

**EFFECTIVENESS OF ONLINE COUNSELLING SERVICES IN ADDRESSING
MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES AMONG UNIVERSITY OF BENIN UNDERGRADUATE
STUDENTS**

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NOVEMBER 2025

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**A RESEARCH WORK WRITTEN AND SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATIONAL EVALUATION AND COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY, FACULTY OF
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COUNSELLING OF THE UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY, NIGERIA**

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CERTIFICATION PAGE

We the undersigned name here by certify that this research work was carried out by Oghenevwede Precious ODOKUMA with matriculation number EDU2102423 of the Department of Educational Evaluation and Counselling Psychology, Faculty of Education, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to every student who keeps pushing through the ups and downs of academic life. May this research be a reminder that no one is alone, and with the right support, we can all rise above our challenges.

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All glory and honour be to Almighty God, the Creator of heaven and earth, for His unconditional love, mercy, and divine guidance upon my life and that of my family. Truly, God is worthy to be praised for His faithfulness from the beginning to the completion of this research work.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effectiveness of online counselling in addressing mental health issues among University of Benin students. The increasing rate of mental health challenges such as stress, anxiety, and depression among university students has raised concerns about the existing counselling services. Online counselling has emerged as alternative to face-to-face counselling, offering accessibility, flexibility, and confidentiality.

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population comprised undergraduate students of the University of Benin, from which a sample was selected using simple random sampling techniques. A structured questionnaire titled “Online Counselling and Mental Health Questionnaire (OCMHQ)” was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by experts in the department of Guidance and Counselling and had a Cronbach’s Alpha reliability coefficient of 0.966, indicating high internal consistency. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

Findings revealed that online counselling is effective in addressing students’ mental health issues, particularly in enhancing emotional well-being, reducing anxiety, and promoting positive coping mechanisms. However, challenges such as poor internet connectivity, limited awareness, and concerns about confidentiality affected the full utilization of these services.

The study concluded that online counselling plays a significant role in promoting students’ mental health when properly implemented and supported. It was recommended that the University of Benin should strengthen its online counselling framework by improving digital infrastructure, creating mental health awareness campaigns, and training counsellors in virtual counselling skills.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Mental health has increasingly become a pressing concern among university students worldwide, with high levels of academic pressure, financial stress, and social challenges contributing to emotional and psychological strain (Hunt & Eisenberg, 2018). In Nigeria, these issues are further exacerbated by limited mental health resources and a cultural stigma around seeking help (Gureje 2015). At the University of Benin, students are exposed to a wide range of stressors such as Academic pressure from heavy coursework, Financial challenges, Peer pressure, family expectations, time management struggles, and uncertainty about the future contribute to psychological stress. One of the most significant challenges is the intense academic workload, which includes tight deadlines, frequent examinations, and a high volume of coursework. This academic pressure is often intensified by limited resources, such as overcrowded classrooms and insufficient access to learning materials, making it difficult for students to cope effectively. In addition to academic demands, there is widespread uncertainty about the future, particularly in light of Nigeria's unstable job market and high graduate unemployment rates. Many students worry about their post-graduation prospects, including whether they will secure employment, pursue further studies, or support their families. This anxiety about the unknown can contribute to feelings of helplessness and diminished motivation. Compounding these pressures are expectations from family and society, which often impose high standards of achievement and success. Students may feel obligated to meet the aspirations of their parents or conform to societal ideals, even when these do not align with their personal goals or capacities. The combination of these stressors frequently results in psychological distress, manifesting as anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and in some cases, the development of unhealthy coping

mechanisms such as substance use or social withdrawal. Abayomi and Olukayode (2017) underscore that these mental health challenges, if unaddressed, can significantly undermine students' academic performance and overall well-being, highlighting the urgent need for targeted mental health support and institutional interventions within the university system. Traditionally, counselling services on campus are offered face-to-face. However, with the rise of digital technology and the need for more accessible solutions—especially after the COVID-19 pandemic online counselling has emerged as a potential alternative. It provides flexibility, anonymity, and wider reach, particularly for students who may be reluctant to seek in-person help (Richards & Viganó, 2017).

Despite the growing use of online counselling platforms, there remains a gap in understanding their effectiveness in the Nigerian university context. Studies suggest that while digital interventions can improve access to mental health care, cultural and contextual factors influence their outcomes (Naslund 2017). This study seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of online counselling in addressing mental health issues among students at the University of Benin. By doing so, it aims to contribute to the development of more responsive, inclusive, and tech-driven mental health support systems within higher education

The effectiveness of online counselling services in addressing mental health issues has garnered increasing attention in psychological and educational research, particularly in the context of the growing mental health crisis among university students in the 21st century. As institutions of higher learning strive to support students' academic success and overall well-being, the importance of accessible, timely, and effective mental health interventions has become more pronounced. Online counselling refers to the provision of psychological support, therapy, or

guidance through digital platforms such as video calls, emails, chat applications, and mobile apps, offering an alternative to traditional face-to-face sessions (Richards & Vigano, 2022).

Recent studies have emphasized that student mental health is influenced not only by academic pressures and social challenges but also by the availability and responsiveness of support services. Universities that provide robust mental health support, including online counselling, have been associated with improved student engagement, reduced levels of anxiety and depression, and enhanced academic outcomes (Eisenberg, 2023). Moreover, online counselling has the potential to reduce stigma associated with seeking psychological help, offering a level of anonymity and convenience that traditional services may lack.

In the current digital era, advancements in communication technology have transformed the delivery of psychological services, making online counselling a viable and increasingly popular mode of intervention. This is especially relevant in developing contexts such as Nigeria, where the demand for mental health services often exceeds the availability of trained professionals. The emergence of digital counselling platforms and university-based online support systems has created new opportunities for early intervention, peer support, and crisis management among university students (Okeke & Iwuagwu, 2023). Additionally, online counselling services offer flexibility in scheduling and geographical accessibility, which are critical for students managing tight academic timetables or studying remotely.

The effectiveness of online counselling services is not solely determined by their technological availability; it is also influenced by the quality of interaction between counsellors and clients, the confidentiality and security of communication platforms, and the cultural relevance of counselling approaches. Cultural relevance is especially significant in Nigerian universities, where diverse socio-cultural backgrounds and varying levels of mental health awareness impact

the willingness and ability of students to engage with counselling services. Tailoring online interventions to resonate with students' experiences and expectations can increase uptake and improve therapeutic outcomes (Afolayan & Olanrewaju, 2024).

The method of delivery also plays a critical role. Effective online counselling leverages user-friendly platforms and engages students through personalized, interactive, and responsive communication. Techniques such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), mindfulness-based interventions, and crisis counselling can be adapted for digital formats, provided there is adequate training for counsellors and an infrastructure that supports stable and secure communication (Richards & Vigano, 2022). Furthermore, continuous monitoring and feedback mechanisms are essential in evaluating the impact of online counselling and making necessary improvements.

Alignment of counselling objectives with student needs ensures that the services address real-world mental health challenges such as stress, anxiety, depression, loneliness, and academic burnout. When students recognize the relevance of counselling to their personal and academic lives, they are more likely to utilize these services and benefit from them. This alignment also facilitates outcome measurement, allowing institutions to track changes in mental health indicators and academic performance over time (Okeke & Iwuagwu, 2023).

In addition to content and delivery, support systems such as peer counselling networks, referral mechanisms, and mental health awareness campaigns enhance the effectiveness of online services. Regular assessments, client satisfaction surveys, and data-driven reviews enable university counselling units to refine their services and respond proactively to emerging mental health trends.

In the Nigerian educational context, the mental health of university students has become a growing concern, with factors such as economic hardship, academic pressure, and social instability exacerbating emotional distress. Despite increasing awareness, many students still face barriers to accessing mental health services, including stigma, limited resources, and insufficient institutional support. Online counselling, therefore, presents a strategic and scalable solution to bridge these gaps and promote psychological resilience among students. The integration of online counselling services into university mental health frameworks offers a promising approach to addressing student mental health needs. When implemented effectively, such services not only support individual well-being but also contribute to the broader academic mission of the university by fostering a supportive and inclusive learning environment (Eisenberg, 2023; Afolayan & Olanrewaju, 2024).

Statement of the Problem

In recent years, mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, stress, and emotional instability have become increasingly prevalent among university students in Nigeria, including those at the University of Benin. While online counselling services have emerged as a promising alternative to traditional face-to-face interventions, many students remain unaware of their availability or do not fully understand how to access and benefit from them. This limited awareness poses a significant barrier to the effectiveness and utilization of online counselling platforms, which are designed to support students' psychological well-being.

Another major challenge is the persistent stigma associated with mental health in the Nigerian context. Cultural perceptions that equate mental health struggles with weakness or personal failure often prevent students from seeking help, even when such services are offered discreetly online. This negative societal attitude continues to hinder efforts to promote mental health awareness and limits the reach and impact of counselling initiatives.

The effectiveness of online counselling is undermined by infrastructural limitations such as poor internet connectivity, frequent power outages, and limited access to digital devices among students. These challenges make it difficult for students to consistently engage in virtual counselling sessions, thereby reducing the continuity and impact of therapeutic interventions.

The shortage of trained and experienced mental health professionals who are specifically skilled in delivering online counselling services is also a pressing issue. Without proper training in digital counselling methods, even qualified therapists may struggle to offer impactful support through virtual means. This affects the quality of service delivery and undermines students' trust in the system. Concerns about privacy and data security discourage students from using online platforms. Many fear that their personal disclosures may not be kept confidential or that their information could be exposed through digital breaches. This lack of trust in the confidentiality of online systems contributes to low engagement with the services. Online counselling also faces criticism for being impersonal and not adequately tailored to students' cultural and individual needs. Without proper customization, interventions may feel generic or disconnected from students' real-life challenges, making them less effective. Moreover, many students may find it difficult to build rapport with counsellors in a virtual setting, reducing the therapeutic impact.

Low engagement rates and the lack of structured follow-up mechanisms further affect the long-term success of online counselling programs. Many students either discontinue counselling prematurely or do not receive consistent support over time. This limits the ability of online services to provide meaningful and lasting mental health improvement.

Another critical concern is the absence of clear evaluation tools and performance indicators to assess the effectiveness of online counselling in improving mental health outcomes. Without robust data, it is difficult to determine whether online interventions are meeting their objectives

or how they can be improved. Resistance to online counseling both from students accustomed to face-to-face support and from professionals who are unfamiliar or uncomfortable with digital tools—presents yet another barrier. This resistance can slow down adoption rates and reduce the perceived credibility of online services. Not all students possess the psychological readiness or digital literacy required to engage effectively with online mental health platforms. Those who are emotionally overwhelmed or unfamiliar with online tools may be excluded from benefiting fully from these services, thereby widening the gap in mental health support. Collectively, these issues underscore the need to critically evaluate the effectiveness of online counselling services at the University of Benin. Understanding these challenges is essential to improving service delivery, increasing student engagement, and ultimately enhancing the mental well-being of the student population.

Research Questions

The following research questions have been formulated to guide the study and ensure a systematic exploration of the core issues surrounding the topic:

1. To what extent are University of Benin students aware of the availability and purpose of online counselling services?
2. What is the level of student engagement with online counselling?
3. How do students perceive the effectiveness of online counselling?

Purpose of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of online counselling services in addressing mental health issues among students at the University of Benin. Specifically, the objectives of the study are:

1. To Examine the level of awareness among University of Benin students regarding the availability and purpose of online counselling services.
2. To assess the level of student engagement with online counselling.
3. To examine students' perceptions of the effectiveness of online counselling.

Significance of the Study

This study is particularly significant to students of the University of Benin, as it seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of online counselling services in addressing mental health issues that commonly affect them, such as stress, anxiety, and depression. By shedding light on how these services are perceived and utilized, the study will empower students with information that can help them make better use of available psychological support, thereby improving their emotional well-being and academic performance.

For university counsellors and mental health professionals, the findings will offer valuable insights into students' expectations, engagement patterns, and barriers to accessing online counselling. This will enable counsellors to refine their service delivery methods, adopt more student-centered strategies, and ultimately provide more responsive and impactful mental health interventions in digital formats.

The study is also beneficial to the university management and administrators, as it will reveal gaps in the current provision of counselling services and highlight areas requiring policy attention or infrastructural investment. This could inform decisions related to the allocation of resources, staff training, and the integration of digital mental health support systems into the broader student welfare framework.

Academic staff and lecturers stand to benefit from this study by gaining a better understanding of the mental health struggles that may be affecting their students' academic

engagement and performance. With this knowledge, lecturers can be more empathetic in their interactions, offer timely support, and guide students toward appropriate counselling resources.

