



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Evaluating the Internal Consistency of the Pro Bono Legal Aid Skills and Attitudes (PBLASA) Questionnaire

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: Oct 12, 2024	<p>The Pro Bono Legal Aid Skills and Attitudes (PBLASA) questionnaire is introduced in this study as an instrument to evaluate law students' skills and attitudes in pro bono legal aid (PBLA) which completes the gap of lack of educational instruments in the field of legal studies. The background research highlights the role of PBLA experiences in legal education, helping students develop real life skills, ethical awareness, and a commitment to social justice. Although the McKeown (2015) and Tam (2020) questionnaires assess general volunteering and clinical legal education, they are not specific to the unique ethical responsibilities and often less structured environment present with PBLA, which facilitates the combination of skills training with the delivery of legal aid. However, since the effects of PBLA on law students were so diverse, there was a need for a dedicated tool to capture them. A descriptive quantitative research approach was adopted, and the PBLASA questionnaire was developed to focus on four areas: ethics, social responsibility, professional skills, attitudes towards PBLA. The questionnaire was administered to a sample of 154 second-year law students and the data were analysed for internal consistency and factor identification using Cronbach's alpha and exploratory factor analysis (EFA). The high Cronbach's alpha score of all factors verified the questionnaire's reliability. The results indicated 8 distinct dimensions to the PBLASA questionnaire, including critical legal thinking ability, judgment ability, confidence, professional ethics, awareness of social responsibility, legal practice skills, communication skills, and attitudes towards integration PBLA within a Legal Clinic Course (LCC). The PBLASA questionnaire showed high internal consistency and validity, indicating that students see PBLA as a holistic activity that is simultaneously practical and oriented toward social concerns. The questionnaire used in this study provides a trusted tool for educators to measure the educational value of PBLA, while recommending future steps in validation across various legal contexts for greater utility.</p>
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### INTRODUCTION

Free legal aid is vital to ensuring access to justice for those who are marginalised and underserved (Mayo et al., 2014). In many jurisdictions, legal practice relies on voluntary services from lawyers to those who cannot afford representation. Legal aid is legally recognised worldwide as a fundamental part of legal systems (King and Allmark, 2017), and the significance of legal aid is stressed in the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals, in which Goal 16 underscores the 'access to justice for all' (United Nation, 2021). In the field of law education, pro bono legal aid (PBLA) not only focuses on provision of necessary legal services but instead it is treated as an integral training ground for law students. Being involved with PBLA provides students with practical experience, better developed legal skills, and heightened social responsibility. An increasing body of literature suggests a

substantial proportion of law students do pro bono. Furthermore, U.S. national association for law placement (2023) reports that over 63% of U.S. law students had at least some pro bono work going during their legal education. These students are estimated to generate millions of dollars in pro bono legal services each year. In the UK, Lawworks, (2020), revealed that around 58% of law students had taken part in legal aid clinics or pro bono projects during their studies. They emphasise the importance of pro bono work within legal education, as much for its societal impact as for its influence on future legal professionals.

Since law students are broadly engaged in PBLA service, it is important that their attitudes, competencies, and experiences are systematically assessed. Given this need, legal educators require reliable tools to assess not only the success of PBLA programmes, but also how these programmes facilitate students' development of professional skills and ethical awareness (Cantatore et al., 2020). Besides, it is important to use such assessment tools to figure out how pro bono legal aid shapes the student's attitude toward social justice and preparedness to serve disadvantaged groups. While this acknowledged importance of pro bono legal aid in legal education, no validated and reliable questionnaires exist to assess student skills and attitudes in this field (Lawton, 2017). It restricts educators and researchers from evaluating how PBLA impacts student development. Additionally, in the broader context of educational assessment, reliable and valid instruments are critical for accessing accurate data for the purposes of curriculum development and policy decisions. As calls for outcome based education and accreditation standards continue to grow, which mandate that law schools demonstrate how their programmes facilitate the development of students' professional skills and ethics, the need for reliable questionnaires is underscored. For instance, not only does the American Bar Association (ABA) require that accredited law schools offer opportunities for pro bono work, but the universities must also report the learning outcomes from these experiences (ABA, 2024). But without a valid and reliable questionnaire to measure these outcomes, law schools could find it difficult to prove their programme or course is working.

