



INTEGRATION OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES FOR EMPLOYABILITY AND GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS OF PROFESSIONAL COUNSELLORS IN IMO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract:

The study investigated the integration of digital technologies for employability and the global competitiveness of professional counsellors in Imo state. Three research questions and one hypothesis formulated to guide the study were tested at .05 level of significance. The study adopted a descriptive research design. The population of the study consisted of 330 professional counsellors from Imo state. The instrument used for the data was a 15-item questionnaire. The instrument was validated by three experts, one from the field of measurement and evaluation and two from Guidance and Counselling all from the Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Mean, standard deviation and chi-square were used for data analysis. The study revealed, among others, that the available digital technologies used by professional counsellors are telephone, video conferencing, WhatsApp, smartphones and computer games. It was also revealed that there is a significant influence of integration of digital technology on global competitiveness among professional counsellors in Imo state. The study recommended, among others, that government should also provide a training opportunity for counselors on ICT awareness as social network technologies are vital for counselling services.

Keywords: digital technologies, employability, global competitiveness, professional counsellors

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1. Introduction

Digital technologies are strong tools that have a strong impact on our economic, social, physical and agricultural development. The value of digital technology in education is inevitable. The use of digital technology (ICTs) has enabled many professionals to continue to provide their services during the COVID-19 pandemic (Artemisa, Dores, Andreia & Fernando, 2020). Novelty in the use of digital treatment in counselling process is numerous, they include bias modification as a potential treatment for depression (Blackwell, Browning, Mathew, Pictet, Welch & Davies, 2015), virtual reality-based exposure in the treatment of anxiety disorders, the use of robotic technology to improve social interaction in autism spectrum disorders and dementia (Riek, 2016) and the use of a computer game to block the reconsolidation of intrusive traumatic memories (Jame, 2015). The positive outcome of technology towards education cannot be quantified in any sector of the economy as education is the basic tool for the all-round development of individuals. It stirs up innovation, competitive skills, and advancement and institutes positive values. World Bank stipulated that education is a human right, a powerful driver of development, and one of the strongest instruments for reducing poverty and improving health, gender, peace and stability (overview, n.d).

In Nigeria, education is regarded as *“an instrument per excellence for the social and economic reconstruction of the nation”*. The government regards education as the key to the fast realization of Nigeria’s aspiration of moving from being a developing nation to being a developed nation in a few years (Adebisi, 2014). Globally, education brings consistent returns to all economic sectors and is the most important factor to ensure equilibrium in the global market. In a situation where education is not given adequate attention, employability and global competitiveness become difficult tasks.

Employability is an essential ingredient in human life. It includes effective oral and written communication, the ability to think critically and solve problems, work-based experience, role-specific knowledge and technical skills, along with academic ability (Finch, Humaniton, Baldmin & Zehner, 2013). Odenigbo, Ismal, Suandi and Arshad (2018) assert that the graduate employability capacities not only promote their employability skills but enable the industry to obtain and sustain a competitive advantage in the dynamic world of work. It simply means that an individual cannot gain a good job if he/she has no ability to compete enough to sustain a high rate of growth in the gross domestic product (GDP). According to Sodipo (2014), even with a large number of unemployed graduates in the country, employers of labour still find it difficult to fill the existing few vacancies that crop up from time to time because these graduates are often found unemployable. That means graduates lack certain requisite skills for sustainable employment. It is pertinent to note that possessing competitive skills will help one to compete globally.

Competitiveness is a baseline for the sustainable increase of a nation. According to Goran and Ana (2017), economies that are more competitive are able to produce higher levels of income for their citizens. Global competitiveness is the ability of a person to

strategize his/her skills and knowledge to give in maximum support towards innovation and technical know-how across countries. Global competitiveness is the productivity of a nation over a sustained period of time (Bryan., Tugba., Caner & Fatmanur, 2016). Nonetheless, for a country to be productive the education sector should not be neglected. There is a need to provide basic education for global competitiveness. Basic education for global competitiveness is necessary because it will provide citizens with the ability to acquire knowledge, skill, and work experience which will aid them in solving global challenges such as climate change, poverty, insecurity, ecology and economy. It will serve in the development of an economic, environmental, geopolitical, societal and technological aspects of the country. Global competitiveness cannot be achieved without fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access to human rights (medium.com, 2016). For students, to compete globally and succeed, they need to create awareness and skills. And knowledge to understand, navigate and flourish in this increasingly global economy (educateiowa.com, 2009). Students may be academically prepared but not emotionally ready for the workforce. Hence this makes it difficult for them to adapt and adjust to the world of work. At this juncture, it becomes necessary to equip students with the behavioural competencies needed in the workforce and this is where the guide for a professional counsellor is needed.

