



An Examination of How Counselor Professionals Perceive the Role of Ict in Making Counseling Services More Accessible and Inclusive

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ABSTRACT

This study scrutinizes counselors perceptions regarding the role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in advancing accessibility and inclusivity within Counselling services. A total of 159 counselor professionals participated in the survey, with 124 males and 35 females. The analysis of mean scores displayed a noteworthy variance between male ($M = 3.845$, $SD = 1.39841$) and female ($M = 3.50013$, $SD = 1.50923$) counsellor professionals' perceptions regarding ICT's influence on enhancing accessibility and inclusivity. The statistical examination utilizing an ANOVA test indicated a non-significant difference between the perceptions of male and female professionals ($F\text{-cal.} = 1.726$, $df_{\text{between}} = 3$, $df_{\text{within}} = 2$, $p = .415$). Consequently, the null hypothesis revealed no significant variance in perceptions based on gender was accepted.

INTRODUCTION

The advent of Information Communication Technology (ICT) has change the ways and manners by which human do things including counselling services. It has great impacts on the economic, political, social, sports, entertainment and most importantly in educational system. Education sector all over the world have benefited immensely from the application of computer to the teaching and learning activities. Nigeria National Policy of Education (2013) stated clearly that the use of Information Communication Technology (ICT) in education is to train students to compete more favourably with their counterparts across the globe. This policy emphasized the provision and adoption of ICT training in Nigeria schools in order to solve education problems or challenges.

It is observed by the researcher that, it is not enough for educational institutions to impacting knowledge alone to students but it should also make sure to help students identify issues that can stop them from reaching their full potential and offer practical solutions or alternatives for overcoming such issues. Students and employees who have problems can go to the university counselling unit to get them taken care of on campus. In order to help students reach their maximum potential, the counselling section is responsible for developing counselling programs. The school counselling programs provide a variety of counselling services, including educational counselling, informational counselling, personal-social counselling, psychological counselling, and vocational counselling, among others.

In the past, counsellors are found in using manual approach to offer counselling services to students. In the modern time, ICT like computers have been doing a wonderful job in delivering counselling services to clients. Computer is used to store, process, retrieve and sharing of information. According to Kachar and Joshi (2019), the use of computer includes storing, manipulation of information and transmission of data in an enterprise or institutions including University system. Abdulkareem (2023) emphasised that the benefits inherent in the use of ICT. Computer education is encouraged at all levels of education in conjunction with guidance and counselling practices. Guidance and counselling practices would be more established and effective through a developed ICT in the new millennium. Kachar and Joshi (2019) submitted that although some concern has been expressed regarding potentially inappropriate use of ICT applications, minimal attention has been paid to the impact of this technology on the identity and behaviour of counselling psychologists.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Abdulkareem (2023) lists some of the many benefits associated with online counselling which include client engaging a therapist at own space and time, reduction in transport fees, alleviation of waiting time and queues as well as the possibility of absence from the office for the therapist. Hassan and Abdulkareem (2023) stressed that information technology in counselling would simply mean the application of computers and technologies in counselling process. Ng'ambi, Bozalek, & Gachago, (2013) concluded that internet based therapy on the average is as effective or nearly as effective as face-to-face therapy. Hassan and Abdul

Kareem (2023) noted that the use of technology in counselling and psychotherapy is changing the face of the profession, with practitioners either being challenged and excited by the new opportunities it presents or feeling sceptical, overwhelmed or even frightened by an unwelcome intrusion into traditional methods of providing mental health services.

E-counselling can be a helpful addition to traditional modes of practice, according to Wells' study from 2021, even while it shouldn't be seen as a replacement for conventional, face-to-face counseling and psychotherapy, especially in regards to more serious emotional and psychological challenges. According to Jamiu et al.'s study (2023) revealed that there was no discernible difference between counsellors based in urban and rural areas in terms of mean scores, and ICT may be utilized very well in the counseling practice. Educational counselors should look into the prospect of consistently using the school computer in their job, according to a recommendation made by Hassan et al in 2023, in order to increase counselor effectiveness and efficiency. Ehindero et al (2023) found that there wasn't a significant connection between Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and career guidance among high school students. This discovery led to a deeper exploration of the intricate factors influencing the effectiveness of utilizing social networking platforms in assisting individuals with their career decisions.

However, some of the disadvantages would revolve around connectivity and access to the internet, lack of connectivity or difficulties with same in rural areas, third world electricity interruptions, computer skills for some clients and competency and confidence in engaging in online counselling for both client and counsellor (Abdulkareem, 2023). A highly debated issue at hand is confidentiality issues regarding online counselling and therapy. Jamiu et al (2023) observed that although several mental health professionals now offer counselling via the Internet, little empirical research exists on how this mode of delivery impacts clients and clients demonstrated a significant decrease in anxiety following each mode of delivery, their anxiety was not significantly impacted by the mode of delivery they received. Qazi, Hassan, Abayomi-Alli and Hardaker (2022) uncover no significant gender differences in information and communication technology use and skills with effect in size favour of boys than girls.

