

The Impact of Language Barriers On Patient-Provider Communication From The Perspective of Dental Students

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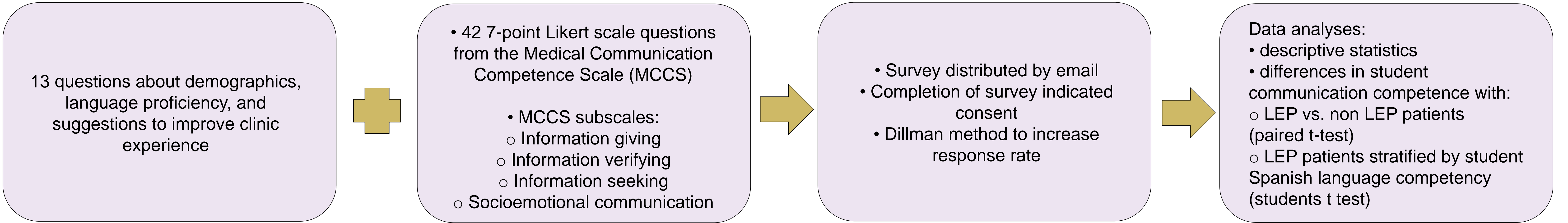
INTRODUCTION & OBJECTIVE

- Number of people with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) growing
- LEP population more vulnerable: reports less patient satisfaction and worse health outcomes
- Commission of Dental Accreditation lacks specific competency requirements for working with diverse populations
- Many dental students feel unprepared to treat LEP patients after graduation

Study Aim: To examine dental student self-reported communication competence when engaging with patients with and without LEP
Hypothesis: Greater language barriers between dental students and LEP patients would undermine communication

METHODS

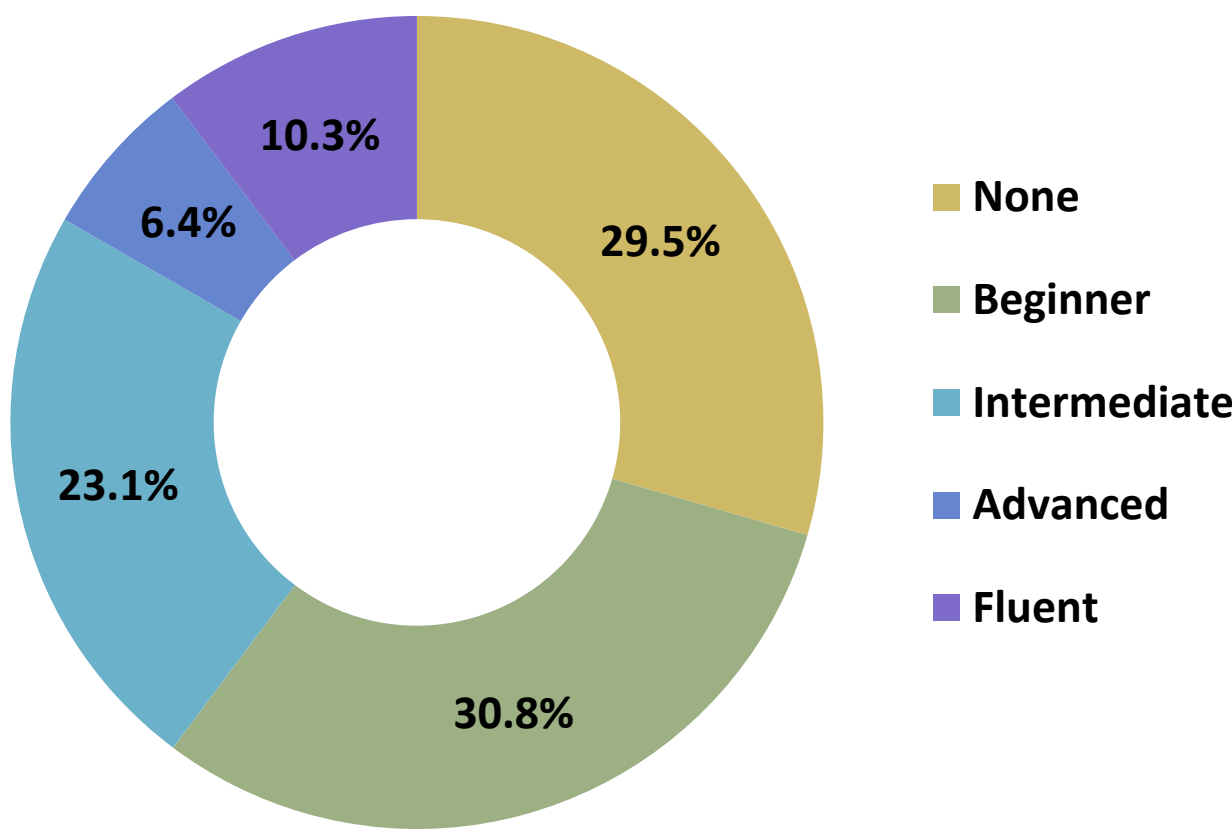
Third- and fourth-year students at Columbia University College of Dental Medicine were asked to complete a 55-item online Qualtrics survey about their most recent clinic experience working with non LEP and Spanish-speaking LEP patients.



