

Incidence of Mental Health Problems Among Undergraduates at the University of Ilorin

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Abstract

This study examines the incidence of mental health problems among undergraduates at the University of Ilorin. It also explores the impact of demographic variables such as gender, age, religion, residence type, and academic level on the mental health of students. Utilizing a descriptive survey method, 400 respondents were selected through simple random sampling. Participants completed a self-designed questionnaire titled "Prevalence of Mental Health Problems Questionnaire (PMHPQ)." The instrument's validity and reliability were rigorously tested. Data analysis involved the use of percentages, t-tests, and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to evaluate the null hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. The findings indicate a slightly high prevalence of mental health issues among the undergraduates, with symptoms including feelings of hopelessness, fear of abandonment, discomfort in close relationships, unexplained physical pain, and stress-related weight changes. However, the study found no significant differences in mental health problems concerning gender, age, or academic level. These results highlight the critical need for school-based mental health programs to address the psychological well-being of undergraduates in Nigeria.

Keywords: Prevalence, Mental Health, Undergraduates, Nigeria, University of Ilorin



By Authors

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Introduction

The concept of health extends beyond the mere absence of physical ailments or injuries, encompassing an individual's ability to adapt across various dimensions, including emotional, physical, cognitive, and social-relational traits in relation to their environment. The adage "health is wealth" underscores the importance society places on optimal well-being. However, it is essential to acknowledge the presence of health vulnerabilities, which manifest as stressors, psychological discomfort, and other related adversities. As Brown (2016) observed, the mental health of students

globally has garnered significant attention, with an increasing focus on their overall well-being. Within the broader discourse on health, both mental and physical health components are contemporary issues of scholarly investigation and public concern.

Mental health is integral to an individual's general well-being and cannot be considered in isolation. Bhugra ¹ emphasized that mental health constitutes a crucial aspect of overall health, influencing productive activities, rewarding interpersonal relationships, and the capacity to adapt to change and cope with challenges. Furthermore, mental health can be described as the absence of disease, the full functioning of an organism, and the holistic balance an individual experiences in relation to their environment ². Personal well-being, positive interpersonal relationships, and the ability to contribute meaningfully to society are all dependent on mental health. As our understanding of this relationship deepens, it becomes evident that mental health is vital to the well-being of individuals, societies, and nations³. The interconnection between the mind, body, and environment suggests that an individual's overall experience of being in the world cannot be separated from their physical and mental health ⁴. Disruptions to students' mental health can manifest as psychotic experiences, eating disorders, self-harm, trauma, personality disorders, or poor physical health.

Several determinants contribute to poor mental health, including "rapid societal change, demanding work conditions, gender discrimination, social isolation, unhealthy lifestyles, risks of violence and physical illness, and human rights violations" ⁵. The transition from high school to university can be particularly stressful, placing university students at heightened risk for mental health problems ⁶. Research indicates that university undergraduates experience higher rates of depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, psychosis, addictions, and other chronic psychiatric conditions compared to the general population ⁷. Female students in their first year of study are particularly vulnerable to mental health challenges, with higher prevalence rates than their male counterparts ⁸.

¹ Dinesh Bhugra, Alex Till, and Norman Sartorius, "What Is Mental Health?," *International Journal of Social Psychiatry* 59, no. 1 (2013): 3–4, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0020764012463315>.

² Ibid.

³ (WHO, 2004)

⁴ Thomas Fuchs and Jann E Schlimme, "Embodiment and Psychopathology: A Phenomenological Perspective," *Current Opinion in Psychiatry* 22, no. 6 (2009): 570–575, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1097/ycp.0b013e3283318e5c>.

⁵ Robert P Gallagher, "Thirty Years of the National Survey of Counseling Center Directors: A Personal Account," *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy* 26, no. 3 (2012): 172–184, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/87568225.2012.685852>.

