PERCEPTIONS OF GUIDANCE COUNSELLORS ON FACTORS HINDERING ONLINE COUNSELLING IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN LAGOS STATE

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Abstract

One of the major responsibilities of professional counsellors is the provision of counselling service to every school child irrespective of the child's location. However, counsellors could encounter challenges in rendering quality virtual service to students due to many factors. This study therefore investigated school counsellors' perceptions on factors hindering online counselling in Lagos State, Nigeria. The descriptive survey method was adopted where a total of one hundred and twenty respondents were randomly selected to participate in the study. Questionnaire titled "Factors Hindering Online Counselling Service Questionnaire (FHOCS)" was employed to gather data. The content validity of the instrument was established using experts. The reliability value of 0.71 was established. The measure of central tendency (mean) and rank ordering were used to answer the research question while t-test statistical tool was used to test the first hypothesis and One Way Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test the second and third hypotheses. The results revealed that irregular supply of electricity and interruption of therapy due to technological problems were the most significant factors hindering provision of online counselling service to students. Also, there is significant difference based on educational qualification. It was recommended that school counsellors should take time out to acquire training on personal computing and its applications and how to navigate the internet and other technological devices for delivery of online guidance and counselling services.

Keywords: Perception, Online Counselling, Guidance Counsellor, Information.

Introduction

Counselling is a relationship involving the provision of information and assistance based on psychological principles by a professional. This help-based relationship is aimed at moving clients toward a desirable change in their life (Zainudin & Yusop, 2018).Professional counselling practice

is typically viewed as a relationship involving the counsellor and the client sharing the same physical space and discussing some personal issues concerning the client (Dey & Kumar, 2020). Counselling is vital to the successful implementation of an academic programme and enough consideration should be given to its proper delivery to ensure that its aims and objectives are achieved (Watts, 2010). However, the advancement and subsequent explosion of Information Communication Technology have brought about some innovations to the field of counselling. The potential within the cyberspace and the World Wide Web (www) have had a profound impact on the practice of counselling as a good number of practitioners are moving their practice online to supplement the traditional face-to-face interaction (Zainudin &Yusop, 2018). Counselling services can now be offered without having to schedule a face-to-face appointment; thecounsellor's role has changed as intimate settings can now be created online (Skinner & Latchford, 2006).

Online counselling is the delivery of professional counselling that occurs when a client and a practicing counsellor are in remote locations and their interaction takes place virtually. The interaction could be either intended as a supplement to face-to-face communication or as a stand-alone intervention. The information communication devices employed are those of everyday use such as smart phones and computers and it may involve the use of email, chat modalities and videoconferencing (Maheu, Pulier, McMenamin, & Posen, 2012).

With this development, secondary school counsellors are having a hard time providing innovative avenues to back students up in their preferred communication. It becomes imperative for secondary school counsellors to embrace technology such as online counselling modalities so as to play their role more effectively, especially with the increased rate of internet users among adolescents (Cipolleta & Mocellin, 2017).

Moreover, online counselling is quite economical to face-to-face counselling, client's privacy is also ensured by taking sessions at home. Counsellors also benefit as it allows them to carefully structure their questions, and they can engage the client from anywhere. Furthermore, online sessions can go as long as the client desires, with the pace being slowed down or put off with ease and clients can as well re-chose their counsellor, clients who would rather remain anonymous also choose online counselling (Stoll, Muller, &Trachsel, 2020).

Mallen, Vogel, and Rochlen (2005) opined that not all school counsellors are interested in providing counselling services online; therefore, to initiate such practices in secondary schools, the

desire of the practitioner to engage in services should be ascertained. One important requirement to be met for those interested is how to train them to effectively carry out this service. Although a school counsellor may be good in face-to-face interaction, the practitioner may not be able to transfer and adapt these techniques in order to effectively relate with clients virtually. To effectively deliver online service it is necessary to acquire training in communication technology (Yager & Feinstein, 2017).

