

## Strengthening Online Counselling in Educational Institutions in the Era of Fourth Industrial Revolution

Gabriel Amponsah Adu<sup>1</sup>, Prof. Sujata Srivastava<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Department of Education, MS University of Baroda, India. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2022-2538>*

<sup>2</sup>*Department of Education, MS University of Baroda, India.*

### Abstract

This paper aims to draw the attention of educational institutions and the International Counsellors Association to the changes and benefits that the Fourth Industrial Revolution has come along with, deemed a breakthrough for the counselling profession. The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) is transforming institutions through new technologies such as cloud computing, artificial intelligence, the internet, robotics, 3D printing, and advanced wireless technologies. Online counselling is a more modern-day approach in counselling which can capitalise on the capabilities of the 4IR to deliver transformed counselling services. Thus, making the acquisition of advanced technologies and upskilling of employees eminent in the practices of counselling in educational institutions. The paper highlights; the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), online counselling, the benefits of online counselling and the limitations of online counselling. Further, the paper suggests effective ways for strengthening online counselling in educational institutions in the Fourth Industrial Revolution era.

**Keywords:** Fourth Industrial Revolution, Counselling, Online Counselling, Educational Institutions.

### Introduction

Every day, the world changes in response to the changing technology trend. The old ways of doing things may not be compatible with how things are done today due to the advent of new technology. The use of technologies to conduct work previously done by humans has exponentially advanced in the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). The 4IR is characterised by fundamental changes in society's more efficient and beneficial life. These changes result from the invasion of digital technology through the acquisition and use of technology and science to

promote the quality of life (Taher, 2021). Despite the positives, it poses many challenges to institutions and society. Technology and artificial intelligence convergence has begun to transform and disrupt the workforce (Lund, 2021). The problems can be seen in the need to retrain employees participating in the new force. Retraining is an act of learning new skills to be able to do a different job or reskilling people to do another job (Kaplan, 2019).

Technological evolution will require people at all levels to continue developing their skills more rapidly than in the past (Kaplan, 2019).

Institutions will need to provide customised training to ensure employees' success in human skills. They must train employees on-site as well as send them to training. Training flexibility will be critical to ensure that employees and businesses are prepared for an effective transition (Nwaohiri & Nwosu, 2021; Morrow, 2021).

Counselling professions face a considerable challenge: guidance and counselling can adapt to technological advances and leaps in communication technology and information. Therefore, to fit into the 4IR, employees, like counsellors, need to adjust to the latest technological trend. They must update their knowledge and skills, change their mind set, and update service strategies in providing guidance and counselling.

Individuals face various challenges throughout their lives and require assistance from others to overcome them. A professional Counsellor is a person who assists them in times of their problems through counselling. Counselling is a mature relationship in which a professionally trained counsellor meets with a client to help them with mental, personal, social, educational, and career functioning to solve a problem for their development (Adu, 2022). It is a fundamental profession that has significantly impacted and evolved in various ways in the twenty-first century. Counselling is one of the mental health-aiding professions (Zeren, 2015). According to Egan (2011), the primary goals of counselling are; to help people manage their problems in life more effectively, to develop unused or underutilised opportunities more

fully, and to contribute to them becoming better at helping themselves in their everyday lives. Counselling has become a handy field because it has improved people's lives (clients) (Amos et al., 2020). It has helped people understand themselves, maintain positive interpersonal relationships, and develop effective communication and interpersonal skills (Hays & Erford, 2018). Counselling is provided in two ways: face-to-face/ in-person and online/e-counselling (Ierardi et al., 2022).

With the advent of online counselling and multiculturalism in the twenty-first century, technology and globalisation have impacted the profession (Sue et al., 2019). Counselling has expanded to include but is not limited to stress management, sports and leisure, academic counselling, career counselling, and community mental health. Globalisation and technology underpin all of this. It is because the World has become a prominent place with interconnected issues, and technology is frequently used to speed up operations so that many problems can be solved in a shorter time. Information and Communications Technology (ICT) is changing people's lives in unprecedented ways. Counselling is not immune to how ICT transforms public service delivery and democratises innovation.

ICT has grown in power to the point where online-health interventions have proven effective in treating health problems; approximately four out of every five internet users report seeking online counselling on health-related issues (Hennemann et al., 2017).

Although online counselling is becoming more popular, professionals have expressed concerns about the ethical and legal standards of care delivery (Remley & Herlihy, 2020), and those who are opposed to technology have questioned how practical this approach is when compared to face-to-face counselling (Kolog, 2014). Other experts are also hesitant to use it due to a lack of ICT knowledge and apprehension about change. The research community and the counselling profession in developed countries like the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada have consistently asserted that, while exclusive (using electronic means), online counselling is just as effective as face-to-face counselling (Nagel & Anthony, 2011). All of this is accomplished over a long distance.

