

Artificial Intelligence in Counseling: Evaluating Its Strengths, Limitations, and Ethical Considerations in Indian Schools

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Abstract— The growing mental health concerns among students in Indian schools, particularly in the face of academic pressure, social challenges, and limited access to qualified counselors, underscore the need for innovative solutions. Artificial intelligence (AI) offers promising potential to address these gaps in the school counseling ecosystem. This paper explores the integration of AI-driven tools, such as chatbots and virtual therapists, in Indian school settings, analyzing their strengths, limitations, and ethical implications. A qualitative approach was employed, including a review of existing literature, case studies, and expert interviews, to examine the current landscape of AI applications in mental health support and its relevance to Indian schools. AI systems can enhance accessibility by providing 24/7, scalable, and non-judgmental mental health support, particularly in rural and underserved regions. They offer the benefits of consistency, cost-effectiveness, and data-driven insights to monitor students' emotional well-being. However, AI tools are limited in their capacity to replicate the emotional depth, empathy, and nuanced understanding that human counselors bring to complex mental health issues. Ethical concerns, including data privacy and informed consent, further complicate the adoption of AI in school counseling. The paper argues that AI should complement rather than replace human counselors, with a hybrid model that leverages both AI and human expertise to provide more comprehensive and inclusive mental health support. By embracing AI as a supplementary tool, Indian schools can address the growing mental health needs of students while maintaining the vital human element in counseling.

Keywords: Mental Health, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Chatbots, Indian Schools, Counseling

I. INTRODUCTION

As India continues to grapple with an increasing mental health crisis, particularly among adolescents and young adults, the need for effective, accessible counseling in schools is more pressing than ever. Mental health challenges among school students in India, such as anxiety, stress, and depression, are rising at an alarming rate. Traditional counseling services in Indian schools are often limited by factors such as a shortage of qualified mental health professionals, lack of awareness, and social stigma surrounding mental health issues. In this context, artificial intelligence (AI) offers a promising solution. AI-driven tools such as virtual therapists, chatbots, and predictive analytics platforms are becoming increasingly prevalent, providing scalable mental health support (Zhang & Wang, 2024).

This paper explores the application of AI in counseling within Indian schools, examining both the strengths and limitations of AI tools in this context. Specifically, it focuses on how AI can address the accessibility challenges in schools, providing students with immediate, non-judgmental, and consistent support. However, the paper also highlights the significant limitations of AI, particularly in replicating the emotional depth and empathy provided by human counselors. Through existing literature and case studies, this paper discusses the ethical concerns, challenges, and potential applications of AI in the school counseling system, ultimately suggesting that AI can serve as a complementary tool rather than a replacement for human counselors.

II. STRENGTHS OF AI IN COUNSELING

• ACCESSIBILITY AND SCALABILITY

The demand for mental health services in Indian schools far exceeds the capacity of existing counseling systems. According to a study by Balamurugan et al, (2024), a significant proportion of Indian school students face mental health challenges, but there is a serious shortage of qualified counselors, particularly in rural and underprivileged areas. The integration of AI into the

counseling ecosystem can help bridge this gap by providing 24/7 access to mental health support, especially in schools that do not have sufficient mental health professionals.

AI-driven tools such as chatbots and virtual therapists have shown promise in addressing the accessibility challenge. For example, the AI-powered chatbot **Woebot**, which uses Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), could provide scalable mental health support to Indian students (Fitzpatrick et al., 2017). With its ability to engage students at any time of day or night, Woebot helps mitigate the constraints of time and geographical location. In Indian schools, where students often experience high levels of stress due to academic pressure, exam anxiety, and social challenges, these tools can offer immediate emotional relief, provide coping strategies, and guide students toward better mental health practices.

Furthermore, AI tools can provide cost-effective solutions for schools, especially in areas where budgets for mental health services are limited. Schools in rural India, for instance, can benefit from AI-driven mental health interventions that are more affordable and scalable than hiring full-time counselors for every institution (Chakraborty, 2020).

• CONSISTENCY AND NONJUDGMENTAL INTERACTION

One of the key benefits of AI tools in school counseling is the ability to provide consistent and non-judgmental support to students. In Indian schools, many students avoid seeking help due to the social stigma associated with mental health issues. AI-driven systems provide a level of anonymity that can encourage students to open up about their problems, particularly in conservative environments where discussing mental health openly may be frowned upon (Yang et al., 2024).

AI systems, like **Wysa**, another AI chatbot, can offer continuous support without the fear of being judged. These tools can create a safe, non-threatening environment for students to discuss issues ranging from academic stress to familial pressures or peer relationships. The consistent responses of AI-driven systems also ensure that students receive continuous guidance without the variability that can sometimes occur with human counselors, who may be unavailable due to time constraints or emotional burnout. For example, research by Sharma et al. (2020) highlights that students in Indian schools who engaged with AI counseling tools experienced a reduction in feelings of isolation and improved emotional resilience. This study emphasizes the non-judgmental nature of AI-driven interventions and how they can serve as a valuable first point of contact for students who may be hesitant to approach human counselors due to fear of social repercussions.

• DATA-DRIVEN INSIGHTS

AI systems can analyze large datasets to detect patterns in students' behavior, emotions, and academic performance, offering valuable insights into their mental health status. In Indian schools, where resources for one-on-one student counseling are limited, AI tools can serve as a valuable diagnostic tool, identifying students who may be at risk of developing mental health issues. AI systems can track students' interactions, flagging students who display signs of anxiety, depression, or stress, and provide early intervention strategies.

