

The Digital Immigrant Guidance Counselors in the Face of the New Normal

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Abstract

This study aimed to construct a phenomenological overview of the experiences of digital immigrant Guidance Counselors during the shift to the new normal and how digital fluency has impacted their delivery of Guidance and Counseling services through information communications technologies. The study anchored itself on the Social Interaction of Technology, Activity Theory, and Motivation Theories. To attain the research objectives, a qualitative design was used. The study covered 11 Registered Guidance Counselors from Baguio City and neighboring municipalities aged 36 and older. Phenomenology and thematic analysis was used as a means to treat the collected data through interviews. Findings from this study uncovered that the digital immigrant Guidance Counselors have discovered new modalities to administer Guidance and Counseling programs, an emergence of various challenges within the profession as impacted by the circumstances of the new normal, and a push towards professional upscaling. Digital fluency did impact the delivery of the Guidance and Counseling responsibilities during the new normal; and with that considered, it was concluded that the willingness to adapt to the ICT modalities was affected by the attitudes towards ICT. Critical analysis points to the gap of knowledge, and challenges with the resources needed to deliver programs through ICT were roots to the issues put forward during the new normal. It is recommended that after this research, actions need to be done to make sure that Guidance and Counseling services can still be accessible throughout any possible circumstance in order to help the learners in need.

Keywords

Information Communications Technology, Guidance and Counseling

1. Introduction

Guidance Counselors in Philippines are highly regarded due to the perception of the profession. Since its professionalization in Philippines in 2004 through the Guidance and Counseling Act, the aptitude, ethical standards, and competencies have been laid forward for the practitioners. Guidance and Counseling can alleviate the distress experienced by afflicted individuals through their services, further enhanced by The Mental Health Act or RA 11036. These services include psychosocial support, information services, education, and promulgation of mental wellness across educational and industrial sectors.

Schools have been mandated to maintain school counselors and guidance practitioners despite the economic challenges posed. A study from the [United Cities and Local Governments \(2020\)](#) found that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) opened up means to ensure essential services and livelihood opportunities throughout the current ordeal. These ICT platforms covered both hardware such as computers and phones, and software which covers applications such as Zoom and Viber. The fact that children and young adults desperately clamor for a more stable psychological state of mind during the onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic ([Francisco et al., 2020](#)) calls for educational administrators to shift to the distanced means to ensure safety among students and employees, and to deliver the highly sought after guidance and counseling services. This implies a considerable number of, if not all, Guidance Counselors shifting to the digital platform.

Digital immigrants, being exposed to ICT in adulthood, pose a more significant effort to adapt to digital technologies. The lack of introduction to ICT during their younger age could hamper a professional's capabilities in the workplace ([Nikou et al., 2020](#)). There are subgroups of Digital Immigrants depending on their attitude toward technology. The avoiders are the group of old digital immigrants who cannot relate to modern technology and young digital natives who philosophically oppose the internet and other modern online technologies; the minimalists are unwillingly forced to use technology but prefer hard copies and are reluctant adopters; the enthusiastic or eager adopters participate in online discussions and may even produce their online content; and the innovators are not only enthusiastic but they work with technology to improve it. The range of attitudes of digital immigrants toward technology affects their motivations in utilizing technology and limits their interest in interacting with ICT.

Digital Immigrant Guidance Counselors and Digital Fluency

The shift to ICT brings up an underlying issue of digital fluency amongst digital immigrant professionals. First coined by [Prensky \(2001\)](#), digital immigrants are those born before the proliferation of computers and the internet. A digital immigrant is a blanket terminology for those who had to adapt to the changes in lifestyle and working conditions due to the presence of ICT.

[Wang et al. \(2014\)](#) assert that digital fluency is the ability to reformulate knowledge and produce information to express oneself creatively and appropri-

ately in a digital environment. Compared to the digital immigrants, the familiarity of digital natives with social technologies is undeniable, given that it has always been accessible for them during their early adolescence (Amsalem et al., 2020). Noting the broad definition of the concept of digital fluency, this research focused on the attitude and familiarity of digital immigrants about digital fluency.

Studies reveal that digital immigrants lack an intrinsic aptitude for navigating technology. Although digital immigrants may have the training and understanding of technology, this demographic lacks the innate digital fluency to adapt to the shift to ICT use quickly. Employers and clients highly value the importance of digital fluency at the turn of the century (Jose, 2016). Unfortunately, digital immigrants are limited to primary formal communication channels and business use of ICT. However, for those highly or completely impaired in terms of computer-based skills, the use of any ICT was only facilitated with a digital native colleague (Gibson et al., 2010). This hindrance often results in a 53% productivity slowdown, bringing a challenge to the entire team (Vandenbroucke, 2020).

The demands for abilities mentioned above are carried out in the realms of Guidance and Counseling. In her study, Susanto (2014) highlights that counselors must internalize the technology's function to elevate the professionalism of Guidance and Counseling. Implications from the study challenged the use of ICT toward the achievement of the counseling goals. Similarly, it poses a challenge to digital immigrant Guidance Counselors who are not knowledgeable about using technology to be up-to-date with the changing times.

The challenges are piled on the digital immigrant counselors. However, evidence also shows that these people born in that generation are not necessarily technologically impaired (Creighton, 2018). Professionals strive to adapt to the changing times and have found means to be digital learners rather than mere immigrants to ICT. The fact remains that Counseling through ICT is not new to the profession, as online counseling has been around since early 1990. Numerous training and mandates were set forth by accredited Psychological and Counseling Associations (Rønnestad et al., 2018). In the Philippines, the Continuous Professional Development, imposed by the Philippine Regulatory Commission (PRC), encourages professionals to keep abreast of developments and trends in their field of work. This means that no professional should be left behind.

The use of ICT serves a highly beneficial purpose in the administration of Guidance and Counseling. There have been citations of how a gap in digital fluency is observed amongst digital immigrant professionals. Unfortunately, there is a knowledge gap in terms of understanding the experiences of digital immigrant Guidance Counselors. Studies are scarce in terms of explaining the challenges and motivations for this demographic. The unavailability of resources discussing the experiences of digital immigrant Guidance Counselors necessitated this research.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on several theories analyzing the structure of Guidance

and Counseling through the ICT platform and the impact of digital fluency on Guidance Counselors' experiences. Although these theories were the baseline for the study, the unique phenomenological experiences of the population, in this case, Digital Immigrant Guidance Counselors, have been the main reference of data when conclusions were drawn.

The interaction of people with ICT can almost overlap with how people perceive other people. In order for the researchers to comprehend the novel means of how humans interact with technology, the next section will discuss theories of how humans intentionally create their phenomenological and personal meaning to technology.

