



### Psychoeducation Using Symbol Modeling Techniques for Enhancing the Subjective Well-Being of Long-Distance Marriage Couples

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### **Abstract**

Long-distance married couples tend to experience anxiety, stress, unhappiness, delayed problem resolution, difficulty finding time together, and feelings of helplessness without their partner. However, previous psycho-educational interventions have not utilized symbolic modeling techniques and have not specifically focused on long-distance marriages. This study aims to examine the effectiveness of psycho-education using symbolic modeling techniques in enhancing the subjective well-being of long-distance married couples. An experimental matching control study design was used with 16 participants, divided into 8 in the experimental group and 8 in the control group. The subjective well-being scale was used as the instrument for data collection. Data analysis was conducted using the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test and the Mann-Whitney U Test. The results of the study show that psycho-education using symbolic modeling techniques is effective in enhancing the subjective well-being of long-distance married couples. Psycho-educational interventions with symbolic modeling can be used to help long-distance married couples achieve well-being, making their marriages more meaningful.

Keywords: Modeling symbol, psycho-education, subjective well-being.

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### Introduction

Long-distance marriage is a condition where married couples maintain a relationship while being physically separated for a considerable period of time due to various reasons, such as work, studies, or other family responsibilities (Purnamasari, 2008; Jimenez, 2011; Waterman et al., 2017). This situation requires couples to sustain their relationship despite not being in the same location, which often presents more complex challenges compared to couples who live together. Research shows that long-distance marriage can lead to anxiety, stress, unhappiness, delays in problem-solving, difficulties in finding time together, and feelings of helplessness in the absence of a partner (Rachman, 2020; Wardati, 2011).



The physical absence in a marital relationship can affect communication dynamics, intimacy, and emotional support, all of which are crucial elements for maintaining relationship stability and happiness (Kim, 2023). Additionally, long-distance marriage couples often face challenges in building trust and security in the relationship due to the inability to directly monitor or support their partner in daily life, which can result in conflict, stress, and decreased trust between partners (Zulkifli, Saidon, & Aziz., 2022). This absence can trigger unresolved conflicts, exacerbate tension, and increase the risk of emotional alienation between partners, particularly when poor communication worsens these tensions, thereby leading to lower marital subjective well-being (Apostu, 2022).

Subjective well-being in the family is a primary goal for every couple, both before and after marriage. Marriage itself is an institution expected to provide tranquility, peace, happiness, well-being, and mental health for both parties (Asman, 2020; Irsandef et al., 2018). However, in the context of long-distance marriage, achieving this happiness becomes more difficult due to the limited physical and emotional interaction available.

Subjective well-being refers to an individual's perception of their quality of life, including satisfaction in relationships, positive emotions experienced, and low levels of stress and anxiety (Mustafa, 2023). Subjective well-being is an individual's evaluation of their psychological well-being (Nayana, 2013). Kurniady & Karneli (2023) describe subjective well-being as feelings of happiness, joy, security, and peace. Meanwhile, Diener (2000) defines subjective well-being as an individual's evaluation of overall and specific life satisfaction. Furthermore, subjective well-being represents an individual's response to life experiences related to cognitive, affective, and psychological assessments (Mujamiasih, 2013). Based on the above explanation, it can be concluded that subjective well-being is an individual's evaluation of life satisfaction, consisting of both cognitive and affective satisfaction.

Diener (2000) explains that individuals with high subjective well-being generally have adaptive self-qualities, making it easier for them to control emotions and face life events well. Conversely, individuals with low subjective well-being tend to have a negative view of their



quality of life and perceive events as unpleasant, such as difficulties in controlling negative emotions. Subjective well-being is a predictor of an individual's quality of life because it affects success in various life aspects (Pavot & Diener, 2004). Moreover, Neeve et al. (2013) state that subjective well-being can reduce the risk of mortality, enhance social abilities, boost creativity, and benefit mental health. Based on this theoretical explanation, the researcher concludes that having high subjective well-being is crucial for achieving happiness in long-distance marriages.