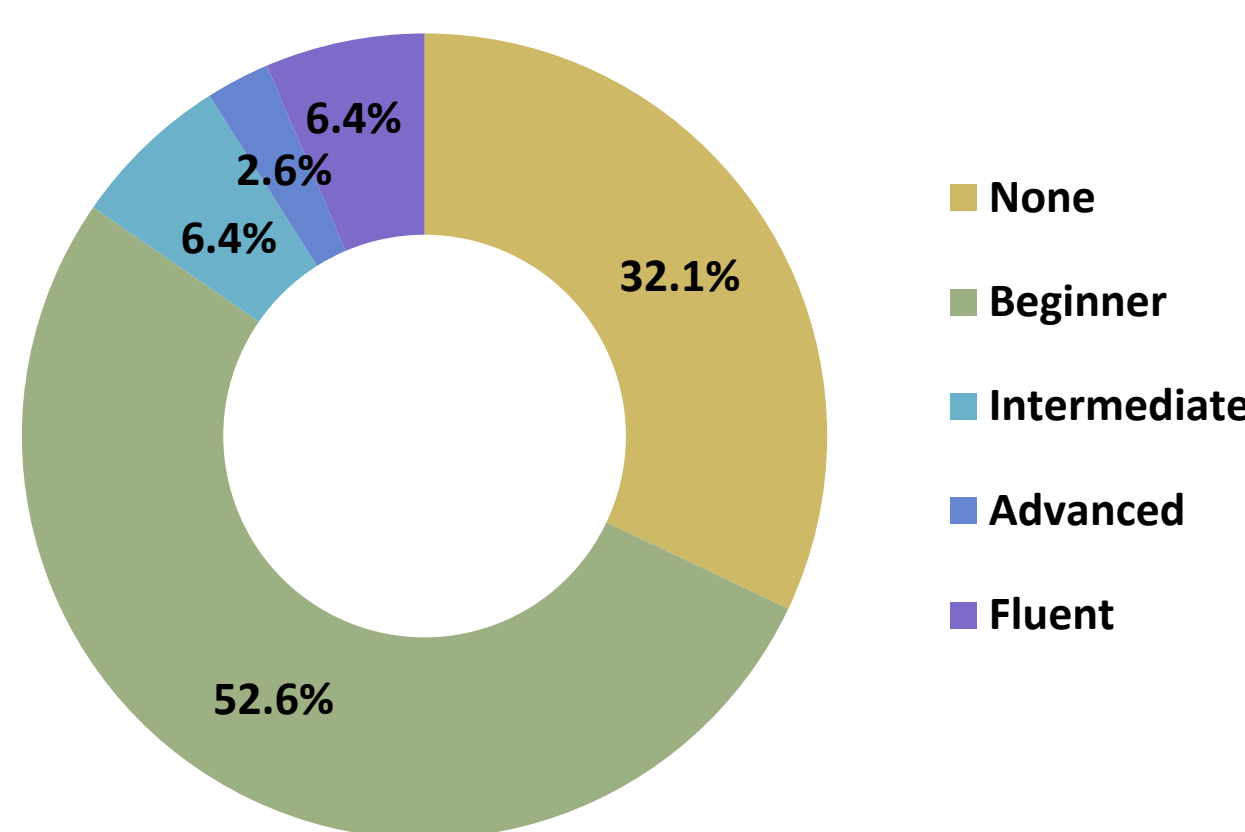
RESULTS

Student Demographics		
Class Year	N	%
2020	34	43.6
2021	44	56.4
Age		
18-24	14	18.0
25-34	60	76.9
35-44	4	5.1
Female	47	60.3
Primary Language English	61	78.2