2.1. Critical Theory of Technology

First, the Critical Theory of Technology served as a basis for understanding the interaction of digital immigrant Guidance Counselors with ICT. This theory describes technology as value-laden and humanly controlled (Pond, 2021). It combines a philosophical approach to technology and constructivism of the components that make up technology. The theory proposed a framework for analyzing technologies and systems across various viewpoints. The Critical Theory of Technology involves decontextualization and recontextualization of the relationship of man to technology in a natural, technical and social environment (Feenberg, 2017). Technology has beneficial properties while also having pitfalls derived from the accessibility and literacy of particular members of society (Aziz, 2021). The technical code is the rule under which technologies are realized in a social context, with biases reflecting the unequal distribution of social power. Subordinate groups may challenge the technical code with impacts on design as technologies evolve. Noting that the Critical Theory of Technology entails how the user's values shape the purposes and existence of ICT, it can now be concluded for the case of Guidance and Counseling practitioners that technology is seen not just as a neutral object but rather as a tool for the context of the dissemination of information services and channel for administering counseling sessions.

As the Critical Theory of Technology may serve as a basis for analyzing the digital immigrants' attitude toward technology, one can zone in on the relationship of Guidance Counselors with ICT as its tool for delivering its outcomes through a theory known as Social Construction of Technology (SCOT). This is a theory about the relationship between society and technology. The theory argues that people create implied meaning using a particular artifact or tool (Bijker, 2015). It then speaks about using ICT and how it functions to serve the Guidance Counselors' purposes. ICT can mainly be used in any school setting for online forums, accessing information, delivering counseling sessions on various sites, and posting information for stakeholders to access (Nwamara, 2005, cited by Oraegbunam, 2009). Acknowledging these features leads to this study's third foundation, which cites a feature of SCOT known as the Relevant Social Groups (RSG). RSG, in its essence, can be categorized based on shared interpretations of

technology (Bijker, 2015). Jarrahi and Eshraghi (2019) examined how the “age factor influence” (digital fluency) can coincide with other factors rooted in individual and work-related realms. The findings were astounding regarding the variance in attitude towards ICT use among digital natives and digital immigrants. Technophilia, the love for technology, is present within their digital native participants, while for the digital immigrants, their attitude toward technology was just bound by essentialism.

2.2. Activity Theory

Having identified theories and reports relating to the study, it is essential to acknowledge that an individual’s phenomenological experiences vary. Data from this research was analyzed through several philosophical viewpoints. It includes the symbolic interactionism of the digital immigrant Guidance Counselor with both the new normal and ICT. The interaction and relationship of the factors can be visualized through the Activity Theory. Initially proposed by Engeström (2001 as cited by Hashim & Jones, 2014), this framework involves a model composed of the subject, tool, object, rules, community, and the division of labor. The subject is the people studied, the object is the activity, and the tool facilitates the tasks (Hasan, 1998). The later modifications were described by the rules, which are conditions that guide how one may act and result from social conditioning. The other is the division of labor, which provides for the distribution of tasks in an organization. These two components provide a new factor known as community, and through this, groups of activities and teams of workers are anchored and can be analyzed (Verenikina, 2001).

The model follows the Activity Theory’s design to demonstrate the relationship among factors affecting the Guidance and Counseling practice and its goals. Guidance and Counseling involve assisting, piloting, and helping individuals through a range of services to bring out the best versions of themselves. This model focuses on ICT as the modality for achieving the objective of Guidance Counselors. As the study was set in the academic practice of Guidance and Counseling during the New Normal, the community and tools for this interaction are set to the ICT platform. A study by Ekechukwu and Eze (2016) affirms that ICT is an indispensable tool in practical Guidance and Counselling services for students’ sustainable educational development in the 21st century.

Considering that the community in which these Digital Immigrant Guidance Counselors are involved are the students engaged in the digital world undergoing the adverse effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, their presence is much sought after—considering that the clamor for stable psychological and emotional well-being has been reported at an all-time high. This implication is confirmed by numerous studies affirming the need for online Guidance and Counseling at times of major scale calamities (Gabri et al., 2016). Tulio & Velasquez (2016) suggest that people have higher tendencies to seek online Counseling when making an open choice. Hence, an urgency to adapt to the new normal is highly necessary.

As high as the demands for the services are, the ethical principles and guidelines of Guidance and Counseling must still be implemented. In fact, standards are set by several accredited institutions on how to execute online Guidance and Counseling. Structures for implementation of the online delivery of these services may vary depending on the institutional practices however, the goal is the same which is to serve the community to which the Guidance Counselor is assigned.

2.3. Growth Mindset

The interaction of digital immigrants with ICT should not be a limitation, despite finding the constant need to keep up with the digital natives, they are still capable of being technologically fluent. A study conducted by Suša (2014), which included digital immigrants knowledgeable of primary ICT use, finds that a course discussing the benefits of ICT in their work model improves their motivation to learn. This argument can be grounded by several intrinsic motivational factors. Anchoring from psychological theories, a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006) is the openness and desire to develop one's personality, intelligence, and abilities. People with a growth mindset believe that they can grow and learn by cultivating their skills through experience, effort, and social guidance. Being equipped with a growth mindset bolsters a person's potential to acquire novel knowledge and skills (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). A study conducted by Keating and Heslin (2015) manifested concrete evidence of increased employee engagement when the group is exposed to an environment that fosters a growth mindset. It can then be postulated that if a digital immigrant Guidance Counselor has a growth mindset, they can cope with the challenge of the shift to ICT-mediated work.

This study was conducted to discuss the Digital Immigrant Guidance Counselors' experiences in administering their functions and services in academic institutions through the varied ICT platforms. A robust discussion of how digital fluency affects the administration of their services served as the backbone of the study. Digital Fluency and Generational Attributes will also be studied through the phenomenological experiences of counselors using digital platforms, how it manifests itself among Guidance and Counseling professionals, and how it can potentially influence their ability to aid in the clients' needs.

The Input-Process-Output (IPO) Model was used as the research paradigm, which then was utilized to guide the construction of the research methods, tool, and treatment of data. Guided by the framework, the researchers explored the lived experiences of the Digital Immigrant Guidance Counselors using a semi-structured interview. The interview sessions were analyzed through qualitative methods.

3. Research Objectives

This research explored the phenomenological experiences of digital immigrant Guidance Counselors in the facilitation of their Guidance and Counseling services on the ICT platforms. This study investigated experiences, attitudes, and insights on using ICT in Guidance and Counseling from the viewpoint of digital immi-

grant Guidance Counselors as the world shifted into the so-called New Normal. Specifically, the researchers sought to answer the following questions:

- 1) What are the lived experiences of digital immigrant Guidance Counselors in their facilitation of Guidance and Counseling services through information and communications technology?
- 2) How does digital fluency affect the implementation of a Guidance Counselor's duties during the new normal?

4. Research Design and Methodology

The study followed a qualitative research design. Considering the limited source of information and the uniqueness of the circumstance and population that the researchers studied, phenomenology was used as the design. Phenomenological Research is a form of a qualitative study that looks into an individual's lived experience within the world and as impacted by their personal experiences (Neubauer et al., 2019). In the case of this study: the experiences of digital immigrant Guidance Counselors in using ICT platforms, how challenges arise among digital immigrant practitioners, and how it could have potentially hindered or facilitated the individual's ability to help amidst the clients' needs during the pandemic.

