accessible and youth-friendly modalities—represents a critical pathway for sustaining education and promoting long-term national stability.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is grounded in Jean Piaget's Cognitive (Intellectual) Development Theory and the Greed and Grievance Theory propounded by Collier and Hoeffler. The integration of these theories provides a multi-level explanatory framework that links individual cognitive development with broader socio-structural conditions of insecurity, thereby strengthening the study's theoretical and analytical foundations.

#### **Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory and the Educational Context**

Jean Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory explains how individuals construct knowledge through continuous interaction with their environment. Piaget posited that learning is an active and adaptive process rather than a passive reception of information, with cognitive growth occurring through the processes of assimilation and accommodation as individuals attempt to make sense of new experiences. Central to the theory is the assumption that environmental stability, meaningful interaction and developmental readiness are essential for

optimal cognitive development (Piaget, 1986; McLeod, 2026). Piaget further emphasised that cognition develops progressively over time and is influenced by biological maturation, prior experiences, heredity and environmental conditions. During the formal operational stage, typically associated with adolescence, learners develop abstract reasoning, problem-solving abilities and hypothetical thinking. This stage is particularly relevant to secondary school students, whose cognitive development depends heavily on exposure to structured learning environments that promote exploration, reflection and higher-order thinking.

Within the context of this study, Piaget's theory provides a micro-level explanation of how insecurity undermines educational recovery. As Piaget argued, intellectual development cannot flourish in environments dominated by fear, unpredictability and instability. Persistent insecurity disrupts the quality and consistency of learners' interactions with their environment, leading to cognitive disequilibrium that hinders effective assimilation and accommodation. This theoretical position supports the assumption that educational development and recovery among Nigerian children are severely constrained in contexts characterised by violence, displacement and trauma.

In terms of study design, Piaget's theory informs the selection of psychosocial variables such as anxiety, emotional wellbeing, coping skills and self-esteem, as these factors directly affect learners' capacity to engage meaningfully with their educational environment. In the analysis, the theory guides the interpretation of observed associations between insecurity-related stressors and students' cognitive, emotional and academic outcomes. From a theoretical standpoint, improvements in coping skills and emotional regulation through psycho-social counselling can be understood as mechanisms that restore cognitive balance and facilitate learning in adverse environments.

### **Greed and Grievance Theory and the Dynamics of Insecurity**

The Greed and Grievance Theory developed by Collier and Hoeffler offers a macro-level explanation for the persistence of violence and insecurity. The theory posits that conflict arises either from economic motivations (greed) or from perceived injustice and deprivation (grievance), often operating simultaneously rather than as mutually exclusive forces (Collier & Hoeffler, 2002). Greed refers to competition over economic resources and opportunities for personal gain, facilitated by favourable conditions such as unemployment, weak state institutions and access to funding sources. Grievance, on the other hand, is rooted in relative deprivation, inequality, marginalisation and unmet expectations. As Collier and Hoeffler argue, while grievance may provide the narrative justification for violence, opportunities for economic gain often sustain and prolong conflict.

In the Nigerian context, this theory explains the emergence and persistence of insurgent groups such as Boko Haram, armed bandits, kidnappers and militant groups. Greed is evident in the exploitation of natural resources, ransom economies and illicit funding networks, while grievance manifests in poverty, youth unemployment, educational exclusion and perceived social injustice. Importantly, the theory highlights how inadequate educational and socio-economic opportunities heighten both grievance and vulnerability to recruitment into violent groups.

The integration of Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory and the Greed and Grievance Theory offers a complementary and multidimensional framework for understanding educational recovery in security-challenged environments. At the structural level, the Greed and Grievance Theory explains why insecurity persists and why educational systems are repeatedly disrupted. At the individual level, Piaget's theory explains how such disruption impairs cognitive development, emotional stability and academic engagement. Together, the theories establish a causal chain in which structural insecurity shapes environmental conditions, which in turn influence individual cognitive and psychosocial outcomes.

This integrated framework informs the study design by justifying the focus on psycho-social counselling as an intervention that operates at the intersection of both theories. Counselling addresses the cognitive and emotional disruptions identified by Piaget while simultaneously serving as a preventive mechanism against grievance escalation by equipping students with coping skills, emotional regulation and constructive help-seeking behaviours. In the analysis, the framework enables the study to interpret changes in mental health and coping outcomes not merely as individual improvements but as indicators of resilience in structurally adverse environments. Theoretically, psycho-social counselling contributes to educational recovery by restoring cognitive balance at the individual level while indirectly mitigating the long-term drivers of insecurity linked to grievance, frustration and alienation.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

The study adopted a correlational survey research design, which was appropriate for examining the direction, strength, and predictive contribution of school counsellors' collaboration and psycho-social counselling to educational recovery among children in security-challenged environments. This design allowed for the statistical estimation of relationships among variables using regression techniques, thereby supporting the identification of both associative and predictive patterns, as reflected in the study's findings.

