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PERCEIVED INFLUENCE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY ON DISPENSATION OF COUNSELLING SERVICES IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The rapid advancement of digital technology has transformed various sectors of society, including education. In particular, the field of school counseling has seen significant changes due to the integration of digital tools. The study employed a descriptive survey design and was conducted in public secondary schools across urban and rural areas of Anambra State, Nigeria. Eighty (80) respondents, including counselors, principals, and teachers, were purposively selected. Data were collected using a structured, expert-validated questionnaire based on a four-point Likert scale. A reliability test was conducted which gave a reliability coefficient of 0.72. The questionnaire was distributed electronically via WhatsApp and email. Descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation were used for analysis, with a 2.50 cut-off point for agreement. Inferential statistics, including ANOVA, were applied where necessary, and all analyses were conducted using SPSS version 22. Findings revealed a moderate level of digital technology integration in counselling services, with gender-based variations in perceived effectiveness and challenges. Mental health apps, teletherapy, and virtual peer support platforms were among the tools assessed. Key challenges identified included socioeconomic barriers, lack of training, and technical limitations. The study concluded that while digital technology had great potential to improve counseling services, there was a need for better implementation strategies, more resources, and professional development for counselors. Recommendations were made to support the integration of digital tools and enhance counseling practices in schools.

Keywords: Digital technology, counseling services, secondary schools, Anambra State, Nigeria, education, technology integration.

Introduction

Counselling services are a fundamental component of students' academic, emotional, and social development in secondary schools. However, the traditional face-to-face model of delivering counselling services is becoming increasingly inadequate in addressing the diverse and complex needs of today's adolescents, especially in the face of challenges such as limited access to qualified counsellors,

high student-to-counsellor ratios, and social stigma associated with seeking counselling (Eze, Ntaji, & Uba, 2025). Counselling services refer to professional support systems provided to individuals, particularly students, to help them understand and resolve personal, academic, social, or emotional challenges. In secondary schools, counselling services aim to guide students in making informed decisions, coping with stress, developing interpersonal skills, and enhancing their overall well-being. These services are typically delivered by trained school counsellors through individual or group sessions and may include academic advising, career guidance, and personal development programs (Ajibola & Odebode, 2025). Counselling promotes self-awareness, problem-solving, and resilience, enabling students to navigate the complexities of adolescence and achieve success in their academic and personal lives.

Secondary schools play a critical role in the educational journey of young people, particularly those between the ages of 11 and 18. These institutions bridge the gap between primary education and tertiary or vocational training, equipping students with academic knowledge, social skills, and values necessary for future success. Education, in its broadest sense, is a lifelong process of acquiring knowledge, developing skills, and forming attitudes that shape individuals and societies. It is essential for personal empowerment, national development, and the advancement of communities. In today's evolving learning landscape, technology integration has become a vital component of effective education (Sudrajat, Suherman and Yusuf, 2024). The use of digital tools such as interactive whiteboards, educational software, and internet-based resources enriches the learning experience, making it more engaging and accessible. When properly implemented in secondary schools, technology supports innovative teaching methods, enhances student participation, and opens up opportunities for collaborative and self-directed learning.

In this evolving educational era, digital technology has emerged as a promising tool to enhance the reach, efficiency, and quality of counselling services. The integration of digital technology in school counselling services has grown considerably over the last decade (Popoola, Ibraheem & Yusuf, 2024). Researchers have documented a shift towards the use of technology in facilitating counselling interventions, assessments, and communication between counsellors and students. According to Sudrajat, Suherman and Yusuf (2024), digital platforms such as emails, chat-based systems, video conferencing, and mobile applications are increasingly being utilized to provide timely and private counselling services to students. These digital modalities have been shown to reduce barriers associated with face-to-face counselling, such as social stigma and geographic constraints.

In a related study, Modebelu and Nwaoba (2024) observed that e-counselling platforms enhance confidentiality and provide a comfortable medium for students to express themselves without fear of judgment. This development is particularly vital in societies where cultural taboos and misconceptions about mental health hinder open conversations. In contrast, some researchers have raised concerns about the limitations of digital counselling. For example, East (2015) pointed out that while digital tools can support counselling services, the lack of personal connection, potential breaches of confidentiality, and the digital divide could hinder effectiveness, particularly in low-resource settings.