4.1. Population and Locale of the Study

Purposive Sampling was utilized in selecting the participants of this study. Registered Guidance Counselors who underwent the provisions under RA 9258 of the Philippines were selected. These participants were all born before 1988. Hence, Guidance Counselors aged 33 to 65 were included. The participants were from Baguio City, La Trinidad, Itogon, Sablan, Tublay, and Tuba area (BLISTT) of the Cordillera Administrative Region in the Philippines to facilitate the efficiency of data gathering. These practitioners were currently employed either at a Higher Education Institution (HEI) or the Basic Education sector. The study included eleven (11) participants as the source for data which spanned from years 2022 through 2024. It was ensured that by that number, the data saturation was met.

4.2. Data Gathering Tool

The data for this study was collected through a semi-structured interview process. A semi-structured interview is a qualitative method of inquiry that combines a predetermined set of open questions that prompt interaction with the opportunity for the researchers to explore particular themes. An interview guide was constructed based on the researchers' readings on relevant theories, concepts, previous studies, and articles related to the experiences of Digital Immigrant Counselors and their administration of Guidance and Counseling Services. The semi-structured interview guide allowed the participants to narrate and describe their subjective perceptions and experiences. To come up with an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences, the researchers asked probing questions dur-

ing the interview.

4.3. Data Gathering Procedures

The researchers made use of purposive sampling hence, participants for this study were selected based on the inclusion criteria as described under the research design. An advertisement calling for participants was posted on public social media platforms such as Facebook and LinkedIn. Those who volunteered were then contacted by the researchers in order to verify if they fall within the inclusion criteria.

The prospective participants were sent an email containing the letter of invitation. Upon their confirmation, the schedule for the interview was set. The participants were sent a copy of the Informed Consent and a copy of the Interview Guide in order to orient the participants on the specific procedure of the study.

Since qualitative research was employed, the semi-structured interview was used as a means to gather data. Semi-structured interviews are composed of different vital questions that help to define the areas explored. This approach's flexibility allows for the disclosure of information that is important to participants but may not have previously been thought of as significant by the researchers.

The interview sessions were done after working hours to ensure that the collection of data will not impede the institution the participant was working under. The sessions lasted around 45 minutes to an hour long. In order to conduct a more efficient interview, and with the consent of the participant, the session was recorded using a voice recorder.

4.4. Treatment of Data

For this study, a qualitative research approach was used. Thematic Analysis was the method used to treat the data collected. Inductive Thematic Analysis was chosen as a method to identify, analyze, organize, describe, and report themes found within the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006, as cited in Nowell et al., 2017). This method provided the researchers flexibility and liberty in coming up with theoretically-guided interpretations. This approach provided a rich, detailed, and complex account of the experiences of Digital Immigrant Guidance Counselors. The researchers followed the six-step process of inductive thematic analysis: familiarization (knowing the data), coding (highlighting sections of the text), generating themes (looking over the codes created, identifying patterns among them, and coming up with themes), review themes (make sure that the themes are valuable and accurate representations of the data), defining themes, and lastly, writing up analysis for the data (Caulfield, 2019).

To increase the rigor of the results from the thematic analysis, the expertise of three co-raters was sought. The co-raters that were consulted are professionals with a background in research, Psychology, Psychometrics, and Guidance and Counseling. These co-raters were invited to perform their own thematic analysis of the collected data as guided by the provided coding protocol. Afterward, common themes that emerged among the researchers and co-raters' treatment of data

were used in drawing the general themes and subthemes. The finalized themes and subthemes were constructed by the researchers with the validation and enhancement from the output of the sought co-raters.

5. The Lived Experiences of Digital Immigrant Guidance Counselors in their Facilitation of Guidance and Counseling Services through Information and Communications Technology

The phenomenological experiences of digital immigrant Guidance Counselors in implementing their services through ICT platforms are as follows:

Theme 1: The Discovery of Innovations within the Practice of Guidance and Counseling

There is no doubt that technology has greatly affected the way we live and work. In recent years, advances in computer and telecommunications technologies have made it possible for professionals such as Guidance Counselors to facilitate their services through these platforms. The co-raters used terms such as “innovations of technology in Guidance and Counseling” and “discovering other means to administer counseling”.

The current role of guidance and Guidance Counselor’s ability to provide support and coping strategies to students has changed in recent years due to the advances in technology. An article written by [St Bonaventure University \(2020\)](#) stated that proficient Guidance Counselors have the capabilities to help the students manage their woes with the future and inspire their clientele to continue with their academic pursuits despite the uncertain times. The onset of the pandemic last 2020 has pushed mental health professionals into relying on ICT. Given the increased reliance on digital technology in people’s daily lives, many schools have started to use various forms of technology such as mobile devices and online software to provide students with important information and guidance resources.

Subtheme 1: The Use of ICT Platforms in Delivering Guidance and Counseling Services

A multitude of platforms were used in the facilitation of Guidance and Counseling. Among these ICT platforms included phone calls, use of social media, and registration for the use of Learning Management Systems (LMS). Through these various platforms, the Digital Immigrant Guidance Counselors are able to continue with the administration of their services ([Rollins, 2021](#)). The reoccurrence of the said theme was shared among the corroborators when they coded the same statements as “use of gadgets” or “use of communications software”.

One platform that has been increasingly used for guidance and counseling services during the new normal is through video conferences. Research has shown that video conference counseling can be as effective as traditional in-person counseling with the added benefits of being more accessible and convenient for clients ([Day & Schneider, 2020](#)). Another platform that has gained popularity during the new normal is text messaging services. These services allow clients to communi-

cate with counselors via text messages, which can be particularly helpful for clients who may feel more comfortable expressing themselves in writing than verbally. Text messaging services also offer clients a greater degree of privacy and anonymity than traditional counseling services (Zhang & Fulreader, 2020).

With the respondents, they shared their use of different platforms such as through SMS, social media, and online communications platforms. The specific programs and other ICT are shared by the respondents.

The extent of knowledge with using these ICTs varies among the Digital immigrant Guidance Counselors. Access to these platforms also differs among them depending on the provision of their school administrations. The delivery of the Guidance and Counseling services became more efficient with the use of ICT platforms during the pandemic as evidenced by the responses of the participants. Although there were differences in their knowledge, use, and accessibility of these ICT platforms, most of the respondents appreciated the benefits that come with it.

Subtheme 2: The use of blended modalities to Guidance and Counseling

The new normal has created unprecedented challenges for guidance counselors, with many clients experiencing heightened levels of stress and anxiety. However, information and communication technology has made it easier for Guidance Counselors to deliver services to clients during this difficult time. ICT provided the ability to deliver Guidance and Counseling services remotely. This has been particularly important during the COVID-19 pandemic, as many clients are unable or unwilling to attend in-person counseling sessions. Guidance Counselors can use video conferencing, phone calls, or even messaging services to deliver counseling services remotely, which can be more convenient and accessible for clients (Mullins et al., 2021). This can be particularly helpful for clients who may be hesitant to reach out for help or who may not have access to traditional counseling services (Cooper et al., 2020). The use of both in-person initial assessments and counseling sessions then migrating to ICT later on became a staple during the easing of the lockdown. The use of this blended modality continued to be done by Guidance Counselors even when the lockdown and social distancing protocols were lifted. This is rooted from the convenience on incorporating ICT to the Guidance and Counseling tasks.