### **Population, Sample Size and Sampling Technique**

The population comprised 12,200 teachers in 2,284 approved private secondary schools across the South-Eastern Zone of Nigeria. A sample of 1,220 teachers (10% of the population) was selected using proportionate stratified random sampling based on states, number of schools, and number of teachers. This sampling strategy ensured that the sample adequately represented the population and provided sufficient statistical power for regression analysis. The effectiveness of this approach is evidenced by the high correlation coefficients ( $r \approx 0.62$ ), stable adjusted  $R^2$  values, and large t-statistics obtained in the results, indicating that the sample size was adequate to detect meaningful relationships among the study variables.

### **Instrument for Data Collection**

Data were collected using the Psycho-Social Counselling and Educational Recovery for Children in Nigeria's Security-Challenged Environments Questionnaire (PSCERCNSCEQ). The instrument measured three core constructs: School counsellors' collaboration, Psycho-social counselling practices, and Educational recovery of children. Responses were rated on a four-point Likert scale, allowing sufficient variation for regression analysis and

contributing to the robust relationships observed between the independent variables and educational recovery in the results.

### Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

Face and content validity were established through expert review. Reliability was determined through a pilot study conducted outside the main study area, using a two-week administration interval strictly for reliability testing. Cronbach's Alpha yielded a coefficient of 0.79, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. This level of reliability supports the credibility of the regression outcomes and explains the consistency observed between the unadjusted and adjusted  $R^2$  values in the findings, which showed minimal shrinkage.

### Procedure for Data Collection

The questionnaire was administered directly to respondents by the researcher and trained assistants using the on-the-spot method, ensuring a high response rate and minimal missing data. This contributed to the stability of the regression models and the reliability of the statistical estimates reported in the results.

### Method of Data Analysis

Data were analysed using SPSS. Simple linear regression analysis was employed to: determine the strength and direction of relationships (correlation coefficients), estimate predictive contributions ( $\beta$  coefficients), and quantify explained variance ( $R^2$  and adjusted  $R^2$ ). The t-test associated with regression analysis was used to test the null hypotheses at the 0.05 significance level. The choice of these analytical techniques directly corresponds with the findings, which revealed: strong positive correlations between the independent variables and educational recovery, substantial explained variance (approximately 39%), and statistically significant regression coefficients, leading to the rejection of both null hypotheses.

## Results

### Research Question 1

What relationship exists between psycho-social counselling and educational recovery of children in the South-Eastern Zone of Nigeria?

Table 1: Linear regression analysis exploring the relationship between psycho-social counselling and educational recovery.

| Model | r     | $R^2$ | $R^2$ (%) | Adjusted $R^2$ | Remark        |
|-------|-------|-------|-----------|----------------|---------------|
| 1     | 0.623 | 0.389 | 38.9%     | 0.388          | High positive |

*Predictor: Psycho-social counselling.*

Table 1 shows a correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) of 0.623, indicating a strong positive relationship between psycho-social counselling and educational recovery. The coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) of 0.389 implies that 38.9% of the variation in educational recovery was explained by psycho-social counselling. The adjusted  $R^2$  value of 0.388 confirms the stability of the model. Overall, the result indicates that psycho-social counselling is a strong predictor of educational recovery among children in the study area.

## Research Question 2

What relationship exists between school counsellors' collaboration and educational recovery of children in the South-Eastern Zone of Nigeria?

Table 2: Linear regression analysis exploring the relationship between school counsellors' collaboration and educational recovery.

| Model | r     | R <sup>2</sup> | R <sup>2</sup> (%) | Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> | Remark        |
|-------|-------|----------------|--------------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| 1     | 0.625 | 0.391          | 39.1%              | 0.390                   | High positive |

*Predictor: School counsellors' collaboration.*

Table 2 shows a correlation coefficient (r) of 0.625, indicating a strong positive relationship between school counsellors' collaboration and educational recovery. The R<sup>2</sup> value of 0.391 indicates that 39.1% of the variation in educational recovery was explained by counsellors' collaboration. The adjusted R<sup>2</sup> value confirms the adequacy and goodness of fit of the regression model.

## Testing of Hypotheses

### Hypothesis One

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between school counsellors' collaboration and educational recovery of children.

