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Emotional Intelligence and Pro-Social Competence of University Undergraduates

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The study investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence and pro-social competence of university undergraduates in Osun State, Nigeria. The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The population for the study comprised all university undergraduates in Osun State, Nigeria. The sample size was 400 university undergraduates from two universities in Osun State, Nigeria. Multistage sampling procedure was used to select the sample for the study. Purposive sampling technique was used to select two public universities in Osun State. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 200 undergraduates from each of the university selected. The instruments for data collection were titled "Emotional Intelligence Scale" (EIS) and "Pro-Social Competence Scale" (PCS) with reliability coefficient values of 0.81 and 0.71 respectively. Data collected were analysed using frequencies, percentages, mean and simple linear regression. Results showed that gratitude was the prominent pro-social competence among university undergraduates, with a mean ($\bar{x}$) score of 2.74. Results also showed that there was no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and pro-social competence of university undergraduates in Osun State, Nigeria ($R = 0.055$; $p>0.05$). Based on the findings, the study suggests that university undergraduates should be encouraged to develop healthy coping mechanisms to help them manage their emotions and navigate life challenges.

Keywords: emotion**,** emotional intelligence, pro-social competence, university undergraduates, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Pro-social competence which constitutes behaviour or actions such as altruism, empathy and so on is very essential for individuals to function effectively in the society. However, one of the greatest challenges in human society particularly among university undergraduates is developing positive relationship and promoting social well-being. This is because several issues and challenges are related to developing these competences. These include difficulties in understanding and respecting other people's emotions, managing disagreement among themselves, and resisting negative pressure. Scholars (Adetoro & Omiyefa, 2017; Omiyefa, 2024; Omiyefa & Salawu, 2024) have observed the neglect of pro-social competence by citizens, as there are cases of immorality, dishonesty, and other anti-social vices among Nigerian citizenry. This justifies the need for the growth and development of pro-social competence among the citizenry.

Pro-social competence encompasses behaviour or actions in form of cooperating with others willingly, tolerance, helping others, and behaviour that helps to limit and avert unacceptable anti-social behaviour or actions (Adetoro & Omiyefa, 2017; Omiyefa & Salawu, 2024; Redondo et al., 2016). According to Eisenberg and Fabees (1998), there are several factors that can be traced as backing up pro-social competence, among which are, sympathy and empathy. In the view of Aune et

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al. (2014), pro-social competence encompasses the feelings and convictions of an individual in question, which gives him or her the motivation to exhibit behaviour oriented towards others.

Pro-social competence is a type of voluntary behaviour which is driven by a desire to benefit and care about the wellbeing of others (Hui et al., 2020; Keltner et al., 2014). According to Feldman (2012), pro-social competence is a positive activity or behaviour since they are founded on love, attention, and selflessness of an individual to make it helpful to others. Based on this opinion, pro-social competency is a helping behaviour aimed at reducing the physical and psychological load that is voluntarily made (Hidayat & Bashori, 2016). Pro-social competence encompasses a wide range of voluntary actions which is recognized valuable by the society and also aimed at benefiting others. The term pro-social competence comprises a variety of concepts, such as, respect, benevolence, social activism, sharing, heroism and so on. It also encompasses dispositions, such as humanity, perspective-taking, empathy as well as personality traits such as conscientiousness, openness and agreeableness. Within the university environment, it involves actions and policies that demonstrate social responsibility, philanthropy, equity, inclusion, empathy, commitments to diversity, to name a few (Eisenberg et al., 2014; Hrona, 2024).

There are two categories of pro-social competences namely: helping behaviour which is referred to as skills that gives benefits to individuals in improving the welfare of others who provides help and selflessness, which is referred to as the behaviour or skills of rendering help to people without expecting anything in return. In individuals, pro-social competence is influenced by positive emotions which encourages individuals to empathise, help and feel obligated to others. According to Diazgranadose (2014), individuals with high level of pro-social competence are also able to perceive the emotions of others on a higher level, as these constitute the elements of willingness and ability to form satisfactory relationships with other people. In this way, the probability of pro-social competence will be raised.

