

In Minna East Senatorial District, Niger State, Assessing Counselors' Ability and Competencies in E-Counselling Services in Secondary Schools

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Received: 27 Feb 2022; Accepted: 01 Apr 2022; Published: 05 Apr 2022

Citation: Benedict BS, Michael FB. In Minna East Senatorial District, Niger State, Assessing Counselors' Ability and Competencies in E-Counselling Services in Secondary Schools. *Int J Psychiatr Res* 2022; 5(3): 1-7.

ABSTRACT

In the Minna East Senatorial District of Niger State, this study looked into e-counseling and counsellors' talents and competencies for counseling services in secondary schools. The study was directed by three research questions and one null hypothesis. The study was conducted using a descriptive survey research approach. 312 counselors were included in the study. A basic random sampling procedure was used to select the sample. The respondents' data was collected using the E-counseling and Counsellors' Abilities and Competencies in Guidance and Counselling Services Questionnaire (ECACGCSQ). To answer the study questions, the data were examined using frequency counts and percentages, while t-test statistics were utilized to test the null hypothesis at the 0.05 level of significance. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the data demonstrated that certified school counselors have very weak e-counselling abilities and competencies in the utilization of ICT facilities for students' counseling services. In light of the hazards and threats posed by COVID-19, the study advised that the government teach counsellors on how to use E-counselling services, in accordance to health experts' COVID-19 safety guidelines for the health and safety of all pupils.

Keywords

E-counseling, Counseling educational services, Counselor abilities and competencies, Secondary schools.

Introduction

The issue is that many Nigerian school counselors lack the talents and competencies (i.e. technological expertise) to effectively use ICT facilities to assist pupils in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic that is wreaking havoc on educational institutions. Educational Counsellors are trained to assist students in gaining a better understanding of themselves and progressing constructively in all aspects of their educational and life development. The transition from a mechanical to a digital phase is currently popular all around the world. Information and communication technology (ICT) plays a crucial role in improving education by facilitating the delivery of timely and high-quality services, such as counseling [1]. In recent years, the worldwide shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered education has increased the use of information and communication

technology (ICT) in educational and counseling services (otherwise known as e-counselling). Nigeria, for example, has made significant investments in ICT by expanding the number of computers in schools and connecting classrooms. ICT has a lot of potential in terms of assisting counsellors in their work. ICT counseling is a practical method that will benefit both the counsellor and the client. E-counselling is the process of offering counseling services over the internet. This might be done through e-mail, internet chats, video conversations, or even phone calls over the internet. However, because seamless integration of computers in teaching and learning has yet to be realized, integrating technology into the educational curriculum remains a difficult and challenging process [2]. Counselors play a critical role in the integration of computers in schools, particularly in counseling services. In light of this, Cuban [3] asserted that any school reform attempt should take into account counsellors' expertise and skills in using ICT to provide counseling services. The aptitude, competency, and attitude of counsellors toward the use of contemporary technologies in counseling services

are all important factors in the successful integration of ICT in the educational system, particularly in counseling services. According to studies, most Government schools in Nigeria have insufficient ICT facilities to cater for the growing population of students in the schools where they work as counselors, or they lack the abilities and competencies to use such ICT facilities for counseling services where the tools are available. According to studies, technological initiatives to integrate ICT in counseling services have failed because the beliefs, skills, and attitudes of counsellors and teachers were never taken into account [3-5].

According to a research conducted by Papanastasiou and Angeli [6], teachers employed software programs in several educational disciplines with a very low frequency. The average level of use per week was found to be anything from 0 and 0.86. Fakeye [7] discovered in an Ibadan study that the majority of the schools studied lacked computers and so were not linked to the internet. He went on to say that those who have computers just utilize them for administrative purposes, not for teaching or counseling. Okwudishu [8] discovered that teachers' usage of ICTs is hampered by the lack of some ICT components in schools. Secondary school teachers claimed that a lack of basic search skills and access points in the classrooms was preventing them from using the internet.

