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LATENT PROFILES OF COUNSELLING SERVICE RESISTANCE AMONG NIGERIAN TERTIARY STUDENTS: A PERSON-CENTERED ANALYSIS OF BARRIER PATTERNS

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Abstract

This study explored latent profiles of counselling resistance among Nigerian tertiary students, focusing on a person-centered analysis of barrier patterns. The study involved 2,410 students in tertiary institutions from universities, polytechnics, colleges of education from various parts of Nigeria. Participants were aged 16 years and over with a majority of those aged 21-25 years (43.7%) then 16-20 years (29.1%), 31 years and above (18.2%) and 26-30 years (9.0%). The predominance of female (64.1%) was found in the sample. Students were spread across academic levels with the largest percentage in 200 Level (28.4%). Findings revealed four distinct latent profiles of low counselling service patronage as identified among the participants. The latent classes are: self-management oriented (31.9%), help-seeking positive (26.2%), strongly help-seeking averse (25.0%), and stigma-avoidant (16.9%). Results revealed that self-management subgroup of help-seekers are the highest. Also, counselling resistance was multidimensional, and driven by autonomy preferences, stigma concerns, and combined barriers. It was found that latent class membership significantly predicted overall counselling barrier burden, with a moderate effect size. The strongly help-seeking averse group reported the highest barrier burden, while the help-seeking positive group reported the lowest.

Keywords: latent profiles, counselling service resistance, help-seeking positive, self-management, oriented, stigma-avoidant, strongly help-seeking averse

INTRODUCTION

Counselling utitlization challenges occasioned by socio-cultural, structural, and personal factors have continued to trend in scholarship discourse over the years. Avoidance help-seeking behaviour among students in higher institutions is both a national and global burden as unresolved academic, vocational and psychological challenges could go a long way to affect students even after graduation. As a result of psychological and behavioural rising problems, there is a growing interest for the enhancement of counselling services (Perera, 2023). Counselling services could improve students' academic outcomes (Eremie & Jackson, 2019), and psychological stability and vocational readiness (Godfrey, 2022; Shaheen et al., 2023; Diponegoro & Agungbudiprabowo, 2020). However, non-utilization of counselling services exists among students. Mental health problems are also on the rise (Boulden & Brown, 2022), requiring counselling interventions. Barriers to counselling optimization and utilization

include: financial constraints and unfavourable school policies (Arfasa & Weldmeskel, 2020); institutional problems like inadequate resources (Panford-Quainoo et al., 2024; Chilewa & Osaki, 2022); inaccessibility of counselling services (Permadin & Herdi, 2021; Suleiman et al., 2020, Delaney et al., 2023; Williams-Dobosz et al. 2021); untrained counsellors (Kandel, 2020); limited access to financial and human resources (Grimes (2020); seeing help-seeking as a sign of weakness (Çebi & Demir, 2019) among other factors. As a result of these challenges, instituional and structural interventions may be neeeded to enhance counselling engagement readiness and utilization among students from diverse backgrounds (Bryan et al., 2023).

Insights on why students jettison counselling services are important for the purpose of creating interventions strategies that can bring about the desired change (Sithaldeen et al., 2025). To comprehend these challenges, latent class analysis (LCA) has to be performed to create subgroups according to the patterns of items of barriers to counselling non-use among students in tertiary institutions. Latent variables can quietly shape the direction and strength of counselling utilization. Along this line, counselling seekers are classified in this study into four latent classes: help-seeking positive, self-management oriented, stigma-avoidant, and strongly help-seeking averse groups. The strengths of these classes may determine the level of counselling patronage among help-seekers.

Help-seekers are often very much mindful about trust, confidentiality and approachability in counselling relationship. Previous reports reveal that issues of confidentiality, trust and approachabality determined the strength and direction of attitude of counselling help-seekers. Many studies reported that confidentiality and trust shaped the behaviour of help-seekers, contributing to low utilization of counselling services (Upoalkpajor et al., 2018; Radez et al., 2021; Sedofia et al., 2022; Crisp & Bartels, 2025; Novak & Kovács, 2025). Some potential counselling help-seekers also decline to engage in counselling interactions because they could not trust unfamiliar help-providers (Radez et al., 2021). A few seekers were equally worried about ethics and privacy, leading to another set of notable barriers to counselling services (Ibrahim et al., 2025; Ramdass et al., 2020). Some students who need help may not do so because of minimization of problem, fear of embarrassment, preference for handling problems independently, or fear of being labelled as mentally disordered persons (Ogueji & Okoloba, 2020; Hatun & Serin, 2021). Adding to these challengs, Yamauchi et al. (2023) noted mistrust hindered effective counselling utilization. Akinwale et al. (2025) observed low level of students' awareness of counselling services. Academic pressures or workload can also aid students' help-seeking avoidance (Rivera et al., 2025). Essential skills like communication, tolerance, compassion, effective listening skills, note taking, and empathy are needed for effective counselling relationship (Uzoekwe et al., 2023).