⁶ 37–41. <http://doi.org/10.1037/a0022390> Tuma, J. M., & Pratt, J. M. (1982). Clinical child psychology practice and training: A survey. \ldots of *Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology*, 137(August 2012) et al., "Youth Mentoring across Professional Settings: A Pedagogic Approach to Social Exclusion," *Doctor of Education School of Education University of Derby* (2012): 1–210, <http://derby.openrepository.com/derby/handle/10545/272012>.

⁷ Matthew Fisher et al., "Stakeholder Perceptions of Policy Implementation for Indigenous Health and Cultural Safety: A Study of Australia's 'Closing the Gap' Policies," *Australian Journal of Public Administration* (2021); Gallagher, "Thirty Years of the National Survey of Counseling Center Directors: A Personal Account."

⁸ Mohammad Mofatteh, "Risk Factors Associated with Stress, Anxiety, and Depression among University Undergraduate Students," *AIMS public health* 8, no. 1 (2021): 36; Lorenzo Roldán-Espínola et al., "Depression and Lifestyle among University Students: A One-Year Follow-up Study," *The European Journal of Psychiatry* 38, no. 3 (2024): 100250.

Mental health issues significantly impede students' academic progress, with faculty and staff increasingly observing that the students they teach and counsel are dealing with more complex clinical challenges. Kadison and DiGeronimo ⁹ noted that a significant proportion of students grapple with depression, anxiety, eating disorders, personality disorders, and other mental health-related issues.

The living arrangements of undergraduates may also play a crucial role in influencing their mental health. According to Easterbrook and Vignoles ¹⁰, students residing on campus benefit from frequent interpersonal interactions and spontaneous meetings, which contribute to stable mental health compared to their peers living off-campus. Campus residences facilitate physical interactions, friendship formation, and necessary adjustments, reducing the likelihood of students dropping out of university ¹¹.

The prevalence of mental health issues among university students has reached alarming levels. For example, a study by Gallagher ¹² reported that over 70% of university counseling directors had encountered crises requiring immediate attention, with concerns related to psychiatric medication, alcohol or drug use, and self-injury being prevalent. Furthermore, Australian studies have revealed significant correlations between age and alcohol consumption, with younger students (aged 18-20) more likely to engage in hazardous drinking than older students ¹³.

Recent research highlights the growing incidence of psychopathology among students in higher education. Large-scale studies have reported high levels of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation among university students, with these issues becoming more prevalent over time ¹⁴. Studies have also shown that undergraduate students experience increased anxiety and poorer psychological well-being, particularly during their first year at university ¹⁵. The transition to

⁹ Richard Kadison and Theresa Foy DiGeronimo, *College of the Overwhelmed: The Campus Mental Health Crisis and What to Do about It*, vol. 6 (Jossey-Bass San Francisco, CA, 2004).

¹⁰ John W. Santrock, *LIFE-SPAN Development (13th Ed.)*, McGraw-Hill, 2017.

¹¹ Michael Priestley et al., "Student Perceptions and Proposals for Promoting Wellbeing through Social Relationships at University," *Journal of Further and Higher Education* 46, no. 9 (2022): 1243–1256; Ian Neale et al., "Student Resilience: Unite Students Insight Report," *Bristol: Unite Students* (2016).

¹² David R Reetz, Brian Krylowicz, and Brian Mistler, "The Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors Annual Survey," Retrieved from Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors: <https://www.aucccd.org/director-surveys-public> (2016).

¹³ Sharyn Burns et al., "Consequences of Low Risk and Hazardous Alcohol Consumption among University Students in Australia and Implications for Health Promotion Interventions," *Open Journal of Preventive Medicine* 05, no. 01 (2015): 1–13, <http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/ojpm.2015.51001>; Jonathan Hallett et al., "Undergraduate Student Drinking and Related Harms at an Australian University: Web-Based Survey of a Large Random Sample," *BMC Public Health* 12, no. 1 (2012), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-12-37>.

¹⁴ Hanover Research, "Trends in Higher Education Marketing, Recruitment, and Technology," *Hanover Research* (2014); Daniel Eisenberg, Justin Hunt, and Nicole Speer, "Mental Health in American Colleges and Universities: Variation across Student Subgroups and across Campuses," *The Journal of nervous and mental disease* 201, no. 1 (2013): 60–67.

