

Assessment of counsellors' awareness and perceptions of e-counselling for improved guidance and counselling services

Durowoju, Esther Olajumoke & Olaleye, Victor Olugbenga

Department of Educational Foundations and Counselling,

Faculty of Education, University of Ilesa, Ilesa

Abstract

Counselling in the 21st has revolutionised to e-therapy as against the face-to-face relationship that characterized counselling before this dispensation. Therefore, this study investigated the extent of counsellors' awareness and perceptions of e-therapy for improved guidance and counselling. Descriptive research design was adopted. The counselling psychologists in both Universities and secondary schools in the Southwest zone constituted the population and 78 counselling psychologists were purposively used for the study. Counsellors' Awareness and Perception of E-therapy for Improved Guidance and Counselling Services (CWPEIGCS) which consisted four sections was used and the reliability coefficient were 0.82, 0.78 and 0.72 respectively determined using Cronbach Alpha. Data were analysed using descriptive (frequency, percentages, mean and content analysis) and inferential analysis (t-Test). Findings revealed that the rate of counsellors who were aware of e-counselling was moderately high ($\pi = 2.77$); there was no significant difference between male and female counsellors' awareness of the use of technology for counselling services [$t_{(76)} = 0.229$ $p > 0.05$]. The rate of those who were competent in the use of e-therapy was moderately low ($\pi = 2.48$), there was no significant difference between male and female counsellors' competency in the usage of technology for counselling services [$t_{(76)} = 1.416$ $p > 0.05$] while the rate of those who frequently utilize e-therapy was very low. From the findings it is apparent that counsellors need to acquire and utilize technological skills (ICT applications) that will afford them the opportunity of providing online therapy geared towards meeting the needs of 21st century clients who are scattered across the globe. Recommendations made were: the Counselling Association of Nigeria in conjunction with the technological experts should design e-therapy software application for easy accessibility by counsellors to effectively and efficiently provide helping services to their variant clients among others.

Keywords: Guidance, Counselling, Awareness, Perception and E-therapy

Introduction

Education being a vital tool for individual and national development is a lifelong experience which starts from cradle to death. Education is a process of transmitting knowledge, value, skills, belief, norms, languages and culture of the family and society from one generation to another. When a child is born into the family, the child begins to receive education (knowledge, value, skills, belief, norms, languages and culture) from his parents, siblings, extended family members and the society at large in form of initiation, instruction, indoctrination, training, teaching, nurturing, schooling and guidance for a life transforming experiences and development. It is not an understatement to mention that positive socio-economic, political and technological changes and development can

only be achieved by individuals or nation through excellent and well-designed educational services. Therefore, it is crucial to provide enough educational services in order to implement educational policy, carry out policy objectives, and realize an effective educational system (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013).

Educational services are services incorporated into the educational system to promote conducive teaching and learning environment which will in turn engender improved students' learning outcomes. In order words, educational services sector comprises establishments or institutes that offer instructions, trainings and guidance on array of disciplines or vocations (FRN, 2013). The national policy outlines the goals of educational services as follows:

creating, evaluating, and improving educational programs; improving instruction and teacher competency; giving children a more meaningful learning experience; increasing the cost-effectiveness of education; encouraging in-service training; and creating and encouraging the efficient use of innovative materials in schools (FRN, 2013). According to Usen (2016), educational services include the creation of textbooks, research institutes, teacher resource centers, curriculum development centers, language centers, science and math centers, archives, school health services, radio and television broadcasting centres, guidance and counseling etc. Guidance and counselling as one of the educational services plays significant role in promoting effective teaching and learning, conducive learning and workplace environments; and the total well-being (social, physical and psychological development) of students and staff in the school system. In line with this, Egbo as cited in Amadike and Adiola (2018) asserted that guidance and counseling are essential in encouraging educational activities that ensure teaching and learning becomes more effective in the school for improved students' performance and development.

It is not gainsaying to state that guidance services is an age long activities rendered by professionals to enable individuals understand themselves, their environments in a bid to adjust well in their societies. Frank Parsons, the founder of the American advice Movement, brought modern advice to the United States in 1908, and it was formally introduced in Nigeria in 1958 (Olowolabi, 2021) Guidance services aim at meeting individuals and societal needs. Guidance services include orientation, information, placement, counselling, referral, planning and evaluation and follow-up (NTI library repository, nd). Counseling is an in-person relationship or contact between a counselor and their clients in which the counselor uses his professional abilities to help the emotionally unstable client have a better understanding of himself and his difficulty so that he can make an informed decision.

