

Models, Effectiveness, and Challenges of Online Counseling for Generation Z in an Educational Context: A Systematic Literature Review

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Article Information	ABSTRACT
Received: May 2026	Background: Rapid advances in digital technology have transformed mental health services, including the implementation of online counseling for Generation Z in an educational context. Aim: This study aims to comprehensively examine online counseling services for Generation Z, focusing on service models and approaches, effectiveness, and challenges in their implementation. Method: This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach. The literature search was conducted using the Publish or Perish application to access the Google Scholar and Scopus databases with relevant keywords. A total of 28 articles meeting the inclusion criteria were analyzed using a thematic synthesis approach. Results and Discussion: The findings indicate that online counseling services are evolving in various forms, such as chat-based, video-based, and multi-platform services, including innovations based on applications and the metaverse. The approaches employed are flexible and adaptable to clients' needs. In terms of effectiveness, online counseling has been shown to reduce anxiety, stress, and depression, as well as improve psychological well-being and help-seeking behavior. The effectiveness of this service also tends to be comparable to face-to-face counseling under certain conditions. However, there are various challenges, such as limitations in non-verbal communication, low client engagement, as well as issues of trust, privacy, and stigma. Conclusion: Online counseling services have significant potential to support the mental health of Generation Z, but require adaptive strategies such as the development of blended counseling, enhancing counselors' competencies in a digital context, and strengthening the ethical and safety aspects of the service to improve service quality. Keywords: Online Counseling, Generation Z, Mental Health, Education, Systematic Literature Review
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INTRODUCTION

Rapid advances in digital technology have brought about significant changes in various aspects of life, including mental health services. This transformation reflects a shift in how individuals access services, moving from conventional approaches to digitally based services (Yip et al., 2021). Generation Z, as a group that has grown up in a digital environment, exhibits high levels of technology use in daily life, including when accessing mental health services (Gbollie, 2023). This situation makes the use of technology to provide counseling services increasingly relevant, particularly through chat, video, and other online platforms that enable flexible interaction without the constraints of time and space (Yip et al., 2021; S. G. Zeren et al., 2020). Additionally, digitally based services offer ease of access and the potential to reach individuals who previously faced barriers to accessing in-person services, such as time constraints, location limitations, or social stigma (Vongtangswad et al., 2017; S. G. Zeren et al., 2020).

As the need for psychological support in educational settings grows, online counseling services are becoming increasingly relevant as an alternative for reaching students more broadly and flexibly (Gbollie, 2023; Ristianti, 2022). These services not only support students' academic needs but also their personal and social well-being. Additionally, anonymity in digital services can reduce barriers to seeking help and increase individuals' openness in sharing their concerns (Dowling & Rickwood, 2015). However, the utilization of these services is also influenced by factors such as trust, digital literacy, and perceptions of service security (Chen et al., 2022). Therefore, counselors' readiness to integrate technology into their counseling practice is a critical factor in the successful implementation of these services.

The development of online counseling services also includes various innovations, such as online group counseling and blended counseling approaches that combine digital and in-person services (Chan, 2020). These approaches offer opportunities to enhance social support while maintaining service flexibility. However, the implementation of online counseling services also faces a number of challenges, such as issues of ethics, privacy, and data security (Chen et al., 2022). Additionally, limitations in non-verbal communication,

counselors’ readiness to use technology, and factors such as stigma and mental health literacy also influence the success of online counseling services (Dewaele et al., 2025; Gbolliie, 2023).

Various empirical studies have shown that online counseling services are effective in improving psychological well-being and reducing anxiety and stress levels among users (Celia et al., 2022; S. G. Zeren et al., 2020). Furthermore, the flexibility of access and ease of use of digital services contribute to increased user engagement in the counseling process (Lane, 2024; Nelson et al., 2023). Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these services is influenced by various factors, such as the quality of the therapeutic relationship, the intensity of interaction, and the individual’s readiness to utilize digital services (Davis et al., 2023; Ş. G. Zeren, 2015).

In addition to empirical research, studies based on systematic literature reviews also indicate that internet-based psychological interventions are effective in addressing various mental health issues and, in many cases, are as effective as in-person therapy (Andersson et al., 2023). Furthermore, videoconference-based counseling services have also been reported to yield positive outcomes in the treatment of depression and other psychological issues (Berryhill et al., 2019).