Counselling help-seekers manifest a number of latent help appproach or avoidance behaviour. This calls for a careful examination of these latent variables to depeen the understanding of the intricacies surrounding deteminants of counselling services. Patronage of counselling may be low among students of higher institutions due to misconceptions held by them. Inadequate awareness could hinder counselling utilization (Martin et al., 2023). This study examined four latent classes or groups of counselling seeking behaviour: help-seeking positive class, self-management-oriented class, stigma-avoidant class and strongly help-seeking averse class.

The help-seeking positive class of students may patronize counselling services as a result of their positive attitude towards help services. Previous studies reported positive attitude of students towards help services. Perera (2023) reported that students perceived that seeking help from the counselling unit was beneficial to them, an idication that some students manifested positiive help-seeking behaviour. Similarly, Adu et al. (2023) indicated that learners showed significant interest in receiving counselling services. Shehu et al. (2021) reported positive changes in students' academic performance after receiving counseling support, an indication that the students had postive attitude towards counselling. Arfasa (2018) also posited that the students' perception about counselling was positive. Wangid et al. (2025) on their part revealed there was high awareness of counselling services

utilization and satisfaction among learners. These reports show evidence of posititive help-seekers inspite of the widespread negative attitude towards counselling services utilization.

The self-management-oriented class of students do not seek counselling because they wish to solve problems by themselves or solve them through other sources. Recent studies cited emotional suppression, self-reliance, skepticism about the potency of counselling services and preferences for other sources as barriers to adaptive help-seeking behaviour (Novak & Kovács, 2025; Ramdass et al., 2020). Some students prefer relying on non-formal counsellling sources to formal ones in times of counselling needs (Yamauchi et al., 2023).

The stigma-avoidant class of students do not seek help because of negative social labelling of counselling and the consequences of stigmatization and embarrassment that accompany help- seeking behaviour or patronage of counselling services. Previous researches noted perceived social stigma and embarrassment as barriers to help-seeking (Radez et al., 2021; Ibrahim et al., 2025; Novak & Kovács, 2025; Larran, & Hein, 2024; Arahanthabailu et al., 2024; Lu et al., 2021).

The strongly help-seeking averse group of students develop aversion for help-seeking because of their latent negative disposition towards counselling. Counselling avoidance can be a product of soiocultural and interpersonal constructs (Tan et al., 2020). Previous studies observed resistance, reluctance, misconcepption and negative perception towards help-seeking among participants (Doan et al., 2020, Upoalkpajor et al., 2018; Maria, 2024). Similarly, clash of cultural inclination and the person-centered nature of counselling services could trigger avoidance and averseness towards counselling utilization (Rao, 2025).

Previous studies on help-seeking behaviour have largely concentrated on investigating the determinants of resistance to counselling service utilization without excavating probable effects of latent classes of help-seeking behaviour. Understanding latent classes of help-seeking behaviour can unveil some of the hidden factors behind help-seeking avoidance behaviours that are common among students in higher institutions. The task of investigating the latent profiles of counselling service resistance among Nigerian tertiary students became important because help-seeking is needed among higher institution students to address the peculiarity of the various help-seeking behaviour (positive attitude, self-management attitude, social stigma and strong aversive behaviour) among them. The need for a study of this nature has become inevitable because cases requiring counselling services are escalating without a corresponding rise in counselling utilization. Studying the structure of these latent behaviours that can influence help-seeking services can provide tools that can help practitioners and policy makers to reposition counselling services in order to make them available, accessible and approachable to students in higher institutions.