Moreover, digital technology has improved the administrative and record-keeping processes in school counselling services. According to Bahago andFadipe (2022), digital tools such as electronic databases and management software aid in organizing student data, tracking progress, and evaluating the outcomes of counselling interventions. This facilitates evidence-based practice and ensures that services are better tailored to student needs. In terms of accessibility, the adoption of mobile counselling applications has made it easier for students to seek help outside

the traditional school setting. A study by Ogueji et al. (2022) reported that mobile-based counselling services significantly increased the number of students who accessed mental health support in rural schools. In a similar vein, Mohammed and Usman (2022) found that WhatsApp and other social media platforms are commonly used by school counsellors in Nigeria to maintain regular communication with students, especially during holidays or emergencies.

However, in contrast to these optimistic findings, some studies caution against the uncritical adoption of digital tools. For instance, Julius, Fahriza andWulandari (2020) argue that the effectiveness of digital counselling depends on digital literacy, student motivation, and the availability of supportive infrastructure. Without adequate training for counsellors and access to internet facilities, the benefits of digital counselling may not be fully realized. Nonetheless, despite these concerns, the overall body of literature points to a growing consensus on the potential of digital technology to transform the delivery of counselling services in secondary schools. As observed by Sudrajat, Suherman and Yusuf (2024), digital technology is not a replacement for human interaction but rather a complementary tool that, when properly implemented, can enhance the effectiveness and inclusiveness of counselling services. The essence of this study lies in addressing the growing need for more accessible, efficient, and responsive counselling systems for students. Despite the critical role of school counselling in fostering emotional and academic development, many secondary schools, especially in developing countries like Nigeria, continue to rely on outdated, face-to-face models that are often inaccessible, stigmatized, or under-resourced (Ndhlovu & Zimba, 2025).

Recent technological advancements offer tools such as mobile apps, video conferencing, and chat-based platforms that can enhance service delivery. However, there is limited empirical evidence on how effectively these tools are being adopted or their impact in the school setting (Karaman&Özbek, 2024). Furthermore, most

existing studies focus on tertiary institutions, creating a research gap regarding secondary education (Mohammed & Usman, 2022). Also, concerns about digital literacy, infrastructure, and ethical issues such as confidentiality and data security remain largely unexplored in this context. Thus, this study seeks to fill these gaps by examining how digital technology is transforming counselling services in secondary schools and identifying the challenges and opportunities therein.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the extent of digital technology integration into counseling services in secondary schools in Anambra state?
2. What is the perceived effectiveness of digital technology in counseling services in secondary schools in Anambra state?
3. What challenges do counselors face in utilizing digital technology for counseling in secondary schools in Anambra state?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance

3. There is no significant integration of digital technology into counseling services in secondary schools in Anambra State.
4. Digital technology is not significantly effective in counseling services in Anambra State.
5. Counselors in secondary schools do not face significant challenges in utilizing digital technology for counseling.

Method

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The research was conducted in Anambra State, located in southeastern Nigeria. This area was chosen due to its growing integration of digital tools in public secondary education and its reputation for high educational engagement. The study focused on selected public

secondary schools within both urban and rural locations in the state. A total population of 80 respondents participated in the study, consisting of school counselors, principals, and teachers who were directly or indirectly involved in the delivery and supervision of counselling services. These participants were selected using purposive sampling, a technique that ensured the inclusion of individuals with relevant experience and exposure to the subject of digital counselling practices.

To gather data, the researcher developed a structured questionnaire that addressed various dimensions of digital technology usage in counselling services. The questionnaire was built on a four-point Likert scale, with response options ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (4). This scale was designed to measure the extent of agreement with statements related to the integration, perceived effectiveness, and challenges of digital counselling tools and platforms in schools. For the validation of the instrument, three experts—two in guidance and counselling and one in educational measurement and evaluation—were consulted. Their input helped refine the content of the questionnaire to ensure clarity, relevance, and appropriateness. The reliability of the instrument was confirmed through a pilot test involving ten participants drawn from a different set of schools outside the main sample. Data from the pilot were analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.72, which indicated a high level of internal consistency because it falls within the acceptable range for social science research.

In light of technological advancements and convenience, the questionnaire was administered electronically. Respondents received links to the online form via school WhatsApp groups and email, making it easier for them to respond at their convenience. This approach facilitated a high response rate, with all 80 participants completing and submitting the questionnaire. Data collected from the study were analyzed using descriptive statistical tools, particularly mean and standard deviation, to answer the research questions. A cut-off mean score of 2.50 was used to interpret

the responses, where any score equal to or greater than 2.50 indicated agreement, while lower scores reflected disagreement. Where necessary, inferential statistics such as ANOVA was employed to determine significant differences in responses based on demographic variables. All analyses were carried out using SPSS version 22.

