



Ethics, Benefits and Challenges of Online Counseling: Implications for Theological Education in Nigeria's Low-Bandwidth, High-Mobile Context

Janet Olufunke Bamidele,* Adebayo Ola Afolaranmi

Lead City University, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria

Email: bamidele.janet@lcu.edu.ng*

Received: 20 August 2025 | Revised: 10 July 2026 | Accepted: 22 July 2026 | Published: 17 August 2026

How to cite this article:

Bamidele, J. O. and Afolaranmi, A. O. (2026). Ethics, Benefits and Challenges of Online Counseling: Implications for Theological Education in Nigeria's Low-Bandwidth, High-Mobile Context. *CHEVRA: Indonesian Journal of Economic, Science, and Humanities*, 1(1): 78-109.
<https://doi.org/10.46362/chevra.v1i1.153>.

Abstract:

Background: The rapid digitalization of counseling services has created new opportunities and ethical challenges for mental health and pastoral care, particularly in resource-constrained settings. Theological education institutions in Africa must prepare counselors and pastoral caregivers for digitally mediated practice while maintaining professional and spiritual integrity.

Purpose: This study critically examines the ethical considerations, benefits, and challenges of online counseling within Nigerian and African contexts and explores their implications for theological education in low-bandwidth, high-mobile environments.

Method: A qualitative narrative review was conducted using literature sourced from Google Scholar, Scopus, PsycINFO, and African Journals Online (2015–2025). Thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns related to ethical principles, benefits, challenges, and educational implications. The analysis was guided by an integrative framework combining professional counseling ethics, digital competence, and contextual theological reflection.

Result: Findings indicate that online counseling offers significant benefits, including expanded accessibility, reduced stigma, flexible service delivery, and enhanced pastoral reach. However, substantial barriers persist: inadequate digital infrastructure, limited professional training, weak regulatory frameworks, cultural tensions between individual autonomy and communal values, and significant risks to confidentiality and data security. The study identifies critical gaps in theological curricula regarding digital counseling competencies. Ethical online counseling requires intentional integration of professional ethics, technological competence, cultural sensitivity, and theological reflection. Theological institutions must revise curricula to include digital counseling ethics, supervised online practice, and crisis management. A phased implementation framework is proposed to address infrastructural and capacity constraints.

Contribution: This study provides evidence-based recommendations for theological educators, professional counseling bodies, and policymakers seeking to strengthen ethical digital counseling practice in Africa's evolving digital landscape.

Keywords: online counseling; pastoral care; theological education; digital ethics; Nigeria; low-resource settings.

INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of digital technologies has fundamentally transformed communication patterns, social relationships, and service delivery across the globe

(Barak, Klein, & Proudfoot, 2009). In the mental health and pastoral care sectors, this transformation has manifested in the growing adoption of online counselling - the provision of psychological, emotional, and spiritual support through digital platforms including video conferencing, telephone calls, email, and instant messaging services (Anthony & Nagel, 2013; Richards & Viganó, 2013). This shift has been accelerated by increased internet penetration, mobile phone adoption, and global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which necessitated remote care delivery (World Health Organization [WHO], 2022).

Nigeria represents a particularly significant context for examining digital counseling's potential and challenges. As Africa's most populous country and one of the continent's largest mobile telecommunications markets, Nigeria has witnessed substantial growth in smartphone ownership and mobile internet access (International Telecommunication Union [ITU], 2023). An estimated 83% of internet users access the web through mobile devices, suggesting considerable potential for technology-mediated counseling services (Abe, 2025). However, this digital expansion coexists with persistent socio-economic inequalities, unreliable electricity supply, inconsistent network coverage, and significant disparities in digital literacy (Pederson et al., 2020; Eleke, 2023).

Within this complex environment, online counseling offers promising avenues for expanding mental health and pastoral care services, particularly in regions where professional counselors are scarce and stigma surrounding mental health remains prevalent (Osarenren, 2007; Salami, 2011). Several digital mental health initiatives, including PsychNG and MyTherapist.ng, have emerged in Nigeria, demonstrating the growing viability of online therapy services (Adesanya, 2025). However, the quality, accessibility, and ethical integrity of these services depend heavily on counselor competence, technological infrastructure, and regulatory frameworks—factors that remain inadequately developed in many Nigerian contexts.

The Nigerian Context: Low-Bandwidth, High-Mobile Realities

Nigeria's digital environment is characterised by what may be termed a "low-bandwidth, high-mobile" paradox. While mobile phone penetration is high—with over 80% of the population owning a mobile device—fixed broadband infrastructure remains limited, and internet connectivity is often unstable and expensive (ITU, 2023). This creates unique conditions for digital service delivery that differ substantially from high-

income, high-bandwidth contexts where most online counseling research has been conducted.

The implications for counseling practice are significant. Many Nigerians access the internet through mobile devices with limited data plans, making video-based counseling services prohibitively expensive or technically impractical. Consequently, low-bandwidth approaches such as telephone counseling, text-based interventions, and asynchronous communication may be more appropriate than resource-intensive video platforms. This technological reality must inform both the design of counseling services and the preparation of counselors within theological education institutions.

Theological Education and Digital Ministry

Theological education institutions in Africa play a critical role in training pastors, chaplains, counselors, and pastoral caregivers expected to respond compassionately to human suffering while upholding ethical and spiritual values (Adeleke & Afolaranmi, 2026). As faith communities increasingly engage in digital worship, online fellowship, and virtual pastoral care, theological education must adapt to contemporary digital realities (Odeleye, Afolaranmi, & Ojo, 2024).

Several Nigerian theological institutions, including the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary (Ogbomoso) and ECWA Theological Seminary (Karu), have expanded online learning offerings and provide programmes in pastoral care and counseling. However, publicly available curricula reveal limited evidence of dedicated courses addressing online counseling ethics, telepsychology competencies, or digital counseling skills (Enyinnaya, 2015). Instead, counseling curricula continue to emphasise traditional counseling theories, face-to-face ethics, and in-person practicum without explicit preparation for technology-mediated practice.

This gap is concerning, as digital ministry requires competencies beyond those needed for traditional pastoral care. Counselors must navigate ethical challenges unique to digital environments, including data security, boundary management, crisis intervention across distance, and culturally appropriate communication through text or voice alone. Without intentional curriculum reform, theological institutions risk preparing graduates who are ill-equipped for the digital realities of contemporary ministry.

The Research Gap

While substantial research exists on online counseling in Western contexts (Richards & Viganó, 2013; Anthony & Nagel, 2013), comparatively limited scholarship examines the ethical, cultural, and theological dimensions of digital counseling within African contexts, particularly Nigeria. Existing studies have largely focused on technological adoption and telepsychology practices in North America, Europe, and other high-income settings, with less attention to the unique challenges and opportunities of low-resource, high-mobile environments (WHO, 2022).

Moreover, the intersection of online counseling with theological education remains underexplored. While several scholars have called for curriculum reform to address digital ministry (Adeleke & Afolaranmi, 2026; Odeleye et al., 2024), specific guidance on integrating digital counseling ethics and competencies into theological training programmes is limited. This study addresses this gap by situating online counseling within Nigerian socio-cultural and theological realities while offering practical recommendations for theological education.

Study Aims and Objectives

This study aims to critically examine the ethical considerations, benefits, and challenges of online counseling within African and Nigerian contexts and to assess their implications for theological education in contemporary digital realities.