Counselling is a one-to-one (face to face) helping relationship that focuses upon an individual's growth, achievement, problem-

solving and decision-making needs (Hodges as cited in Amos, 2022). However, it is evident that the upsurge of technology in the 21st century has brought a drastic change to individual and societal needs which demanded a paradigm shift in the mode of conducting counselling service for these needs to be met. To support this, Yamin (2019) submitted that some groundbreaking information technologies have emerged in the twenty-first century which has revolutionizing our way of life. According to him, the introduction of the internet in 1995 marked the beginning of the revolution, which has led to the development of techniques, instruments, and devices with incredible uses in both the business and academic domains. Hence, this necessitates that counsellors need to employ e-counselling effectively to secure the attention, communicate and meet the needs of the various generations, especially the Generation Z.

The term "Gen Z," "silent generation," or "iGeneration" refers to people born after 1996 since they were raised in an era where technology had nearly taken over the globe. Vukasović (2023) argued that Generation Z was the first to be born into the "digital world" and that they mostly converse online, using communities like Google, Facebook, Twitter, and others, rather than in person. Experience has shown that members of "Gen Z" are always on the internet interacting, chatting, gaming, shopping and holding meetings with people across the globe from their comfort zones. Prior the dawn of information technology (ICT), counselling was strictly a face to face interaction which necessitated that the client must be physically present during the counselling session but this phenomenon has changed due to global technological advancement. The digital age has altered many facets of our lives, such as how we interact, work, and obtain information (Robbi, et al., 2024). They also noted that technological advancements have created new opportunities and improved a variety of industries, including counseling. This suffice that the dynamism of individual and societal needs in the 21st century that is characterized with massive technological innovations which demands that counsellors be knowledgeable and skilled in the use of digital devices for improved counselling intervention. E-counselling also

known as online counselling is one of the most important revolutions that have occurred in counselling. E-counselling entails provision of professional counselling through internet facilities. E-counselling gives counsellors opportunity to interact with clients from all over the globe, thereby enabling therapy available to everyone regardless of race, age and distance. To function effectively and efficiently as a professional counsellor in the digital age, it is expedient that counsellors employ ICT devices such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Whatsapp, Zoom etc in reaching and providing psychological intervention to counsellee. To corroborate this, Busari and Ibrahim (2022) found that during the epidemic, which was marked by a worldwide lockdown, text messaging, chat, video conferencing, and email were all frequently utilised in counseling sessions.

It is not an understatement that professional counsellors who desire to effectively meet the needs of clients in this digital age have to update their knowledge and competency in the use of digital devices. In line with this assertion, Robbi, et al. (2024), confirmed that counselors must stay abreast of technical advancements and modify their methods of operation to suit current circumstances. They also restated how crucial it is that they keep up-to-date on the latest technological developments. They contend that counseling in the digital age presents both new opportunities and difficulties, such as the use of mental health apps, online counseling, and telecounselling. They felt that when counselors comprehend and use pertinent technology, they can increase the accessibility of counseling services and expand their reach to help more clients. To corroborate this, Rossano (2023) stated that accessibility, convenience, and efficiency were major advantages of e-counseling. He found that although e-counseling should not be used as a replacement for traditional, face-to-face counseling and psychotherapy, especially when it comes to more severe emotional and psychological challenges, it can be a helpful adjunct to traditional modes of practice.

The benefits of e-counseling according to

Rossano (2023), include the ability to see a therapist at your convenience, lower transportation costs, shorter wait times and lines, and the potential for the therapist to be absent from the office. On the other hand, some drawbacks are poor connectivity or trouble with it in rural areas, third-world power outages, computer proficiency for certain clients, and the ability and confidence of both the client and the counselor to participate in online counseling. Rossano further reiterated that the controversial issue concerning e-therapy is the issue of confidentiality. Speyer and Zack (2010), as cited by Nwachukwu, et al. (2014), posited that e-counselling offers significant advantages, particularly for clients with mobility constraints, time limitations, or those unable to meet with a counselor face-to-face. This modality facilitates a greater frequency of attendance for clients or patients compared to conventional sessions. According to them, maintaining appointments at a set time and location is not a concern for counseling. Compared to in-person therapy, there are much fewer missed appointments. There is no requirement to see receptionists in the office, nor is there any time zone or geographic restrictions.