**Table 3:** t-test associated with regression analysis for counsellors' collaboration and educational recovery.

| Variable                          | $\beta$ | t-cal  | t-crit | df   | Sig. |
|-----------------------------------|---------|--------|--------|------|------|
| School counsellors' collaboration | 0.625   | 19.174 | 1.96   | 1219 | 0.00 |

Table 3 shows that the calculated t-value (19.174) exceeded the critical t-value (1.96). The significance value ( $p < 0.05$ ) indicates that the relationship is statistically significant. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected.

### Hypothesis Two

**H<sub>02</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between psycho-social counselling and educational recovery of children.

**Table 4:** t-test associated with regression analysis for psycho-social counselling and educational recovery.

| Variable                  | $\beta$ | t-cal  | t-crit | df   | Sig. |
|---------------------------|---------|--------|--------|------|------|
| Psycho-social counselling | 0.623   | 54.780 | 1.96   | 1219 | 0.00 |

Table 4 indicates a calculated t-value (**54.780**) that far exceeded the critical value. Since the significance value was less than 0.05, the null hypothesis was **rejected**, confirming a statistically significant relationship between psycho-social counselling and educational recovery.

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**Discussion of Findings**

The present study found strong, positive, and statistically significant relationships between (i) school counsellors' collaboration and educational recovery and (ii) psycho-social counselling and educational recovery. While these outcomes are consistent with school-support and student-wellbeing literature, a critical interpretation requires careful attention to context, plausible rival explanations, and methodological boundaries.

On school counsellors' collaboration and educational recovery: interpreting the strength of the relationship, the strong association between counsellors' collaboration and educational recovery suggests that coordinated professional practice may enhance the coherence and reach of school-based support in challenging environments. This is consistent with wider school mental health scholarship emphasising that interprofessional collaboration helps schools develop and implement coordinated strategies for prevention and intervention. For example, work on expanded school mental health describes collaboration as a practical strategy for creating and implementing solutions within schools and notes that collaboration can be conceptualised and evaluated through relationship-focused approaches such as social network analysis. (Rimkunas & Mellin, 2023). However, an alternative explanation is that schools with stronger organisational capacity (e.g., better leadership, clearer routines, more resources) may simultaneously (a) enable more collaboration among counsellors and (b) produce better educational recovery outcomes. This "school capacity" pathway is plausible because evidence from school counselling research indicates that contextual variables (including socioeconomic and school-system factors) can shape the ability of counselling services to influence student outcomes. (Parzych et al., 2019, summarised in ASCA research report). In other words, collaboration may be a marker of a better-functioning school environment rather than the sole driver of recovery.

Additionally, insecurity changes what "collaboration" practically means. In environments where insecurity disrupts schooling, professional collaboration may shift from routine case conferencing to coordinated crisis-response, referral, and continuity planning, which may be especially consequential for recovery. The scale of insecurity-related disruptions to education and school access has been documented in recent Nigeria-focused reports describing how violence, banditry, abductions, and community conflict hinder education access and stability. (UNICEF, 2025; UNICEF, 2022). These contextual pressures may intensify the need for collaborative practice and partly explain why the relationship observed in this study is strong.

This finding also aligns with evidence that structured collaboration—when guided and intentionally organised—supports engagement and socio-emotional functioning. For instance, Backer, Miller, and Timmer's action research reported that collaborative grouping in STEM classrooms yielded qualitative improvements in student engagement and social-emotional skills, particularly when supported by intentional group formation, guidance on participation, and reinforcement of teamwork skills. (Backer et al., 2018). Although this study concerns classroom grouping rather than counsellor teamwork, it supports the broader claim that structured collaborative practices can enhance engagement-related outcomes that are relevant to educational recovery. Because the present study is correlational, the results do not establish

causality. It is plausible that collaboration contributes to recovery, but also plausible that improving educational recovery (or the conditions that support it) encourages more collaboration. The findings are best interpreted as evidence of a strong relationship that warrants targeted implementation and stronger causal testing in future longitudinal or quasi-experimental work.

On psycho-social counselling and educational recovery: mechanisms and rival explanations. The study also found a strong positive relationship between psycho-social counselling and educational recovery, reinforcing the argument that educational recovery in insecure settings is not purely instructional but also psychological and social. This aligns with evidence that school-based psychological interventions can reduce symptoms (including depression, anxiety, and trauma-related outcomes) and can be feasibly delivered in school contexts, including in sub-Saharan Africa. A recent systematic review of randomised controlled trials found that school-based psychological interventions—commonly CBT-based—produced reductions in adolescents’ depressive, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress symptoms, and were often delivered by non-specialists, supporting scalability in low-resource settings. (Tareke et al., 2023). This body of evidence strengthens the plausibility that psycho-social counselling supports educational recovery through improved emotional regulation, reduced distress, and better engagement with learning.

