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Prospects and challenges of digital education in the field of digital guidance and counseling - a descriptive analytical study.

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Abstract:

This research paper seeks to explore the potential and effectiveness of digital education in improving the quality of guidance and counseling services, and to identify ways that enable counselors and students alike to benefit from digital means and tools to develop self-guidance skills and psychological, academic and professional support. The research paper also addressed the challenges of digital education, mainly represented by the digital divide, privacy, security and data protection issues, the lack of clear policies and regulatory standards for the use of technology in guidance, in addition to resistance to change and doubts about the effectiveness of digital tools and programs compared to traditional practices.
Finally, the research paper presented a set of recommendations, most importantly: strengthening digital infrastructure in schools and institutions, and encouraging educational leadership to support and adopt digital mentoring projects and provide the necessary resources**.**

key words: Digital education, digital mentoring, educational leadership, digital divide.

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Introduction:

Digital internet networks have played an active role in providing humanity with a wealth of information, studies, research, and specialized digital libraries in various fields of research. This has resulted in numerous trends advocating for the utilization of social media networks due to the free electronic space they provide, enabling individuals to interact, converse, discuss, and learn within what are called (virtual communities). Human relationships are no longer confined to a specific environment but have expanded to encompass the entire world, which has become like a small village with its boundaries defined by the computer screen and modern social media networks. This necessitates innovative educational and guidance approaches (Holmes, Bialik, & Fadel, 2019). This transformation places digital education at the forefront of attention, focusing on equipping individuals to be responsible digital citizens capable of positive and safe interaction with technology (Livingstone & Third, 2017).

THE FIRST TOPIC : STUDY PROBLEM

Today, electronic psychological counseling has become a support for the educational process in various scientific institutions, as the psychological counselor can communicate with counselees at any time and from anywhere through cyberspace. Internet networks have been used to open special paths for electronic psychological counseling within electronic platforms to provide counseling services on encouraging students to participate in e-learning and overcoming the difficulties they face through psychological and digital informational counseling lectures, in addition to the many problems left by the misuse of modern technology on the individual, the family and society, such as electronic addiction, electronic blackmail, violation of privacy, abuse and harassment.

In this context, the concepts of guidance and counseling have expanded to include digital or electronic guidance, which has become an urgent necessity to address emerging challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which imposed a complete reliance on digital learning (Al-Badawi, 2021). Consequently, integrating the principles of digital education into guidance and counseling practices becomes essential to capitalize on opportunities and overcome the challenges associated with the new environment (Al-Saawi, 2024). The research paper seeks to answer the following main question: What future prospects does digital education offer for developing and modernizing digital guidance and counseling practices, and what challenges must be overcome to achieve this effective integration?

FIRST REQUIREMENT: SUB-QUESTIONS

It also seeks to answer the following sub-questions:

1- How do digital tools, especially artificial intelligence, contribute to enhancing the effectiveness of guidance and counseling services?
2- What is the required role of digital literacy in preparing counselors and learners to deal with the digital guidance environment?
3- What are the most prominent educational, technical, and ethical challenges that hinder the implementation of digital guidance and counseling?

SECOND REQUIREMENT: OBJECTIVES AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study aims to explore the potential and effectiveness of digital education in improving the quality of guidance and counseling services, and to identify ways in which counselors and students alike can utilize digital tools and resources to develop self-guidance skills and provide psychological, academic, and professional support. The study also addresses the challenges of digital education, primarily the digital divide.

THE SECOND TOPIC : PREVIOUS STUDY

Among the most prominent previous studies that addressed the relationship between digital technology and academic advising and guidance is the study by Al-Mudaires and Al-Hajji (2015), titled: "Measuring the Impact of Using Smartphone Applications to Support the Culture of Academic Advising and Guidance." This study aimed to measure the impact of using interactive smartphone applications in the field of academic advising and guidance on student culture and to assess user satisfaction. The results showed that the primary source of advice for students is their peers, indicating the limited influence of official bodies. The study recommended the necessity of using the application as a resource for both students and academic advisors due to its ease of access.

FIRST REQUIREMENT: ARABIC STUDIES

Key international studies on the prospects of digital education in guidance and counseling:
These studies focus on various aspects, including the use of digital platforms, artificial intelligence tools, accessibility challenges, and their impact on the roles of mentors and learners.

