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Evaluation of Adoption and Productiveness of Online Counseling in Colleges of Education in Southeast Nigeria (Case Study Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe, Anambra State and Alvan Ikokwu College of Education, Owerri, Imo State)

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ABSTRACT

The study evaluated the adoption and productiveness of online counseling in colleges of education in south eastern region of Nigeria. It examined the effect of online counseling services on the moral and the academic achievement of students. It also examined the relationship between the productiveness of online counseling and the well being of colleges of education students of Anambra and Imo states as case studies. The study employed survey research design to assess the adoption and productiveness of online counseling in colleges of education in southeast Nigeria in which a validated 10 item questionnaire termed the 'Evaluation of Adoption and Productiveness of Online Counseling in Colleges of Education in Southeast Nigeria' (EAPOCCESN) was developed in line with the research questions, and used to extract information from categories of the population; lecturers, students, school management, staff of the ministry of education and Nigeria Communications Commission. Data collected were analyzed using frequency table, percentage and mean score analysis while the Pearson correlation method was used to test the formulated hypothesis using SPSS (statistical package for social sciences).

Key words: Counseling, Online Counseling, Colleges of Education.

Introduction

The use of online counseling services has increased overtime in Nigeria. The counseling service varies; it might be counseling for health, business, marriage or counseling for academic and moral achievement.

According to (Harris Interactive, 2002) stated that more than 100 million people searching the Internet for health information. In this same vein, the demand for actual health care services increasing (Grover, Wu, Blanford, Holcomb, & Tidler, 2002). The need is clear for increased regulation and monitoring of Internet health practices. Stamm (1998), in his research stated that the practice of online counseling in particular, only a small but significant number of practicing psychologist offer professional services on the internet. As the world technology continues to evolve, the use of internet as a medium for counseling continues to increase.

VandenBos & Williams (2000, p. 492) stated that with the provision of online counseling service expected to become as routine, readily accessible and expected as the telephone, there must be consistency in the availability of internet. It is evident according to (see VandenBos & Williams, 2000) that the current online counseling practitioners associated with the American Psychological Association (APA) ranges from 2% for individual psychotherapy via the Internet to 13% to 15% for the use of faxes and e-mail to conduct psychological assessments, evaluations, and family therapy.

Yet, despite a person's ability to access the Internet and receive mental and behavioral health services, there remain few guidelines, restrictions, or practical suggestions for the practice of online counseling, with the service modality in general remaining complex and controversial (see Akister, 2003; Barak, 1999; Barnett & Scheetz, 2003; Bloom, 1998; Finfgeld, 1999; Fisher & Fried, 2003; Griffiths, 2001; Grohol, 1998; Holmes & Ainsworth, 2004; Hsiung, 2002; King & Poulos, 1999; Koocher & Morray, 2000; ManhalBaugus, 2001; Pomerantz, 2002; Ragusea & VandeCreek, 2003; Rochlen, Zack, & Speyer, 2004; Rosik & Brown, 2001; Shapiro & Schulman, 1996; Stricker, 1996). It is to this regard that the study wishes to carry out an evaluation of adoption and productiveness of online counseling in colleges of education in Southeast Nigeria as the case study.