The specific objectives are to:

1. Examine ethical principles guiding online counseling practice in African and Nigerian contexts.
2. Identify the benefits of online counseling for mental health and pastoral care delivery.
3. Analyse the challenges affecting effective implementation of online counseling.
4. Explore the relevance of online counseling to theological education and pastoral formation.
5. Propose recommendations for ethically integrating online counseling into theological training and practice.

Significance and Contribution

This study contributes to knowledge in several ways. First, it provides a conceptual synthesis of online counseling ethics, benefits, and challenges specifically grounded in Nigerian and African realities, addressing the gap in non-Western scholarship. Second, it integrates counseling ethics with theological education, highlighting the moral, spiritual, and professional dimensions of digital counseling practice. Third, it offers context-specific recommendations for theological institutions, professional counseling bodies, and policymakers seeking to strengthen ethical and culturally responsive digital counseling practice across Africa.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Theoretical Foundations

This study is underpinned by an integrative framework that draws upon three interconnected theoretical domains: professional counseling ethics, digital communication theory, and contextual theological reflection. Rather than applying a single theoretical lens, this framework acknowledges that ethical online counseling in African contexts requires the integration of universal professional standards with culturally responsive and theologically informed practice.

Professional Counseling Ethics

The ethical practice of counseling, whether face-to-face or online, is guided by core principles articulated in professional codes of ethics (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2014; National Board for Certified Counselors [NBCC], 2023). These include:

- Confidentiality: The obligation to protect clients' personal information and ensure disclosures are not exposed to unauthorized parties.
- Informed Consent: The requirement that clients be adequately informed about counseling procedures, risks, and rights before services commence.
- Competence: The expectation that counselors practice within their training and expertise boundaries.
- Beneficence and Non-Maleficence: The duty to promote client welfare and avoid harm.
- Justice: The obligation to treat clients fairly and ensure equitable access to services

- Professional Boundaries: The maintenance of appropriate relational limits to protect both client and counselor.

These principles provide the moral foundation for counseling practice. However, their application in online contexts requires adaptation, as technology-mediated communication introduces new complexities related to data security, digital competence, boundary management, and crisis intervention.

Digital Communication and Technology-Mediated Practice

The digital environment shapes counseling practice in ways that extend beyond the simple substitution of face-to-face with screen-mediated interaction. Key theoretical insights from digital communication research inform this study's framework:

- Media Richness Theory (Daft & Lengel, 1986) suggests that different communication media vary in their capacity to convey information, including non-verbal cues. Video calls offer greater richness than text-based communication, but both differ from face-to-face interaction. Counselors must adapt their approaches accordingly.
- Therapeutic Presence in Digital Spaces (Anthony & Nagel, 2013) highlights the need for intentional strategies to build rapport, convey empathy, and maintain presence when separated by technology.
- Digital Ethics (Richards & Viganó, 2013) encompasses issues of data security, platform selection, digital literacy, and the unique risks of technology-mediated practice.

Contextual Theological Reflection

Theological education provides the formative context in which counselors and pastoral caregivers develop the knowledge, professional competence, spiritual discernment, and moral responsibility required for ethical counseling practice. Within African contexts, this framework must also recognise:

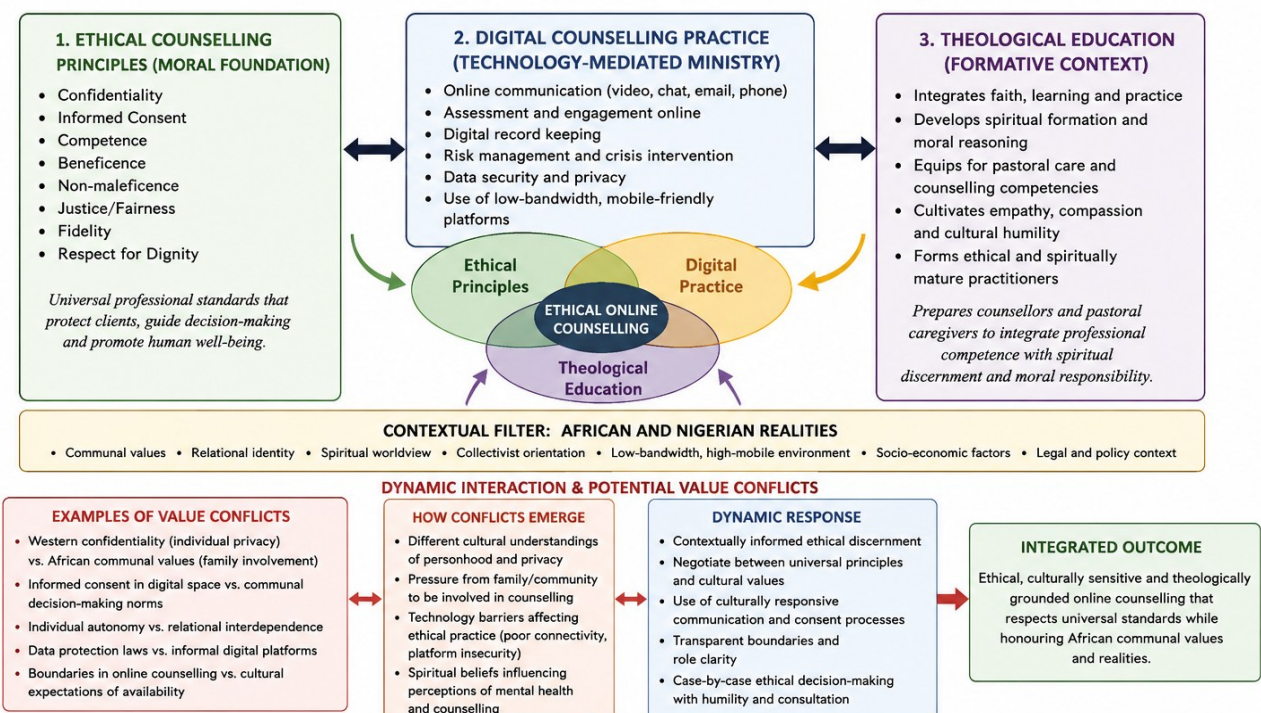
- Communal Values: Many African societies emphasise collective responsibility, family involvement, and relational identity, which may conflict with Western counseling assumptions of individual autonomy and confidentiality (Akinade, 2012).
- Spiritual Worldviews: Understanding of suffering, healing, and care is often shaped by religious and spiritual frameworks that must be respected in counseling practice.

- **Cultural Sensitivity:** Culturally appropriate communication, respect for elders, and awareness of social hierarchies influence the counseling relationship.

Framework Integration

The interaction among these three domains is dynamic rather than linear, and value conflicts may arise when universal counseling ethics intersect with African socio-cultural values. For example:

- **Confidentiality vs. Communal Values:** While professional ethics emphasise strict client confidentiality, many African communities value collective decision-making and family involvement. Counselors must navigate these tensions ethically.
- **Autonomy vs. Relational Identity:** Western counseling models often prioritise individual autonomy, while African contexts may emphasise relational identity and communal responsibility. Counselors must balance these perspectives.
- **Professional Boundaries vs. Cultural Expectations:** In communal societies, counselors may have overlapping social, religious, or familial relationships with clients, challenging professional boundary maintenance.