The ease of delivery of services for Guidance Counselors during the new normal has been greatly improved by ICT. By using remote delivery methods and other data management tools, The Digital Immigrant Guidance Counselors can continue to provide services to clients despite the challenges posed by the pandemic. Despite the efficiency of the use of the ICT platforms and its benefits, there were reported challenges that came along with it. The second theme would categorize these difficulties into subthemes as well as an explanation anchoring from the responses of the digital immigrant Guidance Counselors.

Theme 2: Emergence of Challenges on the Shift to the Delivery of Guidance and Counseling Programs

The unprecedented circumstances of the new normal pushed policies that al-

lowed for innovations with the delivery of Guidance and Counseling. The disruption to the system that people were accustomed to cause a raveling of the patterns that were once perceived as routinely. As advantageous as it was to incorporate ICT into the experiences of the facilitation of Guidance and Counseling, it was not without any setbacks. Moreover, the personal fears and uncertainty affected the community on an individual basis.

The co-raters and researchers shared overlapping codes during the thematic analysis. Such included “experience of anxiety”, “fear of getting infected”, “issues with ICT” and others which relate to the theme generated.

The disparity between the knowledge of technology and the older generation has not been felt like in the new normal than ever before. Students today grow up in an environment where computers are an integral part of their lives. As a result, it is rare for many students to be unfamiliar with basic computer functions such as the use of a mouse or the operation of a keyboard. In these settings, the ability to manage web-based platforms can be a significant challenge for many Digital Immigrant Guidance Counselors, which can negatively impact their ability to succeed in their work. Counselors who provide support to students using these types of programs need to possess extensive knowledge of the various software platforms that are most commonly used in schools today.

Another area that the research community within the humanities has studied extensively yet not acted upon is the issue of the lack of resources with access to ICT. This theme brings to the surface the novelty of the indigent locale. It was disclosed by Guidance Counselors working in public schools that access to the students became a prevalent barrier to the delivery of guidance and counseling services. Private institutions were not spared from these said challenges whereas the institutions may have supported the Guidance Counselors, but a few clients were still experiencing hindrances to connecting with their Guidance Counselors.

Subtheme 1: Lack of Familiarity on the Use of ICT Platforms

The response from the participants shared their lack of familiarity of digital immigrant professionals with the use of ICT) platforms during the new normal. The challenge poses a significant concern to many organizations.

During the new normal, which emphasized the shift towards remote work and online communication as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of ICT platforms has become even more critical. Research has shown that many guidance counselors, particularly those who are digital immigrants, may not be fully prepared to use ICT in their counseling practices (Chen, 2020). They may lack the necessary technological skills, access to equipment, or familiarity with online counseling platforms. As a result, some Guidance Counselors may struggle to adapt to the new normal and provide the same level of service to their clients as they did before the pandemic. Many organizations have had to adapt quickly to these changes, which have required the use of tools such as video conferencing, online collaboration software, and cloud storage. However, digital immigrant professionals may find these tools challenging to use, particularly if they have not had extensive ex-

posure to them before. They may be less familiar with the interface, find it difficult to navigate different features, or experience technical issues that they are not sure how to troubleshoot.

To overcome this challenge, a handful organization provided training and support for digital immigrant professionals. This training had taken various forms, including online courses, and digital workshops. Organizations can create a culture that encourages experimentation and learning, where employees feel comfortable asking questions and seeking help when needed.

With the lack of familiarity of digital immigrant professionals with the use of ICT platforms during the new normal is a challenge that requires proactive measures from organizations to address. With proper training and support, these professionals can adapt to new ways of working and contribute to the success of their organization (McKenna et al., 2020). Since there is a lack of familiarity of the ICT platforms, skepticism as to its features especially when considering confidentiality of information storage and processing may arise. The viewpoints are further discussed under the next subtheme.

Subtheme 2: Apprehension with the Use of ITC

The apprehension of Digital Immigrant Guidance Counselors served a pivotal viewpoint to the delivery of services by the professionals. One reason for this apprehension is that technology can create a disconnect between the counselor and the client. When counseling is done face-to-face, counselors can pick up on nonverbal cues such as body language, tone of voice, and facial expressions, which are critical in establishing trust and rapport with the client. However, when counseling is done through ICT, these nonverbal cues can be lost, making it difficult for the counselor to establish a meaningful connection with the client. Another challenge of virtual counseling is the loss of nonverbal cues that are important for building rapport and understanding clients' emotions. Without these cues, counselors may struggle to interpret clients' body language or tone of voice, which can hinder the effectiveness of therapy. Furthermore, the pandemic has brought about a significant increase in stress, anxiety, and depression for many people, making it more difficult for them to engage in therapy. This has required counselors to be more flexible and adaptable in their approach, providing support and guidance as needed while also being mindful of their clients' mental health needs.

Counselors may be hesitant to use ICT in counseling because they are not familiar with the technology or do not feel comfortable using it. Many counselors may not have received training in using ICT for counseling, and they may be wary of incorporating technology into their practice without proper training and support. Hence another reason why counselors may be apprehensive about using ICT in counseling is the potential for technical difficulties. Technology can be unreliable and may not always work as intended, causing disruptions in the counseling process. For example, if the internet connection is lost during a counseling session, it can be challenging to maintain the flow of the session and can cause stress and frustration for both the counselor and the client.

Privacy and confidentiality are also major concerns for counselors when using ICT. There is always a risk that sensitive information shared during a counseling session could be intercepted or hacked, which could have serious consequences for the client (Hanley et al., 2020). Counselors need to take extra precautions to ensure that the technology they use is secure and that client information is protected. Furthermore, digital immigrants may feel that their counseling skills and abilities are not transferable to the online environment. They may worry about being able to read nonverbal cues and body language or they may have concerns about the efficacy of online counseling (Birnbaum et al., 2020).

Subtheme 3: Threats and Limitations Brought About by the Pandemic

The pandemic has brought significant challenges to the education sector, including the role of Guidance Counselors in providing support to students. In the new normal, Guidance Counselors face several threats that affect their ability to perform their duties effectively. These threats include changes in student behavior, increased workload, and limited access to resources.

During the initial months of the pandemic, the workload of Guidance Counselors increased. With the transition to online learning and the need for social distancing, counselors must work harder to maintain connections with their students. They must also spend additional time and effort to develop new methods of providing guidance and support, such as virtual counseling sessions and online resources. This has resulted in increased stress and burnout among counselors, who are struggling to manage their workload (American School Counselor Association, 2021).

The health and safety have posed numerous challenges for reaching counseling clients. One of the primary challenges is that the quarantine and limited social interaction mandates prohibited in person counseling. This has made it necessary for counselors to adapt to virtual counseling, which presents its own set of challenges. One of the biggest challenges of virtual counseling is ensuring that clients have access to the necessary technology and internet connection to participate in video sessions. Counselors may need to help clients troubleshoot technical issues or find alternative ways to communicate if video sessions are not possible. As a matter of fact, the response from the locale has highlighted the indigence of most people within the suburban and rural areas.