One effective approach to addressing problems in long-distance marriages is through psychoeducational counseling. Psycho-education covers topics such as household rights and responsibilities, marital advice, divorce, reconciliation, and assistance in resolving domestic disputes according to religious law (Holik & Sulthon, 2020). Previous studies have shown that marital interventions positively impact couples' subjective well-being. Psycho-educational interventions, such as the Gottman Online Psycho-education Intervention (O-GPI), have shown significant improvements in marital communication. Couples participating in O-GPI reported increased constructive communication and reduced negative communication patterns, such as demand-withdraw and mutual avoidance (Deylami et al., 2021). These programs have proven to be as effective as face-to-face sessions, making them a viable option for couples separated by distance (Megale et al., 2022). Relationship education programs, such as EPL (Ein Partnerschaftliches Lernprogramm für Paare), have demonstrated long-term positive effects on relationship stability and satisfaction. Couples who participated in these programs reported lower divorce rates and higher relationship satisfaction even after several years (Hahlweg & Richter, 2010; Engl et al., 2019). The psycho-educational model creates a therapeutic environment that encourages self-disclosure, alleviates symptoms, and yields positive outcomes. This environment is crucial for couples to gain insights and build a strong therapeutic alliance, which is beneficial in resolving communication conflicts (Mahaffey, 2010).

Other studies also indicate that psycho-educational programs can improve marital satisfaction and subjective well-being. For instance, a structured Family Communication Skills Psychoeducation Program significantly increased marital satisfaction among participating couples (Atan & Buluş, 2019). Additionally, the Online Relationship Education (ORE) Program has been



shown to improve relationship satisfaction, communication skills, and overall quality of life, which can be particularly beneficial for long-distance couples (Spencer & Anderson, 2021). Further findings indicate that Couple Relationship Education (CRE) programs have positive effects on relationship quality, mental health, and even child well-being, suggesting that such programs can have broad benefits (Markman et al., 2022).

However, existing psycho-education has not yet utilized counseling services through symbolic modeling techniques, which are part of the behaviorist approach. The use of this technique aims to produce new, more effective behaviors and provide mental health education through observation-based media, such as learning materials presented in PowerPoint slides (Yulia & Bunu, 2019). The benefits of symbolic modeling include providing learning experiences that can be emulated by the counselee, eliminating ineffective behaviors, shaping more adaptive behaviors, and helping to address social skill disorders, emotional disturbances, and self-control issues (Amrah, 2023; Febrianti & Nawantara, 2022). Using this technique is an alternative in developing a psycho-education program as a solution to reduce divorce rates among long-distance marriage couples.

In a scopus database search, no psycho-education program was found that specifically focuses on improving the subjective well-being of long-distance marriage couples using symbolic modeling techniques, as proposed by the researcher (Deylami et al., 2021; Engl et al., 2019). Therefore, this study aims to provide new insights into well-being interventions for long-distance marriage couples. This knowledge gap relates to the lack of interventions focused on the emotional and psychological aspects of long-distance couples, who often face communication challenges and emotional isolation (Megale et al., 2022). Based on this background, this research employs symbolic modeling psycho-education techniques specifically tailored for long-distance marriage couples. The advantage of symbolic modeling is its ability to create desired new behaviors, with the goal of eliminating maladaptive behaviors and shaping new ones through observational learning using media such as slides or PowerPoint (Sari, Taufik, & Sano., 2017).



### Method

### Design

This study utilized a matched controlled group design with pre-test and post-test assessments.

### **Participants**

The study involved 16 participants from long-distance marriages, who were randomly assigned into two groups: 8 participants in the experimental group and 8 participants in the control group. The experimental group received psycho-education modeling symbol services. As described by Cartwright (2007), psychoeducation groups typically consist of 5-10 people. Therefore, with 8 participants in each research group, the psychoeducation could be effectively implemented. Prior to participating in the study, participants provided informed consent. They participated voluntarily and had the option to withdraw at any time if they felt uncomfortable.

### Interventions

Once the groups were identified, participants were given a scale measuring the subjective well-being of couples in long-distance marriages. Following the scale analysis, the experimental group received the psycho-education modeling symbol intervention. The study was conducted by a professional counselor with a doctoral degree in Guidance and Counseling Services. The intervention was carried out over the course of one week, with sessions lasting 55 minutes each, conducted five times. The intervention took place from April 30 to June 24, 2024, in a classroom at Universitas Negeri Padang. Table I below provides a detailed outline of the psycho-education modeling symbol intervention procedure.