The framework shows that ethical counselling principles provide the moral foundation, digital counselling practice is the medium of service delivery, and theological education is the formative context that shapes competent and spiritually grounded counsellors. These three pillars interact dynamically within African/Nigerian realities where value tensions may arise. Ethical online counselling is achieved through ongoing negotiation, cultural sensitivity, and the integration of professional standards with theological wisdom.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for Ethical Online Counseling in Nigerian Contexts (Source: Authors' Conception, 2026).

Rather than viewing these as opposing forces, this framework conceptualises them as complementary dimensions that can be thoughtfully integrated to promote ethical, culturally sensitive, and spiritually grounded online counseling within Nigeria's low-bandwidth, high-mobile context.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design based on a narrative and thematic review of the literature. This approach is appropriate for synthesising existing knowledge on emerging topics where empirical evidence remains limited (Grant & Booth, 2009). The narrative review methodology enables the integration of diverse disciplinary perspectives - including counseling psychology, pastoral theology, digital ethics, and educational technology - to develop a comprehensive understanding of online counseling within African theological contexts.

Search Strategy

Literature was retrieved from multiple academic databases, including Google Scholar, Scopus, PsycINFO, and African Journals Online (AJOL), to ensure both global and African perspectives. The search strategy employed Boolean operators combining keywords related to online counseling, ethics, theological education, and African context. Additional sources were identified through citation chaining (snowballing) from relevant publications and reference lists.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Sources were included if they met the following criteria: publication period between 2015 and 2025, with seminal earlier works included where they provided important theoretical foundations; English language; direct focus on online counseling, counseling ethics, theological education, or digital counseling practice within African contexts; scholarly credibility as peer-reviewed journal articles, books published by academic presses, professional counseling guidelines, or official policy documents; and geographic focus that was global, African, or specifically Nigerian. Publications were excluded if they were not peer-reviewed (except for authoritative policy documents),

duplicated across databases, unrelated to the focus of the study, or focused exclusively on non-counseling applications of digital technology.

Analytical Approach

The selected literature was analysed using thematic analysis, following the six-phase approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The process began with familiarisation through repeated reading of sources to develop overall understanding. Initial coding then systematically identified relevant concepts and ideas across the literature. Codes were grouped into broader thematic categories, which were then reviewed against source material and study objectives to ensure coherence. Themes were refined and defined with clear boundaries through repeated comparison of literature. Finally, themes were integrated into a coherent narrative structure that addressed the study's objectives while capturing the cultural and contextual realities of Africa, particularly Nigeria. Relevant data were systematically coded using NVivo 14 software (Lumivero, 2023) to identify recurring concepts and patterns.

Quality and Rigour

To enhance trustworthiness, the study employed several strategies: source triangulation through drawing from multiple disciplinary databases; maintenance of an audit trail with detailed records of search, selection, and analysis processes; acknowledgement of reflexivity regarding the authors' positions as Nigerian academics in theological education; and peer debriefing through review of findings with colleagues in counseling and theology.

Limitations

The study's primary limitation is its reliance on existing literature rather than primary empirical data. Consequently, findings should be interpreted as conceptual synthesis rather than direct evidence of practice. Additionally, the search was limited to English-language publications, which may have excluded relevant French or Portuguese-language sources from other African countries. Finally, the rapidly evolving nature of digital technology means that some technological references may become outdated.

RESULT

The thematic analysis of the literature revealed five major themes that capture the key findings regarding online counseling in Nigerian and African contexts: ethical issues in online counseling, benefits of online counseling, challenges affecting implementation, tensions between universal ethics and African values, and implications for theological education. Each theme is presented below with supporting evidence from the analysed literature.

Ethical Issues in Online Counseling

Ethical issues emerged as a central concern across the literature, reflecting the profession's foundation in trust, respect for human dignity, and responsibility to promote client well-being (ACA, 2014; Richards & Viganó, 2013). The analysis revealed that while the core ethical principles of counseling remain applicable in digital contexts, their implementation requires significant adaptation to address the unique challenges of technology-mediated communication.

Confidentiality was identified as the most critical ethical issue in online counseling (Akinade, 2012; Eleke, 2023). The literature documents that digital environments introduce new vulnerabilities not present in traditional face-to-face settings. Data breaches through insecure communication platforms may expose client information to unauthorised parties (Amri et al., 2024). In Nigerian households where multiple family members share phones or computers, confidentiality may be compromised as counseling conversations or messages could be accessed by others (Eleke, 2023). Electronic records stored on cloud services may be vulnerable to unauthorised access, particularly if proper encryption and security measures are not implemented (Amri et al., 2024). Informal platforms like WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger may not provide adequate encryption for sensitive counseling communications, exposing clients to privacy risks (Eleke, 2023). The Nigeria Data Protection Act (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2023) provides a legal framework for data protection, but the literature indicates that implementation remains inconsistent. Many counselors lack awareness of their data protection obligations, and clients may be unaware of privacy risks associated with online counseling (Amri et al., 2024).

Informed consent was identified as an essential ethical requirement in online counseling (NBCC, 2023; Richards & Viganó, 2013). Sources indicate that in online

counseling, informed consent must extend beyond traditional explanations to include technological risks and limitations of digital platforms, limits of confidentiality specific to digital environments, emergency procedures and crisis response protocols, the counselor's professional credentials and jurisdictional limitations, and data storage and security practices. In contexts where digital literacy varies widely, counselors have an ethical responsibility to ensure consent is truly informed and understood (Richards & Viganó, 2013). This may require simplified explanations, verbal discussions rather than written forms, and confirmation of understanding through interactive dialogue.

Professional competence emerged as a key ethical concern in the literature (ACA, 2014; Osarenren, 2007). Sources identify that online counseling demands additional competencies beyond those required for face-to-face practice. Technological skills are needed to use digital platforms effectively and troubleshoot common technical issues. Understanding of digital communication ethics is required to comprehend how text-based or audio-only communication alters therapeutic processes. Remote assessment capacity is needed to evaluate clients' mental state and safety without physical presence. Crisis management skills are essential to respond to emergencies across distance. Counselors who lack adequate training in online modalities risk causing harm (Eleke, 2023; Osarenren, 2007). The literature indicates that this concern is particularly acute in Nigeria, where formal training in online counseling ethics remains limited (Eleke, 2023).

Boundary management was identified as particularly relevant in African communal settings, where counselors may have overlapping social, religious, or familial relationships with clients (Akinade, 2012). The literature documents that digital communication can blur professional boundaries if not carefully regulated. Clients may expect immediate responses due to digital access and constant connectivity, creating pressure on counselors to be available beyond professional hours. Ambiguity about whether counselor-client relationships extend to social media platforms can create confusion about appropriate communication channels. In religious contexts, counselors may serve as both pastoral caregiver and spiritual leader, creating complex relational dynamics that require careful navigation. The literature emphasises that clear policies, supervision, and accountability mechanisms are essential to maintain appropriate boundaries in online counseling (ACA, 2014).

Emergency and crisis management represents one of the most complex ethical challenges in online counseling (NBCC, 2023). The literature documents that unlike face-

to-face counseling, online counselors may be unable to provide immediate physical intervention when a client expresses suicidal ideation, engages in self-harm, or experiences a psychiatric emergency. Key requirements identified in the literature include thorough risk assessment conducted at the beginning of the counseling relationship to identify potential risks, obtaining client's current location and emergency contacts before sessions begin, developing clear protocols for managing emergencies that arise during online sessions, and discussing circumstances when confidentiality may be breached to protect life (ACA, 2014; NBCC, 2023). Technology failures—poor connectivity, power outages, software malfunctions—present additional risks, particularly in Nigeria's low-bandwidth environment (ITU, 2023). The literature indicates that counselors must develop contingency plans, including alternative communication means and emergency support services, to address these risks.