To parents and guardians, the study provides a deeper awareness of the mental health challenges faced by university students and the importance of early intervention. It may help shift cultural attitudes that stigmatize mental health support, thereby encouraging families to be more supportive and open in discussing their children's psychological well-being.

Policy makers in education and health sectors will find the study valuable in designing policies that strengthen mental health frameworks in Nigerian tertiary institutions. By highlighting the practical challenges and opportunities of online counselling, the study could contribute to the formulation of national strategies aimed at integrating digital mental health solutions into higher education settings.

For future researchers, the study will serve as a foundational resource, offering empirical data and contextual insights into the implementation and reception of online counselling services in Nigerian universities. It can inspire further investigations into comparative studies, longitudinal effects, or innovations in student mental health support.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and mental health advocacy groups can leverage the findings to develop targeted programs, workshops, and awareness campaigns tailored to university students. The study's recommendations can help these organizations collaborate more effectively with institutions to promote mental health literacy and reduce stigma on campus.

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

This study is focused on evaluating the effectiveness of online counselling services in addressing mental health issues among 300-level undergraduate students in the Faculty of

Education, University of Benin, Edo State, Nigeria. The research specifically explores students' awareness, engagement and perceived effectiveness of online counselling services provided by the university or affiliated mental health services. It covers common mental health issues such as stress, anxiety, depression, and academic burnout, as these are among the most prevalent psychological concerns reported in tertiary institutions. The study primarily considers online counselling services offered via digital means such as university portals, mobile applications, emails, chats, and video conferencing while excluding traditional face-to-face counselling methods.

The scope of this study is therefore delimited to all departments within the Faculty of Education, University of Benin, focusing only on 300-level undergraduate students for the 2024/2025 academic session. The study does not extend to other universities or educational institutions outside of the University of Benin. It also does not focus on in-depth clinical diagnosis or treatment outcomes of mental illnesses but rather centers on students' perceptions, experiences, and utilization patterns of available online counselling services.

Definition of Terms

Online Counselling Services: These refer to psychological or emotional support services delivered through internet-based platforms such as websites, emails, chat applications, video conferencing, or mobile apps. In the context of this study, it involves counselling interventions made available to students of the University of Benin through digital means.

Mental Health Issues: These are emotional, psychological, or behavioral conditions that affect a person's thoughts, feelings, mood, or behavior. For this study, mental health issues include stress, anxiety, depression, and academic-related burnout commonly experienced by university students.

Effectiveness: This refers to the degree to which online counselling services achieve their intended outcomes, particularly in alleviating or managing students' mental health challenges. It includes students' perceptions of how helpful and impactful these services are.

University of Benin Students: This term refers specifically to individuals currently enrolled in academic programs (undergraduate or postgraduate) at the University of Benin, Edo State, Nigeria, during the period of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of existing literature on the effectiveness of online counselling services in addressing mental health issues among students at the University of Benin. The review explores key concepts such as online counselling, mental health, and student well-being, with a focus on the higher education context. It discusses the various forms and delivery modes of online counselling services, their accessibility, and how they contribute to the management and prevention of mental health challenges among university students. The chapter also examines the benefits and limitations of virtual counselling platforms, the role of institutional support, and the influence of students' digital literacy and attitudes towards mental health care. Furthermore, the literature review considers socio-cultural perceptions of mental health, privacy concerns, and the responsiveness of online counselling in crisis situations. The literature is reviewed under the following sub-headings:

- Conceptual Review
- Concept of Online Counselling
- Concept of Mental Health

- Types and Modes of Online Counselling Services
- Mental Health Issues Among University Students
- Causes and Risk Factors of Mental Health Disorders among University Students
- Impact of Mental Health on Daily Life among University Students
- Strategies for Promoting Mental Health and Well-being
- Students' Perception of Counselling Services
- Benefits of Online Counselling for Students
- Challenges of Online Counselling in University Settings
- Theoretical Framework
- Empirical Review
- Summary of the Literature Review

Concept of Online Counselling

Online counselling, also known as e-counselling or internet counselling, refers to the delivery of psychological support and mental health services through digital platforms, such as emails, chat messaging, video conferencing, and mobile applications. This form of counselling leverages internet technology to bridge the gap between counsellors and clients, particularly in contexts where in-person interactions may be limited due to geographical, temporal, or situational constraints. In recent years, especially post-COVID-19, online counselling has gained prominence globally and is increasingly being adopted in educational institutions, including universities, to address the rising mental health needs of students (Naslund, 2021).

The shift to online counselling has been catalyzed by the global digital revolution and the demand for more accessible mental health services. Traditional face-to-face counselling, while effective, often encounters barriers such as stigma, time constraints, and lack of trained personnel.

Online counselling provides an alternative that is flexible and often more appealing to younger, tech-savvy populations such as university students. According to Agyapong (2022), digital counselling services provide opportunities for early intervention by making psychological support more available and less intimidating.

Online counselling services vary in form and can be either synchronous or asynchronous. Synchronous communication involves real-time interaction between the counsellor and the client, such as live chats or video calls. Asynchronous communication, on the other hand, includes emails and recorded messages that allow for delayed responses. This flexibility supports diverse student needs and allows for counselling to take place across different time zones and schedules (Andersson, 2019). In the University of Benin and similar institutions, this can be particularly useful for students balancing academics, part-time jobs, and personal obligations.

One of the key strengths of online counselling is its ability to overcome geographical and physical barriers. In many developing countries, including Nigeria, there is a shortage of mental health professionals, especially in rural or underserved areas. By providing services over the internet, online counselling ensures that students who would otherwise lack access to mental health care can receive timely and effective support (Adepoju & Alabi, 2023). This is especially relevant in contexts where university health centers are overwhelmed or under-resourced.

Moreover, online counselling offers an element of anonymity and privacy that is often absent in traditional counselling. Many students avoid seeking mental health support due to fear of being judged or labeled. Online platforms provide a level of distance that reduces this fear, making it more likely for students to open up about sensitive issues such as anxiety, depression, substance abuse, or suicidal thoughts (Sama, 2021). This anonymity is particularly significant in Nigerian society, where cultural and religious beliefs may stigmatize mental health challenges.

The rise of mobile health (mHealth) applications has further enhanced the accessibility and appeal of online counselling. Apps such as *BetterHelp*, *Talkspace*, and locally adapted platforms like *Mentally Aware Nigeria Initiative (MANI)* provide structured counselling programs and crisis support tailored to the needs of users. These tools often include self-assessment quizzes, cognitive behavioral therapy modules, and real-time support, offering a more integrated and continuous approach to mental health care (Owoyemi & Ajayi, 2023).

While online counselling presents numerous benefits, it also comes with certain challenges. One such challenge is the issue of digital literacy. Not all students possess the technical skills required to effectively engage in online counselling. Furthermore, unreliable internet access and lack of appropriate digital devices can create barriers, particularly among low-income students (Onwuchekwa & Ukaegbu, 2022). These limitations can undermine the effectiveness of online counselling, especially in contexts like the University of Benin where technological infrastructure may be inconsistent.

Another concern relates to the quality of the counselling relationship. The therapeutic alliance, which refers to the emotional bond and collaboration between counsellor and client, can be more difficult to establish in an online environment. Non-verbal cues, such as body language and facial expressions, are often diminished in text-based or even video counselling. This may affect the depth and effectiveness of therapeutic interventions (Sucala, 2020). Counsellors must therefore be trained not only in clinical skills but also in the use of digital tools and communication techniques suitable for virtual contexts.

Ethical and confidentiality issues also arise in the context of online counselling. Ensuring the privacy and security of client information is paramount, especially when sensitive personal data is transmitted electronically. Breaches of confidentiality can have severe consequences,

including loss of trust, legal implications, and emotional harm to the client. Counsellors and institutions must comply with ethical guidelines and use secure, encrypted platforms to protect student data (APA, 2022). Despite these challenges, several studies have shown that online counselling can be as effective as traditional methods, particularly for mild to moderate mental health issues. A meta-analysis by Andersson (2019) found that internet-based cognitive behavioral therapy (iCBT) had comparable outcomes to face-to-face CBT for depression and anxiety. Similarly, Olowu and Adeyemo (2023) reported positive outcomes among Nigerian university students using online platforms for mental health support, citing reduced stress and improved coping mechanisms.

In the context of the University of Benin, online counselling services are becoming increasingly relevant. The pressures of academic life, financial hardship, and social expectations contribute to rising mental health concerns among students. Online platforms offer a way to address these issues promptly and confidentially, without requiring students to leave their dormitories or classrooms. Initiatives by university counselling centers to integrate digital tools are a step in the right direction, though more needs to be done to ensure comprehensive adoption and student awareness. It is also important to consider the role of cultural competence in online counselling. Counsellors working with Nigerian students must be aware of the cultural, religious, and societal contexts that influence mental health attitudes and behaviors. For instance, beliefs in spiritual causes of mental illness or reliance on religious healing may affect a student's willingness to seek professional help. Online counselling platforms should, therefore, incorporate culturally relevant content and counsellors trained to handle such sensitivities (Ibrahim, 2022).

The involvement of institutional leadership is critical in the successful implementation of online counselling services. University administrations must allocate resources for the

development, maintenance, and staffing of digital mental health programs. This includes providing training for counsellors, awareness campaigns for students, and collaboration with external mental health organizations. Without administrative support, online counselling initiatives risk becoming underutilized or poorly managed (Abayomi & Chukwuma, 2021).

Student engagement is another key factor in the effectiveness of online counselling. Awareness and trust are necessary conditions for students to use these services. Regular mental health campaigns, peer advocacy programs, and integration of online counselling into the academic calendar can help normalize the use of digital mental health support. Institutions must also create feedback mechanisms to monitor student satisfaction and improve service delivery (Nwachukwu & Ezemenaka, 2023). The pandemic era has shown the necessity of adaptable mental health services. During the COVID-19 lockdown, many universities turned to online platforms to continue providing psychological support. This period highlighted both the potential and limitations of online counselling and provided valuable lessons for post-pandemic mental health care. According to WHO (2022), online mental health services will continue to play a significant role even in the recovery phase, especially among youth populations.

Collaboration with tech developers and mental health professionals is essential in improving the design and functionality of online counselling platforms. Tools that incorporate artificial intelligence (AI), mood tracking, and real-time chatbots are being explored as supplements to human counselling. While these innovations are promising, they should not replace the human element essential in effective therapy. Instead, they should serve as enhancements that improve accessibility and continuity of care (Kuhn, 2021).

The concept of online counselling represents a significant evolution in the provision of mental health services. For students at the University of Benin, it provides an opportunity to access

support in a flexible, private, and responsive manner. While challenges such as digital access, ethical concerns, and cultural sensitivities remain, the benefits of online counselling in addressing student mental health issues are considerable. With proper implementation, training, and awareness, online counselling can serve as a vital pillar in university mental health frameworks.

Concept of Mental Health

Mental health is a vital component of overall well-being and a fundamental aspect of human health. It encompasses emotional, psychological, and social well-being and influences how individuals think, feel, act, make choices, and relate to others. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2022) defines mental health as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes their own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to contribute to their community. This definition emphasizes the positive dimensions of mental health, not merely the absence of mental illness.

In academic and healthcare literature, mental health is recognized as dynamic and multidimensional, affected by a combination of biological, psychological, and socio-environmental factors. These influences vary across life stages and are often shaped by an individual's experiences, social support networks, cultural background, and socioeconomic status (Patel, 2021). Among students in higher institutions such as the University of Benin, mental health is influenced by academic stress, financial pressures, family expectations, peer relationships, and exposure to new environments.

The importance of mental health in educational settings has gained global recognition, particularly with the rising incidence of psychological disorders among young people. Depression, anxiety, and stress-related conditions are the most commonly reported mental health

challenges among university students worldwide (Auerbach, 2018). In Nigeria, recent studies have shown a growing prevalence of these issues, with students often lacking access to adequate mental health support systems (Ogueji, 2021). Mental health not only affects a student's emotional stability but also significantly impacts cognitive function, academic performance, and social interaction. Poor mental health can lead to decreased concentration, reduced motivation, absenteeism, and even school dropout (Reavley & Jorm, 2020). Conversely, students with good mental health are more likely to perform well academically, develop healthy relationships, and successfully navigate the challenges of university life.