However, it is pertinent to underscore that a counselor cannot be expected to counsel or operate on the website when he is not acquainted with the computer. Hence, the implementation of e-counselling in Nigeria, according to Nwachukwu, et al. (2014), implies that all professional counselors and therapists must be computer literate and possess the necessary additional training for counseling clients online. They therefore argued that, even though there are professionally trained and licensed counselors in Nigeria, approximately three quarters of the population do not yet possess the skills and rudiments needed for internet counseling. In addition, they maintained that majority of Nigerians are not computer literate, majority of clients are not familiar with e-counselling, and the bulk of counselors are not competent in incorporating e-counselling into their clients' services. In support of this, Popoola, et al (2023) claimed that the difficulties facing counselors using digital counseling services include: excessive internet use, access

to pornography and porno-action that causes mental alterations in youngsters, etc.

The reality of e-counseling services in the context of digital learning as perceived by Jordanian teachers at the general level was examined by Alomoush and Altarawneh (2022), who found no discernible difference between male and female teachers' perceptions of e-counseling. To support this, Girsang and Saragih's (2020) study revealed that instructors' perceptions of e-counseling for guidance and counseling services are the same regardless of their gender. In their study, Zamania, Naira, and Yusooffa (2010) found that while respondents had a favorable opinion of e-counseling, they still preferred in-person counseling because it ensures secrecy, unlike e-counseling, which is vulnerable to information leaks. However, research indicates that the impact of online/cybercounseling is comparable to that of in-person practice (Rossano, 2023). In light of this, Dagang (2014) believed that maintaining integrity and confidence in the counseling profession required adherence to professional ethical principles and rules when using technology for counseling. It is pertinent to mention that the awareness and perceptions of counsellors about e-counseling could determine their readiness and willingness to acquire and utilize digital literacy for improved counselling.

Based on the above discourse, it can be inferred that counsellors' awareness and perception of their competency and utilization of e-counseling could possibly engender improved guidance and counselling services. It becomes imperative that a study be undertaken to examine counsellors' awareness, perceptions of their competency and utilization of e-counseling for improved guidance and counselling since there is dearth of study that have addressed the extent to which counsellors are aware of and perceived their competency in the usage of e-therapy. Therefore, this study investigated the extent of counsellors' awareness and perceptions of e-counseling for improved guidance and counselling as well as the benefits and challenges of e-counseling in Southwest zone of Nigeria.

Research questions

The following research questions were posed to guide the study:

1. a. To what extent is counsellors' awareness of the usage of technology for counselling service in Southwest zone, Nigeria?
- b. Is there any significance difference between male and female counsellors awareness of usage of technology for counselling service in Southwest zone, Nigeria?
2. a. How competent are counsellors' in the usage of technology for counselling service in Southwest zone, Nigeria?
- b. Is there any significance difference between male and female counsellors competency in the usage of technology for counselling service in Southwest zone, Nigeria?
3. a. How often do counsellors make use of ICT for counselling service in Southwest zone, Nigeria?
- b. Is there any significance difference between male and female counsellors usage of technology for counselling service in Southwest zone, Nigeria?
4. What is the perception of counsellors about the benefits and challenges of e-counseling in Southwest zone, Nigeria?
5. What are the measures to put in place to enhance privacy in e-therapy for improved guidance and counselling services in Southwest zone, Nigeria?

Methodology

The study employed concurrent (quantitative and qualitative) mixed method of non-experimental design. The counselling psychologists in both Universities and secondary schools in the Southwest zone constituted the population of this study. From the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria, one geopolitical zone (Southwest) was randomly chosen. Out of six States in the selected geopolitical zone, three states were randomly selected which were Osun, Oyo and Ekiti. In each State, the Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON) members were purposively chosen to participate in the study through on-line survey. Seventy-eight (78) counselling psychologists who responded to the online survey sent to CASSON Whatsapp platforms

formed the sample of the study.