Various questionnaires for measuring student attitudes in clinical legal education or voluntary work do exist, but none of these have been specifically adapted for the evaluation of PBLA effect. Two well-known scales in related fields are the Student Attitudes toward Pro Bono and Voluntary Work questionnaire (McKeown, 2015), and the Clinical Legal Education Volunteering and Pro Bono Work questionnaire (Tam, 2020). The two questionnaires consist of Likert-type items that seek to rate students' attitudes, experiences, and competencies in voluntary legal work and in clinical education. Yet, limitations exist when applying these same instruments to the particular purpose of PBLA. First, the McKeown (2015) questionnaire primarily measures general attitudes towards volunteering without exploring specific legal and ethical quandaries that students from pro bono work encounter. The tool is meant to measure the students' motivations and it lacks precision when it comes to the professional aspects of legal aid. While similarly targeted towards legal education, Tam's (2020) questionnaire is designed for clinical legal settings as opposed to pro bono services provided in non-clinical settings. Both questionnaires were also developed in different cultural contexts, thereby complicating their application in different legal education systems. Whereas the existing literature has failed to effectively provide a comprehensive questionnaire that integrates both the practical skills learned through PBLA and the ethical responsibilities that come with it (Rhode, 2005). However, the existing questionnaires do not capture the wide breadth of competencies that students gain from PBLA, including client communication, legal research, and case management, in combination with their growing awareness of social justice issues. Furthermore, currently no questionnaire has comprehensively addressed the distinct legal ethics as they relate to PBLA, including the restriction against collection of fees or gifts from clients, along with the duty to manage client expectations where there are no guarantees of successful outcomes (Graves Poller, 2015).

To address this gap, this study will develop and validate the Pro Bono Legal Aid Skills and Attitudes (PBLASA) questionnaire; a questionnaire that measures law students' skills and attitude towards integration PBLA in Legal Clinic Course (LCC). The PBLASA questionnaire contains items developed in the McKeown (2015) and Tam (2020) questionnaires as well as additional items that are more tailored to the PBLA context. The questionnaire focuses on four key areas: Four aspects of free legal services provision: (1) professional skills development, (2) ethical awareness, (3) social responsibility, (4) personal attitudes towards integration pro bono legal aid (PBLA) in LCC. The

purpose of the study is to assess the internal consistency and reliability of the PBLASA questionnaire, using a sample of law students. The study is guided by the following research questions:

- **RQ1:** Does the PBLASA questionnaire exhibit high internal consistency across its subscales (professional skills, ethical awareness, social responsibility, and personal attitudes)?
- **RQ2:** Does the PBLASA questionnaire show strong item-total correlations, indicating that each item contributes meaningfully to the overall construct?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Achieng (2017), define pro bono legal aid as services and representation which are provided to those who cannot afford the services of a lawyer at no cost, and it is capable of facilitating access to justice. It is integral and is considered to be a social responsibility throughout many legal systems around the world. Increasingly, pro bono legal aid is being recognised as socially beneficial to society and possibly to professional development of law students. Participation in pro bono legal aid can provide students with practical experience, competencies in the professional world, and the development of an ethical responsibility and sense of social justice. Ruan, (2013) further notes that pro bono legal aid in educational settings gives students a chance to gain legal practice which goes beyond classroom walls. The student experiences indispensably required activities such as client interviews, legal research and case management, which contribute to their professional development. Studies indicate that the involvement of pro bono legal aid in a study helps to increase knowledge about legal practices, better communication skills, to have more feelings and sensitivity towards disadvantaged groups in society (McKeown 2015). In addition, pro bono legal aid allows the students to develop social responsibility by realising that their legal services might affect others in the larger community and training them for a legal career that would include public interest law.

Pro bono work has been studied in terms of its educational effect. In a study by Evans et al. (2017), law students across jurisdictions were surveyed, and 78% of the participants indicated that pro bono legal aid greatly improved their practical legal skills, while 64% stated that it had increased their awareness of social justice issues. One such study, Dickson, (2014) argues that students involved in pro bono work are more likely to continue it into their professional careers, with that benefit potentially lasting in the long term of providing pro bono legal aid services. While these positive educational outcomes exist, the evaluation of the students' experience and competencies gained from the pro bono legal aid remains informal. Diane (2023) explains that many law schools depend on reflective journals or informal feedback to measure student development, but these methods yield anecdotal instead of systematic evidence of outcomes of learning. Thus, where the literature gaps, there is a need for reliable and validated tools to measure the effect of pro bono legal aid on students, specifically the way it supports the development of students' skills, ethical awareness, and attitudes towards public service.