Table I outlines the comparison of the psycho-education service procedures between the control group and the experimental group using the symbolic modeling technique. Both groups followed a similar service phase structure consisting of five main phases: experiencing, publishing, processing, generalizing, and applying. In the first phase, the experiencing phase, activities in both groups began with greetings, prayers, attendance checks, and the delivery of service objectives. However, differences began to emerge in the experimental group, where the



counselor explained the service objectives as part of the symbolic modeling technique to help the counselees find their focus.

In the publishing phase, the counselors in both groups presented the material using PowerPoint slides. In the control group, the counselees were asked to observe and analyze the material as discussion content. Meanwhile, in the experimental group, in addition to doing the same, the counselor used symbols in the slides to provide examples as part of the symbolic modeling technique. These symbols were designed to help the counselees gain a deeper understanding of the material through visual examples.

Table I
Implementation Procedure of Psycho-education Modeling Symbol Service for the Experimental Group and Control
Group

| Group | )  |   |   |  |
|-------|--|---|---|--|
| No    | o Activity Stage Psycho-education Service Activities (Control) |   | Psycho-education Service Activities Using Symbolic  |  |
|       |  |   | Modeling Technique (Experiment)   |  |
| ١.    | Experiencing   | <ol> <li>Opening with a greeting</li> </ol>   | Opening with a greeting   |  |
|       | Phase  | 2. Leading a prayer   | 2. Leading a prayer   |  |
|       |  | 3. Building a good relationship with the counselee  | <ol><li>Building a good relationship with the counselee</li></ol>   |  |
|       |  | 4. Checking the counselees' attendance  | 4. Checking the counselees' attendance  |  |
|       |  | <ol> <li>The counselor explains the purpose of the provided service</li> </ol>  | <ol> <li>The counselor introduces the service to<br/>be explained to the counselee (part of the<br/>symbolic modeling technique step is to<br/>convey the rationale of the activity so that<br/>the counselee can find focus).</li> </ol>   |  |
| 2.    | Publishing<br>Phase  | <ol> <li>The counselor delivers the material through PowerPoint slides</li> <li>The counselor instructs the counselees to observe and analyze the material presented through PowerPoint slides as discussion material.</li> </ol> | <ol> <li>The counselor delivers the material through<br/>PowerPoint slides.</li> <li>The counselor instructs the counselees to<br/>observe and analyze the material through<br/>PowerPoint slides and explains it to prepare<br/>them for discussion.</li> <li>In this phase, the counselor uses the symbolic<br/>modeling technique by providing examples<br/>through PowerPoint slides containing symbols<br/>as models.</li> </ol> |  |
| 3.    | Processing<br>Phase  | The counselor guides the discussion by asking questions and summarizing to deepen   | The counselor guides the discussion by asking questions, providing a summary, and giving the counselees a chance to practice as a deep  |  |

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| No | Activity Stage          | Psycho-education Service Activities (Control)  | Psycho-education Service Activities Using Symbolic Modeling Technique (Experiment)   |
|----|-------------------------|--|--|
|    |                         | the material   | learning process.  2. In this phase, the symbolic modeling technique continues to be used, giving the counselees an opportunity to practice behaviors from the material    |
| 4. | Generalization<br>Phase | I. The counselor helps the counselees formulate principles and hypotheses based on the overall experience as part of the learning phase. | The counselor helps the counselees<br>formulate principles and hypotheses based on<br>the overall experience learned in the phase  |
|    |                         |  | <ol> <li>The counselor notes the discussion results to<br/>be implemented. This phase includes<br/>documentation as part of the symbolic<br/>modeling technique</li> </ol> |
| 5. | Application<br>Phase    | The counselor conveys the meaning and benefits of the training and provides motivation for applying it in daily life                     | I. The counselor conveys the meaning and benefits of the training and provides motivation for applying it in daily life  |
|    |                         | 2. The counselor closes the meeting  | 2. The counselor closes the meeting  |

Next, in the processing, generalizing, and applying phases, the counselors in both groups facilitated discussions, formulated principles, and provided motivation. However, in the experimental group, there was an additional component where the counselees were given the opportunity to practice the behaviors they had learned. The symbolic modeling technique continued to be used in this process to reinforce learning through simulations and real examples, which the counselor then documented for further evaluation.