However, Richiello, Mawdsley, and Gutman (2021) stressed that before employing online therapeutic services it is important that school counselling units consider likely delivery modalities and identify potential barriers to the successful implementation of online counselling services. These include lack of visual cues and increased tendency for misunderstanding, increased clients' anxiety as a result of delayed response and counsellors' inability to protect client in the event of immediate crisis.Similarly; Glasheen, McMahon, Campbell, Rickwood, and Shochet (2018) opined that in conveying emotions, the lack of visual and non-verbal cues seem to lower practitioners' confidence that they are having emotional connection with their clients. They stressed that in face-to-face counselling sessions, relationships deepen when counsellors share moments with clients such as laughter or pain. But, as a result of not seeing or capturing clients in online interaction that emotional exchange is often not shared. Decreased empathy and sensitivity is also associated with online counselling as a result of lack of visual and auditory cues in online interaction (Richiello, Mawdsley, & Gutman, 2021).

Furthermore, counsellors employing the use of online modalities may struggle with the technicalities of online therapeutic communication and with the challenge of transferring and adapting their capacity to initiate and sustain relationships in this new environment (Owolabi, 2018).Baker and Ray (2011) carried out a study on, working alliance in online therapy as compared to face-to-face therapy. The result from the study revealed some disadvantages against online counselling; most prominent concerns the difficulties in having strong therapeutic relationship in the absence of non-verbal cues and messages. Similarly, Dunn (2014) reported that non-verbal information is a necessity in therapy as it is highly critical to building relationships. However, non-verbal cues may not really affect counselling interaction held through video conferencing.

In the study of Richiello, Mawdsley, and Gutman (2021) it was suggested that online counsellors should acquire adequate training in the usage of new technologies for communication purposes such

as decoding text messages conveyed through synchronous chat and the ability to assess clients in the absence of non-verbal cues and messages.

The study of Eyo (2012), on problems hindering the utilization of Information Communication Technology (ICT) in counsellor education in Nigerian universities, found that factors hindering the usage of Information Communication Technology in counselling include: inadequate access to the internet, inefficiency in computer skills, high cost of acquiring a computer and of linking it to the internet and problem of electricity supply.

Finn and Barak (2010) conducted a study employing the descriptive survey research design on online counsellors' attitudes, practices and ethical behaviours. In the study, a good number of counsellors identified training and supervision of counsellors as a major problem area. Majority of the counsellors who participated in the study reported that their programme did not cover training in online counselling and thus constitutes a barrier to its effective implementation. Likewise, Ersahin and Hanley (2017) conducted a systemic review on synchronous online counselling, the study revealed that lack of quality training of counsellors results in a lack of awareness of regulations guiding the conduct of online counselling, such as, when to break the principle of confidentiality and how to effectively implement online therapeutic communication with young people.

ICT proficiency is a major challenge facing the secondary school sector in Nigeria. A lot of secondary school students and counsellors are technically incapable of the use of ICT skills, tools and resources to promote and complement counselling services. The breakthrough in technology and its advancement has taken counselling service beyond face-to-face interaction to online correspondence. Sadly, the realization of this paradigm shift in Nigeria still remains a pipe dream. From the literature above, some of the reviewed studies employed different research designs, data collection instruments and methodologies; however, none of the studies addressed factors hindering online counselling in secondary schools in Lagos State. The current study addresses this research gap. The aim of this study is to examine counsellors' perceptions on factors hindering online counselling in secondary schools in Lagos State.

Research Question

What are the Guidance Counsellors' perceived factors hindering online counselling in secondary schools in Lagos State?

1. Research Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in the perceptions of guidance counsellors on factors hindering online counselling in Lagos State on the basis of gender.
2. There is no significant difference in the perceptions of guidance counsellors on factors hindering online counselling in Lagos State on the basis of educational qualification.
3. There is no significant difference in the perceptions of guidance counsellors on factors hindering online counselling in Lagos State on the basis of training in online counselling.

