



Awareness, efficacy, and readiness on the usability of counseling service application software to enhance the academic outcome

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ABSTRACT

With the emergence of e-counseling applications, counseling services can now be provided to clients online. This study examines secondary school counselors' awareness, efficacy, and readiness to utilize counseling service application software in Lagos, Nigeria. Using a descriptive survey design, data were collected through a standardized questionnaire validated by experts. The analysis revealed that counselors exhibit low awareness, capability, and readiness to use such software. Additionally, there is a moderate positive relationship between these variables and the usability of counseling applications, which is statistically significant. These findings highlight the need for training programs to enhance counselors' awareness and competencies. Support from the government and educational institutions is essential to promote the adoption of this technology, which can improve counseling effectiveness, support students' mental health, and enhance academic outcomes. Collaboration with technology experts is strongly recommended to optimize the application of this software in counseling practices.

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ABSTRAK

Munculnya aplikasi e-konseling, layanan konseling kini dapat diberikan kepada klien secara online. Penelitian ini mengkaji tingkat kesadaran, efikasi, dan kesiapan konselor sekolah menengah di Lagos, Nigeria, dalam menggunakan perangkat lunak aplikasi layanan konseling. Dengan desain survei deskriptif, data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner terstandar yang telah divalidasi oleh para ahli. Analisis data menunjukkan bahwa konselor memiliki tingkat kesadaran, kemampuan, dan kesiapan yang rendah terhadap penggunaan perangkat lunak tersebut. Hasil juga menunjukkan adanya hubungan positif yang moderat antara ketiga variabel tersebut dengan kegunaan aplikasi konseling, yang signifikan secara statistik. Temuan ini menyoroti pentingnya program pelatihan yang dirancang untuk meningkatkan kesadaran dan kompetensi konselor. Dukungan pemerintah dan institusi pendidikan diperlukan untuk memfasilitasi adopsi teknologi ini, yang diharapkan dapat meningkatkan efektivitas layanan konseling, mendukung kesehatan mental siswa, serta memperbaiki hasil akademik mereka. Kolaborasi dengan pakar teknologi sangat dianjurkan untuk memaksimalkan penerapan perangkat lunak ini dalam praktik konseling.

Kata Kunci: aplikasi layanan konseling; konseling; teknologi

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INTRODUCTION

Information communication technology has come to replace the traditional methods of face-to-face counseling relationships. With the advent of e-counseling applications, counseling services are now possible for clients online. Technological advancements in computers and the internet introduced e-counseling decades ago; it is not a new concept in counseling. E-counseling clients are more satisfied than the face-to-face approach (Bello et al., 2023; Zainudin et al., 2021).

In developed countries like the United States of America, various counseling applications have been discovered and used to provide counseling services to clients. Electronic counseling started early in the 1960s in countries in the Western region, such as the United States, with the development of computer software (Ehinderero et al., 2024). For example, in ELIZA and PLATO, clients responded to a counselor via computer instead of absolute (Hassan et al., 2024). What happened was that the client was exploring his feelings based on the questions given by ELIZA. This program is the first attempt in the counseling field to use computers for communication in the form of therapeutic. The ELIZA service was first introduced at the International Conference on Computer Communication in October 1972.

These counseling service applications can work on smartphones and are most helpful in registering potential clients. Select the type of concern or concern, be it academic, personal-social, or psychological concerns. After this, the client is asked to select a counselor who prefers to have a counseling relationship. These and more are some of the information required while using counseling applications online. Previous studies demonstrate that counseling applications have made e-counseling possible and workable. Online therapy, also known as teletherapy, virtual therapy, or internet/online counseling, among other names, is rapidly expanding (Tiamiyu et al., 2024). Online counseling, or e-counseling, has begun to gain popularity, allowing counselors to offer their services alternatively (Zainudin et al., 2021).

