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Role of Information and Communication Technology in Counselling Practicum for Trainee Counsellors in Nigeria: Implications for Practice in a Digitalizing Society

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Highlights:

Encourage ICT competency spanning tools like computers and smartphones for client communication, scheduling, session recording enhances practicum efficiency, reflective supervision, and telecounselling access, especially in underserved areas.

Highlight key barriers include insufficient infrastructure, curriculum gaps, the urban-rural digital divide, and inadequate training on NDPA-aligned ethical practice.

Recommend curriculum reform, infrastructure investment, mandatory ICT workshops, and modern supervision skills to prepare ethically sound, digitally competent counsellors.

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Abstract: In this paper, the roles and implications of Information Communication Technology (ICT) competency for trainee counsellors during counselling practicum in Nigeria was evaluated. Literature review showed that computers and smartphones are widely applied in client communication, scheduling, note-taking, and recording of session, while traditional audio-visual tools were grossly underutilized. Sufficient and consistent application or utilization of ICT competency promotes practicum efficiency, aids reflective supervision, encourages telecounselling, and access to mental health services becomes better, particularly in areas that are undeserving. However, inadequate competency leads to low productivity, trainee anxiety, risks in ethical conduct, and misalignment with contemporary values. The main challenges that were discovered are insufficient infrastructure, curriculum gaps, urban-rural digital divide, and inadequate training that are ethical under the Nigeria Data Protection Act (NDPA). This study recommends reforms in curriculum, investment in infrastructure, mandatory workshops or seminar in ICT, and modern supervision skills to produce competent and ethically sound counsellors with the ability to meet the Nigeria's needs in a digitizing society.

Keywords: ICT competency, trainee counsellors, fieldwork practicum, counsellor education, Nigeria

Introduction

The rapid advancement of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has fundamentally transformed educational practices and professional training across disciplines, including guidance and counselling in Nigeria. In the 21st century, ICT is no longer optional but an essential component of effective service delivery in mental health support systems. The integration of digital technologies into counselling practices has enhanced communication, data management, recordkeeping, and intervention strategies, thereby improving the overall effectiveness and accessibility of counselling services, especially in resource-constrained environments (Ekechukwu & Eze, 2016; Ugwuegbulam et al., 2024). Consequently, trainee counsellors are increasingly expected to develop ICT competencies as part of their professional preparation, particularly during the mandatory fieldwork counselling practicum phase.

Counselling practicum represents a critical experiential learning phase in counsellor education programmes in Nigeria, where theoretical knowledge is translated into real-life supervised practice. Trainee counsellors typically engage in fieldwork exercises in schools, hospitals, community centres, and other settings, developing core competencies such as

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empathy, active listening, ethical decision-making, client engagement, and problem-solving abilities (Nsisong & Ime, 2018; Okezie & Best-Njoku, 2021; Akpochafo, 2018). This phase serves as a bridge between classroom learning and professional practice, equipping trainees to address prevalent psychosocial challenges in Nigerian contexts, including academic stress, family issues, career uncertainties, and emerging mental health concerns. However, the evolving digital landscape has introduced new demands, requiring trainees to seamlessly incorporate ICT tools into these practicum experiences.

ICT competency for trainee counsellors encompasses the ability to effectively utilise digital tools such as computers (laptops and desktops), mobile/smartphones, internet platforms, audio-visual recording devices, data management software, electronic record-keeping systems, and telecounselling applications. These skills extend beyond basic literacy to specialised applications, including session recording for supervision and self-reflection, secure client follow-ups, access to evidence-based online resources, and digital documentation tailored to Nigerian cultural contexts (Uba, 2016; Egenti & Obumse, 2021; Ugwuegbulam et al., 2024). During fieldwork practicum, such competencies enable trainees to overcome geographical barriers, enhance service efficiency, and adapt to hybrid or remote counselling modalities, which have become more prominent in recent years. Empirical evidence highlights the pivotal roles of ICT during fieldwork counselling practicum in Nigeria. Mobile phones and computers are used to a very high extent by trainee counsellors for scheduling, real-time communication, note storage, and client engagement, thereby improving operational efficiency and continuity of care. In contrast, many traditional audio devices (e.g., CD & DVD burners, camcorders) and visual tools (e.g., projectors, CD/DVD players) remain underutilised, indicating a selective reliance on accessible, portable technologies (Ugwuegbulam et al., 2024). Audio-visual devices further support session recordings for supervisor feedback and personal reflection, while digital platforms facilitate access to culturally relevant interventions, underscoring ICT's role in bridging theory and practice in real-world settings.