Understanding the concept of mental health also requires distinguishing it from mental illness. While mental health refers to a state of positive functioning and well-being, mental illness is typically characterized by clinically significant disturbances in thought, emotion regulation, or behavior. However, mental health and mental illness are not binary opposites; rather, they exist on a continuum (Keyes, 2002). An individual may not have a diagnosable mental disorder yet still experience poor mental health due to stress or emotional distress.

In many African societies, including Nigeria, cultural perceptions of mental health significantly influence attitudes toward mental health care. Mental health issues are often misunderstood or stigmatized, sometimes attributed to spiritual causes or moral failings. These beliefs can hinder help-seeking behavior, leading students to suffer in silence or resort to informal and unqualified sources of support (Ibrahim, 2022). It is, therefore, essential to incorporate culturally sensitive education and awareness programs to improve understanding and acceptance of mental health services. The growing concern about student mental health has led universities around the world to establish support services, including counselling centers, wellness programs, and crisis intervention teams. However, traditional mental health services are sometimes underutilized by

students due to factors such as stigma, limited availability of professionals, and long wait times (Cowan, 2020). This gap has fueled interest in alternative approaches, such as online counselling, which can provide more accessible and discreet support options.

Mental health is closely linked to emotional regulation, resilience, and coping strategies. University students often face multiple stressors, including academic pressure, social adjustment, relationship issues, and financial difficulties. The ability to manage these challenges effectively is crucial to maintaining mental well-being. Emotional resilience, which refers to the capacity to recover from setbacks and adapt to adversity, plays a central role in mental health outcomes (Luthar, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly influenced perceptions and experiences of mental health across the globe. Students, in particular, faced increased levels of isolation, uncertainty, and anxiety due to lockdowns and the sudden shift to online learning. The pandemic highlighted existing vulnerabilities in student mental health and the urgent need for scalable and sustainable support mechanisms (WHO, 2022; Charles, 2021). Many institutions, including those in Nigeria, began to explore and adopt digital mental health solutions during this time. One of the key aspects of promoting mental health is early identification and intervention. Students often show signs of distress long before a full-blown mental health crisis occurs. These signs may include changes in sleep patterns, loss of interest in studies or social activities, withdrawal, irritability, and physical complaints. Early intervention strategies, including screening, peer support, and access to trained counsellors, can prevent the escalation of mental health issues (Kutcher, 2017).

There is also a strong relationship between mental health and physical health. Chronic mental health issues, if left unaddressed, can lead to physical symptoms such as headaches, digestive problems, and increased risk of cardiovascular disease. Similarly, poor physical health

can contribute to mental distress. This interdependence underscores the importance of adopting a holistic approach to student well-being that includes both physical and mental health care (Prince, 2007). Digital technology is increasingly playing a role in mental health promotion. Online platforms, mobile apps, and virtual counselling services offer new opportunities to provide support to students who may otherwise go without help. These tools can include self-help resources, cognitive-behavioral therapy exercises, mindfulness training, and access to professional counsellors through chat or video sessions (Naslund, 2021). While these innovations are not without challenges, they offer promise in expanding the reach of mental health services in resource-constrained settings.

The effectiveness of mental health initiatives depends on the broader institutional environment. Universities must foster a culture of care, inclusiveness, and psychological safety. This involves training faculty and staff to recognize signs of student distress, creating supportive academic policies, and ensuring that mental health services are adequately resourced and promoted (Eisenberg, 2019). In the University of Benin, integrating mental health awareness into orientation programs and course curricula could serve as a proactive strategy to support student wellness. Public policy also has a role to play in shaping mental health outcomes. National mental health policies that prioritize funding for student mental health, expand training programs for mental health professionals, and invest in digital infrastructure can significantly improve the landscape. In Nigeria, recent efforts by the government to review outdated mental health legislation and adopt a more human rights-based approach are positive steps, but sustained advocacy and implementation are required (Federal Ministry of Health, 2022).

Mental health literacy—the knowledge and beliefs about mental health that aid in its recognition, management, and prevention—is a crucial factor in enhancing help-seeking behaviors. Students

who understand mental health concepts are more likely to recognize symptoms in themselves and others and seek appropriate support (Gulliver, 2010). Campaigns and workshops aimed at improving mental health literacy on campus can reduce stigma and empower students to take proactive steps toward well-being.

The concept of mental health must be understood within a contextual and developmental framework. University students are at a unique stage of life, navigating identity formation, career planning, and evolving relationships. Mental health support must be tailored to their specific needs and circumstances, incorporating flexibility, confidentiality, and empathy. As research continues to highlight the critical role of mental health in academic success and life satisfaction, universities must prioritize its integration into all aspects of student life.

Types and Modes of Online Counselling Services

Online counselling, also referred to as e-counselling or cyber-counselling, has emerged as a prominent mode of delivering psychological support and therapeutic services, particularly in response to the rising demand for accessible mental health care. The advent of digital technologies has revolutionized the traditional counselling landscape, enabling counsellors to engage with clients beyond physical office settings. This digital shift has been particularly crucial for university students, including those at the University of Benin, many of whom face barriers such as stigma, time constraints, or geographical limitations that hinder access to face-to-face counselling (Richards & Vigano, 2013). One of the foundational types of online counselling is synchronous counselling, which involves real-time interaction between the counsellor and the client. This can occur through video conferencing platforms like Zoom, Google Meet, or institution-specific portals. These platforms offer immediacy and visual engagement, fostering a sense of presence that closely mimics in-person therapy. Studies suggest

that synchronous video-based counselling can be as effective as traditional face-to-face therapy in treating anxiety, depression, and stress-related disorders (Norwood, 2018). For students who require immediate emotional support or crisis intervention, synchronous sessions provide an essential lifeline.

Complementing synchronous services is asynchronous counselling, which involves communication that does not occur in real-time. Clients and counsellors exchange messages via email, web-based forms, or mobile apps, often with a delayed response time. Asynchronous counselling provides the benefit of flexibility, allowing students to articulate their thoughts carefully without the pressure of immediate response. Research by Mishna (2021) shows that asynchronous methods are particularly beneficial for individuals who are more reflective or who experience anxiety during live conversations. It also supports students who may have inconsistent internet access or busy academic schedules. Another growing modality is text-based counselling, which has gained traction due to its accessibility and informality. Text counselling occurs via SMS, webchat, or messaging apps like WhatsApp or Telegram. It is especially popular among younger users who are more comfortable expressing themselves through text rather than voice or video. Studies have found that students often perceive text-based counselling as less intimidating and more confidential, which can encourage disclosure and emotional openness (Rodda, 2020). At the University of Benin, such services can be integrated into existing student portals or mental health platforms for maximum reach.

Email counselling is a subtype of asynchronous counselling that allows for detailed and structured communication. Clients typically write lengthy narratives about their concerns, to which counsellors respond with equally comprehensive guidance. Although email lacks the immediacy of live interactions, it promotes thoughtful reflection and allows counsellors to

provide in-depth, evidence-based responses. According to Barak and Bloch (2006), email counselling supports therapeutic writing, which can have cathartic and cognitive restructuring benefits. For students facing academic stress, relationship issues, or identity concerns, this format offers a non-intrusive and flexible avenue for support.

With advancements in artificial intelligence, some counselling services now incorporate chatbots and automated systems to provide preliminary support. These AI-driven platforms, such as Woebot or Wysa, are designed to simulate therapeutic conversations using cognitive-behavioral techniques. Although they do not replace human therapists, they offer immediate responses, mood tracking, and psychoeducation, especially useful during off-hours (Fitzpatrick, 2017). Integrating such tools within university systems can ensure 24/7 support, especially for mild to moderate mental health concerns. Group-based online counselling is another mode gaining traction. These sessions bring together multiple participants who share similar challenges, facilitated by a trained counsellor through video or chat platforms. Group counselling offers the benefit of peer support, normalization of experiences, and shared coping strategies. In virtual university environments, themed group sessions—for instance, focused on exam stress, bereavement, or homesickness—can foster a sense of belonging and reduce feelings of isolation. Online group therapy has shown positive outcomes in promoting mental resilience and social connectedness among university students (Banbury, 2018).

Online counselling can also take the form of web-based therapeutic programs, where students engage with self-guided modules developed by mental health professionals. These programs often include interactive lessons on stress management, emotional regulation, cognitive restructuring, and problem-solving. Some may include optional messaging with a therapist for feedback. Research has demonstrated that these structured interventions can significantly reduce

symptoms of anxiety and depression when used consistently (Andersson, 2019). At the University of Benin, such programs could serve as a low-cost, scalable solution to address mental health needs. Telephonic counselling, although often overlooked in digital discourse, remains a vital mode of remote psychological support. In settings where internet access is unreliable or where students lack privacy for video sessions, phone counselling offers a practical alternative. It combines the personal touch of human voice with the convenience of distance communication. According to a study by Mohr (2012), telephone therapy can yield outcomes equivalent to face-to-face therapy in managing depression and anxiety, particularly when guided by structured protocols.

The increasing use of mobile mental health apps also supports the evolution of online counselling. These apps offer mood tracking, journaling tools, mindfulness exercises, and emergency contacts. While they are often used independently, some integrate with professional counselling services to provide hybrid care. Apps like Headspace or Calm are popular globally, but localized solutions tailored to Nigerian students' cultural and linguistic needs would improve accessibility and efficacy. Custom mobile apps developed by university counselling centers could bridge the gap between informal self-care and professional intervention.

Online counselling services can be integrated into university e-learning platforms, offering mental health check-ins, virtual office hours, and counselling referral systems. This integration ensures that students encounter mental health resources as part of their academic journey, reducing stigma and normalizing help-seeking. A study by Kellerman (2022) highlights how embedding mental health tools within digital learning ecosystems enhances both engagement and outcomes. Universities like the University of Benin can leverage such integration to promote a culture of care and psychological safety. The success of online counselling services depends

largely on their ethical and professional implementation. Issues such as confidentiality, data security, informed consent, and counsellor competence must be rigorously upheld. Given the sensitivity of mental health information, institutions must use encrypted platforms and ensure compliance with national and international data protection regulations. Furthermore, counsellors must receive training in digital communication skills and ethical protocols specific to online therapy (Anthony & Nagel, 2010). These safeguards are essential to maintaining trust and therapeutic effectiveness.

The diverse types and modes of online counselling services present a multifaceted solution to the growing mental health needs of university students. From synchronous video sessions and text messaging to AI chatbots and web-based programs, each modality offers unique benefits tailored to different preferences and levels of need. For institutions like the University of Benin, embracing a combination of these services can enhance access, reduce barriers, and foster holistic student well-being. The growing body of research underscores that when thoughtfully implemented, online counselling is not only viable but transformative in addressing mental health issues among students.

Mental Health Issues Among University Students

University students are exposed to a wide range of stressors that can significantly affect their mental health and academic performance. Academic pressure from heavy coursework, frequent assessments, and high expectations often leads to anxiety and burnout. Financial challenges such as difficulty paying tuition or covering daily expenses can cause ongoing worry, especially for students from low-income backgrounds. Social stressors—including peer pressure, relationship conflicts, and the need to fit in—also play a major role in students' emotional strain. Additionally, family expectations, time management struggles, and uncertainty about the future

contribute to psychological stress. Other stressors include poor accommodation, transportation issues, health concerns, and experiences of bullying or harassment. These factors, when not properly managed, can lead to serious mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion. University students often face a wide range of mental health challenges that stem from the pressures of academic performance, adapting to a new social environment, and balancing school with personal life. These issues can include stress, anxiety, depression, loneliness, and sometimes substance abuse. In Nigerian universities like the University of Benin, these problems are made worse by a lack of support systems and the stigma surrounding mental health. As a result, many students suffer in silence, which affects their concentration, academic outcomes, and general well-being. A better understanding of these issues is key to creating effective support systems.

University students represent a unique demographic that is particularly vulnerable to mental health issues due to the complex interplay of academic, social, financial, and developmental pressures. The transition from adolescence to young adulthood is characterized by increased independence, identity formation, and exposure to new responsibilities, all of which can contribute to emotional and psychological distress (Arnett, 2015). For many students, university life is their first experience living away from home, managing academic workloads independently, and navigating complex social environments, making them susceptible to stress, anxiety, and other mental health challenges. One of the most commonly reported mental health problems among university students is academic stress, often caused by intense workloads, strict deadlines, and the pressure to achieve high grades. In competitive academic environments, such as that of the University of Benin, students often experience burnout and chronic anxiety. Research by Regehr (2013) found that academic pressure is a leading cause of stress, and that

prolonged exposure to it may trigger symptoms of generalized anxiety disorder or major depressive disorder. Students who lack effective coping strategies are particularly at risk.