As with generosity and willingness, pro-social competence does not just benefit an individual, it is also useful for others. Individuals can help others easily and quickly with generosity. According to Li and Shao (2022), the most similar features of pro-social competence are harmonising, helping and sharing with others. Nevertheless, a final cause of the pro-social competence of people remains controversial. In spite of the motive, what is vital is that as a result of pro-social competence, individuals can support each other mutually, thus creating unity, peace and harmony (Luengo et al., 2014). It can be applied to all students (no one will be excluded) since they interact and communicate with other people across the world and this results in familiarity (Cado & Padilla-Walke, 2020). Caprara et al. (2014) and further postulates that familiarity affects the willingness to do something that is advantageous to others without pay. The other good effect of pro-social competence is that it leads to development of good social relation that later influences adaptability at adulthood (Ebrahimi et al., 2018).

In addition, pro-social competence helps to protect individuals from aggressive behaviour and other social issues and challenges. People are able to see needy individuals seeking assistance in which they are expected to develop thankful and appreciative feelings. That is, it is likely to be perceived as one way of being helpful to others. This feature enables the individuals to propagate positive emotions as well as be truthful of others which make them to be liked as pro-social people by others. Pro-social competence needs to be attended to since it is a significant aspect of human existence as social beings. Pro-social competence is a very crucial need because observations have revealed that individuals have been increasingly exhibiting individualistic nature in the recent past. Being selfish and ignorant in observing peers struggling to do specific things and avoiding community activities and caring only about themselves are some instances of this individualistic behaviour and character (Adetoro & Omiyefa, 2017; Omiyefa, 2021; Omiyefa & Salawu, 2024; Pitaloka et al., 2015).

Kapur et al. (2023) posited that a large portion of early development helps young adults in developing the social and ethical behaviours that are appropriate to societal norms and cultures. Parents often serve as role models for their children. Every society set standards for how people should behave and regard one another, yet what is considered to be pro-social competence in one society might not be in another. For instance, in Nigeria, particularly in Yoruba land, it is customary for ladies to greet elders with their two knees touching the ground while the guys are to prostrate with their chest touching the ground, yet in other tribes or parts of the world, these actions could be seen as unnecessary. Different perspectives on how to interpret pro-social competence in a person are derived from these varied origins.

In the view of Hoffman, (2000) pro-sociality is observed to be primarily self-oriented. It has been argued that youths feel self-distress in reaction to the distress of others because they do not have the capability to differentiate their own experiences from those of others. The significance of pro-social competence is that it plays a key role in the prevention of antisocial behaviour. Unfortunately, in-depth studies have not been carried out to establish the correlation between emotional intelligence and pro-social competence among undergraduates.

Several factors could be used to improve pro-social competence among university undergraduates by providing supportive environment, promoting emotional awareness, creating a stable and safe home environment for learners, and fostering positive relationships. These factors include: cultural background, cognitive development, behavioural factors, family dynamics, environmental factors, emotional intelligence, educational settings and so on. For the purpose of this study, emotional intelligence was explored as a determinant of pro-social competence among university undergraduates.

Emotional intelligence has become the central element of an effective relationship between people during the last few years because one must know his/her feelings and emotions and those of others. This guarantees pro-social competence skills that play significant role in promoting positive and healthy relationship between people (Baba, 2020; Makkar & Basu, 2017). The criteria outlined by Alothman (2017) of emotional intelligence include the capacity to notice and observe feelings and emotions, and to have the capability to know and understand such feelings, to have the capability to control such feelings, based on seeing and correctly perceiving feelings and emotions of other people, and to be able to become increasingly engaged in positive social and emotional relationships, which will enable individuals to grow emotionally, mentally and in other professional ways (Alothman, 2017).

Various scholars have a number of definitions of emotional intelligence. Mayer et al. (2004) defined emotional intelligence as the capacity to manage oneself in terms of the emotions and vice versa. It includes the power to discriminate rightly the emotions, to recall and create emotions to support thought, to capture emotions and emotional knowledge and contemplatively regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual changes. Bradberry and Greaves (2009) observe emotional intelligence is an individual skill of recognizing and understanding the feelings in other individuals and in oneself and using this information to regulate his/her behaviour and relationships.

