

Between Need and Hesitation: Analysis on the Social Factors Affecting Student Help-Seeking Behavior

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Abstract. In academic environments, students' willingness or hesitation to seek help can significantly influence both their learning outcomes and emotional well-being, yet complex factors often shape this behavior. This study analyzed the social factors affecting students' help-seeking behavior in academic settings, focusing on fear of judgment and stigma, teacher approachability, and cultural and institutional norms. Employing a quantitative descriptive-correlation research approach, data were gathered through surveys that measured students' perceptions related to these variables. Statistical analyses revealed a strong positive correlation between fear of judgment and cultural/institutional norms that discourage help-seeking ($r = +0.660$, $p < 0.001$). At the same time, teacher approachability showed moderate negative correlations with both fear of judgment ($r = -0.318$, $p = 0.025$) and cultural/institutional norms ($r = -0.478$, $p < 0.001$). Results indicated that students moderately agree that social stigma, peer pressure, and cultural expectations inhibit their willingness to seek help, whereas approachable and empathetic teachers significantly encourage help-seeking behaviors. The findings highlight the complex interaction between internalized social stigma, cultural values promoting self-reliance, and institutional factors such as competitive school environments that together shape students' help-seeking decisions. This suggests that efforts to improve academic support should include stigma-reduction programs, culturally responsive policies, and fostering positive teacher-student relationships to normalize help-seeking as a strength rather than a weakness. Creating an inclusive educational environment where students feel safe and supported in seeking assistance can enhance both their academic success and emotional well-being.

Keywords: Academic support; Fear of judgment; Help-seeking behavior; Social stigma; Teacher approachability.

1.0 Introduction

The shift toward student-centered learning in 21st-century education emphasizes that students are at the heart of the learning experience. However, despite this focus, many students continue to struggle with the demands of their academic pursuits. While student-centered approaches foster autonomy and engagement, not all learners possess the metacognitive skills essential for effective self-directed learning, such as time management, goal-setting, and self-monitoring (Nerland, 2020). As a result, help-seeking becomes a crucial part of their academic journey. The role of teachers remains vital in supporting students' educational growth, yet some students hesitate to seek assistance from teachers even when they need it. In such situations, academic help-seeking becomes a vital cognitive, emotional, and social learning strategy.

Help-seeking behavior is not merely an admission of difficulty; it is an adaptive approach to problem-solving associated with higher academic achievement, better self-regulation, and improved well-being (Karabenick &

Gonida, 2024). Recent research underscores that help-seeking is shaped both by intrapersonal cognitions and the social environments in which students operate (Makara & Karabenick, 2023). Numerous factors contribute to concerns regarding students' help-seeking behavior. This behavior is significantly influenced by peer pressure and fear of judgment. According to Ng (2025), self-stigma, rooted in the internalized fear of being perceived as incompetent, discourages students from accessing academic support. Tan et al. (2025) further explained that the stigma as felt by the students is exacerbated by peer dynamics, where students may avoid seeking help to maintain social acceptance or avoid negative evaluation from classmates or peers. The fear of being judged among students may indicate a more pressing issue, as students will show avoidance behavior and could deteriorate their academic engagement (Lyu, 2023).

Many students base their help-seeking behavior on how approachable they perceive their teachers to be. According to Ramos (2025), students are more likely to ask for help if they view their teacher as approachable and empathetic. Conversely, if a teacher appears strict or unapproachable, students are less likely to seek assistance, even when they are struggling with a task (Graham et al., 2023). To encourage students to seek help, teachers should respond positively and supportively to students' questions. As highlighted by Graham et al. (2023), reducing students' fear of judgment and boosting their confidence in initiating academic conversations are essential for fostering optimal academic performance. In the post-pandemic education landscape, hybrid and remote learning environments have redefined the dynamics of help-seeking. While digital platforms increase resource accessibility, they can also exacerbate reluctance among students who fear judgment in public online forums (Makara et al., 2024). Recent trends show an urgent need for individualized and stigma-free support channels that combine institutional resources with personalized, relational support from teachers (Nyatanga & Volet, 2023; Karabenick & Gonida, 2024).