CONCEPT OF ONLINE COUNSELLING

Online counselling provides an alternative to traditional face to face therapy. It can be a beneficial option for many people who have a need for counselling. Many who like to have time to think and reflect find that counselling online can help them work through their thoughts and feelings more thoroughly than just talking about issues. Those who have difficulty talking about their concerns face to face may find that it is possible for them to write about such things, and sharing this with a counsellor online can give them feedback to help towards resolving the issues. As well, online counselling is a way in which help can be easily provided for those who wish more anonymity than they can receive in going to a counsellor's office, for those who are shut in, for people who live at great distances from qualified counsellors, or for those who simply want more options. Online counselling can be done in several ways. One way is for a client to write to the counsellor regarding his or her situation or problem, via email or a message board format, and the counsellor can then reply with insights regarding the issues to assist the client to discover a solution. The benefit of this method is that it slows the whole process of counselling down, allowing for time to consider issues and solutions more thoroughly. Also, it can be done on one's own time. There is no need for an appointment. Another method of online counselling is through real time interactions in a chat room environment. A client books a time with the counsellor, then they meet at that time in the online private chat room. The benefit of this is that the client can receive instant feedback, much like in a face to face session, as well as having time to think through what is being said, since everything is written down. The main difference between this method and face to face sessions is that body language and tone of voice cannot be observed, so it is important that the client openly communicates through words to the counsellor what is being experienced in the session. This can help the counsellor be aware and understand the situation better, and the client can benefit more from the session. Technology is improving all the time, and now it is possible to add voice and/or video to chat, depending on which messenger system is used. This is helpful, as the client and counsellor can both get some enhanced communication, through hearing tone of voice and/or observing body language. Online forms systems can also be used to enhance the counselling process, as they can provide a simple way of presenting homework and self-help exercises for a client to use to assist them in working through issues in a focused manner. This is similar to email counselling, in that the client can work at their own pace. Online courses can also be presented and completed through the use of forms. Through the use of online courses, a person can receive the assistance of the counsellor as a teacher or coach, and get feedback as they work through their issues, while learning some self-help tools.

Ethical and Legal Issues for Counseling Psychologists

The most common concern addressed in the online-counseling literature surrounds the ethical and legal implications of conducting counseling and behavioral services to someone over a distance. Regardless of the distance technology used in treatment, standard adherence to current ethical and legal codes must be maintained (APA, 2002). For this reason, the ethical implications of online counseling have been rigorously debated for many years (see Akister, 2003; Barak, 1999; Barnett & Scheetz, 2003; Bloom, 1998; Finfgeld, 1999; Fisher & Fried, 2003; Griffiths, 2001; Grohol, 1998; Holmes & Ainsworth, 2004; Hsiung, 2002; King & Poulos, 1999; Koocher & Morray, 2000; Manhal-Baugus, 2001; Pomerantz, 2002; Ragusea & VandeCreek, 2003; Shapiro & Schulman, 1996; Stricker, 1996). The APA (1997) released a statement concerning the use of the telephone and other distance-communication technologies for delivering mental and behavioral health services, stating that the Ethics Code is not specific with regard to telephone therapy or teleconferencing or any electronically provided services as such and has no rules prohibiting such services [and that] complaints regarding such matters would be addressed on a case by case basis. Since this time, the APA has adopted a new Ethics Code, which took effect on June 1, 2003. In the introduction to the new code, it states, "This Ethics Code applies to these [scientific, educational, or professional] activities across a variety of contexts, such as in person, postal, telephone, internet, and other electronic transmissions" (p. 2). The new code added language throughout the standards that addresses the Internet and electronic transmission of information. The new language can be found only in the following four standards: 3.10, Informed Consent; 4.02c, Discussing the Limits of Confidentiality; 5.01, Avoidance of False or Deceptive Statements; and 5.04, Media Presentations. For example, Standard 4.02c stipulates that psychologists offering services, products, or information through electronic transmission should inform their clients of the privacy risks and the limits of confidentiality (Smith, 2003). Although the new APA Ethics Code acknowledges the Internet and electronic transmission of information, it does little to provide clear standards or practical guidelines on how to overcome the unique obstacles of delivering mental and behavioral health services to clients from a distance. As a result, counseling psychologists interested in providing mental and behavioral health services do not have firm guidelines and standards to ensure that they are conducting themselves in a professional and ethical manner. The following is a summary of the most commonly noted ethical and legal issues that have emerged from the practice of online counseling (see also Kraus, 2004).

Confidentiality of Counselling

Another problematic ethical issue related to online counseling is maintaining confidentiality (APA Ethics Code 4.01). For instance, to conduct online sessions through synchronous chat or asynchronous e-mail, a counseling psychologist must take steps to limit the risk of a third party's receiving or stealing the information shared during an online session. The most common security step is to use encryption to safeguard the data transfer when communicating to a client. The process of encryption can be accomplished in multiple ways, with different products and programs available, and with varying levels of protection (Zack, 2004). We refer the reader to Stein (1997) and Garfinkel (2002) for more extensive guides on using encryption devices. A counseling psychologist should also inform clients that he or she can only protect their confidentiality to a certain degree and discuss the limits of confidentiality (APA Ethics Code 4.02). For example, a counseling psychologist should educate the client about possible ways another person could view messages sent from a computer, especially if the client decides to save an electronic or paper copy of the session's transcripts. Another factor that must be taken into consideration is the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), which was signed in August 1996. The act was designed to protect citizens and to streamline the transmission of health care information with regard to privacy and security. Counseling psychologists who meet