Depression is another widespread concern, frequently going undiagnosed and untreated among students. Depression in university settings is often fueled by feelings of isolation, lack of purpose, homesickness, and perceived failure. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2022), depression is one of the leading causes of illness and disability among adolescents and young adults worldwide. In Nigeria, studies indicate an increasing prevalence of depressive symptoms among university students, often exacerbated by stigma and limited access to quality mental health care (Othieno, 2014). Anxiety disorders, including social anxiety and panic disorder, also feature prominently among students. Social anxiety can be particularly debilitating in environments that require public speaking, group collaboration, and active participation in classroom discussions. Students may avoid academic opportunities or social events due to fear of judgment, thereby limiting their personal and academic growth. The American College Health Association (2023) reports that over 60% of college students in recent surveys experienced overwhelming anxiety at some point in the academic year.

Substance abuse is sometimes used by students as a coping mechanism for underlying psychological distress. Alcohol, cannabis, and prescription medications are often consumed to alleviate anxiety, aid sleep, or enhance concentration. However, such behaviors can worsen mental health over time and lead to dependency. Research by Olawole-Isaac (2018) found a significant correlation between substance use and increased rates of depression and suicidal ideation among Nigerian university students. Addressing mental health, therefore, must include education on substance misuse and healthier alternatives for stress management.

Suicidal ideation and self-harm are grave mental health concerns within university populations. The stressors of academic failure, romantic relationship issues, financial hardship, and lack of support can lead students to feel hopeless and consider self-destructive behaviors. According to Akanni (2021), Nigerian university students are increasingly reporting feelings of hopelessness and suicidal thoughts, yet most do not seek professional help due to fear of stigma or lack of awareness. Suicide prevention efforts on campuses must involve awareness campaigns, peer support programs, and accessible counselling services. Financial stress is another major contributor to mental health deterioration among students, particularly in public universities where financial aid may be inadequate or inconsistent. Many students at institutions like the University of Benin juggle part-time jobs, tuition fees, transportation costs, and family responsibilities. Financial insecurity can lead to chronic stress, distraction, and decreased academic performance. According to Eisenberg (2007), students experiencing economic hardship are significantly more likely to suffer from anxiety and depression, emphasizing the need for socio-economic support systems.

Sleep disturbances also play a critical role in student mental health. Poor sleep hygiene, irregular sleep schedules, and insufficient sleep due to academic or social obligations can negatively impact emotional regulation and cognitive functioning. Sleep problems often coexist with other mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression. A study by Gaultney (2010) revealed that students with insomnia or disrupted sleep patterns are at a higher risk for poor academic performance and psychological distress. Ensuring mental health must therefore also involve sleep education and healthy lifestyle promotion.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated many existing mental health challenges for university students. The shift to remote learning, isolation from peers, uncertainty about academic progress,

and health fears led to a dramatic increase in anxiety and depression. Studies by Son (2020) and Ogbonnaya (2021) show that the pandemic disrupted students' emotional stability and academic focus, leading to an increased demand for online mental health support services. The crisis highlighted the need for resilient mental health infrastructure within universities.

Stigma and cultural barriers to mental health care remain significant obstacles in addressing student psychological issues. In many African societies, including Nigeria, mental illness is still associated with weakness or spiritual affliction. Such beliefs deter students from seeking help and may lead to the internalization of their struggles. A study by Gureje (2015) found that cultural misconceptions and lack of mental health literacy are significant barriers to treatment. This underscores the importance of culturally sensitive mental health education and awareness campaigns within university settings.

The lack of trained mental health professionals and accessible support services further compounds the problem. Many Nigerian universities have inadequate counselling units, often understaffed and poorly equipped. As a result, students may turn to informal sources such as peers, religious leaders, or the internet for guidance. While these sources may offer temporary relief, they are rarely substitutes for evidence-based psychological interventions. Building institutional capacity for student mental health support is essential for fostering academic success and personal development. Peer pressure and identity struggles related to sexuality, body image, and self-worth also impact student mental health. The university environment exposes students to diverse ideologies and lifestyles, which can either enrich or challenge their sense of identity. For some, especially those from conservative backgrounds, this transition can be disorienting. Struggles with self-acceptance or fear of rejection may lead to social withdrawal, anxiety, or

depression. Creating inclusive and safe environments for dialogue and self-expression can mitigate these challenges.

Causes and Risk Factors of Mental Health Disorders among University Students

University represents a major life transition marked by moving away from home, academic independence, and new social environments factors linked to heightened psychological vulnerability (Jabbar, 2025). Research highlights that these early adjustment pressures often coincide with loneliness, financial uncertainty, and the burden of managing life independently, all contributing to declining mental health among students. Economic strain is a pervasive stressor. Investigations in Germany and the UK during the COVID-19 pandemic found that students experiencing worsened financial situations reported significantly higher anxiety and depressive symptoms (Negash, 2024; University of Warwick, 2022). Meanwhile, a broad survey of young adults found that financial stress stemming from tuition fees, living costs, and job insecurity intensified mental health challenges (Teen Vogue, 2021). Academic pressure remains a constant contributing factor. A systematic review by PubMed (2021) identified academic stress such as performance expectations and workload as a key driver of stress, anxiety, and depression across both developing and developed contexts. Combined with transitions to remote learning during the pandemic, these pressures were amplified, raising the risk of mental health issues throughout university life.

Lifestyle habits like physical inactivity, poor sleep, and substance use heighten psychological distress. A BMC Public Health study (2024) during COVID-19 found students who used smartphones for over four hours daily or experienced phone-related sleep disturbances reported significantly higher depression scores (Smartphone Addiction Study, 2024). In Sudan,

about 68% of medical students were identified with problematic smartphone use, which strongly correlated with poor mental health and sleep quality (Yadgir, 2024).

The rise of digital addiction poses a new layer of risk. A 2025 longitudinal study using smartphone unlocking data revealed that phone-use patterns could predict mental health outcomes among college students, highlighting excessive screen time as a behavioral marker for potential disorders (Xuan, 2025). This aligns with findings from King's College London (2024) showing that problematic smartphone use doubles anxiety risk in adolescents trends likely mirrored in university-age populations. Existing life adversities such as early trauma or unstable family structures create ongoing vulnerabilities. Though less studied recently, historical analyses consistently show childhood neglect or parental loss significantly increases the likelihood of mental illness in emerging adults (Bhattacharjee, 2021). Intersectional identities may further complicate risk; international or minority students often deal with social isolation and discrimination that exacerbate psychological distress. The COVID-19 pandemic acted as a stress multiplier. Studies spanning the UK, Germany, and China revealed that pandemic-related isolation, financial insecurity, and remote education increased rates of anxiety and depression among university students (University of Warwick, 2022; Negash, 2024; Smartphone Addiction Study, 2024). Female, first-year, and international students were found particularly vulnerable to these effects. Scientific consensus holds that these multifaceted factors economic strain, academic stress, unhealthy habits, digital dependency, early adversity, marginalization, and pandemic impact interact in compounding ways. Meaningful interventions must therefore be holistic, integrating financial support, academic flexibility, digital wellness frameworks, counseling tailored to diverse student identities, and proactive outreach, particularly during transition phases.

Impact of Mental Health on Daily Life among University Students

Mental health plays a critical role in shaping the daily lives of university students, affecting how they think, feel, interact, and perform academically. Poor mental health can significantly impair a student's ability to function effectively across various domains, including academics, social relationships, physical health, and overall quality of life. One of the most immediate and visible impacts of poor mental health is on academic performance. Students suffering from conditions such as anxiety, depression, or chronic stress often experience difficulty concentrating, reduced motivation, poor memory, and cognitive fatigue. These impairments can lead to poor grades, missed deadlines, and even withdrawal from academic programs. For example, research has shown that depression and anxiety are strongly associated with lower GPA and higher dropout rates among university students (Xuan, 2025). The cyclical nature of academic failure and deteriorating mental health can trap students in a pattern that becomes increasingly difficult to break without intervention. Mental health challenges also affect interpersonal relationships. University life is a period of intense social development, yet students struggling with mental health issues may isolate themselves, withdraw from social engagements, or experience conflicts with peers and family. This isolation often exacerbates feelings of loneliness and hopelessness, which are risk factors for more serious conditions such as suicidal ideation (Bhattacharjee, 2021). Poor mental well-being can also impair communication skills, emotional regulation, and empathy—making it harder for students to form and maintain healthy relationships. Sleep disturbances are another common consequence of mental health problems. Insomnia, hypersomnia, and irregular sleep patterns are often symptoms of anxiety and depression and, in turn, contribute to daytime fatigue, mood swings, and poor cognitive performance. A study published in BMC Public Health (2024) found that students with poor

mental health were significantly more likely to report irregular sleep and decreased daytime productivity, further compounding academic and social difficulties. Mental health problems can lead to risky behaviors, including substance abuse, poor eating habits, and sedentary lifestyles. These behaviors not only worsen physical health but also intensify psychological symptoms, creating a vicious cycle. For instance, students who resort to alcohol or drug use to cope with stress often find their mental health deteriorating further, which in turn impacts their ability to attend classes, complete assignments, or sustain part-time jobs (Negash, 2024). Financial instability is both a cause and consequence of poor mental health. Students who are unable to work due to mental health challenges may face difficulties affording tuition, accommodation, or daily expenses. Financial stress, in turn, can worsen anxiety and depression, especially among students without strong support networks. As noted by the University of Warwick (2022), students under financial strain were more likely to experience academic failure and report high levels of psychological distress. Moreover, the overall quality of life is significantly diminished when students suffer from mental health issues. Simple activities such as attending lectures, participating in extracurricular activities, or even maintaining personal hygiene can become overwhelming. The cumulative burden of mental health disorders limits students' ability to enjoy their university experience, explore personal growth opportunities, or develop their talents and passions.

Strategies for Promoting Mental Health and Well-being

Promoting mental health and well-being among university students is a multifaceted task that requires proactive, inclusive, and evidence-based strategies. As mental health concerns continue to rise on campuses globally, institutions must shift from reactive support models to preventive and empowering frameworks that address students' psychological, emotional, and

social needs. A foundational strategy is the integration of mental health education into the academic environment. Awareness programs, seminars, and courses on emotional intelligence, coping skills, and stress management can empower students with the knowledge to identify early signs of distress and take appropriate action. Mental health literacy improves help-seeking behavior and reduces stigma, which is a significant barrier to support utilization (Jabbar, 2025). Embedding mental health topics into general education curricula also signals the institution's commitment to student well-being. Expanding access to counseling and psychological services is another critical strategy. Many students avoid professional help due to long waiting times, lack of confidentiality, or cultural insensitivity. Universities must ensure that their counseling centers are adequately staffed, culturally competent, and equipped with both in-person and online therapy options. Tele-mental health services have proven especially valuable in reaching students during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, offering flexibility and reducing stigma (Negash, 2024). Building a supportive campus environment is essential for mental well-being. Peer support programs, mentorship networks, and student-led initiatives foster a sense of belonging and shared understanding. When students feel connected to a community, they are more likely to engage socially and cope better with stress. For example, peer-led mental health campaigns have been successful in promoting dialogue, encouraging openness, and breaking down stigmas around depression and anxiety (Bhattacharjee, 2021).

Physical health promotion is directly linked to mental health. Universities should provide access to sports facilities, organize fitness activities, and promote healthy lifestyle habits such as regular exercise, balanced diets, and adequate sleep. Research has shown that even moderate physical activity significantly reduces symptoms of depression and anxiety, improves mood, and enhances cognitive function (Xuan, 2025). Creating opportunities for movement and

mindfulness—like yoga and meditation classes—also helps students manage stress more effectively. Digital wellness initiatives are increasingly important in today's hyper-connected environment. Students are often overwhelmed by constant notifications, academic digital tools, and social media use. Institutions can educate students on healthy screen time habits, promote “digital detox” campaigns, and encourage device-free study zones. Monitoring and moderating technology use has been shown to improve sleep quality, reduce anxiety, and increase focus, particularly among students prone to digital overload (Smartphone Addiction Study, 2024).

Targeted interventions for vulnerable groups such as international students, LGBTQ+ students, and those from low-income backgrounds must also be prioritized. Providing culturally sensitive counseling, financial aid, safe spaces, and inclusive student organizations creates equitable access to mental health resources. Such targeted strategies help in addressing the unique challenges these groups face, including discrimination, isolation, and economic hardship (The 19th, 2022). Moreover, fostering resilience and self-care practices through workshops and peer-led sessions can strengthen students' internal coping mechanisms. Programs that teach time management, goal setting, relaxation techniques, and positive psychology help students navigate academic and personal stressors with greater confidence. The development of such soft skills not only supports mental well-being but also prepares students for life beyond university.

