

CHALLENGES IN THE UTILIZATION OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY FOR EFFECTIVE COUNSELLING SERVICE DELIVERY IN AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study investigated the challenges in the utilization of information and communication technology for effective counselling service delivery. The subjects for the study comprised 241 practising counsellors in all the public secondary schools in the three Senatorial Districts of Akwa Ibom State. Two research questions and two null hypotheses were raised and tested in the study. Data collection was done using a researcher-designed structured questionnaire tagged 'Information and Communication Technology for Effective Counseling Service (ICTECS). The data were analysed at .05 alpha level using mean scores and t-tests statistics. The results showed that counsellors in Akwa Ibom State do not rely much on information and communication technology in enhancing effective counselling service delivery. The results also showed that cost of procuring ICT facilities, not being familiar with the technology and lack of training on computer applications among others are some of the challenges in the utilization of ICT in effective counselling services. Implications for counselling and recommendations were also made based on the findings.

The increasing emphasis on information technology is a worthy recognition that the entire world has progressively become smaller due to efficient communication. Wireless communication has reduced the entire world to a global village or even less. The advent of computer has significantly improved information storage, retrieval and usage (Denga & Ekoja, 2008). Information communication technology according to Joseph (2011) can be described as the use of electronics-based combinations of computing and telecommunications equipment for acquisition, processing, storage, retrieval and dissemination of local pictorial, textual and numerical information for the use of man. Information technology equipment include radio, camera, television, tape recorder, video, fax, telephones, micro-processors, word processors, computers and more recently the internet.

Computer technology has become an important part of our society. It provides users with applications that can simplify several tasks. Recently counsellor educators have seen the value of computer-based applications in the delivery of counselling supervision and services. The use of computer applications by counselling professionals has continued to steadily increase during the past 18 years (Sampson, Kolodinsky and Greeno, 2007). It has been observed that the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in counselling service delivery has helped a lot of client interns efficiency. It has helped in improving client service as well as brooding the service research.

As noted by Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA, 2005). ICT can enable transformational improvement for an organization or profession, optimize operational efficiency and offer increased opportunity, improved efficiency and connectivity can transform service delivery, leading to improved relationship with members or clients. With the increasing popularity of the ICT via internet, the counselling profession is beginning to realize the effectiveness of this approach in facilitating the delivery of services. Research have shown that computer usage is becoming an integral part of counselling and counsellors training (Lee and Pulveno, 2009).

Computer-based approaches appear to have many benefits to both counsellor and clients, however, logistically there could be several problems that are associated with it. While the benefits of computer-based applications are evident, the full potential of this technology are yet to be realized. Technology will continue to play a more significant role in the counselling profession thereby revolutionizing the counselling process.

It is important to note that as counselling profession is increasing its uptake of ICT is succeeding slowly and remains uneven, indicating that thee are still a number of barriers to the adoption and effective use of ICT. It has been observed that the major barriers encountered by organizations in the effective use of ICT were cost, resourcing and the level of ICT awareness and skills. Sustainability as well as energy equally constitute barrier (DCITA, 2005). As noted by Abraham (2009) the cost associated with many of the computer-based approaches has remained a problem to its usage. Purchasing and installing the equipment needed to provide various services can be expensive. Aside from the cost, many participants might not be familiar with the technology and will have to first be trained in how to use the equipment. As with any form of technology, the process is susceptible to electronic technology failure. All these may offset the benefits of using a computer-based approach.

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Unlike most developed countries of the world where various personal and professional initiatives have all been finally and effectively integrated into technology the status of information technology in Nigeria as far as counselling is concerned has not been fully integrated into information technology. Professional counsellor organizations in the developed countries have since recognized the importance of information technology and have wholly integrated it into counselling. Counselling professionals also use this new medium to facilitate their practice. They have realized the effectiveness of this approach in facilitating the delivery of their services (Udom, 2010).

The above is a situation in the developed world unlike Nigeria and most developing countries where such is yet to be integrated fully in the counselling services. Equally a number of factors may have been contributing to this but yet to be x-rayed. In view of the above the researcher therefore decided to investigate the challenges in utilization of information and communications technology for effective counselling service delivery.

Purpose of the Study

Since ICT has not been fully integrated in counselling services delivery in Nigeria, the outcome of the delivery system may be affected. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the challenges in the utilization of information and communication technology for effective counselling service delivery in Akwa Ibom State.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions.

- How much do counsellors rely on information and communication technology (ICT) in enhancing effective counselling outcome in Akwa Ibom State?
- What are the areas of challenges in the use of information and communication technology in enhancing counselling services in Akwa Ibom State?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested in the study:

- There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female counsellors on how much counsellors rely on ICT in enhancing effective counselling outcome in Akwa Ibom State.
- There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of urban and rural counsellors on the areas of challenges in the use of ICT in effective counselling services in Akwa Ibom State.