with clients online may need to ensure that their practices and record keeping are compliant with HIPAA regulations (for more information about HIPAA regulations and standards, see http://www.hipaa.org and http:// www.hhs.gov/ocr/hipaa/).

Online-Counseling Skills in Synchronous Chat

It would seem that text-based synchronous chat and asynchronous e-mail would be the most disorienting for counseling psychologists to adapt to because nonverbal cues are not present. In a study of more than 500 doctorallevel psychologists, 98% reported that they used a telephone in their practice. However, only 2% reported that they used Internet, satellite, or video- conferencing technologies in their practice (VandenBos & Williams, 2000). Telephone and videoconferencing technology allow the participants in the session to attend to vocal and visual cues, which is not possible in the textbased formats. Because text-based technologies may be the most challenging to adapt to, our discussion of online-counseling skills focuses on a synchronous-chat session. The following transcript is an example of a 50-minute session taken from a Mallen and Vogel (2002) study in which therapists-in-training from various graduate programs volunteered to conduct a one-time-only online session with a client.

Statement of the Problem/Justification

What really instigated the study on evaluation of adoption and productiveness of online counseling in colleges of education in Southeast Nigeria was due to inability of Colleges of Education students to gain access to counseling services offered by the management. The effect of these difficulties is mostly seen in the new intake (year one students); most of the students don't know where the counseling unit of is located. Secondly the number of students that needs counseling is much thereby increasing the competition for counseling services in the Colleges of Education.

The use of internet by most of the students to have access to counseling services has increased overtime; even at that, there are still some challenges; some of these challenges are unavailability of internet in the school premises, lack of adequate power supply, and lastly the effect of the socio economic background of the students.

Research Questions

The following research questions would guide the study:

1. What is the level of awareness of colleges of education students of the existence, function and productiveness of online counseling?

2. How effective is the trailability and observability in the use of colleges of education online counseling platform?

3. What are the areas in which students consider online counseling to be useful to them?

4. What are the roles of the colleges of education management in the adoption of online counseling?

Objectives of the Study

Specifically, this study would:

- investigate the level of awareness of Colleges of Education students of the existence function and productiveness of online counseling

- examine the trainability and observability in the use of College of Education online counseling platform

Research Methodology

This study adopted survey research design to assess the evaluation of adoption and productiveness of online counseling in colleges of education in Southeast Nigeria. According to Nworgu (2006), survey research design insured that a group of people or items is studied by collecting analyzing data from only a few people or items considered to be representative of the entire group. It uses a questionnaire to determine the opinions, preferences, attitudes and perceptions of people about issues that concern them. A survey design is suitable for this research because it is going to make use of a questionnaire to elicit information from the respondents.

A validated questionnaire titled the Evaluation of Adoption and Productiveness of Online Counseling in Colleges of Education in Southeast Nigeria' (EAPOCCESN), (for students and lecturers) designed by the researcher, and constructed in a 4-point Likert scale format will also be administered. The reliability of the questionnaire would also be established before use. The Statistical Model of Impact Measuring, a combination of multivariate regression methods and statistical inference would be used in analysing data generated from the study. Data analysis will be carried out on MS Excel, SPSS 17.

RESENTATION OF DATA

The data are based on the number of copies of the questionnaire completed and returned by the respondents. The data are presented in tables and the analysis is done using t-Test.

BIO DATA OF RESPONDENTS

Table 1

GENDER OF THE RESPONDENTS

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	MALE	78	39.0	39.0	39.0
	FEMALE	122	61.0	61.0	100.0
	Total	200	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field survey, August, 2023

Table 1 above shows the gender distribution of the respondents, 78 of the respondents which represent 39 percent of the entire population are male while 122 of the remaining respondents which represent 61 percent of the total population are female.