In the larger field of legal education there has been a rising interest in developing scales and instruments capable of measuring different aspects of student learning and professional development. As Saha et al. (2023) highlights, outcome based assessment has been in demand in legal education, as well as in other professional fields. This means regional accrediting bodies like the American Bar Association (ABA) or Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) in the UK require evidence from law schools that they train students to develop core competencies. As a result, a number of questionnaires have been developed to measure learning outcomes across legal reasoning, client communication, and professional ethics. However, as Neal et al. (2022) highlight, the development of validated scales in legal education is much underdeveloped compared with other fields, such as medicine and psychology. Conventional legal education has privileged theoretical knowledge and doctrinal analysis and has not centred on the empirical measurement of practical skills and professional attitudes. In recent years, this has begun to change with several attempts to develop questionnaires to measure specific competencies in clinical legal education and experiential learning settings. However, one important example is the questionnaire developed by Krieger (2004) to measure law students' well being and their ethical decision making. The questionnaire was developed to gauge the level of stress and the ethical dilemma that law students undergo in their legal education. In this area, it has been widely used for studying law students' mental health and professional development for instance, Ashraf & Anwar, (2023) developed the Clinical Legal

Education Assessment Tool (CLEAT) to assess students' performance in legal clinics by measuring practical skills including legal research, client interviews, and case management.

However, few questionnaires are specifically designed to assess the influence of pro bono legal aid on student learning. Most of the current instruments target clinical legal education, where students work on authentic cases under a supervisory umbrella, frequently in a university run legal clinic. The challenges of assessing pro bono work — which may be undertaken in less structured environments and often on a voluntary basis — are unique. Moreover, this further underscores the need for a dedicated instrument that assesses the pro bono legal aid specific competencies and attitudes. The Pro Bono Legal Aid Skills and Attitudes (PBLASA) questionnaire, which is the focus of this study, was developed by adapting items from two existing questionnaires: Student Attitudes towards Pro Bono and Voluntary Work (McKeown, 2015) and the Clinical Legal Education Volunteering and Pro Bono Work (Tam, 2020) questionnaires. Neither questionnaire has been specifically designed for pro bono legal aid in the educational context, and both have been influential in measuring student attitudes and competencies regarding voluntary and clinical legal work. Primarily, McKeown's (2015) questionnaire was built to address the motivations that drive students to engage in voluntary work. Among its items are measures of students' altruistic tendencies, of the sense of social responsibility they feel, and the personal satisfaction they obtain from helping others. In spite of its contributions to the psychological and emotional elements of voluntary work, this scale is not specific regarding the competencies students acquire with respect to their legal work through pro bono work. For example, professional ethics and the practical skills that are critical to legal education and eventually, to practise are not assessed on the McKeown questionnaire.

In contrast, Tam's (2020) questionnaire is more specific to a legal education context, including items which relate to student experiences in a clinical legal environment. There are areas of assessment such as legal research, client communication and case management, necessary for the professional development of students. Second, Tam has adapted his questionnaire for the pedagogical setting of structured legal clinics, where students work under the direct supervision of attorneys. Therefore, this is less useful for pro bono legal aid, which is often done in less formal or external contexts such as in legal aid organisations or community legal projects. In response, the PBLASA questionnaire was formed by fusing the strengths in the McKeown questionnaire and Tam questionnaire (Karmakar & Lama, 2024). Combining McKeown's focus on social responsibility and personal attitudes with Tam's emphasis on application of practical legal skills. New items also are included to measure the ethical aspects of pro bono work such as adherence to professional codes of conduct and proscriptions against receiving fees or gifts from clients. Cantatore also states that this enhances the PBLASA questionnaire to be a wider scale that assesses a broad classroom of competencies and attitudes that ought to be imparted in pro bono legal aid.