METHOD

Design

This study was conducted using a cross-sectional survey approach with a person-centred approach to studying heterogeneity in low counselling service patronage among tertiary students in Nigeria. Specifically, latent class analysis (LCA) was performed to create subgroups according to the patterns of items of barriers to counselling. The study is part of a bigger research project on the usage of counselling services, structural trust and psychological barriers in tertiary institutions in Nigeria, involving university, polytechnic and colleges of education students. The present study has concentrated on identifying latent resistance profiles and their association with the overall burden of counselling barriers. A quantitative, non-experimental design was suitable considering the fact that the goal was to model naturally occurring variations in counselling attitudes, rather than to manipulate independent variables.

Participants

The study involved 2,410 students in tertiary institutions from universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education from various parts of Nigeria. Participants were aged 16 years and over with a majority

of those aged 21-25 years (43.7%) then 16-20 years (29.1%), 31 years and above (18.2%) and 26-30 years (9.0%). The predominance of female (64.1%) was found in the sample. Students were spread across academic levels with the largest percentage in 200 Level (28.4%). Approximately half of them went to universities (50.5%), and other people were enrolled in polytechnics (27.4%), colleges of education (21.5%). The majority of the participants lived off-campus (77.3%). The demographic distribution shows wide representation in type of institution and study levels in Nigeria tertiary education.

Measures

Low patronage of the counselling service was measured with the help of five attitudinal items indicating typical barriers to professional help seeking. These constructs in particular were used for detecting latent classes and reflected three areas: minimization of problems, stigma issues, and preference for self-directed or religious coping. Items included: (a) considering problems not serious enough for counselling, (b) embarrassment if others knew, (c) preference for handling problems independently, (d) fear of being perceived as mentally ill and (e) preference for consultation of religious/spiritual leaders. Responses were coded in latent class modelling to detect different patterns of resistance. Overall counselling barrier burden was assessed on a 10-item scale in which perceived obstacles to utilisation of counselling services were measured. Items assessed structural, psychological and social barriers. Higher values are associated with the perceived burden. The scale provided evidence of satisfactory internal consistency in the present sample (Cronbach's a >= .70). Prior validation was done within the larger study and confirmed construct validity and reliability. Counselling trust and approachability deficit (CTAD) was measured with the help of 5-item scale for the evaluation of the perceptions towards the credibility of a counsellor, confidentiality, accessibility and trust in the institution. The higher the scores the lower the perceived trust and approachability. The CTAD scale showed acceptable reliability (Cronbach's a >= 70) and evidence of construct validity in the more general research project.

Procedures

Data were gathered using an online survey with a Google Form. The survey link was distributed via the WhatsApp platforms like the platform of Association of Professional Counsellors in Nigeria, a professional network of counselling lecturers in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Lecturers were asked to distribute the survey link to the students in their respective institutions using institutional communication channels and student platforms. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. The survey started with an informed consent statement which described the purpose of the study, assurances of confidentiality, and the right to leave at any time. Completion took about 10-15 minutes approximately. No incentives were provided. Because distribution was across multiple institutions through the lecturer networks, the study was extensive in institutional and student level participation.

Ethical Considerations

Full ethical approval for the research was obtained from Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Nigeria, Health Research Ethical Committee which is a registered committee with registration number: NHREC/12/06/2013. The Health Committee’s assigned certificate number for this research is 221/25. Ethical procedures were run according to guidelines provided by the Faculty Research Committee. The study followed ethical principles of research involving humans as adopted by the APA. Participants gave informed consent to participate by electronic means before the study. No identifying information was gathered, in order to guarantee anonymity. Data was stored securely and was only accessed by the research team. Participants were told that they could withdraw from participation at any time without penalty. Given the counselling related nature of the study, participants were encouraged to contact institutional counselling services if completion of the survey raised any psychological issues.

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Analysis

Data analysis was done in two stages. First, latent class analysis (LCA) was performed to identify the subgroups of students according to the response patterns to the five low counselling patronage items. Competing models (one- to four-class solutions) were evaluated based on AIC, BIC, SABIC, entropy and interpretability criteria. The four-class solution was maintained based on better statistical fits and clarity of concepts. Second, generalized linear modelling (GLM) with normal distribution and identity link function on the outcome variable was used to investigate the predictive effect of latent class membership on overall counselling barrier burden under control of CTAD. Wald chi-square statistics were used to evaluate model effects and partial eta squared was used to estimate effect size. Adjusted marginal means were compared with pairwise contrasts and Cohen's d was calculated to determine if there was practical significance. Statistical significance was set to alpha level = .05 (two tailed).