This study holds significance as it addresses critical gaps in the current body of literature on academic help-seeking behavior. While previous research has often examined factors such as stigma, teacher approachability, and cultural norms in isolation, there is limited empirical evidence on how these variables interact within a single quantitative framework, particularly in the context of Senior High School Education in Palimbang. Existing studies are also heavily skewed toward Western or high-income educational settings, where cultural norms and institutional structures differ considerably from those in Southeast Asia. By focusing on the Filipino student experience, this study provides localized evidence in a collectivist culture where deep-seated respect for authority, high value on self-reliance, and familial expectations uniquely shape help-seeking decisions. Moreover, many institutional reforms aimed at improving academic support have primarily concentrated on expanding available resources, often overlooking the underlying social and psychological barriers, such as fear of judgment from peers, internalized stigma, and perceived inaccessibility of teachers, which critically influence a student's willingness to seek help.

In the post-pandemic learning environment, where hybrid and online modalities have transformed the dynamics of teacher-student interactions, understanding these social and cultural factors is more important than ever. The findings of this study contribute actionable insights for designing stigma-reduction programs, promoting culturally responsive academic policies, and fostering teacher-student relationships that encourage open communication. Ultimately, it reframes academic help-seeking as a proactive learning strategy and a marker of engagement, rather than a sign of weakness, thereby supporting both academic success and student well-being. Hence, this study aims to analyze the social factors that influence the help-seeking behavior of senior high school students in Palimbang National High School. Understanding these factors is essential to identifying why some students hesitate to seek help from their teachers, even when they genuinely need assistance.

By exploring these social influences, the study seeks to deepen our understanding of students' behaviors, enabling educators and the academic community to develop more effective strategies to support students. Ultimately, this understanding will help create a more supportive learning environment that encourages help-seeking and improves students' academic performance. Hence, it seeks to answer the following questions: (1) To what extent do peer pressure and fear of judgment influence students' likelihood of seeking academic help? (2) How does teacher approachability affect students' help-seeking behavior in academic contexts? Moreover, (3) How do cultural and institutional norms statistically correlate with students' willingness to seek academic support?

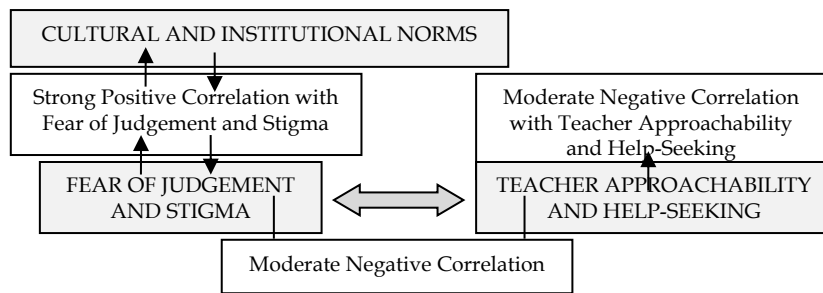


Figure 1. *Conceptual Model of Correlational Links in Student Help-Seeking Behavior*

This model illustrates how sociocultural and emotional factors interact to influence students' willingness to seek academic support. At the core of the framework are the Cultural and Institutional Norms, which encompass prevailing values. Cultural and Institutional Norms as a factor exhibit a strong positive correlation with Fear of Judgement and Stigma, as students in culturally rigid environments often internalize apprehension about being perceived as weak or incapable (Vaswani et al., 2022). This fear, in turn, shows a moderate negative correlation with Teacher Approachability and Help-Seeking, suggesting that heightened fear reduces students' perception of teachers as accessible and supportive figures (Li, Hassan, & Saharuddin, 2023). Additionally, cultural norms directly influence help-seeking behavior by shaping relational dynamics and emotional safety within the classroom (Durani, 2024). The model also reflects findings from recent studies emphasizing that perceived teacher support significantly enhances student engagement and motivation, especially when psychological safety is present (Prananto et al., 2025). Altogether, this framework provides a culturally sensitive lens for understanding barriers to help-seeking and informs the development of responsive pedagogical strategies, thereby fostering inclusive academic environments.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research methodology, specifically utilizing a descriptive correlational design to explore how social factors influence student help-seeking behavior. This design was selected for its flexibility and inductive strength, allowing the researcher to observe and analyze natural associations among variables without manipulation. Anchored in the framework proposed by Sullivan and Artino (2013), the descriptive correlational approach enables the identification of patterns and relationships in real-world educational settings. It is particularly well-suited for examining how fear of judgment, teacher approachability, and cultural or institutional norms relate to students' likelihood of seeking academic assistance.