### Data analysis

To test the difference in subjective well-being of long-distance marriage couples before and after receiving psycho-education treatment using the modeling symbol technique (experimental group), the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test analysis technique was used. This analysis technique will be used to observe differences in subjective well-being between pretest and posttest



(without the modeling symbol technique) within the group. To test the difference in subjective well-being between the experimental group and the control group, the Mann-Whitney U test with the N-Gain Score was used.

### Result

The study aimed to test the effectiveness of psycho-education using the modeling symbol technique in improving subjective well-being. In the first stage, the researcher tested the differences in pre-test and post-test scores separately within the experimental and control groups. In the second stage, the researcher compared the gain scores of the experimental and control groups to assess the effect of psycho-education using the modeling symbol technique. Based on the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test analysis, the difference in pretest and posttest subjective well-being of long-distance marriage couples in the experimental group showed a significant result, with a z-value of -2.533,  $p = 0.011 \le 0.05$ . This indicates a difference in subjective well-being among long-distance marriage couples in the experimental group before and after participating in psycho-education using the modeling symbol technique. The histogram in Figure 1 shows the pre-test and post-test scores of each participant in the experimental group.

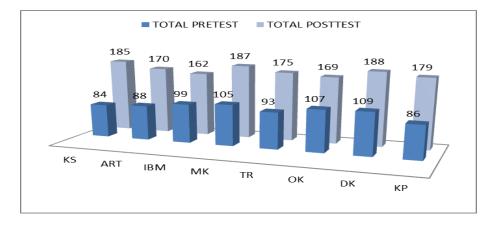


Figure I. Histogram of pretest and posttest data results for subjective well-being of long distance marriage couples in the experimental group

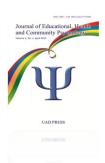


The diagram above shows a comparison of total pretest and posttest scores for all participants: KS, ART, IBM, MK, TR, OK, DK, and KP. In general, there was a significant increase in posttest scores across all categories compared to pretest scores. For subject KS, the score increased from 84 (pretest) to 185 (posttest), indicating a substantial improvement. Subject ART also experienced a significant increase, with scores rising from 88 to 170. The same pattern was observed for subject IBM, where the pretest score of 99 rose to 162 in the posttest.

Subject MK showed a significant jump in score from 105 to 187, while TR's score increased from 93 to 175. Subject OK had an increase from 107 to 169, indicating an improvement in performance. Subject DK also exhibited a notable increase, from 109 to 188. Finally, subject KP showed a sharp rise from 86 (pretest) to 179 (posttest).

Overall, this graph illustrates significant improvements in every category following a certain intervention or action, which may suggest the effectiveness of the implemented method or program. The marked differences between pretest and posttest scores indicate a positive impact of the intervention.

Next, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test analysis results for the difference between pretest and posttest subjective well-being scores of long-distance marriage couples in the control group showed a significant z-value of -2.521,  $p = 0.012 \le 0.05$ . This indicates a difference in subjective well-being pretest and posttest scores for long-distance marriage couples in the control group before and after participating in psycho-education without using symbolic modeling techniques. The histogram below presents the processed pretest and posttest subjective well-being data for the control group of long-distance marriage couples.



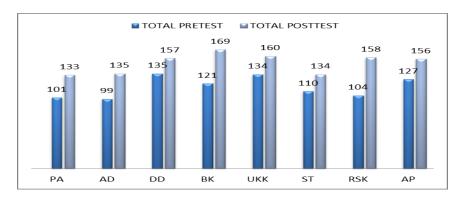
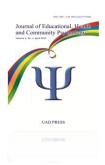


Figure 2. Histogram of pretest and posttest results of subjective well-being in long distance marriage couples in the experimental group

The diagram above displays a comparison of the total pretest and posttest scores for all participants, namely KS, ART, IBM, MK, TR, OK, DK, and KP. Overall, there is a significant increase in posttest scores across all categories compared to pretest scores. For subject KS, the score increased from 84 (pretest) to 185 (posttest), indicating a substantial improvement. Similarly, subject ART experienced a significant increase, with scores rising from 88 to 170. The same pattern was observed for subject IBM, where the pretest score of 99 increased to 162 in the posttest.