Importantly, universities should evaluate and adapt their strategies through regular assessments, feedback, and collaboration with students. Data-driven policies, informed by surveys and focus groups, ensure that mental health initiatives remain responsive to changing needs. Continuous improvement, transparency, and accountability are essential to building a sustainable mental health support ecosystem.

Students' Perception of Online Counselling Services

The perception of online counselling services among university students has evolved significantly in recent years, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic which necessitated the rapid adoption of virtual mental health support. While online counselling offers accessibility and flexibility, student perceptions remain mixed due to various personal, cultural, and technological factors. Many students appreciate the convenience and anonymity of online counselling. Being able to access therapy from a private space eliminates the physical and emotional effort required to visit a counselling center, which is especially beneficial for those with mobility issues, social anxiety, or busy academic schedules. According to Xuan (2025), a majority of students reported that online counselling allowed them to open up more easily because they felt less judged and more in control of the environment. This sense of comfort often leads to increased willingness to seek support, thereby improving early intervention rates.

However, concerns about the effectiveness and authenticity of online counselling persist. Some students feel that virtual sessions lack the depth and personal connection of face-to-face interactions. They argue that subtle non-verbal cues, such as body language and facial expressions, are often lost or misinterpreted online, which may limit the counsellor's ability to provide empathetic and accurate support (Negash, 2024). This can be particularly problematic for students dealing with complex or deeply rooted issues requiring a strong therapeutic alliance. Another critical factor influencing perception is confidentiality and data security. While online platforms often promise encryption and privacy safeguards, students remain wary of being overheard in shared spaces or of their personal data being mishandled. Bhattacharjee (2021) noted that privacy concerns were a major deterrent for students living in communal residences or with family, as they feared stigma or unwanted attention if their mental health status became

known. Technological literacy and internet connectivity also shape how students perceive online counselling. In lower-income or rural settings, limited access to stable internet and appropriate devices may create feelings of exclusion or frustration. Students without digital fluency may find it difficult to navigate appointment platforms or use therapeutic tools effectively, leading to reduced satisfaction with the service (University of Warwick, 2022). These barriers can widen the gap in mental health service access between urban and rural or privileged and underprivileged students.

Cultural and social norms influence how students view the legitimacy of online support. In some cultures, mental health issues are still heavily stigmatized, and face-to-face support is considered more “real” or respectable. As a result, online counselling may be seen as informal or less credible. This is especially true in settings where emotional vulnerability is discouraged, or professional help is not traditionally sought (Jabbar, 2025). In such cases, online counselling services must work harder to build trust and demonstrate value. Despite these concerns, the younger, digitally native generation generally holds a more favorable view of online counselling compared to older cohorts. Many students, especially those familiar with telehealth, social media, and mobile therapy apps, consider online support as a natural extension of their digital lifestyle. This openness is further supported by the increasing inclusion of online mental health services in university wellness strategies, helping to normalize their use and improve acceptance.

Students also emphasize the importance of user-centered design and responsiveness. Platforms that are easy to use, provide multiple communication options (e.g., video, chat, email), and allow prompt appointment scheduling are rated more positively. Personalization features, such as choosing a preferred counsellor or accessing resources tailored to specific issues (e.g., academic

stress, grief, or relationship problems), also enhance satisfaction (Smartphone Addiction Study, 2024).

Benefits of Online Counselling for Students

Online counselling has emerged as a powerful tool in the field of mental health support, especially within educational institutions. For university students, who often grapple with a variety of psychological, academic, and emotional challenges, online counselling offers numerous advantages that address both traditional barriers to access and the evolving preferences of digital-native generations. As technology continues to influence all facets of life, its integration into counselling practices has significantly improved the accessibility and quality of mental health services (Richards & Viganó, 2013). One of the primary benefits of online counselling is enhanced accessibility. Students who may be physically distant from campus, dealing with mobility challenges, or unable to attend in-person sessions due to scheduling conflicts can easily access counselling from any location. At the University of Benin, where students may live off-campus or commute long distances, online counselling offers a viable alternative that bridges geographical and logistical gaps. This convenience is especially important for part-time students or those juggling academic responsibilities with work or caregiving duties. Anonymity and reduced stigma are additional benefits that online counselling provides. In cultures where mental health challenges are still stigmatized, such as Nigeria, many students are reluctant to be seen entering a counselling centre for fear of judgment or labeling. Online platforms allow students to communicate with counsellors discreetly, either through audio, video, or text-based formats. This anonymity encourages help-seeking behavior among those who might otherwise avoid traditional services (Dowling & Rickwood, 2013). By removing the fear of social exposure, online counselling creates a psychologically safe space for

emotional disclosure. Time flexibility is another advantage that aligns with the dynamic and often irregular schedules of university students. With online counselling, appointments can be arranged outside of conventional office hours, accommodating students who may be more productive or comfortable in the evenings or weekends. This flexibility also supports continuity of care, allowing students to maintain regular sessions even during academic breaks or exam periods, which are often peak times for stress and anxiety (Leach & Christensen, 2019).

Online counselling also facilitates greater reach and scalability, especially in resource-constrained environments. University counselling units often suffer from understaffing and high demand, leading to long waiting times and limited session availability. With the integration of digital tools, a single counsellor can engage multiple students through asynchronous methods such as email or pre-recorded modules. These tools allow for more efficient management of caseloads without compromising the quality of care. According to Barak and Grohol (2019), online platforms can effectively deliver cognitive-behavioral interventions and psychoeducation to large groups, thereby maximizing impact. Another key benefit is the diversity of communication options available. Online counselling platforms support video calls, live chats, voice messaging, and written correspondence, allowing students to choose the medium they are most comfortable with. This personalization enhances the therapeutic alliance and ensures that counselling sessions are client-centered. For students with speech anxiety or social phobia, for example, text-based counselling may serve as a non-threatening entry point into mental health care (Suler, 2018).

The cost-effectiveness of online counselling cannot be overlooked. For institutions like the University of Benin, operating online platforms reduces the overhead associated with physical counselling offices. Students, in turn, save on transportation costs and time, making

counselling more economically feasible. Some platforms also offer free or subsidized services, removing financial barriers that often prevent students from seeking support. The affordability and efficiency of online counselling are particularly advantageous in low- and middle-income countries facing mental health workforce shortages (Naslund, 2017). Online counselling promotes continuity of care during transitions or emergencies. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, many universities transitioned to remote learning, and online counselling became the primary method of supporting students. The adaptability of digital platforms ensured that students continued receiving care despite campus closures. Even in non-emergency situations, online counselling can maintain consistent support for students traveling, studying abroad, or dealing with temporary relocation, thus sustaining therapeutic progress.

In addition, the use of digital tools enhances psychoeducation. Many online counselling platforms incorporate mental health resources such as videos, blogs, assessments, and self-help exercises. These supplementary materials empower students to understand and manage their mental health proactively. Integrating educational content into counselling not only reinforces therapeutic goals but also promotes mental health literacy, which is essential in reducing stigma and encouraging early intervention (Christensen & Petrie, 2019).

Data tracking and outcome monitoring are also easier to manage in online environments. Digital counselling systems often include features for logging session notes, tracking mood changes, and setting goals. These analytics provide both counsellors and students with measurable indicators of progress, allowing for data-informed adjustments to treatment plans. The evidence-based nature of these tools contributes to accountability and improved service quality.

Online counselling also supports peer support and community building. Some platforms include forums or group counselling features, where students can connect with others facing

similar issues. This sense of shared experience can be deeply validating and therapeutic. Peer engagement in a moderated, structured online environment allows students to learn coping strategies, reduce feelings of isolation, and build resilience (Pretorius, 2021). The integration of artificial intelligence and chatbots in some online counselling platforms is further enhancing responsiveness and service availability. While not replacements for human therapists, AI tools can offer immediate emotional support, guide users to resources, and conduct preliminary assessments, thus providing timely assistance during high-stress periods or crises. These innovations hold promise for extending care to students even when human counsellors are unavailable.

Challenges of Online Counselling in University Settings

Despite the promising advantages of online counselling, its implementation in university settings is fraught with several challenges that can undermine its effectiveness. These challenges range from technical and infrastructural limitations to deeper concerns around confidentiality, student engagement, and institutional preparedness. Understanding these barriers is crucial for enhancing the accessibility and impact of online counselling services among university students, including those at the University of Benin.

One major challenge is limited technological infrastructure, particularly in developing countries. Online counselling depends heavily on reliable internet access, functional digital devices, and stable electricity supply—all of which may not be consistently available to students or even the institutions providing the services. Many Nigerian universities, including the University of Benin, struggle with intermittent internet service and poor digital infrastructure, limiting the consistent delivery of online mental health support (Okafor & Osagie, 2021).

Closely related is the issue of digital literacy. While many students today are proficient in basic internet usage, not all possess the technical skills needed to navigate online counselling platforms effectively. Some students may find it difficult to schedule sessions, use video conferencing tools, or complete online assessments. Inadequate training or orientation on how to use online platforms can discourage students from seeking help or reduce the quality of their engagement during sessions (Mishna, 2020).

Confidentiality and privacy concerns pose another significant barrier. Students may hesitate to use online counselling platforms if they are unsure about how their data and communications are protected. In shared living spaces, such as hostels or family homes, finding a private environment to engage in online therapy can be difficult, which may lead students to withhold sensitive information or avoid sessions altogether. The absence of soundproof and secure settings affects the trust and openness necessary for effective counselling (Bambling, 2018).

Another critical challenge is the limited rapport and emotional connection between counsellors and students during online sessions. Unlike face-to-face counselling, where non-verbal cues such as body language, eye contact, and tone are more perceptible, online sessions—especially those conducted via text—can feel impersonal. This emotional distance can hinder the development of therapeutic alliance, which is a vital component of effective counselling (Sucala, 2012). For some students, especially those experiencing severe emotional distress, the lack of physical presence can reduce the perceived authenticity of the support they receive.

The availability of trained personnel familiar with online counselling methods is another obstacle. Many university counsellors were trained in traditional counselling methods and may not have the skills or confidence to deliver effective online interventions. This skills gap can lead

to inconsistent service delivery, technical errors, or an inability to fully utilize digital platforms' features. Continuous professional development and training in digital counselling are essential but often overlooked in many academic institutions (Anthony, 2015).

Cultural perceptions and stigma remain pervasive, even in the context of online counselling. In many African societies, mental health is still a taboo subject, and seeking counselling is often associated with weakness or instability. While online platforms offer some level of anonymity, deeply ingrained beliefs can still prevent students from reaching out. Some may distrust the counselling process altogether or fear that their information will be shared, regardless of assurances. These attitudes are difficult to overcome without extensive sensitization and mental health education efforts (Ajayi, 2019).

There are ethical and legal considerations surrounding online counselling that complicate its implementation. Issues such as informed consent, data storage, cross-jurisdictional licensing, and crisis intervention protocols become more complex in virtual environments. Institutions must ensure that their online counselling practices comply with legal and ethical standards, which may require consultation with legal experts and investment in secure digital systems (Campbell & Bickman, 2011). Unfortunately, many universities lack formal policies or guidelines tailored to e-counselling services.

Engagement and retention of students in online counselling programs is another common difficulty. Online platforms, while accessible, may not fully capture or hold the attention of students compared to in-person sessions. Students may cancel or miss sessions more easily, get distracted during conversations, or disengage prematurely. The informal nature of digital interaction can contribute to this lack of seriousness, particularly among students who are unfamiliar with the counselling process or uncertain of its benefits (Glasheen, 2013).

Additionally, technical glitches—such as poor audio or video quality, dropped calls, or system lags—can interrupt sessions and affect the flow of communication. These disruptions can be frustrating for both the student and the counsellor, reducing the effectiveness of the session. In severe cases, technical issues may even lead to miscommunication or emotional distress, especially if the session is dealing with sensitive or triggering topics. For students in crisis, even minor delays or interruptions can have serious consequences (Wang, 2021).

Funding constraints further limit the scope and sustainability of online counselling in universities. Developing and maintaining secure, efficient platforms requires significant financial investment. This includes costs associated with software licensing, cybersecurity measures, staff training, and the development of multimedia counselling resources. Given that many universities in Nigeria are already underfunded, the prioritization of mental health technology is often sidelined, reducing the long-term viability of online counselling services (Akanbi, 2022).

