

An Investigation On The Relationship Between Empathy Levels And Academic Performance Of Undergraduate Medical Students of Year Groups 1 to 5 From The Faculty Of The Medical Sciences, UWI.

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Introduction

Empathic expression is a valuable technique since it increases patient trust, lowers anxiety, and improves health outcomes across all medical specialties. This project seeks to shed light on the question of whether medical students in the Faculty of Medical Sciences at UWI who perform well academically have higher levels of empathy.

Objective

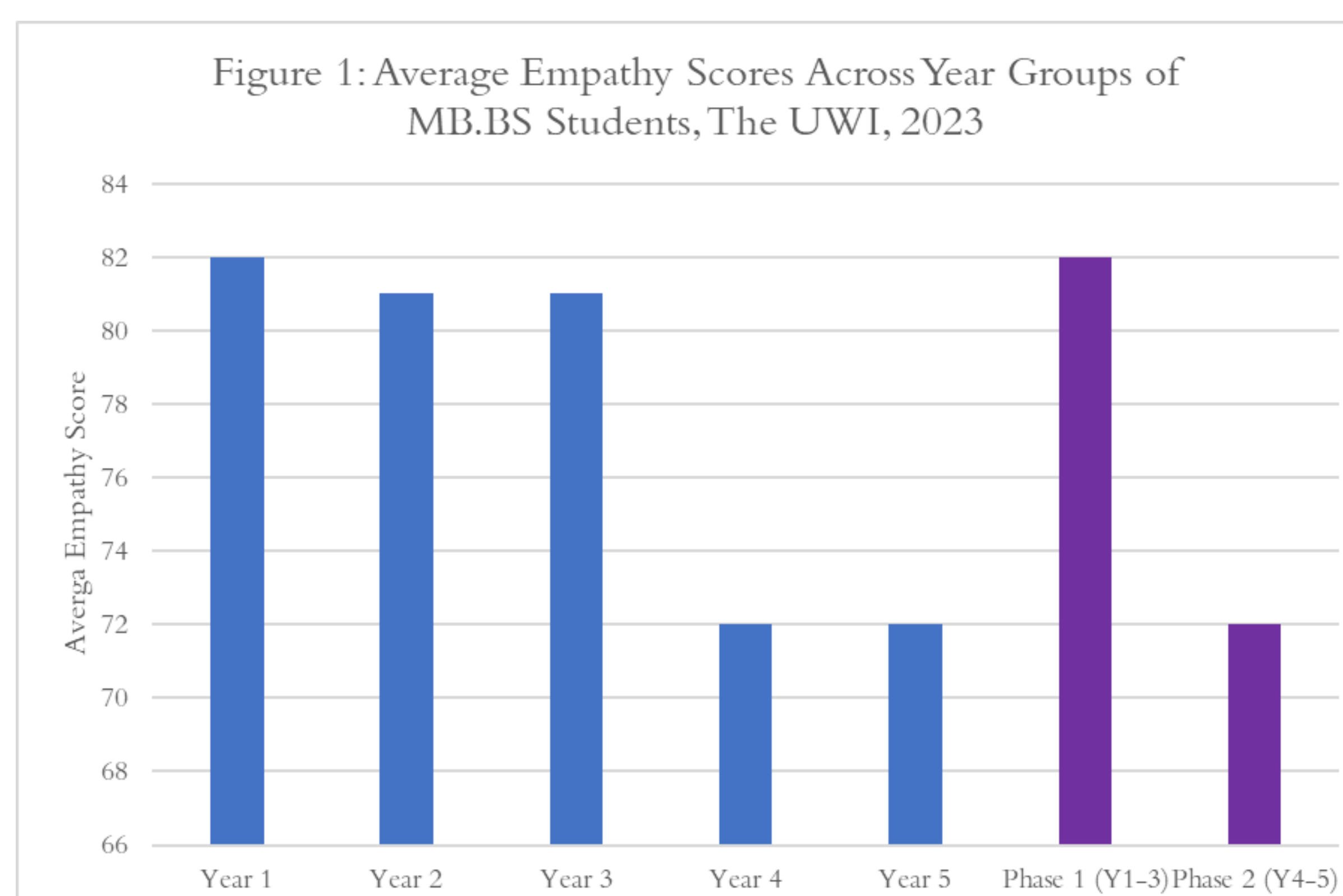
1. Define empathy and state reasons MBBS students need to be empathetic
2. Compare MBBS students' knowledge of their current academic standing
3. Determine the year group of MBBS students that are the most academically inclined
4. Explore the relationship between levels of empathy and academic inclination of MBBS students
5. Explain the effect of background factors on the levels of empathy shown by MBBS students
6. Outline ways to increase levels of empathy displayed by MBBS students

