The Dynamics of Digital Counseling During the Covid-19 Pandemic

Putri Keniza Balqis, Robi'atur Rokhmah Salsabiila
UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya
putrikenza22@gmail.com, salsarr05@gmail.com

Corresponding Autor: Putri Keniza Balqis

Abstract: The advancement of information technology has introduced innovations in counseling services through digital platforms. This phenomenon became particularly relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic, when face-to-face interactions were limited. This study aims to analyze the dynamics of digital counseling use, focusing on digital counseling techniques from an Islamic perspective. A qualitative case study approach was employed, involving a single informant who participated in digital counseling during the pandemic. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and analyzed using data reduction and narrative presentation techniques. Findings indicate that digital counseling allows clients to receive guidance flexibly and effectively, enhances emotional regulation, resolves personal and academic issues, and encourages openness during counseling sessions. Techniques applied, including active listening, reflection, empathy, exploration, open-ended questions, and paraphrasing, effectively support interactive and adaptive digital sessions. Moreover, integrating Islamic values, such as dhikr and self-reflection, provides spiritual tranquility. This study concludes that digital counseling is not merely a substitute for face-to-face sessions but also a means of developing character, emotional skills, and mental well-being,

Keywords: Digital Counseling, Islamic Counseling, COVID-19, Counseling Techniques, Mental Well-Being

INTRODUCTION

The development of information technology in the modern era has brought significant changes to various aspects of life, including the field of counseling services. In the past, counseling was predominantly conducted face-to-face; however, a new form known as *digital counseling* has now emerged. Digital counseling utilizes technology-based media such as applications, websites, and online communication platforms as means of interaction between counselors and clients. This shift not only expands access to counseling services but also offers flexibility in terms of time and place. Nevertheless, digital counseling also presents several challenges, such as limited direct interaction, potential privacy concerns, and technical barriers that may affect service effectiveness. This phenomenon is particularly interesting to study, especially in relation to the needs of modern society, which has become increasingly dependent on technology (Chintyasari, 2025).

From an Islamic perspective, counseling holds a deeper dimension compared to secular approaches. Counseling in Islam not only focuses on psychological aspects but also emphasizes spiritual dimensions grounded in the Qur'an, Hadith, and the thoughts of Islamic scholars. Fundamental principles such as *tawhid* (oneness of God), *sabr* (patience), *shukr* (gratitude), *muhasabah*

(self-reflection), *taubah* (repentance), *du'a* (supplication), and *dhikr* (remembrance of God) serve as essential guidelines in the Islamic counseling process. Through this approach, counseling aims not only to address psychological issues but also to cultivate inner peace and closeness to Allah. This makes Islamic counseling unique, as it touches upon the spiritual dimension often neglected in secular counseling. Along with technological advancement, these Islamic values remain highly relevant and can be effectively applied even through digital media.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which struck the world in early 2020, further emphasized the importance of digital counseling. Social restrictions, isolation, and the limitations of face-to-face interactions have had serious impacts on public mental health. Many individuals have experienced stress, anxiety, loneliness, and even family conflicts due to drastic changes in daily life patterns. In such circumstances, digital counseling has become an alternative solution that enables counselors to continue providing services online. The presence of *Islamic digital counseling* has become increasingly significant, as it not only offers psychological support but also strengthens the spiritual aspect something that is deeply needed during times of crisis (Konseling, Pendidikan, & Padang, 2025a).

Previous studies have extensively discussed both digital counseling and Islamic counseling separately. However, research that specifically highlights the integration of these two approaches—particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic—remains relatively limited. In fact, examining digital counseling based on Islamic values is crucial to address the challenges of the modern era while fulfilling the needs of the Muslim community. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by exploring how digital counseling is implemented from an Islamic perspective, especially during the pandemic period.

The objectives of this study are to explain the concept of digital counseling, describe counseling from an Islamic perspective, and analyze the relevance of Islamic digital counseling during the COVID-19 pandemic. Theoretically, this research is expected to enrich the literature on Islamic counseling in the modern context. Practically, it provides valuable insights for counselors, educators, and the wider community in optimizing technology for counseling services that are not only psychologically effective but also aligned with Islamic values. Hence, this study carries significant urgency, given its relevance to the needs of modern society that faces both global challenges and spiritual demands (Konseling, Pendidikan, & Padang, 2025b).

