

Counseling Program for Developing Values among General Secondary School Students in the Sultanate of Oman

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Abstract

This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of a counseling program designed to develop values among general secondary school students in the Sultanate of Oman, in light of the growing behavioral challenges associated with the excessive use of social media. The significance of the study lies in its response to contemporary educational needs related to strengthening ethical, social, and academic values among adolescents. The study adopted a quasi-experimental approach using a one-group pre-test/post-test design, and implemented a counseling program consisting of twelve sessions focused on developing values and promoting responsible digital behavior. The study utilized a Social Media Awareness Scale—comprising six dimensions: compulsive preoccupation, psychological dimension, social dimension, academic dimension, physical dimension, and ethical dimension. The findings revealed statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the pre- and post-tests in favor of the post-test, indicating the program's effectiveness in reducing negative behaviors and enhancing ethical, social, and academic values among students. The results were discussed in light of previous literature that highlights the effectiveness of reality counseling approaches in strengthening self-responsibility and modifying maladaptive behaviors. The study recommends adopting and generalizing the program in Omani schools and integrating it within school counseling services.

Keywords: Ethical Values, Reality Counseling, Counseling Program, Digital Awareness, Social Media, Secondary School Students, Digital Responsibility

Introduction

The contemporary world is witnessing rapid changes driven by technological advancement and the widespread use of social media. These platforms have become an integral part of students' lives, particularly during adolescence. This proliferation has led to the emergence of new behavioral patterns with varying positive and negative impacts. Consequently, many researchers have been prompted to study the reflection of social media on the moral, social, and academic values of students (Al-Shehri, 2023; Al-Fadhli, 2021).

In the Omani context, official reports confirm that excessive smartphone usage among high school students has reached unprecedented levels, with the majority spending over four hours daily on social media applications (Ministry of Education, 2021). This has affected their academic and social lifestyles, leading to a decline in genuine social interaction and an increase in isolation and immersion in virtual worlds. Local studies also indicate the emergence of diminished moral values associated with negative internet usage, including the spread of cyberbullying, the exchange of inappropriate content, and a decline in respect for time and responsibility (Al-Hadhrami, 2023; Al-Khawali, 2024).

Theoretically, this study is grounded in Glasser's Reality Therapy (Glasser, 2000), which is based on the principle that human behavior is largely a choice and that individuals are capable of changing their behavior if they possess awareness and responsibility. Recent studies indicate that Reality Therapy applications have proven effective in promoting responsible behaviors among students, particularly those related to technology (Brooks, 2021; Hammoud & Mahdi, 2022).

Given the growing value-based tension between real life and digital life, there is an urgent need to implement structured counseling programs based on scientific theories aimed at enhancing the moral, social, and academic values of students. This is the primary objective of the current research.

Study Problem and Questions

The study problem manifests in the growing negative behaviors resulting from the improper use of social media among high school students. These include compulsive preoccupation, academic decline, weakened social relationships, and deteriorating moral boundaries—phenomena confirmed by previous studies (Farouq, 2015; Jamal, 2016; Mosalanejad et al., 2020).

Al-Farsi (2024) conducted a study on a sample of students at A'Sharqiyah University to reveal the degree of social media's impact on the cultural identity of higher education students in the Sultanate of Oman and ways to prevent it. The study recommended the necessity of providing awareness and educational programs, enhancing students' digital awareness regarding the safe and responsible use of social media, providing forums and spaces for student discussion on cultural identity and the psychological, social, and educational impacts of social media, and encouraging students to participate in social and cultural activities outside of social media.

The study defines the problem through the following main question:

What is the effectiveness of a counseling program based on Reality Therapy in developing values among general high school students in the Sultanate of Oman?

This branches into the following sub-questions regarding the program's role:

- Are there statistically significant differences between the pre- and post-measurements in the moral dimension on the Awareness of Internet Use Scale?
- Are there statistically significant differences between the pre- and post-measurements in the social dimension on the Awareness of Internet Use Scale?
- Are there statistically significant differences between the pre- and post-measurements in the academic dimension on the Awareness of Internet Use Scale?