A study by Al Masoud (2024), titled "The Use of Information and Communication Technology in Career Guidance from the Perspective of Educational Counselors in Jordan," aimed to explore the views of educational counselors on the importance of using ICT in career guidance and to determine the extent to which their opinions are influenced by demographic variables. The most prominent findings related to this topic showed that counselors hold positive views about the benefits of employing ICT in career guidance and are convinced of the importance of integrating it and keeping pace with the demands of the digital age.

A study by Hatem Bin Salman, published in 2023, titled "The Role of Educational Leadership in Supporting the Use of Digital Technology in School Counseling," aimed to identify the role of educational leadership in supporting social workers' use of digital technology and social media in school counseling. The study concluded that educational leadership plays a crucial role in supporting the use of digital technology in counseling and that there is a need for leadership systems that are informed about technological developments to adapt emotional and psychological counseling to the digital age.

Ben Marzouq's study (2025), titled "The Role of Digital Learning in Developing Future Skills among Basic Education Students from the Teachers' Perspective," aimed to determine the impact of STEM-based digital learning on 21st-century skills among primary school students. The results demonstrated the effectiveness of STEM-based digital learning in enhancing personal skills, citizenship, critical and creative thinking, and collaboration and communication among primary school students compared to traditional methods.

SECOND REQUIREMENT: FOREIGN STUDIES

Key international studies on the prospects of digital education in guidance and counseling:

Recent international literature shows growing interest in the intersection of digital education and mentoring practices, exploring how digital technology can enhance the effectiveness and inclusivity of these services. These studies focus on various aspects, including the use of digital platforms, artificial intelligence tools, accessibility challenges, and their impact on the roles of mentors and learners.

A study by Holmes, W., Bialik, M., & Fadel, C. (2019), titled "Artificial Intelligence in Education: Its Promises and Implications for Teaching and Learning," aims to explore the potential of AI in improving learning experiences and supporting students, including aspects of mentoring and guidance.

Key findings: The book indicates that artificial intelligence can support the personalization of educational and psychological support, help identify at-risk students, and provide interactive counseling tools. It also emphasizes the need for these tools to be designed ethically and transparently.

A study by Andersson, G., & Titov, N. (2014), titled "Advantages and Limitations of Internet-Based Interventions for Common Mental Disorders," aimed to evaluate the benefits and limitations of online interventions (including psychological counseling) for common mental illnesses. The study concluded that online interventions are effective for a range of mental disorders and offer greater flexibility in access compared to traditional therapy. However, it also highlighted challenges related to confidentiality, security, and the need for specialized training for counselors.

The study, Livingstone, S., & Third, A. (2017), titled "Children's and Young People's Rights in the Digital Age: An Emerging Agenda," aimed to identify the rights of children and young people in the digital age, emphasizing the importance of digital literacy in enabling them to interact safely and responsibly. The study underscores that digital literacy is essential for developing digital critical thinking skills, dealing with misinformation, and addressing cyberbullying—key aspects of digital guidance.

The study by Arnold, K. E., & Pistilli, M. D. (2012), titled "Course Signaling at Purdue University: Using Learning Analytics to Increase Student Success," aimed to explore the use of learning analytics as an early warning and guidance tool for at-risk students. The study demonstrated that early warning systems based on learning data can help identify students who need additional support, enabling advisors to intervene proactively and provide tailored resources.

A study by Kaffenberger, M., & Pritchett, L. (2020), titled "Education and Technology in the Time of COVID-19," aimed to analyze the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on digital education and identify the challenges and opportunities presented by the rapid shift to distance learning. The study highlighted the importance of digital infrastructure, professional development for teachers, and the need to design effective digital teaching strategies to ensure the continuity of learning and provide support to students in emergency situations.

A study by Van Dijk, J. (2020), titled "The Digital Divide," aimed to analyze the dimensions of the digital divide and its impact on access to information and opportunities, including education. Key findings: The study demonstrates that the digital divide is not simply a matter of owning devices, but also encompasses access to high-speed internet, digital skills, and relevant content, directly affecting everyone's ability to benefit from digital guidance services.