Asserts that e-counseling can be a valuable adjunct to traditional modes of practice (Wells, 2021). The main benefit of the online environment is emotional safety due to reduced client emotional proximity to the counselor, and the main disadvantage is that reduced emotional proximity and the absence of non-verbal cues could result in communication problems and difficulty in accurately assessing young people's concerns. Time proved a significant issue for counselors, as the slow speed of text exchange could limit their ability to complete interventions. Methods that enhance both the process and effectiveness of online counseling are needed. Potential solutions to the challenges faced by online counselors are discussed. Clients report strong beliefs in the effectiveness of telepsychotherapy and identified advantages, including enhanced freedom of expression through writing, reduced costs, anonymity, and convenience. However, clients also noted concerns about confidentiality and security of personal information and potential technical difficulties (Schwartzman & Boswell, 2020).

An extensive review of distance counseling, analyzing the efficacy of online therapy, along with illustrated examples. Included topics are 1) the pros and cons of online therapy; 2) its best practices, ethical issues, and limitations; 3) and how online therapy works. Moreover, the researcher aims to impart a summary of online therapy through a literature review and

survey and identify the vital predicament of distance counseling to be examined and reviewed by future researchers. Data was collected from different resources, like UST Miguel de Benavides Library, Library Genesis, Google Scholar, books, videos, newsletters, blogs, and other means through descriptive-analytical qualitative research design. The findings suggest that online therapy is efficacious, underpinning the online disinhibiting effect. It implies that the current study may benefit the current situation that the world is facing when the COVID-19 pandemic arises. The possibility of contacting their counselors when needed might make them feel good and allow them to receive online counseling because of anonymity and ease. The literature on empathy in the context of online health care and clinical interventions is still sparse (Grondin et al., 2019).

The American Psychological Association provides specific guidance for therapists who use telecommunication to treat patients. Their advice, which can also apply to those using teletherapy services, includes the following precautions: counselors should do their best to understand the technology you are using, including any necessary security measures, Take care with your use of social media, and be aware that even your search history is a potential security risk, Know that electronic communication has a higher risk of being made public and Use robust passwords, data encryption, and other similar security measures (Barnwell, 2019). Some conventional-thinking counseling practitioners still criticize online counseling as not a genuine counseling service. However, in developing nations like Nigeria, counseling applications are used to create counseling awareness among teaming youths who are passing through one challenge of life or another at the infant level. This study is on the awareness, efficacy, and readiness of the usability of counseling service application software among secondary school counselors in Lagos State (Schlenger et al., 2022). E-counseling is also widely implemented in education and learning in schools. The efficacy of technology in enhancing educational counseling services (Muhammad, 2024). Internet technologies are rapidly changing our lives, so school counselors now face challenges in providing innovative ways to support students in their preferred communication mode (Foon et al., 2020).

To determine the level of awareness on the usability of counseling service application software among secondary school counselors in Lagos State. To find out the influence of efficacy on the usability of counseling service application software among secondary school counselors in Lagos State. To assess the readiness for the usability of counseling service application software among secondary school counselors in Lagos State and to enhance the student academic outcome.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Technology Acceptance Model

A suitable theory to guide this study is the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). TAM is widely used to explain how users accept and adopt new technologies (Guner & Acarturk, 2020). The model suggests that two key factors, perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use, significantly influence a user's decision to embrace a technology. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) can effectively guide this study by illustrating the relationships between awareness, efficacy, readiness, and usability of counseling service applications (AlQudah et al., 2021). TAM explains that external variables such as promotional activities

and educational efforts affect how users perceive a technology. In the context of counseling service apps, awareness functions as an external factor that informs users about the existence and benefits of the app. Users are more likely to view the app as beneficial and easy to use when they are aware. Higher awareness increases perceived usefulness and ease of use, making users more likely to adopt the app. TAM posits that perceived usefulness refers to the degree to which a user believes using the technology will improve their performance or outcomes (Masadeh & El-Hagggar, 2024).

