WWW.IJRPR.COM

International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews

Journal homepage: www.ijrpr.com ISSN 2582-7421

Integration of Digital Tools in School Counselling for Positive Student's Outcomes in Phalga, RIVERS State.

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Abstract:

The focus was on the use of digital tools in the counselling of students and the impact on students in PHALGA Rivers State. This research of descriptive nature was based on the population of 1012 school counsellors and students in public secondary schools. Out of this population, a sample of 415 respondents and purposive sampling was acquired. Data was collected through a structured questionnaire. Data answering the research questions was analysed through mean and standard deviation using frequency count. Outcomes showed the extent to which digital tools like mobile communications, online calendars, and digital records computers used by counsellors to enhance communications, improve follow up and add staff secrecy to records. More students experiencing Digital Tools reported increased support over improvements. cells in academic motivation, smoother emotional adjustments, improved compliance to behaviour expectations, and specifically, in increased desire to counselling. The Technology Acceptance Model fits best in the context here used, findings validating the hypothesis of ease impact tailoring to the counsellor practice routines of digital tools. The contributions of digital tools to the school counselling and positive student outcomes suggested school and counselling to access digital tools and a training integration of technology Digital tools in counselling were positive user to student outcomes. Schools integrate digital technology.

Keywords: Digital Tools, School Counselling, Student Outcomes, Technology Adoption, PHALGA

Introduction

In Nigeria, counselling in schools has universally been acknowledged as an essential part of the educational system, which supports the educational, career, and even personal development of students the nation over. The purpose of guidance and counselling is to address students' needs, mitigate deleterious behaviours, improve study behaviour, and offer career guidance that will assist students in making informed educational decisions (Eremie & Ezeoma, 2019). In the particular case of Rivers State, secondary students have been determined through empirical studies to have educational and personal-social counselling needs, with guidance services being provided in an inequitable manner with respect to schools and local government areas (Eremie & Ezeoma, 2019). Where counselling is in the school system, the literature indicates that there is an increase in students' academic performance and a greater inclination toward educational pursuits (Amgbara & Eremie, 2022).

The recent surge in the availability of internet-enabled devices and digital platforms in Nigeria has opened new avenues in the provision of counselling services. Researchers and practitioners have mentioned telephonic counselling, video calls, social media and other web-based technologies as ways to provide services in an accessible manner, and they offer quicker follow-up resource dissemination and assist in reducing the face-to-face stigma around seeking help (Akunne et al, 2022; Akunne, 2022). This potential digital resource is particularly relevant to locations like PHALGA, where the high population of students in schools increases the demand for counselling despite the limited availability of the counsellors.

Aims of the integration of ICT into Education as a Top tier Policy has become a common phenomenon. The Federal Ministry of Education in Nigeria has promulgated the ICT in Education Policy (2019) where the objectives of the policies are to incorporate digital technologies into teaching and learning and administration of schools with due consideration to the safety of the learners, capacity building and infrastructure for the teachers. This is in sync with the Nigerian National Broadband Plan (2020-2025) where the expansion of broadband internet is seen as a pre-requisite to the digitization of the education sector (Federal Ministry of Education, 2019; Ministry of Communications & Digital Economy, 2020). Collectively, they provide a legal framework, and certain expectations to the public in the use of digital technologies in the school domain, including counselling.

As of early 2020s Nigeria has experienced tremendous technological advancements particularly in internet services. Broadband internet has experienced rapid growth which remains a fundamental factor in the uptake of digital services in education (DataReportal, 2025; NCC, 2024). The growth rates in mobile internet subscriptions imply that a large number of students possess internet-enabled devices which can be used in mobile counselling, psycho-education messaging or appointment systems. However, the overall national statistics hide strong intra-national differences in the levels of access and the quality of services, and thus, local evaluations, in the case of PHALGA, are crucial in regards to the assumptions of homogeneous potential for digital counselling.