METHOD

The research method used in this study is a qualitative approach with a case study design. Qualitative research is essentially a scientific method used to obtain data for specific purposes and uses. It is grounded in an inductive way of thinking, based on objective and participatory observation of social phenomena. The social phenomena in question include conditions of the past, present, and even the future, and are related to objects of study in the fields of social sciences, economics, culture, law, history, humanities, and other related disciplines, in order to arrive at an objective conclusion (Ummah, 2019).

The focus of this research lies in understanding the individual experience of participating in digital counseling during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data were collected through an in-depth interview with an informant who had participated in digital counseling during the pandemic. The interview aimed to explore the informant's experiences, perceptions, and the benefits they felt while engaging in digital counseling services.

Research Design

This qualitative case study was designed to gain an in-depth understanding of the client's experience in digital counseling during the COVID-19 pandemic. The case study method was chosen because it allows the researcher to explore a phenomenon holistically from the perspective of individuals directly involved. The research subject consisted of one informant selected using purposive sampling.

Research Stages

The stages of this study began with determining the informant—an individual who had participated in digital counseling during the COVID-19 pandemic. Next, the researcher prepared an interview guide to serve as the basis for the questions.

The interview was conducted online via WhatsApp Call and lasted approximately 20–30 minutes. With the informant's consent, the interview was recorded and then fully transcribed. After transcription, the researcher conducted a *member checking* process to ensure that the collected data accurately reflected the informant's actual experience.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the techniques of data reduction and data presentation. During the data reduction stage, all information obtained throughout the research process was analyzed and simplified, emphasizing key aspects related to the implementation and effectiveness of digital counseling during the pandemic, so that the data could be organized systematically.

Subsequently, the researcher presented and managed the data to better understand how digital-based counseling techniques were applied in interactions between counselor and client. In this study, data reduction was conducted using information gathered from interviews with a participant directly involved in online counseling, ensuring that the data collected were relevant to the dynamics of digital counseling during the pandemic.

The data presentation stage involved organizing and describing the collected data according to the focus of the study. The purpose of presenting the data was to understand the actual events and to help determine the next steps. Through narrative presentation, the researcher connected the data with real-life experiences to provide a deeper understanding of the studied phenomenon.

No	Question
1	How was your experience participating in digital counseling services during the pandemic?
2	To what extent did digital counseling help you?
3	How did the counselor facilitate the digital counseling sessions to make you feel comfortable and open?

RESULT

Implementation and Effectiveness of Digital Counseling During the Pandemic

Digital counseling programs or services represent a form of guidance and counseling implemented as an alternative to face-to-face counseling, which was restricted due to health protocols during the COVID-19 pandemic. Clients participated in sessions through digital media such as video call platforms or messaging applications, allowing them to continue receiving direct guidance from home.

During the initial phase, clients experienced some adaptation challenges since counseling was typically conducted in person. However, over time, they began to feel more comfortable and accustomed to the digital method. This allowed them to open up more easily and express issues

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that might have been difficult to share in face-to-face settings. Such an approach enabled counselors to provide more personalized guidance aligned with clients' needs, thus enhancing the effectiveness of the counseling process.

The flexibility of digital counseling also emerged as a key factor supporting successful sessions. Clients could attend sessions based on available schedules, utilize the allocated time effectively, and—when necessary—communicate through chat for urgent matters. The use of digital media made clients feel more at ease, focused, and motivated to actively engage in the sessions.

Based on the client's experience, digital counseling proved effective in helping them resolve personal and academic problems, improve their ability to manage stress and emotions, and develop strategies for handling daily pressures. Although some aspects might still feel more comfortable when conducted face-to-face, digital counseling remained a practical, flexible, and adaptive alternative—particularly during the pandemic when in-person meetings were highly restricted.

Interview Material

Researcher	1. How was your experience participating in digital counseling services during the pandemic? 2. To what extent did digital counseling help you?
Informant	"At first, I was a bit confused because I was used to face-to-face counseling, but after a few sessions, I started to get used to it and felt comfortable. The digital counseling process allowed me to attend sessions from home more flexibly while still receiving the guidance I needed. It was quite effective in helping me resolve both personal and academic issues. I felt calmer, more confident, and able to make better decisions. The counselor provided strategies for dealing with daily pressures. Although some things might feel easier face-to-face, overall, digital counseling was a very useful alternative during the pandemic."
Reflection	Based on the interview results, the informant explained their experience regarding the implementation and effectiveness of digital counseling during the pandemic.