ICT was not just difficult on the end of Guidance Counselors but to clients, they serve as well. Respondents attribute this to both poverty in Philippines and the unstable access to the internet of the students. The Cordillera Region has a low internet penetration rate of only 24%, which is significantly lower than the national average of 47% (Cruz & Cuaresma, 2021). The lack of telecommunications infrastructure such as fiber-optic cables and cellular towers is a major contributor to this issue. Moreover, the high costs of ICT devices and services, such as computers and internet connections, also pose a challenge for indigent Filipinos. The new normal presented numerous challenges for reaching counseling clients, but with creativity, adaptability, and a commitment to providing quality care, coun-

selors can continue to support their clients through these difficult times.

As surmounting as these specified challenges of the digital immigrant Guidance Counselors faced, a sense of self-empowerment was revealed through intrinsic motivations. These motivations are postulated to stem from internal growth mindset among the respondents.

Theme 3: The Call towards Professional Upskilling

The new landscape where Guidance and Counseling is being delivered creates opportunities for growth. This is where Dweck's Growth Mindset comes in. The Guidance Counselors were found to have a general optimistic view for their personal growth. Many took to the various learning opportunities and applied it to their practice. Despite the setback and growing pains of the adjustment periods, many found their way and settled to the online and blended delivery of Guidance and Counseling.

Subtheme 1: Opportunity for Learning

It was established in the prior themes that the new normal has forced many Guidance Counselors to adapt to a new way of providing support to students through the use of ICT. To meet the demands of the new normal, Guidance Counselors need to enhance their digital skills through various learning opportunities. Many organizations offer professional development programs for Guidance Counselors to enhance their digital skills. For instance, some provides online workshops and webinars on topics such as virtual counseling, social media, and online communication (American School Counselors Association, 2021). Online courses were also made available to provide opportunities for digital immigrant Guidance Counselors to enhance their skills in a flexible manner.

Online colloquiums provided an opportunity for digital immigrant Guidance Counselors to learn from experienced professionals. Many organizations, including the Philippine Guidance and Counseling Association and the Philippine Mental Health Association, offered colloquiums that pair novice counselors and digital immigrant Guidance Counselors with experienced counselors.

Subtheme 2: Discovered Resilience and Growth Mindset among Digital Immigrant Guidance Counselors

The crossroads that was the pandemic has brought about unprecedented changes in the education sector, leading to a new normal in the delivery of guidance and counseling services. The adoption of ICT for counseling, and other support services has been deemed important. The digital immigrant Guidance Counselors have had to adapt to these changes. The emergence of resiliency among these counselors has been critical in ensuring that students continue to receive guidance and support during these challenging times.

Digital immigrant Guidance Counselors have had to overcome numerous challenges as they adjust to the new normal and despite these challenges, the respondents have emerged resilient and adapted to the new normal. For instance, they have developed new skills, such as the use of virtual platforms, and have become more innovative in their approach to counseling.

6. The Effects of Digital Fluency in the Implementation of a Guidance Counselor's Duties during the New Normal

Theme 1: Hesitations Arise as a Result of Limited Knowledge Regarding ICT

Guidance and Counseling, and technology have certainly changed over the years, there are certainly ethical considerations that must be taken into account in order to ensure that the process is conducted in a safe and effective manner. The update is already promulgated among more developed regions but there is an obvious gap with the community of professionals serving in less developed areas.

Subtheme 1: Persistent Preference of Traditional Mode of Delivery

While many digital immigrant Guidance Counselors have adapted to the use of ICT in counseling, some still prefer traditional modes of guidance and counseling. This could be attributed to the themes stated beforehand.

Many digital immigrant Guidance Counselors may have limited experience with technology, which can make them less comfortable using it in counseling, have limited access to technology or may not have the necessary resources to use it effectively in counseling (Williams & Hernandez, 2020).

The respondents shared portions where digital fluency served as a barrier and had difficulty to embrace the use of technology in counseling. Some still prefer traditional modes of counseling. Factors as stated above as well as their individual view lens may all contribute to this preference. Their preference of in-person sessions may be linked to their proficiency in the use of these platforms. Subsequently, this leads to diminished thoughts about their capabilities and while majority of the participants in the study prefer the traditional modes of counseling, they came to a realization that they have to adapt to the new trends brought about by the pandemic. In fact, all of them had to learn to use the online modality in order to accommodate their students during the pandemic.

Subtheme 2: Surfacing Inadequacy due to Low Proficiency

The incorporation of ICT into counseling practice has not been without challenges for digital immigrant guidance counselors, leading to feelings of inadequacy and anxiety. A lack of training and support, technological skills and knowledge, and confidence in the use of technology have been significant barriers.

The use of ICT has become increasingly essential for digital immigrant Guidance Counselors in delivering counseling and support services to students during the pandemic. However, the incorporation of ICT has been challenging for some counselors. For instance, some counselors have reported feeling overwhelmed by the need to learn new technologies and adapt to new counseling platforms, which has contributed to feelings of inadequacy. A study by Cheung and Wong (2021) explored the challenges faced by Guidance Counselors during the pandemic, identified a lack of training and support as significant factors contributing to feelings of incompetence. These negative feelings of inadequacy and insecurities could have led to learned helplessness and closed their learning potentials under a fixed mindset. However, the digital immigrant Guidance Counselors were able to cope

with these feelings through encouragement and support from colleagues who are more adept at using ICT.

Theme 2: The Willingness to Adapt Relies on the Attitude of Digital Immigrant Guidance Counselors towards ICT

The polarized attitudes of the Digital Immigrant Guidance Counselors are fueled more by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. It is important to keep in mind that for effective counseling to occur between a client and a mental health professional, there are a number of factors that must be present in order for the client to feel safe and comfortable enough to share their thoughts and feelings with the counselor. It is important for the client to be able to build trusting relationships with the counselor in order to create a productive environment in which they can feel comfortable sharing their problems and concerns. In addition, it is important for the counselor to demonstrate compassion and empathy toward their clients in order to make them feel safe and respected during the counseling process. The counselor should also be patient and flexible, taking into account the fact that each client is different and may respond differently to different types of interventions. A positive attitude towards ICT could facilitate the stated responsibilities whereas a negative perception of ICT would serve as a hindrance.

Filipino Guidance Counselors exhibited a range of attitudes and perceptions towards ICT adoption even before the pandemic. Some counselors recognized the potential of ICT to enhance their services and increase accessibility for students and parents (Gonzales, 2018). They perceived ICT as a tool to bridge geographical barriers, provide online counseling, and share relevant resources (Lim & Ong, 2019). These counselors embraced technology as a means to improve efficiency, effectiveness, and reach in their practice. However, some counselors expressed reservations about the use of ICT platforms. Concerns included potential data breaches, privacy issues, and the impersonal nature of online interactions (Valiente, 2017). These counselors were skeptical about the ability of ICT to establish a strong rapport with students and deliver personalized counseling (Tioseco, 2016). Limited training and resources were also identified as barriers to effective ICT integration among guidance counselors (Sanchez et al., 2018).