RESULTS

Latent Class Model Selection

Latent class analysis (LCA) was conducted to identify distinct profiles of low counselling service utilization among Nigerian tertiary education students; the results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Fit Indices and Classification Diagnostics for Latent Class Models (N = 2.410)

Panel A. Model Fit Comparison

Classes	Log-Likelihood	AIC	BIC	SABIC	Entropy
1	-17.388	34.816	34.932	34.868	—
2	-16.535	33.153	33.390	33.260	—
3	-16.090	32.303	32.662	32.465	—
4	-15.635	31.437	31.917	31.653	.733

Panel B. Classification Quality (Four-Class Solution)

Latent Class	Proportion	Average Posterior Probability (AvePP)*
Help-Seeking Positive	.262	.81
Self-Management Oriented	.319	.78
Stigma-Avoidant	.169	.84
Strongly Help-Seeking Averse	.250	.86

Note. Lower AIC, BIC, and SABIC indicate better model fit. Entropy reflects overall classification precision. AvePP values above .70 indicate acceptable classification accuracy.

As shown in Table 1, Latent class analysis (LCA) was conducted to identify distinct profiles of low counselling service patronage among Nigerian tertiary students. Model fit indices progressively improved from the one to four-class solutions. The four-class model demonstrated the lowest AIC, BIC, and SABIC values, indicating superior fit relative to more parsimonious alternatives. Entropy for the four-class solution was .733, suggesting acceptable classification precision. Average posterior probabilities exceeded .70 for all classes, supporting adequate assignment accuracy. Beyond statistical criteria, the four-class solution provided clear theoretical differentiation between autonomy-driven, stigma-driven, and strongly resistant profiles. Accordingly, the four-class model was retained.

The analysis results for "Item-Response Probabilities" are presented in Figure 1.

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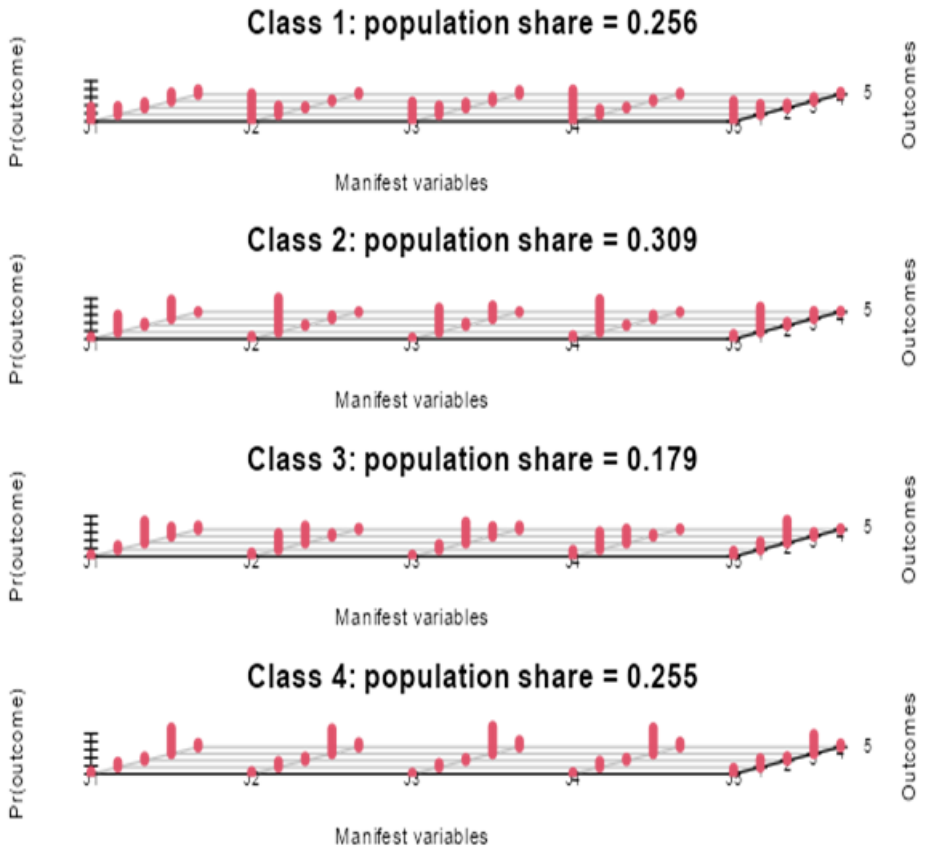


Figure 1. Item-Response Probabilities

The conditional probability plot illustrates distinct response patterns across classes. The Help-Seeking Positive class showed consistently low endorsement of barrier items, whereas the Strongly Help-Seeking Averse class exhibited high endorsement across most items. The Self-Management Oriented group primarily endorsed autonomy-related barriers, while the Stigma-Avoidant class showed elevated probabilities on embarrassment and mental-illness concerns. These differentiated patterns confirm that resistance to counselling is multidimensional, driven by stigma, self-reliance, and preference for alternative support sources.