#### **The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR)**

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) is the fusion of digital, biological, and physical worlds. Cloud computing, artificial intelligence, the internet, robotics, 3D printing, and advanced wireless technologies, among others, are notable examples of the 4IR (Njuguna & Landry, 2020). These new technologies have the potential to make public services more accessible.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution has altered how products are imagined, manufactured, distributed, acquired, and consumed. It has an impact on how businesses operate and what customers, employees, and society as a whole expect of them (Kaplan, 2019). These disruptions are having a significant impact on jobs. The power of the 4IR can be leveraged in

online counselling to provide the best experience for clients.

4IR is dramatically altering global labour and production systems, necessitating those job seekers to develop the skills and capabilities required for rapidly adapting to the needs of international firms and, more broadly, automation (Njuguna & Landry, 2020). Institutions cannot continue to do things in the same old ways; hence they are required to upskill employees critically, analytically and creatively. Similarly, counsellors need to be developed to be critical, analytical, creative, and problem solvers in this era of 4IR.

#### **Online Counselling**

Online counselling is a more modern-day approach in which counselling is done over the internet. Online counselling is one of the technological ways of delivering counselling to clients who use a desktop computer, laptop, tablet or smartphone (Morrow, 2021). It is compatible with applications such as Google Hangouts, Microsoft Teams, FaceTime, WhatsApp, Skype, Zoom and Webex.

In terms of technological conveniences, online counselling is primarily performed in two ways (Bozkurt, 2013): one is the use of video-conferencing for communication between a counsellor and client; this type of contact is similar to face-to-face contact. The other is a written communication (chat) between the counsellor and the client that is devoid of image and sound. These programmes have one thing in common: Counsellor and client can see each other while speaking in real-time.

Long-distance appointments can be quickly scheduled this way; even social distancing can be observed. This technology can provide life coaching, counselling, psychotherapy and satisfaction to our clients in comfort and privacy in their homes (Zeren, 2015).

During an online counselling session, the counsellor works with the client to assess the client's problems and assist in overcoming them. Online counselling has the same content and structure as in-person counselling/face-to-face counselling. Appointments are scheduled similarly, with regular meetings lasting the same amount of time. It would maintain the same levels of privacy and confidentiality as we would if we met face-to-face. The client will be meeting in a private, secure room. Online video and chat services use encryption, a sophisticated form of internet security that ensures the security of your conversation.

Others have expressed concern about the relatively impersonal setting, which may prevent a strong counsellor/client relationship from forming. Scientific research has demonstrated that online treatment is an effective tool for dealing with mental health and well-being issues and assisting others in addressing many problems, such as anxiety and depression, career concerns, and relationship problems (Morrow, 2021).

Online counselling is convenient and accessible (Bennett, 2019). Clients must not travel to the counsellor's office to receive treatment. This option may benefit people who live in remote areas or have physical limitations. Mobile technology is now being used to improve

counselling data and service delivery (Njuguna & Landry, 2020). During the rules of COVID-19, online counselling offered long-distance support and greater scheduling flexibility. Online counselling may foster intimacy in ways that face-to-face counselling cannot by providing new methods of forming counselling relationships with different clients (Weinberg & Rolnick, 2020). For example, it can be helpful for people who are uncomfortable opening up during face-to-face sessions. Weinberg & Rolnick (2020) emphasised that during video conferences, counsellors can see facial and emotional responses much more clearly, which is another unique feature of online counselling. More so, messaging services expand communication opportunities between the counsellor and the client.

### **Benefits of online counselling**

This paper, "Strengthening Online Counselling in the era of Fourth Industrial Revolution", highlight the following benefits of using online counselling services;

**Affordability and Convenience:** In an educational environment, appointments may have more flexibility and options. Because it is at a time and place convenient for the client (students), the client may be able to focus more fully on the counselling process. Online counselling is usually reasonably priced and suitable. Because a person will be attending counselling sessions online from home or in a hostel, a person can often schedule the sessions at times that are convenient for him/her.

Counsellors who only treat clients (students) online will likely have lower overhead costs, such as renting office space. As a result, online counselling can frequently provide affordable treatment to students and other clients.

**Accessibility:** Provides greater access to services from rural and remote locations and those who cannot leave their homes, hostels or workplaces or travel to an office. It is also very convenient for people who travel a lot because it can be accessed from anywhere. Individuals who are disabled or housebound can access online counselling. Regarding accessing mental health care, mobility can be a significant issue. For example, a counsellor working from home may not be equipped to work with clients of all abilities. People who cannot leave their homes, workplaces and hostels for different reasons, such as physical or mental illness, time to go for lectures and others, can find online counselling an effective alternative to face-to-face counselling settings.

**Time savings:** There is no need to take time off work/miss some study periods or travel anywhere. It can be done at your workplace, hostel or home. Driving long distances and taking significant time away from a busy schedule to seek face-to-face counselling can burden people needing assistance. If you have reliable internet access, online counselling provides you with relatively quick and easy access to treatment that you might not have had otherwise.

