Counselling: An Antidote in Minimizing Online Corrupt Practices among Students in Nigerian Schools

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Abstract

This paper examines the pressing issues of corrupt online practices among students in Nigeria, propelled by the rapid expansion of digital technologies. Students frequently engage in unethical behaviors, including plagiarism, unauthorised resource use during exams, harassment, and data manipulation, influenced by factors such as academic pressure, the accessibility of online resources, and the impact of social media. Recognizing the urgent need for intervention, this study proposes counselling as a pivotal strategy to address these challenges. The integration of counselling programs is essential to bridge the gap between technological advancements and ethical conduct, cultivating a deeper understanding of digital ethics. The influence of social media and online communities exacerbates the complexity of the issue, creating a culture that normalizes unethical behavior. Counselling interventions are positioned as disruptors, aiming to instill individual responsibility, ethical decision-making, and awareness of the consequences associated with corrupt online practices. By addressing the multifaceted nature of the problem, counselling programmes can serve as a comprehensive approach to mitigate corrupt online behaviors. The paper emphasizes the importance of evaluating and implementing counselling strategies tailored to the unique context of Nigeria, addressing root causes such as academic pressure and a lack of digital ethics education. As a conceptual exploration, this study contributes to the academic discourse on ethical considerations in the digital age, offering insights into potential avenues for fostering informed and ethical digital citizens within the Nigerian educational landscape.

Keywords: Corruption, Counselling, Online, Plagiarism, Students

Introduction

In recent years, the pervasive influence of online platforms has significantly reshaped how students engage, communicate, and disseminate information. These digital spaces have presented unprecedented opportunities for connection, expression, and access to information, contributing to the development of a dynamic online ecosystem. Nevertheless, the rapid expansion of digital

technologies has brought about an alarming increase in corrupt and unethical practices among Nigerian students in the digital realm.

Researchers show that students often engage in corrupt online behaviours such as copying and pasting information from online sources without proper attribution or presenting someone else's work as their own (Maeda, 2019;Owenga, Aloka, Raburu 2018); utilising unauthorised resources or assistance during online exams or assignments; or accessing online materials; engaging in online harassment, intimidation, or bullying of peers through social media, messaging platforms, or other online channels; attempting to access or manipulate data, accounts, or information without proper authorisation, including hacking into systems or using others people's login credentials without permission; and posting or sharing content that is offensive, inappropriate, or violates ethical standards, such as explicit material, hate speech, or content that could harm others.

Possible factors that contribute to these online corrupt practices include academic pressure, ease of access to online resources, the influence of social media and online communities, and a lack of awareness and education on digital ethics. The intense academic pressure in a competitive environment is acknowledged as a major factor propelling students towards engaging in corrupt online practices. The ease of accessing online resources is recognized as a double-edged sword, providing both opportunities and challenges, as the ubiquity of information online, coupled with anonymity, tempts students towards unethical behavior.

The insufficient awareness and education on digital ethics are underscored as fundamental issues, revealing students' vulnerability to poor choices due to a lack of guidance. Counselling emerges as a pivotal intervention to address these foundational issues associated with students' engagement in corrupt online practices. Recognizing the scarcity of research in this specific area, there is a need to explore diverse counselling approaches that can contribute to the eradication of corrupt online practices among students. This study aims to fill this research gap by examining and evaluating various counselling strategies to address the complex challenges associated with students' engagement in corrupt online behaviors.

Corruption

Corruption is a complicated practice and is commonly understood to be the misuse of authority for one's own benefit (Jha, & Sarangi, 2017; Maeda, 2019). Transparency International,

defines corruption as the abuse of power for private gain (Buhari, &Momoh, 2021; Jayawickrama, 2015). This definition underscores the essential element of abuse of power as a core characteristic of corruption. As noted, Jayawickrama, (2015), corruption undermines institutions, erodes public trust, and hampers economic and social development. Corruption can manifest in various forms, including bribery, embezzlement, nepotism, fraud, and other unethical practices.

Causes of corruption are numerous and often interlinked with social, economic, political, and cultural factors (Enikolopov, Petrova, &Sonin, 2018; Jha, & Sarangi, 2017). Weak institutional frameworks and inadequate governance structures contribute significantly to corruption. Countries with ineffective law enforcement, judicial systems, and regulatory bodies are more susceptible to corrupt practices. The World Bank identifies institutional weaknesses as a key factor fostering corruption, emphasizing the importance of strong institutions in preventing and combating corruption (Buhari, &Momoh, 2021; Sihombing, Afiezen, & Muda, 2022).