Digital Immigrant Guidance Counselors who showed a growth mindset towards their skills in ICT and Guidance and Counseling continued to create programs relevant to the needs of the clients during the new normal. Those with growth mindsets were the ones who were enthusiastic or eager adopters and innovators who managed to participate in pieces of training held during the initial wave of the pandemic and incorporated the skills into their practice.

Meanwhile, respondents with an apprehensive attitude towards ICT implied the lack of training with the use of the platform, much more with the incorporation of ICT with the profession. They were found to be those with fixed mindsets and have either avoidant or minimalist with their relationship to ICT. These Digital Immigrant Guidance Counselors continue to pine for face-to-face counseling and delivery of guidance services in-person. The limitation they've posted on

themselves leaves a question on the quality and reach of their services towards their school community.

Subtheme 1: Digital Immigrant Guidance Counselors being Proactive with Change

Digital Immigrant Guidance Counselors have had to adjust their counseling practices in response to the new normal of remote counseling and online education. To be proactive, they must be willing to adapt their counseling strategies and integrate technology into their counseling sessions. This can involve using online communication tools, such as video conferencing, email, or chat, to reach out to students and offer support. It is necessary to educate themselves on the latest technology tools and how to use them effectively in counseling sessions (Gonzales & Nye, 2021). By doing so, they can become more comfortable with using technology and can provide more effective counseling services to students.

Being proactive as a digital immigrant Guidance Counselor in the new normal requires a willingness to learn, adapt, and collaborate with others to provide effective counseling services to students in a rapidly changing environment. With that, there are still digital immigrant Guidance Counselors who demonstrated contradictory viewpoints to what was just discussed. The next subtheme elaborates on this posits further.

Subtheme 2: Digital Immigrant Guidance Counselors with Lingering Skepticism of ICT Platforms

Despite the increasing use of technology in counseling, there is still a lingering skepticism among some digital immigrant Guidance Counselors towards adopting ICT into their counseling practices. Some Guidance Counselors may not have access to the necessary technology or infrastructure to conduct online counseling sessions. This can limit their ability to integrate technology into their practice, which can be a barrier to adopting ICT (Bartle-Haring et al., 2018).

Guidance counselors may have concerns about confidentiality and privacy when conducting online counseling sessions. They may be unsure about how to secure the communication channels and protect the client's data. Some may perceive technology as a distraction that could hinder their ability to form a strong therapeutic relationship with their clients. They may believe that technology could create a barrier between themselves and their clients, making it harder to establish trust and rapport. The attitude of some Guidance Counselors towards technology may be influenced by their cultural upbringing and background. For example, some cultures may have a more traditional approach to counseling, and technology may be seen as a departure from that approach (Laux et al., 2019).

The uprooting from the practices from the "once normal" to the contemporary times, the difficulties to understand and navigate the use of ICT, and mistrust in the use of technologies in counseling became factors contributing to the skepticism of some digital immigrant Guidance Counselors towards adopting ICT. Addressing these barriers through training, support, and the development of guidelines can help to promote the use of technology in counseling.

7. The Lived Experiences of Digital Immigrant Guidance Counselors

A derived model has been constructed to showcase the lived experiences of Digital Immigrant Guidance Counselors during the new normal. This model gives a glance into the formulation of what has been the experience of Digital Immigrant Guidance Counselors in the face of the new normal and how these experiences shaped the Guidance and Counseling profession. Themes from the study are incorporated seamlessly to illustrate the digital immigrant practitioners of Guidance and Counseling through an adaptation of the Activity theory that was illustrated in **Figure 1**.

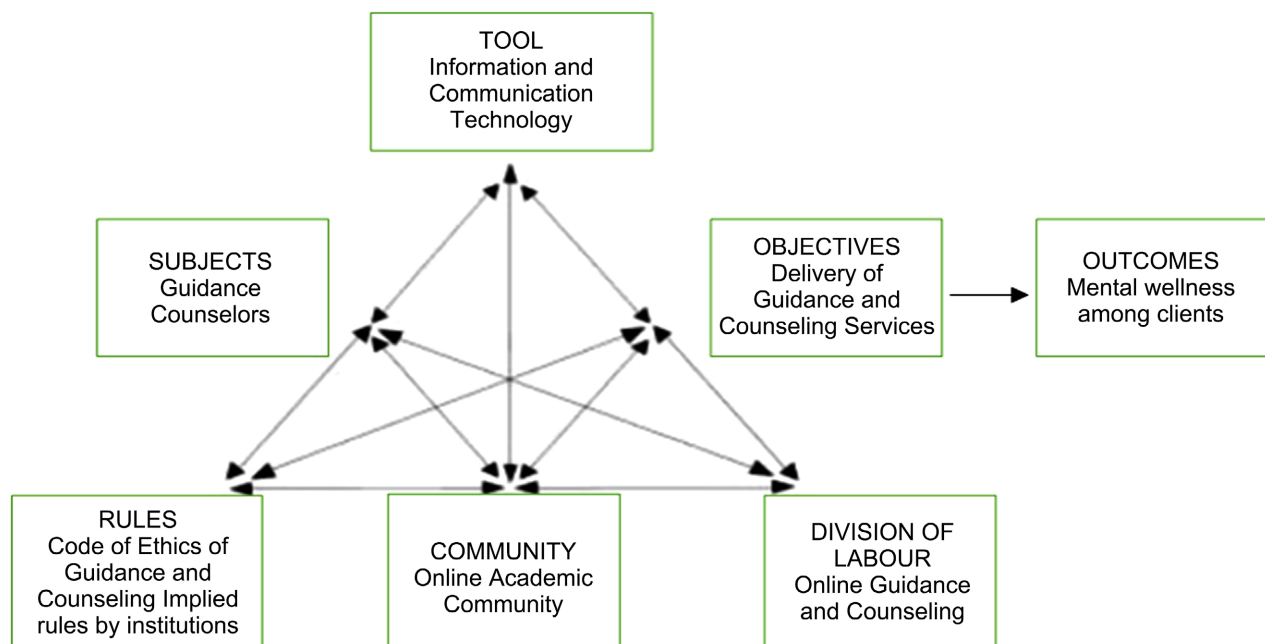


Figure 1. Application of the activity theory to the practice of guidance and counseling as mediated by information and communication technology.

The model demonstrates the relation among the themes that were generated. As the major themes all stem from the experiences of digital immigrant Guidance Counselors, a crucial aspect from the analysis sheds light to the interconnectedness of these experiences and how each of these experiences could lead to the other.

An aspect that the model highlights is the experiences of the Guidance Counselors stem from the discovery of administering Guidance and Counseling services through varied ICT platforms. These platforms then unveiled the varying competencies of these Guidance Counselors with using technology in administering their duties.

