

## Online Guidance and Counselling Needs and Preferences of University Undergraduates in a Nigerian University

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**Abstract :** Research has confirmed that the emergence of information technology is significantly reflected in the field of psychology and its related disciplines due to its widespread use at reasonable price and its user-friendliness. It is consequently affecting ordinary life in many areas like shopping, advertising, corresponding and educating. Specifically the innovations of computer technology led to several new forms of communication, all with implications and applicability for counselling and psychotherapy practices. This is premise on which online counselling is based. Most institutions of higher learning in Nigeria have established their presence on the Internet and have deployed a variety of applications through ICT. Some are currently attempting to include counselling services in such applications with the belief that many counselling needs of students are likely to be met. This study therefore explored different challenges and preferences students present in online counselling interaction in a given Nigerian university with the view to guide new universities that may want to invest into these areas as to necessary preparations and referral requirements. The study is a mixed method research incorporating qualitative and quantitative methodologies to sample the preferences and concerns students express in online interaction. The sample comprised all the 876 students who visited the university online counselling platform either voluntarily, by invitation or by referral. The instrument for data collection was the online counselling platform of the university 'OAU Online counsellors'. The period of data collection spanned between January 2011 and October 2012. Data were analysed quantitatively (using percentages and Mann-Whitney U test) and qualitatively (using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)). The results showed that the students seem to prefer real-time chatting as their online medium of communicating with the online counsellor. The majority of students resorted to e-mail when their effort to use real-time chatting were becoming thwarted. Also, students preferred to enter into online counselling relationships voluntarily to other modes of entry. The results further showed that the prevalent counselling needs presented by students during online counselling sessions were mainly in the areas of social interaction and academic/educational concerns. Academic concerns were found to be prevalent, in form of course offerings, studentship matters and academic finance matters. The personal/social concerns were in form of students' welfare, career related concerns and relationship matters. The study concludes students' preferences include voluntary entry into online counselling, communication by real-time chatting and a specific focus on their academic concerns. It also recommends that all efforts should be made to encourage students' voluntary entry into online counselling through reliable and stable internet infrastructure that will be able to support real-time chatting.

**Keywords :** online, counselling, needs, preferences

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