Techniques of Digital-Based Counseling

In addition to implementation and effectiveness, digital counseling also demonstrated various techniques used to facilitate the online counseling process. Based on the interview data, clients participated in sessions conducted through video call platforms or messaging applications with clear structures, measurable durations, and high flexibility—allowing them to adjust the timing and location of sessions according to their personal needs.

During the sessions, counselors applied techniques that encouraged clients to express personal or academic issues more openly. These included the use of open-ended questions, the option to communicate via chat for urgent concerns, and the establishment of interactive sessions designed to maintain client focus. Clients reported that such an approach made them feel more comfortable and motivated to participate actively.

The use of digital media also allowed counselors to manage session timing and flow efficiently, ensuring each session remained effective despite the distance. Moreover, counselors could directly provide coping strategies through discussion and chat, helping clients develop adaptive responses to daily pressures, including academic and personal stress.

These findings indicate that digital counseling is not merely a substitute for face-to-face counseling but also a platform for developing new, adaptive, and interactive counseling techniques tailored to clients' needs in the digital era. The techniques integrate structured sessions, flexible media, and effective communication strategies, thus fostering client openness and supporting the overall success of the counseling process.

Interview Material

Researcher	How did the counselor facilitate the digital counseling sessions to make you feel comfortable and open?
Informant	"Usually, the counselor starts by asking how I'm doing and how I feel, which makes me feel cared for. Then they ask easy but thought-provoking questions, such as about stress or study problems. I'm given time to talk without being interrupted, and sometimes the counselor shares short tips through chat. This approach makes me feel more comfortable, less anxious, and more confident to talk about things I usually keep to myself."
Reflection	Based on the interview, the informant described how the counselor applied specific techniques to ensure comfort and openness in digital counseling sessions during the pandemic.

DISCUSSION

In accordance with the concept of qualitative research, this study, after presenting data related to the implementation and effectiveness of digital counseling during the COVID-19 pandemic and understanding how digital-based counseling techniques were applied in counselor–client interactions, proceeds to the discussion stage. The discussion in this study relates directly to the data that have been presented. The following is the form of the discussion:

Implementation and Effectiveness of Digital Counseling During the Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic brought significant changes to the field of counseling. Face-to-face interactions became limited, prompting counselors to utilize digital media such as Zoom, WhatsApp, Google Meet, and other specialized counseling applications. Digital counseling was conducted regularly with scheduled sessions and clear durations, allowing clients to receive effective services even remotely.

During online sessions, counselors continued to apply fundamental counseling principles such as active listening, empathy, and exploration of client experiences. Digital media enabled counselors to build safe and comfortable relationships, ensuring that clients felt cared for and supported. Through a combination of verbal and non-verbal communication, clients were still able to express their feelings and receive the necessary guidance.

The effectiveness of digital counseling was evident in the clients' ability to share experiences, gain psychological support, and find solutions to their problems. Other advantages included time flexibility, health safety, and accessibility for clients from various locations. With the proper application of counseling techniques, digital sessions were proven to be as valuable as face-to-face sessions, helping clients gain self-understanding and strengthening their coping skills in dealing with the stress of the pandemic.

In the context of Islamic Counseling, inner peace could also be achieved through spiritual reminders, as stated in the Qur'an:

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"Those who believe and whose hearts find peace in the remembrance of Allah. Indeed, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find peace."(Ar-Ra'd: 28).

The implementation and effectiveness of digital counseling during the pandemic encouraged clients to remain active in managing emotions, facing challenges, and developing self-skills despite online interactions. This shows that digital counseling not only helps clients solve personal problems but also serves as a means of building safe and supportive counselor–client relationships. Therefore, digital counseling contributes significantly to clients' mental well-being, self-confidence, and coping abilities amid pandemic pressures.

For clients, digital counseling became an important medium for fostering self-reflection, empathy, and effective communication. Active participation in online sessions trained clients to become more open, express emotions, and gain a deeper understanding of themselves.

Thus, it can be concluded that the implementation of digital counseling during the pandemic era was not merely a medium of remote interaction but also an avenue for developing essential emotional and social skills such as empathy, confidence, and stress management.