A counsellor is a person whose vocation inclines toward building the reputation, inspiration, aspiration, personality and skills of students through counselling (Chigbu, Nwobi, Ngwaka & Mokwelu, 2021). Counsellors equip students with behavioural competences through behavioural improvement. behaviour improvement may be a process of strengthening the positive conduct of an individual through motivation, reinforcement and commitment (Chigbu, Obi, Uzoekwe, & Juloana, 2021). A counsellor is committed to his/her job through hard work in discharging his duties effectively without stress and discomfort. A counsellor may discharge his work effectively by making use of digital technologies. Most times, a professional counsellor assists clients in reaching their optimal level of psychosocial functioning through resolving negative patterns, prevention, rehabilitation, and improving their quality of life (Chronister, Chou & Chan, 2022). A professional counsellor is a mental health consultant with a master's degree in a counselling-related field, such as psychology (study.com, 2021). For an individual to engage in global competitiveness, their mental health may be affected, giving room for poor performance in the maximum productivity.

The pressure and tension of global competition will increase the probability of having few workers performing more tasks for the business to survive (Gloria, Frank, Timothy, Katherine, Ricardo, Tamika & Eunice, 2009). This means the pressure will hinder productivity by breaking down the commitment of some workers through health stress. The counselling profession can take a proactive approach by initiating discussions regarding the implication of global competition (Gloria et al, 2009). Counsellors should provide a continued dialogue, research and advocacy on the need to assure the relevance of their intervention in an increasingly integrated world of work (Daniel, Kyoung, Maria, Arline, Nikolai, Ana, Sachin, Chieko, Scoth & James, 2008). Global competitiveness leads

to globalization which the consequences can have an impact on every aspect of life. Therefore, there is a need for counsellors to understand their roles as one of the few groups of professionals that operate in schools, mental health, and career counselling setting (Daniel et al, 2008).

Because of the consequences, pressure, and tension involved in global competitiveness in lieu to technological advancement which may result in poor mental health hence the need to engage in it for employability and globalization for changes in the nature of economic activity among nations, expanding trade, opening global supply chains and providing access to natural resources and labour market. There is a need for extensive research on the integration of digital technologies for employability and the global competitiveness of professional counsellors in Imo state.

2. Statement of Problem

The ability of professional counsellors in rendering good counselling services has resulted in low satisfactory returns, especially in Imo state. Their lapses are observed in the behavioural patterns of secondary school students, tertiary students and the youth among others. Considering the negligence towards the education sector by the government, there have been great deals of behavioral defects in the youths (restiveness, ritual killings, immoral behaviour, cybercrime and others). All these are the resultant effect of the poor global competitiveness of professional counsellors.

However, competitiveness is boosting the sustainable development of a nation, it is determined by economic performance, business efficiency, government efficiency and infrastructural advancement and these elements are promoted by human capital development. When there is poor sustainability in the improvement of human capital development through low integration of digital technologies, professional human services will be limited, affecting the employability and competitiveness among workers and hindering the efficiency of job performance by professional counsellors. This, in the end, will have a negative effect on society at large.

It is also observed that delimitation in the integration of digital technologies among professional counsellors adversely results in bad behavioural patterns in adolescents, and subjects the society to disharmony. Thus, poor provision of digital technologies for adequate and proficient discharge of counselling services, causing lapses among students, youth, government and society at large thereby creating massive unemployment and global competitiveness among professional counsellors. Therefore, the study sought to determine the integration of digital technologies for employability and the global competitiveness of professional counsellors in Imo state.

2.1 Research Questions

- 1) What are the available digital technologies for professional counsellors in Imo state?
- 2) To what extent do available digital technologies used in counselling education?

- 3) To what extent do digital technologies enhance global competitiveness among professional counsellors in Imo State?