Although these various studies have provided insights into the effectiveness and implementation of online counseling, most studies still focus on specific aspects in isolation, whether in empirical research or systematic literature reviews. Research that comprehensively integrates service models, effectiveness, and challenges into a single analysis remains limited, particularly regarding Generation Z in an educational context. This situation indicates that understanding of online counseling remains fragmented and has not yet been fully integrated.

Therefore, in light of this existing gap, this study contributes by presenting a comprehensive synthesis of service models, effectiveness, and challenges of online counseling for Generation Z within an integrated educational context. Thus, this study is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the development of online counseling services in the digital age. Based on these findings, this study aims to answer the following questions: (1) What models and approaches to online counseling services are used with Generation Z? (2) How effective are online counseling services in educational settings? (3) What challenges exist in implementing online counseling services in an educational context?

METHOD

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to comprehensively examine online counseling services for Generation Z in an educational context. The SLR approach was chosen because it allows researchers to systematically and transparently identify, evaluate, and synthesize findings from previous studies (Snyder, 2019). Additionally, this study employs a thematic synthesis approach to integrate various research findings into more comprehensive patterns and themes.

The research procedure followed the SLR stages, which include formulating research questions, determining inclusion and exclusion criteria, conducting a literature search, selecting studies, and extracting and analyzing data (Page, 2021). The research questions were formulated to examine: (1) models and approaches to online counseling services, (2) the effectiveness of online counseling services, and (3) challenges in the implementation of online counseling services.

The literature search was conducted using the Publish or Perish application by accessing academic databases—namely Google Scholar and Scopus using the keywords “online counseling,” “digital counseling,” “e-counseling,” “Generation Z,” and “education.” Inclusion and exclusion criteria were established to ensure the relevance and quality of the articles analyzed, as presented in Table I.

Table I. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Research Topic	Online/digital counseling services.	Does not cover online/digital counseling.
Population	Students (Generation Z).	Children or the general population outside of Generation Z.
Type of Study	Empirical research (qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods).	Literature review, opinion piece, editorial.
Publication Year	2015 – 2026.	Outside that time frame.
Access the Article	The article is available in full text.	The full article is not available.
Language	English and Indonesian.	In addition to English and Indonesian.

The study sample consisted of 28 empirical articles that met the inclusion criteria, focusing on adolescents and college students who fall into the Generation Z category. The article selection process was conducted in stages, comprising the identification, screening, and eligibility phases. During the identification phase, all retrieved articles were compiled and checked to avoid duplication. Next, during the screening phase, articles were selected based on their titles and abstracts to identify relevant ones. Articles that pass this stage are then analyzed in full text during the eligibility stage to ensure their compliance with the established inclusion criteria. The entire selection process is conducted using the Covidence application to facilitate the systematic management and screening of articles and to minimize bias in study selection (Page, 2021). The article selection flow is visualized using a PRISMA diagram