The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire (online survey) developed by the researchers. The questionnaire tagged Counsellors' Awareness and Perception of E-therapy for Improved Guidance and Counselling Services (CWPEIGCS) consisted of four sections. Section A comprised 10 items which elicited information on counsellors' awareness of e-counselling, Section B comprised 6 items which generated information on counsellors' rating of their competency in the usage of e-therapy, Section C consisted of 5 items which elicited information on the frequency of utilizing e-therapy while Section D is an online interview

that elicited information on the perception of counsellors which required open ended responses about the benefits, challenges of e-counselling and measures to put in place to enhance privacy in e-therapy for improved guidance and counselling services. The reliability coefficients of Counsellors' Awareness and Perception of E-therapy for Improved Guidance and Counselling Services (CWPEIGCS) consisted of four sections were 0.82, 0.78 and 0.72 respectively ascertained using Cronbach Alpha. Data collected were analyzed using frequency, percentages, mean, t-test and content analysis.

Findings and discussion

Research question 1a: To what extent is counsellors' aware of the usage of technology for counselling service in Southwest zone, Nigeria?

Table 1a: Counsellors' awareness of the usage of technology for counselling service in Southwest zone, Nigeria

S/N O	ITEMS	Very Large Extent	Large Extent	To Some Extent	Not at all	MEAN (π)
1	I have heard of e counselling before	22 (29.3%)	20 (25.6%)	31 (39.7%)	5 (6.4%)	2.76
2	I have adequate information about e counselling	22 (28.2%)	24 (30.8%)	24 (30.8%)	8 (10.3%)	2.77
3	I am aware that most clients of 21st century belong to generation Z (digital complaint)	26 (30.8%)	24 (33.4%)	23 (29.5%)	5 (6.4%)	3.63
4	I am aware that technology can be used for guidance and counselling services.	33 (42.3%)	16 (20.5%)	25 (32.1%)	4 (5.1%)	3.00
5	I am aware that Facebook can be used for group counselling.	32 (41.0%)	21 (26.9%)	19 (24.4%)	6 (7.7%)	2.60
6	I am aware that guidance and counselling can be done via Instagram	15 (19.2%)	28 (35.9%)	28 (35.9%)	7 (9.0%)	2.65
7	I am aware that guidance and counselling services can be conducted through Twitter	14 (17.9%)	26 (33.3%)	31 (39.7%)	7 (9.0%)	2.60
8	I am aware that guidance and counselling can be done via WhatsApp	25 (32.1%)	28 (35.9%)	22 (28.2%)	3 (3.8%)	2.96
9	I am aware of the ethical and legal standard in digital counselling by professional organizations such as American Psychological Association (APA).	20 (25.6%)	30 (38.5%)	20 (25.6%)	8 (10.3%)	2.79
	GRAND MEAN					2.77

Note: The decision rule was that any grand mean score of below 2.5 is low, mean score from 2.5 – 3.5 is moderately high, while mean score above 3.5 is high.

The results in Table 1a revealed the extent of counsellors' awareness of e-counselling for counselling service in Southwest zone, Nigeria. 29.3% of the counsellors claimed that to a very large extent they were aware that technology can be used for counselling service, 25.6% of them submitted that to a large extent they have heard of e-counselling before, 39.7% of them claimed that to some extent they have heard of e-counselling before while 6.4% said they were not aware of e-counselling. 28.2% of the counsellors claimed that to a very large extent they have adequate information about e-counselling, 30.8% averred that they have adequate information about e-counselling, 30.8% stated that to some extent they have adequate information about e-counselling but 10.3% said they do not have adequate information about e-therapy before. Again, 30.8% of the counsellors stated that to a very large extent they were aware that most of the clients of 21st century belong to generation Z (digital complaint), 33.4% mentioned that to a large extent they were aware that most clients of 21st century belong to generation Z (digital complaint) while 6.4% of them asserted that they were not aware that most of the clients of 21st century belong to generation Z (digital complaint). Furthermore, 42.3% of the counsellors asserted that to a very large extent they were aware that technology can be used for guidance and counselling services, 20.5% of them averred that to a large extent they were aware that technology can be used for guidance and counselling services, 31.1% stated that to some extent they were aware that technology can be used for guidance and counseling, while 5.1% stated that they were not aware that technology can be used for guidance and counseling services.