Internal consistency is one of the most important psychometric concepts and refers to the degree to which items on a scale measure the same underlying construct. A key aspect of reliable measurement involves reliability, which refers to the extent to which an instrument generates consistently and uniformly accurate results. Cronbach's alpha is the most commonly used measure of internal consistency, assessing the degree that the set of items is homogeneous (i.e., how closely related are the items as a group). Taber (2018), mentions that a high Cronbach's alpha (usually greater than 0.70) implies that the items are measuring the same construct and hence the scale is reliable. Internal consistency is especially important in terms of scale development because this provides the assurance that the items in the scale are not measuring different or unrelated concept. In the PBLASA questionnaire, items are also meant to assess how students are developed in terms of their ethical awareness, social responsibility, and professional skills (Hwang et al., 2023). If these items are not internally consistent, this suggests that all of these items are not measuring one underlying construct, which would invalidate the questionnaire. Reliability assessment is more than internal consistency. Test retest reliability measures the stability of a questionnaire over time and inter rater reliability measures the consistency between different raters when using the questionnaire.

## METHODS

### Research design

The design of this study follows a descriptive quantitative research approach, which is suited for measuring and analysing the internal consistency and reliability of the Pro Bono Legal Aid Skills and Attitudes (PBLASA) questionnaire. This approach allows for the collection of numerical data that can be statistically analysed to determine patterns, relationships, and generalizations regarding the reliability of the questionnaire. The study aligns with the positivist research philosophy, which posits that objective reality can be measured and understood through empirical data (Ali, 2024). In the context of this research, the objective reality refers to the competencies, ethical awareness, and attitudes of law students participating in pro bono legal aid service. The research approach is deductive, meaning it begins with a theoretical framework (based on previous research and psychometric principles) and tests this framework through data collection and analysis. The primary objective is to validate the PBLASA questionnaire by assessing its internal consistency, which will either confirm or reject the hypothesized reliability of the instrument.

### Sampling strategy and participants

The sample for this study consists of 154 second-year law students who participated in the study through an online survey. The selection of second-year law students was intentional, as students at this stage of their legal education are likely to have had some legal knowledge to handle pro bono legal aid or at least an understanding of its significance within the profession. The sampling strategy employed is snowball sampling, a type of non-probability sampling where initial participants recruit others through their networks (Sadler et al. 2010). This method was chosen due to the convenience of reaching participants and their peers through existing connections within the university community. While snowball sampling may limit generalizability, it facilitates data collection from a relevant population within the given time frame. The participants were drawn from a single university, and the survey was distributed through the WeChat platform, which is widely used among students in China. This platform facilitated access to the target population and ensured a high response rate. All 154 students completed the survey, providing a full dataset with no missing values, which was crucial for the reliability of the statistical analysis.

### Data collection and instruments

The primary data collection instrument was the PBLASA questionnaire, developed for this study to assess law students' skills and attitudes with pro bono legal aid. The PBLASA questionnaire consists of 36 Likert-scale items, for which 20 items were adapted from two existing questionnaires: the Student Attitudes toward Pro Bono and Voluntary Work (McKeown, 2015) and the Clinical Legal Education Volunteering and Pro Bono Work (Tam, 2020) questionnaires and 16 questions were self made. The items cover four key dimensions: (1) professional skills development, (2) ethical awareness, (3) social responsibility, and (4) personal attitudes toward providing pro bono legal aid services. The Likert-scale responses ranged from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The questionnaire was reviewed by legal education experts and students to ensure both content and face validity. The expert reviewers provided feedback on the clarity and relevance of the items, while the students helped to ensure that the wording was comprehensible. Based on this feedback, minor revisions were made to improve the final version of the questionnaire. The data were collected using the Questionnaire Star platform, a widely used online survey tool in China, which allowed for efficient data collection and automated recording of responses.

### Data analysis

The data were analysed using SPSS version 29 to evaluate the internal consistency and reliability of the PBLASA questionnaire. An independent samples t-test was conducted to evaluate the discriminatory power of each question, determining the ability of individual items to differentiate between high and low scorers on the PBLASA questionnaire. To identify the underlying factor structure, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was performed using Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with a varimax rotation. Factors were extracted based on eigenvalues greater than 1, helping to cluster items into meaningful dimensions. The adequacy of the dataset for factor analysis was confirmed through the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's Test

of Sphericity. A KMO value above 0.70 and a significant Bartlett's test ( $p < 0.05$ ) indicated that the sample was suitable for factor analysis (Shrestha, 2021). Additionally, item-total correlations were calculated to assess how each item contributed to the overall reliability of the questionnaire, with items below 0.40 flagged for potential removal. This analysis ensures that the PBLASA questionnaire reliably measures law students' skills and attitudes related to pro bono legal aid.