Results

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Years of Experience and Gender

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent (%)	Valid Percent (%)	Cumulative Percent (%)
Years of Experience	Less than 5 years	23	28.8	28.8	28.8
	5–15 years	30	37.5	37.5	66.3
	15–25 years	18	22.5	22.5	88.8
	Above 26 years	9	11.3	11.3	100.0
	Total	80	100.0	100.0	
Gender	Male	28	35.0	35.0	35.0
	Female	52	65.0	65.0	100.0
	Total	80	100.0	100.0	

Table 1 showed that most respondents had 5–15 years of experience (30; 37.5%), followed by those with less than 5 years (23; 28.8%), 15–25 years (18; 22.5%), and above 26 years (9; 11.3%). Regarding gender, a higher proportion of respondents were female (52; 65.0%) compared to males (28; 35.0%). This suggests a relatively experienced and female-dominated sample population, with over two-thirds (66.3%) having more than 5 years of work experience.

Research question 1: What is the extent of digital technology integration into counseling services in secondary schools in Anambra state?

Table 2: Gender-Based Group Statistics on Digital Technology Integration in Counseling Services

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Teletherapy allows virtual counseling sessions for secondary school students remotely.	Male	28	3.32	1.156	.219
	Female	52	3.37	1.237	.172
	Male	28	2.57	1.451	.274

Mental health apps track moods and offer coping strategies for secondary school students.	Female	52	3.56	1.056	.146
Communication platforms enable constant support for secondary school students via email, video.	Male	28	3.54	1.071	.202
	Female	52	3.60	.995	.138
E-resources provide secondary school students with mental health education and skills.	Male	28	1.89	1.286	.243
	Female	52	1.90	1.287	.179
Virtual support groups connect secondary school students for peer-driven emotional support.	Male	28	3.43	1.069	.202
	Female	52	3.56	1.056	.146
Online crisis intervention platforms provide immediate help for secondary school students.	Male	28	3.29	1.182	.223
	Female	52	3.38	1.207	.167

The results in Table 2 show a moderate level of digital technology integration in counseling services among secondary school students, with female respondents generally rating the platforms slightly higher than their male counterparts. Notably, for mental health apps that help track moods and provide coping strategies, females had a higher mean score (M = 3.56, SD = 1.06) compared to males (M = 2.57, SD = 1.45), indicating a gender-based difference in perceived usefulness. Both male and female respondents agreed on the value of communication platforms that offer constant support, with females scoring slightly higher (M = 3.60, SD = 0.99) than males (M = 3.54, SD = 1.07). Similarly, virtual peer support groups were viewed positively, with females reporting a mean of 3.56 (SD = 1.06) and males 3.43 (SD = 1.07). However, e-resources for mental health education received the lowest ratings from both groups, with nearly identical means (Female: M = 1.90, SD = 1.29; Male: M = 1.89, SD = 1.29), suggesting limited engagement or accessibility.

Research Question Two: What is the perceived effectiveness of digital technology in counseling services in secondary schools in Anambra state?

Table 3: Gender-Based Group Statistics on the Perceived Effectiveness of Digital Technology in Counseling Services

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Digital technology improves engagement in secondary school counseling services.	Male	28	3.14	1.177	.223
	Female	52	3.48	1.038	.144
Online counseling provides flexibility for secondary school students seeking mental health support.	Male	28	2.79	1.397	.264
	Female	52	3.00	1.138	.158
Virtual platforms enable counselors to reach students who need immediate support.	Male	28	2.71	1.301	.246
	Female	52	2.94	1.110	.154
Online resources empower secondary school students with self-help tools	Male	28	2.43	1.136	.215
	Female	52	2.92	.987	.137
Teletherapy fosters a safe environment for secondary school students to express concerns.	Male	28	1.57	.920	.174
	Female	52	1.88	1.114	.155
Digital technology facilitates personalized care, promoting better mental health in schools.	Male	28	2.64	1.096	.207
	Female	52	2.94	1.110	.154