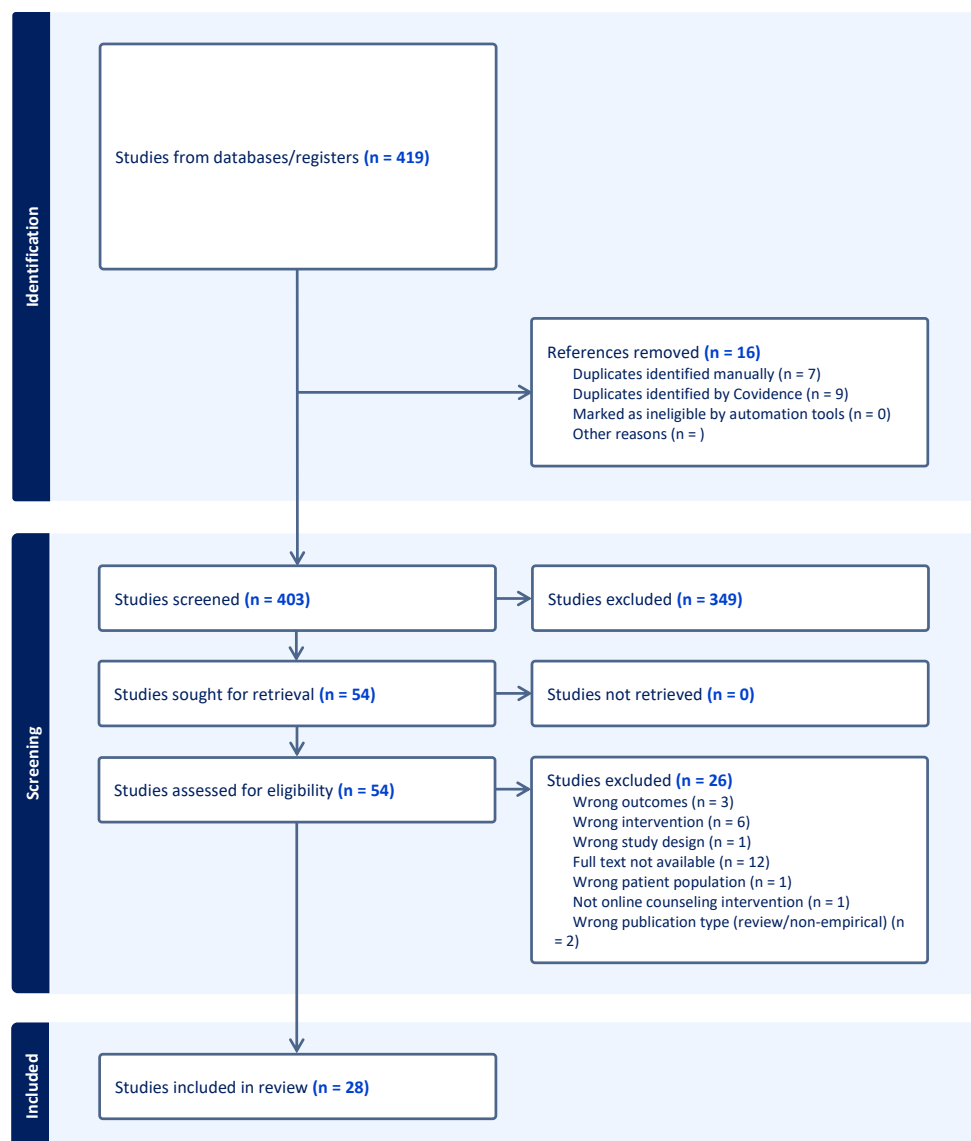


Figure 1. PRISMA flowchart

Based on a literature search using the Publish or Perish application, a total of 419 articles were retrieved from Google Scholar and Scopus. After removing 16 duplicate articles, 403 articles remained for screening. At this stage, 349 articles were excluded for not meeting the study criteria, resulting in 54 articles selected for full-text retrieval. All articles were successfully obtained and analyzed during the eligibility phase. Subsequently, 26 articles were excluded for various reasons, including mismatched outcomes ($n = 3$), irrelevant interventions ($n = 6$), inappropriate study designs ($n = 1$), unavailable full text ($n = 12$), inappropriate study population ($n = 1$), failure to address online counseling interventions ($n = 1$), and publication types that did not meet the criteria, such as reviews or non-empirical studies ($n = 2$). Consequently, 28 articles were deemed to meet the inclusion criteria and were used in this systematic literature review.

Furthermore, data were extracted from the selected articles, including information on the authors, publication year, research methods, sample characteristics, and the main findings of the studies (Kitchenham & Charters, 2007). The collected data were then analyzed using thematic analysis, grouping the findings into three main categories: service models and approaches, service effectiveness, and challenges in implementing online counseling services. This approach was used to identify patterns and key themes across the selected studies (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Characteristics of the Study

The results of data extraction from 28 articles that met the inclusion criteria indicate that studies on online counseling exhibit diverse characteristics in terms of context, methods, and participants. The analyzed studies originated from various countries, including Australia, Turkey, Thailand, the United States, Ghana, Hong Kong, Italy, China, the United Kingdom, the United Arab Emirates, Germany, South Africa, South Korea, Sweden, and Indonesia. The publication years span the period from 2015 to 2026, indicating that research on online counseling services has continued to grow in recent years.

From a methodological perspective, the studies analyzed employed a variety of approaches, including quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, experimental, quasi-experimental, and longitudinal designs. This diversity of methods indicates that research on online counseling not only focuses on the effectiveness of the service but also encompasses user experiences and the dynamics of service delivery in different contexts. It should be noted that a single article may be classified under more than one research question (RQ) category because its discussion is relevant to multiple research focuses. Therefore, the number of articles in each RQ category does not reflect the total number of articles. Some articles discuss service models and approaches, service effectiveness, and challenges in implementing online counseling.

Models and Approaches to Online Counseling Services (RQ1)

Of the 28 articles that met the inclusion criteria, only 7 specifically focused on models and approaches to online counseling services.