Table 2

AGE RANGE OF THE RESPONDENTS

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	10-14 YEARS	3	1.5	1.5	1.5
	15-19 YEARS	14	7.0	7.0	8.5
	20-24 YEARS	126	63.0	63.0	71.5
	25 YEARS AND ABOVE	57	28.5	28.5	100.0
	Total	200	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field survey, August, 2023

Table above shows the age distribution of the respondents, 3 of the respondents which represent 1.5 percent of the total population are between 10 to 14 years of age. 14 of the respondents which represent 7 percent of the total population are between 15 to 19 years of age. 126 of the respondents which represent 63 percent of the total population are between 20 to 24 years of age while 57 of the respondents which represent 28.5 percent of the total population are 25 years old and above.

Table 3

MARITAL STATUS OF THE RESPONDENTS

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	MARRIED	30	15.0	15.0	15.0
	SINGLE	162	81.0	81.0	96.0
	DIVORCED	3	1.5	1.5	97.5
	WIDOWED	5	2.5	2.5	100.0
	Total	200	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field survey, August, 2023

Table 3 above shows the marital status of the respondents. 30 of the respondents which represent 15.0 percent of the total population are married. 162 of the respondents which represent 81.0 percent of the total population are single. 3 of the respondents which represent 1.5 percent of the total population are divorced while 5 of the remaining respondents which represent 2.5 percent of the total population are widowed.

Table 4

RESIDENCE OF THE RESPONDENTS

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	CAMPUS HOSTEL	106	53.0	53.0	53.0
	OFF CAMPUS	81	40.5	40.5	93.5
	QUATERS	13	6.5	6.5	100.0
	Total	200	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field survey, August, 2023

Table 4 above shows the residence of the respondents. 106 of the respondents which represent 53.0 percent of the total population are resident in the campus hostel. 81 of the respondents which represent 40.5 percent of the total population are resident off campus while the remaining 13 of the respondents which represent 6.5 percent of the total population are resident in the quarters.

SECTION B: Students Level of Awareness of the Existence and Function of the College of Education Online Counseling Platform

Table 5

IAM AWARE OF THE EXISTENCE OF ONLINE COUNSELING SERVICES IN COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	104	52.0	52.0	52.0
	NO	46	23.0	23.0	75.0
	MAYBE	50	25.0	25.0	100.0
	Total	200	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field survey, August, 2023

Table 5 above shows the responses of the respondents if they are aware of the existence of online counseling services in selected college of education in Nigeria. 104 of the respondents which represent 52.0 percent of the total population indicated a positive response that they are aware of the existence of online counseling services in the college of education. 46 of the respondents which represent 23.0 percent of the total population indicated a negative response which means that they are not aware of the existence of the online counseling services in college of education while 50 of the remaining respondents indicated a maybe response meaning they are not sure if they are aware of the existence of the online counseling services in college of education.

Table 6

I AM AWARE OF THE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION ONLINE COUNSELING PLATFORM BUT I HAVE NEVER USED IT

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	177	88.5	88.5	88.5
	NO	18	9.0	9.0	97.5
	MAYBE	5	2.5	2.5	100.0
	Total	200	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field survey, August, 2023

Table 6 above shows the responses of the respondents if they are aware of the college of education online counseling platform and if they have used it. 177 of the respondents which represent 88.5 percent of the total population indicated a positive response that they are aware of the college of education online counseling platform but they have never used it. 18 of the respondents which represent 9.0 percent of the total population indicated a negative response that they are not aware of the college of education online counseling platform and that they have never used it while the remaining 5 of the respondents which represent 2.5 percent of the total population indicated a maybe response which means they are not sure if they are aware of the college of education online counseling platform and not sure if they have used it.