The implications of ICT competency are profound for trainee counsellors' professional growth, resilience, and ethical practice amid Nigeria's unique infrastructural and socio-economic challenges. Strong ICT skills can expand access to mental health support in rural or underserved areas through tele-counselling, promote evidence-based decision-making, and align practicum experiences with national development goals such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 3 and 4) on health and education. Competent trainees are better positioned to transition into the workforce, leveraging tools for proactive interventions with millennial and Generation Z clients who frequently engage via digital platforms (Popoola, 2024; Akunne et al., 2022). Conversely, inadequate competency may lead to inefficiencies, heightened anxiety, data privacy risks, and over-reliance on technology at the expense of relational depth issues exacerbated by erratic power supply, limited internet penetration, and the digital divide between urban and rural institutions.

In Nigeria, where counsellor education programmes mandate fieldwork practicum, systemic gaps persist in traditional training models regarding ICT integration. Many trainees enter practicum with limited prior exposure to advanced digital tools, resulting in uneven utilisation and calls for curriculum reforms that embed ICT training from micro-counselling stages through to fieldwork deployment (Ugwuegbulam et al., 2024; Nwaoba & Nwankwo, 2019;). Counsellor

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educators play a vital role in modelling these skills and providing hands-on opportunities, as insufficient preparation can hinder trainees' adaptability and overall practicum outcomes.

Despite the benefits, significant challenges impede effective ICT integration during practicum, including inadequate institutional infrastructure and funding, varying digital literacy levels among supervisors and trainees, and ethical concerns related to confidentiality and data security under frameworks such as the Nigeria Data Protection Act. These barriers highlight the need for mandatory ICT modules, workshops, and supervised digital practicum components to align training with contemporary demands (Olanrewaju et al., 2022; Akunne et al., 2022; Ekechukwu & Eze, 2016). Recent studies further emphasise that addressing these gaps is essential to prevent practicum experiences from becoming outdated in Nigeria's rapidly digitising society.

Ultimately, the roles and implications of ICT competency underscore a necessary paradigm shift in counsellor education in Nigeria. By equipping trainee counsellors with robust digital skills alongside traditional competencies during fieldwork practicum, institutions can produce professionals who are clinically adept, technologically innovative, ethically grounded, and responsive to the nation's socio-economic realities. This synergy between conventional counselling skills and technological competence is vital for fostering adaptable, future-ready counsellors capable of delivering high-quality services in an increasingly digital world. The present discussion sets the foundation for a comprehensive examination of how targeted ICT interventions can optimise practicum experiences, bridge existing gaps, and elevate the standard of counselling practice across Nigeria.

Literature Review

The concept of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) competency has received considerable scholarly attention in recent years, particularly within the context of education and professional training in counselling. ICT competency generally encompasses the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to effectively use digital technologies for professional tasks. In counselling, this includes the ability to utilise online platforms, manage digital records, apply technological tools in client interactions, interpret computerised assessments, and conduct virtual sessions (Egenti & Obumse, 2021; Uba, 2016). For trainee counsellors, these competencies extend beyond basic digital literacy to specialised applications that support fieldwork practicum, such as session recording for supervision, secure client follow-ups, and electronic documentation tailored to Nigerian contexts.