## RESULTS

Internal consistency is measured using Cronbach's alpha, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to explore underlying factor structure and item-total correlation analysis for the items.

### Independent sample T-Test

The results of the independent samples t-test show that each PBLASA question has strong discriminatory power. All t-values are extremely significant ( $p < .001$ ) 5.317–12.220, meaning that each question successfully differentiates between high and low scorers on the scale. In particular, Question 32 ( $t = 12.220$ ) and Question 35 ( $t = 11.928$ ) have high discriminatory power, since they are able to measure critical legal thinking and professional ethics very accurately. Thus these results validate the ability of the scale to differentiate different competency levels and attitudes in students, and so it is reliable and effective.

**Table 1: Independent sample t-test result for the discriminatory power of each question**

Question	<i>t</i>	Question	<i>t</i>
22	7.858***	39	6.292***
23	7.339***	40	7.064***
24	9.895***	41	5.317***
25	7.047***	42	6.254***
26	5.411***	43	9.354***
27	5.511***	44	10.695***
28	8.028***	45	7.160***
29	7.306***	47	6.543***
30	6.564***	48	8.101***
31	7.251***	49	8.956***
32	12.220***	50	8.244***
33	10.200***	51	8.928***
34	9.218***	52	10.107***
35	11.928***	53	7.366***
36	6.865***	54	9.331***
37	11.025***	55	8.087***
38	9.284***	56	8.963***
46	5.733***	57	6.709***

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

### Exploratory factor analysis (EFA)

An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was thus performed to further examine the structure of the PBLASA questionnaire. Analysis of the factors was performed using principal component analysis (PCA) as the extraction method and varimax rotation to simplify the interpretation of the factors. The EFA sought to analyse latent components in students' skills and attitudes with regard to pro bono legal aid.

### KMO and Bartlett's test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity results indicate that the dataset is appropriate for the factor analysis. Since the KMO value (0.843) is higher than the proposed threshold (0.70), it reflects that the sampling is sufficient and that the items have enough common variance to perform exploratory factor analysis (EFA). An examination of Bartlett's Test of Sphericity gives a highly significant Chi-square of 4382.881 ( $df = 630, p < .001$ ) which confirms that correlations between items are strong enough to proceed with factor extraction. The existence of the latent factors that characterised the observed variables is supported by these findings in demonstrating the construct validity of the PBLASA questionnaire, thus confirming that the dataset was suitable in identifying meaningful dimensions of law students' skills and attitudes towards pro bono legal aid.

**Table 2: KMO and Bartlett's test for construct validity of PBLASA questionnaire**

<b>KMO</b>		.843
<b>Bartlett's Test of Sphericity</b>	<b>Approx. Chi-Square</b>	4382.881
	<b>df</b>	630
	<b>Sig.</b>	.000

These tests provide confidence in the dataset's suitability for factor analysis. Although the KMO value indicates a moderate level of sampling adequacy, the significance of Bartlett's test suggests that the correlations among items are sufficiently strong to identify meaningful factors within the PBLASA questionnaire.

### Factor extraction

An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed on the 36 Likert-scale items (Q22 to Q57) to explore the underlying structure of the PBLASA questionnaire. Principal component analysis was performed with varimax rotation to identify potential factors and to improve interpretability of the results. EFA is a statistical practise to uncover latent constructs by grouping items into factors based on shared variance. In this study, the analysis found that eight factors with eigenvalues 1 had developed; each of these factors consisted of different dimensions of the students' skills and attitudes toward pro bono legal aid. These factors together explained substantial proportions of variance which lead to the conclusion that the constructs help provide a meaningful interpretation of students' pro bono legal aid skills and attitudes.

**Table 3: Exploratory factor analysis**

Question	Component								Communality
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
22				.745					.747
23				.788					.791
24				.706					.746
25				.671					.636
26							.786		.752
27							.840		.839
28							.719		.758
29						.765			.769
30						.771			.739
31						.853			.825
32			.742						.808
33			.713						.720

34			.756						.794
35			.764						.789
36					.724				.689
37					.740				.757
38					.743				.752
46					.776				.696
39		.750							.654
40		.723							.686
41		.718							.664
42		.779							.719
43		.751							.743
44								.751	.854
45								.852	.901
47	.796								.730
48	.763								.698
49	.813								.737
50	.874								.788
51	.795								.719
52	.791								.723
53	.783								.677
54	.764								.690
55	.829								.756
56	.800								.750
57	.855								.758

A detailed analysis of the PBLASA questionnaire by a rotated component matrix reveals eight factors corresponding to the theoretical framework of the questionnaire. These are important dimensions of law students' skills, attitudes, and experiences in providing pro bono legal aid. The factor loadings and high communality values indicate the strength and reliability of the questionnaire to capture these dimensions, which each factor uniquely contributes to form a comprehensive evaluation of students' skills and attitudes.