The results presented in Table 3 show a generally moderate perception of the effectiveness of digital technology in counseling services across gender. Female respondents consistently gave higher ratings than males in nearly all areas. For instance, digital technology improving engagement in counseling services was rated by females at a mean of 3.48 (SD = 1.04), compared to 3.14 (SD = 1.18) by males. Similarly, when asked about online resources providing self-help tools, females reported a higher mean of 2.92 (SD = 0.99) while males scored it lower at 2.43 (SD = 1.14), indicating a gender gap in perceived usefulness. Both genders had comparable perceptions regarding the flexibility of online counseling services, with females rating it at 3.00 (SD = 1.14) and males at 2.79 (SD = 1.40). The ability of virtual platforms to provide immediate support was also moderately rated, with females scoring a mean of 2.94 (SD = 1.11) and males 2.71 (SD = 1.30). Notably, the lowest perceived effectiveness across both groups was recorded for teletherapy in

fostering a safe environment for students. Females rated it at 1.88 (SD = 1.11) and males at 1.57 (SD = 0.92), suggesting limited trust in emotional safety within virtual sessions. These results point to areas where digital counseling tools are valued and where improvements are needed to build user confidence and engagement.

Research Question Three: What challenges do counselors face in utilizing digital technology for counseling in secondary schools in Anambra state?

Table 4: Gender-Based Group Statistics on Challenges in Utilizing Digital Technology for Counselling

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Lack of training may hinder counselors' effective use of technology.	Male	28	2.43	1.136	.215
	Female	52	2.81	1.030	.143
Privacy concerns arise when handling sensitive student data through digital platforms.	Male	28	2.64	1.096	.207
	Female	52	2.75	1.046	.145
Technological barriers like poor internet access hinder effective virtual counseling.	Male	28	1.89	1.286	.243
	Female	52	2.13	1.372	.190
Some students face challenges accessing digital tools due to socioeconomic factors.	Male	28	3.43	1.069	.202
	Female	52	3.56	1.056	.146
Inadequate technical support can disrupt online counseling services in schools.	Male	28	3.29	1.182	.223
	Female	52	3.38	1.207	.167
Counselors struggle to maintain student confidentiality in virtual environments.	Male	28	2.43	1.034	.195
	Female	52	2.79	1.035	.144

Findings in Table 4 reveal that counselors face significant challenges in utilizing digital technology. Socioeconomic barriers (Female: 3.56; Male: 3.43) and inadequate technical support (Female: 3.38; Male: 3.29) were rated as major hindrances. Privacy concerns and lack of training also emerged as moderate issues, with females perceiving these more strongly. The lowest ratings were related to internet access, though females (2.13) perceived this as slightly more challenging than males (1.89). The consistent gender differences suggest that while challenges are shared, females tend to express slightly higher concern across most indicators

Hypothesis One: There is no significant integration of digital technology into counseling services in secondary schools in Anambra State.

Table 5: ANOVA Summary on Digital Technology Integration Based on Years of Experience

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	736.099	3	245.366	15.147	.000
Within Groups	1231.101	76	16.199		
Total	1967.200	79			

The ANOVA result in Table 5 showed a significant difference in digital technology integration based on years of experience ($F = 15.147$, $p = .000$). Since $p < .05$, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that years of experience significantly influence how counsellors integrate digital technology in Anambra secondary schools.

Table 6: Post Hoc Dunnett T3 Test of Digital Technology Integration by Years of Experience

(I) Years of experience	(J) Years of experience	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Less than 5 years	5-15 years	6.26087*	1.17642	.000	3.0011	9.5207
	15 - 25 years	-.29469	.55402	.995	-1.8257	1.2363
	above 26 years	.70531	.93397	.966	-2.1758	3.5864
5-15 years	Less than 5 years	-6.26087*	1.17642	.000	-9.5207	-3.0011
	15 - 25 years	-6.55556*	1.15817	.000	-9.7744	-3.3367
	above 26 years	-5.55556*	1.38084	.002	-9.4081	-1.7030
15 - 25 years	Less than 5 years	.29469	.55402	.995	-1.2363	1.8257
	5-15 years	6.55556*	1.15817	.000	3.3367	9.7744
	above 26 years	1.00000	.91088	.840	-1.8555	3.8555
above 26 years	Less than 5 years	-.70531	.93397	.966	-3.5864	2.1758
	5-15 years	5.55556*	1.38084	.002	1.7030	9.4081
	15 - 25 years	-1.00000	.91088	.840	-3.8555	1.8555

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Post hoc analysis in Table 6 reveals that counsellors with 5–15 years of experience differ significantly in technology integration compared to other groups ($p < .05$). The highest integration is observed among this group. Since multiple comparisons show significant differences, the null hypothesis is rejected—years of experience significantly affect technology integration in counselling.