Among the respondents, 41.0%% claimed that to a very large extent Facebook can be used for group counselling, 26.9% mentioned that to a large extent they were aware that Facebook can be used for group counselling, 24.4% of them

stated that to some extent they are aware that Facebook can be used for group counselling but 7.7% confirmed that are not aware that Facebook can be used for group counselling. 19.2% of them claimed that to a very large extent they were aware that guidance and counselling can be done via Instagram, 35.9% opined that to a large extent they were aware that guidance and counselling can be done via Instagram, 35.9% mentioned that to some extent they were aware that guidance and counselling can be done via Instagram but 9% of them said they were not aware that guidance and counselling can be done via Instagram. Also, 17.9% of the counsellors mentioned that to a very large extent they were aware that guidance and counselling can be conducted through Twitter, 33.3% of them stated that to a large extent they were aware that guidance and counselling can be conducted through Twitter, 39.7% said that to some extent they were aware that guidance and counselling can be conducted through Twitter while 9% of them stated that they were not that guidance and counselling can be conducted through Twitter

In addition, 32.1% of the counsellors mentioned that to a very large extent they were aware that guidance and counselling can be done via WhatsApp, 35.9% claimed that to a large extent they were aware that guidance and counselling can be done via WhatsApp, 28.2% of them affirmed that to some extent they were aware that guidance and counselling can be done via WhatsApp, but 3.8% of them asserted that they were not aware that guidance and counselling can be done via WhatsApp. 25.6% of the counsellors attested to the fact that to a very large extent they were of the ethical and legal standard in digital counselling by professional organizations such as American Psychological Association (APA), 38.5% said that to a large extent they were of the ethical and legal standard in digital counselling by professional organizations such as American Psychological Association (APA), 25.6% mentioned that to some extent they were of the ethical and legal standard in digital counselling by professional organizations such as American Psychological Association (APA), whereas 10.3% of them submitted that they were not aware of the ethical and legal standard in digital counselling by professional organizations such as American

Psychological Association (APA). Based on the grand mean value ($\pi = 2.77$) of the counsellors response it can be concluded that their awareness of e-therapy for counselling services was moderately high.

Research question 1b: Is there any significance

difference between male and female awareness of usage of technology for counselling service in Southwest zone, Nigeria?

Table 1b: Difference between male and female awareness of usage of technology for counselling service in Southwest zone, Nigeria

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Df	T	Sig.
Male	49	28.94	8.15835	76	0.229	0.196
Female	29	28.51	7.31252			

Table 1b showed the significance difference in counsellors' awareness of usage of technology for counselling service based on gender. The result revealed that the mean score of male is $\pi = 28.94$ while that of the female counsellors is $\pi = 288.51$, the mean difference is 0.43 and $t_{(76)} = 0.229$ $p > 0.05$. Since P is greater than 0.05, which implies that null hypothesis will not be

rejected. The t-value observed indicating no significant difference between male and female counsellors' awareness of usage of technology for counselling services. This implies that the difference observed in male and female counsellors' awareness of usage of technology for counselling services is not significant.

Research question 2a: How competent are counsellors' in the usage of technology for counselling service in Southwest zone, Nigeria?

Table 2a: Competency of counsellors' in the usage of technology for counselling service in Southwest zone, Nigeria

S/N O	ITEMS	Very Large Extent	Large Extent	To Some Extent	Not at all	MEAN (π)
1	For me, acquiring digital literacy has been difficult.	4 (5.1%)	20 (25.6%)	31 (39.7%)	23 (29.5%)	2.06
2	I can provide counselling therapy using Twitter.	23 (29.5%)	14 (17.9%)	34 (43.6%)	7 (9%)	2.68
3	I can provide counselling therapy using Instagram.	23 (29.5%)	17 (21.8%)	22 (28.2%)	16 (20.5%)	2.60
4	I can provide counselling therapy using WhatsApp.	16 (20.5%)	14 (17.9%)	37 (47.4%)	11 (14.1%)	2.45
5	I can provide counselling therapy using zoom	26 (33.3%)	28 (35%)	14 (17.5%)	10 (12.8%)	2.90
6	I can provide counselling therapy using Facebook	19 (24.4%)	22 (28.2%)	33 (42.3%)	4 (5.1%)	2.72
	GRAND MEAN					2.48

Note: The decision rule was that any grand mean score of below 2.5 is low, mean score from 2.5 – 3.5 is moderately high, while mean score above 3.5 is high.