Table II. Models and Approaches

No.	Author & Year	Sample	Model/Approach
1.	Chan (2020)	502 Adolescents	Services include online, in-person, and blended counseling, with an integrated model as the primary approach.
2.	Vongtangswad et al. (2017)	71 students	Counseling is conducted via chat as a form of text-based communication.
3.	Cho et al. (2023)	60 students	Using metaverse-based counseling as a digital service innovation.
4.	Sebo et al. (2023)	143 Adolescents	Developing counseling services in an avatar-based metaverse environment.
5.	Yip et al. (2021)	Adolescents and adults	Text-based services via digital platforms are the primary means of communication in counseling.
6.	Kang et al. (2025)	31 students	Comparing video-based counseling with metaverse-based counseling.
7.	Novella (2019)	49 students	Using the Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) approach in both online and in-person counseling sessions.

Research findings indicate that online counseling services are evolving in a variety of forms and continue to undergo innovation. As shown in Table II, the most common forms of service include chat-based counseling, video counseling, and services that utilize more than one form of digital communication. In addition, several studies have also identified service innovations, such as the use of app-based digital platforms, chatbots, and metaverse-based counseling.

Chat-based counseling tends to be widely used because it offers users ease of access and flexibility in scheduling (Dowling & Rickwood, 2015; Vongtangswad et al., 2017; Yip et al., 2021). Meanwhile, video-based counseling allows for interactions that more closely resemble face-to-face conditions because it involves direct visual communication (Ierardi et al., 2022; Novella, 2019). On the other hand, several studies also indicate that integrating online and in-person services through a blended counseling approach yields more optimal results compared to using a single method alone (Chan, 2020; Yurayat & Tuklang, 2023).

In terms of approach, a number of studies explicitly employ specific approaches, such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT), Behavioral Activation (BA), and psychodynamic approaches. However, many studies do not specifically mention the approach used, indicating that online counseling services are flexible and can be applied within various theoretical frameworks, and are influenced by the medium used in the intervention process.

Of the 28 articles that met the inclusion criteria, 15 specifically addressed the effectiveness of online counseling services.

Table III. Service Effectiveness

No.	Author & Year	Sample	Effectiveness
1.	Zeren et al. (2020)	60 students	Online counseling has been proven effective and yields results comparable to in-person counseling.
2.	Celia et al. (2022)	32 students	Online counseling services can reduce stress, anxiety, and psychological distress.
3.	Ierardi et al. (2022)	115 students (34 online, 81 offline)	Online counseling is nearly as effective as in-person counseling in reducing psychological distress.
4.	Davis et al. (2023)	479 students	Teletherapy services have shown results that are non-inferior to those of conventional services.
5.	Dowling & Rickwood (2015)	152 adolescents	Online counseling boosts clients' sense of hope.
6.	Blackshaw et al. (2023)	23.260 clients	There was an improvement in psychological outcomes, particularly among users who attended more sessions.
7.	Amos et al. (2020)	8 students	Online counseling services help clients understand and resolve personal issues.
8.	Baldofski et al. (2023)	247 clients	Online counseling encourages help-seeking behavior.
9.	Cho et al. (2023)	60 students	Metaverse-based counseling has proven to be highly effective as a psychological intervention.
10.	Sebo et al. (2023)	143 adolescents	Online counseling services are considered effective in helping to address mental health issues.
11.	Chan (2020)	502 adolescents	The blended counseling model yields better results than the single-model approach.
12.	Vongtangswad et al. (2017)	71 students	Chat-based counseling has proven to be an effective alternative service.
13.	Novella (2019)	49 students	Online counseling has proven to be just as effective as in-person counseling.
14.	Novella & Ng (2025)	49 students	The therapeutic relationship in online counseling is just as effective as in face-to-face counseling.
15.	Gbollie et al. (2023)	17.838 students	Online counseling improves access to and utilization of mental health services.

According to Table III, most studies indicate that online counseling services have a positive impact on users' psychological well-being. The effectiveness of these services is demonstrated by a reduction in anxiety, stress, and depression levels, as well as an improvement in psychological well-being following participation in online counseling services (Celia et al., 2022; Dowling & Rickwood, 2015; Ierardi et al., 2022).