Scholars have emphasised the growing importance of ICT in enhancing the effectiveness of counselling services. ICT tools facilitate communication, enable quick access to informational resources, support innovative strategies such as e-counselling and teletherapy, and help overcome traditional barriers like distance and time constraints. Ekechukwu and Eze (2016) argue that ICT serves as an indispensable tool for modern counselling practice, particularly in developing countries like Nigeria, where access to services is often limited in rural and underserved areas. This relevance has intensified in the digital era, where trainee counsellors must integrate technology to address psychosocial challenges effectively during practicum. The role of ICT in counsellor education and supervision has also been widely explored. Training institutions are increasingly expected to incorporate ICT into curricula to prepare students for contemporary

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demands. Ugwuegbulam and Ibrahim (2018) highlight that shifting from traditional "old school" tape-based supervision to ICT-enabled approaches such as video conferencing and digital portfolios enhances communication between trainees and supervisors, improves documentation, and provides more timely, accurate feedback. Such integration ensures trainee counsellors are better equipped for real-world practicum environments, though implementation remains constrained by infrastructural limitations in many Nigerian institutions.

Fieldwork counselling practicum constitutes a vital experiential component of counsellor education programmes in Nigeria, offering opportunities for trainees to apply theoretical knowledge in supervised real-world settings such as schools, hospitals, and community centres. Literature indicates that practicum experiences significantly contribute to the development of professional competencies, including ICT skills. Wang and Ko (2022) found that pre-service professionals engaging in ICT-integrated practicum demonstrate higher digital competence. In the Nigerian context, however, traditional models often provide limited prior exposure to digital tools before fieldwork deployment (Nsisong & Ime, 2018; Okezie & Best-Njoku, 2021; Akpochafo, 2018). Empirical investigations reveal selective but growing adoption of ICT during fieldwork counselling practicum in Nigeria. A survey of trainee counsellors in South-East Nigeria showed that mobile/smartphones and computers (laptops and desktops) are utilised to a very high extent for scheduling, real-time communication, note storage, and client engagement. In contrast, many traditional audio devices (e.g., CD & DVD burners, camcorders) and visual tools (e.g., projectors, CD/DVD players) are used to a low or very low extent, indicating reliance on accessible portable technologies rather than comprehensive infrastructure (Ugwuegbulam et al., 2024). These findings illustrate both progress and persistent gaps in full ICT integration.

Several studies have examined the level of ICT competency among trainee counsellors in Nigeria, generally indicating moderate to low proficiency attributed to limited access to resources and inadequate training. Okechukwu (2026) reported that many counselling students lack exposure to functional counselling laboratories equipped with ICT tools, which negatively impacts their clinical competence during practicum. This infrastructural deficit correlates significantly with reduced practical skills, underscoring the need for improved resource allocation and curriculum reforms that embed ICT from micro-counselling stages onward.

The availability of ICT facilities has been identified as a key determinant of competency development. Research shows that institutions with better access to computers, internet connectivity, and digital counselling tools produce trainees with higher technological competence, enhancing employability and effectiveness (Otakpo et al., 2025; Akunne et al., 2022). In Nigeria, however, challenges such as erratic power supply, limited internet penetration, funding shortages, and the urban-rural digital divide continue to hinder equitable development of these skills during practicum (Ekechukwu & Eze, 2016; Nwaoba & Nwankwo, 2019; Olanrewaju et al., 2022).

Pedagogical approaches to teaching ICT skills, including blended learning that combines face-toface instruction with online components, have been recommended as effective strategies. Such methods promote self-directed learning, adaptability, and practical application in counselling contexts (Olanrewaju et al., 2022). Counsellor educators play a pivotal role in modelling ICT use, yet varying digital literacy levels among supervisors often limit consistent integration (Ugwuegbulam et al., 2024; Isiaka, 2024).

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Literature advocates for mandatory ICT workshops and hands-on digital practicum components to bridge these gaps.

The implications of ICT competency on counselling outcomes are profound. Trainee counsellors who effectively utilise ICT tools demonstrate improved client engagement, accurate recordkeeping, timely interventions, and better management of emerging issues such as cyberbullying among digital-native clients (Egenti & Obumse, 2021; Popoola, 2024; Thompson & Akinwumi, 2016). Positive outcomes extend to expanded service reach in underserved areas via telecounselling and alignment with national goals like the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 3 and 4). However, over-reliance on technology may undermine relational depth and cultural nuances in Nigerian counselling.

