

DIGITAL LITERACY USAGE AND ITS INFLUENCE ON COUNSELLING ACADEMICALLY UNDERACHIEVING SECONDARY STUDENTS IN OYO METROPOLIS, OYO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated the role of digital literacy in counselling underachieving secondary school students in Oyo metropolis. A descriptive research design was adopted, utilising a survey method to collect data from 30 secondary school teachers in Oyo metropolis. The research instruments were the Literacy Skills Questionnaire (LISQ) and the Counselling and Underachieving Students Questionnaire (CUSQ). The validity and reliability coefficients of the instruments were determined through a pilot test. The LISQ and CUSQ both recorded validity coefficients of 0.88 and reliability coefficients of 0.78, respectively. The results revealed that digital literacy is moderately to highly utilised in counselling practices, with digital tools playing a significant role in identifying academic challenges (Mean = 2.97), personalising support (Mean = 3.52), and improving students' academic outcomes (Mean = 3.23). Participants reported that digital platforms enhanced the tracking of academic progress (Mean = 3.34) and increased student engagement (Mean = 3.44). The weighted means for the extent of digital literacy use (3.33) and its influence (3.43) indicated strong agreement among participants. The study concluded that while digital literacy has a positive influence on counselling, addressing challenges such as insufficient training, inadequate infrastructure, and cybersecurity concerns is essential. The study recommended that secondary schools should invest in regular training for counsellors, ensure access to digital resources, and implement robust security measures to protect client information, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of digital counselling and supporting underachieving students more effectively.

Keywords: Counselling, cyber security, digital literacy, digital tools, underachieving

Introduction

Digital literacy encompasses the skills, knowledge, and competencies required to effectively utilize and adapt to digital technologies in personal, educational, and professional contexts. It transcends basic device usage, stressing the ability to manage information, communicate, and solve problems in a digital environment. Founded on critical thinking and adaptability, digital literacy is vital for navigating the transformative integration of ICT across sectors, particularly in education, where it enables access to resources, fosters collaborative learning, and prepares individuals for careers. Ultimately, digital literacy empowers individuals to thrive in the rapidly evolving digital world.

Spires, H. A., Medlock, Paul, C., & Kerkhoff, S. N. (2018) noted that digital literacy is the essential skills and processes required to effectively locate, evaluate, create, and communicate digital content in the 21st century. It encompasses strategically searching for accurate and relevant information, critically assessing its credibility, and utilizing diverse digital tools to generate meaningful content. Building on foundational knowledge of digital platforms and literacy skills, digital literacy empowers learners and educators to interact with digital resources, enhancing personalised learning and engagement. By incorporating tools such as video editors, Web 2.0 applications, and strategic search techniques, digital literacy enhances teaching and learning and prepares individuals for participation in a rapidly evolving digital society. It demands a critical evaluative mindset to ensure that users direct their inquiry and interaction with technology, rather than being led by it.

According to Bleuer (1987), student underachievement is a complex and multifaceted issue beyond a simple lack of effort or

motivation. It is characterised by a significant discrepancy between a student's potential and actual performance, often influenced by both internal and external factors. Internally, ineffective learning strategies, low self-esteem, and unresolved psychological issues can hinder achievement. At the same time, external factors like negative peer pressure, challenging home environments, and an unsupportive school atmosphere can exacerbate the problem. Underachievers frequently weigh the immediate benefits of non-achievement, such as leisure or socializing, against the delayed rewards of academic success, prioritising short-term gratification. Furthermore, criticisms from parents and teachers may unintentionally reinforce a sense of inadequacy, leading to a cycle of underperformance. Addressing underachievement requires a tailored approach that enhances immediate rewards for effort, emphasises long-term benefits, and mitigates the factors contributing to the student's disengagement.