Methodology

The descriptive survey design was used for the study. The population for the study comprised all the counsellors in secondary schools in Lagos State, while the target population involved practicing school counsellors in the state. 20 counsellors were randomly selected from each of the six education districts in Lagos State, in all 120 counsellors participated in the study. A self-constructed questionnaire was used as research instrument. The questionnaire was divided into two parts, namely: demographic variables and factors hindering online counselling. Factors hindering online counselling is a 20-item scale. The scale was on a 4-point response category; ranging from Strongly Agree – SA, Agree – A, Disagree –D and Strongly Disagree – SD. The instrument was presented to experts in the field of psychometrics for face and content validity. A pilot test was carried out among 15 counsellors who were not part of those selected for the main study. The Chronbach alpha is the statistical tool used to determine the reliability of the instrument. The reliability test which included the whole items in the questionnaire, except the demographic characteristics, gave a reliability result of 0.71. Data collected for this study was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The measure of central tendency (mean) and rank order was used to answer the research question while t-test statistical tool was used to test the first hypothesis and One Way Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test the second and third hypothesis at 0.05 alpha level.

Results

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by gender, educational qualification and training in online counselling

N	Variables		Frequency	Percentage %
1	**Gender**	Male	43	35.8
		Female	77	64.2
		Total	**120**	**100.0**
2	**Educational Qualification**	B.Ed.	89	74.2
		M.Ed.	27	22.5
		PhD	4	3.3
		Total	**120**	**100.0**
3	**Online Counselling Training**	Computer Software/H.	12	10.0
		Self-help Guide	9	7.5
		Phone	40	33.3
		Zoom	42	35.0
		Google Meet	10	8.3
		Hangout	7	5.8
		Total	**120**	**100.0**

Table 1, shows that, of the 120 participants in the study, more female counsellors, 77 (64.2%) participated than their male counterparts, 43(35.8%). With respect to educational qualification, 89 (74.2%) of the respondents have B.Ed., 1st Degree qualification; 27 (22.5%) were M.Ed., Master's Degree holders; while, 4 (3.3%) have bagged their Ph.D. Finally, 42 (35.0%) of the respondents have had training in online counselling on Zoom; 40 (33.3%) of the respondents have had training in online counselling on their phones; 12 (10%) of the respondents have had training on computer software and hardware; 10 (8.3%) have had online counselling training on Google meet; 9 (7.5%) have had training in online counselling through self-help guide resources; while, 7 (5.8%) have had online counselling training on Hangout.

Research Question: What are the perceived factors hindering online counselling in secondary schools by guidance counsellors in Lagos State?

Table 2: Mean and Rank order of perceived factors hindering online counselling in secondary schools by guidance counsellors in Lagos State.

N	Factors;	Mean	Rank
8.	Irregular supply of electricity	3.36	1st
13.	Interruption of therapy due to technological problems	3.27	2nd
1.	Inability to observe client's non-verbal cues	3.21	3rd
4.	Lack of training in delivering online counselling	3.19	4th
14.	The capacity to form a therapeutic alliance using online counselling	3.12	5th
9.	Identifying the kind of concerns which are appropriate for online counselling.	3.11	6th
3	Inadequate access to the internet	3.06	7th
7.	Inadequate availability of online counselling facilities	3.05	8th
6.	The high cost of acquiring a computer	2.99	9th
10.	The possibility of misunderstanding.	2.95	10th
12.	Electronic confidentiality and privacy issues	2.94	11th
11.	Maintenance of professional boundaries	2.91	12th
19.	Poor maintenance of online counselling facilities	2.91	13th
15.	Client's identity issues	2.88	14th
17.	Licensure issues.	2.88	15th
20.	Time delays	2.85	16th
5.	Inability to access self-help guide in online counselling	2.80	17th
2.	Inefficiency in computer skills	2.79	18th
16.	Counsellor's identity issues	2.74	19th
18.	Recordability	2.63	20th