Benefits of Online Counseling

Despite ethical challenges, the literature identifies substantial potential benefits of online counseling, particularly in expanding access to mental health and pastoral care in underserved contexts. These benefits suggest that online counseling can address longstanding barriers to care in Nigeria.

Accessibility emerged as one of the most frequently cited advantages in the literature (Barak et al., 2009; Richards & Viganó, 2013). In Nigeria, mobile internet usage is high, with an estimated 83% of internet users accessing the web through mobile devices (Abe, 2025). Sources suggest this creates a large potential client base for online counseling, including those in rural and underserved communities who cannot access traditional services due to distance, transportation costs, or counselor shortages. However, the literature also documents that disparities in network coverage, electricity supply, internet affordability, and digital device ownership continue to limit equitable access (ITU, 2023). The potential for increased accessibility is therefore unevenly distributed across different populations and geographical areas, with urban and higher-income populations benefiting more than rural and lower-income groups.

Flexibility and convenience were identified as significant benefits of online counseling (Anthony & Nagel, 2013). Online platforms enable flexible service delivery, which may enhance continuity of care and pastoral responsiveness. Sources indicate that clients can participate in counseling from familiar environments, reducing barriers

associated with transportation, scheduling, and physical attendance. The literature identifies several groups that particularly benefit from this flexibility. Working clients who cannot attend daytime appointments due to employment commitments can access counseling outside traditional hours. Caregivers who have family responsibilities limiting mobility can participate from home. Students who may face academic schedules conflicting with counseling hours can schedule sessions around their studies. Rural residents for whom travel to counseling centres is costly and time-consuming can access services without leaving their communities. Similarly, the literature suggests that theological institutions can utilise digital platforms to facilitate supervision, skills training, and virtual practicum experiences for counselors-in-training (Odeleye et al., 2024).

Reduced stigma was identified as a significant potential advantage in the Nigerian context. Stigma surrounding mental health remains a significant barrier to help-seeking in Nigeria (Pederson et al., 2020; Salami, 2011). A cross-sectional study among Nigerian undergraduates found that many students experiencing psychological distress were reluctant to seek professional help because of stigma and cultural beliefs surrounding mental illness (Pederson et al., 2020). The literature indicates that online counseling may encourage help-seeking by offering greater privacy and anonymity than traditional face-to-face services (Richards & Viganó, 2013). Clients can access support without being seen entering a counseling centre or psychiatric facility, reducing social stigma. However, sources also document that anonymity presents ethical challenges, including difficulties in verifying client identity, the possibility of fraudulent practitioners operating online, and reduced accountability (Ladi-Akinyemi et al., 2023).

Cost-effectiveness was noted as a potential benefit in some literature, suggesting online counseling may be more cost-effective than traditional services by reducing costs related to physical infrastructure, transportation, and administrative overhead (WHO, 2022). However, the literature also acknowledges that these savings may be offset by costs related to technology acquisition, platform subscriptions, and counselor training. In Nigeria's context, where data costs remain high, cost-effectiveness is not guaranteed and may vary depending on the specific service model and target population (ITU, 2023).

Continuity of care during crises was identified as a critical benefit. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the essential role of online counseling in maintaining continuity of care during disruptions to face-to-face services (Salami, 2011; WHO, 2022). The

literature documents that the ability to rapidly transition to remote service delivery proved essential for protecting mental health during lockdowns and social distancing measures. Sources suggest this has implications for future public health emergencies and other disruptions—such as natural disasters or civil unrest—that may limit physical access to services. This benefit is particularly relevant in Nigeria, where various disruptions may affect service delivery.

Challenges Affecting Implementation

Despite the potential benefits, the literature identifies several significant challenges that constrain effective implementation of online counseling in Nigerian contexts. These challenges span technological, educational, regulatory, and cultural domains.

Table 1. Challenges of Online Counseling (Source: Authors' Conception, 2026).

Challenge	Relative Severity	Groups Most Affected
Poor internet, electricity, and data costs	Very High	Rural communities, low-income households
Digital literacy gap	High	Older adults, rural populations, less educated users
Confidentiality and cybersecurity	High	All online counseling users
Limited professional training and regulation	High	Counselors and clients
Cultural stigma and preference for face-to-face counseling	Moderate	Faith communities and first-time help seekers
Gender and disability barriers	Moderate–High	Women, girls, and persons with disabilities

Technological infrastructure emerged as the most significant challenge in the literature (ITU, 2023; Eleke, 2023). Sources document that many parts of Nigeria experience unstable internet connectivity that disrupts counseling sessions and limits consistent access, frequent power outages that interrupt sessions and prevent platform use, high data costs that make online counseling unaffordable for many potential clients, and inadequate broadband coverage particularly in rural areas. The literature indicates that these constraints disproportionately affect rural communities, where broadband coverage and electricity supply are generally less available than in urban areas, thereby widening inequalities in access to mental health services (ITU, 2023).

Digital inequality and limited digital literacy were identified as significant barriers. Although mobile phone ownership is widespread, the literature documents that many individuals lack the technical skills required to effectively use online counseling platforms (Pederson et al., 2020). Sources identify several groups as particularly affected: older adults who may be unfamiliar with digital technologies, individuals with limited education who may lack literacy for text-based interventions, rural populations who may have less exposure to digital tools, and low-income individuals who may have limited access to digital devices. The literature emphasises that these disparities reduce the inclusivity and effectiveness of digital counseling services, highlighting that access to technology alone does not guarantee meaningful participation (Pederson et al., 2020).

Confidentiality, cybersecurity, and data protection concerns were documented as critical challenges. The frequent use of informal communication platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, and Zoom increases risk of privacy breaches and unauthorised access to sensitive information (Amri et al., 2024; Eleke, 2023). The literature documents specific concerns including inadequate encryption on many platforms, potential for hacking and data breaches, risk of unauthorised access in household settings where devices are shared, and insufficient protection of electronic records. Although the Nigeria Data Protection Act (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2023) provides a legal framework, sources indicate that awareness and implementation remain inconsistent among counseling practitioners (Amri et al., 2024).

Cultural and social factors were identified as complicating online counseling delivery in Nigeria (Akinade, 2012; Pederson et al., 2020). Strong communal values may conflict with individual-focused counseling approaches that emphasise autonomy, creating tension between professional expectations and cultural norms. Mental health stigma remains prevalent in many communities, discouraging help-seeking and potentially limiting the reach of online counseling. Preference for face-to-face interactions may make trust harder to establish through digital platforms, particularly for clients unfamiliar with technology-mediated services. The absence of non-verbal cues may limit counselors' ability to accurately assess clients' emotional states and build therapeutic rapport. Language barriers may arise as digital platforms primarily serve English-speaking populations, potentially excluding non-English speakers from accessing services.