**Cost-effectiveness:** It is frequently less expensive than face-to-face counselling. Furthermore, travel expenses, child-care

expenses, and time away from work can all be avoided. People in rural or remote areas can get mental health treatment through online therapy. Those who live in rural areas may not have access to any other type of mental health treatment because their location has few or no mental health practices.

**Anonymity:** The anonymity provided by online counselling, in which clients create a new online mail address that does not include their name and is not linked to anything that could identify them, may be beneficial. Online counselling has made mental health treatment more accessible. People may feel at ease discussing physical health problems with friends and family, but they may not feel the same way about discussing equally essential mental health issues. Online access makes it easier for clients' to overcome pain, reduce stigma, and boost their confidence when communicating with counsellors about their mental health issues in the past.

### **Limitations of online counselling**

In all situations, there are challenges. Online counselling is not always the best way to deal with crisis (Eboueya & Uden, 2011). For example, if a person is having suicidal thoughts, online counselling is not a substitute for getting immediate help. Similarly, if a person is experiencing or at risk of experiencing violence or abuse, there is a limit to the amount of support an online counsellor can provide.

### **Suggestions for strengthening online counselling;**

**The expansion of online counselling in the curriculum:** The expansion of online counselling should be linked to training psychological counsellors who can provide this assistance. Online counselling courses must be added to the existing educational curriculum for guidance and counselling sections to assist counsellors with much experience to match the Fourth Industrial Revolution. In this regard, counsellors will receive the necessary knowledge and skills through education and training to make them more effective and efficient in online counselling sessions.

**Provision of in-service training:** In terms of online counselling, it has become necessary for counsellors to improve themselves and keep up with the speed of global technological changes with time. According to Cann (2018), 54% of giant international Institutions and employees would require significant re- and up-skilling to capitalise on the Fourth Industrial Revolution's growth opportunities fully. As a result, it is suggested that in-service counsellors receive in-service training to gain knowledge and skills for practising online counselling. The International Association of Applied Psychology (IAAP), International Counselling Psychologists Councils (ICP) and other Psychological

Association should give way by organising training programmes on online counselling. It will motivate counsellors to pursue further training in online counselling to reduce the scarcity of online counselling practitioners in educational institutions, especially universities.

**Introducing online counselling platforms:** To effectively implement online counselling, it is expected that work with counsellors and the Information Technology (IT) Department in collaboration with counsellors in educational institutions must enact and drive more innovative counselling platforms to assist clients with issues. The institution's administration can employ graduates from counselling programmes to manage these sites, allowing counsellors to meet their clients online without interruption. When this is introduced, it will save time, and many clients (students) will be catered for at shorter periods without having to see the counsellor physically. It would also promote online group counselling, which will assist the counsellor in meeting a group of students with everyday needs and treating a wide range of students' problems like anger management, academics, anxiety and alcoholism. It will promote respect for other members, a sense of belonging, encouragement, behaviour change and an environment for learning.

### Acquisition of advanced technologies:

Investment in state-of-art digital technologies by educational institutions to assist counsellors in the delivery of counselling services online is eminent. Embracing digital technologies in the area of counselling can make the process of counselling faster and convenient. Digital technologies could transform the communication between the counsellor and the client, helping them learn better about the problem and the subsequent treatment.

### Conclusion

Fourth Industrial Revolution made the fusion of digital, biological, and physical worlds possible. It is the upraise of new technologies such as cloud computing, artificial intelligence, the internet, robotics, 3D printing, and advanced wireless technologies, among others, to solve the World's problems. It is prudent all skilled labours, like counsellors, adjust to these changes.

Online counselling is one of the technological ways of delivering counselling to clients who use a desktop computer, laptop, tablet or smartphone on popular platforms, such as Google Hangouts, Microsoft Teams, FaceTime, WhatsApp, Skype, Zoom and Webex. Online counselling is performed in two ways: video-conferencing for communication between a counsellor and client, and the other is written communication (chat) between the counsellor and the client.

With the advent of online counselling in the twenty-first century, technology and globalisation have impacted the medium of

counselling clients. Online counselling provides clients with as advanced satisfaction as face-to-face counselling. Online counselling is affordability and convenient, accessible, time-saving, cost-effective and anonymous as to face-to-face counselling to both counsellors and clients. As a result, it is suggested that:

- Online counselling need to be expanded into the curriculum to link to training psychological counsellors who can assist the client (Students).
- Educational in-service counsellors receive adequate in-service training to gain knowledge and skills for practising online counselling in various educational institutions.
- Educational institutions should introduce more online counselling platforms in their workplaces to assist clients (Students) find solutions to their problems.
- Acquisition of advanced technologies to assist counsellors in the delivery of counselling services online.

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