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THIRD REQUIREMENT:COMMENTARY ON PREVIOUS STUDIES

Previous studies emphasize the importance of technology in supporting counseling, with a growing focus on the role of artificial intelligence and digital skills:

1- The Role of Technology in Counseling: Studies have demonstrated that technology facilitates access to counseling services and provides an effective means of data collection and analysis. (Andersson & Titov, 2014)
Digital counseling is also a crucial alternative for service delivery in emergency situations (Al-Badawi, 2021), and a guidance manual has indicated the need to broaden counseling concepts to include the digital environment and its challenges. (Al-Ghamdi, 2024)
2. Artificial Intelligence and Interactive Platforms: There is a growing trend towards using artificial intelligence to support student guidance, as it contributes to early diagnosis and tailoring guidance interventions, thus increasing the efficiency of student counselors (Al-Anzi, 2025). However, some studies indicate a scarcity of literature that specifically examines the effectiveness of using artificial intelligence and interactive platforms in designing and evaluating guidance activities.
3. Digital Education and Citizenship: Digital education is a necessary framework for teaching students proper digital behavior and responsible media use, which reduces digital risks (Livingstone & Third, 2017). Furthermore, promoting human values in digital education, such as respect and cooperation, contributes to improving academic performance and reducing cyberbullying.

THE THIRD TOPIC :ONLINE COUNSELING

FIRST REQUIREMENT: DEFINITION OF ONLINE COUNSELING

Online counseling is the process of providing counseling assistance using digital communication technologies, whether via mobile phones and their applications or the internet, from the counselor to the client.

Suler (2004) defines online counseling as the process of providing counseling and psychological support services through digital communication methods and technologies such as email, text messaging, audio/video calls, and specialized applications. The aim is to help and support individuals in understanding their problems, developing coping skills, and achieving mental health and well-being, while maintaining professional and ethical principles of competence and confidentiality.

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SECOND REQUIREMENT: ADVANTAGES OF ONLINE COUNSELING

Recent evidence suggests that online counseling can be effective in treating a range of mental health disorders and increasing access to services (Cuijpers et al., 2019) because it:

1- Is suitable for clients who travel to different and distant geographical locations to seek psychological counseling.
2- Is suitable for clients who feel more comfortable using the internet as a medium, as they possess skills that can be activated through this remote approach.
3- Is suitable for clients who feel embarrassed to seek mental health counseling in person.
4. It helps clients develop honesty, openness, and cooperation by providing a safe and embarrassment-free environment, encouraging them to reveal themselves.
5. It provides a mechanism for analyzing clients' psychological progress by maintaining written communication records.
6. It creates an electronic database for all clients, enabling counselors to access their files electronically and retrieve information.
7. It breaks down psychological barriers and overcomes shyness between clients and counselors, allowing clients to discuss topics they might not be able to discuss in person online.

THE FOURTH TOPIC: TYPES OF ONLINE PSYCHOLOGICQL COUNSELING

There are two important types of Online psychological counseling: one direct and the other indirect.

Direct: This refers to simultaneous communication between the counselor and the client through various communication channels, using the most accessible and user-friendly method available to the client. This can involve audio and video, text messages, or audio only, using platforms like Messenger, WhatsApp, Viber, email, Telegram, etc.
Indirect: This involves communication between the counselor and the client at different times, allowing both the counselor and the client the freedom to choose the most convenient time to respond to messages, homework assignments during case studies, or voice messages. Communication occurs at various times. (Van Dijk, 2020)

FIRST REQUIREMENT: ONLINE PSYCHOLOGICQL COUNSELING TOOLS

Official online platforms and websites associated with scientific institutions, research centers, universities, and social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Viber, WhatsApp, Messenger, email, and blogs are among the most prominent and widespread social networks in the world. The popular Facebook site is a social networking platform where people connect to exchange information and photos and discuss ideas. Analysis of counselees' posts on Facebook indicates that they focused on exchanging academic and practical information, holding meetings, and providing support.