In her study, Abdul Salaam [9] discovered that the majority of the teachers included as a sample were not proficient in the usage of ICT. Counsellors' usage of ICT in counseling services appears to be increasing and significantly growing. However, while there is a great deal of knowledge on how ICT is utilized in counselling services in developed countries, there is not much information on how ICT is being used by counsellors in counselling services in poor countries including Nigeria. Most research in the literature have focused solely on what children learn from technology, leaving a void in understanding why and how counsellors utilize or do not use technology in school counseling services. As a result, it was necessary to assess counsellors' talents and competencies in using e-counselling facilities for pupils in schools in Niger State's Minna East Senatorial District.

The Origins of E-Counselling in Nigerian Schools and the Concept of COVID-19

S. Bahago, B. M. Fadipe, B. O. Ogunlade, T. Joseph [10]. COVID-19 is a sickness caused by a new coronavirus strain, according to the researchers. Corona is represented by the letter CO, virus by the letter VI, and illness by the letter D. Previously, this disease was known as the '2019 novel coronavirus,' or '2019-nCoV.' The COVID-19 virus is a new virus that belongs to the same virus family as SARS and several types of common colds [11]. N. Kaur, A. Sethi, H. C. Patil, S. Singh, H. Kaur, and U. K. Mishra. [12]. Coronaviruses are single-stranded RNA (ribonucleic acid) viruses with spike projections that give them a crown-like appearance, as explained more on the origin and pathogenic progression of COVID-19. There have been two previous outbreaks of the disease (the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus- SARS-COV and the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus- MERS-COV), each of which killed over

350, 000 people. Coronaviruses belong to the Orthocoronavirinae subfamily of the Coronaviridae family; order Nidovirales, and realm Riboviria. They are envelope viruses with an h nucleocapsid and a positive-sense single-stranded RNA genome.

The arrival of COVID-19 resulted in horrific experiences of lockdown in practically every element of human life. Businesses, factories, hospitals, educational institutions, hotels, and tourist attractions, to name a few, were all shut down. In addition, these lockdowns were a result of the media's growing dread of an increase in the number of daily deaths, rapid transmissions, and the trauma brought on by COVID-19's rising mental illness and stress. Closures of schools due to COVID-19 affected learners/clients (i.e. students) all over the world, not just in Nigerian institutions, and this prompted the development of E-counselling or online counseling to allow professional counselors to reach out to their clients (students) and assist those with problems as needed. Sanders and Rosen field define e-counselling as "counselling through the use of telecommunication technologies such as the telephone, the internet, and teleconferencing." The digital counseling game is progressively gaining traction as a useful tool for encouraging students to engage in holistic self-management and development. During the COVID-19 Pandemic, e-counselling has been described as the ideal technique to provide psychological and counselling assistance both in and out of educational settings. Instant messaging, synchronous chat, text messaging, video conferencing, and asynchronous email are examples of other E-counselling approaches [13].

Despite the fact that face-to-face counseling is still necessary and effective, due to the challenges of social distancing caused by COVID-19, E-counselling is appropriate and being used in Nigerian institutions of learning, as it is in most other countries. E-counselling is the provision of professional counseling services via the internet. When a professional counselor or therapist communicates with a client via the internet to provide emotional support, mental health guidance, or other professional services, this occurs. It can be referred to as "online counseling/therapy," "internet counseling," "e-mail counseling," "web counseling," "e-therapy," "tele-therapy," or "cyber-therapy." It's also known as 'tele-presence,' which Lombard and Dillon, referenced in Pamela and Patrick [14] defined as "the illusion that a mediated experience is not mediated" and gives the sensation of being in someone's presence without having to share physical space. Email, internet phone (voice-over-IP), real-time chat, and/or video conferencing are all options for these services. This is a potentially difficult type of counseling practice that requires standard professional counselors to go beyond in their training. E-counsellors are completely qualified and experienced in face-to-face therapy, as well as having additional training and expertise in email counseling. It is a viable alternative source of support, according to Metonia [15], when traditional psychotherapy is not available. It is efficient, confidential, and carried out by specialists who are skilled, qualified, and ethical. It may be the only method for some people to seek help from a competent therapist; however, it takes time and does not happen in one e-mail discussion. E-counselling