2.2 Participants and Sampling Technique

This study utilized convenience sampling, a type of non-probability sampling wherein respondents self-selected to be part of the research. A total of fifty (50) senior high school students from Palimbang National High School agreed to participate and complete the survey questionnaire. This method was appropriate due to time and access constraints, and enabled efficient data collection from individuals who were readily available and willing to contribute. Given the descriptive-correlational nature of this study, a non-probability sampling technique was deemed appropriate. This approach allowed for the exploration of potential relationships between key variables within a specific and accessible group of respondents, aligning with the study's objectives while accommodating contextual constraints (Bhandari, 2022).

2.3 Research Instrument

The primary tool used in this study was a researcher-made survey questionnaire explicitly developed to measure the three key variables under investigation, such as Fear of Judgment and Stigma, Teacher Approachability, and Cultural and Institutional Norms, in relation to students' academic help-seeking behavior. The initial pool of items was created after a comprehensive review of literature and existing instruments on help-seeking behaviors, stigma, teacher-student relationships, and educational cultural norms, ensuring that the statements reflected the realities of students in the local academic context of Palimbang. To establish content validity, the initial draft was evaluated by a panel of three experts in education and research methodology, who assessed each item for clarity, relevance, and alignment with the intended construct. The resulting Content Validity Index (CVI) for the overall instrument was 0.92, indicating excellent content validity. Based on the experts' feedback, wording adjustments

were made to some items to improve clarity, and two items were removed due to redundancy.

The revised instrument was then pilot-tested on a sample of 30 students drawn from a similar population who were not part of the main study. Internal consistency reliability was established using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded coefficients of 0.88 for Fear of Judgment and Stigma, 0.91 for Teacher Approachability, 0.87 for Cultural and Institutional Norms, and 0.90 for the overall instrument, indicating high to excellent reliability. After validation and reliability testing, the final version of the questionnaire consisted of 30 items divided into three sections corresponding to the study variables: 10 items measured students' perceived social risks and self-stigma related to seeking help; 10 items assessed perceptions of teacher behaviors that encourage or discourage help-seeking, such as friendliness, openness to questions, and patience; and 10 items explored cultural beliefs and institutional practices affecting help-seeking, such as respect for authority, competitiveness of the learning environment, and the level of institutional encouragement for asking questions. All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale as indicated in the table below:

Table 1. *Interpretation of Likert Scale Mean Ranges*

Scale	Range of Mean	Interpretation
5	4.21 - 5.00	Strongly agree
4	3.41 - 4.20	Agree
3	2.61 - 3.40	Moderately Agree
2	1.81 - 2.60	Disagree
1	1.00 - 1.80	Strongly disagree

Table 2. *Threshold Indicators of the Coefficient Correlation(r)*

Correlation Coefficient (r)	Strength of Relationship
0.00 - 0.30	Weak
0.31 - 0.60	Moderate
0.61 - 0.90	Strong
>0.90 or <-0.90	Very Strong

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

In conducting the study, the researcher employed a structured data collection approach by designing a survey questionnaire. The available number of respondents was coordinated through the Senior High School Coordinator of Palimbang National High School. A formal request letter to conduct the survey, along with an informed consent form, was sent to the prospective respondents for approval—only those who voluntarily agreed participated in completing the survey. After the consent forms were signed, the Google Form survey link was distributed to the respondents. The researcher remained within proximity during the survey process to provide immediate clarification if needed. All fifty (50) respondents completed the survey over the course of one week. To manage the data collection efficiently, the researcher administered the survey in five batches, with ten respondents per batch.

2.5 Data Analysis

The study employed descriptive correlational statistics to identify the relationship between students' perception of teacher approachability and their frequency of asking for academic assistance. Measures such as mean and standard deviation were calculated to describe the variables. To determine the association between factors influencing students' help-seeking behavior, the Pearson correlation coefficient (r) was used. The data were analyzed using the statistical software Jamovi version 2.6.26 to ensure accuracy and efficiency.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

The researcher provided each respondent with a consent form clearly outlining the study's objectives and procedures, and addressed any questions or concerns regarding their participation. Respondents' involvement was safeguarded through the following measures: the researcher took necessary precautions to protect the privacy and confidentiality of responses, and no personally identifiable information was recorded to ensure anonymity. Additionally, the researcher did not collect personal data such as names, age, ethnicity, or other sensitive information. Participation in the survey was entirely voluntary and based on the respondents' informed consent and availability.