Latent Class Characteristics

The analysis results for "latent class membership distribution" are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Latent Class Membership Distribution

Latent Class	N	%
Help-Seeking Positive	631	26.2
Self-Management Oriented	769	31.9
Stigma-Avoidant	407	16.9
Strongly Help-Seeking Averse	603	25.0
Total	2,410	100.0

Class membership distribution is presented in Table 2. The Self-Management Oriented class was the largest subgroup (31.9%), followed by Help-Seeking Positive (26.2%) and Strongly Help-Seeking Averse (25.0%) students, while the Stigma-Avoidant class constituted 16.9% of the sample. These relatively balanced proportions indicate substantial heterogeneity in counselling attitudes.

Inspection of conditional item-response probabilities revealed distinct response patterns (Figure 1). The Help-Seeking Positive class demonstrated consistently low endorsement of barrier items. The Self-Management Oriented group showed elevated endorsement of autonomy-related barriers,

particularly preference for handling problems independently. The Stigma-Avoidant class exhibited higher probabilities for embarrassment and concerns about being perceived as mentally ill. In contrast, the Strongly Help-Seeking Averse class displayed high endorsement across most items, reflecting multiple, overlapping barriers.

Differences in Overall Barrier Burden Across Classes

The analysis results for "generalized linear model results predicting barrier burden" are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Generalized Linear Model Results Predicting Barrier Burden

Panel A. Tests of Model Effects

Predictor	Wald χ^2	df	P	Partial η^2
Latent Class (Group)	387.80	3	< .001	.139
Counselling Trust & Approachability Deficit	3544.79	1	< .001	—

Panel B. Adjusted Means by Latent Class

Latent Class	Adjusted Mean	SE	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
Help-Seeking Positive	97.46	.51	96.46	98.45
Self-Management Oriented	102.13	.45	101.26	103.01
Stigma-Avoidant	104.48	.61	103.28	105.68
Strongly Help-Seeking Averse	112.06	.53	111.03	113.09

Note. Dependent variable = Overall Counselling Barrier Burden total score. Covariate fixed at mean (CTAD = 13.43). Partial η^2 calculated from Wald χ^2.

To examine whether latent class membership predicted overall counselling barrier burden, a generalized linear model was estimated controlling for Counselling Trust and Approachability Deficit (CTAD). Results are presented in Table 3.

Latent class membership significantly predicted barrier burden, Wald $\chi^2(3) = 387.80$, $p < .001$, with a moderate effect size (partial $\eta^2 = .139$). CTAD also emerged as a strong independent predictor, Wald $\chi^2(1) = 3544.79$, $p < .001$, indicating that institutional trust plays a substantial role in perceived barriers.

Adjusted means revealed a clear gradient across profiles. The Strongly Help-Seeking Averse class reported the highest barrier burden (M = 112.06), followed by the Stigma-Avoidant (M = 104.48) and Self-Management Oriented (M = 102.13) groups. The Help-Seeking Positive class reported the lowest burden (M = 97.46). This ordered pattern supports the structural validity of the latent classification.

Pairwise Comparisons and Practical Significance

The results of the "Pairwise Comparisons and Effect Sizes (Cohen's d)" analysis are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Pairwise Comparisons and Effect Sizes (Cohen's d)

Comparison	Mean Difference	P	Cohen's d	Magnitude
HSP vs SMO	4.68	< .001	.21	Small
HSP vs SA	7.02	< .001	.31	Small–Medium
HSP vs SHA	14.60	< .001	.65	Medium
SMO vs SA	2.34	.002	.10	Small
SMO vs SHA	9.93	< .001	.44	Small–Medium
SA vs SHA	7.58	< .001	.34	Small–Medium

Note. Cohen's d calculated using pooled SD = 22.53. Values of .20, .50, and .80 represent small, medium, and large effects respectively.

Pairwise comparisons confirmed that all class differences were statistically significant (Table 4). The largest difference was observed between the Help-Seeking Positive and Strongly Help-Seeking Averse groups (d = .65), representing a moderate practical effect. Differences between adjacent profiles were small to moderate (d = .10 – .44), indicating meaningful but graduated distinctions in barrier severity.