Students' use of social media aims to fulfill five needs: cognitive and informational needs, emotional and psychological needs, pragmatic personal needs, social and communication needs, and needs to escape reality and fill a void. It is more suitable for individuals suffering from psychological problems in the areas of personal growth, achievement, addiction, anxiety, social phobia, and feelings of guilt. (Barak & Grohol, 2011)

SECOND REQUIREMENT: THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA

1. It provides opportunities for collaboration, sharing, and interaction, positively impacting communication and negotiation skills related to emotional intelligence.
2. It fosters self-understanding, self-regulation, and emotional management. Social media allows each user to express their intelligence through their digital identity, particularly those with lower emotional intelligence in real life who feel more comfortable in the virtual world through social networks.
3. They express their feelings and emotions in different and new ways due to the absence of barriers between them, and consequently, the absence of these barriers' influence on their thought processes.
4. It provides opportunities for individuals to better understand and become aware of their emotions through feedback from other participants, and allows them to express their feelings emotionally, which helps develop their creative and innovative abilities. They gain the ability to express themselves and be creative because they do not fear any censorship, as in the real world.
5. It requires new methods to adapt to the means used by others to express themselves. (Andersson & Titov, 2014)

THIRD REQUIREMENT: PROSPECTS OF DIGITAL EDUCATON IN GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING (EXPECTED RESULTES)

Expanding access and flexibility is one of the most prominent prospects that digital education opens up for guidance and counseling services. In light of the rapid digital transformations, guidance is no longer limited to traditional time and place, but it has become possible to provide it in a way that transcends

geographical and temporal constraints, making it easier and more convenient for beneficiaries.

1. Overcoming geographical and social barriers: Digital platforms, such as instant messaging and video applications, enable the provision of counseling and guidance services to students who face difficulties accessing counselors due to distance or social restrictions. Studies have shown that online counseling (e-counseling) can be effective in providing support for a wide range of psychosocial issues, provided that safety and confidentiality standards are adhered to. (Barak & Grohol, 2011)

This expanded access ensures that services reach groups that may be marginalized or deprived of traditional psychosocial support, thus promoting the principle of equity in service provision. (Van Dijk, 2020)

2. Flexibility in Service Timing: Digital tools offer significant flexibility in scheduling counseling services. Instead of adhering to fixed appointment times at the counseling office, learners can access pre-recorded counseling materials, communicate with counselors via asynchronous messaging, or even use interactive self-assessment tools at times that suit them. (Schrum & Levin, 2013)

This flexibility increases the likelihood of students benefiting from the service, especially those with busy schedules or personal circumstances that require greater flexibility.

3. Responding to crises and emergencies: The importance of flexibility in counseling delivery became particularly evident during crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Digital tools enabled the continuity of counseling services, helping to mitigate the psychological and social impacts of the crisis on students (Kaffenberger & Pritchtt, 2020). The ability to provide psychosocial support quickly and effectively online, even in situations that hinder in-person work, is a competitive advantage of digital counseling.

4. Promoting digital independence and responsibility: By providing diverse digital resources for information and guidance, students can be empowered to find solutions to their problems independently and develop their decision-making skills. This fosters their independence and encourages them to take responsibility for their personal and academic growth. At the same time, this expanded access to digital resources necessitates enhanced digital literacy to ensure the safe and effective use of these tools. (Livingstone & Third, 2017)

FOURTH REQUIREMENT:CHLLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH EXPANDING ACCESS AND RESILIENCE

Despite these promising prospects, challenges remain that must be addressed to ensure that this expansion is fully realized.

The most prominent of these challenges is the digital divide, which refers to the disparity in access to technological infrastructure, such as internet access and

devices, among different segments of society (Van Dijk, 2020). Ensuring data security and confidentiality also presents a significant ethical and technical challenge when providing online services (Cummings & Ferris, 2016).

Expanding access and flexibility in digital guidance supported by digital education is a key step towards achieving more inclusive and equitable guidance. However, realizing these prospects requires a strategic approach to the digital divide and the promotion of ethical practices to ensure that all students benefit from these opportunities.

Conclusion:

Based on the findings of previous studies and the research points discussed, it can be said that digital education represents a significant opportunity to broaden the scope, reach, and quality of guidance and counseling services. It also offers the potential for tailoring psychological interventions and improving accessibility and flexibility. However, this requires integrated and coherent strategies encompassing infrastructure, training, ethical safeguards, and leadership support to ensure effective and sustainable impact.

Finally, the study calls for: strengthening digital infrastructure in schools and institutions, and encouraging educational leaders to support and adopt digital guidance projects and provide the necessary resources.

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