Min-Ying (2024) suggested that counselling plays a pivotal role in addressing the unique challenges faced by underachieving learners. It fosters emotional resilience, self-compassion, and empathy by equipping them with strategies to cope with internal and external pressures. By leveraging frameworks such as the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) and incorporating principles of positive psychology, counselling interventions can enhance emotional regulation, social skills, and overall well-being. Moreover, these programs help students navigate issues like perfectionism, sensitivity, and social isolation, while cultivating strengths and fostering self-awareness. Through tailored approaches, such as bibliotherapy, service learning, and integration of digital tools and compassion-based curricula, counselling empowers underachieving students to overcome

obstacles, realise their potential, and achieve personal and academic success.

Amos (2022) expressed that integrating digital tools into counselling practice offers an opportunity to expand accessibility and provide flexibility for students seeking support. While face-to-face counselling remains the preferred method for many, particularly in terms of personal connection and the ability to read non-verbal cues, e-counselling has gained traction due to its convenience and reach, especially among tech-savvy individuals. Despite concerns over the loss of therapeutic alliance and technological challenges, such as internet access or device skills, e-counselling can complement traditional methods by offering alternative avenues for students who may be hindered by stigma or logistical barriers. Findings suggest that students value both face-to-face and e-counselling for different reasons, with males showing a stronger preference for face-to-face interactions, while females appear to be more open to online counselling. Therefore, counsellors should consider hybrid approaches, blending face-to-face sessions with e-counselling options, to accommodate diverse needs and ensure that all students can access the support they require. This integration can maximise the effectiveness of counselling services while promoting student satisfaction and engagement.

Similarly, Davies (2019) stated that integrating digital tools into counselling practices offers a range of benefits, enabling more flexible and accessible therapeutic options for clients, especially those in rural or underserved areas. Digital technologies, such as smartphone apps, email communication, video conferencing, and online therapy platforms, facilitate easier communication, improved record-keeping, and increased client access to therapy. These tools can enhance traditional

treatments, such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), and support mental health professionals in delivering care, improving outcomes, and promoting continuity of care. However, challenges such as ensuring privacy and confidentiality, the competence of practitioners in using digital tools, and the need for effective training and quality assurance of digital platforms remain critical. As digital technologies evolve, their integration must follow established ethical frameworks and be tailored to clients' needs to ensure safe, effective, and evidence-based therapeutic practices.

Pur, H. J., Mbah, L. A., & Audu, A. (2019). In an empirical study conducted at Maimusari Public Primary School, Borno State, Nigeria, the effects of individual counselling on the academic performance of underachieving pupils were investigated. Using a quasi-experimental design, the study identified key factors contributing to underachievement, including lateness to school, lack of learning materials, depression, anxiety, and teachers' attitudes. Findings demonstrated that individual counselling significantly improved the pupils' ability to overcome learning barriers, thereby enhancing their academic performance. The study stressed the importance of equipping teachers to identify underachieving pupils and ensuring timely interventions through counselling for better educational outcomes.

Uba, M.B. I., Uwake. N. C., Awoke, N.N., & Obioha, C.N. (2020), in their study, emphasised the critical importance of enhancing counselling for underachievers in Nigeria. Effective counselling equips school counsellors with essential skills for instructional supervision and academic progress monitoring, thereby addressing underachievement and fostering better educational outcomes. By building the capacity of counsellors, students benefit from targeted interventions that combat indiscipline,

improve academic commitment, and support holistic development. This is particularly significant in Nigeria's context, where underachievement among students impedes educational attainment and societal progress. Empowering counsellors through structured training and capacity-building programs is thus vital for improving the overall quality of education and students' performance.