Subject MK showed a considerable jump in score from 105 to 187, while subject TR experienced an increase from 93 to 175. For subject OK, there was a rise from 107 to 169, indicating an improvement in performance. Subject DK also demonstrated a significant increase, from 109 to 188. Lastly, subject KP showed a substantial jump from 86 (pretest) to 179 (posttest).

Overall, this graph highlights a significant increase in each category following a particular intervention or action, which may indicate the success of the method or program implemented. The striking differences between pretest and posttest scores suggest a positive impact of the intervention.

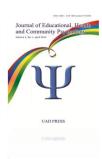


Next, the results of the Wilcoxon signed ranks test for the difference in pretest and posttest subjective well-being scores of long-distance marriage couples in the control group show a significant result with a value of z = -2.521,  $p = 0.012 \le 0.05$ . This indicates that there is a difference in pretest and posttest subjective well-being scores of long-distance marriage couples in the control group before and after participating in psycho-education without using the modeling symbol technique. Below is the histogram of the processed data for pretest and posttest subjective well-being scores of long-distance marriage couples in the control group.

Table 2
Results of the Mann-Whitney U Analysis of Subjective Well-being in Long Distance Marriage Couples for the Experimental and Control Groups

|                                | Subjective well-being Long Distance Marriage |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Mann-Whitney U                 | 1,5  |
| Wilcoxon W                     | 37,5   |
| Z                              | -3,205                                       |
| Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)         | 0,001  |
| Exact Sig. [2*(1-tailed Sig.)] | .000⁵  |

Next, a comparison test of the gain scores between the experimental group and the control group will be conducted. It can be seen that there is a difference in the Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) probability of subjective well-being for long-distance marriage couples between the experimental and control groups, based on the Mann-Whitney U test result of 0.001, or a probability below 0.05 (0.001 ≤ 0.05). Therefore, H0 is rejected and H1 is accepted, indicating that there is a significant difference between the experimental group, which received psychoeducation services using the modeling symbol technique, and the control group, which received psycho-education services without the modeling symbol technique, in terms of improving the subjective well-being of long-distance marriage couples. Furthermore, based on the N-Gain Score, the experimental group scored 78 (Effective) while the control group scored 41 (Less Effective). It can be concluded that psycho-education using the modeling symbol technique is effective in improving the subjective well-being of long-distance marriage couples compared to psycho-education without the modeling symbol technique.



### Discussion

This study examined the subjective well-being of long-distance marriage couples in both experimental and control groups, assessing the impact of psycho-education using symbolic modeling techniques. The analysis focused on differences in well-being before and after the intervention. The experimental group received psycho-education with symbolic modeling, while the control group received psycho-education without it. The findings revealed a significant improvement in subjective well-being for the experimental group compared to the control group. This difference was attributed to the structured psycho-education sessions, which were delivered by a counselor using symbolic modeling techniques across five meetings. These sessions provided continuous and relevant content tailored to the needs of long-distance couples.

Psycho-education, as an intervention, integrates psychotherapy and education to enhance knowledge, reduce anxiety, and improve family functioning (Cartwright, 2007; Harvey & O'Hanlon, 2013; Şahin & Türk, 2021; Stuart & Schlosser, 2009). Symbolic modeling, rooted in behavioristic approaches (Pratiwi, 2017), involves observing modeled behaviors. In this study, symbolic models were presented through PowerPoint visuals, using images aligned with the session content (Nursalim, 2005). This method helped participants learn and adopt new behaviors by observing the symbols modeled by the counselor.

Goldenberg (2004) highlights that psycho-education can reduce family stress and improve coping skills, aligning with Chan, Lee, & Chan (2007), who emphasized its effectiveness in providing preventive and promotive information. The psycho-education sessions in this study engaged participants actively, with couples showing enthusiasm and attention throughout each phase. These sessions were carefully designed to address the unique challenges faced by long-distance couples, enhancing their subjective well-being.

The effectiveness of psycho-education using the modeling symbol technique in improving subjective well-being among long-distance marriage couples is a significant area of research. Several studies have highlighted the importance of such interventions. The first study



emphasized the use of psycho-educational strategies like Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) combined with modeling techniques to enhance marital bonds and address issues related to concentration and well-being (Kurniadi, Firman, & Netrawati., 2023). Another investigation into the subjective well-being of wives in long-distance marriages revealed that well-being often remains moderate, indicating room for improvement through tailored psycho-education interventions (Dana & Afdal, 2022).