From the incorporation of ICT brought by the quarantine mandates comes the branching out of distinct attitudes, those who found an appreciation for the tool, and those who found a lack of familiarity and difficulty to utilize it for Guidance and Counseling services. Those who have appreciated using ICT found opportu-

nities for learning and manifested growth mindset. Another feature of this model presents the community's situation during the new normal as indicated by the theme on the threats and limitations. Within these experiences of these said challenges, there were ways by which the respondents took their conclusion on their experience. Some have uncovered resilience, while others highlighted on the challenges which in turn cascaded to their professional work. These respondents exhibit qualities that are related to enthusiastic adopters and even innovators to the digitalization of Guidance and Counseling. Meanwhile those who have not found appreciation manifested apprehension to the new medium of facilitating their duties as Guidance Counselors. Those who showed these are considered minimalists and reluctant adopters.

Guidance and Counseling have always been a partnership between the clients and the Guidance Counselor. This sets apart Guidance and Counseling from other helping professions. Several identified factors were enumerated which influenced the practice within this shift to the new normal. The integration of ICT was a factor in this relationship. As a helping professional during navigating the shift to the so called new normal, ICT played an integral role in the facilitation of guidance and counseling services. This then leads to this evolution of practice that included the incorporation of various ICT platforms that lead to the ease of delivery of services.

It was noted that several influencing facets facilitated and hindered the delivery of counseling, information, and other related services. Identified factor that blossomed was the push towards self-development. This was the product of opportunities for learning that then lead towards an intrinsic motivation of discovered resilience. Contrary to this, the challenges brought about by the unique setup of the new normal hindered the full blown implementation of the said guidance and counseling services. The challenges can be traced to the lack of familiarity and apprehension of digital immigrants with using ICT, as well as the threats and barriers created by the shift to the new normal.

It then boils down to the attitudes held by these digital immigrant Guidance Counselors whether they would be proactive to change or merely linger with their skepticism with using ICT as part of their assets to the administration of guidance and counseling in the new normal.

It is impossible to discount the phenomenological experiences of every individual who is involved in this helping relationship while going through the circumstances of the pandemic. It is evident that fear, uncertainty, scarcity of resources, and other imperative hindrances have been shared experiences among the respondents. Having said this, the impact of this has been cascaded to the delivery of guidance and counseling services.

The study delved into qualitative and subjective evaluation of the experiences and the practice of the Guidance and Counseling profession. The evidence of a gap in the administration of guidance and counseling services by the digital immigrants was drawn along with the themes discussing on their experiences.

Below is a postulated model that presents this gap in services provided during the early stages of the new normal.

8. The Gap Created by the New Normal

The new normal created bottleneck or filter that handicapped the delivery of guidance and counseling services to the clients. This was a result of the sum of the phenomenological experiences of the Digital Immigrant Guidance Counselors. To give us then the general overview on the results of the study, the model on the next page shows a simplified conclusion to themes generated in **Figure 2**.

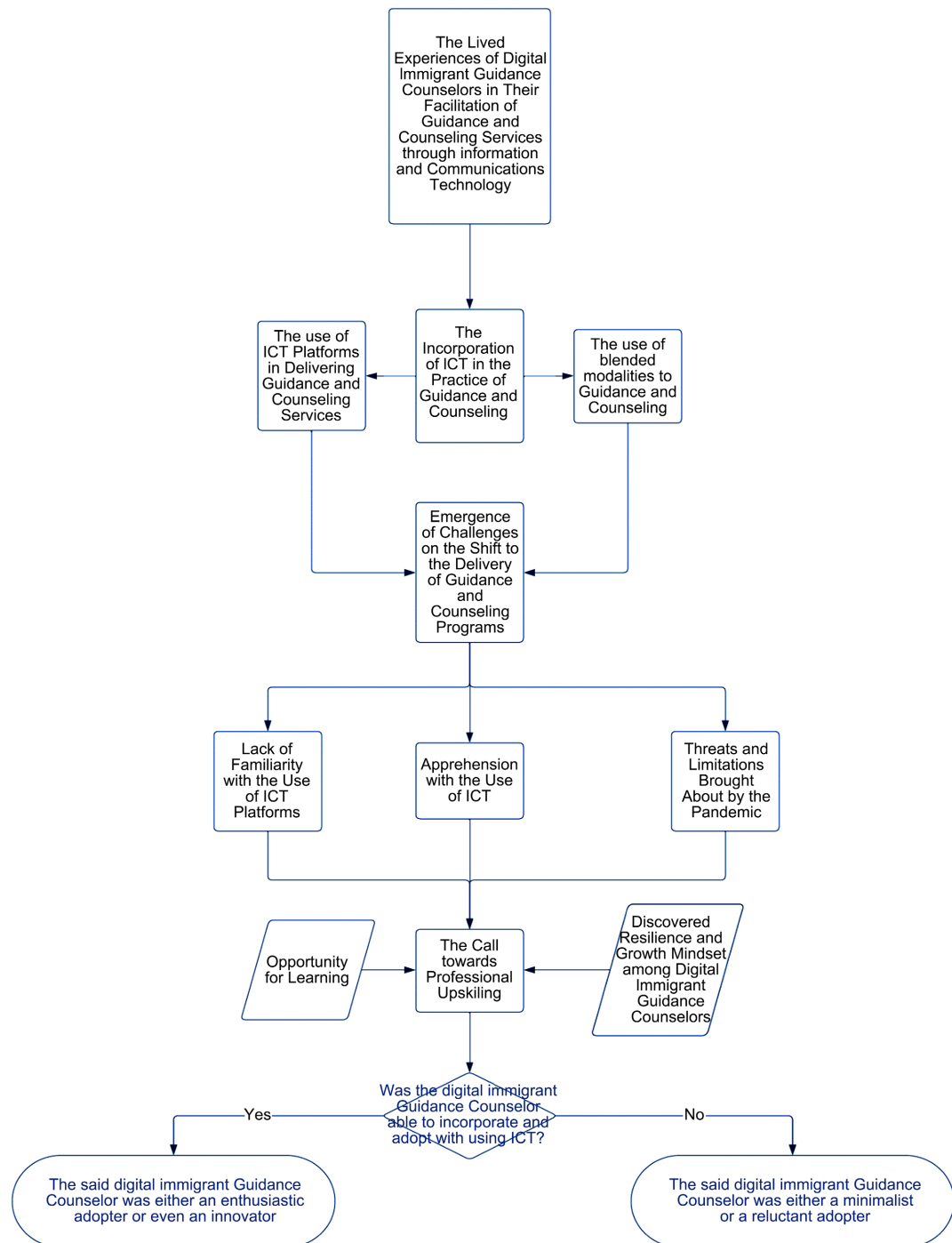


Figure 2. Activity model of digital immigrant guidance counselors in the new normal.