improves a counsellor's abilities. It is crucial to emphasize that e-counselling is not psychotherapy and cannot be used in place of regular treatment. However, it can be used in conjunction with traditional counseling that includes in-person appointments. Not all problems can be solved online, and online therapy is not ideal for everyone. For example, mental illness cannot be diagnosed or treated online, but those who are having relationship, career, or life problems can receive help and advice. In industrialized nations, clients consult with professional psychologists via videoconferencing, synchronous and asynchronous e-mails, or in addition to face-to-face sessions.

Online counseling can take place via email, video conferencing, online chat, internet phone, or other online techniques, according to Cherry [16] in the About.com Guide. Online therapy, she added, is a relatively new concept in counseling in which a therapist/counselor provides psychological advice and support over the internet. E-counselling can occur in real time, such as over the phone or in online chartrooms, or in a time-delayed format, such as through e-mail communications. E-counselling professions have delved into the computer-mediated arena of online counseling, leveraging the potential to broaden access to counseling services, according to Pamela and Patrick [14]. This service is viewed as a qualitative human characteristic that can be replicated in a virtual environment, and it should be adopted in our society since it will benefit everyone. E-mail, instant messaging (IM), real-time chat, internet phone, and videoconferencing are the most common ways to communicate in e-counselling therapy. However, there is a scarcity of trained counsellors in many Nigerian schools. Where we do have some qualified counsellors, their abilities and skills in using e-counselling services for kids have not been adequately developed, resulting in school counsellors having very weak counsellor abilities and competencies. This study was driven by the dreadful situation in most secondary schools in Niger State. Based on these findings, the paper examines Some Factors Contributing to Poor Counselor e-Counselling Abilities and Competencies in Nigeria, as well as some of the benefits of e-counselling for students, counsellors, and the community at large.

Some Factors Contributing to Poor Counsellor e-Counselling Abilities and Competencies in Nigeria: In view of the COVID-19 pandemic's social distancing rules and regulations, there are a number of challenges to providing good e-counseling services in Nigeria, particularly in educational settings. Charles N. U., Letitia C. N., Chinyere N. D. I. Nwazue, D.

Nwazue, D [17] recognized the following issues or factors as some of the reasons for inadequate counselor e-counselling abilities and competences in Nigerian government schools: 1. Lack of skilled e-counsellors: While there are professionally educated and certified counselors in Nigeria, three quarters of the population lacks the basic skills and knowledge required for internet counseling. When a counselor is unfamiliar with computers, he cannot be expected to counsel or administer the website. In order to implement e-counselling in Nigeria, every professional counselor/therapist must be computer proficient and have the necessary additional

training to counsel clients over the internet. There is also a scarcity of counselors who are capable of incorporating e-counselling into their practices.

Inadequate clients: In Nigeria, the number of people seeking e-counseling is quite small. Furthermore, the majority of client are not computer literate. Professional counselors may be eager to try e-counselling, but as Cherry points out, there is a significant lack of consumer demand [16].

Lack of awareness of e-counselling: The majority of Nigerians have never heard of e-counselling, let alone experienced it. In Nigeria, e-counselling has yet to be adopted, and people are unfamiliar with the concept. Clients have found it difficult and naive to meet counselors in person, never alone establish an internet connection.

Financial constraints: E-counselling necessitates the use of ICT-related components, which are not always available to all counselors and are not always inexpensive to all Nigerians. This simply means that it will take a long time for e-counselling services to be widely used in Nigeria. People may find it difficult to pay the fees associated with e-counselling, thus they will always seek informal assistance.