Factor 1, namely, Critical Legal Thinking Ability reflects the students' capability to think critically about legal and regulatory issues and being able to apply theoretical knowledge in practical contexts. This is further demonstrated by questions 22, 23, and 24 with loadings of 0.745, 0.788, and 0.706 respectively, meaning they have relevance in this dimension. Additionally, the high communality values (e.g., 0.747 for Question 22) strengthen the claim that these items measure students' critical thinking skills which are a core competency in legal education. Factor 2, or Judgment Ability, refers to the students' ability to make decisions in the legal scenarios. For example, questions 26 and 27 showing loadings of 0.786 and 0.840, respectively, indicate the ability to consider and solve legal issues with clear judgment. The communality values indicate the latter for Question 27, as confirmed by a communality value of 0.839. Factor 3 is linked with Confidence and comprises of students' confidence in handling legal responsibilities. A strong loading of 0.765 for Questions 29, 0.771 for Questions 30, and 0.853 for Question 31 illustrates the students' confidence to engage in pro bono work. This dimension is further supported by communality values in communality, for example the value of 0.825 that is obtained for Question 31. Professional Ethics: Factor 4 reflects students' adherence to ethical standards in pro bono work. Loadings of 0.742 and 0.713 in Questions 32 and 33 demonstrate the focus on upholding integrity, confidentiality and professional conduct. The communality value of 0.808 for Question 32 confirmed its validity in assessing ethical awareness, an essential dimension of legal professionalism.



Factor 5 is Awareness of Social Responsibility, which reflects students' commitment to social justice and the broader societal role of legal professionals. Questions 36 and 37 load strongly on this factor with values 0.724 and 0.74 respectively. Community values, such as 0.757 for Question 37, also confirm that these items measure well the altruistic motivations behind pro bono legal aid. Factor 6 (Legal Practice Skills) are competencies that relate to practical skills such as client interaction and case management. In the same figure, Questions 39 and 42, with loadings of 0.750 and 0.779, suggest students' readiness to employ their legal training in the real world. Note that the communality values are not trivial, for instance, for a question such as Question 42, it is 0.719. Factor 7: Communication Skills is used to evaluate how effectively students communicate ideas. Questions 44 and 45 load strongly with 0.751 and 0.852, with question 45's communality of 0.901 showing it is very much an item for this domain. Lastly, Factor 8, Students' Attitudes toward PBLA in LCC, is a measure of overall perceptions of pro bono legal aid. Communality values such as those of 0.758 support items such as Question 57, loaded by 0.855, as having the highest alignment with this factor.

### Reliability and item-total statistics of eight dimensions

Reliability analysis was conducted to evaluate the internal consistency of the PBLASA questionnaire, ensuring that all items within each dimension reliably measure their respective constructs. By calculating Cronbach's alpha and corrected item-total correlations, the analysis determined the contribution of each item to the overall reliability, confirming the questionnaire's robustness and coherence.

**Table 4: Reliability and item-total statistics of eight dimensions**

Dimensions	Item	Corrected item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted	Cronbach's Alpha
Critical legal thinking skills	22	.753	.816	.866
	23	.752	.814	
	24	.708	.832	
	25	.657	.853	
Judgement ability	26	.674	.714	.806
	27	.697	.689	
	28	.600	.791	
Confidence	29	.685	.790	.838
	30	.685	.795	
	31	.752	.729	
Professional ethics	32	.782	.863	.896
	33	.743	.876	
	34	.782	.862	
	35	.777	.863	
Sense of social responsibility	36	.628	.830	.847
	37	.728	.789	
	38	.731	.785	
	46	.658	.817	
Legal practice skills	39	.636	.848	.864
	40	.698	.833	
	41	.638	.847	
	42	.694	.834	
	43	.760	.816	
Communication skills	44	.782	/	.877
	45	.782	/	
	47	.775	.952	.955