Counseling Techniques Based on Digital Media

In the digital era, counseling is no longer limited to face-to-face interactions. Counselors can now utilize online platforms such as Zoom, WhatsApp, or other counseling applications to engage with clients. Although the medium has changed, the core principles of counseling remain the same understanding clients' conditions, feelings, and needs. Therefore, counselors need to apply effective techniques to ensure that digital counseling sessions remain interactive and meaningful.

In guidance and counseling, counseling techniques are specific steps used by counselors to understand their clients. Several key techniques applicable in digital counseling include:

1. Attending (Active Listening)

    Attending refers to the counselor's behavior of engaging the client through eye contact, body language, and verbal communication. This technique helps clients feel safe, enhances self-confidence, and encourages openness. For instance, nodding, maintaining eye contact, and giving brief verbal responses during digital conversations. According to Carkhuff (1983), full attention through facial expressions and posture strengthens the counseling relationship.

2. Reflection (Restating the Client's Thoughts and Feelings)

    Reflection involves mirroring the client's thoughts, feelings, and experiences using the counselor's own words. For example, if a client says, *"I feel anxious about my presentation,"* the counselor might respond, *"So, you're feeling anxious about that presentation."* This technique helps clients feel heard and strengthens rapport.

3. Empathy (Understanding and Valuing the Client's Feelings)

    Empathy is the counselor's ability to sense the client's experiences and place themselves in the client's position. Empathy is expressed through tone, facial expressions, and verbal acknowledgment. For example: *"I can understand how difficult this situation must be for you."* This enhances safety and emotional connection in digital counseling.

4. Exploration (Exploring the Client's Problems and Experiences)

    Exploration involves delving into the client's thoughts, feelings, and experiences using open-ended questions such as *"Tell me more about that experience."* This encourages expression without fear or pressure.

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5. Minimal Encouragement

    This technique uses short responses to encourage clients to continue talking, such as *"I see," "Go on,"* or *"Can you tell me more about that?"* It keeps the client engaged and open during digital sessions.

6. Closed Questions

    Closed questions are used to obtain specific information or clarify issues, such as *"Do you feel better after talking with your friend?"* Responses are typically short — "yes" or "no."

7. Open Questions

    Open questions allow clients to respond in more detail, such as *"How did you feel when that happened?"* This technique fosters reflection and deeper emotional expression.

8. Paraphrasing

    Paraphrasing helps counselors capture the main message of the client's statement in their own words, e.g., *"So, you feel unappreciated in that relationship?"* This clarifies communication and shows the counselor's active presence.

9. Leading

    The leading technique is used to guide conversations back on track, helping clients reflect and gain deeper self-understanding, such as *"How does this relate to your personal values?"*

10. Summarizing

    Summarizing is used to conclude discussions temporarily, helping clients see the overall picture and focus on main issues. It enhances understanding and allows clients to evaluate their emotions and experiences (Hamdanah, 2022).

    The implementation of digital counseling during the pandemic proceeded smoothly because it was designed to meet clients' needs and counseling objectives helping them overcome personal, emotional, and social difficulties. Digital counseling proved appropriate because it allowed flexible, safe, and effective interactions through platforms such as Zoom, WhatsApp, and other dedicated applications.

    Based on interviews and observations, the implementation of digital counseling showed positive impacts on clients. These include improved emotional expression, self-understanding, and emotional regulation. Furthermore, digital counseling strengthened counselor–client relationships, fostering a safe and supportive environment for sharing experiences much like how community programs such as *jimpitan* strengthen social bonds among neighbors.

    From the discussion above, it can be concluded that the application of digital-based counseling techniques has significant positive impacts, helping clients develop empathy, self-responsibility, and better coping skills in facing stress or difficulties. With appropriate techniques, digital counseling becomes not only a medium of remote communication but also a means for character development and holistic mental well-being.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of digital counseling during the COVID-19 pandemic has proven effective in helping clients manage emotions, resolve personal and academic problems, and foster openness during counseling sessions. Digital-based counseling techniques — such as active listening, reflection, empathy, open-ended questioning, and paraphrasing — supported an interactive and adaptive process despite being conducted online.

The integration of Islamic values, including *dhikr* (remembrance of Allah) and self-reflection, provided clients with inner peace. Thus, digital counseling serves not only as an alternative to face-

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to-face sessions but also as a means of character development, emotional skills enhancement, and mental well-being for the modern Muslim community.

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