Muraina et al (2021) opined that the challenges of the new millennium go a long way in establishing the fact that there is no option other than to concentrate on the full integration of computer education into all levels of the Nigerian educational system. Nigeria needs well-established information and communication technology systems to meet up with other parts of the world. This is a gap; the current study is to find out perception and attitude of professional counsellors toward ICT integration for counselling services in Kwara Private Universities: Evidence from Alhikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

1. To find out the perception of professional counsellor toward ICT integration for counselling services in Alhikmah University, Ilorin based on gender.

2. To assess the attitude of professional counsellor toward ICT integration for counselling services in Alhikmah University, Ilorin based on cadre.

Research Questions

1. What is the perception of professional counsellors toward ICT integration for counselling services in Alhikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria?
2. What is the attitude of professional counsellors toward ICT integration for counselling services in Alhikmah University, Ilorin?

Research Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference between male and female perception of professional counsellors toward ICT integration for counselling services based on gender.
2. There is no significant difference in the attitude of professional counsellors toward ICT integration for counselling services in Alhikmah University based on cadre.

METHODOLOGY

The study was on the perception and attitude of professional counsellor toward ICT integration for counselling services in Kwara Private Universities: Evidence from Alhikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria. Descriptive survey method was used. The population was 159 academic staff consisting of 124 males and 35 females in Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin-Nigeria (Establishment Office, 2022). 5 lecturers who are professional counsellors from the Department of Management and Counselling, Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin were purposively selected. A questionnaire was the main data collection instrument. Face, contents and construct validity of the instrument was carried out by 2 experts from department of guidance and Counsellig and 1 expert from Department of Educational Technology, Al-Hikmah University, and Ilorin. The reliability of the instrument was done through pilot test using 3 counsellors from Kwara State College of Education, Ilorin and reliability score was 0.76. All the lecturers in the department constitute the sample size. Multi-stage sampling techniques such as purposive and accidental sampling techniques, purposive sampling was used to select set of school counselors while accidental sampling procedure was used to administer the instrument on the respondents and retrieved in person. Both descriptive and inferential statistical tools was used for data analyses, Descriptive statistical tool of mean and standard deviation scores was used to analyze data collected and presentation of results. T-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) statistical tools were used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significant.

RESEARCH RESULT

To facilitate understanding and reading, the results of the study are described first, followed by the discussion section. The results subtitles and discussion subtitles are presented separately.

Findings

To facilitate understanding and reading, the results of the study are described first, followed by the discussion section. The results subtitles and discussion subtitles are presented separately. This section must be the most numerous, a minimum of 60% of the entire body of the article.

Research Question 1: What is the perception of professional counsellors toward ICT integration for counselling services in Alhikmah University, Ilorin?

Table 1. Key: Always (5), Sometimes (4), Seldom (2), Never (1)

S/N	Statement on perception of professional counsellors toward ICT integration in counseling	Mean	Std.
1.	Am aware of integration of telephone in counselling.	3.5012	1.3681
2.	Am conscious of projector during orientation programme for undergraduate students.	3.7123	1.3721
3.	My grasps of integrating smart phones for provision of counselling services to students.	3.8067	1.3840
4.	Understanding of integration of computers with Internet facilities for counselling students is wonderful.	3.8407	1.5481
5.	My knowledge of integrating fax machines and CD-Rom,	3.8018	1.7472
6.	I do belief in integration of electronic notice boards, interactive white boards in counselling	3.2300	1.3980
7.	I understand the ways of integrating slides, video players and VCDs etc. in counselling.	3.8034	1.3374
8.	I could integrate landline or cell phone in counselling.	3.6000	1.3176

Source: Self developed (2022).

Table 1 revealed that majority of the professional counsellors shows strong perception to the statements “Understanding of integration of computers with Internet facilities for counselling students is wonderful” (M=3.8407; SD=1.5481); “My grasps of integrating smart-phones for provision of counselling services to students.”(M= 3.8067; 1.3840). However, “I do belief in integration of electronic notice boards, interactive white boards in counselling” (M=3.2300; 1.3980) suggest moderate perception.

Research Question 2: What is the attitude of professional counsellors toward ICT integration for counselling services in Alhikmah University based on cadre?