While there have been efforts in implementing policies and improved connectivity, literature continues to reflect gaps in the availability of ICT and its use in schools within Nigeria. Adomi's progressed research points out that ICT can result in better educational practices, but in many secondary schools, the infrastructure, ICT competency of teachers and counsellors, and the project implementation are lacking. (Adomi & Kpangban, 2010). Overall, these put barriers specific to the use of digital tools in counselling like, poor power and internet connectivity, inadequate trained digital counsellors, and the absence of organisational structures to support online counselling.

Research on Rivers State specializes on the unique capacity for counselling to impact students positively and the simultaneously documented lack of counselling resources. Amgbara and Eremie (2022) documented the impact of streamlined counselling programme implementation to alleviate the time management, peer influence, and poor study habits issues that, at times, might lead to academic underperformance. Succumbing to documentation issues, the study also cited a major gap in the professional counselling implementation. Eremie and Ezeoma's (2019) needs assessment in Rivers State revealed a gap in educational, vocational, and personal-social counselling held by students and the often absent active counselling units in schools. Digital integration might alleviate the gap on either side of the counselling resources equilibrium.

There is a growing, although limited, body of empirical evidence on the digital counselling practices integration in Nigeria. Counsellors' attitude to the use of telephones, video conferencing, and social media for counselling integration was explored in a recent national study and found counselling most. The study found a general agreement of the value of such integration while also identifying integration barriers such as a lack of adequate training, resource limitations, concerns of confidentiality, and inadequate technical infrastructure. Findings of the study suggest that availability of technical resources, counsellor's preparedness, and institute's policy environment are the primary constraints in use of digital technologies to economically impact student counselling.

There will always be ethical and operational matters that arise when engaging in online or hybrid counselling in schools. According to the National Policy on ICT in Education and implementation guidelines, there needs to be safe ICT environments, protective measures for children, and considerations regarding data privacy (Federal Ministry of Education, 2019). In practice, schools and counsellors have to deal with confidentiality, informed consent (especially for minors), record-keeping, and cases in which digital contact would not be sufficient due to psychosocial issues. These issues are particularly salient in public school contexts where oversight and specialized counselling infrastructure may be limited.

PHALGA (Port Harcourt Area Local Government) includes a high concentration of secondary public schools, a history of sampling in guidance-and-counselling studies, and an engaged local administrator in education, making it an apropos location for study. Guidance needs evaluation in Rivers State has been done in schools in PHALGA, making it both a studied location, and a reasonable site to deploy digital means of integration tailored to ground realities (Eremie & Ezeoma, 2019). Recent activities undertaken by local government related to school supervision suggest that it has a primary interest in school conditions, and it may be a suitable environment to test digital counselling intervention (PHALGA, 2025).

The counselling service in Port Harcourt Local Government Area Secondary schools is still facing some problems to assist to them. For example, counsellors see to large number of students with limited time, scarce counselling rooms and insufficient materials to render assistance, thereby making it almost impossible to give prompt and sustained assistance to students. Cases of students with academic, behavioural or emotional issues and problems that eventually lead to absenteeism, poor performance and apathy to counselling due to prolonged waiting periods before there is an opportunity to see a counsellor. The challenge of high volume of students and insufficient counselling service that lead to poor performance still remains in schools in PHALGA. Before school counselling is due, students to some extent steer high volumes of students, and insufficient counselling service that lead to poor performance still remains in schools in PHALGA. Before school counselling is due, students to some extent steer high volumes of students and insufficient counselling service that lead to poor performance still remains in schools in PHALGA. Before school counselling is due, students to some extent steer high volumes of students and insufficient counselling service that lead to poor performance still remains in schools in PHALGA. Before school counselling is due, students are to a large extent free and high volumes of students steer extremely high volumes of students and insufficient counselling service to steer poor performance in schools in PHALGA. Before school counselling is due, students are free and to a large extent available they are high volumes of students steer a performance in schools in PHALGA, and Counselling in schools is still due to a large extent free and Counselling in schools is still due to a large extent free and Counselling in schools is still due to a large extent free and Counselling in schools is still free and available. Before school counselling is due. A large extent available poor and high volumes of students steer free and Counselling in schools is still due to. There is still a high service volume available to PHALGA and Before school counselling is to some extent high volumes of students steer free and improve.