In addition, online counseling services also play a role in expanding access to mental health services and encouraging help-seeking behavior, particularly among adolescents and college students (Baldofski, 2023; Nelson et al., 2023). In some cases, these services even serve as a first step before individuals proceed to in-person services (Lane, 2024), highlighting their role as an entry point into the mental health care system.

Furthermore, several studies have shown that the effectiveness of online counseling services does not differ significantly from that of in-person counseling (Davis et al., 2023; Novella, 2019; S. G. Zeren et al., 2020). In fact, some studies have reported that blended counseling models yield better results than the use of a single method alone (Chan, 2020).

However, the effectiveness of online counseling is not absolute and is influenced by a number of important factors, such as client engagement, the number of sessions attended, and the quality of the therapeutic relationship between the counselor and the client (Blackshaw, 2023; Mawdsley et al., 2022; Novella & Ng, 2025).

Challenges in Implementing Online Counseling (RQ3)

Of the 28 articles that met the inclusion criteria, 10 specifically addressed the challenges of implementing online counseling services.

Table IV. Challenges in Online Counseling

No.	Author & Year	Sample	Challenges
1.	Zeren (2015)	21 clients	Limitations in nonverbal communication affect understanding between the counselor and the client.
2.	Mawdsley et al. (2022)	8 counselors and 43 adolescents	Low client engagement is a challenge in the counseling process.
3.	Nelson et al. (2022)	1.518 students	Stigma and openness pose obstacles to the delivery of services.
4.	Chen et al. (2022)	823 students	Concerns regarding privacy, ethics, and trust affect the delivery of services.
5.	Blackshaw et al. (2023)	23.260 clients	High dropout rates and a limited number of sessions affect service outcomes.
6.	Andersson et al. (2023)	17 participants	The lack of in-person counseling affects the client's experience.
7.	Dewaele et al. (2025)	38 stakeholders	Challenges related to service systems, ethics, and service sustainability.
8.	Lane (2024)	101 students	Low motivation is an obstacle to consistent participation in the program.
9.	Gbollie et al. (2023)	17.838 students	Social stigma and access are the main barriers to the use of services.
10.	Kankam & Adinkrah (2023)	411 students	A lack of understanding and awareness of the services affects the client's acceptance.

Although the results in Table IV demonstrate good effectiveness, they also indicate that online counseling services face various challenges in their implementation. One of the main obstacles is the limitation of nonverbal communication, as the absence of direct facial expressions and body language can affect the depth of interaction and understanding between the counselor and the client (Mawdsley et al., 2022; Vongtangswad et al., 2017; Ş. G. Zeren, 2015).

In addition, client engagement is also a key issue in online counseling services. Several studies indicate a tendency toward higher dropout rates and suboptimal engagement during the counseling process (Blackshaw, 2023; S. G. Zeren et al., 2020). This situation suggests that maintaining continuity of interaction poses a unique challenge in digital-based services and can impact the overall effectiveness of the service.

Other challenges relate to trust issues, stigma surrounding mental health services, and concerns about privacy and ethics in the use of digital technology (Chen et al., 2022; Gbollie, 2023). In addition, several studies have also highlighted that the lack of a counselor's physical presence, as well as technical challenges such as internet connection quality, can affect the client's experience during the counseling process. Overall, these findings suggest that while online counseling holds great potential, its successful implementation depends heavily on the ability to manage technical, psychological, and relational challenges simultaneously.

Discussion

I. Models and Approaches to Online Counseling Services (RQ1)

Research findings indicate that online counseling services are not only evolving in various forms but are also undergoing significant transformations in mental health care practices, particularly among Generation Z. The diversity of service formats—ranging from chat-based and video counseling to the use of innovative platforms such as digital apps and the metaverse (Dowling & Rickwood, 2015; Kang et al., 2026; Sebo et al., 2023; Vongtangswad et al., 2017; Yip et al., 2021), indicates that technology no longer merely serves as a medium for delivering services but has become an integral part of the intervention process itself.

These findings also show that the choice of service model is not neutral but is closely tied to users' needs and characteristics. Chat-based counseling, for example, tends to enhance user anonymity and comfort in expressing their concerns, while video-based counseling allows for interactions that more closely resemble face-to-face conditions. On the other hand, innovations such as the metaverse show potential in creating more immersive interaction experiences, although further testing is still needed regarding their effectiveness and sustainability.