In this study, efficacy relates to how users perceive the counseling app's ability to address their mental health needs. If users perceive the app as effective in improving their mental health (i.e., high efficacy), they will perceive it as applicable. This positive perception encourages adoption and continuous use. TAM defines perceived ease of use as the extent a user believes using the technology will be free from effort. In this study, readiness refers to the user's preparedness to engage with the app, including their technical ability and willingness to seek help via a digital platform. If users find the app easy to navigate, they are more likely to feel prepared (ready) to use it, thereby increasing their likelihood of adopting it. TAM suggests that a user's attitude toward using a technology is shaped by their perceptions of its usefulness and ease of use. In this study, usability represents the app's user-friendliness, design, and overall experience for users (Legi & Saerang, 2020).

Figure 1 explains how a well-designed app with high usability positively influences users' attitudes. If the app is user-friendly, accessible, and meets the user's needs, it enhances perceived usefulness and ease of use, leading to higher engagement and adoption. To use a technology is the most direct predictor of actual use. Both perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use influence it. In this study, behavioral intention reflects the likelihood of users adopting the counseling app based on their perceptions of its efficacy (usefulness) and ease of use (readiness). Greater awareness, higher perceived efficacy, and increased readiness lead to stronger behavioral intentions to use the app, ultimately resulting in its actual adoption (Tahar et al., 2020).

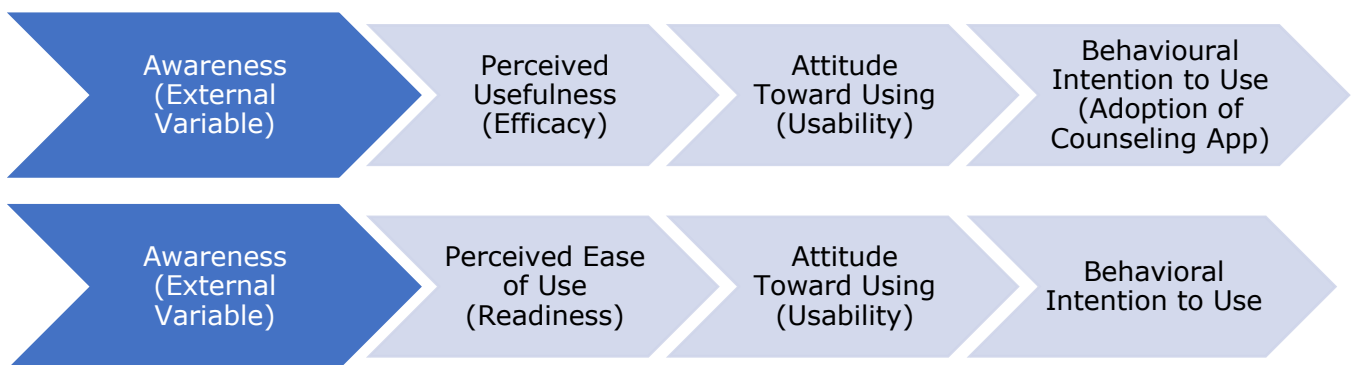


Figure 1. Perceived Usefulness of Adoption Counseling App
Source: Research 2024

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) provides a theoretical framework for understanding the factors influencing counseling service application software adoption and usability. In this context, awareness is an external factor that informs perceived usefulness (efficacy) and ease of use (readiness). These perceptions shape users' attitudes toward the app's usability, ultimately influencing their behavioral intention. By employing TAM, this study can identify

and assess the key determinants that drive the successful adoption and sustained use of digital mental health services (AlQudah et al., 2021).

Awareness refers to the extent to which potential users know about the existence of counseling service applications. Research shows that awareness is influenced by marketing efforts, educational programs, and promotional campaigns (Henderson et al., 2020). Institutions like universities significantly enhance awareness by integrating these apps into mental health literacy initiatives (Murray, 2021). However, despite the growing availability of these services, a large portion of the population remains unaware due to insufficient outreach or misconceptions about the quality and effectiveness of digital mental health interventions (Morris & Schueller, 2020).

Efficacy refers to how well these applications meet their goals of improving mental health outcomes. Applications based on evidence-based practices, such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), have significantly improved mental health outcomes (Andersson et al., 2019). Apps that actively incorporate user feedback tend to evolve and better meet user needs over time (Nunirmala et al., 2024). However, the long-term efficacy of these applications remains a key area of study, as some research suggests that while short-term benefits are clear, sustained improvements may not always be achieved without robust empirical support (Torous et al., 2020).