2.2 Hypothesis

The following hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance.

H₀: integration of digital technologies has no significant influence on global competitiveness among professional counsellors in Imo State.

3. Methodology

The study adopted the descriptive survey design. Descriptive design is one in which a group of people or items is studied by collecting and analyzing data from a few people considered to be a representative sample of the entire population (Emaikwu, 2011). The population of the study comprises all 330 professional counsellors in Imo state. The whole number of counsellors was selected, and no sample was done.

The instrument for the conduct of the research was a structured questionnaire titled, "Digital Technologies for Employability and Global Competitiveness Questionnaire" (DTEGCQ). The instrument was divided into two sections. Section A contained instructions for the respondents. Section B contained 15 items on two variables of the study. The instrument was validated by three experts, one from measurement and Evaluation and two from guidance and counselling all from the faculty of education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The instrument was a trial test on 32 respondents and yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.72. The questionnaire was structured on four rating scales VHE=4, HE=3, LE=2, and VLE=1. Data gathered were analysed using mean scores and standard deviation to answer the research questions and chi-square was used to test the null hypothesis at a 0.05 level of significance.

4. Presentation of Results

Research Questions 1: What are the available digital technologies for professional counsellors in Imo state?

Table 1 shows that items 1 to 5 had mean scores of 3.51, 3.00, 3.01, 3.12 and 3.26 with a corresponding standard deviation of 0.71, 1.22, 1.09, 0.97 and 1.16 respectively. Based on the criteria for decision making. It means that all the items were rated above the cutoff point of 2.50. The cluster mean of 3.18 with a standard deviation of 1.03 is also above the cut-off point of 2.50. The standard deviation scores of the respondents are small signifying homogeneity for the items raised. This implies that professional counselors use all the digital technologies listed in the items, which include, telephone, video conferencing, WhatsApp, smartphones and computer games.

Table 1: Mean scores and standard deviation of the available digital technologies for professional counsellors in Imo state

Item No.	Item Description	N	\bar{x}	SD	Decision
1.	I make use of the telephone to disseminate information to my clients.	330	3.51	0.71	VHE
2.	The use of video conferencing is acceptable in counselling process.	330	3.00	1.22	HE
3.	The use of the social networks (WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn) improves counselling process.	330	3.01	1.09	HE
4.	I engage in the private discussion with my clients through smartphones.	330	3.12	0.97	HE
5.	Computer games can function as a counselling tool.	330	3.26	1.16	HE
	Cluster Mean		3.18	1.03	HE

Research Questions 2: To what extent do available digital technologies used in counselling education?

Table 2: Mean ratings and standard deviation of the extent the available digital technologies are used in counselling education

Item No.	Item Description	N	\bar{x}	SD	Decision
6.	The use of telephone device is used in conducting e-counselling from any location.	330	2.89	1.15	HE
7.	Available digital technologies are used to promote client counsellor relationship, thereby providing privacy of client's information.	330	3.19	1.05	HE
8.	Digital technologies are used to follow up with clients frequently after counselling sessions.	330	2.58	1.13	HE
9.	Digital technologies are used to provide psychological tests to clients regularly.	330	2.95	1.16	HE
10.	Telephone devices conserve time spent during physical counselling session.	330	2.59	0.87	HE
	Cluster Mean		2.84	1.07	HE

Table 2 shows that items 6=10 had mean scores of 2.89, 3.19, 2.58, 2.95 and 2.59 with a corresponding standard deviation of 1.15, 1.05, 1.13, 1.16 and 0.85 respectively. Based on the criteria for decision making, it means that all the items were rated above the cut-off point of 2.50. The cluster mean of 2.84 with a corresponding standard deviation of 1.07 is also above the cut-off point of 2.50. The standard deviation scores of the respondents are small and have significant homogeneity for the items raised. This means that professional counsellors perceive the use of digital technologies as of great value, to a high extent useful in counselling education.

Research Question 3: To what extent do digital technologies enhance global competitiveness among professional counsellors in Imo State?