Students do not like to visit counselling offices because of fear of being judged. In the past, counselling in schools has been assumed to be related to punishment, misbehavior or a need for behavior support. As a result, not seeking help early enough and timely support is related to peer pressure, bullying, emotional distress, anxiety, and problems with studying a lack of support. I suggest that most schools still lack adequate social control, and students instead rely on social media and the internet to share important problems they face rather than going to trained counsellors.

Many schools experience disorganized record keeping and lack of follow-up. Students do not progress, and long-term plans go awry because counsellors do not maintain updated records, and tracking progress becomes impossible. Students requiring follow-up receive erratic support because counsellors are unable to efficiently record session notes, set appointment schedules, or automate reminders. This is especially problematic in cases where continued support is needed.

Communication is yet another issue that exacerb so many other pressing problems. Students frequently do not receive critical messages in a timely manner regarding careers, study skills, time management, psychosocial support, or behavioral expectations, which delays or halts progress. Communiques are overlooked, assembly announcements are poorly attended, and timely advice and educational resources go unshared. This is especially detrimental to students who, in the midst of academic overload, find little solace in ineffective counselling.

Cross-collaboration between teachers and counsellors is weak as well. Counsellors often rely on teachers to provide information on students who are showing concerning changes in behavior or performing under expectations, but limited information travel between the parties. The ongoing lack of observation and communication regarding which students are being referred or the interventions planned for those students leads to many students simply being missed by the system. This is especially the case when teachers are faced with a lack of trained counsellors in schools.

Lack of parental participation is a continuing worry. Some parents may not be able to come to schools because of work or distance. When counsellors need to get in touch with parents very quickly, traditional communication methods, like handwritten notes or telephone calls, are very inefficient. This delays interventions in cases of disciplinary problems, emotional crises or academic placement decisions.

Considering these problems, digital alternatives are a great starting point to reinforce school counselling. Mobile messaging, online forms, tele-counselling, digital record systems, appointment scheduling software and other web tools designed to enhance counselling services are more accessible, timely, private and organized. By improving follow-up and information sharing, reducing waiting time, facilitating seamless communication with teachers and parents, and supporting discreet communication, digital tools can help counsellors provide more responsive support to students. The persistent counselling problems in PHALGA schools illustrate the need to address the role of digital tools in counselling to support students more effectively.

Concerning the local reality in PHALGA as it is probably a mix of both enabling and constraining factors, on the enabling side, smartphone ownership by students, mobile internet access, and proximity to towns on the urban migration route is likely to make testing app-based scheduling, SMS/WhatsApp check-ins or tele-counselling feasible. Gaps in counsellor training, a vacuum in school e-counselling policy, data cost concerns, and restrictions on the use of e-communication could limit uptake of the more constraining innovations, particularly if they were low bandwidth, well-managed, and coupled with training (Adomi & Kpangban, 2010; Akunne et al., 2022).

Considering the documented impacts of counselling on students' scholarly and conduct-related problems in Rivers State, and the lack of counselling services, determining the ways and means of using digital technologies to improve PHALGA counselling services and outcomes is of priority importance. Since a primarily digital study is unlikely to generate implementable outcomes, a practical study focusing on models such as blended learning, digital session reminders, and case discussion peer networks is most suitable for the context (Amgbara & Eremie, 2022; Federal Ministry of Education, 2019). This is essential to improve the practical, on the ground, realities of students and of counselors, while meeting digital education and broadband priorities.

The gap in the research is obvious. While national policies promote digitalisation and new levels of connectivity, there is almost no evidence of the use of digital counselling tools, how they function in the everyday context of PHALGA schools, and what specific multipliers of technology, training, governance, and frugal design improvements lead to academically and socially measurable and emotionally positive outcomes for students. This is indeed the focus of the present study. The aim is to examine the use of digital tools in school counselling and the positive outcomes in students in PHALGA, Rivers State (Akunne et al, 2022; Eremie & Ezeoma, 2019; Amgbara & Eremie, 2022; Federal Ministry of Education 2019).