Statement of the Problem

Student underachievement is prevalent among secondary school students. It is characterised by a significant discrepancy between a student's potential and actual performance, often influenced by internal and external factors. Ineffective learning strategies, low self-esteem, and unresolved psychological issues have hindered achievement, while challenging home environments and an unsupportive school atmosphere magnify the problem. This has led to a cycle of underperformance. Addressing underachievement requires a tailored approach that enhances immediate rewards for effort, emphasises long-term benefits, and mitigates the factors contributing to the student's disengagement. Additionally, there is limited focus on the specific digital literacy tools and contextual adaptations required for counselling underachieving secondary school students, particularly in the Oyo metropolis. The current study investigated the implications of digital literacy and counselling education in addressing underachievement among students.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to investigate digital literacy and its implications for counselling underachieving secondary school students in the Oyo metropolis. The specific objectives included:

1. To examine the extent to which digital literacy is utilised in counselling underachieving secondary school students in Oyo metropolis.
2. To determine the influence of digital literacy in counselling underachieving secondary school students in Oyo metropolis

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What is the extent to which digital literacy is utilised in counselling underachieving secondary school students in Oyo metropolis?
2. What is the influence of digital literacy on counselling underachieving secondary school students in Oyo metropolis?

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Data was obtained from experienced teachers through responses to a researcher-made questionnaire. All secondary teachers in Oyo metropolis comprised the population for the study. Random sampling was adopted as a technique to select 30 participants from the Emmanuel Alayande University Model Secondary School and SPED International Secondary School within Oyo metropolis. The research instruments were the Literacy Skills Questionnaire (LISQ) and the Counselling and Underachieving Students Questionnaire (CUSQ). The validity and reliability coefficients of the instruments were determined through a pilot test. The LISQ and CUSQ both recorded validity coefficients of 0.88 and reliability coefficients of 0.78. The validity and reliability coefficients of 0.88 and 0.78 of the instruments were determined through a pilot test. Items in the two research instruments were rated on a 4-

point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, with options 1 to 4. Data were collated, entered, coded, and analysed

using descriptive statistics, frequency counts, mean values, and standard deviations.

Results and Discussions

Research Question 1: What is the extent to which digital literacy is utilised in counselling underachieving secondary school students in Oyo metropolis?

Table 1. Descriptive summary of the extent to which digital literacy is utilised in counselling underachieving secondary school students in Oyo metropolis

S/N.	Statements	Mean	SD	Remark
1.	Counsellors in my school use digital tools to identify and address students' academic challenges.	2.97	0.80	Agreed
2.	Digital platforms are effectively integrated into counselling sessions to provide personalised support for underachieving students.	3.52	0.75	Strongly Agreed
3.	Counsellors in my school are trained in using digital technologies for educational counselling.	3.42	0.69	Agreed
4.	Students have access to online resources recommended by counsellors to improve their academic performance.	3.53	0.59	Strongly Agreed
5.	The use of digital technology in counselling has significantly improved the academic outcomes of underachieving students in my school	3.23	0.80	Agreed

Weighted mean = 3.33

Decision Rule: Strongly Disagree (1): 1.00 – 1.4, Disagree (2): 1.50 – 2.49, Agree (3): 2.50 – 3.49, Strongly Agree (4): 3.50 – 4.00

The descriptive summary in Table 1 reveals the extent to which digital literacy is utilised in counselling underachieving secondary school students in Oyo metropolis. With a weighted mean of 3.33, the results indicate an overall agreement that digital literacy is being applied to counselling practices. Specifically, counsellors use digital tools (Mean = 2.97), integrate digital platforms effectively (Mean = 3.52), and are trained in digital technologies (Mean = 3.42). Students also have access to recommended online resources (Mean = 3.53), and digital technologies have contributed to improved academic outcomes (Mean = 3.23). This demonstrates that while digital literacy is being effectively utilised in counselling, there is room for further improvement to maximise its impact.

Research Question 2: What is the influence of digital literacy on counselling underachieving secondary school students in Oyo metropolis?