Schutte (2021) posited that emotional intelligence places a prominent role in managing stress and it makes learners aware of strengths and weaknesses. The ability to perceive, understand and manage emotions is an integral part of emotional intelligence (Ebrahimi et al., 2018). A person with high emotional intelligence is one that can recognise, and then effectively deal with their own emotions while at the same time recognise and empathize with other people's feelings. It is a set of competency and according to McPheat (2010), it brings equilibrium and integrity to our emotional construct to cope with oneself amidst interpersonal situations of diverse levels. Emotionally intelligent individuals are those individuals who are well balanced, understand themselves and other people, act with

integrity, react very well to challenges, and have connections with people. The emotional intelligence is related to the aptitude to perform correct reasoning regarding emotions and the aptitude to apply emotions and emotional information to refine thinking (Mayer, 2008; Ebrahimi et al., 2018).

It is made attractive area due to its powerful effects on various parts of our life such as our decision and behaviour. According to Mayer et al. (2012), emotionally intelligent individuals can perceive and utilise the emotional data and then transfer the data to relationship management and management of problems. It is worthy to mention that emotional intelligence has been suggested to be the basis of the behaviour that is traditionally known as pro-social competence. Several authors have outlined a reciprocal association between pro-social competence and emotional intelligence whose studies were skewed to the capacity and position of individuals like empathy and altruism, which are regarded to be important dimensions of pro-social competence (Cob & Mayer, 2000; Hrona, 2024). It has been noted that emotional intelligence has been examined separately in other academic disciplines such as mathematics (Muhtadi, 2022), language (Hrona et al., 2024), sociology and psychology, but there is a dearth of research on this variable in Osun State, Nigeria. There is therefore a need for further research on emotional intelligence as a determinant of pro-social competence of university undergraduates in Osun State, Nigeria.

University undergraduates are expected to possess pro-social competence which encompasses various skills such as empathy, altruism, helping others, cooperation and so on, which are essential for effective functioning in the society. However, it has been observed that many students are struggling to manage their emotions, maintain healthy social relationships, and lack self-esteem. All these can be said to be an effect of their emotional intelligence level. According to Abera (2023), emotional intelligence is a key determinant of pro-social competence, as it enables individuals particularly university undergraduates to understand and manage their emotions effectively, leading to a more effective and long-lasting social relationships. Individuals with low emotional intelligence often lack the ability to recognise their emotions and other people's emotions.

Trianatasya et al. (2021) examined the relationship between the emotional intelligence and pro-social competence of students. The results showed that there exists relationship between emotional intelligence and pro-social competence among 200 level students. The findings revealed that the high pro-social competence had 27 students, the medium category had 107 students and the low category had 27 students. According to their research results, medical students in 200 level are able to deal with emotions. Actually, they were never discouraged to assist others because they had negative feelings.

The research conducted by Carlo et al. (2012) on the role of emotional reactivity, self-regulation, and puberty in adolescent pro-social competence revealed that students with more emotional intelligence tended to perpetrate acts of kindness and demonstrate social responsibility, which underscores the prediction role played by emotional intelligence in pro-social competence. Extremera and Fernández-Berrocal (2005) discovered that high emotionally intelligent students were less anxious, less depressed and less stressed when compared with those with low emotional intelligence who tends to develop anxiety, avoidance, fear and so on and consequently has poor subjective well-being. This is attributed to the fact that emotionally intelligent individuals can manage emotions and adopt healthy coping strategies.

Also, a study by Petrides and Furnham (2003) on emotion recognition and reactivity to mood induction indicated that emotional intelligence is positively correlated with life satisfaction and happiness on a global scale and this implies that the individuals who are in a position of successfully managing their emotions are likely to experience high levels of subjective well-being. Their results showed that individuals with strong emotion intelligence tend to demonstrate pro-social competence due to the high level of perception of emotional cues and empathetic responses (Mikolajczak et al., 2015).