Gender and disability barriers were documented as influencing access to online counseling (WHO, 2022). The literature documents that women and girls, particularly in low-income and rural communities, may experience restricted access to digital devices and internet connectivity due to economic inequalities and sociocultural expectations. Persons with disabilities may encounter accessibility barriers where online counseling platforms are not designed to accommodate visual, hearing, or other functional impairments. The literature emphasises that these disparities underscore the need for inclusive digital counseling practices that address the diverse needs of all users (WHO, 2022).

Limited professional training and regulation were identified as constraining the ethical delivery of online counseling. Many Nigerian counselors have not received formal training in online counseling ethics, digital competencies, crisis management, or technology-mediated therapeutic practice (Eleke, 2023). The literature documents that the absence of comprehensive national guidelines specifically addressing online counseling further undermines professional consistency and accountability (Eleke, 2023).

Tensions Between Universal Ethics and African Values

The literature reveals important tensions between universal professional ethics—developed primarily in Western contexts—and African communal values. These tensions are documented across multiple sources and require careful navigation by counselors practising in Nigerian contexts.

The tension between confidentiality and communal values is particularly significant. While professional ethics emphasise strict protection of client information, many African communities value collective decision-making and family involvement in personal matters. This creates a dilemma for counselors who must balance privacy with cultural expectations that challenges should be addressed within family or community networks. The tension between autonomy and relational identity presents another challenge. Western counseling models often prioritise individual autonomy and self-determination, while African contexts may emphasise relational identity and communal responsibility. Counselors may need to involve family members in counseling while respecting client autonomy, requiring careful negotiation of boundaries and consent. The tension between professional boundaries and cultural expectations arises because in communal societies, counselors may have overlapping social, religious, or familial relationships with clients.

This challenges professional boundary maintenance and requires counselors to navigate multiple roles while maintaining professional integrity.

Table 2. Implementation Framework for Online Counseling in Nigeria (Source: Authors' Conception, 2026).

Challenge	Recommended Action	Lead Responsibility	Cost Level	Suggested Timeline
Poor confidentiality and data security	Develop national online counseling guidelines and adopt encrypted platforms	CASSON, NAPCOUN, Nigeria Data Protection Commission	Medium	Short term (1–2 years)
Poor internet connectivity and electricity	Expand broadband infrastructure and promote low-bandwidth counseling	Federal Government, NCC, telecom companies	High	Medium–Long term (3–5 years)
High data costs	Subsidised educational and health data packages; public-private partnerships	NCC, telecom providers, Ministry of Communications	Medium–High	Medium term (2–4 years)
Low digital literacy	Digital orientation programmes for clients and counselors	Seminaries, universities, churches, NGOs	Low	Short term (Within 1 year)
Limited professional competence	Revise counseling and theological curricula; provide CPD training	Universities, seminaries, CASSON, NAPCOUN	Medium	Short–Medium term (1–3 years)
Cultural barriers and stigma	Community awareness campaigns and culturally responsive counseling	Churches, faith-based organisations, community leaders	Low	Continuous

The tension between individual informed consent and collective decision-making processes reflects differences in how decisions are made. While professional ethics require individual decision-making, cultural norms may expect consultation with family or community elders. Consent processes may need to accommodate communal consultation while ensuring the client's rights are protected. The tension between individual and community crisis response reflects different approaches to emergencies.

Professional ethics focus on individual crisis intervention, while cultural practices may involve family and community crisis response. Emergency protocols must account for cultural support systems while ensuring appropriate professional intervention. These tensions require counselors to exercise ethical discernment that balances universal professional standards with culturally responsive practice (Akinade, 2012; Smit, 2015).

Implications for Theological Education

The findings have significant implications for theological education, particularly in preparing counselors and pastoral caregivers for digital ministry. These implications span curriculum content, pedagogical approaches, faculty development, and institutional partnerships.

Several sources indicate that Nigerian theological institutions' counseling curricula do not adequately address digital counseling competencies (Enyinnaya, 2015; Adeleke & Afolaranmi, 2026; Odeleye et al., 2024). The literature documents that while traditional counseling theories, ethics, and practicum are included, there is limited evidence of dedicated courses on online counseling ethics and telepsychology, training in technology-mediated communication skills, instruction on data protection and cybersecurity, or supervised online counseling practicum experiences. The literature suggests that this gap leaves graduates unprepared for the digital realities of contemporary pastoral care and counseling practice (Adeleke & Afolaranmi, 2026).

The literature indicates that theological education must move beyond teaching separate courses on counseling and technology to integrate digital competencies across the curriculum (Odeleye et al., 2024). Sources identify several areas requiring integration. Theological reflection on digital practice must integrate theological perspectives on technology, community, and care, helping students understand the spiritual and ethical dimensions of digital ministry. Ethical frameworks must teach ethical decision-making in digital contexts, preparing students to navigate the complex ethical challenges of online counseling. Practical skills must provide hands-on training with counseling platforms, ensuring students develop the technical competence needed for effective practice. Supervised experience must offer online practicum opportunities with professional supervision, allowing students to apply their learning in real-world contexts.

Effective integration of digital counseling competencies requires faculty development (Odeleye et al., 2024). The literature indicates that theological educators

themselves need training in digital counseling ethics and technology-mediated practice to effectively teach these competencies to students. Without faculty development, curriculum reforms may not achieve their intended impact. Theological institutions can benefit from partnerships with professional counseling bodies, technology providers, and mental health organisations to strengthen digital counseling training and practice (Adeleke & Afolaranmi, 2026). These partnerships can provide expertise, resources, and practical opportunities that individual institutions may not be able to develop independently.

DISCUSSION

Synthesis and Interpretation of Findings

This study examined the ethics, benefits, and challenges of online counseling within African and Nigerian contexts and explored implications for theological education. The results reveal a complex picture in which online counseling offers significant potential for expanding access to mental health and pastoral care, yet faces substantial barriers related to infrastructure, professional competence, regulation, and cultural tensions. The findings demonstrate that while online counseling has become an essential component of contemporary counseling practice, its successful implementation in Nigeria depends on addressing multiple interconnected challenges. The ethical issues identified—confidentiality risks, informed consent complexities, competence requirements, boundary management difficulties, and crisis response limitations—are not unique to Nigeria but are exacerbated by the country's specific contextual realities. These findings suggest that the adoption of online counseling in Nigeria must be accompanied by intentional efforts to build the necessary infrastructure, develop professional competencies, establish regulatory frameworks, and address cultural concerns.

The study's findings indicate that online counseling in Nigeria exists at the intersection of opportunity and constraint. On one hand, the high mobile penetration and growing internet access create unprecedented opportunities to reach underserved populations. On the other hand, the limitations of infrastructure, training, and regulation constrain the quality and reach of services. This tension suggests that online counseling cannot simply be imported from Western contexts but must be adapted to local realities. The benefits identified—accessibility, flexibility, reduced stigma, cost-effectiveness, and

continuity during crises—are valuable and relevant to Nigerian needs, but they can only be realised if the challenges are systematically addressed.

Interpretation Within the Theoretical Framework

The findings can be interpreted through the study's integrative framework, which combines professional ethics, digital communication theory, and contextual theological reflection. This framework provides a comprehensive lens for understanding the complexities of online counseling in Nigerian contexts and for identifying the competencies required for ethical and effective practice.