Ethical considerations surrounding ICT use in practicum have gained prominence. Digital platforms raise concerns about confidentiality, data security, and professional boundaries, particularly under the Nigeria Data Protection Act. Trainee counsellors must be equipped with ethical knowledge to navigate these challenges responsibly while preserving client trust and relational aspects of counselling (Olanrewaju et al., 2022; Akunne et al., 2022). The literature stresses the inclusion of explicit ethical training modules within practicum programmes.

Global perspectives provide valuable comparative insights for the Nigerian context. In developed countries, ICT integration in counsellor training is more advanced, with widespread use of online platforms and digital assessments that significantly enhance trainee readiness (Wang & Ko, 2022; World Health Organization, 2018). Nigeria can benefit from adopting adapted best practices, while addressing unique local challenges such as infrastructural deficits and cultural factors (Peters, 2026; Smithson et al., 2019). This comparative lens highlights the urgency of localised curriculum reforms.

This review has examined the critical roles and multifaceted implications of ICT competency for trainee counsellors during fieldwork counselling practicum in Nigeria. While empirical evidence demonstrates selective high utilisation of basic mobile and computer technologies alongside growing recognition of ICT's transformative potential, persistent infrastructural, ethical, pedagogical, and access-related gaps continue to limit full integration (Ugwuegbulam et al., 2024; Okechukwu, 2026; Popoola, 2024). Addressing these challenges through targeted policy interventions, infrastructure investment, and curriculum overhaul is essential for producing competent, adaptable, and future-ready counsellors capable of delivering effective services in Nigeria's rapidly digitising society.

The Central Problem: The ICT Preparedness Gap in Counselling Practicum

The core issue at the heart of this topic is the persistent gap between the growing expectation of ICT competency among trainee counsellors and the limited preparation they receive during fieldwork counselling practicum in Nigeria. In an era where digital tools have become indispensable for effective mental health service delivery, many trainees enter practicum with insufficient skills in using computers, smartphones, tele-counselling platforms, electronic recordkeeping, and audio-visual devices for supervision and client engagement. This deficiency stems from traditional counsellor education curricula that prioritise face-to-face skills while underemphasising technology integration, leaving trainees ill-equipped to navigate real-world demands in schools, hospitals, and community settings (Ugwuegbulam et al., 2024; Okechukwu,

2026). As a result, practicum experiences risk becoming outdated, compromising both trainee development and the quality of counselling services provided to Nigerian clients facing academic, family, and psychosocial challenges.

ICT competency plays several pivotal roles during fieldwork practicum, serving as a practical enabler that enhances efficiency, accessibility, and reflective practice. Trainee counsellors who possess these skills can utilise mobile devices for real-time scheduling and client follow-ups, laptops for secure note storage and report writing, and digital platforms for hybrid sessions that bridge geographical barriers in rural areas. Empirical evidence from South-East Nigeria shows that smartphones and computers are already employed to a very high extent for daily operations, while audio-visual tools support session recordings for supervisor feedback and self-reflection (Ugwuegbulam et al., 2024). These roles transform practicum from a purely relational exercise into a technologically supported process, allowing trainees to access evidence-based resources and adapt interventions to culturally diverse client needs more effectively.

The positive implications of adequate ICT competency are far-reaching for trainee counsellors' professional readiness and service delivery. Competent trainees are better positioned to expand mental health access in underserved communities through tele-counselling, leverage social media for awareness campaigns targeting millennial and Generation Z clients, and contribute to national development objectives such as the Sustainable Development Goals on health and education. Higher ICT proficiency correlates with improved client engagement, accurate documentation, and evidence-based decision-making, ultimately fostering more resilient and adaptable future counsellors (Popoola, 2024; Akunne et al., 2022). In Nigeria's rapidly digitising society, this competency equips trainees to address emerging issues like cyberbullying and online mental health crises, thereby elevating the overall relevance and impact of counselling practice.