Table 2a showed the extent to which counsellors claimed to be competent in the use of technology for providing counselling services. From the table, 4% of the counsellors admitted that to a very large extent acquiring digital literacy has been difficult for them, 25.6% said to a large extent acquiring digital literacy has been difficult for them, 39.7% claimed that to some extent acquiring digital literacy has been difficult while 29.5% admitted that it was not difficult for them to acquire digital literacy. 29.5% of counsellors claimed that to a very large extent they can provide counselling therapy using Twitter, 17.9% mentioned that to a large extent they can provide counselling therapy using Twitter, 43.6% said that to some extent they can provide counselling therapy using Twitter but 9% admitted that they could not do so. Also, 29.5% of the counsellors said that to a very large extent they could provide counselling therapy using Instagram, 21.8% claimed that to a large extent they can provide counselling using Instagram, 28.2% stated that they can provide counselling using Instagram whereas 20.5% of them mentioned that could not provide counselling therapy using Instagram. Moreover, 20.5% of the counsellors stated that to a very large extent they could provide counselling therapy using WhatsApp, 17.9% mentioned that

to a large extent they can provide counselling using Whatsapp, 47.4% admitted that to some extent they can provide counselling using WhatsApp, however, 14.1% claimed they could not.

Furthermore, 33.3% of the counsellors affirmed that they could provide counselling therapy using zoom to a very large extent, 35% averred that to a large extent they can provide counselling using zoom, 17.5% stated that to some extent they can provide counselling therapy using Whatsapp but 12.8% of them submitted that they could not. 24.4% of the counsellors claimed that to a very large extent they could provide counselling therapy using Facebook, 28.2% mentioned that to a large extent they can provide counselling therapy using Facebook, 42.3% asserted that to some extent they can provide counselling therapy using Facebook whereas 5.1% of them confirmed that they could not do so. However, considering the grand mean value ($\pi = 2.48$) of the counsellors response it can be concluded that the extent to which the counsellors could use technology for providing therapy is moderately low. Nevertheless, most of the counsellors could use Whatsapp better than Zoom, Instagram, Facebook and other devices.

Research question 2b: Is there any significance difference between male and female competency in the usage of technology for counselling service in Southwest zone, Nigeria?

Table 2b: Difference between male and female competency in the usage of technology for counselling service in Southwest zone, Nigeria

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Df	T	Sig.
Male	49	15.94	4.56165	76	1.416	0.10
Female	29	14.52	3.73804			

Table 2b showed the significance difference in counsellors' competency in the usage of technology for counselling service based on gender. The result revealed that the mean score of male is $\pi = 15.94$ while that of the female counsellors is $\pi = 14.52$, the mean difference is 1.41 and $t_{(76)} = 1.416$ $p > 0.05$. Since P is greater than 0.05, which implies that null hypothesis will

not be rejected. The t-value observed indicating no significant difference between male and female counsellors' competency in the usage of technology for counselling services. This implies that the difference observed in male and female counsellors' competency in the usage of technology for counselling services is not significant.

Research question 3a: How often do counsellors make use of ICT for counselling service in Southwest zone, Nigeria?**Table 3a: Frequency of counsellors' use of ICT for counselling service in Southwest zone, Nigeria**

S/N O	ITEMS	ALWAYS	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	NOT AT ALL	MEAN (π)
1	I provide counselling therapy using Facebook	13 (17%)	21 (27%)	33 (42%)	11 (14%)	2.46
2	I provide counselling therapy using Instagram	2 (3%)	16 (20%)	39 (50%)	21 (27%)	1.99
3	I provide counselling therapy Twitter.	5 (6%)	19 (24%)	33 (33%)	36 (37%)	2.01
4	I provide counselling therapy using Facebook	11 (14%)	23 (30%)	33 (42%)	11 (14%)	2.44
5	I provide using zoom webinar	5 (6%)	21 (27%)	32 (41%)	20 (26%)	2.14
	GRAND MEAN					2.21

Note: The decision rule was that any grand mean score of below 2.5 is low, mean score from 2.5 – 3.5 is moderately high, while mean score above 3.5 is high.

Table 3a unveiled the frequency at which counsellors use technology for providing counselling therapy. 17% of the counsellors submitted that they always provide counselling therapy using Facebook, 27% of them claimed they often provide counselling therapy using Facebook, 42% mentioned that sometimes they provide counselling therapy using Facebook while 14% claimed they do not use Facebook. 3% of the respondents asserted that they always provide counselling therapy using Instagram, 20% of them said they often use Instagram for counselling therapy, 50% of them said that sometime they provide counselling therapy via Instagram but 27% said not at all. 6% of the counsellors mentioned that they always provide counselling therapy via twitter, 24% claimed they often offer counselling therapy through twitter, 33% said they sometimes provide

counselling therapy using twitter while 37% stated that they have not using twitter for counselling. 14% of the counsellors confirmed that they always provide counselling therapy through Facebook, 30% of them claimed they often provide counselling via Facebook, 42% said that sometimes they provide counselling therapy using Facebook but 14% said not at all. Finally, 6% of the counsellor submitted that they always provide counselling therapy via zoom webinar, 27% said they often provide counselling therapy through webinar, 41% of them mentioned that they sometimes do so while 26% claimed that they never provided counselling therapy through zoom webinar. Based on the grand mean value ($\pi = 2.21$) of the counsellors response it can be concluded frequency of counsellors' use of ICT for counselling service in Southwest zone, Nigeria is low.