Additionally, economic factors play a crucial role in the emergence of corruption. Low wages and inadequate financial incentives for public officials may drive them to engage in corrupt practices to supplement their income (Sihombing et al., 2022). Political factors also contribute to corruption, as the concentration of power without effective checks and balances can foster a culture of impunity. Perhaps cultural and societal factors are more influential factors as they also play key role in fostering or resisting corruption. For instance, social acceptance of online practices among students can create a climate where corruption becomes ingrained in everyday life of students.

Corrupt Online Practices

Corrupt online practices in Nigeria involves the misuse and abuse of social media and online platforms for various purposes, often to the detriment of individuals, communities, and society as a whole. (Enikolopov, Petrova, &Sonin, 2018; Ogbette, Idam, Kareem, &Ogbette, 2019). These practices are discussed below:

Plagiarism: is the act of presenting someone else's work, ideas, or intellectual property as one's own without proper attribution (Osman, Ahmad, Nor-Rashidah, Mat Yatim, &Sauid, 2019). This unethical practice undermines the principles of academic integrity and can take various forms, including direct copying from online sources, paraphrasing without citation, or submitting someone else's work. Satija and Martínez-Ávila, (2019). Plagiarism not only compromises the individual's educational experience but also erodes the foundation of trust within academic

communities. Educational institutions typically have strict policies against plagiarism, employing tools like plagiarism detection software to identify and deter such misconduct (Satija&Martínez-Ávila, 2019; Nalendra, 2021).

Cheating: involves gaining an unfair advantage, typically during exams, quizes, or assignments (Adzima, 2020; Ghaffar & Akram, 2022). In an online context, students might use unauthorised resources, collaborate with others against the rules, or resort to technological aids like hidden notes or external websites. This behavior undermines the assessment process and compromises the credibility of educational outcomes (Lancaster, 2017; Adzima, 2020). Institutions combat cheating by implementing secure online exam platforms, monitoring tools, and promoting a culture of academic honesty through awareness campaigns and clear guidelines.

Cyber bullying: is the use of electronic communication to harass, intimidate, or threaten others (Akeusola, 2023; Negi, 2023). In an academic setting, this can manifest as students targeting their peers through social media, messaging apps, or online forums. Cyber bullying can have severe psychological and emotional effects on victims, impacting their well-being and academic performance (Okoiye, &Onah, 2015; Carvalho, Branquinho, & de Matos, 2021). Educational institutions address cyber bullying through policies that prohibit harassment, awareness programs, and intervention strategies to create a safe and respectful online environment. (Okoiye, &Onah, 2015)

Unauthorised Access: involves attempting to gain entry into systems, data, or accounts without proper permission (Rizvi, Pipetti, McIntyre, Todd, & Williams, 2020). This behavior can have serious consequences, as it compromises the security and confidentiality of information. In an academic setting, students might attempt to access restricted materials, manipulate grades, or breach the privacy of others. Ulven and Wangen, (2021) observe that Universities employ robust cyber security measures, such as secure login systems, encryption, and monitoring tools, to prevent and detect unauthorised access.

Sharing Inappropriate Content: encompasses posting or distributing materials that are offensive, explicit, or violate ethical standards (Al-Zoubi, 2021). In an academic context, this could involve sharing inappropriate images, engaging in hate speech, or disseminating content that creates a hostile environment (Al-Zoubi, 2021; Siapera, & Viejo-Otero, 2021). Educational institutions

address this behavior by promoting digital citizenship, educating students on responsible online behavior, and enforcing policies that prohibit the creation and distribution of inappropriate content.

Factors Contributing to Students' Online Corrupt Practices

Students' engagement in corrupt online practices is a complex phenomenon rooted in various fundamental issues. One significant factor is the intense pressure to succeed academically in an increasingly competitive environment. The fear of not meeting societal expectations can drive students to resort to shortcuts, such as plagiarism, cheating, or buying pre-written assignments online (Ramadhan, 2017; Curry, 2023). Another underlying issue is the ease of access to online resources, which presents both opportunities and challenges (Ramadhan, 2017). While the internet provides a wealth of information for educational purposes, it also offers readily available tools for dishonest practices. As shown in Dodge, (2021), the ubiquity of information online, coupled with the anonymity it provides, often tempt students to engage in unethical behavior, believing that they can escape detection. This ease of access blurs the lines between legitimate research and academic misconduct, contributing to the normalization of corrupt online practices.