Conversely, the negative implications of low ICT competency manifest in inefficiencies, heightened trainee anxiety, and suboptimal practicum outcomes. Without sufficient skills, trainees struggle with basic tasks such as digital record-keeping or virtual supervision, leading to fragmented service continuity and missed opportunities for proactive interventions. This inadequacy is exacerbated by over-reliance on traditional methods in a context where clients increasingly expect digital responsiveness, potentially undermining relational depth and cultural sensitivity in Nigerian counselling encounters. Studies indicate that trainees with limited exposure report greater challenges transitioning to professional roles, where ICT proficiency is now a baseline expectation (Nwaoba & Nwankwo, 2019; Okechukwu, 2026).

Empirical data from Nigerian studies further illuminate the main issue through selective patterns of ICT adoption during practicum. While basic portable devices like smartphones are widely used, advanced tools such as dedicated audio-visual equipment or specialised counselling software remain underutilised due to inconsistent training and availability. This selective reliance highlights a broader systemic failure to embed comprehensive ICT modules from micro-counselling through to fieldwork stages, resulting in uneven competency levels across urban and rural institutions (Ugwuegbulam et al., 2024). Such findings underscore that the issue is not merely individual skill deficits but a structural mismatch between training models and contemporary professional realities. Systemic barriers in Nigeria compound the main issue, with inadequate infrastructure erratic power supply, limited

internet penetration, funding shortages, and poorly equipped counselling laboratories serving as primary obstacles. Many institutions lack functional ICT facilities, forcing trainees to improvise during practicum and perpetuating a cycle of low proficiency. The digital divide between urban training centres and rural fieldwork sites further widens disparities, as trainees from under-resourced backgrounds enter placements without foundational skills (Ekechukwu & Eze, 2016; Olanrewaju et al., 2022). These infrastructural and policy gaps reveal that the problem is deeply rooted in national educational priorities that have yet to fully align counsellor training with the demands of a digital economy.

Ethical dimensions add another layer of complexity to the main issue, as ICT use during practicum raises critical concerns around confidentiality, data security, and professional boundaries under the Nigeria Data Protection Act. Trainee counsellors often lack explicit guidance on navigating virtual sessions, electronic records, or potential breaches, which can erode client trust and expose practitioners to legal risks. Over-dependence on technology without ethical training may also diminish the human-centred essence of counselling, particularly in culturally rich Nigerian contexts where relational nuances are paramount (Akunne et al., 2022; Olanrewaju et al., 2022). This ethical shortfall highlights the need for integrated training that balances technical skills with moral responsibility.

The main issue insufficient ICT competency among trainee counsellors during fieldwork practicum represents a critical bottleneck in Nigerian counsellor education that undermines roles, amplifies negative implications, and perpetuates systemic inequities. Addressing it demands urgent curriculum reforms, infrastructure investment, mandatory digital workshops, and ethical modules to produce professionals who are both clinically proficient and technologically adept. Without such interventions, the full potential of counselling services in Nigeria's evolving digital landscape will remain unrealised, limiting trainees' ability to meet societal mental health needs effectively.

Challenges and Implications

Trainee counsellors in Nigeria face significant infrastructural and access-related challenges when developing ICT competency during fieldwork practicum. Erratic power supply, unreliable internet connectivity, and poorly equipped counselling laboratories limit hands-on practice with essential tools such as computers, recording devices, and tele-counselling platforms. Many trainees depend on personal smartphones and laptops of varying quality, while advanced audio-visual equipment remains underutilised. This situation is worsened by the digital divide between urban training institutions and rural practicum sites, which restricts equitable exposure and heightens anxiety among trainees from under-resourced backgrounds (Ugwuegbulam et al., 2024; Okechukwu, 2026). Curriculum and pedagogical gaps further compound the problem. Most counsellor education programmes continue to emphasise traditional face-to-face skills with minimal integration of mandatory ICT modules. As a result, trainees often enter practicum with limited proficiency in electronic record-keeping, virtual session management, and digital supervision techniques. Supervisors themselves frequently exhibit inconsistent digital literacy, leading to reliance on outdated "post-mortem" tape reviews rather than real-time ICT-enabled feedback. These training deficiencies leave many trainees ill-prepared for technology-supported tasks in realworld settings (Ugwuegbulam & Ibrahim, 2018; Ekechukwu & Eze, 2016).