According to Manrai (2025), university undergraduates who possess high emotional intelligence are able to recognise their emotions and those of others, respond adequately, gain greater support, feel a sense of belonging, and form healthy interpersonal relationships all of which have a positive effect on their psychological well-being. It also develops selfless and helpful behaviour in them which is crucial for support and cooperation among their peers in the university environment. Despite the importance of pro-social competence, there is a dearth of research about the specific factors that influences its development among university undergraduates in Osun State, Nigeria, hence, this study. The study therefore investigated emotional intelligence as a determinant of pro-social competence of university undergraduates in Osun State, Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

i. identify the prominent component of pro-social competence of university undergraduates in Osun State, Nigeria; and
ii. examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and pro-social competence of university undergraduates in the study area.

Two research questions were asked to guide this study:

i. What are the prominent components of pro-social competence among university undergraduates in Osun State, Nigeria?
ii. What is the relationship between emotional intelligence and pro-social competence of university undergraduates in the study area?

One null hypothesis was tested in this study:

There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and pro-social competence of university undergraduates in Osun State, Nigeria.

METHOD

Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design of correlational type. The main rationale why this design was used is that it allows an in-depth study of the subject matter, thereby making it an appropriate methodology for investigating the relationship between emotional intelligence and pro-social competence of a particular group (university undergraduates).

Context and Participants

The study was conducted in two public universities in Osun State, Nigeria. The two institutions operate a four-year and five-year undergraduate programme across various faculties including Education, Science, Administration, Agriculture, Technology, and so on. Both institutions provide social and academic environments that encourage positive relationship among students, making it appropriate for exploring the relationship between emotional intelligence and pro-social competence. All the university undergraduates in Osun State, Nigeria were the targeted population for the study. The sample size for the study was 400 university undergraduates from two universities in Osun State. Multistage sampling procedure was used to select the sample for the study. At the first stage, purposive sampling technique was used to select two public universities in Osun State. The purpose was to choose two conventional public universities (one federal and one state) that have been established over 10 years. At the second stage, simple random sampling technique was used to select 200 undergraduates from each of the university selected making a total of 400 university undergraduates.

Research Instruments

Two self-designed instruments for data collection titled: Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS) and Pro-Social Competence Scale (PCS) were tailored towards answering the research questions and testing the hypothesis drawn to assist in achieving the objectives of the study. The Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS) consisted of two sections, namely; Section A and B. the first section inquired for the demographic information of the participants like gender, level, age and institution while the second section comprised 15 items which elicited information on emotional intelligence of university undergraduates in Osun State. This was based on three-points Projective Rating Scale Model of Always (A), Sometimes (S) and Never (N). The Pro-social Competence Scale (PCS) consisted of 15 items which elicited information on pro-social competence of university undergraduates in Osun State. This was based on three-points Projective Rating Scale Model of Always (A), Sometimes (S) and Never (N). The instruments were validated by experts in Social Studies and Test and Measurement for proper scrutiny. Test-retest reliability method was adopted in ensuring the reliability of the instruments. In achieving this, the research instruments were administered to 20 undergraduates in another university outside the scope of the study. Two weeks after, another 20 copies of the same research instrument were re-administered to the same 20 set of respondents to generate the reliability coefficient value of the instruments. Hence, the EIS and PCS yielded 0.81 and 0.71 co-efficient values respectively which affirmed to the reliability of the instruments.

Data Gathering

After the construction of the research instrument was completed, two research assistants were trained on how to collect the data. The instruments were administered randomly among the students through the help of the research assistants. Instructions on the instruments were clearly spelt out, explained in a well simplified manner such that the students would not have any difficulty when answering. The administration of the questionnaire took a duration of four weeks using trained research assistants. Field editing was done by cross checking the responses of the respondents, the questionnaires that were not properly filled were returned to the respondents for the necessary update. The data was entered on the computer and analysis was done using Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS). The outputs of the analysis were interpreted and necessary discussions were made with the view to achieving the research objectives.

Data Analysis

The data collected was coded and tested for completeness and then analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Specifically, descriptive statistical analysis of frequencies, percentages and mean were employed in order to answer the research question earlier raised. Regression analysis of simple linear regression was used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance.

Ethical Consent

The participation of university undergraduates in the study was voluntary as informed consent was obtained, and anonymity/confidentiality of their responses were assured.