Readiness is the extent to which users are prepared to engage with counseling service applications regarding technical ability and willingness to use digital platforms for mental health support. Digital literacy plays a critical role; individuals comfortable with using smartphones and apps are likelier to adopt these services, whereas older adults or those with limited tech skills may struggle (Lu et al., 2024; Widjaya & Komara, 2023). Moreover, mental preparedness is a barrier, with the stigma surrounding mental health and concerns about privacy reducing readiness to engage with these services. Socioeconomic factors also influence readiness. For instance, access to smartphones and reliable internet connections are prerequisites for using these apps. Individuals from low-income backgrounds or those living in remote areas often face barriers that limit their ability to benefit from digital counseling services (Jardine et al., 2022).

Usability refers to how easily users can navigate and benefit from a counseling service application. Usability is critical to user engagement (Nielsen et al., 2019). A well-designed app with a simple user interface, clear instructions, and easy navigation enhances user experience and ensures consistent use. Key features that ensure usability include secure communication channels with counselors, confidentiality, flexibility in scheduling, and access to mental health resources. Furthermore, ensuring the app is accessible to diverse users, such as providing language options and accommodating users with disabilities, is essential for maximizing usability (Torous et al., 2020).

Integration with other health-related apps, such as fitness trackers or mood monitoring tools, can also enhance the app's overall value and usability. The usability of counseling service applications depends on awareness, efficacy, and readiness (Flavián et al., 2022). Ensuring users know the app, understand its efficacy, and are ready to engage with it is critical for successful adoption. Research shows that applications grounded in scientific evidence, designed with user feedback, and accessible to a broad audience are more likely to promote long-term engagement and improve mental health outcomes (Torous et al., 2020).

Counselling Services

Counseling services are services between counselors and clients face-to-face to discuss the problems faced by clients. Counseling services at higher education allow students to obtain personal services through direct face-to-face contact with the counselor. Counseling services are expected to help students solve their problems by consulting with counselors. Counseling services can solve problems and take precautions for clients. In counseling problems in junior high schools, students often skip school, so counseling services are needed to solve these problems (Fauziyah, 2021). Counselors help clients achieve independence and maturity in solving their problems to be helpful in the future (Nehe et al., 2024).

Counseling services hold the principle of humanity or service to others by helping students achieve independence. The components of counseling include essential services, responsive services, individual planning, and support systems to help students know their self-concept and the surrounding environment so that awareness of the importance of development and transformation arises (Nehe et al., 2024). Counselors are tasked with helping students develop their potential optimally, so counselors must provide guidance service designs for students according to their needs, individually and in groups (Gaho et al., 2021).

Counseling services can be carried out with role-playing techniques that allow students to discuss and solve the problems they experience. This technique is expected to improve students' interactions with the surrounding environment. Role-playing counseling allows clients to discuss personal problems by exchanging experiences, knowledge, and atmosphere. This technique helps students to convey what they want, feel, and think to the counselor so that there can be an exchange of information between the counselor and the client to solve the problem (Gaho et al., 2021).

In addition to the role-playing technique, counseling services can be carried out with groups so that students can solve problems in group dynamics. This counseling service technique can increase students' self-confidence so they can face their problems in the future. Lack of self-confidence in students can cause them not to be confident in acting, tend to surrender, remain silent, and not dare to express their opinions. The growth of self-confidence in students can convince students of their abilities and begin to find their confidence (Imro'atun, 2024).

Counselors are expected to provide professional assistance to clients. However, in reality, only a few students visit the counseling service room, and sometimes, there is an assumption that the counselor is less friendly. Counseling services are sometimes only for students who have problems or violate the rules. Sometimes, student problems are not resolved entirely, so students feel burdened with their problems. Counselors are advised to conduct counseling services sincerely so services can run effectively. Technological breakthroughs in counseling services can be an effective solution to run counseling services effectively (Yandri et al., 2019).