Weighted Mean: 2.50

Table 2, shows that all the twenty items have mean scores above the average mean score of 2.50 (which is the benchmark for determining the major factors hindering online counselling. The benchmark was derived by adding all the scale points of the questionnaire together (i.e 4+3+2+1 and divided by 4). Simply that the respondents believed that all the items could hinder online counselling in Lagos State). However, items 8, 13, 1, 4 and 14 with mean values of 3.36, 3.27, 3.21, 3.19 and 3.12 preceded others, hence, were ranked 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th respectively. The items indicated irregular supply of electricity, interruption of therapy due to technological problems, inability to observe client's non-verbal cues, lack of training in delivering online counselling and the capacity to

form a therapeutic alliance using online counselling as factors hindering online counselling in secondary schools in Lagos State.

Three null hypotheses were postulated and tested for this study. The hypotheses were tested using t-test and Analysis of Variance statistical methods at 0.05 level of significance.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference in the perceptions of guidance counsellors on factors hindering online counselling in Lagos State on the basis of Gender.

Table 3*:* Result of independent sample t-test onperceptions of guidance counsellors on factors hindering online counselling in Lagos State on the basis of gender.

Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	cal.t	Sig	Remark
Male	43	60.30	5.86				Not significant
Female	77	59.23	7.37	118	0.82	0.61	

Table 3, shows the result of the analysis of male and female counsellors' perceptions of factors hindering online counselling in secondary schools in Lagos State. Male (M=60.30, SD=5.86), Female (M=59.23, SD=7.37, t=0.82, p=0.61). The probability value (p-value) of 0.61 is greater than the 0.05 significant level. This indicates no significant difference hence; the hypothesis was not rejected. Therefore, gender has no significant influenceon factors hindering online counselling in secondary schools as perceived by guidance counsellors in Lagos State.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference in the perceptions of guidance counsellors on factors hindering online counselling in Lagos State on the basis of educational qualification.

Table 4: One Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) showing difference in the perceptions of guidance counsellors on factors hindering online counselling in Lagos State on the basis of educational qualification.

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Remark
Between Groups	282.082	2	141.041	3.104	0.049	Significant
Within Groups	5316.285	117	45.438			
Total	5598.367	119				

Table 4 shows a calculated F-value of 3.104 with calculated significant value of 0.049 at 0.05 alpha level. Since calculated significance of 0.049 is less than 0.05 alpha level, hypothesis two is thus rejected. Therefore, there is a significant difference in the perceptions of guidance counsellors on factors hindering online counselling in Lagos State on the basis of educational qualification.Since there is a significant difference in the perceptions of guidance counsellors on factors hindering online counselling in Lagos State on the basis of educational qualification a further analysis was thus conducted to show the magnitude of difference in the teachers' perceptions using Scheffe post-hoc test.

Table 5: Scheffe post-hoc analysis on significant difference in the perceptions of guidance counsellors on factors hindering online counselling in Lagos State on the basis of educational qualification.

Edu. Qual.	N	Mean	Group
M.Ed.	27	56.78	1
B.Ed.	89	60.42	2
Ph.D.	4	61.00	**3**

Table 5 shows the post-hoc analysis on the significant difference in the perceptions of guidance counsellors on factors hindering online counselling in Lagos State on the basis of educational qualification. The table revealed that PhD respondents had a mean score of 61.00 followed by B.Ed. and M.Ed. respondents with mean scores of 60.42 and 56.78 respectively. Hence, guidance counsellors with Ph.D. qualification contributed more to the significant difference that was noticed in table 5. This might be due to their high level of education.

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant difference in the perceptions of guidance counsellors on factors hindering online counselling in Lagos State on the basis of online counselling training.

Table 5*: One Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) showing difference in the perceptions of guidance counsellors on factors hindering online counselling in Lagos State on the basis of training in online counselling.