Ethical and security concerns add another layer of complexity. The use of

digital platforms raises issues of client confidentiality, data protection, and professional boundaries under the Nigeria Data Protection Act. Trainees often lack adequate guidance on managing virtual sessions, secure documentation, or potential breaches, which can undermine client trust and expose them to legal risks. Over-reliance on technology without proper ethical training may also weaken the relational and culturally sensitive aspects central to effective counselling in Nigerian contexts (Akunne et al., 2022; Olanrewaju et al., 2022). On the positive side, strong ICT competency holds promising implications for service delivery and professional growth. Competent trainees can overcome geographical barriers through tele-counselling, maintain efficient client follow-ups, and extend mental health support to underserved rural populations. This enhances accessibility, enables evidence-based interventions, and aligns practicum experiences with national development goals, including the Sustainable Development Goals on health and education. It also improves engagement with digital-native clients through mobile apps and awareness campaigns (Popoola, 2024; Akunne et al., 2022).

However, persistent low ICT competency carries notable negative implications. Trainees may experience fragmented service delivery, disrupted virtual interactions, and reduced confidence, leading to suboptimal client outcomes and difficulties transitioning into professional practice. The gap between training and real-world demands risks producing counsellors who are less adaptable in Nigeria's rapidly digitising society, ultimately affecting the overall quality and relevance of counselling services (Nwaoba & Nwankwo, 2019; Okechukwu, 2026). While infrastructural deficits, curriculum shortcomings, and ethical challenges hinder effective ICT competency development during fieldwork practicum, the implications are twofold. Positive outcomes include expanded access, innovation, and better professional readiness, whereas negative ones involve inefficiency, ethical vulnerabilities, and reduced service impact. Addressing these issues requires urgent systemic reforms such as infrastructure investment, mandatory ICT modules, supervisor training, and integrated ethical guidelines to equip trainee counsellors with the balanced skills needed for contemporary practice in Nigeria

Conclusion(s)

The roles and implications of ICT competency for trainee counsellors during fieldwork counselling practicum in Nigeria reveal both significant challenges and transformative opportunities. While infrastructural limitations, curriculum gaps, ethical concerns, and the digital divide currently hinder effective technology integration, addressing these through targeted recommendations can produce counsellors who are clinically competent, technologically adept, and ethically grounded. By equipping trainees with robust ICT skills alongside traditional counselling competencies, Nigeria can strengthen mental health service delivery, expand access to underserved populations, and align counsellor education with the demands of a rapidly digitising society. Ultimately, deliberate investment in ICT-enhanced practicum will foster future-ready professionals capable of meeting the psychosocial needs of Nigerian clients in the 21st century and beyond.

Recommendations

1. Counsellor education programmes in Nigeria should prioritise comprehensive curriculum reform to embed ICT competency from the micro-counselling stage through to fieldwork practicum.
2. Universities and relevant government agencies should invest in equipping counselling laboratories with reliable

computers, high-speed internet, backup power systems, and modern audio-visual devices.

3. Departments should shift from traditional post-mortem reviews to ICT-enabled approaches, including live video conferencing, digital session recordings, and electronic portfolios for reflective feedback.

4. Supervisors should receive training on digital literacy and ethical ICT use, with a policy requiring multiple site visits and timely virtual check-ins. Extending the duration of practicum (currently often 6–12 weeks) would allow trainees more time to master technology-supported skills in real settings.

5. Stakeholders, including CASSON, NUC, and the Federal Ministry of Education, should collaborate on policy frameworks that mandate ICT integration in counsellor education Minimum standards.

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