¹⁵ Bridgette Bewick et al., "Changes in Undergraduate Students' Psychological Well-being as They Progress through University," *Studies in Higher Education* 35, no. 6 (2010): 633–645, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03075070903216643>; Richard Cooke et al., "Measuring, Monitoring and Managing the Psychological Well-Being of First Year University Students," *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling* 34, no. 4 (2006): 505–517, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03069880600942624>.

university life, combined with the demands of early adulthood, poses significant psychosocial challenges for students ¹⁶.

Given the persistent challenges of poor mental health among university students, particularly in the context of academic stress and the need for social support ¹⁷, this study seeks to examine the prevalence of mental health problems among undergraduate students at the University of Ilorin.

Method

This study employed a descriptive survey design, which was selected due to its effectiveness in collecting data from a large and diverse population. The target population consisted of all undergraduate students enrolled at the University of Ilorin, with an estimated total exceeding 48,000 students as of 2021, distributed across 15 faculties. Ethical considerations were strictly adhered to, with the informed consent of each participant being obtained verbally prior to the administration of the research instrument.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A sample size of 400 undergraduates was selected for this study. The sampling was conducted using a simple random sampling technique to ensure that each student had an equal chance of being included in the study. This approach was chosen to achieve a representative sample of the broader student population, encompassing various faculties and academic levels.

Research Instrument

Data were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire titled the "Prevalence of Mental Health Problems Questionnaire (PMHPQ)." The questionnaire was structured into two main sections. Section 'A' captured demographic information, including gender, academic level, age, and place of residence. Section 'B' comprised 20 items designed to assess the prevalence of mental health problems among the respondents. The responses were measured on a four-point Likert-type scale, with options ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree."

Validity and Reliability

To ensure the content validity of the PMHPQ, the questionnaire was reviewed by five experts from the Department of Counsellor Education at the Faculty of Education, University of Ilorin. Their feedback and suggestions were incorporated into the final version of the instrument. The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using the test-retest method, resulting in a reliability coefficient of 0.84, indicating a high level of consistency in the responses.

Data Collection Procedure

¹⁶ Colleen S Conley et al., "Negotiating the Transition to College," *Emerging Adulthood* 2, no. 3 (2014): 195–210, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/2167696814521808>.

¹⁷ Christina M Scott-Young, Michelle Turner, and Sarah Holdsworth, "Male and Female Mental Health Differences in Built Environment Undergraduates," *Construction Management and Economics* 38, no. 9 (2020): 789–806, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01446193.2020.1748213>.

Data were collected over a specified period, with questionnaires being distributed to the selected sample of undergraduates. The respondents were assured of the confidentiality of their responses and were encouraged to answer honestly. The completed questionnaires were retrieved and prepared for analysis.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process involved both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions and percentages, were employed to analyze the demographic data provided in Section A of the questionnaire and the responses to the mental health items in Section B. To test the hypotheses, inferential statistics were utilized. Specifically, t-tests and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were conducted to determine the significance of differences in mental health problems across various demographic variables. The hypotheses were tested at a significance level of 0.05.

Research Results and Discussion

Research Question:

How prevalent are mental health problems among undergraduate students at the University of Ilorin?