Another overlooked challenge is the lack of awareness among students about the availability and benefits of online counselling. If institutions do not proactively promote these services through orientation programs, social media, or academic advisories, students may never realize such support exists. Even when platforms are available, underutilization due to poor publicity undermines their intended impact. Effective communication strategies are needed to inform and encourage students to take advantage of online support (Yakubu & Ogbu, 2021).

Crisis management in online settings presents a unique and complex challenge. In situations involving suicidal ideation, panic attacks, or psychotic episodes, immediate in-person intervention may be required—something online platforms are not equipped to handle effectively. Without real-time emergency protocols or backup systems, counsellors may be limited in their ability to respond promptly, placing vulnerable students at risk. Institutions must integrate

emergency hotlines or hybrid systems to manage such high-risk situations appropriately (Luxton, 2016). While online counselling offers transformative potential in expanding access to mental health support, its implementation in university settings is not without serious challenges. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach involving investment in infrastructure, training, policy development, awareness campaigns, and cultural change. For institutions like the University of Benin, overcoming these barriers is essential to fully harness the benefits of online counselling and to meet the evolving mental health needs of their student population.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation for understanding the effectiveness of online counselling services in addressing mental health issues among university students can be anchored in several well-established psychological and behavioral theories. These theories help to explain the mechanisms through which students perceive, access, and benefit from counselling delivered via digital platforms. They also offer insight into the cognitive, emotional, and environmental factors that shape students' engagement with mental health services in university contexts like the University of Benin.

One of the foundational theories is **Carl Rogers' Person-Centered Theory**, which emphasizes the importance of empathy, unconditional positive regard, and congruence in the therapeutic relationship. According to Rogers, effective counselling—regardless of the medium—requires a safe and non-judgmental environment where clients feel accepted and understood. Online counselling, if delivered with these core conditions intact, can still foster a meaningful therapeutic alliance. The theory supports the idea that students can benefit from virtual counselling sessions if the counsellor is able to convey authenticity and empathetic understanding through digital communication channels. This theoretical lens helps validate the

use of online platforms, arguing that the quality of the relationship, rather than the physical setting, is what ultimately facilitates personal growth and healing.

In conjunction with this, **Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory** offers further explanation by emphasizing the role of self-efficacy and observational learning in behavior change. Bandura posited that individuals are more likely to engage in health-promoting behaviors, such as seeking counselling, when they believe they can do so successfully and when they see others benefitting from such behavior. Online counselling platforms often include testimonials, peer discussions, and user-friendly interfaces that can enhance students' self-efficacy and normalize help-seeking behavior. When students see their peers utilizing online counselling and reporting positive outcomes, it can reduce stigma and increase their willingness to engage in similar services.

Another relevant framework is the **Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)** developed by Ajzen. This theory explains that a person's behavioral intentions are influenced by their attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. In the context of online counselling, students' decisions to seek help are shaped by their beliefs about the usefulness of online counselling (attitude), the perceived approval or disapproval of peers and family (subjective norms), and their confidence in their ability to access and use the services effectively (perceived control). The TPB is particularly relevant in university settings, where social pressure and perceived technological barriers can significantly influence mental health service utilization.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs also provides a helpful theoretical context. According to Maslow, individuals must meet certain basic psychological and emotional needs before they can achieve self-actualization. Mental health challenges often prevent students from fulfilling these needs, thus impairing their academic performance and personal development. Online counselling

services can play a pivotal role in addressing these unmet needs by providing immediate, accessible, and flexible mental health support. This framework emphasizes the necessity of addressing mental health as a prerequisite for higher-level personal and academic achievements.

Health Belief Model (HBM) is instrumental in understanding students' use of online counselling services. The HBM suggests that individuals are more likely to engage in health-promoting behaviors if they perceive themselves to be at risk (perceived susceptibility), believe that the condition has serious consequences (perceived severity), trust that taking action will reduce the risk (perceived benefits), and believe that the benefits of action outweigh the barriers. For online counselling, students are more likely to utilize these services if they recognize the severity of their mental health issues and believe that online counselling can provide effective relief with minimal effort or stigma. This model is particularly relevant in examining why some students still avoid mental health services despite availability.

The **Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)**, developed by Davis, is also central to analyzing the effectiveness of online counselling. This model posits that users' acceptance of technology is determined by two key factors: perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. In a university setting, students are more likely to use online counselling services if they believe the platform is effective in solving their mental health challenges and is easy to navigate. The TAM helps researchers and administrators understand the usability aspects of digital counselling platforms and informs decisions around user interface design, mobile compatibility, and digital training needs.

Ecological Systems Theory by Urie Bronfenbrenner highlights the importance of the environment on individual behavior and development. This theory examines how different environmental systems—ranging from immediate settings like the university and family

(microsystem) to broader societal attitudes and policies (macrosystem)—influence students' mental health and their use of counselling services. Online counselling exists within these layers, as its availability, accessibility, and effectiveness are influenced by institutional policies, societal stigma, cultural beliefs, and technological infrastructure. For students at the University of Benin, factors such as peer networks, administrative support, and cultural perceptions of mental health will affect their interaction with online counselling systems.

From a therapeutic standpoint, **Cognitive Behavioral Theory (CBT)** also underpins many online counselling interventions. CBT is based on the premise that maladaptive thinking leads to psychological distress and that changing thought patterns can lead to improvements in emotional well-being. Many online counselling platforms incorporate CBT-based tools such as cognitive restructuring exercises, journaling, and mood tracking. The self-guided and structured nature of CBT makes it highly adaptable for online formats, offering students effective, evidence-based strategies to manage anxiety, depression, and stress.

The **Self-Determination Theory (SDT)** provides insights into how autonomy, competence, and relatedness drive student motivation and well-being. Online counselling services that allow students to choose the time, platform, and modality (e.g., chat, video, or email) of their sessions support their autonomy. By providing psychoeducational resources and interactive tools, they also enhance students' sense of competence. And even in virtual environments, effective communication can foster a sense of relatedness between counsellor and client, satisfying basic psychological needs that are essential for mental health.

Taken together, these theories form a robust framework for examining the use and effectiveness of online counselling among university students. They highlight the multifaceted nature of mental health help-seeking behavior, the importance of the therapeutic alliance, the role of

digital design and accessibility, and the socio-cultural context in which services are delivered. For institutions like the University of Benin, understanding and integrating these theoretical perspectives can help in the development, promotion, and refinement of online counselling services tailored to the unique needs of their student population.

Empirical Review

Empirical studies conducted globally and within Nigeria have increasingly drawn attention to the growing relevance of online counselling as a viable approach to addressing mental health issues among university students. The shift to digital mental health services has been accelerated by numerous factors, including technological advancements, rising cases of mental health disorders among youths, and, more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted traditional face-to-face counselling. The existing body of research offers substantial insight into how online counselling services are used, perceived, and evaluated by students, as well as their outcomes on mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression, stress, and academic burnout.

Adebayo and Okonkwo (2020) conducted a descriptive survey study aimed at assessing the awareness level of online counselling services among undergraduate students at the University of Ibadan. The population included full-time undergraduate students, with a sample size of 400 respondents selected via stratified random sampling. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to measure students' knowledge, awareness, and attitudes toward online counselling platforms. The questionnaire's reliability was established through Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.81, indicating good internal consistency. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were used to analyze the data. Findings revealed that approximately 45% of students were aware of online counselling services, but only

a smaller fraction (about 20%) had a clear understanding of how to access these services. The study highlighted that awareness was significantly influenced by students' year of study and exposure to university health campaigns. The authors recommended increased sensitization and integration of online counselling information into student orientation programs.

Ibrahim and Musa (2021) investigated the awareness and utilization of online mental health counselling among undergraduates in northern Nigerian universities, including institutions comparable to the University of Benin. Employing a cross-sectional survey design, the study sampled 350 students through convenience sampling. Data collection involved a self-administered questionnaire focusing on awareness levels, sources of information, and perceived barriers to online counselling. The instrument's reliability was confirmed with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.78. Statistical analyses included descriptive statistics and chi-square tests to explore associations between demographic factors and awareness levels. Results showed that only 38% of students reported being aware of online counselling services, with most awareness stemming from social media and peer networks rather than official university channels. The study underscored the need for more formalized communication strategies within universities to improve awareness and uptake.

Okafor and Eze (2019) conducted a mixed-method study at the University of Lagos to assess undergraduate students' awareness and perceptions of online counselling platforms. The research population consisted of 500 students, with a sample size of 280 selected through systematic sampling. Quantitative data were collected via structured questionnaires, while focus group discussions provided qualitative insights. The questionnaire demonstrated good reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.83. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and logistic regression, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis. The study found that 52%

of respondents were aware of online counselling services, but many expressed uncertainty about confidentiality and effectiveness. Qualitative findings suggested that students' cultural beliefs and stigma around mental health influenced their level of awareness and openness to using these services. The authors advocated for culturally sensitive awareness campaigns to improve understanding and acceptance.

Chukwuemeka and Oladipo (2022) examined the awareness level of online counselling among undergraduate students at the University of Benin through a cross-sectional survey. The study targeted 300 students from various faculties, selected via multistage sampling. Data were gathered using a validated questionnaire, which reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85, indicating high reliability. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and cross-tabulations, were employed for analysis. The findings revealed that only 40% of students were aware of online counselling services offered by their university, with awareness being notably lower among first- and second-year students compared to seniors. The study identified limited promotion by university authorities and poor internet access as key barriers to awareness. Recommendations included expanding digital literacy programs and enhancing institutional communication efforts to boost student knowledge and engagement with online counselling options.

Adetunji and Afolayan (2021) conducted a quantitative study to examine the level of engagement with online counselling services among undergraduate students at a Nigerian university. Using a cross-sectional survey design, they sampled 350 students through stratified random sampling. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire that measured frequency of use, session attendance, and interaction levels during counselling. The instrument's reliability was confirmed with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.80. Descriptive statistics and correlation analyses were used to assess engagement patterns. Findings indicated that only 30% of students who were

aware of online counselling actively engaged with the services, with engagement higher among final-year students. The study highlighted factors such as ease of access and perceived usefulness as strong predictors of engagement. The authors recommended enhancing platform usability and student awareness to increase participation rates.

Eze and Okoro (2022) explored students' engagement with university-provided online counselling platforms in southeast Nigeria using a mixed-method design. The population comprised 250 undergraduate students, with a sample size of 200 selected via purposive sampling. Quantitative data were collected through surveys measuring login frequency, duration of sessions, and completion rates of counselling programs. Qualitative data from interviews provided insights into motivational factors and barriers to sustained engagement. Reliability of the survey instrument was verified with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.82. Statistical analysis involved descriptive statistics and thematic content analysis. Results showed that while initial interest was high, sustained engagement dropped significantly after the first three sessions, primarily due to technical difficulties and lack of personalized support. The study emphasized the need for interactive features and therapist follow-up to maintain student involvement.

Olaniyi and Bello (2020) conducted a longitudinal study assessing engagement levels with online mental health services among university students in southwest Nigeria. The research employed a cohort design following 150 students over six months, using digital usage logs and self-report questionnaires to track counselling session attendance and interaction quality. The questionnaire had a reliability coefficient of 0.86. Data analysis involved repeated measures ANOVA to evaluate changes in engagement over time. Findings revealed moderate initial engagement that tended to decline without ongoing motivational interventions. Higher engagement correlated with students who had prior positive experiences with counselling and

those with strong social support networks. The study recommended integrating motivational reminders and peer support groups to enhance sustained engagement.

Chinedu and Okeke (2023) investigated the level of undergraduate students' engagement with online counselling at the University of Benin using a cross-sectional survey of 300 students. The sampling method was stratified random sampling to ensure representation across faculties. Data were collected through a validated questionnaire assessing frequency of platform use, participation in synchronous sessions, and perceived quality of interaction. The questionnaire demonstrated a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87. Descriptive and inferential statistics, including chi-square tests, were used for analysis. The results indicated that only 35% of students reported regular engagement with online counselling services, with lower engagement among first- and second-year students compared to seniors. Factors influencing engagement included digital literacy, perceived confidentiality, and counselor responsiveness. The study concluded that targeted efforts to improve these factors could enhance overall student participation in online mental health services.

Iheanacho and Eze (2021) conducted a cross-sectional survey to examine undergraduate students' perceptions of the effectiveness of online counselling services at a Nigerian university comparable to the University of Benin. The study population consisted of 320 students selected via stratified sampling. Data were collected using a Likert-scale questionnaire that assessed perceived effectiveness in reducing stress, improving coping skills, and enhancing academic performance. The instrument's reliability was confirmed with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.84. Descriptive statistics and multiple regression analyses were employed to explore factors influencing perceived effectiveness. Results showed that 60% of respondents rated online counselling as moderately effective, citing convenience and accessibility as key advantages.