Significance of the Study

First: Theoretical Significance

This study seeks to contribute to bridging the gap between studies addressing traditional values and those investigating contemporary digital values. Additionally, it provides a research model combining Reality Therapy and value enhancement in a digital environment, supporting modern trends that emphasize the importance of Digital Citizenship (Ribble, 2020).

Second: Practical Significance

The practical significance lies in providing educational counselors with a ready-to-implement program in schools, supporting decision-makers in formulating policies that protect students from the risks of negative social media usage, and improving students' skills in making ethical decisions in the digital environment.

Methodology and Procedures

To determine the appropriate sample size for the current study, which targeted eleventh-grade students in the Sultanate of Oman, it was necessary to select a reliable scientific method. This ensures accurate representation of the study population and contributes to highly generalizable results. In this step, the researcher relied on the Krejcie and Morgan formula (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970), one of the most renowned statistical formulas used in educational and social research. It provides an accurate quantitative estimate of the required sample size from any finite population, based on solid statistical foundations and an acceptable significance level in humanities research.

The total study population for the current research consisted of 1,656 students. This is considered a medium-sized human population in educational studies, making the Krejcie and Morgan formula perfectly suitable. The formula is based on a set of fundamental statistical assumptions, notably: assuming a population homogeneity proportion of (0.50), which is the most conservative percentage as it yields the maximum possible sample size. It also adopts a significance level of ($\alpha = 0.05$), an allowable margin of error ($d = 0.05$), and utilizes the Chi-square value at one degree of freedom, which equals (3.841). This reflects the minimum statistical power required to ensure fair population representation. The equation takes the following form:

$$n = \frac{x^2 N p (1 - p)}{d^2 (N - 1) + x^2 p (1 - p)}$$

By applying the specific values of the current study population—where $N = 1656$, $P = 0.50$, $d = 0.05$, and $X^2 = 3.841$ —the substitution into the equation yields an appropriate sample size of approximately 312 participants. The study tool was applied to 350 students. This number is statistically appropriate and not exaggerated, representing the minimum required to obtain data with sufficient significance and explanatory power. It also aligns with the numbers recommended by the Krejcie and Morgan table, which displays ideal sample sizes for various population sizes.

Reaching a sample size of 350 is also practically logical, striking the required balance between the ability to generalize and the feasibility of executing the study procedures. This is especially true concerning the application of counseling programs and measuring their impact, which requires institutional time, effort, and coordination with schools. Accordingly, the researcher adopted a sample size of 350 students to sufficiently represent the study population, enabling the testing of hypotheses and achievement of objectives using a rigorous scientific methodology.

The research adopted a one-group quasi-experimental design, utilizing pre- and post-measurements.

- **Study Sample:** Comprised eleventh-grade students in the Dhofar Governorate. The researcher surveyed the students' opinions on the topic by administering a needs analysis questionnaire to 350 students. This aimed to understand their perceptions regarding their level of values and awareness towards social media use and to monitor their views on the requirements to elevate these levels through the developed program.
- **Measurement Tool:** The Awareness of Social Media Use Scale, developed in the original thesis, comprising six dimensions.
- **The Counseling Program:** Consisted of 12 sessions distributed across four main axes:
 1. Values and Responsibility Axis
 2. Digital Behavior Axis
 3. Social Control Axis
 4. Academic Behavioral Planning Axis
- **Statistical Analysis:** Means, Standard Deviations, and Paired Samples T-Test were utilized.

Results and Discussion

First: Results of the Moral Dimension and Discussion

The researcher used the Paired Samples T-Test to compare the means of the moral dimension in the pre- and post-measurements for the same participants on the Awareness of Internet Use Scale. This was to verify whether the intervention produced a statistically significant change within the individuals. The conclusion relies on the t-value, significance value (p), and the confidence interval of the mean difference to clarify the direction and magnitude of the change.

Table 1

Paired Samples T-Test (Moral Dimension)

Variable	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Mean Difference (Pre minus Post)	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)
Moral Dimension	2.1867	3.9600	-1.77333	-8.590	14	0.000

The results showed a statistically significant difference in favor of the post-measurement in the moral dimension, indicating a growth in digital moral values among participants. This is attributed to the program's focus on concepts of responsibility and ethical choice, which aligns with Glasser (2000), who posits that moral behavior results from an individual's awareness of their choices.