Moreover, the influence of social media and online communities plays a significant role in shaping student behavior (Gamage, Silva, &Gunawardhana, 2020). The pursuit of social validation, peer pressure, and the desire for online recognition can drive students to adopt questionable practices to enhance their online presence (Iheanacho, Oyo-Ita, Ofoegbu, &Akpan, 2023). This may involve creating fake profiles, participating in cyberbullying, or even resorting to unethical strategies to gain popularity. The lack of awareness and education on digital ethics is another fundamental issue. Many students are not fully aware of the consequences of their online actions or the long-term impact of engaging in corrupt practices (Ochulor, Metuonu, &Asuo, 2011). Insufficient guidance on navigating the digital landscape ethically, combined with a lack of emphasis on the importance of academic integrity in online spaces, leaves students vulnerable to making poor choices (Ochulor, et al., 2011). Addressing these fundamental issues requires a holistic approach that combines educational, psychological, and socio-cultural interventions to promote a culture of integrity in both traditional and online academic settings.

Role of Counselling

Counselling can play a crucial role in addressing the fundamental issues underlying students' engagement in corrupt online practices. As explained by Baker, Evans, Li, and Cung (2019), in

tackling academic pressure, counselling provides a platform for students to explore healthy coping mechanisms, time management skills, and strategies for handling academic stress. Nguyen-Feng, Greer, and Frazier, (2017) also explained regarding the ease of access to online resources that counselling can educate students about the ethical use of online information and the consequences of academic dishonesty. By promoting digital literacy and emphasizing the importance of proper citation and research skills, counsellors can empower students to navigate the internet responsibly (Nguyen-Feng et al., 2017).

Furthermore, in addressing the influence of social media and online communities, counselling can help students develop a strong sense of self-worth independent of online validation (Salami, 2011). By fostering self-esteem and encouraging healthy offline relationships, counsellors can mitigate the impact of peer pressure and social media expectations (Salami, 2011; Tolulope, Lauretta, &Oladotun, 2023). As suggested by Alqahtani, (2017), discussions on digital citizenship and responsible online behavior can empower students to resist the temptation to adopt unethical practices for social recognition, fostering a more positive and ethical online presence.

Moreover, in tackling the lack of awareness and education on digital ethics, counselling can serve as an educational platform (Supriyanto, Hartini, Irdasari, Miftahul, Oktapiana, &Mumpuni, 2020). Counsellors can provide information on the ethical implications of online actions, emphasizing the importance of integrity in academic and personal digital spaces (Supriyanto et al., 2020). Additionally, workshops, seminars, or individual counselling sessions can help bridge the gap in understanding, ensuring that students are equipped with the knowledge and skills to make informed and ethical decisions online (Jaber, & Al-Hroub, 2023).

Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored on social learning theory and Theory of planned behaviour. These theories are explained in relation to how they apply to the use of counselling programs in addressing corrupt online practices of students.

Social Learning Theory: was developed by psychologist Bandura (1969). It posits that learning occurs through the observation of others' behavior and the consequences of those behaviors (Allan, 2017). Social learning is also known as modelling. The theory contends that cognitive processes like attention, reproduction, and motivation shape behavior (Eyyam, Dogruer, &Meneviş, 2016). It suggests individuals learn by observing others, imitating rewarding or socially

accepted behaviors, and that behavior, environment, and personal factors interact dynamically. The social learning theory helps students to understand the consequences of their actions and develop skills to resist negative influences. By addressing personal motivations, environmental influences, and strategies for positive behavior modification, counsellors can create a social environment that encourages responsible online practices.

Theory of Planned Behaviour: Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) was proposed by Ajzen (1991) by building upon the earlier theory of reasoned action (Al-Suqri, & Al-Kharusi, 2015). The TPB aims to predict and explain human behavior by considering individuals' attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Al-Suqri, & Al-Kharusi, 2015). The TPB assumes that individuals make rational decisions based on their attitudes toward a behavior, the subjective norms surrounding that behavior, and their perceived ability to exercise control over it. (Ajzen, 2020). Also, the attitudes are shaped by beliefs about the outcomes of a particular behavior. Subjective norms are influenced by an individual's perception of social pressures and expectations from significant others (Ajzen, 2020). Furthermore, perceived behavioral control reflects an individual's assessment of their ability to perform the behavior in question, taking into account both internal and external factors (Al-Suqri, & Al-Kharusi, 2015; Ajzen, 2020). Through an understanding of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, counsellors can implement strategies that align with TPB's principles to promote ethical decision-making and discourage involvement in dishonest online behaviors.