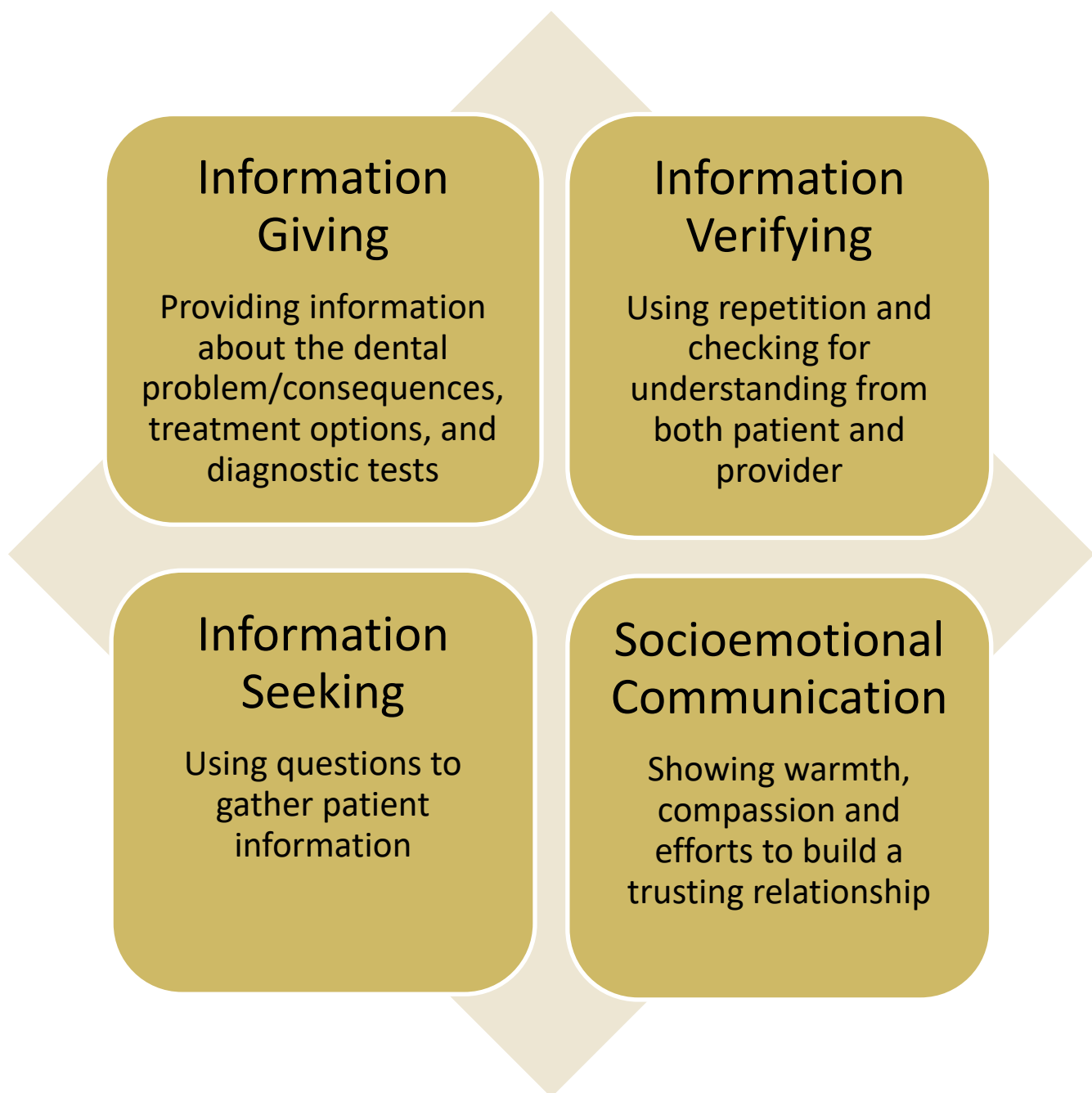
Level of Student Spanish Proficiency



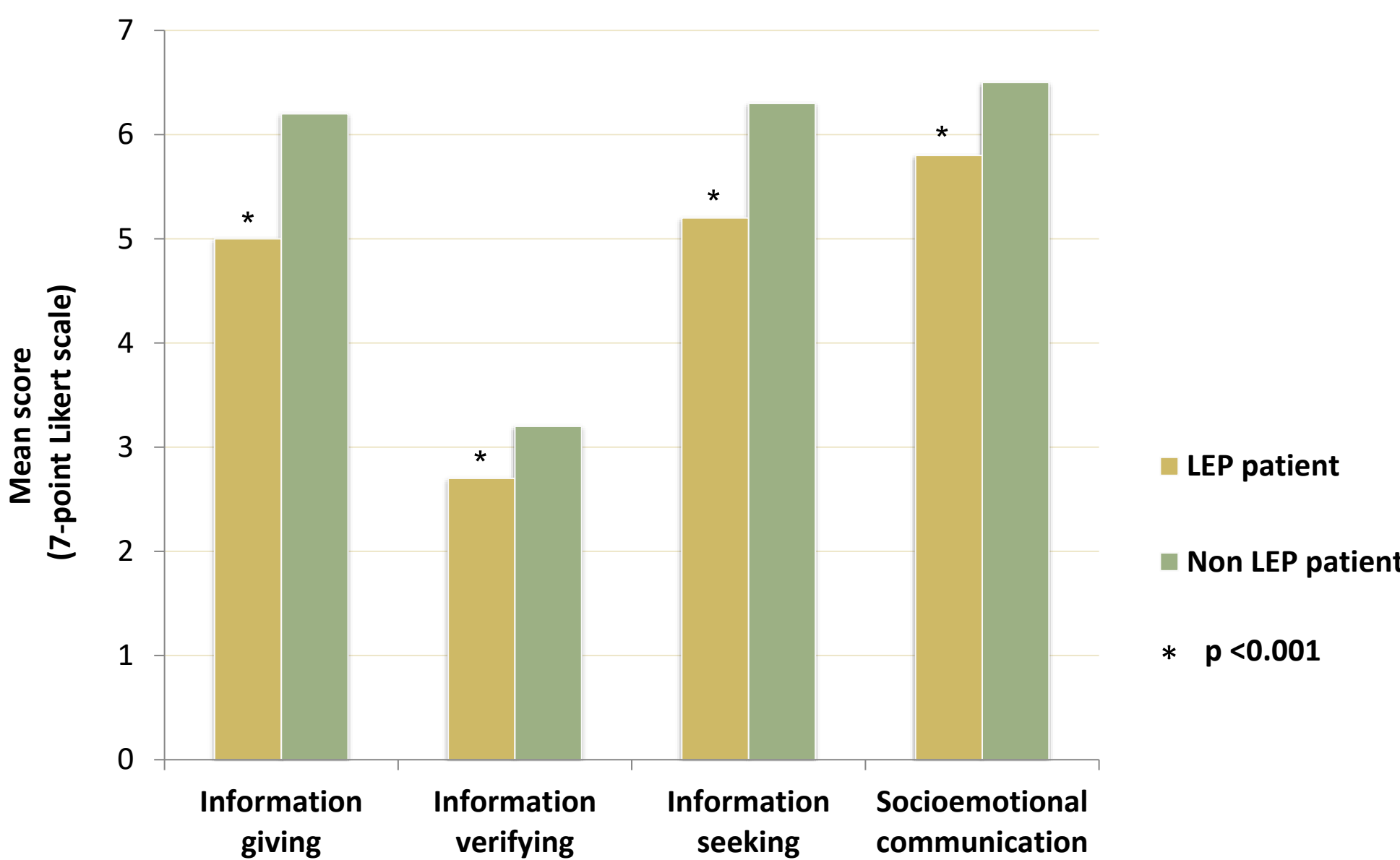
Level of Patient English Proficiency



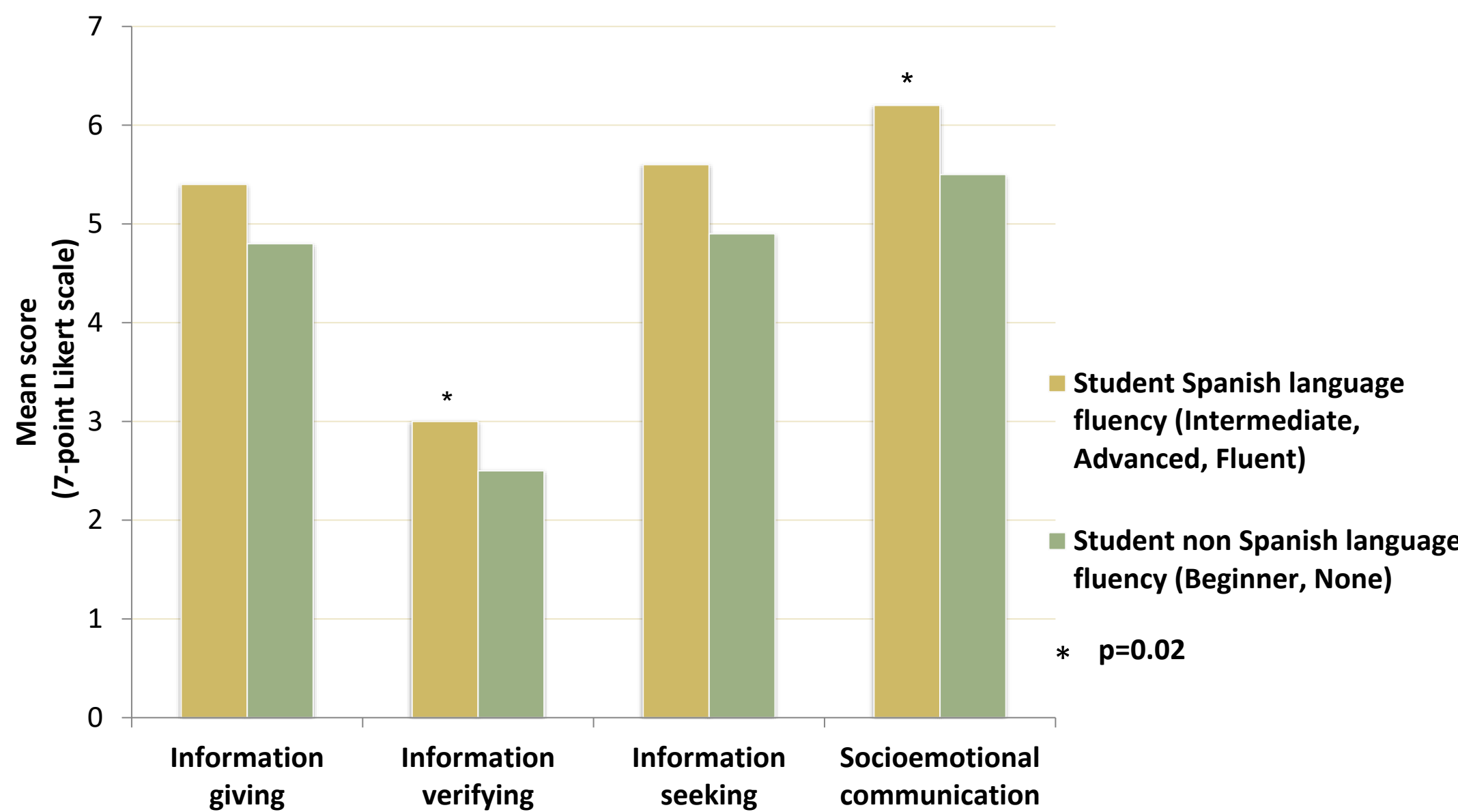
MCCS Subscales



Student Communication Competence with LEP vs. non LEP Patients



Student Communication Competence with LEP Patients (Stratified By Student Spanish Fluency)



69% of student encounters with a LEP patient involved translation assistance.

63%: phone interpreting service only
19%: phone interpreting service and Google Translate
6%: patient relative as interpreter only

Students: What can be done to improve your experience treating patients who do not speak fluent English?

- 51% recommended a Spanish course within the school curriculum
- 35% recommended on-site translators in the clinic to improve clinical experience
- Dissatisfied with current phone interpreting service:
 - inconsistent interpreter skills
 - takes time to call in and connect to interpreter
 - lacks three-way calling for more seamless communication

CONCLUSIONS

- Dental students in this sample demonstrated less communication competence with LEP patients compared to their interactions with non-LEP patients
- Information-verifying and socioemotional communication scores with LEP patients were significantly higher for students who reported at least some Spanish fluency compared to those with no Spanish fluency. These results suggest that these domains require higher level language skills
- To decrease language barriers between dental students and their patients, survey participants recommended inclusion of a Spanish course and availability of on-site translators in the clinic

ACKNOWLEDEGMENTS

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