Collectively, these findings demonstrate that counselling resistance among Nigerian tertiary students is not dichotomous but structured along multiple psychologically distinct profiles with measurable differences in barrier burden.

Main findings of the study

The analysis results regarding the "main findings of the study" are presented below.

1. Four distinct latent profiles of low counselling service patronage were identified among Nigerian tertiary students.
2. The four-class model demonstrated superior statistical fit and conceptual clarity compared to more parsimonious models.
3. The largest subgroup was Self-Management Oriented (31.9%), followed by Help-Seeking Positive (26.2%), Strongly Help-Seeking Averse (25.0%), and Stigma-Avoidant (16.9%).
4. Counselling resistance was multidimensional, driven by autonomy preferences, stigma concerns, and combined barriers.
5. Latent class membership significantly predicted overall counselling barrier burden, with a moderate effect size.
6. The Strongly Help-Seeking Averse group reported the highest barrier burden, while the Help-Seeking Positive group reported the lowest.
7. All class differences were statistically and practically significant, indicating structured variation rather than simple acceptance-versus-avoidance patterns.
8. Counselling Trust and Approachability Deficit was a strong independent predictor of barrier burden.

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, and RECOMMENDATIONS

This study reveals four distinct latent profiles of low counselling service patronage as identified among Nigerian tertiary students who participated in the study. Interestingly, the four-class model demonstrated superior statistical fit and conceptual clarity compared to more parsimonious models. The findings also reveals that the largest subgroup was self-management oriented (31.9%), followed by help-seeking positive (26.2%), strongly help-seeking averse (25.0%), and stigma-avoidant (16.9%). From this result, self-management subgroup of help-seekers are the highest among students of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. This aligns with previous studies where emotional suppression, self-reliance, skepticism, and reliance on self-help affected adaptive help-seeking behaviour (Novak & Kovács, 2025; Ramdass et al., 2020). This suggests that help-seekers need awareness campaigns to understand the importance of help service.

This study also confirmed that counselling resistance was multidimensional, and driven by autonomy preferences, stigma concerns, and combined barriers. This reinforces the finding of Yamauchi et al. (2023) positing that students preferred informal sources of help to formal counselling services. Previous studies show that social stigma and embarrassment could foster non-use of counselling services (Radez et al., 2021; Ibrahim et al., 2025; Novak & Kovács, 2025). This finding shows that resistant behaviour towards counselling could be enhanced or supported by other negative latent classes. Social stigma in previous studies was found to contribute to non-use of counselling services (Radez et al., 2021; Ibrahim et al., 2025; Novak & Kovács, 2025). These reinforcing constructs could

indirectly influence students' counselling patronage level through resistant behaviour. It means that a decrease of stigma, and other barriers are likely to impose a decrease in counselling avoidant behaviour and an increase positive help-seeking behaviour, and counselling use.

Results also reveal that latent class membership significantly predicted overall counselling barrier burden, with a moderate effect size. This shows that latent classes of help-seeking behaviour substantially determined the overall counselling service use among the participants. Thus, institutional interventions should aim at formulating policies that could weaken counselling barriers and increase help-seeking behaviour. Hence, counselling awareness seems crucial to remedy the current counselling situation across the various Nigerian higher institutions. Social factors like stigma and anti-counselling cultural beliefs can give room to counselling avoidance and aversive help-seeking behaviour among students, especially within the Nigerian context where communal lifestyle is prominent on campuses. Thus, negative peer influence could exert pressure on students' perception of counselling and weaken help-seeking behaviour.

Expectedly, the Strongly help-seeking averse group reported the highest barrier burden, while the help-seeking positive group reported the lowest. This finding poses a challenge to help-seeking services as more students are averse to counselling services. The present state of aversion towards counselling use among the students could be supported by other factors such as structural failure, lack of awareness and non-availability of counselling services, confidentiality and privacy concerns, seeker's attitude of minimization of problems, stigma issues, and preference for self-directed or religious coping among others. Again, all class differences were statistically and practically significant, indicating structured variation rather than simple acceptance-versus-avoidance patterns. This means interventions should address the peculiarities of each class within a framework that would support or improve positive help-seeking behaviour and counselling service patronage in tertiary institutions.