Table 2: Descriptive summary of the influence of digital literacy on counselling underachieving secondary school students in Oyo metropolis

SN	Statements	Mean	SD	Remark
1	The use of digital literacy by counsellors helps to identify the root causes of students' academic underachievement.	3.49	.56	Agreed
2	Digital tools enable counsellors to provide more effective and targeted interventions for underachieving students.	3.45	.48	Agreed
3	Incorporating digital literacy into counselling has improved students' engagement and motivation to learn.	3.44	.49	Agreed
4	The application of digital literacy in counselling enhances the ability of counsellors to track students' academic progress.	3.34	.57	Agreed
5	Digital literacy has a significant positive impact on the overall academic performance of underachieving students.	3.45	.75	Agreed

Weighted mean = 3.43

Decision Rule: Strongly Disagree (1): 1.00 – 1.4, Disagree (2): 1.50 – 2.49, Agree (3): 2.50 – 3.49, Strongly Agree (4): 3.50 – 4.00

The descriptive summary in Table 2 highlights the influence of digital literacy on counselling underachieving secondary school students in Oyo metropolis. With a weighted mean of 3.43, the findings indicate a strong agreement that digital literacy positively impacts counselling practices. Specifically, digital literacy helps counsellors identify root causes of underachievement (Mean = 3.49), enables targeted interventions (Mean = 3.45), and improves student engagement and motivation (Mean = 3.44). Additionally, it enhances counsellors' ability to track academic progress (Mean = 3.34) and positively influences overall academic performance (Mean = 3.45). These results underscore the significant role digital literacy plays in enhancing counselling effectiveness for underachieving students.

Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the extent to which digital literacy is utilised in counselling underachieving secondary school students in Oyo metropolis. The weighted mean indicates that digital literacy is moderately to highly integrated into counselling practices. Specifically, counsellors use digital tools to address academic challenges, integrate digital platforms effectively, and have a fair level of training in digital technologies. This aligns with the findings of Popoola et al. (2023), who explored the implications and opportunities of digital counselling in Nigeria, revealing both benefits and challenges. While counsellors recognised the advantages of digital tools, such as improved accessibility and engagement, they faced issues like exposure to harmful content, excessive internet use, and challenges in maintaining client confidentiality. A lack of sufficient training further limited the

effectiveness of digital counselling practices. The study concluded that digital counselling is vital for reaching the tech-savvy generation but requires adequate training, robust cybersecurity measures, and ongoing support to ensure effective and secure integration into counselling practices.

In addition, the integration of digital platforms into counselling sessions appears to influence outcomes for underachieving students positively. The results demonstrate a significant positive impact, with a weighted mean of 3.43. Respondents agreed that digital literacy aids in identifying the root causes of underachievement, enables targeted interventions, and improves student engagement and motivation. For instance, Davies (2019) highlighted the benefits of integrating digital tools into counselling, including greater flexibility, accessibility, improved communication, enhanced record-keeping, and support for treatments like CBT. These tools are particularly valuable for reaching clients in rural or underserved areas and improving continuity of care. However, challenges such as ensuring privacy, practitioner competence, and the need for training and quality assurance of digital platforms must be addressed. Ethical considerations and client-centred approaches are essential for the safe and effective integration of digital technologies in counselling.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the study demonstrates that digital literacy significantly influences counselling underachieving students in Oyo metropolis, enabling counsellors to better diagnose challenges, personalize interventions, and track progress. While the current utilisation levels are commendable, addressing gaps in training and infrastructure is critical to maximising its potential. By doing so, digital literacy can play

an even more transformative role in improving the academic outcomes of underachieving students.

Recommendations

These are recommended based on the findings of this study:

1. Secondary schools should provide regular training programmes for counsellors to improve their competence in using digital technologies effectively and ethically in counselling practices.
2. Schools should implement robust cybersecurity systems and privacy protocols to safeguard client confidentiality during digital counselling sessions and interactions.
3. Schools must ensure that digital tools and platforms are affordable and accessible, particularly for underserved and rural areas, to maximize the reach and impact of counselling services

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