Research question 3b: Is there significant difference in frequency of counsellors make use of ICT for counselling service based on gender in Southwest zone, Nigeria?**Table 3b: Difference in frequency of counsellors' use of ICT for counselling service based on gender in Southwest zone, Nigeria**

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Df	T	Sig.
Male	49	11.49	3.58889	76	1.517	0.324
Female	29	10.28	3.09258			

Table 3b showed the significance difference in counsellors' frequency in the usage of technology for counselling service based on gender. The result revealed that the mean score of male is $\pi = 11.49$ while that of the female counsellors is $\pi = 10.28$, the mean difference is 1.21 and $t_{(76)} = 1.517$ $p > 0.05$. Since P is greater than 0.05, which implies that null hypothesis will not be rejected. The t-value observed indicating no significant difference between male and female counsellors' frequency in usage of technology for counselling services. This implies that the difference observed in male and female counsellors' frequency in the usage of technology for counselling services is not significant.

Research question 4a: What is the perception of counsellors about the benefits of e-counselling in Southwest zone, Nigeria?

The counsellors perceived that e-therapy can help therapists reach clients at distant place. According to them, e-therapy is faster and cheaper. It makes counselling effective, faster, and prominent among youth and serves as a standard and digital ways of counselling especially among the youths. It saves time

Research question 4b: What is the perception of counsellors about the challenges of e-counselling in Southwest zone, Nigeria?

The counsellors stated that the challenges of e-counselling are bad networks and poor technology know-how. They averred that e-therapy is time consuming, engenders low physical feedback and sometimes create fear of confidentiality by the clients. According to the respondents:

"When e-counselling is used, clients may be exposed to online pornography, which instills sexual immorality in minors. It might cause overuse of the internet. Overuse of social media in particular has the potential to lead to poor time management, inability to focus, and poor customer service habits. Advertisements for illegal products like alcohol and drugs are displayed to internet users in visually appealing packaging for both adults and children. Clients were exposed to online gaming, which had an impact on their competency and performance at work and in school. E-

counselling violates the fundamental principle of confidentiality by requiring clients to provide sensitive information that is vulnerable to cyber-attacks. Compared to dealing with a counselor in person, online counseling uses a significant amount of data subscription. Emotions and body language are not evident during e-counselling meetings between clients and counselors. Cyber hackers or unlicensed counselors who lack the necessary training or credentials are likely to misuse online counseling services."

Research question 5: What are the measures to put in place to enhance privacy in e-therapy for improved guidance and counselling services in Southwest zone, Nigeria?

The measures to put in place to enhance privacy in e-counselling as stated by the counsellors are: counsellors should set some rules of terms of reference and follow it strictly. According to the respondents:

"Counselors should receive technology-assisted counseling training, and the public should be made more aware of e-counselling. Counselors' ICT abilities and cyber security should be improved to ensure confidentiality in counseling. Adequate cyber-security policy and device should be put in place to ensure confidentiality of vital information about the counselling sessions and the clients".

Discussion

This study examined the extent of counsellors' awareness and perceptions of e-counselling for improved guidance and counselling as well as the benefits and challenges of e-counselling in Southwest zone of Nigeria. The result of research question 1a and 1b revealed that counsellors' awareness of e-therapy for counselling services was moderately high and that there was no significant difference between male and female counsellors' awareness of usage of technology for counselling services. This could be attributed to the fact most counsellors' irrespective of gender make use of hydroid phone cell through which they communicate

with others via internet devices. This findings corroborate that of Zamania, Naira and Yusooffa (2010) who found in their study though 90% of the counsellors were aware of online counseling and that of Alomoush and Altarawneh (2022) who stated that male and female teachers' perceptions of e-counselling did not significantly differ. The results also support the research by Girsang and Saragih (2020), which demonstrated that instructors' perceptions of e-counselling for guidance and counseling services are the same regardless of their gender.