Hypothesis Two: Digital technology is not significantly effective in counseling services in Anambra State.

Table 7: ANOVA Summary on the Perceived Effectiveness of Digital Technology in Counseling Services Based on Years of Experience

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	562.376	3	187.459	9.450	.000
Within Groups	1507.612	76	19.837		
Total	2069.988	79			

The ANOVA in Table 7 showed a significant difference in the perceived effectiveness of digital technology in counseling services based on counselors' years of experience ($F = 9.450$, $p = .000$). Since $p < .05$, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, digital technology is significantly effective in counseling services in Anambra State.

Table 8: Post Hoc Dunnett T3 Test of Effectiveness of Digital Technology by Years of Experience

(I) Years of experience	(J) Years of experience	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval Lower Bound	95% Confidence Interval Upper Bound
Less than 5 years	5-15 years	4.09130*	1.27396	.014	.5983	7.5843
	15 - 25 years	-1.33092	1.05094	.747	-4.2502	1.5884
	above 26 years	-3.16425	1.10746	.059	-6.4153	.0868
5-15 years	Less than 5 years	-4.09130*	1.27396	.014	-7.5843	-.5983
	15 - 25 years	-5.42222*	1.35507	.001	-9.1389	-1.7056
	above 26 years	-7.25556*	1.39936	.000	-11.1730	-3.3381
15 - 25 years	Less than 5 years	1.33092	1.05094	.747	-1.5884	4.2502
	5-15 years	5.42222*	1.35507	.001	1.7056	9.1389
	above 26 years	-1.83333	1.19989	.571	-5.3037	1.6371
above 26 years	Less than 5 years	3.16425	1.10746	.059	-.0868	6.4153
	5-15 years	7.25556*	1.39936	.000	3.3381	11.1730
	15 - 25 years	1.83333	1.19989	.571	-1.6371	5.3037

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Post hoc results in Table 8 indicate significant group differences in perceived effectiveness. Counselors with 5–15 years of experience rated digital technology significantly more effective compared to other groups ($p < .05$). Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected—digital technology is significantly effective in counseling services in secondary schools in Anambra State.

Hypothesis Three: Counselors in secondary schools do not face significant challenges in utilizing digital technology for counseling.

Table 9: ANOVA Summary on Challenges Faced by Counselors in Utilizing Digital Technology by Years of Experience

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	808.979	3	269.660	20.661	.000
Within Groups	991.909	76	13.051		
Total	1800.887	79			

The ANOVA result in Table 9 showed a significant difference in the challenges counselors face based on their years of experience ($F = 20.661$, $p = .000$). Since $p < .05$, the null hypothesis is rejected. Counselors in secondary schools do face significant challenges in utilizing digital technology for counseling in Anambra State

Table 10: Post Hoc Dunnett T3 Test on Challenges Counselors Face in Utilizing Digital Technology by Years of Experience

(I) Years of experience	(J) Years of experience	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval Lower Bound	95% Confidence Interval Upper Bound
Less than 5 years	5-15 years	6.26377*	.99923	.000	3.5250	9.0025
	15 - 25 years	-.59179	.86291	.981	-2.9930	1.8094
	above 26 years	-.42512	1.20482	.999	-4.1501	3.2999
5-15 years	Less than 5 years	-6.26377*	.99923	.000	-9.0025	-3.5250
	15 - 25 years	-6.85556*	1.08601	.000	-9.8344	-3.8767
	above 26 years	-6.68889*	1.37346	.001	-10.6922	-2.6856
15 - 25 years	Less than 5 years	.59179	.86291	.981	-1.8094	2.9930
	5-15 years	6.85556*	1.08601	.000	3.8767	9.8344
	above 26 years	.16667	1.27771	1.000	-3.6756	4.0090

above 26 years	Less than 5 years	.42512	1.20482	.999	-3.2999	4.1501
	5-15 years	6.68889*	1.37346	.001	2.6856	10.6922
	15 - 25 years	-.16667	1.27771	1.000	-4.0090	3.6756

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Post hoc comparisons in Table 10 reveal that counselors with 5–15 years of experience perceive significantly more challenges in utilizing digital technology compared to other groups ($p < .05$). These variations confirm that challenges exist and are influenced by experience level. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected—counselors do face significant challenges.