Poor power supply: Nigeria's power supply is epileptic, and the situation is getting worse every day, while e-counselling relies totally on a good network supported by electricity. The power network frequently affects communication and practical usage of e-counselling facilities.

Limited service: Not all cases are suitable for online resolution. In many settings, according to Speyer and Zack [18], web-based intake procedures are designed expressly to screen out clients who would be better served offline.

Cases involving a threat to life, such as violence, suicidal ideation, serious substance abuse, or an immediate and urgent crisis, are not handled online, though online counseling can be used to initiate the relationship. Delay in response: While time-delayed responses allow for reflection, they can also lead to misunderstandings. In online counseling, the lack of a spontaneous response and clarification is usually a constraint, as both parties are locked in a loop of delay.

Inadequate professional competency: Counselors must adhere to ethical guidelines and advise clients on their limitations. For the medium to work successfully, both sides must have trust and confidence in it.

Insufficient computer literacy: Both the counselor and the client must be familiar with the technology platform utilized in the online counseling procedure. Both should have sufficient technical knowledge to deal with the skills required for the job. Both must be competent writers and types. They need to be at ease with what is essentially a letter-writing procedure. They must be able to

effectively convey their views and feelings, as well as carefully understand messages.

Some of the Benefits of E-counselling

Some of the benefits of e-counselling, according to Rawlings [19], are as follows:

Because of the anonymity, clients are more likely to discuss their issues.

It is less stigmatizing than going to a therapist's office.

It can reach those who have trouble getting to a therapist's office, such as the homebound, the ill, agoraphobic, or those who reside in rural places.

It appears to compel counsellors to plan their sessions rather than leave them open-ended.

Sessions are frequently more structured and deliberate.

It gives you more options for when you want to meet and what kind of counseling you want to do.

Clients can access internet resources, publications, links to professional organizations, and support through a well-designed website, which are not often available in traditional treatment.

Clients can choose a therapist who lives far away yet specializes in their presenting condition because it is not limited by geographical limitations.

To evaluate and strengthen therapy, clients might refer to written material generated as part of the counselling process (emails, instant chats, etc.).

It is frequently less expensive than face-to-face therapy.

Should outside assistance be required, group members from the client's region can typically supply services if the distance counselor is connected with an online consultation group.

The Study's Objectives

The study was guided by three main goals:

To determine the extent of counselors' e-counselling abilities in secondary schools in Niger State's Minna East Senatorial District.

To determine the degree of counsellors' e-counselling competences in secondary schools in Niger State's Minna East Senatorial District.

To determine the factors that contribute to school counselors' e-counseling inabilities and incompetence in providing counseling services in the Minna East Senatorial District of Niger State.

Questions to Ponder

The study was directed by three research questions.

- What is the level of school counselors' e-counselling abilities in secondary schools in Niger State's Minna East Senatorial District?
- What is the level of school counsellors' e-counselling competences in secondary schools in Niger State's Minna East Senatorial District?
- What are the variables that contribute to school counselors' e-counseling ineptitude and inability to provide counseling services in the Minna East Senatorial District of Niger State?

Hypothesis

The investigation was directed by one null hypothesis:

H01: In secondary schools in Minna South Senatorial District, Niger State, there is no significant difference between the use of e-counseling and face-to-face counseling of students by counselors.

Methodology

The study was conducted using a descriptive survey research approach. 312 people took part in the survey. It was chosen by a basic random sampling method. Data was collected using a 30-item instrument called the E-counselling Counsellors' Abilities and Competencies in Guidance and Counselling Services Questionnaire (1CTEGCSQ). The questionnaire's face and content validity were determined, as well as its reliability, using the Pearson product moment correlation coefficient. A value of 0.75 was obtained, which was sufficient to assess its reliability. To address the study questions, the obtained data were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, and mean, while the null hypothesis was tested using the t-test at the 0.05 level of significance. A mean criterion of 2.50 or higher was kept, while a mean of less than 2.50 was dismissed. If the computed t-calculated value was equal to or greater than the t-tabulated value, the null hypothesis was rejected, however if the t-calculated value was less than the t-tabulated value, the null hypothesis was retained. In addition, if the calculated p-value was equal to or less than the set p-value, the null hypothesis was rejected, and if the calculated p-value was greater than the specified p-value, the null hypothesis was preserved.