Table 7

I KNOW THE FUNCTIONS PERFORMED BY THE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION ONLINE COUNSELING PLATFORM

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	195	97.5	97.5	97.5
	NO	2	1.0	1.0	98.5
	MAYBE	3	1.5	1.5	100.0
	Total	200	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field survey, August, 2023

Table 7 above shows the responses of the respondents if they know the functions performed by the college of education online counseling platform. 195 of the respondents which represent 97.5 percent of the total population indicated a positive response that they know the functions performed by the college of education online counseling platform. 2 of the respondents which represent 1 percent of the total population indicated a negative that they are not aware of the functions performed by the colleges of education online counseling platform while 3 of the respondents which represent 1.5 percent of the total population indicated a maybe kind of response which means they are not sure of the functions performed by the college of education online counseling platform.

Table 8

I HAVE USED THE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION ONLINE COUNSELING PLATFORM

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	11	5.5	5.5	5.5
	NO	179	89.5	89.5	95.0
	MAYBE	10	5.0	5.0	100.0
	Total	200	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field survey, August, 2023

Table 8 above shows the responses of the respondents if they have used the college of education online counseling platform. 11 of the respondents which represent 5.5 percent of the total population indicated a positive response that they have used the college of education online counseling platform. 179 of the respondents which represent 89.5 percent of the total population indicated a negative that they have not used the college of education online counseling platform while 3 of the respondents which represent 1.5 percent of the total population indicated a maybe kind of response which means they are not sure if they have used the college of education online counseling platform.

Table 9

I SOMETIMES USE THE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION ONLINE COUNSELING PLATFORM

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	11	5.5	5.5	5.5
	NO	177	88.5	88.5	94.0
	MAYBE	12	6.0	6.0	100.0
	Total	200	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field survey, August, 2023

Table 9 above shows the responses of the respondents if they have sometimes used the college of education online counseling platform. 11 of the respondents which represent 5.5 percent of the total population indicated a positive response that they have sometimes used the college of education online counseling platform. 177 of the respondents which represent 88.5 percent of the total population indicated a negative that they have sometimes used the college of education online counseling platform while 12 of the respondents which represent 6.0 percent of the total population indicated a maybe kind of response which means they are not sure if they have sometimes used the college of education online counseling platform.

Table 10

I DO NOT NOTICE THE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION ONLINE COUNSELING LINK ON MY E-PORTAL PAGE

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	18	9.0	9.0	9.0
	NO	172	86.0	86.0	95.0
	MAYBE	10	5.0	5.0	100.0
	Total	200	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field survey, August, 2023

Table 10 above shows the responses of the respondents if they do not notice the college of education online counseling link on their e-portal page. 18 of the respondents which represent 9.0 percent of the total population indicated a positive response that they do not notice the college of education online counseling link on their e-portal page. 172 of the respondents which represent 86 percent of the total population indicated a negative that they do not notice the college of education online counseling link on their e-portal page while 10 of the respondents which represent 5.0 percent of the total population indicated a maybe kind of response which means they are not sure if they do not notice the college of education online counseling link on their e-portal page.

Summary of Major Findings

The study made the following findings based on the responses of the respondents that:

1. The students in colleges of education are aware of the existence of online counseling services in the colleges of education; we can see from table 5 above about 104 of the respondents give their nod for the acknowledgment the existence of online counseling services in colleges of education.

2. The respondents were fully aware of the functions performed by the college of education online counseling platform.

3. The study found that the college of education online counseling has been long implemented but most of the students hardly use it.

4. Most of the students noticed that the link for the college of education online counseling platform is on their e-portal page but due to some reasons they failed to use it.

5. It was also found that most of the students do not feel safe disclosing their emotional and stressful problems to the counselors in the college of education online platforms but they feel they can encourage friends that have problems to use the college of education online counseling platform

Conclusion

The implementation of the college of education online platform tend to be very important to the entire colleges of education, but the lack of encouragement and security of information guarantee, is discouraging students from using the college of education online counseling platform.

Recommendations

The study recommends that:

1. The Management of colleges of education, through TETFund yearly allocation should make available free WIFI and power supply so as to enable students and other members of staff get access to online counseling

2. The Management should always encourage students to always visit some recommended website for counseling concerning their course of study, health and other issues that concerns them

3. The federal government of Nigeria through the ministry of education should introduce guidance and counseling in secondary schools so as to guide students towards understanding the benefit of counseling

4. There should be a kind of training, through TETFund, for students that are not computer literate as this will enable them utilize online counseling without difficulties.

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