The study confirms that core ethical principles—confidentiality, informed consent, competence, boundaries—remain essential but require adaptation for digital practice (Richards & Viganó, 2013; ACA, 2014). The challenges identified regarding data protection, platform security, and emergency response highlight that counselors need enhanced competencies in risk assessment, technology selection, and crisis management specific to online contexts. The findings reveal that the application of these principles in Nigeria is complicated by infrastructure limitations, cultural expectations, and regulatory gaps. For example, the principle of confidentiality is challenged by shared device usage and insecure platforms, requiring counselors to develop strategies for protecting client information within these constraints. The principle of informed consent is complicated by varying levels of digital literacy, requiring counselors to ensure that consent is truly understood rather than merely obtained.

However, the study also reveals an important gap: professional codes of ethics, while providing general guidance, do not fully address the specific challenges of low-bandwidth, high-mobile environments. Nigerian counselors require guidance on selecting appropriate platforms, managing power outages, and working with limited bandwidth—issues not addressed in codes developed primarily for high-resource settings. This finding suggests that existing ethical frameworks, while valuable, need contextual adaptation to be fully applicable in Nigerian settings. The development of context-specific guidelines that address the technological and cultural realities of Nigerian practice would be a valuable contribution.

The findings highlight the importance of adapting therapeutic approaches to digital modalities. The absence of non-verbal cues, potential for technical interruptions, and limitations of text-based communication require intentional strategies for building

rapport, conveying empathy, and maintaining therapeutic presence (Anthony & Nagel, 2013). This is particularly important in Nigerian contexts where relational connection and trust are foundational to effective counseling and pastoral care. The study's results suggest that counselors operating in Nigeria's low-bandwidth environment must develop competencies in working with multiple modalities—telephone, text-based, and occasional video—depending on available bandwidth. This multimodal approach differs from the video-first approach often emphasised in Western telepsychology literature. The finding that many Nigerian counselors lack training in these adapted approaches represents a significant professional development gap that theological institutions are well-positioned to address.

The study confirms the importance of contextual theological reflection in adapting professional ethics to Nigerian realities. The identified tensions between universal ethical standards and African communal values highlight the need for contextualised ethical frameworks that respect cultural values while maintaining professional integrity. This aligns with the growing literature on contextual theology and pastoral care (Smit, 2015), which emphasises that theological reflection must engage with local cultural and social realities. The finding that confidentiality expectations may conflict with communal decision-making practices is particularly significant. In many African contexts, personal challenges are not considered private matters but family or community concerns requiring collective response. While professional ethics require client confidentiality, culturally responsive practice may need to accommodate some level of family involvement while still protecting client privacy. Theological education has a critical role in equipping future counselors to navigate these tensions through ethical decision-making, contextual theological reflection, and culturally appropriate communication.

An important dimension of the findings that warrants further interpretation is the role of power dynamics and resource constraints in shaping online counseling practice in Nigeria. The digital divide documented in the results is not merely a technical issue but reflects broader patterns of inequality. Those with greater economic resources, educational opportunities, and urban location have disproportionate access to digital counseling services, while marginalised populations—rural residents, women, persons with disabilities—face compounded barriers. This disparity creates an ethical tension with the principle of justice in counseling ethics. If online counseling primarily serves already-advantaged populations while leaving the most vulnerable without access, it

risks exacerbating rather than reducing mental health inequalities. Theological education must therefore prepare counselors to advocate for equitable access and develop interventions specifically designed for underserved populations. Additionally, the power dynamic between counselor and client may shift in digital contexts. Clients with higher digital literacy may have more agency in navigating online platforms, while those with limited digital skills may feel disempowered. Counselors must be sensitive to these dynamics and ensure that their approaches do not inadvertently reinforce existing inequalities.

Comparison with International Literature

The findings are consistent with international literature on online counseling in several respects. Studies from Western contexts similarly identify confidentiality, informed consent, and competence as key ethical issues (Richards & Viganó, 2013; Anthony & Nagel, 2013). The benefits of improved accessibility, flexibility, and reduced stigma are also well-documented internationally (Barak et al., 2009; WHO, 2022). This consistency suggests that the core ethical concerns and benefits of online counseling are broadly shared across contexts, providing a foundation for international dialogue and collaboration.

However, the Nigerian context presents unique challenges that differ from high-income settings. Infrastructure constraints such as low bandwidth, unreliable electricity, and limited broadband coverage are less pressing in Western contexts where high-speed internet and stable power are generally available. Digital inequality, while present globally, is more pronounced in Nigeria, with significant rural-urban and gender disparities documented in the results. Regulatory gaps are more significant in Nigeria, where telepsychology guidelines are underdeveloped compared to many Western countries that have established comprehensive frameworks. Cultural tensions between individual autonomy and communal values create complexities that are less pronounced in individualistic cultures. Resource limitations affect both counselor training and client access in ways that differ from high-income settings, where professional development opportunities and client resources are generally more available. These differences underscore the importance of context-specific research and guidelines for online counseling in Nigeria and similar African contexts. The findings suggest that while

international literature provides valuable foundations, direct application without contextual adaptation may be inappropriate or ineffective.

Addressing the Research Gap

This study makes several contributions to addressing the research gap identified in the introduction. First, it provides a comprehensive synthesis of online counseling ethics, benefits, and challenges specifically grounded in Nigerian realities, addressing the relative absence of African perspectives in the international literature. Second, it integrates counseling ethics with theological education, highlighting dimensions often overlooked in purely clinical or psychological analyses. Third, it offers context-specific recommendations that acknowledge the unique opportunities and constraints of Nigeria's low-bandwidth, high-mobile environment.

The findings confirm that the intersection of online counseling with theological education in Nigeria is both under-researched and critically important. As theological institutions prepare pastors and counselors for digital ministry, they must address the competencies, ethical frameworks, and contextual understandings identified in this study. The curriculum gaps documented in the results suggest that current preparation may be insufficient for the digital realities graduates will face. By identifying these gaps and proposing concrete recommendations for addressing them, this study provides a foundation for curriculum development and professional practice.

Practical Implications for Stakeholders

The findings have several practical implications for different stakeholders involved in counseling and pastoral care in Nigeria.

For theological institutions, the findings indicate that curriculum reform is urgently needed to include online counseling ethics, digital competencies, and supervised online practice. This is not merely an addition to existing programmes but a fundamental reorientation to prepare graduates for contemporary ministry realities. Faculty development must accompany curriculum reform, as theological educators cannot teach what they have not learned themselves. Institutions must invest in training for faculty in digital counseling ethics and technology-mediated practice. Theological institutions should also consider their role in the broader digital ecosystem by developing partnerships with technology providers, mental health organisations, and professional

counseling bodies to strengthen digital counseling training and practice while contributing to community mental health.

For professional counseling bodies, the findings indicate a critical role in developing national guidelines for online counseling practice. The absence of such guidelines in Nigeria leaves counselors without clear standards and clients without clear protections. Guidelines should address platform selection, data protection, informed consent, crisis management, and cultural responsiveness. Professional bodies should also establish credentialing standards for online counseling competence and provide continuing professional development opportunities in digital counseling to address the limited professional training documented in the results.

For individual counselors and pastoral caregivers, the findings suggest a responsibility to pursue training in online counseling ethics and digital competencies. The results indicate that many currently lack this training, creating risks for clients. Counselors should select secure platforms compliant with data protection requirements, develop crisis management protocols, and engage in supervision specifically for online counseling work. Counselors should also be attentive to the cultural dimensions of online counseling, understanding communal values, mental health stigma, and culturally appropriate communication as essential for building trust and effectiveness in Nigerian contexts.