For instance, AI tools like **Crisis Text Line**, which incorporates predictive analytics, can analyze communication patterns and identify keywords or emotional indicators in text-based interactions. This enables the system to assess the urgency of the situation and prioritize students who need immediate human intervention (Torous et al., 2018). In Indian schools, where early intervention is often lacking, such tools can help counselors identify students in need of support even before significant issues arise. By monitoring students' interactions, these AI platforms can track progress over time, providing regular updates on students' mental health status and offering personalized therapeutic resources.

Moreover, AI can play a role in identifying trends and patterns in mental health issues across school populations. By aggregating data from multiple students, AI systems can provide administrators with valuable insights into the mental health climate of the school, allowing them to implement targeted interventions that address widespread issues such as academic stress, peer pressure, or bullying (Sharma et al., 2020). This data-driven approach ensures that interventions are more tailored to the needs of the student body as a whole.

• COST-EFFECTIVENESS

The cost-effectiveness of AI-driven tools is particularly important in the Indian school context, where many schools lack the budget to hire sufficient numbers of qualified counselors. By integrating AI into the counseling framework, schools can provide more affordable mental health support to students. According to studies by Hsu et al. (2023), AI tools can supplement the work

of human counselors, offering support between counseling sessions and ensuring that students receive continuous guidance at a lower cost than traditional therapy sessions.

AI systems like **Woebot** can deliver interventions based on CBT without requiring a trained mental health professional to be present at all times. This allows for the democratization of mental health services, ensuring that students in underfunded schools, especially those in rural areas, have access to support. Additionally, AI tools reduce the administrative burden on human counselors, allowing them to focus on more complex cases that require personal attention, while AI handles routine check-ins and provides basic emotional support.

By reducing the need for full-time human intervention in low-risk cases, AI can make mental health services in Indian schools more sustainable and accessible to all students, regardless of their socio-economic background.

III. LIMITATIONS OF AI IN COUNSELING

• LACK OF EMOTIONAL DEPTH

While AI tools offer numerous advantages in terms of accessibility, consistency, and scalability, they lack the emotional depth and empathy that are essential components of effective counseling. In the context of Indian schools, where students face complex emotional and social challenges, AI systems are unlikely to provide the nuanced support that a trained human counselor can offer.

AI chatbots may simulate empathy by responding with pre-programmed statements, but they cannot engage in the genuine emotional exchange that forms the foundation of human counseling relationships. In Indian schools, where cultural and familial contexts play a significant role in shaping students' mental health, AI tools may struggle to understand the complex interplay of personal, social, and cultural factors affecting a student's emotional well-being (Yang et al., 2024).

Research by Brotherdale et al. (2024) emphasizes that while AI can provide immediate and symptom-focused interventions, it cannot replicate the deep emotional connection and therapeutic alliance that human counselors build over time. Students in Indian schools, particularly those facing issues such as family problems, bullying, or identity struggles, may require the emotional depth and understanding that only a human counselor can provide.

• ETHICAL CONCERNS

The use of AI in counseling within Indian schools raises significant ethical challenges, particularly regarding data privacy and informed consent. Indian students, many of whom are minors, may not fully understand the implications of sharing sensitive mental health data with AI systems. Research by Pandita (np) highlights concern about the potential for data breaches, misuse of personal information, and the violation of privacy in AI-driven platforms.

Moreover, the lack of regulation surrounding AI tools in India means that there is little oversight on how these tools handle students' sensitive data. Schools must ensure that AI systems comply with ethical standards, protecting the privacy and confidentiality of students while also informing them of the risks associated with sharing personal information.

Additionally, informed consent is a critical issue when dealing with minors. Students and their guardians must be fully aware of how AI tools collect, store, and use their data, ensuring that participation in AI-driven counseling programs is voluntary and informed. Schools must adopt transparent policies and provide clear explanations of how AI platforms work to prevent exploitation or misuse of students' personal information (Fitzpatrick et al., 2017).

• CRISIS SITUATIONS

In the case of mental health crises, such as suicidal ideation or severe emotional distress, AI systems are insufficient. While AI tools can assist in identifying at-risk students, they cannot provide the immediate, personalized intervention required to address such high-stakes situations. In Indian schools, where incidents of student suicide and self-harm have been on the rise, it is crucial that AI systems be seen as a supplement to, rather than a replacement for, human intervention.

AI-driven platforms like **Crisis Text Line** can help flag students in crisis by analyzing keywords and emotional cues in text-based communication (Iftikhar et al., 2024). However, these tools cannot provide the real-time, adaptive responses needed to address complex and high-risk situations. Human counselors, with their ability to assess and intervene in emotionally charged situations, are essential for ensuring the safety and well-being of students in crisis.

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, AI has the potential to significantly enhance mental health counseling in Indian schools by addressing the challenges of accessibility, scalability, and cost-effectiveness. AI tools can provide students with immediate, consistent, and non-judgmental support, helping to fill the gap created by the shortage of qualified mental health professionals. However, the limitations of AI, particularly in its inability to replicate human empathy and its ethical challenges regarding data privacy, must be carefully considered.

Rather than replacing human counselors, AI should be seen as a complementary tool that enhances the counseling system in Indian schools. AI-driven platforms can serve as an important first point of contact, offering preliminary support and monitoring, while human counselors focus on more complex cases that require emotional depth and cultural sensitivity. A hybrid model, integrating both AI and human expertise, could lead to a more inclusive and effective mental health care system in Indian schools.

As India continues to grapple with the mental health needs of its student population, AI offers a promising solution to bridge the existing gaps. However, ethical considerations, such as informed consent and privacy protection, must be addressed to ensure that AI tools are used responsibly and effectively. With careful implementation, AI can play a transformative role in the mental health landscape of Indian schools, supporting students' emotional well-being while preserving the irreplaceable role of human counselors.

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