FINDINGS

Research Question: What is the prominent pro-social competence among university undergraduates in Osun State, Nigeria?

Table 1
Descriptive analysis of the prominent pro-social competence of university undergraduates in Osun State, Nigeria

S/N	Pro-social Competences	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)	Mean ($\bar{x}$)
1.	Helping	382	95.6	2.48
2.	Attentiveness	389	97.2	2.61
3.	Understanding	390	97.6	2.65
4.	Collaboration	384	96.0	2.57
5.	Support	384	96.1	2.62
6.	Generosity	348	87.0	2.22
7.	Conflict resolution	375	93.8	2.40
8.	Respect	384	96.0	2.66
9.	Kindness	375	93.8	2.61
10.	Accountability	380	95.1	2.55
11.	Compromise	371	92.7	2.45
12.	Consideration	385	96.3	2.58
13.	Empathy	389	97.3	2.62
14	Gratitude	388	97.0	2.74
15.	Sociability	368	92.0	2.50

Note: Any Mean ($\bar{x}$) that is 2.57 and above is adjudged to be prominent
Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Table 1 presents the descriptive analysis of the responses of respondents on the prominent pro-social competence among university undergraduates in Osun State, Nigeria. Considering the mean values, it can be deduced from the Table that gratitude ($\bar{x}$ = 2.74) is the prominent pro-social competence among university undergraduates in Osun State, Nigeria. Others are: respect ($\bar{x}$ = 2.66), understanding ($\bar{x}$ = 2.65), support ($\bar{x}$ = 2.62), empathy ($\bar{x}$ = 2.62), attentiveness ($\bar{x}$ = 2.61) and kindness ($\bar{x}$ = 2.61), consideration ($\bar{x}$ = 2.58) and collaboration ($\bar{x}$ = 2.57).

Research Question Two: What is the relationship between emotional intelligence and pro-social competence of university undergraduates in the study area?

Hypothesis: There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and pro-social competence of university undergraduates in Osun State, Nigeria

In order to answer research question two and test the hypothesis, data collected on emotional intelligence known as the independent variable as well as the pro-social competence of university undergraduates (dependent variable) were subjected to simple linear regression.

Table 2
Simple linear regression analysis of the relationship between emotional intelligence and pro-social competence of university undergraduates in Osun State, Nigeria

$R = 0.055^a$	Unstandardized		Standardized		
$R^2 = 0.003$	Coefficients		Coefficients		
Adj. $R^2 = 0.001$					
($F = 1.219$; $p > 0.05$)	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	40.630	2.124		19.133	<.001
EI	-0.065	0.59	-0.055	-1.104	.270

a. Dependent Variable: Pro-social Competence
b. Predictors: (Constant), Emotional Intelligence

Table 2 presents that there was no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and pro-social competence of university undergraduates in Osun State, Nigeria ($R = 0.055$; $p > 0.05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis that states that there is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and pro-social competence of university undergraduates in Osun State, Nigeria is hereby not rejected. The result also implied that emotional intelligence could not significantly predict the pro-social competence of university undergraduates in Osun State, Nigeria.

DISCUSSIONS

İn order to address the first specific objective which is to identify the prominent component of pro-social competence of university undergraduates in Osun State, Nigeria, findings of the study showed that gratitude is the prominent component of pro-social competence among university undergraduates in Osun State, Nigeria. Others are: respect, understanding, support, empathy, attentiveness and kindness and collaboration. The results of the study imply that university undergraduates in Osun State, Nigeria has a strong tendency of exhibiting these positive behaviours, most especially gratitude, which the results of the study showed as the prominent pro-social competence among university undergraduates. The result corroborates the findings of Lambert and Fincham (2011) which showed that expressing gratitude contributes to an increasing comfort in expressing relationship concerns to one's partner, friend or peers and a positive perception of an individual's partner in a relationship. This higher comfort was a significant component of relationship maintenance behaviours.