For policymakers and government, the findings have implications at various levels. The federal government should continue expanding broadband infrastructure and reducing internet costs to address the technological barriers identified. Digital inclusion initiatives should specifically target underserved populations, including rural communities, women, older adults, and persons with disabilities. Stronger implementation of data protection legislation is needed to address the privacy and security concerns identified. The Nigeria Data Protection Act provides a framework, but its enforcement and awareness-raising require greater attention. Government should also fund research on digital mental health in Nigerian contexts, as the evidence base currently relies heavily on literature from other settings, limiting the applicability of findings.

Strengths and Limitations

This study has several strengths. First, it provides a comprehensive synthesis of literature across multiple disciplines, offering a holistic understanding of online counseling in Nigerian contexts. By drawing from counseling psychology, pastoral theology, digital ethics, and educational technology, the study captures the multidimensional nature of the topic. Second, the integrative theoretical framework provides a useful lens for analysing ethical challenges and educational implications, offering a structure that can guide future research and practice. Third, the context-specific focus addresses an important gap in the literature, contributing to the growing body of research on digital mental health in African settings.

However, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study relies on existing literature rather than primary empirical data from counselors, educators, or clients. Future research should employ qualitative and quantitative methods to examine actual practices and outcomes, providing evidence that can complement the conceptual synthesis offered here. Second, the search was limited to English-language publications, potentially excluding relevant sources from Francophone or Lusophone African countries. This limitation means that the findings may not fully represent the diversity of African experiences with online counseling. Third, as with any literature review, the findings reflect the available evidence base and may not fully capture emerging practices or innovations. The rapidly evolving nature of digital technology means that new developments may have occurred since the literature search was conducted.

Directions for Future Research

This study identifies several directions for future research that would strengthen the evidence base and inform practice. Empirical studies using qualitative and quantitative methods are needed to examine counselors' experiences, client outcomes, and ethical challenges in Nigerian online counseling. These studies would provide data on actual practices and outcomes, complementing the conceptual synthesis offered here. Intervention effectiveness research should evaluate online counseling effectiveness in Nigerian contexts using rigorous methodologies, providing evidence for practitioners and policymakers. Curriculum development research should investigate effective approaches to integrating digital competencies in theological education, including comparative studies of different pedagogical approaches. Client perspectives should be

studied through research on client experiences, preferences, and barriers to online counseling, particularly among underserved populations. Comparative studies across different African contexts would identify common patterns and context-specific factors, supporting the development of regionally appropriate guidelines. Technology innovation research should investigate appropriate technologies for low-bandwidth environments, including user-centred design studies that involve end-users in technology development. Cultural adaptation research should develop and evaluate culturally adapted online counseling approaches that integrate communal values and spiritual frameworks.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and discussion, several recommendations are proposed for strengthening ethical online counseling within theological education and professional practice in Nigeria and across Africa.

Curriculum Reform in Theological Institutions

Immediate Priority (Year 1): Theological institutions should review and revise counseling curricula to incorporate online counseling ethics and professional standards, digital counseling competencies and skills, crisis intervention in virtual settings, data protection and cybersecurity, and technology-mediated therapeutic communication. This revision should be informed by professional counseling guidelines (ACA, 2014; NBCC, 2023) and adapted for Nigerian and African contexts.

Medium-Term (Years 2–3): Institutions should integrate supervised online practicum into training programmes, develop faculty expertise through professional development programmes, establish partnerships with technology providers and mental health organisations, and create assessment tools for measuring digital counseling competencies.

Ethical Guidelines and Regulation

Short-Term (Year 1): Professional bodies such as the Counseling Association of Nigeria (CASSON) and the Nigerian Association of Pastoral Counselors (NAPCOUN), in collaboration with the Nigeria Data Protection Commission, should develop national guidelines for online counseling practice, including standards for electronic record

keeping and data protection, informed consent in digital contexts, crisis management and emergency protocols, and platform selection and security requirements.

Medium-Term (Years 2–3): Bodies should establish credentialing standards for online counseling practice, advocate for legislation supporting ethical digital counseling, and develop continuing professional development requirements for online counseling.

Infrastructure and Access

Short-Term (Year 1): Stakeholders should promote low-bandwidth counseling approaches (telephone, encrypted messaging) as alternatives to video-based services and train counselors in asynchronous communication methods for continuity during network disruptions.

Medium-Term (Years 2–4): Efforts should support government and telecommunications providers in expanding broadband access, advocate for subsidised educational and health data packages, and develop public-private partnerships for digital inclusion.

Long-Term (Years 3–5): Initiatives should support universal broadband coverage, address electricity supply challenges through renewable energy solutions, and develop national digital inclusion strategies.

Digital Literacy and Inclusion

Short-Term (Year 1): Programmes should develop client orientation on using counseling platforms, create simplified multilingual guides for digital counseling access, and train counselors in assessing clients' digital literacy and adapting approaches accordingly.

Medium-Term (Years 2–3): Initiatives should support community-based digital literacy programmes, develop accessible platforms for persons with disabilities, and address the gender digital divide through targeted interventions.

Faculty and Professional Development

Short-Term (Year 1): Institutions should organise training programmes for theological educators on digital counseling ethics, create faculty learning communities on technology-mediated pastoral care, and develop resources for teaching online counseling competencies.

Medium-Term (Years 2–3): Institutions should establish partnerships with international institutions for curriculum development, support research on digital counseling in Nigerian contexts, and create certification programmes in online counseling.

Culturally Responsive Practice

Ongoing: Stakeholders should develop culturally adapted counseling approaches that respect communal values, integrate theological reflection on digital practice across the curriculum, address mental health stigma through community education, and incorporate African worldviews in counseling training.

Phased Implementation Framework

Recognising that recommendations cannot be implemented simultaneously, a phased approach is proposed. Phase 1 (Year 1) establishes the foundation through curriculum review, ethical guideline development, training for counselor educators and practitioners, and awareness campaigns. Phase 2 (Years 2–3) focuses on implementation through compulsory courses on online counseling, supervised online practicum, strengthened partnerships for digital counseling education, and developed regulatory frameworks. Phase 3 (Years 4–5) emphasises evaluation and expansion through programme outcome assessment, systematic evaluation of online counseling service availability and quality, published empirical research to inform policy and practice, and expansion of digital counseling services nationwide.

Addressing Resistance and Barriers

Integration of digital counseling into theological education may encounter resistance from educators and religious leaders who prefer traditional face-to-face models. Addressing such concerns requires continuous dialogue and evidence-based advocacy, faculty development and demonstration of effectiveness, recognition that online counseling complements rather than replaces conventional pastoral ministry, and integration of digital competencies as enhancements to, rather than replacements for, traditional skills.

CONCLUSION

This research examined the ethics, benefits, and challenges of online counseling within African and Nigerian contexts and explored implications for theological education

in contemporary digital realities. The findings demonstrate that online counseling has become an essential component of contemporary counseling and pastoral care practice, offering meaningful opportunities to expand access to mental health and pastoral services while responding to changing digital realities. However, the potential of online counseling can only be realised when ethical challenges, infrastructural limitations, regulatory gaps, and deficiencies in professional training are deliberately addressed. The research concludes that ethical and effective online counseling requires robust ethical frameworks, technological competence, cultural sensitivity, and intentional integration within theological education.