3.0 Results and Discussion

This study examines the social factors influencing students' academic help-seeking behavior by focusing on three key areas: fear of judgment and stigma, teacher approachability, and cultural and institutional norms. Through quantitative analysis, the findings reveal how these factors individually and interactively affect students' willingness to seek support, highlighting both barriers and facilitators within educational contexts. The following results provide insight into students' perceptions, offering a foundation for developing interventions that promote inclusive and supportive learning environments.

3.1 Fear of Judgment and Stigma

The data presented in Table 3 reveal a consistent pattern of moderate agreement among students regarding fear of judgment and stigma as barriers to help-seeking behavior. With an overall mean of 3.25 and standard deviation of 1.24, the responses suggest that while students do not strongly reject help-seeking, they experience notable discomfort and hesitation rooted in social perceptions. The highest mean score (3.60) corresponds to nervousness when speaking in front of classmates, indicating that performance anxiety and peer evaluation are significant deterrents. Similarly, the tendency to work alone despite academic struggles ($M = 3.52$) reflects a preference for self-reliance, possibly to avoid being perceived as incapable or dependent.

Table 3. Statistical Interpretation of Fear of Judgment and Stigma as a Factor Affecting Student Help-Seeking Behavior

Indicators	Mean	SD	Interpretation
I avoid asking academic questions because I do not want to disturb the class	3.24	1.08	Moderately Agree
I prefer working alone, even when I struggle with the activity or lessons	3.52	1.13	Agree
I feel nervous when speaking up in front of my classmates	3.60	1.32	Agree
I worry that my classmates will think I am trying to impress the teacher	3.28	1.25	Moderately Agree
I hesitate to ask for help because I do not want to seem dependent	3.30	1.23	Moderately Agree
I feel more pressure to stay quiet when others in class also avoid asking questions	3.32	1.17	Moderately Agree
I believe that students who ask for help are often viewed as weak	2.76	1.45	Moderately Agree
I stay silent even when I do not understand the topic	3.20	1.16	Moderately Agree
I feel that asking questions might lead to gossip among peers	3.04	1.29	Moderately Agree
I rarely ask for help because I fear being isolated from my social group	3.20	1.29	Moderately Agree
Overall Mean and SD	3.25	1.24	Moderately Agree

These findings align with recent studies emphasizing the role of self-stigma and perceived social judgment in shaping help-seeking behavior. Tan et al. (2025) found a significant negative correlation between self-stigma and mental well-being among Filipino college students, suggesting that internalized stigma reduces the likelihood of seeking support and contributes to emotional distress. Their study highlights how students who fear being labeled as weak or dependent often avoid counseling services, even when such support is readily available. Moreover, Adebayo et al. (2024) advocate for stigma-reduction programs in educational settings, noting that cultural competence and open dialogue can mitigate fears of judgment and foster healthier help-seeking behaviors. The moderate agreement across most indicators, such as fear of gossip ($M = 3.04$) and concern about social isolation ($M = 3.20$), underscores the need for institutional interventions that normalize help-seeking and dismantle harmful stereotypes. Creating safe spaces for academic inquiry and emotional expression may empower students to overcome these barriers and engage more fully in their educational journey.

3.2 Teacher Approachability and Help-Seeking

The results in Table 4 underscore the vital role of teacher approachability in shaping students' willingness to seek academic help. With an overall mean of 3.66 and a standard deviation of 1.09, the data reflect a general agreement among students that approachable teacher behaviors significantly encourage help-seeking. Indicators such as the use of a friendly tone ($M = 3.98$) and genuine listening to student concerns ($M = 3.96$) received the highest ratings, suggesting that warmth and empathy are powerful facilitators of student engagement. These findings affirm that when teachers demonstrate openness and emotional availability, students feel safer and more confident initiating academic conversations.

In support, Emslander et al. (2025) conducted a second-order meta-analysis revealing that positive teacher-student relationships are strongly associated with improved academic motivation, engagement, and well-being. Their synthesis of over 2.6 million student responses found that teacher approachability, manifested through respectful communication and emotional support, was a consistent predictor of help-seeking behavior and academic success. Similarly, Ramos (2025) emphasized the importance of balancing authority with approachability, arguing that students are more likely to participate and seek help when teachers maintain a

supportive yet structured classroom persona. This balance fosters trust, reduces anxiety, and cultivates a learning environment where students feel valued and heard.