This transformation indicates a paradigm shift in counseling services, from a conventional approach centered on face-to-face interactions toward services that are more flexible, adaptive, and user-centered. In this context, the characteristics of Generation Z who are highly tech savvy have further driven the development of more digitally oriented service models. However, the diversity of these service models also suggests that there is currently no clear standardization in the implementation of online counseling, which could potentially lead to variations in the quality of services provided.

Furthermore, a service approach that combines online counseling with in-person counseling yields more optimal results compared to the use of a single method alone (Chan, 2020; Ierardi et al., 2022; Yurayat & Tuklang, 2023). These findings are consistent

with patterns observed in various studies, which indicate that online services tend to be effective as a complement but are not yet fully capable of replacing the function of direct interaction. Thus, the blended counseling model can be understood as a form of integration that optimizes the strengths of each approach.

In terms of counseling approaches, although some studies employ specific approaches such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT), Behavioral Activation (BA), and psychodynamic approaches (Dowling & Rickwood, 2015; Ierardi et al., 2022; Novella, 2019), the majority of studies do not explicitly mention the approach used (Amos, 2020; Chen et al., 2022). This indicates that online counseling services offer high flexibility in the application of approaches. However, on the other hand, this situation also indicates potential weaknesses in the standardization and clarity of interventions. Without clarity regarding the approaches used, the counseling process risks becoming less focused and difficult to evaluate systematically. Therefore, the future development of online counseling services must strike a balance between technological flexibility and theoretical clarity to ensure service quality is maintained.

2. The Effectiveness of Online Counseling Services (RQ2)

Research findings indicate that online counseling services consistently have a positive impact on individuals' psychological well-being, such as reducing levels of anxiety, stress, and depression, and improving psychological well-being (Celia et al., 2022; Davis et al., 2023; Dowling & Rickwood, 2015; Ierardi et al., 2022). These findings suggest that digital media does not act as a barrier in the psychological intervention process, provided that therapeutic interactions can still be effectively established.

Furthermore, several studies indicate that the effectiveness of online counseling services does not differ significantly from that of in-person counseling (Davis et al., 2023; Novella, 2019; Novella & Ng, 2025; S. G. Zeren et al., 2020). In fact, in some cases, online counseling services demonstrate greater flexibility in reaching clients. However, findings across studies also indicate that this equivalence in effectiveness does not always imply equivalence in the quality of the therapeutic experience, particularly regarding the depth of the therapeutic relationship and emotional engagement.

In terms of accessibility, online counseling services also play a crucial role in increasing help-seeking behavior, particularly among adolescents and college students (Baldofski, 2023; Gbollie, 2023; Lane, 2024; Nelson et al., 2023). In some cases, these services serve as an initial entry point before individuals access in-person services, indicating that online counseling plays a strategic role in expanding the reach of mental health services. This reinforces the function of online services not only as a primary intervention but also as part of a broader service system.

However, the effectiveness of online counseling services is not absolute and is heavily influenced by several key factors. Findings from various studies indicate that client engagement, the number of sessions attended, and the quality of the therapeutic relationship between counselor and client are the primary determinants of success (Blackshaw, 2023; Kang et al., 2026; Mawdsley et al., 2022; Novella & Ng, 2025). Specifically, an increase in the number of sessions correlates with better outcomes, indicating that the continuity of interaction is a crucial factor in the process of psychological change. Furthermore, this suggests that the effectiveness of the service is determined not only by the medium used but also by the quality of the relationship established during the counseling process. Thus, it can be concluded that the success of online counseling depends on the ability to integrate the advantages of technology with the fundamental principles of the therapeutic relationship.

3. Challenges in Implementing Online Counseling (RQ3)

Despite its many advantages, online counseling also faces a number of challenges in its implementation. One of the main challenges is the limitation of nonverbal communication, which can affect the depth of interaction between the counselor and the client (Kankam & Adinkrah, 2023; Mawdsley et al., 2022; Vongtangswad et al., 2017; Ş. G. Zeren, 2015). This limitation impacts the process of forming a therapeutic relationship, particularly in terms of empathy, emotional attachment, and the accuracy of understanding the client's condition.

In addition, low client engagement and high dropout rates also pose significant challenges (Blackshaw, 2023; S. G. Zeren et al., 2020). Research findings indicate that online counseling services tend to face challenges in maintaining consistent participation, particularly when interactions do not occur in person. This suggests that the success of online counseling depends not only on accessibility but also on the service's ability to sustain a therapeutic relationship with clients over time.