Table 1: Percentage Distribution of Prevalence of Mental Health Problems

S/N	As far as I am concerned, I:	Agree	Disagree
1	have trouble concentrating in class	108 (27.0%)	292 (73.0%)
2	have difficulty in sleeping	14 (3.5%)	282 (96.5%)
3	have been feeling hopeless	314 (78.5%)	86 (21.5%)
4	have physical aches or pains without a physical cause	168 (42.0%)	232 (58.0%)
5	have been thinking of injuring myself	118 (29.5%)	282 (70.5%)
6	use to have a sudden/intense episode of anxiety	116 (29.0%)	284 (71.0%)
7	do feel light-headed or dizzy	110 (27.5%)	290 (72.5%)
8	use to feel indifferent to others	82 (20.5%)	318 (79.5%)
9	always have discomfort with close relationships	188 (47.0%)	212 (53.0%)
10	do have inappropriate responses to others	118 (29.0%)	284 (71.0%)
11	am always aggressive among my peers	128 (32.0%)	272 (68.0%)
12	always have an intense fear of being abandoned	190 (47.5%)	210 (52.5%)
13	am always easily influenced by others	80 (20.0%)	320 (80.0%)
14	am sensitive to criticism/rejection	80 (20.0%)	320 (80.0%)
15	like being a loner	80 (20.0%)	320 (80.0%)
16	always afraid of disapproval	116 (29.0%)	284 (71.0%)
17	am addicted to depressants	22 (5.5%)	378 (94.5%)
18	am losing weight due to stress	122 (31.0%)	246 (69.0%)
19	like being thin, but always gaining weight	120 (30.0%)	280 (70.0%)
20	am always obsessed with foods (i.e., always want to eat every time)	84 (21.0%)	316 (79.0%)

Table 1 presents the percentage distribution of respondents' responses regarding the prevalence of mental health problems. The results indicate that 78.5% of respondents have experienced feelings of hopelessness, 47.5% have intense fear of abandonment, 47.0% experience discomfort in close relationships, 42.0% report physical aches or pains without an apparent cause, and 31.0% have been losing weight due to stress. These findings suggest that the prevalence of mental health problems is moderately high among undergraduates at the University of Ilorin.

Hypotheses Testing

Four null hypotheses were formulated and tested for this study. The hypotheses were tested using t-tests and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) statistical methods at a 0.05 level of significance.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference in the prevalence of mental health problems among undergraduates of the University of Ilorin based on gender.

Table 2: Mean, Standard Deviation, and t-value of Respondents' Prevalence of Mental Health Problems Based on Gender

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Df	Cal. t-value	Crit. t-value	p-value
Male	152	38.13	11.609	398	3.89*	1.96	.000
Female	248	44.08	16.487				

*Significant, $p < 0.05$

Table 2 shows that the calculated t-value of 3.89 is greater than the critical t-value of 1.96, with a corresponding p-value of .000, which is less than the 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated p-value is less than the level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates that there is a significant difference in the prevalence of mental health problems among undergraduates of the University of Ilorin based on gender.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference in the prevalence of mental health problems among undergraduates of the University of Ilorin based on the level of study.

Table 3: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Showing Respondents' Prevalence of Mental Health Problems Based on Level of Study

Source	SS	df	Mean Square	Cal. F-ratio	Crit. F-ratio	p-value
Between Groups	18461.48	3	6153.83	33.67*	2.60	.000
Within Groups	72365.55	396	182.74			
Total	90827.04	399				

*Significant, $p < 0.05$

Table 3 shows that the calculated F-ratio of 33.67 is greater than the critical F-value of 2.60, with a corresponding p-value of .000, which is less than the 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated p-value is less than the level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. Thus, there is a significant difference in the prevalence of mental health problems among undergraduates of the University of Ilorin based on the level of study. Scheffe Post-Hoc analysis was conducted to determine where the significant difference lies.

Table 4: Scheffe Post-Hoc Analysis Showing Where the Significant Difference Lies Based on Level of Study

Level	N	Subset for Alpha = 0.05
		1
100	50	30.74

300	54
200	23
400 and above	73
Sig.	1.000

Table 4 indicates that respondents in the 100 level had a mean score of 30.74 (Subset 1), while respondents in the 300, 200, and 400 levels and above had higher mean scores of 44.26, 45.28, and 46.88 (Subset 2), respectively. This suggests that respondents in the 300, 200, and 400 levels and above significantly contributed to the observed differences in mental health problems.

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant difference in the prevalence of mental health problems among undergraduates of the University of Ilorin based on age.