Table 4. *Statistical Interpretation of Teacher Approachability and Help-Seeking as Factors Affecting Student Help-Seeking Behavior*

Indicators	Mean	SD	Interpretation
I find it easy to start a conversation with my teacher about academic concerns	3.70	0.953	Agree
I feel confident to ask for help if my teacher genuinely listens to student concerns	3.96	1.160	Agree
I am comfortable sending a message to my teacher for academic help outside of class	3.70	1.298	Agree
I am more likely to ask questions when the teacher uses a friendly tone	3.98	1.134	Agree
I avoid asking for help when the teacher seems too formal	3.58	0.992	Agree
I feel discouraged when the teacher answers questions impatiently	3.62	1.105	Agree
I only ask for help if the teacher invites questions directly	3.74	0.853	Agree
I do not approach my teacher because they seem unapproachable during class hours	3.10	1.249	Moderately Agree
I feel more comfortable seeking help in smaller class sizes	3.60	1.069	Agree
I would ask for help more often if my teacher had regular consultation hours	3.66	1.042	Agree
Overall Mean and SD	3.66	1.09	Agree

Interestingly, as shown in the table, the lowest-rated item ($M = 3.10$) pertains to perceived unapproachability during class hours, indicating that even subtle cues of detachment or formality can inhibit help-seeking. This aligns with Martinez and Wighting's (2023) findings that negative teacher behaviors, such as impatience or excessive formality, can lead to student withdrawal and reduced classroom participation. The moderate agreement on this item suggests that while most teachers are perceived as approachable, there remains room for improvement in ensuring consistent accessibility across all classroom interactions.

3.3 Cultural and Institutional Norms

The data in Table 5 highlights the nuanced influence of cultural and institutional norms on student help-seeking behavior, with an overall mean of 3.26 and a standard deviation of 1.10, indicating moderate agreement across most indicators. This suggests that while students recognize the importance of seeking academic support, they are often constrained by deeply embedded cultural beliefs and systemic limitations within educational institutions.

Table 5. *Statistical Interpretation of Cultural and Institutional Norms as Factors Affecting Student Help-Seeking Behavior*

Indicators	Mean	SD	Interpretation
I grew up believing that asking questions is disrespectful to authority	2.80	1.414	Moderately Agree
In my previous school, students rarely interacted with teachers outside class	3.12	1.100	Moderately Agree
My current school promotes competition over collaboration	3.14	1.125	Moderately Agree
I believe school systems should normalize academic help-seeking	3.78	1.183	Agree
I feel pressured by family to figure things out on my own	3.38	1.067	Moderately Agree
Our school lacks structured support systems for struggling students	3.42	1.126	Agree
Cultural expectations make me feel I should already know the answer	3.56	0.972	Agree
I do not see enough encouragement from the school to ask for academic support	3.18	0.896	Moderately Agree
School rules and practices do not emphasize the value of asking questions	3.10	1.111	Moderately Agree
There is a cultural belief in my community that seeking help means you did not try hard enough.	3.08	1.338	Moderately Agree
Overall Mean and SD	3.26	1.10	Moderately Agree

The highest-rated item, "I believe school systems should normalize academic help-seeking" ($M = 3.78$), reflects a progressive student perspective advocating for institutional change. However, this is juxtaposed with moderately high agreement on statements such as "Cultural expectations make me feel I should already know the answer" ($M = 3.56$) and "I feel pressured by family to figure things out on my own" ($M = 3.38$), which underscore the internalized cultural scripts that discourage vulnerability and promote self-reliance. These findings resonate with Chang et al. (2020), who found that first-generation college students often experience a cultural mismatch between interdependent familial values and the independent norms of higher education, leading to underutilization of support services and reluctance to seek help.

Institutional factors also play a critical role. The perception that schools prioritize competition over collaboration ($M = 3.14$) and lack structured support systems ($M = 3.42$) suggests that systemic barriers may reinforce cultural hesitations. Richards (2020) argues that educational institutions can either perpetuate social reproduction or serve as cultural guides that empower students to seek help through intentional programming and relational support. When schools fail to emphasize the value of asking questions ($M = 3.10$) or provide visible encouragement ($M =$

3.18), students may interpret silence as the norm, further entrenching help-avoidant behaviors. Moreover, the belief that seeking help implies insufficient effort ($M = 3.08$) reflects collectivist cultural narratives that equate academic struggle with personal failure. Jeng (2024) emphasizes that individualism and collectivism significantly shape help-seeking behaviors, with collectivist contexts often discouraging open academic inquiry to preserve group harmony and avoid face loss.