Furthermore, counselling trust and approachability deficit was a strong independent predictor of barrier burden. This finding shows that counsellor-related factors may pose challenges to help-seeking behaviour. Panford-Quainoo et al. (2024) noted that there were implications of untrained counsellors, loss of confidence and lack of resources for counselling services. Qualities of counsellors like: confidentiality, privacy, unconditional regard, warmth, communication and listening skills can enhance trust and approachableness among help-seekers. Previous studies noted that lack of confidentiality (Crisp & Bartels, 2025; Novak & Kovács, 2025); mistrust (Radez et al., (2021); and privacy concerns (Ibrahim et al., 2025; Ramdass et al., 2020) were barriers to counselling service utilization. Interventions should target overhauling counsellor-related factors like mistrust, poor communication, ethical concerns among others to restore trust and approachability to counselling activities to enhance help-seeking engagement readiness and patronage of counselling services.

Conclusion

Low patronage of the counselling services is common in higher institutions in Nigeria and can be fuelled by person-centred factors (minimization of problems, stigma issues, and preference for self-directed or religious coping), structural and social barriers. This study examined the latent classes of help-seeking behaviours of students. Four latent classes or groups of counselling seeking behaviour were observed. They include: help-seeking positive class, self-management-oriented class, stigma-avoidant class and strongly help-seeking averse class. Apart from the help-seeking positive group, all the other groups manifested behaviours that are inimical to counselling utilization. Institutional reformatory approaches have to address the peculiarity of each group. The positive help-seeking group should receive appropriate stimulation to enhance continuity. Moreover, since counsellors' administrative roles are critical to counselling services (Martin & Vera, 2020), they should be one of the key drivers of institutional reformatory plans.

Recommendations

Students need both academic and emotional soundness (Navarro et al., 2025), making counselling pivotal for all-round development. Hence, counselling services are needed by students of higher institutions of learning, especially in universities, polytechnics and colleges of education. Practicable recommendations are needed to improve counselling services (Khadka et al., 2025). Against this backdrop, this study provides the following recommendations. The finding of this study shows that only the positive help-seeking group of students are the group that are compatible with counselling services. This means help-seeking behaviours need to be developed and maintained on campuses to make students to utilize counselling services. Thus, institutions need to put in place appropriate reward system to encourage those who patronize counselling services to continue with such positive behaviour and to attract those who do not patronize them.

Based on the findings of this study, the self-management-oriented class of students did not access counselling services because they believed in managing their problems by themselves or consulting alternative sources like their spiritual leaders, peers and parents. On the basis of this challenge, it is recommended that institutions should put structures in place to curtail self-management help-seeking behaviour. Institutions may achieve this by carrying out a survey to understand why some students do not patronize counselling. Students' responses about help-seeking in their various counselling units in their institutions may help institutions and policy makers to restore confidence in counselling services. In addition, institutions should address the challenges of non-availability, inaccessibility and lack of confidentiality in counselling services.

Based on the findings in this study, the stigma-avoidant class avoid counselling services because of the stigmatization which goes with help-seeking behaviour. This is critical as seeking counselling could be erroneously equated with mental illness. Thus, it is hereby recommended that institutions should rise against stigmatization to protect counselling services utilizers. Campaigns against stigmatization should be championed by institutions, counsellors and the government.

Based on the results of this study, the strongly help-seeking averse class have aversion for counselling utilization. Institutions should leverage on interventions that can change the mindsets of students aversed to help-seeking. Institutions should also target improving counsellors' professional skills in order to improve counselling engagement readiness and outcomes.

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Ethics and Conflict of Interest

Full ethical approval for the research was obtained from Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Nigeria, Health Research Ethical Committee which is a registered committee with registration number: NHREC/12/06/2013. The Health Committee's assigned certificate number for this research is 221/25. Ethical procedures were run according to guidelines provided by the Faculty Research Committee. The study followed ethical principles of research involving humans as adopted by the APA. Participants gave informed consent to participate by electronic means before the study. No identifying information was gathered, in order to guarantee anonymity. Data was stored securely and was only accessed by the research team. Participants were told that they could withdraw from participation at any time without penalty. Considering the counselling related nature of the study, participants were encouraged to contact institutional counselling services if completion of the survey raised any psychological issues. Ethical approved was obtained for the study and consent was sought from all students who participated. The authors reported no conflicts of interest.

Author Contribution

All authors contributed equally to this study. All authors read and approved of the final manuscript.

Data Availability
The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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