The result also corroborates a Thai study by Wangwan (2014) which was conducted on the role of gratitude and pro-social competence among high school and undergraduate students. The results indicated that the perceived cost of the benefactor, the gain of the recipient and the desirability of the favour offered, all contributed to the pro-social competence of students. Supporting this finding accordingly, the role of respect in perceived gratitude, as students were more appreciative towards parents and teachers, who held higher status than their friends. In addition, results of the study support the findings of Vaish and Savell (2018) which was carried out on the development of gratitude towards pro-social competence in children. The findings showed that five-year old children preferred the grateful beneficiary and expected the benefactor to prefer them, and they distributed more resources to the grateful beneficiary.

To address the second objective which is to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and pro-social competence of university undergraduates in Osun State, Nigeria, results of the study further showed that there was no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and pro-social competence of university undergraduates in Osun State, Nigeria. The result implies that emotional intelligence could not really determine the pro-social competence of university undergraduates in the study area. Emotional intelligence plays a significant role in determining the pro-social competence of university undergraduates in the study area. Probably, it might be that there are other underlying factors that could be highly responsible for the strong exhibition of pro-social competence in university undergraduates, thereby masking the potential influence of emotional intelligence on pro-social competence of university undergraduates. The result was not in line with the findings of Trianatasya et al. (2021) which revealed that majority of the students had high pro-social competence; few of them had high pro-social competence while others had low pro-social competence. Their research findings suggest that medical students can manage their emotions effectively. In fact, having negative emotions did not discourage them from helping others. Zhao et al. (2020) support the statement as they suggest that individuals who possess high emotional intelligence can assess the emotions of others and quickly respond appropriately while those with low emotional intelligence have diffmiculty in recognising the emotions of others, low self-esteem, difficulty in building and maintaining healthy relationship with people amongst others.

The findings of this study also negate the results of Extremera and Fernández-Berrocal (2005) that high emotionally intelligent students had less anxiety, depression and stress which can result in increased subjective well-being compared to people with low emotional intelligence who often exhibits anxiety, avoidance, fear and so on, leading to poor subjective well-being. This is mainly because emotionally intelligent people are capable of controlling emotions, negative feelings and using healthy coping mechanisms. This finding aligns with the research by Mikolajczak et al. (2015) which indicated that university undergraduates who possess high emotional intelligence are able to recognise their emotions and those of others, respond adequately, gain greater support, feel a sense of belonging, and form healthy interpersonal relationships all of which have a positive effect on their psychological well-being. It also develops selfless and helpful behaviour in them which is crucial for support and cooperation among their peers in the university environment.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The study concluded that emotional intelligence could not determine the pro-social competence of university undergraduates in Osun State, Nigeria. The study further concluded that the prominent component of pro-social competence among university undergraduates in Osun State, Nigeria is gratitude. Furthermore, the study has provided insight into the fact that educators, university administrators, and the society have significant roles to play in supporting pro-social competence of university undergraduates.

Based on the findings of this study, it is hereby suggested that;

1. University undergraduates should be more encouraged to exhibit positive behaviours such as gratitude, respect, understanding, support, kindness and so on, as this will strengthen their social relationships with people.
2. University educators should incorporates positive behaviours and discussions into the curriculum in order to promote pro-social competence among university undergraduates; and design programmes that addresses the specific challenges and needs faced by university undergraduates.
3. University administrators should offer support services that addresses and provides the academic, social and emotional needs of studentsand also implement programmes and campus-wide initiatives that foster social responsibility and positive social relationships, recognizing the importance of pro-social competence in university settings.
4. Educational policy makers should provide the necessary supports and resources for initiatives for the acceleration of pro-social competence in educational settings; and provide resources and training for university educators for the effective teaching of pro-social competence in schools.
5. Further research in this area could be made in order to examine the influence of more variables such as, cultural background, personal development programmes and environmental factors on pro-social competence of university undergraduates; as well as making use of a combination of research methods.

The study may not have taken into account all the possible factors that could contribute to pro-social competence of university undergraduates. Variables such as cultural background, cognitive development, personal development programmes and environmental factors were not fully explored. The findings are specific to Osun State, Nigeria, and may not be applicable to other educational systems or region. Accessibility to most of the students was not easy due to their academic commitments and schedules, such as clinical shifts, exam preparations and tutorials.

DECLARATION OF CONFLICT

The authors declare that they have no competing interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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