Methodology

The survey research design was adopted for this study. This was because the researcher had to gather information regarding the variables under study in order to test the hypotheses. The study was conducted in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria which is in the South-south geo-political zone of the country. The population for the study consisted of 241 practicing counsellors in all the public secondary schools in the state. All the population were used for the study because of the smallness of the number.

A structure questionnaire tagged 'Information and Communication Technology for Effective Counselling Service (ICTECS)' was developed by the researcher. The instrument was a Likert scale measure of a four point rating responses.

The instrument was duly validated by three experts in the field of guidance and counselling and measurement and evaluation all in the Department of Educational Foundations, Guidance and Counselling in the University of Uyo. It was tested on fifty (50) practicing counsellors in Calabar, Cross River State for two clusters to determine its reliability using Cronbach Alpha. This stood at .73 and .77 for the two clusters respectively.

Data Analysis and Results

The data collected were analyzed using mean and t-test statistic.

Research Questions 1: How much do counsellors rely on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in enhancing effective counselling outcome in Akwa Ibom State?

Table 1: Mean Responses of Counsellors on How Much They Rely on ICT in Enhancing Effective Counselling Outcome in Akwa Ibom State.

S/N	Item Description	Mean (x)	Decision
1	Counsellors rely on computer-related technology in their professional writing	2.80	Agreed
2	Counsellors rely on computer-related technology in preparation of counselling encounter	2.00	Disagreed
3	Counsellors rely on computer-related technology in test administration	2.00	Disagreed
4	Counsellors rely on computer-related technology in test scoring	2.00	Disagreed
5	Counsellors source information for helping a client through ICT	2.80	Agreed
6	Counsellors are using cyber counselling in their interaction with clients	1.00	Disagreed
7	Through e-mail counsellors interact with clients	2.70	Agreed
8	Counsellors uses software for word processing	2.80	Agreed
9.	Counsellors uses software for record keeping	2.70	Agreed

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Cluster Mean (\bar{X}) 2.39 Disagreed

Based on the analysis of the data generated to address research questions 1, it could be observed that among all the nine items in the table on how counsellors rely on ICT in enhancing effective counselling outcomes, items 1, 5, 7, 8 and 9 were rated slightly above the criterion based of 2.50 and are therefore accepted as where counsellors rely on in their utilization of ICT in enhancing counselling services. On the other hand items 2, 3, 4 and 6 were not accepted by counsellors as being utilized in enhancing effective counselling outcome.

The highest rated mean in table1 is 2.80 of items 1, 5 and 8 while the least rated mean in the table is 1.00 of item 6. Based on the analysis of the table, a cluster mean of 2.39 which fell below the criterion mean of 2.50 was reached. This implies that in enhancing effective counselling services counsellors do not rely much on information and communication technology in Akwa Ibom State.

Research Question 2: What are the areas of challenges in the use of information and communication technology in enhancing counselling services in Akwa Ibom State?

Table 2: Mean Responses of Counsellors on Areas of Challenges in the Use of ICT in Counselling Services in Akwa Ibom State.

S/N	Item Description	Mean (x)	Decision
1	The cost of procuring ICT facilities constitute area of challenge to counsellors	3.60	Agreed
2	Most counsellors are not familiar with technology	3.00	Agreed
3	Lack of training on computer application and usage constitute a challenge to the usage of ICT in counselling	3.60	Agreed
4	Inadequate power supply is a problem of utilization of ICT in counselling.	3.50	Agreed
5	Many counsellors lack the skills involve in the utilization of ICT and this constitute a challenge	3.50	Agreed
Cluster Mean (\bar{X})		3.44	Agreed

From the analysis of the table, it can be observed that all the items in the table on areas of challenges in the use of ICT in counselling services have been positively rated by the respondents. The items 1 and 3 with the highest mean score of 3.60 respectively indicate that the cost of procuring facilities as well as lack of training on computer application and usage constitute areas of challenges in the use of ICT in counselling services.

Based on the analysis of the table where a grand mean score of 3.44 which was above the criterion mean of 2.50 was reached, it was established that there are many challenges in use of ICT in counselling in Akwa Ibom State.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the mean rating of male and female counsellors on how much counsellors rely on ICT in enhancing effective counselling outcome in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 3: The t-test Statistics of the Significant Difference Between the Mean Ratings of Male and Female Counsellors as it Concerns How Much Counsellors Rely on ICT in Enhancing Effective Counselling Outcome in Akwa Ibom State.