Results

The study's three research questions were answered in a descriptive manner.

What is the level of counselors' e-counselling abilities in secondary schools in Niger State's Minna South Senatorial District?

Table 1: Percentage study of secondary school counselors' e-counselling abilities in Minna South Senatorial District, Niger State.

S/N	E-counselling Counsellors' Abilities	Responses			
		Yes		No	
		F	%	F	%
1	Every school counselor knows how to use a closed circuit television for counseling	24	7.7	288	92.3
2	Every school counselor knows how to use a projector for counseling services	17	5.4	295	94.6
3	Every school counselor knows how to use the internet for counseling services	15	4.8	297	95.2
4	Every school counselor knows how to use video camera for counseling services	26	8.3	286	91.7
5	Every school counselor knows how to use free internet for counseling services	13	4.2	299	95.8
6	Every school counselor knows how to use video conferencing for counseling services	14	4.5	298	95.5

7	Every school counselor knows how to use a scanner for counseling services	30	9.6	282	90.4
8	There is low counselor interactivity on platforms like Google, Zoom and WhatsApp with students for counseling services	292	93.6	20	6.4
9	There is counselor high inability to efficiently operate ICT facilities for counseling services	271	86.9	41	13.1
10	There is counselor inability to engage students on e-counseling services	283	90.7	29	9.3
11	There are poor ICT facilities for e-counseling of students in my school	298	95.5	14	4.5
12	There is low understanding of usability of ICT by students for counseling services	257	82.4	55	17.6
13	There is poor counselor understanding of students' usability of counseling clinic ICT facilities	266	85.3	46	14.7

According to table 1, item 1, 7.7% of respondents agreed that every school counselor knows how to use a closed-circuit television for counseling, while 92.3 percent disagreed. Item 2 found that only 5.4 percent of respondents felt that every school counselor understands how to utilize a projector for counseling, while 94.6 percent responded no. Item 3 revealed that only 4.8 percent of respondents agreed that every school counselor understands how to utilize the internet for counseling purposes, while 95.2 percent responded no. Item 4 revealed that 8.3% of respondents agreed that every school counselor understands how to use a video camera for counseling, while 91.7 percent disagreed. Item 5 revealed that only 4.2 percent of respondents felt that every school counselor understands how to use free internet for counseling, while 95.8% responded no. In response to question 6, 4.5 percent of respondents agreed that every school counselor knew how to use video conferencing for counseling, while 95.5 percent responded no. Item 7 revealed that 9.6% of respondents agreed that every school counselor understands how to use a scanner for counseling, while 90.4 percent disagreed. Item 8 revealed that 93.6 percent of respondents agreed that counselor involvement with students for counseling services is low on platforms such as Google, Zoom, and WhatsApp, while 6.4 percent disagreed. Item 9 revealed that 86.9% of respondents agreed that counselors had a high inability to operate ICT facilities efficiently for counseling services, while 13.1 percent disagreed. In response to question 10, 90.7 percent of respondents agreed that counselors are unable to engage students in e-counseling services, while 9.3 percent disagreed. Item 11 revealed that 95.5 percent of respondents agreed that their school's ICT facilities for student e-counseling are inadequate, while 4.5 percent disagreed. Item 12 revealed that 82.4 percent of respondents agreed that students have a poor knowledge of the use of ICT for counseling services, while 17.6 percent disagreed. Item 13 revealed that 85.3 percent of respondents agreed that counselors do not understand students' use of counseling clinic ICT facilities, while 14.7 percent disagreed. As a result, the availability of e-counseling talents among counselors in secondary schools in the Minna East Senatorial District was extremely limited.