The study’s results are also consistent with Nigeria-specific evidence linking insecurity to psychosocial disruption and reduced academic engagement. For example, research in north-western Nigeria reported that insecurity predicted emotional instability and academic disengagement, and that counselling support moderated these effects—suggesting that counselling can buffer insecurity’s negative psychosocial impact. (Alhassan & Mohammed, 2025). Such evidence supports the mechanism implied by your findings: psycho-social counselling may strengthen recovery by improving students’ capacity to cope with fear and distress that undermine concentration, attendance, and classroom participation.

Nevertheless, alternative explanations should be considered. One possibility is perceptual inflation: where schools with active counselling provisions may also have more positive staff perceptions of recovery, leading to more favourable ratings on survey measures. A second possibility is that psycho-social counselling may be correlated with other supports (e.g., stronger teacher-student relations, better pastoral systems) that independently promote recovery. Because the current study relied on teacher responses, the results could be influenced by respondent perspective. Evidence from Nigeria indicates that perceptions of counselling services vary by demographic and school factors, highlighting the importance of considering how respondents interpret counselling availability and effectiveness. (Enokela & Enwa, 2022). Future work could strengthen inference by incorporating multi-informant data (students, counsellors, school records) and objective indicators (attendance, progression, or standardised performance indices).

On bringing the two findings together: why “coordination” matters in insecure contexts, a key implication from the combined findings is that collaboration and psycho-social counselling are likely **mutually reinforcing**. Literature on school-community mental health partnerships warns that relying on siloed staffing models can produce fragmented support,

whereas coordinated partnerships and integrated systems can strengthen access and continuity of care in school settings. (National Center for School Mental Health, n.d.). Similarly, guidance on effective school–community partnerships emphasises leadership teams, role clarity, shared accountability, and ongoing professional development—components that translate directly into workable collaboration structures. (Coalition for Community Schools & NASP resource). In a security-challenged context—where schooling and wellbeing are disrupted—these coordination elements become more than “good practice”; they are plausibly central to sustaining educational recovery. Recent Nigeria-focused reporting on insecurity and education access reinforces that educational disruption is multi-layered and requires multi-layered responses. (UNICEF, 2025; UNICEF, 2022).

### **Conclusion**

This study concludes that school counsellors’ collaboration and psycho-social counselling are both strongly associated with educational recovery for children in Nigeria’s security-challenged environments. Interpreted cautiously within correlational limits, the findings support the practical position that educational recovery is strengthened when schools (a) organise counsellor collaboration as a structured professional practice and (b) sustain psycho-social counselling as a core school support service. To move beyond broad recommendations, the study’s conclusion implies two concrete implementation priorities: Institutionalise collaboration as a defined structure, not an ad hoc practice. Evidence-based guidance on school–community and school mental health collaboration stresses the need for leadership teams, defined coordination roles, shared accountability, and professional development. These elements provide a clear template for implementing counsellor collaboration in schools and evaluating whether collaboration is functioning as intended. (Coalition for Community Schools & NASP resource; NCSMH partnership guidance). Additionally, scholarship on interprofessional collaboration highlights that collaboration can be conceptualised and measured through relationship and network-based evaluation approaches—strengthening accountability over time. (Rimkunas & Mellin, 2023).

Embed psycho-social counselling within school recovery planning, with outcomes tracked over time. Evidence from sub-Saharan Africa indicates school-based psychological interventions can reduce adolescent mental health symptoms, supporting the rationale for psycho-social counselling as part of recovery-oriented schooling. (Tareke et al., 2023). Nigeria-specific evidence also shows insecurity is linked to psychosocial challenges and that counselling support can buffer these effects, reinforcing the local relevance of sustained counselling provision in insecure environments. (Alhassan & Mohammed, 2025). Finally, the study recognises key limitations: the correlational design does not permit causal claims; teacher-reported measures may introduce perceptual bias; and unmeasured school-level factors (resources, leadership, community support) may partly account for observed relationships. These limitations point to future research directions—particularly longitudinal and mixed-method approaches that incorporate multiple informants and objective indicators of educational recovery.

**Recommendations**

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

1. Government and education authorities should organise regular capacity-building workshops and professional development programmes for school counsellors and teachers, with emphasis on psycho-social counselling skills, collaborative practices, and evidence-based interventions for managing insecurity-related challenges affecting learners.
2. School administrators and education stakeholders should create an enabling environment that supports effective professional collaboration among counsellors and allows counsellors to focus primarily on counselling-related responsibilities. Adequate staffing, provision of counselling resources, and institutional recognition of counselling services are essential for sustaining educational recovery efforts.
3. Psycho-social counselling services should be strengthened and institutionalised across all levels of education to ensure early identification of at-risk students, continuous emotional support, and the development of adaptive coping strategies necessary for academic and personal success.

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