METHODS

This study is descriptive of the survey type. This design was chosen because the research gathers data from secondary school counselors in Lagos State at a given time frame. The target population for this study was 30 secondary school counselors. A total enumeration sampling technique was used. The researcher developed a questionnaire that was used as the main instrument for data collection. The instrument's validity was established by making it available to a team of experts consisting of two lecturers from the faculty of education, department of Management and Counseling, Alhikmah University, Ilorin-Nigeria. The reliability of the instrument was assessed using a pilot test. The instrument's reliability was established using the test re-test method, and a score of 0.86 was achieved. Descriptive and inferential statistical tools were used for data analysis. Frequency count and percentage were used to present the respondents' demographic data results and answer the research questions. The research hypotheses were analyzed using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) at a 0.05 significance level.

Research Hypotheses

1. There is no significant relationship between awareness and usability of counseling service application software among secondary school counselors in Lagos State
2. There is no significant relationship between the efficacy and usability of counseling service application software among secondary school counselors in Lagos State
3. There is no significant relationship between readiness and usability of counseling service application software among secondary school counselors in Lagos State

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 below presents the PPMC results on the relationship between awareness and usability of counseling application software.

Table 1. Summary result of the relationship between awareness and usability of counseling application software

| Variable | Mean | Std. | N | r. | df. | t-value | Sig(p.) |
|---|---------|--------|----|------|-----|---------|---------|
| Awareness of the usability of Counselling | 15.8400 | 1.2521 | 15 | .410 | 1 | 0.997 | .000 |
| Application Software | 11.542 | 1.4330 | | | | | |

Source: Research 2024

The relationship is significant at the t -value $.410 < p. 0.05$, table value 0.997. **Table 1** showed that the r -calculated value $.410$ showed a weak positive relationship. The t -value $.410$ is lower than the table value 0.997 ($r = .410 < t\text{-value} = 0.997$). Therefore, hypothesis H_{01} is rejected. Therefore, a weak positive relationship exists between awareness and usability of counseling application software in Lagos State.

Table 2 below presents PPMC's results on the relationship between the efficacy and usability of counseling application software in Lagos State.

Table 2. PPMC of the relationship between efficacy and usability of counseling application

| Variable | Mean | Std. | N | r. | df. | t-value | Sig(p.) |
|--|---------|--------|----|------|-----|---------|---------|
| Efficacy | 14.2083 | 1.4216 | 15 | .512 | 1 | 0.997 | .000 |
| Usability of Counseling Application Software | 12.4194 | 1.2320 | | | | | |

Source: Research 2024

The relationship is significant at r_{cal} -value $.512 < p. 0.05$, table value. 0.997. **Table 2** shows that $r_{.512}$ is a weak positive relationship. The r value $.512$ is lower than the table value 0.997 ($r = .512 < t.value = 0.997$). Therefore, hypothesis HO_2 is rejected. Hence, a weak positive relationship exists between the efficacy and usability of counseling application software in Lagos State.

Table 3 below presents PPMC's results on the relationship between readiness and usability of counseling application software in Lagos State.

Table 3. PPMC of the relationship between readiness and usability of counseling application software in Lagos State

| Variable | Mean | Std. | N | r. | df. | t-value | Sig(p.) |
|--|---------|--------|----|------|-----|---------|---------|
| Readiness | 16.3490 | 1.4203 | 15 | .511 | 1 | 0.997 | .000 |
| Usability of counseling application software | 13.4205 | 1.5217 | | | | | |

Source: Research 2024

The relationship is significant at r -value $.511 < p. 0.05$, $t.value. 0.997$. **Table 3** shows that the calculated r -value $.511$ is a weak positive relationship. The r value $.511$ is lower than the table value 0.997 ($r = .511 < t.value = 0.997$). Therefore, hypothesis HO_3 is rejected. Hence, there is a weak positive relationship between readiness and usability of counseling application software in Lagos State.