Methodology

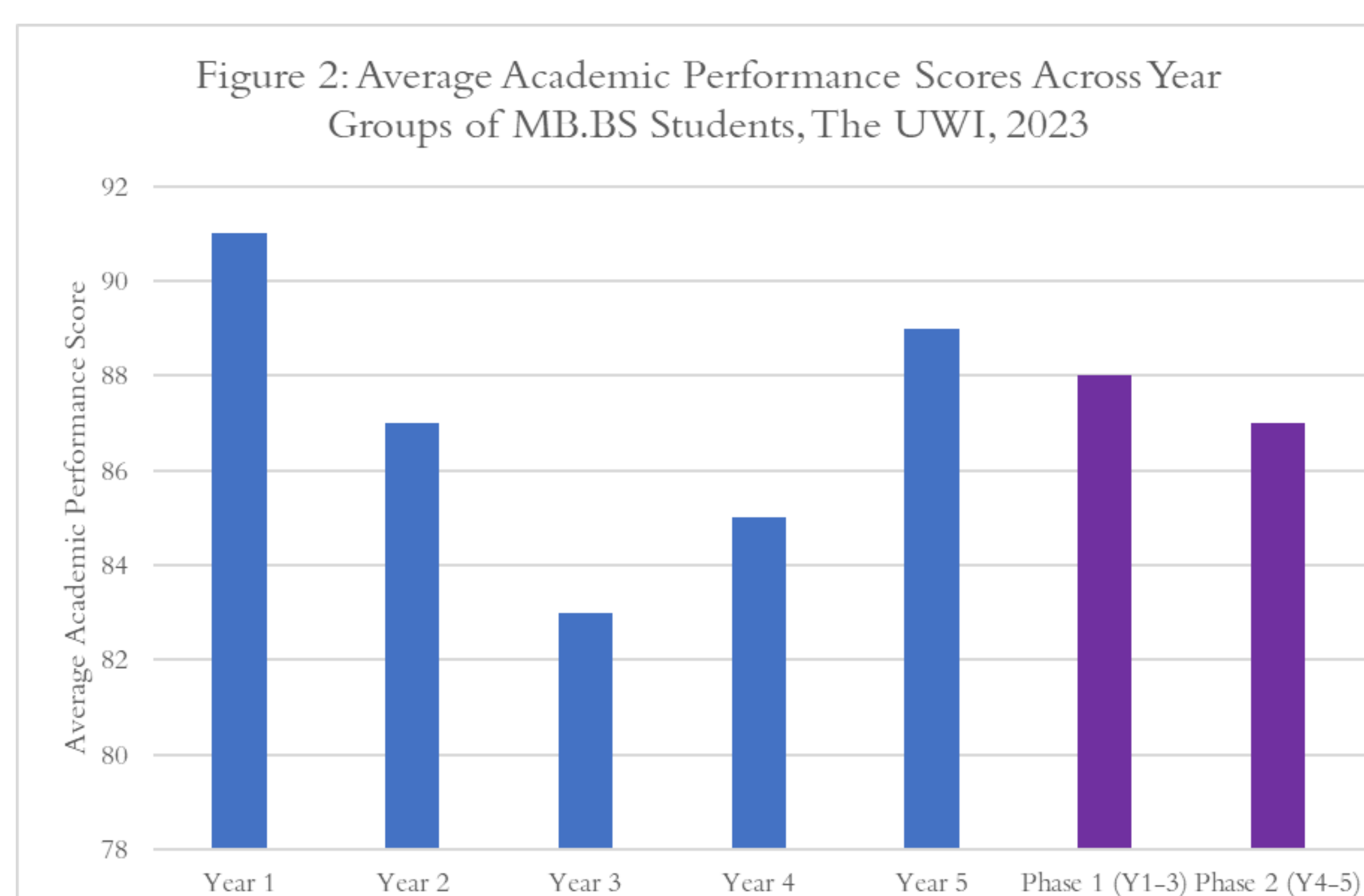
- **STUDY SETTING** - Virtual Online Questionnaire via Google Forms; distributed throughout Years 1 to 5 in the Faculty of Medical Sciences for the Academic Year 2022 / 2023. Total number of respondents = 299 respondents across the Medical Sciences Year Groups 1 to 5.
- **STUDY DESIGN** - Population-based survey research through the collection of quantitative data in the form of questionnaires. The scoring system of the two sectioned questionnaire utilizes a 5- point scale that goes from one extreme attitude to another, often known as a satisfaction scale, to assess attitudes, opinions and views, assessing their judgement about empathy in the healthcare setting and evaluated their cognition of academic standing based on a series of statements.
- **DATA COLLECTION** - via an online questionnaire using the platform Google Forms. All participants were provided with a consent form prior to the start of the questionnaire validating the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses.