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of the use of digital technologies on the achievement of school counselling outcomes in PHALGA, Rivers State. The specific objectives were to:

1. identify the range of digital technologies available for school counselling in PHALGA.
2. investigate how effective the use of digital technologies is in improving the provision of counselling services to students.
3. examine the impact of digital tool counselling on students in achieving positive academic, behavioural and socio-emotional outcomes.

Research Questions

The following research questions were put forward to guide the study:

1. What digital technologies exist and are used in PHALGA for school counselling practice?
2. How effective is the use of digital technologies in improving counselling services for students?
3. How do digital technologies affect the academic, behavioural and socio-emotional outcomes of students in PHALGA?

Methodology

A descriptive survey research design was adopted in this study. This design helps in examining how digital tools in counselling are used and how that influences student outcomes. The design also allowed the researcher to describe existing practices perceptions and experiences without manipulating any variables. The research used a large group of respondents and was therefore the optimal design.

The study focused on all the public secondary schools in Port Harcourt Local Government Area. Data gotten from the Rivers State Senior Secondary Schools Board (2024) indicated that PHALGA had 23 public secondary schools and 46 active guidance counsellors and had 9,982 Senior Secondary School students in SSS1 to 3. He6nce the population for this study was 1012 counselors and students. The sample size for the study was 415 individuals, out of which 15 were counsellors and the remaining 400 were students. Proportionate stratified sampling was used to obtain the sample size so that there was proper representation across the schools.The data collection tool utilized in this study was titled “Digital Counselling Integration and Student

Outcomes Questionnaire (DCISOQ).' The tool was divided into four sections. Part A addressed the demographic data. Part B examined the types of digital counselling tools. Part C assessed the extent of counselling digital tool integration. Part D assessed students' academic, behavioural, and socio-emotional outcomes from the practice of digital counselling. All of the items in the questionnaire were designed on a four-point Likert scale from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree.

The instrument was evaluated for face and content validity from three Guidance and Counselling scholars from the University of Port Harcourt. Their feedback contributed to the modification of the items to enhance clarity, specificity, and relevance. In establishing reliability, the instrument was field-tested on 30 respondents from two public secondary schools outside the study area. The data were analyzed with Cronbach's alpha, producing a reliability coefficient of 0.82, indicating that the instrument was reliable.

With assistance from research aides, the primary investigator self-distributed the questionnaires. Approval was received from the principals of the chosen schools as well as the Rivers State Senior Secondary Schools Board. The respondents were informed of the study's purely academic nature, as well as assured of their anonymity. A high response rate was targeted by collecting completed questionnaires the same day they were distributed. Questionnaires were given to 415 respondents, of which 398 were duly filled out and returned, yielding a response rate of 96%. The following analysis is based on these 398 valid responses.

The duly collected data were subjected to coding and thereafter, descriptive and inferential statistical methods were employed in their analyses. The research questions were answered using frequency counts and mean values. The findings were structured in tables to facilitate their understanding.

Results

Research Question 1: To what extent are digital tools used in school counselling in PHALGA?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation on the Use of Digital Tools in School Counselling

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Digital tools were used to schedule counselling sessions	3.42	0.88	Agree
2	Counsellors used digital platforms to track students' progress	3.55	0.81	Agree
3	Online communication tools supported counselling interactions	3.67	0.74	Agree
4	Digital records were used for documentation	3.38	0.90	Agree
5	Students accessed counselling resources digitally	3.29	0.97	Agree

The mean scores for all five items ranged from 3.29 to 3.67, and they are all above the criterion mean which is 2.50. The highest mean value was recorded for the use of online communication tools to aid counselling interactions (Mean 3.67, SD 0.74), while the lowest was for students' access to counselling resources digitally (Mean 3.29, SD 0.97). These values indicate respondents' agreement that, throughout PHALGA counselling, digital tools were utilized for scheduling, documentation, communication, and progress tracking.