Counselling Programmes

Two counselling programmes that are considered for students who are exposed to corrupt online practices are individual and group counselling. They are discussed below.

Individual Counselling: Individual counselling strategy include incorporating cognitivebehavioral techniques for behavioral change (Hollon, & Beck, 2013). Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is a form of psychotherapy that focuses on the connection between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (Hollon, & Beck, 2013; Kazantzis, Luong, Usatoff, Impala, Yew, & Hofmann, 2018). The CBT thus can be beneficial for individuals dealing with anxiety, depression, or stress related to online experiences (Kazantzis, et al., 2018; Gonzalez-Prendes, Resko, &Cassady, 2019). As explained by Gonzalez-Prendes, et al (2019), the CBT helps in developing coping strategies and changing maladaptive thought patterns. Drawing on CBT, the counsellor can collaborate with the student to address personal issues that are related to online corrupt practices (Kazantzis, et al., 2018). This can include:

- a. CBT techniques in individual counselling begin with helping students identify and challenge distorted thoughts associated with their engagement in corrupt online practices (Gonzalez-Prendes, et al., 2019). Counsellors encourage students to reflect on their beliefs about academic success, the perceived pressures leading to dishonest behaviors, and the rationalizations they employ. With this procedure, students can begin to reframe their attitudes toward academic achievement and integrity.
- b. Counsellors work collaboratively with students to identify triggers and patterns that precede instances of engaging in corrupt online practices (Suter, 2011; Friedberg, & McClure, 2015).
 By recognizing the specific situations, emotions, or stressors that contribute to unethical behavior, students gain awareness of their behavioral patterns (Young, Klosko, &Weishaar, 2006).
- c. Behavior Modification Techniques (BMT): The BMT within the CBT involves targeting specific behaviors associated with academic dishonesty (Mennin, Ellard, Fresco, & Gross, 2013; Bass, Van-Nevel, & Swart, 2014). Counsellors guide students in developing practical, positive alternatives to corrupt practices by establishing a structured study routine, breaking tasks into manageable steps, and adopting time-management strategies. With this programme, students can gradually replace dishonest practices with ethical alternatives, creating a pathway for sustainable change.
- d. Developing Problem-Solving Skills: This focuses on equipping students with effective problem-solving skills (Lee, & Brown, 2022). As noted by Kinsinger, (2017), the problem-solving skills empower students to make informed and ethical decisions, fostering a sense of autonomy and control over their academic endeavors.
- e. Setting and Monitoring Goals: Goal-setting is a fundamental CBT that guides students toward behavioral change (Bruhn, McDaniel, Fernando, &Troughton, 2016). Counsellors assist students in establishing realistic and ethical goals related to academic integrity. Goal-setting within a CBT framework creates a structured approach to behavioral change, reinforcing positive habits and reducing the likelihood of relapse into unethical practices (Creed, Waltman, Frankel, & Williston, 2016).

Group Counselling: Group counselling provides a platform for students to explore, discuss, and collectively navigate the social influences that may contribute to unethical online behaviors (Makhmudah, Wibowo, &Awalya, 2019). By bringing together a diverse group of students, counsellors can create a supportive environment where participants share their experiences. The group dynamics thus play a crucial role in the normalization of positive behaviors (Emerson, 2012). Through group discussions, participants can collectively establish norms that prioritize academic integrity and ethical online practices (Türkay, Formosa, Adinolf, Cuthbert, &Altizer, 2020).

The group counselling setting also allows for the exploration of social validation and peer pressure, which are significant contributors to corrupt online practices (Gentina, Tang, &Gu, 2017). By addressing these dynamics within the group context, counsellors can help students develop skills to resist undue influence, make independent decisions, and assert their commitment to academic integrity (gentian et al., 2017. Group members may provide each other with constructive feedback and encouragement, reinforcing a collective commitment to ethical online behavior.