Table 5: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Showing Respondents' Prevalence of Mental Health Problems Based on Age

Source	SS	df	Mean Square	Cal. F-ratio	Crit. F-ratio	p-value
Between Groups	522.01	3	174.00	.763	2.60	.515
Within Groups	90305.02	396	228.04			
Total	90827.04	399				

Table 5 shows that the calculated F-ratio of 0.763 is less than the critical F-value of 2.60, with a corresponding p-value of .515, which is greater than the 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated p-value is greater than the level of significance, the null hypothesis is accepted. Hence, there is no significant difference in the prevalence of mental health problems among undergraduates of the University of Ilorin based on age.

Hypothesis Four: There is no significant difference in the prevalence of mental health problems among undergraduates of the University of Ilorin based on place of residence.

Table 6: Mean, Standard Deviation, and t-value of Respondents' Prevalence of Mental Health Problems Based on Place of Residence

Place of Residence	N	Mean	SD	Df	Cal. t-value	Crit. t-value	p-value
Off-campus	266	42.65	15.008	398	1.54	1.96	.123
On campus	134	40.18	15.168				

Table 6 shows that the calculated t-value of 1.54 is less than the critical t-value of 1.96, with a corresponding p-value of .123, which is greater than the 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated p-value is greater than the level of significance, the null hypothesis is accepted. This indicates that there is no significant difference in the prevalence of mental health problems among undergraduates of the University of Ilorin based on place of residence.

Discussion

The results of this study reveal that a significant proportion of undergraduate students at the University of Ilorin experience various mental health symptoms, including feelings of hopelessness, difficulty concentrating on academic work, sleep disturbances, physical discomfort,

and thoughts of self-harm. These findings are consistent with broader research highlighting the vulnerability of university students to mental health issues, which are often exacerbated by academic pressures, social stressors, and the transitional challenges associated with this developmental stage¹⁸. This is in line with the findings of Bhugra¹⁹ and WHO, which reported a high prevalence of mental health issues among students. Voelker²⁰ also found that hopelessness is a common symptom of mental health issues among students, while Shamsuddin et al.²¹ identified anxiety as a significant contributor to negative emotional states in medical students.

The study further found significant gender differences in the prevalence of mental health problems, with female students reporting higher levels of distress compared to their male counterparts. This finding aligns with previous research indicating that women are generally more vulnerable to mental health issues due to a combination of biological, social, and cultural factors²². The results are also consistent with Ghayas et al.²³, who reported a higher prevalence of depression among female students (61.00%) compared to male students (38.07%). However, these findings contrast with those of Nkporbu and Alex-Hart²⁴, who found a higher prevalence of mental illness among men. This discrepancy may be due to gender differences in coping strategies and help-seeking behaviors, with men potentially being less likely to report mental health issues due to cultural expectations around masculinity.

The analysis also revealed significant differences in the prevalence of mental health problems based on the level of study, with students in the 300, 200, and 400 levels and above reporting higher levels of distress compared to their 100-level counterparts. This finding suggests that as students progress through their academic journey, they may encounter increased academic demands, career uncertainties, and personal responsibilities, contributing to heightened psychological distress. This is consistent with the findings of Bruffaerts et al.²⁵, who reported that students at different academic levels experience mental health challenges differently, with higher academic levels often being associated with greater stress and anxiety.

¹⁸ Ronny Bruffaerts et al., "Mental Health Problems in College Freshmen: Prevalence and Academic Functioning," *Journal of Affective Disorders* 225 (2018): 97–103, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2017.07.044>; Eisenberg, Hunt, and Speer, "Mental Health in American Colleges and Universities: Variation across Student Subgroups and across Campuses."

¹⁹ Bhugra, Till, and Sartorius, "What Is Mental Health?"

²⁰ Bernward Winter et al., "High Impact Running Improves Learning," *Neurobiology of Learning and Memory* 87, no. 4 (2007): 597–609, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.nlm.2006.11.003>.

²¹ Khadijah Shamsuddin et al., "Correlates of Depression, Anxiety and Stress among Malaysian University Students," *Asian Journal of Psychiatry* 6, no. 4 (2013): 318–323, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ajp.2013.01.014>.