Research Question 2: What extent do counselors at secondary schools in Minna East Senatorial District, Niger State have e-counseling competencies?

Table 2: Percentage study of counselors' e-counseling competencies in secondary schools in Niger State's Minna East Senatorial District.

S/N	E-counseling Counsellors' Competencies	Responses			
		Yes		No	
		F	%	F	%
14	Our school has trained e-counsellors	14	4.5	298	95.5
15	Our school counselors are acquainted with computer	37	11.9	275	88.1
16	Our school counselors are trained on the use of e-counseling with computers	12	3.8	300	96.2
17	Our school counselors are acquainted with projector	19	6.1	293	93.9
18	Our school counselors are acquainted with the media platforms	28	8.9	284	91.1
19	Our school counselors are acquainted with CCTV camera	22	7.1	290	92.9
20	Our school counselors are acquainted with virtual conferencing	11	3.5	301	96.5
21	Every school counselor knows how to use a digital camera	18	5.8	294	94.2
22	Every school counselor knows how to use a video camera for counseling	21	6.7	291	93.3

According to table 2, item 14, 4.5 percent of respondents agreed that their institutions had trained e-counsellors, whereas 95.5 percent stated no. Item 15 found that 11.9 percent of respondents believe that their school counselors are computer savvy, while 88.1 percent disagree. Item 16 revealed that only 3.8 percent of respondents agreed that their school counselors are trained in using computers for e-counseling, while 96.2 percent responded no. Item 17 revealed that 6.1 percent of respondents agreed that their school counselors are knowledgeable about projectors, while 93.9 percent said no. Item 18 revealed that 8.9% of respondents agreed that their school counselors are familiar with social media platforms, while

91.1 percent disagreed. Item 19 revealed that only 7.1 percent of respondents agreed that their school counselors are familiar with CCTV cameras, while 92.9 percent disagreed. In response to question 20, 3.5 percent of respondents agreed that their school counselors are familiar with virtual conferencing, while 96.5 percent disagreed. Item 21 revealed that just 5.8% of respondents thought that every school counselor understands how to use a digital camera, while

94.2 percent disagreed. Item 22 revealed that only 6.7 percent of respondents thought that every school counselor understands how to use a video camera for counseling, while 93.3 percent disagreed. As a result, counselors at secondary schools in Minna East Senatorial District have very little e-counseling skills.

What are the variables that contribute to the inability and incompetence of e-counseling services among secondary school counselors in Minna East Senatorial District, Niger State?

Table 3: Percentage study of reasons causing inability and incompetence in e-counselling services among secondary school counselors in Minna East Senatorial District, Niger State.

S/N	Inabilities and Incompetence's	Responses			
		Yes		No	
		F	%	F	%
23	Lack of trained e-counsellors	281	90.1	31	9.9
24	Lack of e-counselling awareness	275	88.1	37	11.9
25	Financial constraint	301	96.5	11	3.5
26	Poor power supply	256	82.1	56	17.9
27	Limited service	279	89.4	33	10.6
28	Delay in responding to counseling issues	255	81.7	57	18.3
29	Inadequate professional competencies	247	79.2	65	20.8
30	Inadequate computer literacy	302	96.8	10	3.2

90.1 percent of respondents agreed that they lack trained e-counsellors, while 9.9 percent responded no, according to table 3, item 23. Item 24 found that 88.1 percent of respondents agreed that they are unaware of e-counselling, while 11.9 percent disagreed. Item 25 revealed that 96.5 percent of respondents agreed that they lack financial resources, while only 3.5 percent said no. Item 26 revealed that 82.1 percent of respondents agreed that there is a lack of electricity supply, while 17.9% stated no. Item 27 revealed that 89.4 percent of respondents agreed that service is limited, while 10.6 percent disagreed. Item 28 revealed that 81.7 percent of respondents agreed that there is a delay in responding to counseling difficulties, while 18.3% disagreed. Item 29 revealed that 79.2 percent of respondents agreed that their professional competencies are insufficient, while 20.8 percent disagreed. Item 30 revealed that 96.8% of respondents believed that computer literacy is inadequate, while only 3.2 percent disagreed. As a result, factors like trained e-counsellors, e-counselling awareness, finance, power supply, limited service, and delay in responding to counseling issues, professional competencies, and computer literacy are to blame for the inability and incompetence of e-counselling services among secondary school counselors in Minna South Senatorial District.