Ethical Considerations in Online Counselling

Ethical considerations in online counselling of students involve a thoughtful and deliberate approach to ensure that the principles of professional ethics are maintained within the digital realm (Kaplan, Wade, Conteh, & Martz, 2011). Ethical considerations include confidentiality, obtaining informed consent and clarifying communication channels and technology used (Kaplan et al., 2011; Sherman, Gordon, & Edger, 2013; Zakaria &Yusof, 2020).

Confidentiality, a cornerstone of ethical counselling, must be maintained in the online environment (Sherman, et al., 2013). Counsellors need to choose secure and encrypted platforms for communication to safeguard the privacy of student information. Reamer, (2013) is of the view that by establishing clear guidelines on data security, storage, and transmission ensures that the principles of confidentiality are upheld in the digital realm. Counsellors can thus work with students to identify a private and secure location for online sessions, minimizing the risk of breaches to confidentiality.

Obtaining informed consent is a crucial ethical step, wherein students are fully apprised of the risks, benefits, and confidentiality aspects of online counselling before agreeing to participate (Huang, O'Connor, Ke, & Lee, 2016). This process involves explaining the terms of engagement,

potential technological issues, and the measures in place to safeguard privacy Huang et al., 2016). Clarifying communication channels and technology use is essential for establishing boundaries and expectations within the online counselling relationship (Zakaria, &Yusof,2020). This includes specifying the modes of communication, response times, and guidelines for using technology to ensure secure and ethical interactions (Zakaria, &Yusof, 2020). By addressing these ethical considerations, counsellors can uphold the principles of transparency, autonomy, and privacy in the online counselling environment.

Barriers in Implementing Counselling Programmes for Students

Implementing counselling programs to address corrupt online practices among students poses several challenges, reflecting the complex nature of the issue. Students often lack awareness about the legal, ethical, and academic consequences of corrupt online practices, making counsellors face the challenge of developing effective educational strategies to raise awareness and promote responsibility for academic integrity (Maina, Maina, &Jauro, 2014; Okunlola & Obadare, 2016).

Also, counsellors must stay updated on emerging cheating methods and online platforms to provide relevant and timely guidance in academic misconduct (Irizarry, 2021). Counsellors must collaborate with educators and technology experts to develop proactive strategies and professional development to address challenges in combating corrupt online practices. Students may resist counselling interventions due to perceived punitiveness. To overcome this, counsellors should adopt a collaborative, empathetic approach, fostering a comfortable environment for discussing challenges and understanding underlying reasons.

Conclusion

The rapid expansion of digital technologies in Nigeria has led to increased unethical practices like plagiarism and unauthorised resource use. Also, the influence of social media and online communities adds a layer of complexity to the challenges associated with corrupt online practices. Students may be influenced by online peer groups that normalize unethical behaviors, creating a pervasive culture that undermines academic integrity. Furthermore, the identified factors contributing to corrupt online practices, such as academic pressure and a lack of awareness on

digital ethics, highlights the multifaceted nature of the issue. Counselling programmes have the potential to address these underlying factors by providing students with coping mechanisms for academic stress, raising awareness about the importance of ethical conduct in the digital realm, and offering guidance on navigating the challenges posed by the integration of technology in education. By addressing these root causes, counselling interventions can contribute to a more sustainable and comprehensive approach to mitigating corrupt online practices among students.

Counselling programs are crucial to bridge this gap and promote a deeper understanding of digital ethics among students. They can play a vital role in disrupting this negative influence by promoting a sense of individual responsibility and ethical decision-making. Additionally, counsellors can leverage their expertise to educate students on the potential consequences of engaging in corrupt online practices, both in terms of academic repercussions and the long-term impact on personal and professional development.

Recommendations

Based on this study, the following recommendations are made:

- i. Counselling must be made to be an integral part of school curriculum.
- ii. Counsellors must always ensure that their knowledge of online practices is current.
- iii. Seminars and Workshops should be held periodically in schools where students would be made aware of what online corrupt practices are and the consequences of indulging in it.
- iv. School counsellors and Management should deemphasize the punitive measures associated with admitting to indulging in corrupt online practice and emphasize the rewards that come with admitting to the crime and accepting to stop.
- v. Individual and Group counselling should be encouraged in schools as this would encourage the students to open up to their short comings and also see that they are not alone in this and as a result draw strength from their school mates.

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