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Remark
Between Groups	95.849	5	19.170	0.397	0.85	Not Significant
Within Groups	5502.518	114	48.268			
Total	5598.367	119				

Table 5 shows a calculated F-value of 0.397 with calculated significant value of .850 at 0.05 alpha level. Since calculated significance of 0.850 is greater than 0.05 alpha level, hypothesis three is thus not rejected. Therefore, there is no significant difference in the perceptions of guidance counsellors on factors hindering online counselling in Lagos State on the basis of training in online counselling.

Discussion of the Findings

The study found that secondary school counsellors in Lagos State perceived that the delivery of online counselling in schools is being threatened by irregular supply of electricity, interruption of therapy due to technological problems, inability to observe client's non-verbal cues, lack of training in delivering online counselling and the capacity to form a therapeutic alliance using online counselling. This means that school counsellors in Lagos were aware of the need for online counselling services to be sustained in secondary schools but were of the opinion that there are some impediments. The implication of this is that online counselling in secondary schools is still yet to have a stand as expected. The finding of this study is in line with the view of Navaro, Sheffield, Edirippulige and Bambling (2020) which noted that some of the factors decreasing the effectiveness of online counselling are: absence of non-verbal conversational cues, inefficiency in personal computing and challenges owing to internet connectivity. Although, a practitioner may have provided a face-to-face counselling for years, he or she may find it difficult to transfer these techniques online, as observed in the study of Foon, Zainudin, Yusop,andWan-Othman (2020), which revealed that online counselling services was affected by the lack of online counselling skills training and lack of competency in technical skills. Similarly, Steele, Jacokes, & Stone (2014) reported that timely and

265

regular training in technology would raise counsellors' competence level to deliver online services. Hypothesis One revealed that there is no significant difference in the perceptions of guidance counsellors on factors hindering online counselling in Lagos State on the basis of gender. This implies that both male and female secondary school counsellors in Lagos State are not different in their perceptions on factors hindering online counselling in secondary schools. This finding is in line with that of Klemm, Bunnell, Cullen, Soneji, Gibbons, and Holecek (2003) which reported striking similarities between the online patterns of male and female counsellors.The second hypothesis revealed that there is significant difference in the perceptions of guidance counsellors on factors hindering online counselling in Lagos State on the basis of educational qualification. This means that difference in the respondents' educational qualifications has significant influence in their perceptions of factors hindering online counselling in secondary schools. This finding is in agreement with that of Susandra, Hidayah, and Rahman (2020) which noted that the bachelor's degree in guidance and counselling should only lead to a master's degree/Ph.D. in the programme as it is proper for school counsellors to master the counsellor's competence as a whole. The result of the third hypothesis revealed that there is no significant difference in the perceptions of guidance counsellors on factors hindering online counselling in Lagos State on the basis of online counselling training. This means that the perceptions of respondents who have had courses in computer hardware and software did not differ from that of those who updated their online counselling skills from self-help guide resources, phone, Zoom, Google Meet and Hangout. The finding here is not in line with that from the earlier study of Kerwin, Walker-Smith,and Kirby (2005) which noted that forms of training for counsellors should be based on the specialization, skills and qualifications of the counsellor. It stated that, although, there are no empirical evidence to posit that one form of training is superior to the other. However, differences in training could have implications for professional competence.

Conclusion

The findings of this study revealed that secondary school counsellors in Lagos State are aware of the need for online counselling services to be sustained in our schools, but were of the opinion that there are some impediments. The results of the hypothesis tested revealed no significant difference in counsellors' perception on factors hindering online counselling in Lagos State based on gender and online counselling training while there is significant difference based on educational qualifications.

Recommendations

1. Federal and state ministries of education should equip school counsellors through online counselling training, seminars and workshops with the right sensitization, orientation and information on the nature of online counselling in schools.

2. Computers with stable internet connection should be provided in all secondary school counselling centers for the provision of online counselling services.

3. Self-help guide resources/materials on how to navigate the internet, the basics of personal computing and the use of e-mail should be made available to school counsellors.

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