Other challenges include issues of trust, stigma surrounding mental health services, and concerns regarding privacy and ethics in the use of technology (Chen et al., 2022; Dewaele et al., 2025; Gbollie, 2023). These factors indicate that barriers to online counseling are not only technical in nature but also relate to the psychological and social aspects of the client. Additionally, technical constraints such as internet connection quality and platform limitations also affect the smoothness and quality of the counseling experience.

More broadly, these findings reveal a gap between the clinical effectiveness of the service and the quality of therapeutic interaction as perceived by users. In other words, although online counseling is capable of producing positive psychological changes, the relational experience within the counseling process is not yet fully optimized. Therefore, the development of online counseling services needs

to be directed not only toward technological improvements but also toward strengthening counselors' competencies in building therapeutic relationships digitally, enhancing user literacy, and reinforcing ethical and data security aspects. Thus, the challenges in online counseling can be understood as a multidimensional issue encompassing technical, relational, and psychosocial aspects, thereby requiring an integrative approach in its development.

4. Implications for Counseling Practice in Indonesia

The findings of this study have several important implications for counseling practice in Indonesia, particularly in the context of education. First, the development of online counseling services indicates that the use of digital technology can serve as a solution to address limited access to counseling services, especially in areas with a shortage of counselors or geographical barriers (Baldofski, 2023; Gbolle, 2023). In the context of Indonesia, with its vast and diverse geography, online counseling services have the potential to serve as a strategic alternative for reaching a broader range of students.

Second, the effectiveness of online counseling services, which tends to be on par with in-person counseling, suggests that these services can be integrated into guidance and counseling systems in schools and universities (Novella, 2019; S. G. Zeren et al., 2020). However, research findings also indicate that the success of these services is heavily influenced by client engagement and the quality of the therapeutic relationship. Therefore, counselors in Indonesia need to develop specific skills in building therapeutic relationships in a digital context, such as more explicit verbal communication skills and the use of media that support interaction (Mawdsley et al., 2022; Novella & Ng, 2025).

Third, the various challenges identified such as limitations in nonverbal communication, trust issues, and concerns regarding privacy and ethics highlight the need to strengthen regulations and standards for online counseling practices in Indonesia (Chen et al., 2022; Dewaele et al., 2025). This includes the development of ethical guidelines, client data protection, and the use of secure and reliable platforms in the delivery of services.

In addition, the development of a blended counseling model has become one of the most relevant approaches to implement in counseling practice in Indonesia. This model allows for the integration of online and in-person services, thereby optimizing the flexibility offered by technology without neglecting the importance of face-to-face interaction in building a therapeutic relationship (Chan, 2020; Ierardi et al., 2022). Therefore, the implementation of online counseling services in Indonesia must be strategically guided, not only by adopting technology but also by taking into account the readiness of human resources, regulations, and user needs, so that the services provided can operate effectively, safely, and sustainably.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of a systematic literature review of 28 articles, it can be concluded that online counseling services have shown significant development in various forms and service approaches, particularly among Generation Z. The dominant service models include chat- and video-based counseling, and are evolving toward the use of multi-platform approaches and innovative technologies such as digital applications. Furthermore, the integration of online counseling with in-person counseling (blended counseling) demonstrates greater potential because it combines the flexibility of technology with the quality of direct interaction. In terms of effectiveness, online counseling services have been shown to reduce anxiety, stress, and depression, as well as improve psychological well-being and help-seeking behavior, with effectiveness that is, in many cases, comparable to in-person counseling. However, this effectiveness is influenced by client engagement, the number of sessions, and the quality of the therapeutic relationship. On the other hand, the main challenges in implementing these services include limitations in non-verbal communication, low client engagement, as well as issues of trust, stigma, and privacy, indicating a gap between clinical effectiveness and the quality of therapeutic interaction. Therefore, counselors, guidance and counseling teachers need to develop more adaptive and innovative services through the integrated use of technology, the enhancement of therapeutic communication skills in a digital context, and the implementation of blended counseling models. Further research is recommended to explore strategies for improving therapeutic relationships in online counseling and to test the effectiveness of various technology-based service models using more rigorous research designs. These findings indicate that the effectiveness of online counseling services cannot be separated from relational factors and user engagement; thus, service development should focus not only on technological aspects but also on the quality of therapeutic interactions. Overall, these findings confirm that the future of counseling services no longer centers on the dichotomy between online and in-person services, but rather on the adaptive, contextual, and sustainable integration of both, tailored to user needs in the digital age.

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