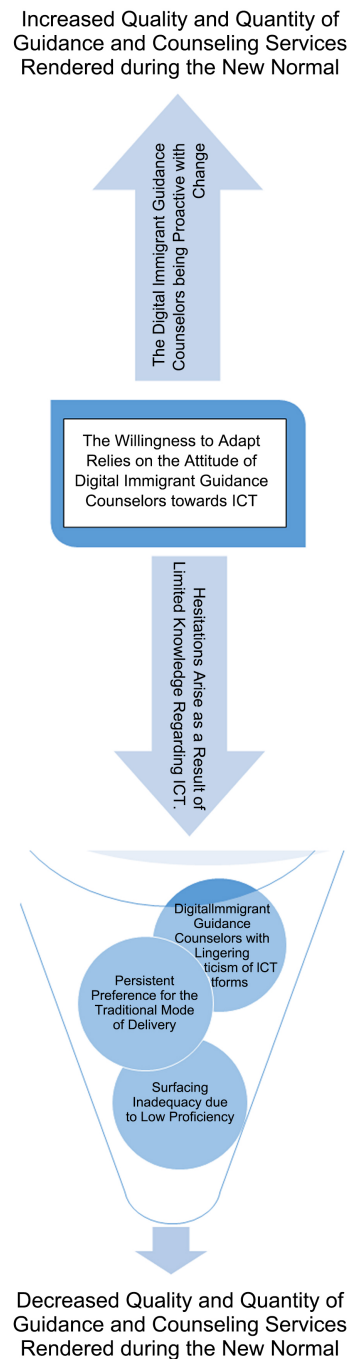


Figure 3. Bottleneck of guidance and counseling services brought by the new normal.

The model generated from the phenomenological analysis, as shown in **Figure 3**, suggests that Digital Immigrant Guidance Counselors who proactively adopted ICT in their service delivery experienced consistent or enhanced client engagement. The enthusiastic adopters managed to use the situation of the pandemic and eventually the new normal to further enhance the mental health programs and connectivity with their counseling cases through the use of ICT. In contrast,

each factor that those unwilling to adapt ICT during the new normal results in the diminishment of either the quality of the services provided or the number of clients that could have benefited from the Guidance Counselors. The transition to virtual counseling has posed several challenges for counselors, including reduced client engagement, technical difficulties, and a lack of personal interaction, leading to decreased effectiveness in counseling sessions. As demonstrated on the figure, the digital immigrant Guidance Counselor's attitude towards ICT impacted the quantity and quality of administered services. The decrease was impacted by the conjured themes that could be rooted from the skepticism regarding incorporating ICT to their practice.

These findings highlight the need for further research to explore effective ways of delivering guidance and counseling services during pandemics, ensuring clients receive high-quality support that is still commensurate or if not better than that of when there is an absence of said pandemics.

9. Critical Discourse

A shared experience among the respondents was the need to adjust to the new modality of facilitating both guidance and counseling activities during the shift to the new normal. The impact of the digital fluency of digital immigrant Guidance Counselor's efficiency to deliver these said services. The adjustment period to the ICT administered was affected by several factors including the access to the resources, support of their respective institutions, and the mindset of the Guidance Counselors to the said shift.

The unavailability of access to ICT prior to and during the new normal stifled the facilitation of Guidance and Counseling. The challenge to have the devices needed or the connectivity served as the primary barrier between the learners and the Guidance Counselors. This is heavily insinuated by the respondents from public schools and those universities catering to indigent students.

Considering the lack of familiarity of digital immigrant Guidance Counselors with ICT, the delivery of both guidance services was, based on their subjective evaluations, lacking in efficacy. Counseling services were also negatively impacted by the lack of digital fluency from both sides of the Guidance Counselors and clients. The attitude towards ICT was heavily skewed towards the opposition towards it, with problems with communications, standardization, and overall apprehension towards it.

Despite the overwhelming challenges of the shift to the new normal, the Guidance Counselors of the Baguio City and surrounding areas persevered towards the aid of learners in need. They managed to find a workaround with the barriers of the limited social interactions, and find means to deliver their responsibilities. The digital immigrant Guidance Counselors either resorted to self-learning, explorations, asking assistance from knowledgeable workmates, and administering responsible in-person counseling sessions while conforming to the social distancing protocols.

10. Conclusion and Recommendation

The conclusions were drawn from the study:

1) Based on the results of the phenomenological approach to the qualitative data, it was observed that in the new normal, digital immigrant Guidance Counselors have discovered innovations in the practice of Guidance and Counseling. They've been made aware of the new modalities that are used to administer Guidance and Counseling services as well as finding out the advantageous efficiency of incorporating ICT to their tasks. The digital Immigrant Guidance Counselors also experienced challenges, particularly caused by their lack of familiarity and apprehension to ICT. Another form of these challenges in the circumstance and the community consider the threats of the pandemic. A final common theme among the experiences of digital immigrant Guidance Counselors is a resounding call towards professional upscaling. This can be attributed both external and internal factors. The analysis uncovered that the new normal brought about many opportunities for learning and an internal motivation within them upon uncovering resilience that led to growth among the Guidance Counselors.

2) The results of the qualitative analysis demonstrated that there was a spectrum of digital fluency among the digital immigrant Guidance Counselors. There were concerns mentioned which lead to the theme on hesitation towards ICT and this was rooted from surfacing inadequacy with the use of ICT and their preference to traditional in-person delivery of Guidance and Counseling. Although having started as reluctant adopters who showed hesitation with the use of ICT in administering Guidance and Counseling services, there was a reported shift in attitude among several respondents as the new normal unfolded. They have mentioned on their willingness to adapt and keep themselves abreast with the changes happening. It was also noted that despite adopting ICT as a means to deliver Guidance and Counseling services, there is still lingering skepticism within some respondents with ICT.

In light of the aforementioned conclusions, the following recommendations could be drawn to enhance the current state of the Guidance and Counseling profession through the changing times, and to benefit the dignified digital immigrants still willing to render their services in the field:

Digital Immigrant Guidance Counselors may continue to explore the various Guidelines and best practices of those professionals with prior experience in the field of ICT. They are also urged to tinker with various platforms that could aid in the administration of guidance and counseling in their institutions while keeping in mind the implementing rules and regulations as set by the Professional Regulations Committee, the Constitution, and the international standards for Counselors.

Digital immigrant Guidance Counselors may empower themselves with fresh innovations and knowledge on ICT through establishing professional learning communities within their organizations, and even in their local areas. It is advocated that the digital immigrants initiate a dialogue with digital natives to halt the

gatekeeping of these innovations that they inherently have in order to equalize the ground by which all Guidance Counselors wish to engage in serving the clientele.

School administrations, accredited Guidance and Counseling organizations, and government leaders are urged to look into conducting and circulating a standardized practice of ICT facilitated counseling guidelines that all counselors must follow in order to do away with the inhibitions and apprehension towards digital guidance and counseling. It is also proposed that a greater focus on guidance and counseling must be looked into as it is crucial to the holistic growth and thriving among the learners. It is to be noted that the issues with the apprehension and barriers to the facilitation of Guidance and Counseling through ICT are rooted in the issue of missed learning opportunities. Inhibition to ICT platforms and lack of familiarity may be addressed by providing counselors opportunities for growth specifically where they may improve their practical skills that are being exposed to the use of ICT platforms. Training may also focus on topics like digital literacy and online safety.

Future researchers may look into the specific services and quality of work done by digital immigrants and evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of their services through a quantitative aspect. It is also suggested that they look further into the deeper impact of the shift to the new normal to the growth mindset and motivations of various age groups of the guidance and counseling profession.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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