In comparing the effectiveness of psycho-educational interventions, research consistently shows that the quality of marriage and relational satisfaction are crucial for personal well-being. The Cardiovascular Health Study found that one spouse's subjective well-being directly influences the other's, emphasizing the relational dynamics that can be targeted for intervention (Bookwala & Schulz, 1996). Additionally, findings from a study on the long-term consequences of relationship formation suggest that structured interventions can slow the decline of subjective well-being over time and are more effective when aligned with theories of marital resources (Soons, Liefbroer, & Kalmijn., 2009).

Marital satisfaction in long-distance relationships has been studied extensively, showing that couples often need improved communication techniques to sustain relational quality. Effective communication reduces conflict and enhances overall well-being, which supports the rationale for using modeling techniques in psycho-education (Christensen & Shenk, 1991). The importance of addressing psychological distance and fostering relational satisfaction through evidence-based techniques is also echoed in work exploring relationship-level predictors of health and well-being (Bois et al., 2021).

Subjective well-being is crucial for long-distance marriage couples to experience positive emotions and maintain mental health. According to Lianti, Neviyarni, & Nirwana (2024), emotional regulation is key to a healthy mind. Diener (2009) further explains that high subjective well-being is characterized by life satisfaction, happiness, and minimal negative emotions. Similarly, Kurniady & Karneli (2023) describe subjective well-being as the dominance of positive feelings over negative ones. Thus, this study concludes that psycho-education using



symbolic modeling effectively enhances the subjective well-being of long-distance marriage couples.

Research shows that approaches like Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) combined with modeling techniques can enhance emotional attachment and relationship quality. Therefore, psycho-education programs for long-distance married couples can be more effective if they incorporate symbolic modeling techniques to provide concrete examples in addressing relational challenges (Kurniadi, Firman, & Netrawati., 2023)

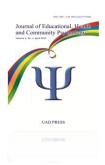
The study findings emphasize the importance of effective communication skills to reduce conflict and improve marital satisfaction. Couples are advised to participate in communication training that not only focuses on speaking and listening but also on managing psychological distance through constructive approaches. This is crucial, as research indicates that couples who can effectively manage communication and conflict have better relationship quality (Christensen & Shenk, 1991).

Considering that couples' subjective well-being is significantly influenced by various psychosocial factors, effective interventions must be multi-dimensional. This means involving techniques that support the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of individual well-being. For instance, counseling services specifically designed to address the unique psychological challenges of long-distance married couples can help improve their overall well-being (Dana & Afdal, 2022).

### Conclusion

Based on the quantitative data and descriptions presented above, the following conclusions can be drawn. There is a significant improvement in the subjective well-being of long-distance marriage couples in the experimental group. Initially, their well-being was categorized as low, but after receiving psycho-education using symbolic modeling techniques, it significantly increased to the very high category. The psycho-education intervention effectively helped participants comprehend the importance of family happiness, the role of family in personal development, the management of financial balance, the transformation of worries into a sense

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of peace, and the value of viewing the family as a support system. It is anticipated that participants will continue to consistently apply and further develop these new behaviors, thereby enhancing their subjective well-being as they navigate the challenges of a long-distance marriage. In contrast, the control group, which started with moderate levels of subjective well-being, experienced an increase to the high category after receiving psycho-education without symbolic modeling techniques. However, the improvement in well-being for this group was not as pronounced as in the experimental group. In summary, psycho-education that incorporates symbolic modeling techniques is more effective in enhancing the subjective well-being of long-distance marriage couples compared to psycho-education delivered without these techniques.

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### **Author Contribution Statement**

The author was responsible for proposing the research idea and design, designing the study, creating the module, writing the initial draft of the publication manuscript, coordinating the research implementation, and revising the publication manuscript. The academic advisor assisted in developing the research idea, guided the module creation, guided the drafting of the publication manuscript, and coordinated the research implementation.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The researchers declare that this paper has no conflicts of interest.

### **Data Availability**

Data can be provided upon request to the author.

### **Declarations Ethical Statement**

The study followed the guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki.

### **Informed Consent Statement**

Informed consent was obtained from all persons involved in the study.

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