The tensions identified between universal ethical standards and African communal values highlight the need for contextualised ethical frameworks that respect cultural values while maintaining professional integrity. Theological education plays a critical role in equipping counselors and pastoral caregivers to navigate these tensions through ethical decision-making, contextual theological reflection, and culturally appropriate communication. While some challenges—such as inadequate digital infrastructure, unreliable electricity supply, and high internet costs—may not be fully resolved in the short term, significant progress can be achieved through coordinated efforts by government agencies, professional counseling bodies, theological institutions, churches, and telecommunications providers. These stakeholders share the responsibility of strengthening digital infrastructure, developing context-specific ethical guidelines, revising counseling curricula, and promoting continuous professional development for counselors and pastoral caregivers.

Ultimately, the future of ethical online counseling in Nigeria depends not only on technological advancement but also on the preparedness of those who provide counseling services. Without the intentional integration of digital counseling ethics, crisis management, and technology-mediated counseling competencies into theological education and professional training programmes, online counseling risks compromising client safety, undermining public trust, and causing more harm than good within Nigeria's low-bandwidth, high-mobile context. This study contributes to knowledge by providing a conceptual synthesis of online counseling ethics, benefits, and challenges grounded in Nigerian and African realities, integrating counseling ethics with theological education, and offering context-specific recommendations for strengthening ethical digital counseling practice. It is hoped that this analysis will inform curriculum development,

professional practice, and policy-making, contributing to the development of ethical, culturally responsive, and effective online counseling services in Nigeria and across Africa.

Acknowledgements: The authors would like to express gratitude to Lead City University, Ibadan, as well as all individuals and communities who contributed to this research by providing valuable insights, perspectives, and support during the research process.

Competing interests: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Ethical considerations: This research is a narrative literature review and did not involve direct primary data collection from human participants. All sources and literature cited in this study were obtained from publicly available academic databases and properly acknowledged.

Authorship contribution: J.O.B. conceived the study, conducted the literature search and analysis, and drafted the initial manuscript. A.O.A. contributed to the conceptual framework, theoretical interpretation, and critical revision of the manuscript. Both authors approved the final version.

Funding information: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability: The data supporting the findings of this study are not publicly available because they contain information obtained from human participants and may compromise participant confidentiality. Where ethically and legally appropriate, relevant information may be made available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to applicable privacy and confidentiality requirements.

AI Use Disclosure: The authors declare that no artificial intelligence or generative AI tools were used in the preparation, analysis, or writing of this manuscript.

Disclaimer: The views and interpretations expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the author's affiliated institution, the editors, or the publisher.

REFERENCES

- Abe, B. (2025). World Mental Health Day: Bridging gaps in Nigeria's crisis response. *International Center for Investigative Reporting*.
<https://www.icirnigeria.org/world-mental-health-day-bridging-gaps-in-nigerias-crisis-response>
- Adeleke, A., & Afolaranmi, A. O. (2026). Theological education and digital pastoral care and counseling: Matters arising. In *Current Trends in Religious Studies in Nigeria* (Vol. 1, pp. 35–44). <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19597305>
- Adesanya, G. (2025). *The best mental health platforms Nigerians are using*. Pulse Nigeria.
<https://www.pulse.ng/articles/pulse-picks/best-mental-health-platforms-nigeria-2025071623035510968>
- Akinade, E. A. (2012). *Introduction to Modern Guidance and Counseling*. Brightways Publishers.
- American Counseling Association. (2014). *ACA Code of Ethics*.
<https://www.counseling.org/resources/aca-code-of-ethics.pdf>

- Amri, I., Sagalane, A. B., Kurniawan, L. S., Julianto, A., & Ta'adi. (2024). Legal and ethical challenges in digital health data privacy: Navigating patient rights and data security in telemedicine. *Global International Journal of Innovative Research*, 2(11), 2663–2675. <https://doi.org/10.59613/global.v2i11.363>
- Anthony, K., & Nagel, D. M. (2013). *Therapy Online: A Practical Guide*. SAGE Publications <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781849204354>
- Barak, A., Klein, B., & Proudfoot, J. G. (2009). Defining internet-supported therapeutic interventions. *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, 38(1), 4–17. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12160-009-9130-7>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Daft, R. L., & Lengel, R. H. (1986). Organizational information requirements, media richness and structural design. *Management Science*, 32(5), 554–571. <https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.32.5.554>
- Eleke, E. M. (2023). Challenges and opportunities in counselor education in Nigeria: A comprehensive analysis. *International Journal of Innovative Education Research*, 11(2), 218–224. <https://www.seahipublications.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/IJIER-J-25-2023.pdf>
- Enyinnaya, J. O. (2015). *The correlation between curriculum and graduate output: A critical assessment of the basic degree programme of the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso*. Master's thesis, London School of Theology & Middlesex University.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria. (2023). *Nigeria Data Protection Act, 2023*.
- Grant, M. J., & Booth, A. (2009). A typology of reviews: An analysis of 14 review types and associated methodologies. *Health Information & Libraries Journal*, 26(2), 91–108. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-1842.2009.00848.x>
- International Telecommunication Union. (2023). *Measuring digital development: Facts and figures 2023*. <https://www.itu.int/itu-d/reports/statistics/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2023/11/Measuring-digital-development-Facts-and-figures-2023-E.pdf>
- Ladi-Akinyemi, T., Okpue, A. P., Onigbinde, O. A., Okafor, I. P., Akodu, B., & Odeyemi, K. (2023). Depression and suicidal ideation among undergraduates in state tertiary

- institutions in Lagos Nigeria. *PLoS ONE*, 18(4), e0284955.
<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0284955>
- Lumivero. (2023). *NVivo (Version 14)* [Computer software]. <https://www.lumivero.com>
- National Board for Certified Counselors. (2023). *Policy regarding the provision of distance professional services*. <https://www.matrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/NBCC-Policy-Regarding-Practice-of-Distance-Professional-Services-2016.pdf>
- Odeleye, D. A., Afolaranmi, A. O., & Ojo, S. O. (2024). Training and education of pastoral care and counseling professionals in Africa. *International Journal of Contemporary Research in Humanities*, 2(1), 102–109.
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14875009>
- Osarenren, N. (2007). *Fundamentals of Practicum in Guidance and Counseling*. Vitaman Educational Books.
- Pederson, A. B., et al. (2020). Mental health stigma among university health care students in Nigeria: A cross-sectional observational study. *Pan African Medical Journal*, 37, Article 5. <https://doi.org/10.11604/pamj.2020.37.5.24898>
- Richards, D., & Viganó, N. (2013). Online counseling: A narrative and critical review. *British Journal of Guidance & Counseling*, 41(3), 199–215.
<https://mycounselor.online/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/online-counseling-narrative-critical-review.pdf>
- Salami, S. O. (2011). Psychosocial predictors of adjustment among first year college of education students. *US-China Education Review*, 8(2), 239–248.
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED519567.pdf>
- Smit, G. H. (2015). Pastoral ministry in a missional age: Towards a practical theological understanding of missional pastoral care. *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 36(1), a1382.
<https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v36i1.1382>
- World Health Organization. (2022). *Mental health and digital technologies: Opportunities and challenges*. World Health Organization.



©2026. The Authors. CHEVRA: Indonesian Journal of Economic, Science, and Humanities
<https://indonesiastt.ac.id/journal/index.php/chevra>
is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License