Results

- Pearson product correlation of Empathy Score and Academic Performance Score: $r = 0.293$ ($p < 0.001$). This shows that higher empathy scores are correlated with higher academic performance scores.



- Figure 1 - There was a significant difference between Empathy Scores for students belonging to Year 1, 2 and 3 i.e Phase 1 (Mean= 81.35) and students belonging to year 4 and 5 i.e Phase 2 (Mean= 71.93); $t = 8.50$, $p = 0.01$.



- Figure 2 - There was a significant difference between the Academic performance Scores for students belonging to Year 1, 2 and 3 i.e Phase 1 (Mean= 87.51) and students belonging to Year 4 and 5 i.e Phase 2 (Mean= 87.16); $t = 2.72$, $p = 0.01$.

Discussion

- Preclinical students (Year 1, 2, and 3) showed higher empathy levels, possibly due to early emphasis on developing interpersonal and patient-centered skills, while clinical students (Year 4 and 5) focused more on theoretical knowledge.
- Year 1,2, and 3 students exhibited a greater inclination towards empathy-related attitudes and behaviors, such as considering patients' perspectives, potentially influenced by communication skills courses.
- Year 4 and 5 students displayed lower agreement with empathy-related statements, possibly due to increased academic demands and theoretical knowledge focus.
- Year 1,2, and 3 students prioritized grades, while Year 4 and 5 students emphasized understanding the material, creating a shift in priorities between Preclinical and Paraclinical Year Groups.

Conclusion

Medical School students' academic performance is significantly influenced by their empathy and understanding of patient care. However, as they progress through their years, their emphasis on demonstrating empathy becomes less important, leading to a decline in their overall performance. There was a trend in which medical students of Year 5 deemed less importance in understanding their studies, enhancing their clinical behavior, viewing the problem from the patient's perspective and doing the minimum compared to the Year 1 students.

From this study, it can be proven that there is in fact a link between empathy and academic performance of medical students which can enhance both patient care and the student's academic performance.

References

- Hojat is research professor of psychiatry and human behavior M. Does empathy decline in the clinical phase of medical... : Academic medicine [Internet]. 2020 [cited 2022 Nov 28]. Available from: https://journals.lww.com/academicmedicine/fulltext/2020/06000/does_empathy_decline_in_the_clinical_phase_of.39.aspx

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