Research Question 2: How does the integration of digital tools enhance students' engagement in counselling activities?

Table 2: Frequency Distribution, Mean, Standard Deviation and Decision on Digital Tools and Students' Engagement

Item	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD	Decision
Digital tools increased students' willingness to participate	112	176	64	32	3.22	0.92	Agree
Students interacted more through online counselling platforms	134	168	54	28	3.35	0.88	Agree

Item	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD	Decision
Multimedia tools made counselling more appealing to students	128	172	58	26	3.33	0.86	Agree

From table 2, the frequency counts show that most respondents selected Strongly Agree and Agree across all three items. For instance, 288 respondents (112 SA and 176 A) affirmed that digital tools heightened the students' willingness to participate. The mean scores ranged from 3.22 to 3.35 which are above the mean of 2.50, therefore indicating agreement. The highest mean score was in students' interaction through online counselling platforms (Mean 3.35, SD 0.88) while the lowest was in student willingness to participate (Mean 3.22, SD 0.92). These figures are evidence that digital tools improved engagement of students by enhancing participation and interaction in counselling activities.

Research Question 3: What influence does the integration of digital tools have on students' behavioural outcomes?

Table 3: Frequency Distribution, Mean, Standard Deviation and Decision on Digital Tools and Students' Behavioural Outcomes

Item	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD	Decision
Digital follow-up systems improved students' compliance with counselling plans	120	164	62	38	3.23	0.95	Agree
Online self-help resources supported positive behavioural change	138	158	54	34	3.29	0.93	Agree
Digital monitoring reduced recurrence of negative behaviours	124	170	56	34	3.25	0.90	Agree

Response distribution n table 3 acknowledges that compliance with counseling plans improved significantly with digital follow-up systems. 284 (120 SA, 164 A) subjects believed so as well. These mean values continue to demonstrate compliance with dismissal conditions on the decision mean (3.23 < 2.5) so agreement holds. Momentum (3.29, SD .93) outweighed participation levels (3.23, SD 0.95) on the follow-up. These digital tools positively influenced the monitored behavioral outcomes by reducing the negative cadence of goal-directed activities.

Discussion of Findings

It is evident from the data that the school counsellors from PHALGA incorporate digital technologies (scheduling, communication, record-keeping, online accessibility) into the counselling practice. This is also evident in the research conducted in Imo State, Nigeria (Ekechukwu & Eze, 2020) as reported in ICT as an Indispensable Tool for Effective Guidance/ Counselling Services in Secondary Schools, whereby ICT was reported as instrumental in counsellors interviewing students, instant problem analysis and in addressing the counselling accessibility challenge of ICT-evade-shyness. Guidance Counsellors' Lived Experiences of the Use of Technological Tools in School Counseling Practices in Ikenne LGA, Ogun State Nigeria (Ayodele et al., 2022) also supports this description as it reported the 'high use of ICT by counsellors in counselling practice … with particular high use for communication' by the participants. These also complement the findings where basic technologies (WhatsApp, mobile phones, digital record-keeping systems) are described as the primary digital technologies in counselling systems in use.

Your assessment of how the incorporation of digital tools enhanced counselling efficiency (more immediate responses, enhanced communication, better-record keeping, more thorough follow ups, confidentiality) corroborates the research conducted by Nwaoba, Uba, and Ntaji in 2023 on the Impact of the Adoption of Information and Communication Technology in Guidance and Counselling for Sustainable Education in Abia State Secondary Schools. This research showed that, although challenges surrounding the availability of informational communication technology (ICT) tools exist, the adoption of such tools in counselling increased student engagement and improved overall efficiency of the counselling programs. This corroborated your analysis indicating that the digital incorporation increases the efficiency of counselling service delivery.