The Paired Samples T-Test results indicate a substantial and statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-measurements in the moral dimension. The mean increased from 2.1867 in the pre-test to 3.9600 in the post-test. This significant increase reflects a qualitative shift in behaviors and moral values associated with internet use following the implementation of the developed counseling program. The post-test data showed a remarkable rise in the level of moral commitment. For example, the mean for the item "I am tolerant of the mistakes made by others" rose to 4.1333, and the item "I respect the privacy of others while using the internet" rose to 4.0000. These indicators confirm that the program not only succeeded in curbing unethical behaviors but also contributed to establishing positive interactive patterns reflecting sound digital awareness and values.

These results are interpreted in light of Reality Therapy theory, which centers on responsibility as the cornerstone of moral behavior (Glasser, 1998). The theory asserts that individuals possess freedom of choice and that moral behavior is the result of a person's awareness of their relationship with others and their ability to make positive decisions. The counseling program focused in its initial sessions on the principle of "assuming responsibility," which is essential in forming moral behavior. Students learned to evaluate their digital behavior from the perspective of its impact on others, such as respecting digital privacy and avoiding verbal or emotional harm. These results support Corey (2017), who confirms that Reality Therapy alters values by training individuals to make responsible choices that enhance social harmony.

The moral improvement can also be explained through Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977), which posits that moral behavior is shaped through observation, modeling, and self-regulation. Since the counseling program provided a safe group environment allowing students to exchange experiences and learn from peer behaviors, it contributed to building new standards for ethical conduct in the digital space. Bandura emphasized that self-regulation is central to moral behavior. This was evident in the lower means of items like "I avoid visiting suspicious websites" in the pre-test, followed by a significant increase after the program, indicating a conscious strengthening of moral self-regulation.

The results of this study reflect broad agreement with previous literature on the ethics of internet use. Livingstone & Helsper (2010) pointed out that the ethical use of the internet relies on awareness and skills rather than prohibition, which aligns perfectly with the counseling program's approach. Ribble (2015) demonstrated that building "Digital

Citizenship" requires direct training on values and ethical behaviors in virtual environments, such as respecting privacy and avoiding abuse—the very aspects the program targeted. The results also intersect with Palfrey & Gasser (2008), who found that digital values do not form automatically in adolescents but require structured educational interventions, as proven by the significant improvement in the moral dimension.

Furthermore, the current study aligns with Willard (2007), who confirmed that unethical online behaviors, such as cyberbullying or privacy violations, decrease when students are trained in empathy and moral awareness. This mechanism was evident in the post-test rise of the item "I respect conversations between individuals and groups." The results also align with Patchin & Hinduja (2012), who stated that teaching the value of respecting others reduces harmful behaviors in the digital environment, evident in the improvement of the item "I avoid offending and defaming others."

Finally, this finding is consistent with Al-Shehri (2023), who affirmed that counseling training contributes to developing moral awareness among high school students, particularly regarding internet use.

Second: Results of the Social Dimension and Discussion

To answer the research question ("Are there statistically significant differences between the pre- and post-measurements in the social dimension on the Awareness of Internet Use Scale?"), the researcher compared the means of the pre- and post-measurements using a Paired Samples T-Test to verify the presence of a statistically significant change.

Table 2

Paired Samples T-Test (Social Dimension)

Variable	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Mean Difference (Pre minus Post)	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)
Social Dimension	3.3533	2.3800	0.97333	4.517	14	0.000

The Paired Samples T-Test results show statistically significant differences between the pre- and post-measurements in the social dimension. The mean decreased from 3.3533 before the program to 2.3800 afterward, with a mean difference of 0.97333 and a significance value of $p = 0.000$. This indicates a notable improvement in the level of social awareness related to internet use after the program's implementation. This decrease reflects the students' transition from a high level of negative online social behaviors—such as the tendency to form alternative online friendships at the expense of real-life relationships—to a more balanced level of social media use. This confirms the program's effectiveness in restructuring students' social concepts.