Group	\bar{X}	SD	No	df	t-cal	t-crit	α	Decision
Male	2.81	0.67	82	239	0.2	1.96	.05	Accepted
Female	2.79	0.80	159					

The data in the above table shows that the mean for male counsellors was 2.81 while that of the female was 2.79. The data was further subjected to t-test analysis in order to find out whether there was any significant difference between the mean ratings of the two groups. The result of the analysis shows that significant difference was not found between the ratings of the groups as it concerns how much counsellors rely on ICT in enhancing effective counselling outcome. This was based on that attainment of t-calculated 0.2, which fell below the critical value of 1.96 at 2.39 degree of freedom and probability level of .05 based on the result. The null hypothesis of significant difference was accepted.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of urban and rural counsellors on the areas of challenges in the use of ICT in effective counselling services in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 4: The t-test Statistics of the Significant Difference Between the Mean Ratings of Urban and Rural Counsellors as it Concerns Areas of Challenges in the Use of ICT for Effective Counselling Services in Akwa Ibom State.

Group	\bar{X}	SD	No	df	t-cal	t-crit	α	Decision
Urban	2.80	0.88	147	239	0.2	1.96	.05	Rejected
Rural	3.0	0.59	94					

The data in the table above show that urban counsellors was 2.80 while that of the rural counsellors was 3.0. The data were further subjected to t-test analysis in order to find out whether there was any significant between the mean ratings of the

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groups as it concerns areas of challenges in the use of ICT for effective counselling services. The result of the analysis shows that significant difference was found as the t-calculated value 0.2 exceeded the critical value of 1.96 at 239 degree of freedom and .05 probability level of significance. Based on the result, the null hypothesis of no significant difference was rejected.

Discussion

The study was guided by two research questions which focused on how much counsellors rely on information and communication technology (ICT) in enhancing effective counselling outcome and areas of challenges in the use of ICT in enhancing effective counselling services. The results, of the research questions showed that counsellors do not rely much on information and communication technology in enhancing effective counselling service delivery. Also the results showed that a number of areas such as cost of procuring ICT facilities, not being familiar with the technology, lack of training on computer application and usage, inadequate power supply and lack of skills on the side of the counsellors are challenges in the utilization of ICT in effective counselling services.

The fact that counsellors rely less in ICT in counselling services may not be for from the fact that most developing countries are just trying to embrace technological changes which the western countries have exhausted for the past four decades. This may have contributed to reasons for lack of integration of ICT in counselling services.

The finding contradicts the view of Lee and Pulvino 2009 who opined that computer usage is becoming an integral part of counselling and counselling training. Also, the findings shows that areas of challenges in counsellors utilization of ICT in effective counselling services delivery is a clear indication that in Nigeria most sectors are still trying to embrace the benefits associated with information and communication technology ICT. This finding agrees with the views of Abraham (2009) that cost associated with many of the computer-based approaches has remained a problem to its usage as well as purchasing and installing the equipment.

The analysis of the significant difference between the mean ratings of the male and female respondents as it concerns how much counsellors rely on ICT in enhancing effective counselling outcomes shows that significant difference was not found as the calculated t-value of 0.2 did not exceed the critical value of 1.96. One may not be surprised at this result as both counsellors in Nigeria context are exposed to the same orientation. On the other hand, the urban counsellors and their rural counterpart disagreed with respect to the challenges. This was based on the ground that the t-calculated value of 2.0 exceeded the t-critical value of 1.96 at 239 degree of

freedom and .05 level of significance making the null hypotheses of no significance difference to be rejected. This difference may be as a result of exposure and enlightenment which may have favoured those in urban areas as against those in rural areas in Akwa Ibom State.

Conclusion

Information Communication Technology (ICT) has become an important part of our society. Its applications make tasks simplified. ICT's importance has been appreciated by counselling professionals as a veritable tool in enhancing service delivery. Based on the findings there are a number of barriers encountered in its application and usage.

Recommendations and Counselling Implications

- The implications of the findings of this study is that in as much as counsellors do not rely much on ICT in enhancing services delivery, there will be continued draw back in smooth functioning of counselling profession in Akwa Ibom State in particular and Nigeria in general.
- Equally, if the challenging factors which impede the successful utilization of ICT by counsellors are not tackled, there will be low output which is not healthy for a developing country like Nigeria.
- The Federal Government as well as the state and Local Government Areas in Nigeria should make it mandatory for all practicing counsellors to acquire knowledge on ICT in order to enhance counselling services delivery in Akwa Ibom State in particular and Nigeria in general.

Finally, the study recommended that there is need for Computer Related Technology (CRT) skills training to be incorporated in counselling curriculum for would be counsellors in Nigeria.

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