Discussion

There is a weak positive relationship between awareness and usability of counseling service application software among secondary school counselors in Lagos State. This finding indicates that proper awareness of counseling application software would facilitate its use for counseling, especially e-counseling covering vast distances. Clients report strong beliefs in the effectiveness of telepsychotherapy and identified advantages, including enhanced freedom of expression through writing, reduced costs, anonymity, and convenience (Asri et al., 2020). There is a weak positive relationship between the efficacy and usability of counseling service application software among secondary school counselors in Lagos State. This finding suggests efficacy is a determinant of using application software for counseling relationships. That online therapy is efficacious, underpinning the online disinhibition effect. It implies that the current study may benefit the current situation that the world is facing when the COVID-19 pandemic arises (Werbart et al., 2024). There is a weak positive relationship between readiness and usability of counseling service application software

among secondary school counselors in Lagos State. This result tallies the position that e-counseling can be a valuable adjunct to traditional modes of practice (Wells, 2021).

Despite the evident potential of such technologies to enhance the delivery of counseling services, the low levels of awareness among counselors suggest a significant barrier. This may be attributed to insufficient exposure to digital counseling tools during professional training or limited promotional efforts by educational and government bodies. Improving the counselor's ability to deal with student problems by utilizing technology through e-counseling can help increase the efficiency of implementing counseling (Muhammad, 2024). Counselors collaborate with teachers, parents, and the community to develop prevention programs to deal with crises and enhance academic outcomes (Abdallah-Altarawneh & Awwad-Alomoush, 2022).

Addressing this gap requires targeted outreach programs demonstrating these technologies' benefits and practical applications. Fostering collaborations with technology developers could help customize these applications to meet the specific needs of counselors, thereby increasing their relevance and appeal. These efforts need to be made to enhance student academic outcomes. Efficacy and readiness were also pivotal in determining the usability of counseling applications. The results indicate that counselors with higher confidence in their digital skills and greater readiness to adopt new technologies are more likely to integrate these tools into their practice. However, many counselors still face challenges such as inadequate digital literacy, concerns over data security, and skepticism about the effectiveness of virtual counseling compared to traditional methods. To overcome these obstacles, it is essential to provide hands-on training sessions that focus on both technical competencies and the ethical dimensions of e-counseling. Policy-level interventions, such as incentivizing digital tools and ensuring reliable infrastructure, can further support technology integration into counseling services.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the adoption of counseling service application software among secondary school counselors in Lagos, Nigeria, is hindered by low awareness, inadequate digital efficacy, and limited readiness. These findings indicate that while counselors recognize the potential benefits of digital tools, they lack the necessary exposure, skills, and confidence to integrate them effectively into their practices. This highlights the need for strategic interventions, including comprehensive training programs to improve digital competencies, targeted awareness campaigns to emphasize the importance and functionality of such software, and robust policy frameworks that encourage technological integration in counseling services to enhance student academic outcomes. There is a need for comprehensive training programs to increase counselors' awareness and proficiency in using counseling service application software. Workshops and seminars organized by the Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON) could address this gap effectively.

The Lagos State Government should proactively integrate technology into counseling services by collaborating with educational technology experts. The Ministry of Education should allocate funds to procure and distribute counseling service application software. Ensuring that all secondary school counselors have access to these tools is crucial for improving the quality of counseling services. Engage various stakeholders, including

educators, parents, and technology experts, to foster a supportive environment for adopting counseling service applications. With increased awareness, capability, and readiness to use counseling software, counselors can provide more efficient, accessible, and effective student services, ultimately leading to better mental health and academic outcomes. Based on the conclusion, the study recommended that the Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON) organize a seminar or workshop titled "Awareness and Use of Counseling Service Application Software for a Counseling Relationship" for all counselors in Lagos state. The study also recommended that the Lagos State Government collaborate with experts from the Department of Educational Technology, AL Hikmah University, Ilorin-Nigeria, to develop local counseling service applications for counselors' use. The study recommended that the Ministry of Education, Lagos State, should sponsor and procure counseling service application software and make it available to all the school counselors in Lagos State.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article and confirms that the data and content are free from plagiarism.

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