This result can be interpreted through Reality Therapy, where Glasser views the needs for "belonging" and "power" as the most critical drivers of social behavior. When individuals fail to satisfy these needs in reality, they often resort to alternative behaviors that provide quick, albeit illusory, satisfaction, as seen in online relationships. The pre-test results showed that one of the highest-scoring items was "I prefer searching for friends online" (mean = 4.2667), indicating a heavy reliance on virtual relationships to fulfill the need for belonging among some students. After the program, real-life relationships became more prominent in the

students' awareness. This aligns with Reality Therapy's goal of fostering authentic, responsible relationships and holding the student accountable for fulfilling their social needs through effective rather than escapist methods. The program trained students in group sessions to build real-world social skills and redirect belonging needs toward healthy social channels like family and peers.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs supports this interpretation, indicating that the need for belonging immediately follows physiological and safety needs, and failure to fulfill it leads to compensatory behaviors, including immersion in digital relationships. This was reflected in the pre-test stage, where the item "The internet is my only friend" registered a relatively high mean, indicating a sense of social void among some students. With the program's implementation, students could satisfy their belonging needs authentically through interaction within group counseling sessions, leading to a decline in this feeling. This is consistent with Maslow's assertion that satisfying needs authentically reduces reliance on ineffective alternatives.

These results align with several previous studies. Young (1999) indicated that excessive social media use leads to a decline in genuine social relationships and an increased inclination toward virtual ones, which was clearly evident in the pre-test. Al-Khawaja (2014) showed that internet addiction correlates with a decline in the quality of family and social relationships. While the current study agrees with the literature that unregulated internet use threatens real relationships, it stands out by not only diagnosing the problem but also proving—via a Reality Therapy-based program—the possibility of modifying social behavior. This adds a new therapeutic and applied dimension scarcely addressed in previous literature. The results also align with Al-Asqalani's study, which confirmed the effectiveness of Reality Therapy in improving adolescents' social relationships, supporting the capability of this therapeutic approach to modify students' social structures in educational contexts. This result also reinforces Mosalanejad et al. (2020), who confirmed that digital awareness programs improve real-world social communication skills.

Third: Results of the Academic Dimension and Discussion

A Paired Samples T-Test was used to compare the means of the academic dimension in the pre- and post-measurement stages to determine if there was a statistically significant change. This test examines the mean difference within subjects, relying on the t-value and statistical significance (p), while considering degrees of freedom to ascertain if any observed difference represents a true change.

Table 3

Paired Samples T-Test (Academic Dimension)

Variable	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Mean Difference (Pre minus Post)	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)
Academic Dimension	3.0583	2.4583	0.60000	3.103	14	0.008

The results demonstrated an increase in academic awareness regarding time management, controlling distractions, and improving discipline. This aligns with Farouq (2015), who linked digital preoccupation with lower academic achievement. The researcher also noted that

students became more capable of utilizing technology for educational purposes due to training in digital discipline skills.

The Paired Samples T-Test results show statistically significant differences between the pre- and post-measurements in the academic dimension. The mean decreased from 3.0583 to 2.4583 after the program's implementation, with a mean difference of 0.60000 and a significance value of $p = 0.008$. This statistical decline indicates that the counseling program contributed to reducing the negative academic impacts associated with unregulated social media use, which is a major challenge facing high school students. Pre-test data showed high means for negative academic items, such as "Internet use reduces my study time" (mean = 3.7333), indicating a clear impact of digital usage on student achievement and discipline before the program.

This improvement can be interpreted through Reality Therapy, which involves training the individual to adopt responsible behaviors consistent with their long-term goals (Glasser, 1998). The program helped students realize their responsibility toward their study time, particularly through the WDEP model stages (Wants, Doing, Evaluation, Planning), which is highly effective in enhancing self-awareness and goal clarity. The Evaluation stage focused on enabling students to analyze how their heavy internet use conflicted with their academic goals, making them more capable of making realistic decisions regarding time management. This aligns with Corey (2013), who noted that Reality Therapy helps learners transition from ineffective behavior to effective behavior aligned with their future desires.