²² Sarah Rosenfield and Dawne Mouzon, "Gender and Mental Health," *Handbook of the sociology of mental health* (2013): 277–296.

²³ S Ghayas et al., "Prevalence and Severity of Depression among Undergraduate Students in Karachi, Pakistan: A Cross Sectional Study," *Tropical Journal of Pharmaceutical Research* 13, no. 10 (2014): 1733, <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/tjpr.v13i10.24>.

²⁴ A K Nkporbu and B A Alex-Hart, "Prevalence and Pattern of Mental Illness among School Age Children Seen at the University of Port Harcourt Teaching Hospital: A Six Year Study," *International Neuropsychiatric Disease Journal* (2020): 1–10, <http://dx.doi.org/10.9734/indj/2019/v13i3-430113>.

²⁵ Chelsey R Wilks et al., "The Importance of Physical and Mental Health in Explaining Health-Related Academic Role Impairment among College Students," *Journal of psychiatric research* 123 (April 2020): 54–61, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32036074>.

Contrary to some expectations, the study found no significant differences in the prevalence of mental health problems based on age or place of residence. These findings suggest that mental health concerns are distributed uniformly across age groups and residential settings, indicating that academic stress and other common triggers for mental health issues are pervasive among all undergraduates, regardless of age or where they live. This aligns with the findings of Camacho et al.²⁶, who reported that age does not have a significant relationship with mental health, and Liaquat et al.²⁷, who found high rates of depression, anxiety, and stress among students living in both home and dormitory settings.

Overall, the findings underscore the need for targeted mental health interventions and support services that address the specific needs of different student groups. University administrators should prioritize the development of comprehensive mental health programs that include personalized counseling, stress management workshops, and peer support networks to help students navigate the challenges of university life and maintain their psychological well-being.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that mental health problems are notably prevalent among undergraduates at the University of Ilorin. Common issues reported by the students included feelings of hopelessness, intense fear of abandonment, discomfort in close relationships, unexplained physical aches or pains, stress-induced weight loss, and dissatisfaction with body image, particularly related to weight fluctuations. The study further revealed that male and female undergraduates experience mental health problems differently, with gender playing a significant role in the prevalence and expression of these issues. Additionally, the study found that the level of study significantly impacts mental health, suggesting that as students advance in their academic journey, they may encounter increased psychological distress.

In contrast, age and place of residence did not appear to influence the mental health of undergraduates, indicating that mental health challenges are pervasive across different age groups and living situations. This finding suggests that mental health problems among university students are not confined to specific demographic or environmental factors but are widespread across the student population.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that professional mental health counselors consider employing various therapeutic approaches to support students experiencing mental health challenges. These approaches may include Client-Centered Therapy, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Interpersonal Therapy, and Psychoanalytic Therapy. Given the prevalence of mental health concerns among undergraduates, it is crucial for university authorities to implement outreach programs and proactive strategies aimed at addressing these issues. Continuous orientation and skills training on the causes and prevention of mental health problems should be

²⁶ Germán Eduardo Rueda-Jaimes et al., "Validez y Confiabilidad de La Escala Del Center for Epidemiologic Studies-Depression En Estudiantes Adolescentes de Colombia," *Biomédica* 29, no. 2 (2009): 260, <http://dx.doi.org/10.7705/biomedica.v29i2.28>.

²⁷ Usama Khalid Choudry, "Deranged Mental Homeostasis in Medical Students: Evaluation of Depression, Anxiety and Stress among Home and Hostel Students," *Acta Psychopathologica* 03, no. 01 (2017), <http://dx.doi.org/10.4172/2469-6676.100074>.

provided by school counselors to equip students with the knowledge and resources necessary to manage their mental health effectively.

Overall, this study underscores the importance of a comprehensive approach to mental health support within the university setting, ensuring that all students have access to the necessary resources and interventions to maintain their psychological well-being throughout their academic journey.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest concerning this paper, financial aspect and all areas of this study.

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