Table 3: Mean ratings and standard deviation of the extent to the available digital technologies enhance global competitiveness among professional counsellors in Imo State

Item No.	Item Description	N	\bar{x}	SD	Decision
11.	Digital technologies enhance global competitiveness through the development of media literacy.	330	2.79	1.05	HE
12.	Engaging in the publication and research of ideas and global knowledge network concerning counselling enhances global competitiveness among professional counsellors.	330	3.09	1.15	HE
13.	Digital technologies drive globalization and digital transformation through skill acquisition.	330	2.51	1.10	HE
14.	The use of digital technologies fosters collaboration and rapport relationship and enable counsellors to collect needed data for counselling process.	330	2.85	1.15	HE
15.	The use of digital technologies improves counsellors productivity and efficiency.	330	2.52	0.83	HE
			2.74	1.06	HE

Table 3 shows that items 11-15 had mean scores of 2.79, 3.09, 2.51, 2.85 and 2.52 with a corresponding standard deviation of 1.05, 1.15, 1.10, 1.15 and 0.83 respectively. Based on the criteria for decision making, it means that all the items were rated above the cut-off point of 2.50. The cluster mean of 2.74 with a corresponding standard deviation of 1.06 is also above the cut-off point of 2.50. The standard deviation scores of the respondents are small and have significant homogeneity for the items raised. This means that the available digital technologies enhance global competitiveness among professional counsellors in Imo State through the development of media literacy, through publication and research on ideas and global knowledge network, skill acquisition, globalization and global transformation, stimulation of cordial relationships between clients and counsellors and improvement of productivity and efficiency.

Ho: Integration of digital technologies has no significant influence on global competitiveness among professional counsellors in Imo State.

Table 4: Chi-square for the Integration of digital technologies on global competitiveness among professional counsellors in Imo State

Opinions	Observed N	Expected N	Level of Sig.	Df	χ^2 -cal	P-value	Decision
VLE	6	82.5	0.05	3	290.24 ^a	0.00	Sig.
LE	23	82.5					
HE	99	82.5					
VHE	202	82.5					

Table 4 revealed that χ^2 -cal is 290.24^a, with a df of 3 and p-value of 0.00. since the p-value of $0.00 < 0.05$ at 3 degrees of freedom, the null hypothesis which states that integration of digital technologies has no significant influence on global competitiveness among professional counsellors in Imo State is, therefore, rejected. This implies that there is a

significant influence of integration of digital technology on global competitiveness among professional counsellors in Imo state.

5. Discussion of The Findings

The study revealed that the available digital technologies for professional counsellors are telephone, video conferencing, WhatsApp, smartphones and computer games. This finding is in agreement with Artemisa et al. (2020) who found that professional counsellors use video conferences, telephone calls, smartphones and social networks for counselling services. The study also revealed that professional counsellors perceive the use of digital technologies to be of great value, to a high extent useful in counselling education. This result also corroborates with Christopher, Fairbun and Vikram (2016) who indicated that digital technology opens up new modes of assessment and transforms mental health care worldwide. The study also found that available digital technologies enhance global competitiveness among professional counsellors in Imo State through the development of media literacy, publication and research on ideas and global knowledge network, skill acquisition, globalization and global transformation, stimulation of cordial relationships between clients and counsellors and improvement of productivity and efficiency. Goran and Ana (2017) support the present finding by indicating that digital technology is of critical importance as a key enabler of socio-economic progress and development, enhancing productivity and economic growth, innovation and competitiveness.

The study indicated that there is a significant influence of integration of digital technology on global competitiveness among professional counsellors in Imo state. The findings are consistent with those of Nashat and Asad (2019) who reported a statistically significant effect of modern technology on the provision of counselling services and its infrastructure.

6. Conclusions

The advent of digital technology which has introduced social media platforms such as Facebook, blogs, Twitter and WhatsApp has been impacting students' behavioural patterns through counselling processes. The study has adequately captured the interception between digital technologies for employability and the global competitiveness of professional counsellors in Imo state. To this extent, it was discovered that government has a tremendous role to play in providing adequate technology for counsellors for employability and competitiveness in the global market.

6.1 Recommendations

Based on the finding of this study, the researchers recommend that:

- 1) Government should keep abreast of the functionality and services of professional counsellors by providing needed technology for the easy and smooth running of the counselling services.
- 2) Government should also provide a training opportunity for counselors on ICT awareness as social network technologies are vital for counselling services.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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