Hypothesis for Research

The null hypothesis was tested at a significance level of 0.05.

H01: In secondary schools in Minna South Senatorial District, Niger State, there is no significant difference in the usage of e-counseling and face-to-face counseling of students by counselors.

Table 4: t-test analysis comparing the utilization of e-counseling and face-to-face counseling by counselors in secondary schools in Minna South Senatorial District, Niger State.

Variables	N	Mean	Std. deviation	Df	t-cal	t-tab	Sig (P-cal)	Remarks
E-counselling	312	9.36	1.551	622	4.548	1.647	0.000	Reject Ho1
Face-to-face counseling	312	7.48	1.322					

Table 4 depicted a t-test comparison of the utilization of e-counselling against face-to-face counseling of students by counselors in secondary schools in Minna South Senatorial District, Niger State. Given 622 degrees of freedom, the t-cal value

of 4.548 was found to be greater than the t-tab value of 1.647 at the 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis was rejected since the t-cal value was bigger than the t-tab value. P-cal was also lower than P-set. It implied that the usage of e-counselling and face-to-face counseling of students by counselors in secondary schools in Minna South Senatorial District, Niger State differed significantly. As a result, when e-counselling was used, therapy became more enjoyable.

Discussion

In response to study question one, it was discovered that the availability of e-counselling abilities among counselors in secondary schools in the Minna East Senatorial District was extremely limited. This is in line with the findings of Okwudishu [8], who discovered that teachers' usage of ICTs is hampered by the lack of some ICT components in schools. Secondary school teachers claimed that a lack of basic search skills and access points in the classrooms was preventing them from using the internet.

The level of e-counselling competences of counselors in secondary schools in Minna East Senatorial District was found to be very low in study question two. This was in line with the findings of AbdulSalaam [9], whose findings discovered that the majority of the teachers included as a sample were not proficient in the usage of ICT. While there is a great deal of knowledge on how ICT is utilized in counselling services in developed countries, there is not much information on how ICT is being used by counsellors in counselling services in poor countries including Nigeria.

In research question three, it was discovered that factors such as trained e-counsellors, e-counselling awareness, finance, power supply, limited service, and delay in responding to counseling issues, professional competencies, and computer literacy are to blame for the inability and incompetence of e-counselling services among secondary school counselors in the Minna East Senatorial District. This backed up Bahago's findings on the same factors militating against effective use of e-counselling in Nigerian private universities [10].

There was a significant difference between the use of e-counselling and face-to-face counseling of students by counselors in secondary schools in Minna East Senatorial District of Niger State, according to the null hypothesis. As a result, when e-counselling was used, therapy became more enjoyable.

Conclusion

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the data demonstrated that qualified school counselors had very inadequate e-counselling abilities and competencies on using ICT facilities for students' counseling services.

Recommendations

In light of the dangers and threats posed by COVID-19, and in response to health experts' COVID-19 safety guidelines provisions, the government should make available e-counselling services facilities for students' health safety.

For effective e-counselling interaction, the government should provide alternative power sources, adequate computers, and free internet access to students and counsellors.

In light of the hazards and threats posed by COVID-19, the study advised that the government train counsellors on how to use E-counselling services, in accordance to health experts' COVID-19 safety guidelines for the health safety of all pupils.

School administration should provide accommodations for counselors to be upgraded and updated on how to adopt and use e-counselling facilities on a regular basis. Seminars or workshops could be used to accomplish this.

Guidance and counselling curriculum should include e-counselling instruction.

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