The result of research question 2a and 2b revealed that the counsellors' competency in the usage technology for providing therapy is moderately low. Nevertheless, most of the counsellors could use Whatsapp better than Zoom webinar, Instagram, Facebook and other devices. The low degree of competency in the use of technological devices for counselling observed in the counsellors could be attributed to the complexity involved in the usage Zoom webinar, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and other sophisticate chat devices. The result also unveiled that there was no significant difference between male and female counsellors' competency in the usage of technology for counselling services. This finding is in support of that of Zamania, Naira and Yusooffa (2010) revealed that 90% of the counsellors interviewed accepted and were aware of online counseling but 70% of them do not report a higher level of usage of online counseling. This result is consistent with that of Zamania, Naira, and Yusooffa (2010), who found that although 90% of the counselors surveyed acknowledged and knew about internet counseling, 70% of them did not report using it more frequently.

The result of research question 3a and 3b revealed that the frequency of counsellors' use of ICT for counselling service in Southwest zone, Nigeria is low and there was no significant difference between male and female counsellors' frequency in usage of technology for counselling services. The low degree of frequency in the use of technological devices for counselling observed in the counsellors could be attributed to the epileptic power supply, poor

internet network and financial implication involved in the usage of Zoom webinar, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and other sophisticate chat devices.

The result of research question 4a and 4b unveiled that the counsellors interviewed submitted that e-therapy can help therapists reach clients at distant place. According to them, e-therapy is faster and cheaper. It makes counselling effective, faster, and prominent among youth and serves as a standard and digital ways of counselling especially among the youths. It saves time. However, the counsellors submitted that the challenges of e-counselling are bad networks and poor technology know-how. They averred that e-therapy is time consuming, engenders low physical feedback and sometimes create fear of confidentiality by the clients. According to them, confidentiality can be compromised in e-therapy. This findings corroborated that of Speyer and Zack (2010), as referenced by Nwachukwu, Ngwuegbulam, and Nwazue (2014) and Rossano (2023) highlights the benefits of e-therapy, which include meeting with a therapist at one's own time and location, lowering transportation costs, reducing waiting times and lines, and allowing the therapist to be absent from the office, while some of the drawbacks of e-therapy include connectivity and internet access, such as lack of connectivity or difficulties with the same in rural areas, third-world electricity interruptions, computer skills for some clients, competency and confidence in engaging in online counseling for both client and counselor, the issue of confidentiality, and the inability to observe and assess nonverbal cues exhibited by clients.

The result of research question 5 showed the positions of the counsellors interviewed about the measures needed to be implemented to enhance privacy in e-therapy. Their positions include: counsellors should set some rules of terms of reference and follow it strictly. Training should be organised for counsellors in the use of technology for counselling and more awareness on e-therapy should be given to the populace. Confidentiality in counselling should be guaranteed by improving cyber security and upgrading ICT skills of counsellors. This outcome is consistent with Dagang's (2014)

assertion that integrity and trust in the counseling profession depend on adherence to professional ethical standards and rules when using technology for counseling.

Conclusion

Using technology to provide clients with guidance and counseling services in the current digital era at their comfort zones becomes necessary to enable everyone regardless of location, age, social-economic status, ethnicity, gender and nationality interact with professional counsellors for help. To achieve this, counsellors or therapists need to acquire and utilize technological skills (ICT applications) that will afford them the opportunity of providing online therapy geared towards meeting the needs of 21st century clients who are scattered across the globe which will in turn make them relevant in the counselling profession that is changing gradually from face to face relationship to online interaction. Though, e-therapy has its challenges, it is apparent that the need, importance, benefits and prospects derived from it use cannot be overemphasised.

Recommendations

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

1. Counsellors are to have open mind towards the use of e-therapy and desire to acquire necessary ICT skills that will boost their professionalism which will in turn make them relevant to the changing needs of the clients of the 21st century.
2. The Counselling Association of Nigeria should create more awareness on e-therapy to the populace and organize training for counsellors in the use of technology for counselling.
3. Government, University authorities and school heads should provide adequate ICT and internet facilities that will enhance uninterrupted e-therapy for effective and efficient guidance and counselling services.
4. The Counselling Association of Nigeria in conjunction with the technological experts should design e-therapy software application for easy accessibility by counsellors to effectively and efficiently provide

helping services to their variant clients.

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