Nevertheless, the data show that students' willingness to seek academic help is influenced by both cultural beliefs and the way schools are run. These beliefs and systems do not work separately; they shape how students feel about asking for help. To improve this, schools need to be more open to different cultural backgrounds, create fair policies, and offer strong support systems. Help-seeking should be seen as a wise choice, not a weakness. When students feel safe and respected, they are more likely to reach out and succeed.

3.4 Relationship between Fear of Judgment and Stigma, Teacher Approachability and Help-Seeking, and Cultural and Institutional Norms

This section presents the relational dynamics of key social factors influencing students' help-seeking behavior. Specifically, it examines how Fear of Judgment and Stigma, Teacher Approachability and Help-Seeking, and Cultural and Institutional Norms interact.

Table 6. *Coefficient of Correlation of the Three Variables per Pair*

Variable Pair	r	r ²	p-value	Interpretation
Fear of Judgment and Stigma × Teacher Approachability and Help-Seeking	-0.318	0.101	0.025	Moderate negative correlation
Fear of Judgment and Stigma × Cultural and Institutional Norms	+0.660	0.435	<0.001	Strong positive correlation
Teacher Approachability and Help-Seeking × Cultural and Institutional Norms	-0.478	0.228	<0.001	Moderate negative Correlation

The results of the Pearson correlation analysis (see Table 6) showed that Fear of Judgment and Stigma had a statistically significant moderate negative correlation with Teacher Approachability and Help-Seeking ($r = -0.318$, $p = 0.025$), indicating that students who reported higher fear of judgment were less likely to perceive their teachers as approachable. Fear of Judgment and Stigma also had a strong positive correlation with Cultural and Institutional Norms that discourage help-seeking ($r = 0.660$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that students who internalized stigma were more likely to be influenced by cultural and school-related barriers. Moreover, Teacher Approachability and Help-Seeking had a statistically significant moderate negative correlation with Cultural and Institutional Norms ($r = -0.478$, $p = 0.0004$), implying that students who perceived their teachers as approachable tended to be less affected by norms that inhibit seeking academic support. All significant correlations align with the study's conceptual framework and support the hypothesis that these variables are interrelated in shaping students' willingness to seek help.

4.0 Conclusion

The results of this study highlight that social and cultural factors significantly shape students' academic help-seeking behavior. Among the examined variables, fear of judgment and stigma showed a strong positive correlation with cultural and institutional norms that discourage help-seeking ($r = 0.660$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that students who experience higher levels of stigma are also more likely to be influenced by prevailing cultural expectations and school practices that deter them from seeking assistance. Teacher approachability, on the other hand, demonstrated a moderate negative correlation with both fear of judgment ($r = -0.318$, $p = 0.025$) and cultural and institutional norms ($r = -0.478$, $p = 0.0004$), suggesting that the more approachable and supportive teachers are perceived to be, the less students feel hindered by stigma and restrictive norms. These findings emphasize that improving student help-seeking behavior requires reducing fear of negative judgment, challenging restrictive cultural norms, and strengthening positive teacher-student relationships. In practical terms, fostering a culture of approachability among teachers through empathetic communication, creating structured opportunities for consultation, and institutionalizing stigma-reduction initiatives can encourage students to view help-seeking as a sign of proactive learning rather than weakness. This study is not without limitations. With a sample size of only 50 participants drawn from a specific academic population, the findings cannot be readily generalized to all students. The results primarily reflect the contexts of Senior High School learners of Palimbang National High School, where teacher-student relationships and collectivist values may influence attitudes toward help-seeking. Moreover, factors such as the socio-economic diversity were not accounted for and may differently shape help-

seeking behaviors. Future studies should use larger and more diverse samples, explore additional socio-cultural dimensions, and consider qualitative methods that can capture the nuanced motivations and barriers that influence students' decisions to seek academic support.

5.0 Contributions of Authors

The author exclusively conceptualized the outcomes presented in each section of this study, including everything from the data collection to the analysis of the results.

6.0 Funding

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7.0 Conflict of Interests

The author of this paper asserts that there are no conflicts of interest concerning the publication of this work.

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