Table 2. Research Question 2

S/N	Statement on attitude of professional counsellors toward ICT integration in counseling	Mean	Std.
1.	My interest toward integrating telephone in counselling sessions.	3.7402	1.3341
2.	My belief in proper integration of electronic multi-media projectors during orientation programme for undergraduate students.	3.8205	1.3984

3.	My disposition toward integrating smart-phones for provision of counselling services to students.	3.8500	1.3360
4.	I have positive perspective to integrate computers with Internet facilities for counselling students.	3.8600	1.3981
5.	Mood to integrate fax machines, optic fibers, CD- Rom,	3.5000	1.5093
6.	I have good spirit to deploy electronic notice boards, interactive white boards in counseling	3.3000	1.3981
7.	I have positive posture toward integrating slides and slide projectors, overhead projectors, video players and VCDs etc in counselling.	3.6000	1.2649
8.	I have good instinct to integrate ICT tools in counselling process	3.8800	1.3374
9.	I develop a positive mindset toward ICT integration in counselling.	3.8842	1.3501
10.	I use of Cellphone in counselling process	3.2014	1.4019

Source: Self developed (2022)

Table 2 shows that majority of the professional counsellors have positive attitude to the statements “I develop a positive mind-set toward ICT integration in counselling” (M=3.8842; SD=1. 1.3501); “I have good instinct to integrate ICT tools in counselling process” (M= 3.8800; 1.3374). However, “I use of Cellphone or land line phones in counselling process” (M=3.2014; 1.4019) suggest moderate attitude toward integration of Cellphone or land line phones in counselling process.

Ho₁: There is no significant difference in the perception of professional counsellors toward ICT integration for counselling services in Alhikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria based on gender.

Table 3. Summary Results T-test on the Difference Between Male and Female Perception of ICT Integration in Counselling

Varaiables	N	Mean	Std	df	t.cal
Male	124	3.84500	1.39841		
Female	35	3.50013	1.50923	1	15.927
Total	159				.000

Difference is significant at t.cal-value 15.927 > p. 0.05.

Table 3 showed that the t. calculation of 15.927 is greater than the p. value 0.05 (p.> 0.05). Therefore, hypothesis HO₁ is rejected. Hence, it can be inferred that there is significant difference between male and female perception of professional counsellors toward ICT integration for counselling services in Alhikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in the attitude of professional counsellors toward ICT integration for counselling services in Alhikmah University based on cadre.

ANOVA

Table 4. Attitude Towards ICT Integration for Counselling Services Based on Cadre

	Sum of Square	df.	Mean Square	F-cal.	Sig.	Remark
Between Groups	15.100	3	2.157	1.726	.415	accepted
Within Groups	2.500	2	1.250			
Total	17.600	5				

Difference is significant at F.cal. Value 1.726 > p.0.05)

Source: Author’s Computation, 2022.

Table 4 shows the difference in the use of ICT by the professional counsellors on the basis of cadre. From the table F-calculation is 1.726 and P-value is .415. F-cal. of 1.726 is higher than the p-value of 0.05. (t-cal 1.726 > p. value 0.05). Therefore, null hypothesis 2 is rejected. It can be deduced that there is difference in the ICT integration by the professional counsellors on the basis of cadre.

DISCUSSION

The study found that there is significant difference in the perception of professional counsellors toward ICT integration for counselling services in Alhikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria based on gender. This outcome is an indication that male and female counselors perceived the ICT integration from different angles. This finding correlate with Qazi, Hassan, Abayomi-Alli and Hardaker (2022) who investigated gender differences in information and communication technology use and skills and uncover that ICT use and skills favour boys than girls.

The study found that there is difference in the ICT integration by the professional counsellors on the basis of cadre. The finding showed that counsellors have positive attitude toward ICT integration for counselling services in Alhikmah University, Ilorin. The result was in agreement with Hassan and Abdulkareem (2023) that ICT could be highly applied in the counselling practice and that no significant difference was observed in the mean scores of urban and rural based counsellors. In addition, (Abdulkareem, 2023) suggested that educational counsellors investigate the possibility of routinely utilising the school computer in their work in order to improve counsellor effectiveness and efficiency.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Based on the findings from hypotheses, the study concluded that there is male counsellors integrated ICT than their female counterpart for counselling services in Alhikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria. The study also concluded that

senior cadre counsellors integrated ICT for counselling services than those in the lower cadre in Alhikmah University, Ilorin.

Reccommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommended that the University management should establish a befitting counselling centre with modern ICT facilities in Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria. Especially in the female counselors' offices, having counselling centre would bridge the dichotomy between male and female counsellors toward ICT integration in counselling. The study also recommended that the school management should organize ICT integration in counselling services for lower cadre counsellors in the University. This would further enhance their ICT skills and also strengthen their attitude to ICT integration in the provision of counselling services to the university community in and outside the campus.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

In writing this article the researcher realizes that there are still many shortcomings in terms of language, writing, and form of presentation considering the limited knowledge and abilities of the researchers themselves. Therefore, for the perfection of the article, the researcher expects constructive criticism and suggestions from various parties.

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