However, concerns were raised about the depth of interaction and confidentiality. The study recommended enhancing counselor training and incorporating interactive features to improve perceived outcomes.

Okonkwo and Afolabi (2020) carried out a mixed-method study focusing on undergraduate students' perceived effectiveness of online mental health services at the University of Lagos, with findings relevant for the University of Benin context. The sample included 280 students selected via purposive sampling. Quantitative data were gathered through standardized questionnaires measuring satisfaction and perceived therapeutic outcomes, while qualitative interviews explored user experiences. The questionnaire had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.82. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and ANOVA, while qualitative data were subjected to thematic analysis. The study found that 55% of participants perceived online counselling as effective in managing anxiety and depression symptoms. Positive perceptions were linked to the anonymity of the platform and ease of access, while limitations included technological issues and lack of personalized care.

Emeka and Nwosu (2022) investigated perceptions of online counselling effectiveness among undergraduate students at the University of Benin through a cross-sectional descriptive design. A sample of 300 students was selected using simple random sampling. Data collection involved a validated questionnaire measuring students' views on symptom relief, emotional support, and academic impact. The reliability of the instrument was confirmed with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85. Statistical analyses included frequency distributions and chi-square tests to assess differences by demographic variables. Findings revealed that 58% of students perceived online counselling as effective, particularly in providing timely emotional support and reducing feelings of isolation. The study noted that effectiveness perceptions were positively correlated with

previous counselling experience and digital literacy levels. The authors suggested regular feedback mechanisms to continuously improve service delivery.

Chukwu and Adewale (2023) explored the perceived effectiveness of online counselling services among undergraduate students at the University of Benin using a survey research design. The study included 250 students selected through multistage sampling across faculties. Data were collected via a structured questionnaire with items on perceived improvements in mental health, coping strategies, and academic focus. The instrument's reliability was validated with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.88. Descriptive and inferential statistics, including logistic regression, were applied to identify predictors of positive perception. The results indicated that 62% of respondents regarded online counselling as effective, especially valuing its flexibility and confidentiality. Challenges such as limited personal connection with counsellors were noted but did not significantly reduce overall positive perceptions. The study recommended enhancing counselor-student rapport through video sessions to boost perceived effectiveness.

Summary of the Literature Review

The reviewed literature offers a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of online counselling and mental health within university settings. The concept of online counselling is framed as the delivery of therapeutic services through digital platforms, providing accessible, flexible, and often anonymous support to students. This modality addresses barriers commonly associated with traditional face-to-face counselling, such as stigma, scheduling conflicts, and geographical limitations. Mental health, broadly defined as a state of psychological well-being, is increasingly recognized as a critical component of students' academic success and overall quality of life. The literature highlights various types and modes of online counselling

services, including synchronous video sessions, asynchronous text-based chats, and hybrid approaches, each offering distinct advantages tailored to student preferences and needs.

University students face a range of mental health issues, with common disorders including anxiety, depression, stress, and adjustment difficulties. These challenges stem from diverse causes and risk factors such as academic pressure, social isolation, financial constraints, and pre-existing vulnerabilities. The impact of mental health problems on daily life is profound, often impairing academic performance, social relationships, and emotional regulation. Recognizing these challenges, the literature emphasizes strategies for promoting mental health and well-being that encompass preventive education, peer support, and institutional policies geared towards creating supportive campus environments.

Students' perception of counselling services plays a crucial role in their willingness to seek help and engage with mental health resources. Positive perceptions are often linked to perceived confidentiality, counselor competence, and ease of access, while negative perceptions can be shaped by stigma and distrust. The benefits of online counselling are well-documented, including increased accessibility, anonymity, and the ability to reach students who might otherwise avoid seeking help. However, challenges persist, such as concerns over confidentiality, technological barriers, digital literacy gaps, and the lack of personal connection, which can hinder effective engagement and outcomes.

The theoretical framework underpinning many studies draws on models of technology acceptance, health behavior change, and therapeutic alliance, providing a lens to understand how students adopt and interact with online counselling services. Empirical reviews consistently demonstrate the efficacy of online counselling in reducing symptoms of common mental health disorders among university students, with evidence supporting improvements in emotional

regulation, resilience, and academic engagement. However, outcomes vary depending on contextual factors such as cultural attitudes, infrastructure quality, and service design.

Despite the growing body of global and national evidence, there remains a notable gap in context-specific research focused on universities like the University of Benin. Limited data exist regarding students' awareness, engagement, and perceptions of online counselling within this particular institutional and cultural setting. Moreover, the intersection of digital literacy, infrastructural constraints, and culturally relevant service delivery has not been fully explored. This study seeks to fill this gap by providing targeted insights that can inform policy and practice, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness and accessibility of online mental health support tailored to the unique needs of University of Benin undergraduate students.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the research methodology used in investigating the effectiveness of online counselling services in addressing mental health issues among University of Benin students. The chapter discusses the research design, data collection methods, sampling techniques, and data analysis procedures employed to explore the role and impact of online counselling services in supporting and improving the mental health of undergraduate students at the University of Benin.

The chapter discusses:

- Design of the Study

- Population of the Study
- Sampling Size and Sampling Technique
- Research Instrument
- Validity of the Instrument
- Reliability of the Instrument
- Method of Data Collection
- Method of Data Analysis Research Instrument

Design of the Study

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This design was deemed appropriate because it enables the collection of data from a population in a systematic manner to describe the prevailing conditions or relationships (Nworgu, 2015). It was particularly useful for assessing students' awareness, usage, and perceptions regarding the effectiveness of online counselling services in addressing mental health issues.

Population of the Study

The population of this study will comprise all 300 level undergraduate students in the departments of Faculty of Education, University of Benin, Edo State. According to the University of Benin Registry and the Student Affairs Division, the faculty of Education has an estimated 1124 undergraduate students across the various departments for the 2024/2025 academic session which are:

Departments	Number of students
Educational and Evaluation Counselling	110

Psychology (EECP)	
Human Kinetics and Sports (HKS)	100
Department of Educational Foundation (DEF)	240
Department of Educational Management (DEF)	165
Health and Safety Education (HSE)	144
Curriculum and Instructional Technology (CIT)	260
Adult Education (ADT)	105
Total	1124

For the purpose of this research, the focus will primarily be on undergraduate students in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin, for the 2024/2025 academic session. This population was chosen because it is accessible to the researcher and provides a manageable scope for data collection across different departments within the faculty.

Sampling Size and Sampling Technique

The sample size for this study will consist of 120 students, selected through proportional stratified random sampling technique from the seven departments. This sample was drawn to ensure adequate representation of undergraduate students across the different departments in the Faculty of Education.

The sample size breakdown is as follows:

Departments	Number of students
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Educational and Evaluation Counselling Psychology (EECP)	12
Human Kinetics and Sports (HKS)	11
Department of Educational Foundation (DEF)	25
Department of Educational Management (DEF)	18
Health and Safety Education (HSE)	15
Curriculum and Instructional Technology (CIT)	28
Adult Education (ADT)	11
Total	120

This proportional sampling ensures that the sample reflects the distribution of the population

Research Instrument

The main instrument to be used for data collection will be a structured questionnaire titled “Online Counselling and Mental Health Questionnaire (OCMHQ)”. The questionnaire was originally developed by Adebayo (2003) and has been adapted for the purpose of this study to acquire data from undergraduate students with respect to their experiences and perceptions about the “Effectiveness of online counselling in addressing mental health issues”.

In the first session of the instrument is to collect biographical information of the respondents such as age, gender, faculty, department and level of study

The second section comprises twenty-four (24) items formulated to measure the key variables of interest in this study. It is a four point Likert scale of Strongly Agreed (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2, Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1.

For positively showed items, the instrument has a minimum score of 24 and a maximum score of 96

Validity of the Instrument

To establish the concrete validity of the instrument, the questionnaire will be reviewed by research experts in the Department of Educational and Evaluation Counselling Psychology, to ensure content and face validity. Necessary corrections and modifications will be made based on their feedback before final administration.

Reliability of the Instrument

To establish the reliability of the instrument, the internal consistency was determined using the Cronbach Alpha method. Twenty (20) copies of the questionnaire were administered to respondents, and the analysis produced a reliability coefficient of 0.966. This very high coefficient indicates that the instrument is internally consistent and reliable for measuring students' awareness, engagement, and perceptions regarding online counselling. A copy of the reliability test result is attached in the Appendix.

Method of Data Collection

Data for this study will be collected using the structured questionnaire, which will be administered in person to undergraduate students in the departments of faculty of Education,

University of Benin. The questionnaires will be administered at different times and locations across the faculty and lecture halls to ensure that the data represented a diverse cross-section of students within the university.

Method of Data Analysis

The data will be analyzed using descriptive statistics means showing where a group mean will be used as a benchmark for each segment of the questionnaire

The researcher personally administered and retrieved the copies of the questionnaire from the respondents.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This chapter deals with the result of this study and discussion of findings. Data collected from 120 undergraduate students of Faculty of Education, University of Benin were subjected to Frequency count, percentage, Mean, and Standard Deviation, on the effectiveness of online

counselling services in addressing mental health issues among undergraduate students of the Faculty of Education University of Benin.

4.1 Presentation of Results

Research Question 1: What is the awareness level of online counselling services in addressing mental health issues among university of Benin undergraduate students?

Table1: Frequency count and percentage score on awareness level of online counselling services in addressing mental health issues among University of Benin undergraduate students.

Awareness Level	No.	Percentage (%)
High Awareness Level	71	58
Low Awareness Level	49	41
Total	120	100

Criteria mean = 20.79

Table 1 shown that 71 university of Benin undergraduate students have high awareness level of online counselling services in addressing mental health issues and this form 59% of the respondents. While 49 university of Benin undergraduate students have low awareness level of online counselling services in addressing mental health issues and this form 41% of the respondents. Since majority of the respondents have mean scores that fell within the criteria mean, it therefore means that the awareness level of University of Benin undergraduate students on online counselling services in addressing mental health issues is high.

Research Question 2: What is the level of engagement on online counselling services in addressing mental health issues among university of Benin undergraduate students?

Table1: Frequency count and percentage score on the level of engagement on online counselling services in addressing mental health issues among University of Benin undergraduate students.

Engagement Level	No.	Percentage (%)
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High Engagement Level	58	48
Low Engagement Level	62	52
Total	120	100

Criteria mean = 19.81

Table 2 shown that 58 university of Benin undergraduate students have high engagement level on online counselling services in addressing mental health issues and this form 48% of the respondents. While 62 university of Benin undergraduate students have low engagement level on online counselling services in addressing mental health issues and this form 52% of the respondents. Since majority of the respondents have scores that fell below the criteria mean, it therefore means that, the engagement level of University of Benin undergraduate students in online counselling services in addressing mental health issues is low.

Research Question 3: What is the perceived effectiveness of online counselling services in addressing mental health issues among university of Benin undergraduate students?

Table1: Mean score on awareness level of online counselling services in addressing mental health issues among University of Benin undergraduate students.

S/N	Item	Mean	SD
1.	Online counselling has helped me cope better with academic pressure.	2.38	0.90
2.	I have experienced improvement in my mental health after using online counselling services.	2.29	0.92

3.	The advice and support I received from online counselling were helpful and practical.	2.28	0.88
4.	Online counselling is just as effective as face to face counselling.	2.34	0.84
5.	I am satisfied with the quality of support provided through the online service.	2.19	0.89
6.	I feel emotionally supported during online counselling sessions.	2.26	0.77
7.	Online counselling sessions are conducted in a professional and respectful manner.	2.50	0.78
8.	I would continue to use online counselling services throughout my time at the university because of it's effectiveness.	2.27	0.79
Grand mean = 2.31			

Criteria mean = 2.50

Table 1 shown that item1 has a mean and SD score of 2.38(0.90), item2 has a mean and SD score of 2.29(0.92), item3 has a mean and SD score of 2.28(0.88), item4 has a mean and SD score of 2.34(0.84), item5 has a mean and SD score of 2.19(0.89), item6 has a mean and SD score of 2.26(0.77), item7 has a mean and SD score of 2.50(0.78), and item8 has a mean and SD score of 2.27(0.79) respectively. Only one item, that is item7 out of the 8 items that measured the perceived effectiveness of online counselling services has a mean score that falls within the criteria mean of 2.50 while 7 of the items have mean scores that are below the criteria mean score. Since the grand mean score of 2.31 is less than the criteria mean score of 2.50 it therefore means that, University of Benin undergraduate students perceived that online counselling services is not effective in addressing mental health issues.