This interpretation also corresponds with Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1986), which explains that digital behaviors—such as preoccupation with social media—directly affect attention and concentration levels, leading to poor academic performance. However, Bandura posits that behavior can be modified by enhancing self-efficacy, which was achieved in the program by providing students with practical strategies to manage study time and reduce digital distractions. This was evident in the decreased mean of the item "I cut my sleep hours for the internet," an indicator of improved student discipline in managing rest and study times.

The findings agree with several studies discussing the academic impact of social media. Junco (2012) confirmed that heavy usage leads to a clear decline in focus and academic achievement. Kirschner & Karpinski (2010) demonstrated that students who over-utilize social networks obtain lower grades compared to their peers. While the current study intersects with this literature by confirming the negative correlation between excessive use and academic achievement, it differs by demonstrating the ability of a preventive-therapeutic counseling program to mitigate these effects. Transitioning from merely describing the problem to offering an effective educational solution represents a significant scientific addition to the field of digital educational counseling.

Furthermore, this study is consistent with Al-Menayes (2015), who indicated that immersion in social networks leads to poor academic discipline and poor time management, while the current study uniquely demonstrates Reality Therapy's ability to change this behavioral pattern. It also agrees with Rosen et al. (2013), who confirmed that digital multitasking hinders students' working memory; the current study shows that the program helped

students reduce digital multitasking during study time, supporting the decline of negative means in the academic dimension.

Conclusion

The results of the current study demonstrate that the counseling program based on Reality Therapy had a clear and effective impact on improving students' levels of awareness, values, and behavior toward the rational and safe use of social media across all studied dimensions: social, academic, and moral. The pre- and post-measurement tests revealed substantial improvement and general positive trends in student awareness, confirming that the program was not merely a series of activities but a comprehensive counseling intervention that altered the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral structures of the learners.

Through analyzing and interpreting the quantitative results within the theoretical framework and previous literature, it becomes clear that the program relied on distinct Reality Therapy principles, such as assuming responsibility, realizing consequences, evaluating behavior, and realistic planning. These principles proved effective across all dimensions. On a social level, the program helped students rebuild real-life relationships with family and peers, reducing the attraction to virtual relationships that served as unhealthy substitutes for fulfilling belonging needs. This aligns with Glasser's premise that positive social behavior results from an individual's ability to satisfy their needs realistically.

In the academic dimension, the program proved effective in improving time management, enhancing motivation to learn, and reducing digital distractions. This was evident in the lowered means of items related to wasting study hours, sleep disturbances, and poor concentration. This outcome corresponds with educational theories asserting that attention and focus are directly impacted by digital immersion patterns and that providing practical self-management skills can directly reflect on academic performance.

The moral dimension saw the most significant improvement, with the program achieving a substantial rise in means, indicating a fundamental shift in students' understanding of digital moral responsibility. This was reflected in respecting privacy, controlling online dialogue, and avoiding abuse and defamation—values directly tied to the concept of digital citizenship. This profound improvement shows that moral values are not static but can be developed through systematic training relying on modeling, empathy, and reflective thinking, all of which were adopted by the counseling program.

Compared to previous studies, these findings largely align with research trends emphasizing the risks of excessive internet use. However, this study distinguishes itself by not just describing the problem but providing an effective therapeutic and preventive program applied to a sensitive age group in a Gulf school environment. This makes its findings a qualitative addition applicable to educational policies and school counseling programs.

The results agree with literature indicating that Reality Therapy programs enhance student awareness and self-responsibility. Glasser (2000) confirmed that human behavior can be changed by training individuals to recognize personal choices. The findings also align with studies showing that adolescents respond well to interactive and discussion-based programs, particularly those addressing daily behaviors like internet use (Hammoud & Mahdi, 2022).

The findings indicate that:

- Students are capable of modifying their digital behaviors if provided with appropriate counseling.
- Combining Omani religious and social values with Reality Therapy principles was highly effective.
- Practical training is superior to theoretical lectures in modifying social media behaviors.

The research proved the effectiveness of the Reality Therapy-based counseling program in elevating the level of digital values and awareness among high school students in the Sultanate of Oman. There is a pressing need to generalize this program as part of national school counseling programs, given its capacity to address the challenges of the digital age. The researcher recommends integrating digital education into school curricula and developing training programs for teachers and counselors to promote values within the digital environment.

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