Discussion

The integration of digital technology into counseling services in secondary schools has become increasingly pertinent, particularly in light of growing concerns around student mental health and limited access to traditional counseling. Findings from research question 1 showed a moderate level of digital technology integration into counseling services, with females generally reporting higher usage than males. For instance, the mean rating for the use of mental health apps was significantly higher among females compared to males. This is in line with Sudrajat et al (2024), who found that female counselors often exhibit greater openness to adopting digital tools due to their proactive approach to student well-being. In contrast, East (2015) reported that male counselors were more skeptical of mobile applications, preferring face-to-face methods. Communication platforms and virtual peer support were rated highly across both genders, suggesting broad acceptance of these tools. This aligns with Nuret al., (2023), who emphasized the role of digital communication in fostering continuous counselor-student interactions. However, the very low ratings for e-resources mirror the findings of Semchuket al., (2022), who reported that many schools lack curated mental health materials for students. In a related study, Bahago and Fadipe (2022) observed that poor internet access and lack of local content remain barriers to e-resource use. The ANOVA result revealed that years of experience

significantly affect how counselors integrate digital technology in secondary schools. This indicates that more experienced counselors likely differ in their adoption or application of digital tools, leading to variations in technology use across counseling practices.

From research question 2, gender differences were also evident in perceptions of effectiveness. Female respondents rated digital platforms higher in promoting engagement and empowering students with self-help tools. This agrees with Brown (2018), who found that female counselors in Nigerian secondary schools are more likely to see digital platforms as flexible tools that can enhance personalization and student engagement. Conversely, both genders rated the safety of teletherapy environments relatively low, suggesting concerns about emotional safety during virtual counseling. Shaughnessyet al., (2017) similarly noted that students may withhold personal information during virtual sessions due to privacy anxieties. In contrast, Safdaret al., (2022) found that in urban schools with stronger ICT infrastructure, students expressed more trust in virtual platforms. Perceived effectiveness remains moderate, possibly due to limited exposure and infrastructure. In a related study, Asareet al., (2023) found that while digital platforms have the potential to enhance counseling, lack of adequate implementation plans restricts their impact. The ANOVA analysis showed a significant difference in perceived effectiveness of digital technology based on years of counseling experience. This suggests that counselors with varying levels of experience perceive digital counseling tools differently, influencing their belief in its usefulness and outcomes in school settings.

Findings from Research Question 3 showed that counselors face considerable challenges in adopting digital tools. Socioeconomic barriers and inadequate technical support ranked highest. This supports Francom (2016), who identified affordability and insufficient tech support as key barriers in public secondary schools. In contrast,

Ndhlovu and Zimba (2025) highlighted training deficits as the main obstacle, which this study also confirmed to be significant. Concerns around privacy and student data confidentiality were also noted. Female respondents expressed slightly higher concerns than males, consistent with Karaman and Özbek (2024) who reported greater ethical sensitivity among female counselors. Technological barriers like internet access scored the lowest among all challenges but were still present. This finding agreed with Ibeet al (2024), who found uneven internet distribution across rural schools in Anambra State.In a comparative perspective, Halliru (2021) argued that challenges in Nigeria mirror those found in other developing nations, especially around infrastructure, cost, and digital literacy. This suggests that systemic reforms are essential for sustainable integration. ANOVA findings indicated that counselors' years of experience significantly affect the challenges they encounter in using digital technology. This means less experienced or more experienced counselors may face distinct barriers, such as technological skills, access, or adaptation, affecting their counseling delivery through digital platforms.

Conclusion

This study explored the perceived influence of digital technology on the delivery of counseling services in secondary schools across Anambra State, Nigeria. Findings revealed a moderate level of digital integration, with female counselors showing slightly higher levels of adoption and more positive perceptions compared to their male counterparts. Technologies such as teletherapy, communication platforms, and virtual peer support were widely recognized as beneficial, especially in improving access, flexibility, and student engagement. However, the use of mental health apps showed the greatest gender disparity, while e-resources emerged as the least utilized, suggesting limited awareness or accessibility. Counselors also identified various challenges, including inadequate digital infrastructure, lack of technical support, and insufficient training. These challenges were more critically

noted by female respondents, indicating a gendered sensitivity to the structural limitations of digital counseling. To enhance the impact of digital technology on school counseling, the study recommends: (1) targeted professional development programs to equip counselors with digital skills; (2) investment in school-based ICT infrastructure to bridge access gaps; and (3) the development of inclusive policies that promote equitable digital education and mental health resources. Addressing these barriers will create a more supportive and efficient digital counseling environment for students and counselors alike in Anambra State.

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