4.2 Discussion of findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of online counselling services in addressing mental health issues among undergraduate students of the Faculty of Education,

University of Benin. The discussion of findings is presented in line with the three research questions that guided the study.

Research Question One: What is the awareness level of online counselling services among University of Benin undergraduate students?

The findings revealed that a majority (59%) of the respondents had a high level of awareness of online counselling services, while 41% had low awareness. This indicates that most students are aware that online counselling platforms exist within or outside the university as a means of supporting mental health and emotional well-being.

This result suggests that online counselling is gradually gaining recognition among university students. The increased awareness could be attributed to exposure to technology, social media platforms, and the growing sensitization about mental health in higher institutions.

This finding aligns with the work of Adebayo and Okonkwo (2020), who reported that awareness of counselling services among undergraduates increases with access to digital information and mental health campaigns. Similarly, Chukwuemeka and Oladipo (2022) found that students at the University of Benin demonstrated moderate awareness of online counselling but noted that limited institutional promotion restricted full awareness.

In agreement, Okafor and Eze (2019) also discovered that over half of their respondents were aware of online counselling, yet many were uncertain about its confidentiality and effectiveness. This shows that awareness alone may not guarantee adequate knowledge or utilization.

However, this study contradicts Ibrahim and Musa (2021), who found that awareness of online counselling among northern Nigerian undergraduates was generally low due to poor dissemination of information through official university channels.

Overall, while awareness in this study appears high, the result still indicates a need for more structured educational and information sharing within the University of Benin to ensure that all students, regardless of level or department, are fully informed about online counselling.

Research Question Two: What is the level of engagement in online counselling services among University of Benin undergraduate students?

Findings showed that 48% of the respondents indicated a high level of engagement, while 52% indicated low engagement in online counselling services. This suggests that although many students are aware of online counselling, fewer actually use it.

This result implies that awareness does not necessarily translate into participation. The low engagement level may be due to factors such as limited trust in online counsellors, preference for face-to-face interaction, concerns about privacy and effectiveness, or lack of confidence in the confidentiality of digital platforms.

This finding agrees with Adetunji and Afolayan (2021), who reported that only a small portion of students who were aware of online counselling actively engaged with the services. They emphasized that students' participation was largely determined by perceived usefulness and accessibility. Similarly, Eze and Okoro (2022) discovered that engagement levels tend to drop after initial participation, often due to technical challenges and lack of follow-up support.

In line with this, Olaniyi and Bello (2020) observed a decline in sustained engagement over time, noting that ongoing motivation and positive past experiences were critical to continuous participation. This is also supported by Chinedu and Okeke (2023), who found that only 35% of students reported regular engagement, identifying digital literacy and confidentiality concerns as key barriers.

The consistency of these findings across multiple studies highlights a general pattern students are increasingly aware of online counselling but remain hesitant to engage fully. Therefore, institutions like the University of Benin should prioritize strategies that build trust, simplify access, and improve the perceived reliability of digital counselling services.

Research Question Three: What is the perceived effectiveness of online counselling services among University of Benin undergraduate students?

Findings revealed that the grand mean (2.31) was lower than the criterion mean (2.50), indicating that students do not perceive online counselling services as highly effective in addressing their mental health issues. Only one out of the eight items met the criterion mean, showing that the majority rated online counselling as less effective.

This perception may be linked to factors such as limited internet connectivity, reduced emotional connection in virtual sessions, and lack of consistent professional follow-up.

This finding is consistent with Iheanacho and Eze (2021), who reported that while students found online counselling convenient and accessible, many doubted its depth and confidentiality compared to face-to-face counselling. Similarly, Okonkwo and Afolabi (2020) found that although over half of their participants perceived online counselling as helpful in managing

anxiety and depression, others felt it lacked the personal touch and therapeutic depth of face-to-face counselling.

Overall, while awareness and engagement exist, perceptions of effectiveness remain mixed. Many students recognize the value of online counselling but are not fully confident in its ability to replace physical counselling sessions for deep emotional or psychological concerns.

Summary of Discussion

Overall, the findings revealed that:

1. Awareness of online counselling services among University of Benin Students is high.
2. Engagement in online counselling is relatively low.
3. Perceived effectiveness of online counselling services is moderate to low.

This finding shows that while students are aware of online counselling, there is still a gap between awareness, actual usage, and satisfaction with its outcomes. Addressing these gaps requires not only awareness campaigns but also quality assurance, user-friendly platforms, and trained online counsellors who can build trust, assurance of confidentiality and provide effective support.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY,CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter deals with the summary of the entire work, conclusion based on the findings, and suggestions for future studies. The summary presents the key elements of the research work chapter by chapter to ensure a meaningful presentation of the whole study.

Summary of the Study

The main aim of this study was to examine the effectiveness of online counselling in addressing mental health issues among undergraduate students of the Faculty of Education, University of Benin. The study was motivated by the researcher's observation that many university students experience mental and emotional distress but are often reluctant to seek physical counselling due to stigma, time constraints, or limited access to counsellors. Consequently, online counselling has emerged as a potential solution, but its awareness, usage, and perceived effectiveness among students remained uncertain which prompted this investigation.

The study specifically sought to find out the level of awareness, engagement, and perceived effectiveness of online counselling among the target population. Three research questions guided the study, and simple descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were used to answer these research questions. The study is significant because it provides insight into how online counselling can serve as an alternative approach to improving mental health support systems in Nigerian universities, particularly the University of Benin.

The review of related literature was done under the following subheadings: conceptual framework, theoretical framework, empirical review, and summary of the reviewed literature.

The study was anchored on Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977), which emphasizes that human behaviour, including help seeking attitudes, is learned through observation and interaction with one's environment. This theory provided a useful basis for understanding how students may develop attitudes toward using online counselling through exposure to digital tools and social influence.

From the review, it was observed that while several studies had examined the effectiveness of counselling services generally, limited studies had focused on online counselling among undergraduates in Nigerian universities. This gap particularly the lack of data on awareness, engagement, and perceived effectiveness of online counselling at the University of Benin was what this study intended to fill.

The research adopted the descriptive survey design, which was considered suitable for collecting opinions from a large number of respondents within the faculty. The population of the study comprised all 300-level students in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin. A total of 1,189 students were involved across various departments, from which a sample size of 120 students was drawn using a simple random sampling technique.

The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire divided into two sections: the first for demographic information and the second containing twenty-four (24) items designed on a four-point Likert scale to measure awareness, engagement, and perceived effectiveness. The instrument was adapted from Adebayo (2003) and validated by experts in counselling psychology. Its reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha and yielded a coefficient of 0.966, indicating high reliability. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation.

The findings revealed that the awareness of online counselling among students was relatively high, as most respondents were familiar with online counselling platforms and their potential benefits. However, the level of engagement was found to be low, as fewer students actively participated in or utilized online counselling services despite being aware of them. Additionally, the perceived effectiveness of online counselling in addressing mental health challenges was rated moderate to low, indicating that while students recognize its existence, they still question its ability to address deep emotional issues effectively.

These findings align with Adebayo and Okonkwo (2020) and Olowu (2019), who similarly found that awareness of online counselling among students does not necessarily translate into active participation. However, it contrasts with Chukwu and Adewale (2023), who found that students who frequently engaged with online counselling reported positive improvements in emotional well-being. The difference between this study and others could be attributed to varying technological exposure, internet accessibility, and institutional support systems.

Based on the findings, it is evident that awareness is growing but engagement and perceived effectiveness still lag behind. This suggests a need for more institutional promotion, improved service quality, and strengthened trust between students and online counsellors.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has shown that while many undergraduate students in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin, are aware of online counselling services, only a few actively use them, and an even smaller number perceive them as highly effective.

From the researcher's perspective, this may be because online counselling, though convenient, lacks the personal connection that students often desire in physical counselling sessions. Many

still prefer face-to-face communication where they can express emotions freely and receive immediate non-verbal feedback. However, the increasing awareness of online counselling signifies a gradual shift toward accepting digital counselling as a viable mental health support method.

Therefore, with proper training for counsellors, stronger institutional backing, and improved awareness campaigns, online counselling can become a sustainable and effective tool for addressing students' mental health needs.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Enhanced Awareness Campaigns:

The university management and counselling unit should intensify awareness programmes that promote online counselling services and clarify how students can access them.

2. Improved Internet Facilities:

The University of Benin should provide reliable internet connectivity and digital counselling platforms that are secure, confidential, and easy to use.

3. Training of Counsellors:

Counsellors should be trained and retrained in digital communication and ethical online practice to ensure professionalism and student confidence in the services.

4. Integration with Academic Support:

Online counselling should be integrated with academic mentoring and wellness programmes so that it becomes part of the students' overall development and not just a response to problems.

5. Continuous Feedback Mechanisms:

Regular evaluation and feedback from students should be encouraged to improve the quality, responsiveness, and trustworthiness of online counselling services.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to 300-level students of the Faculty of Education, University of Benin, which may restrict the generalization of results to other faculties or levels. In addition, the study relied on self-reported data, which might be influenced by personal biases. Finally, the study focused mainly on awareness, engagement, and perceived effectiveness and did not explore the counsellors' perspective.

Suggestions for Further Studies

Based on the limitations and findings, the following suggestions are made for future research:

1. Future researchers should conduct similar studies across other faculties and institutions to allow for broader generalization.
2. Studies should be carried out to compare students' and counsellors' perceptions of the effectiveness of online counselling.
3. Further research could also examine gender or departmental differences in awareness, engagement, and perception of online counselling.

4. A longitudinal study could be conducted to assess the long-term impact of online counselling on students' academic performance and emotional stability.

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APPENDIX A

EFFECTIVENESS OF ONLINE COUNSELLING SERVICES IN ADDRESSING MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES AMONG UNIVERSITY OF BENIN STUDENTS QUESTIONNAIRE

Section A: PERSONAL DATA

Please tick (✓) Where appropriate.

1. Gender: () Male, Female()
2. Age range: under 22(), 22-26 (), 27 and above ()
3. Faculty:
4. Department:
5. Level:

Section B: DATA ON QUESTIONNAIRE

Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

Strongly Agree(SA), Agree(A),Disagree(D), Strongly Disagree(SD)

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD
	What is the awareness level of online counselling among university of Benin undergraduate students?				
1	I am aware that the University of Benin offers online counselling services for undergraduate students.				
2	Information about online counselling services is readily available on campus platforms (e.g., student portal, notice boards).				
3	The university has done enough to create awareness of online mental health support.				
4	Online counselling is often discussed during academic or social programs in school.				
5	My peers are also aware of the availability of online counselling services at the University of Benin				
6	Awareness of online counselling is high among students in my department.				

7	Awareness of online counselling is high among students in my department .				
8	The University has made it easy for students to find information about online counselling.				
	What is the level of students engagement with online counselling services?				
9	I have personally used online counselling services offered by the University.				
10	I frequently use the university's online counselling platform when experiencing stress or anxiety.				
11	I find it easy to book and attend online counselling sessions.				
12	I feel comfortable using online platforms for mental health support.				
13	I recommend online counselling services to other undergraduate students.				
14	The online counselling sessions have positively impacted my mental well-being.				
15	The counsellors are responsive and provide adequate support during online sessions.				
16	I am satisfied with the level of support provided during online counselling.				
	What are the perceived "effectiveness" of online counselling services among undergraduate students in the University of Benin?				
17	Online counselling has helped me cope better with academic pressure.				
18	I have experienced improvement in my mental health after using online counselling services.				
19	The advice and support I received from online counselling were helpful and practical.				
20	Online counselling is just as effective as face to face counselling.				
21	I am satisfied with the quality of support provided through the online service .				
22	I feel emotionally supported during online counselling sessions.				
23	Online counselling sessions are conducted in a professional and respectful manner .				
24	I would continue to use online counselling services throughout my time at the university because of it's effectiveness.				
24					

Appendix B

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's	
Alpha	N of Items
.966	24

Case Processing Summary

	Included		Cases Excluded		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
TotalAwareness	120	53.1%	106	46.9%	226	100.0%

Report

TotalAwareness

Mean	N	Std. Deviation
20.79	120	5.429

Report

TotalEngagement

Mean	N	Std. Deviation
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19.81	120	6.009
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Report

	item17	item18	item19	item20	item21	item22	item23	item24
Mean	2.38	2.29	2.27	2.34	2.19	2.26	2.51	2.27
N	120	120	120	120	120	120	120	120
Std. Deviation	.900	.920	.879	.835	.892	.772	.778	.786