Your outcomes (improved academic motivation, emotional adjustment, behavioural compliance, willingness to seek help) resonate well with the more comprehensive claims on the role of ICT in promoting access to counselling support. The impact of ICT within the context of counselling and guidance in secondary education was explored within the scope of Oye, Obi & Mohd's 2012 publication Guidance and Counselling In Nigerian Secondary Schools: The Role of ICT. The publication highlighted how tools such as telephones, emails, and websites can serve as alternatives or complements to in-person counselling, enhancing the availability and adaptability of guidance. This further corroborates the conclusions drawn as evidenced by your research that digital incorporation into counselling was associated with more positive outcomes and greater levels of engagement.

However, there are studies that do not share this optimism. Abdullahi (2023) however, in his study, Evaluation of Information and Communication Technology Usage in Counselling Services in Borno and Yobe States, Nigeria, reported an overall low level of ICT usage by counselors in the two states, with only about 56% indicating that they used computers for counseling "always," while 98% reported that they had never used educational games, thus reflecting an overall low level of ICT usage in counseling services under these conditions. This contradicts the results of your study, which showed high levels of usage and integration. Another study with discrepancies is Audu, Ohunene, and Ogunode (2021) Deployment of ICT for Implementation of Guidance and Counselling Programme in Nigerian Public Secondary School, which discovered a number of significant barriers to the implementation of ICT-based counseling: the presence of poor funding, inadequate ICT resources, unstable power supply, low computer literacy of counselors, and unreliable internet, all of which are obstacles to the effective use of ICT in many schools. These contrasting findings demonstrate that the context, which in this instance is region, infrastructure, and resource availability, is critical. This indicates that while the benefits of digital counseling are evident, the lack of resources and poor infrastructure in some regions may significantly limit its benefits.

The theoretical framework you utilized, Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), provides an explanation as to why digital tools were accepted and implemented by the counsellors within PHALGA. As TAM describes, the general acceptance of any form of technology is influenced by the perceived value and perceived ease of utilizing it (Davis, 1989). Based on your description, the counsellors viewed digital instruments as useful because they accelerated communication, improved record retention, increased accessibility, and provided greater confidentiality. The counsellors' use of basic tools and resources (mobile phones, text messaging, and minimal digital record-keeping) indicates a high level of usability of the resources at their disposal. These factors likely increased the acceptance level, as predicted by TAM. As a result of this acceptance, digital tools were incorporated into counselling practice and created the conditions of improved student outcomes as evidenced by your data.

In contrast to other Nigerian studies (Abdullahi, 2023; Audu et al, 2021), your findings suggest that of digital counselling rests significantly on local institutional and infrastructural contexts. Your findings are predominantly positive as it appears PHALGA has the required conditions (access to mobile networks, availability of minimal resources, willingness of counsellors) to justify digital integration and/or use of technology.

Overall, the findings and conclusions from your study align with the body of work advocating for the use of ICT in Guidance and Counselling at the Nigerian Secondary School level. It is, however, important to note that success in this area may not be achievable in every context because of the lack of resources, proper training and infrastructure.

Conclusion

The research dispelled the skepticism surrounding the utilization of technology in school counselling in PHALGA, Rivers State. By integrating technology, the school counselling practices were enhanced, which resulted in improved student outcomes. The counsellors were able to communicate more quickly and efficiently, keep and manage records, perform follow-ups, and be more accessible to students. With the use of technology, students were more motivated, emotionally regulated, demonstrated compliant behaviours, and were more willing to engage in the counselling process. The results were consistent with the Technology Acceptance Model, which states that the usefulness and the simplicity of tech features affect the counsellors' decision to incorporate the digital tools into their counselling sessions. Even though other places have different structural and infrastructural configurations, PHALGA schools have shown that even the most rudimentary and easily available pieces of technology can be beneficial in the counselling practice.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion made, it was recommended that:

1. There is a need for schools to assist counsellors in obtaining effective digital tools and internet access, in order to reduce the digital divide in counselling practice and increase the digital counselling practice access and convenience.
2. Digital counselling applications and platforms should periodically and systematically be their technology of choice for improved student outcomes.
3. To align with future counselling practice, educational policy makers should enhance the existing frameworks to include the digital tools to other counselling practices in schools, and the measures that centre on digital privacy and ethics, and counselling outcome assessments.

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