Attitudes towards PBLA on students	48	.771	.952
	49	.805	.950
	50	.824	.950
	51	.799	.951
	52	.804	.950
	53	.760	.952
	54	.779	.951
	55	.813	.950
	56	.802	.950
	57	.792	.951

Cronbach's alpha values for the overall questionnaire and its subscales indicate that the PBLASA questionnaire is internally consistent across all dimensions of reliability analysis. The result is a Cronbach's alpha of 0.955 for the PBLASA questionnaire, which indicates that the items are highly consistent measure of students' pro bono legal aid skills and attitudes towards it. Within each dimension, Cronbach's alpha values are also quite strong, with values ranging from 0.806 (Judgement Ability) to 0.955 (Attitudes toward PBLA). The Cronbach's alpha for the Critical Legal Thinking Skills dimension is 0.866 and the corrected item total correlations range between 0.657 and 0.753 suggesting that all items contribute substantially to this dimension. Likewise, Cronbach's alpha for Judgment Ability is 0.806 and its corrected item-total correlations are high (e.g., 0.697 for Question 27), suggesting the reliability of this subscale as well. Additionally, the internal consistency of Confidence (0.838), Professional Ethics (0.896), Sense of Social Responsibility (0.847), and Legal Practice Skills (0.864) exhibits robust internal consistency. However, corrected item-total correlations for items within subscales are all well above 0.6, reinforcing reliability. Notably, the Cronbach's alpha of Attitudes toward PBLA dimension is the highest with 0.955 and Communication Skills subscale of PBLA is 0.877. These results provide evidence that the PBLASA questionnaire is a highly reliable instrument for measuring the intended constructs.

## DISCUSSION

Current study provides strong evidence to support the reliability and validity of the Pro Bona Legal Aid Skills and Attitudes (PBLASA) questionnaire, which measures law students' attitudes, competencies, and ethical perspectives toward pro bono legal aid. The eight identified factors of Critical Legal Thinking Ability, Judgement Ability, Confidence, Professional Ethics, Awareness of Social Responsibility, Legal Practice Skills, Communication Skills, and Attitudes towards Pro Bono Legal Aid within a Legal Clinic Course (LCC) reveal the multifaceted nature of pro bono engagement and its relevance to the teaching of law. The Critical Legal Thinking Ability of students refers to their ability to analyse and critically assess legal situations, which is necessary for students to do good pro bono legal aid. Similarly, prior studies have also identified critical thinking as an important outcome of clinical legal education. Ashraf and Anwar (2023) further expound that critical thinking in pro bono work develops students' analytical skills to deal with intricate legal issues and add value to the client cases. The inclusion of this factor in the PBLASA questionnaire reinforces the importance of this factor as a core skills developed through pro bono engagement.

Students' evaluative skills in assessing legal scenarios and making wise decisions are represented by Judgement Ability. Pro bono settings are critical, as students are often given real cases, and are expected to work independently, and therefore judgement is imperative. Cantatore (2017) argues that by teaching students to apply theoretical knowledge in practical settings, clinical legal education advances the development of the students' independent judgement and ability to make decisions on their own. Likewise, McKeown (2015) emphasises that the development of judgement skills equips students for professional responsibility, connecting theory to practise. This is supported by the PBLASA questionnaire measuring essential decision-making competencies and aligning with existing literature. Self confidence in legal abilities is important if we are to be effective in representing clients and, hence, is captured by confidence. Particularly in pro bono work, where often students are working with individuals from different, and sometimes vulnerable, backgrounds confidence really matters. Pro bono legal aid enhances students' confidence in imparting legal advice in a structured

and encouraging manner, as well as maintaining composure in high stake situations (American Bar Association, 2024). The value that clinical experiences play in preparing future lawyers is reinforced by the fact that clinical experiences can also contribute to a student's overall professional growth, including in confidence.

Professional Ethics informs students' awareness and commitment to professional ethical standards in the legal profession. The literature supports the development of legal ethics through pro bono legal aid, since ethical responsibility is central to the legal profession. Karmakar and Lama (2024) also emphasise on developing ethics of law students, which need to be inculcated through experiential learning. Exposing students to real ethical dilemmas in pro bono engagements helps reinforce the importance of attorney confidentiality, impartiality, and integrity. The consistency of this factor supports its importance in the PBLASA questionnaire through its high internal consistency, highlighting the fact that ethical awareness is a critical aspect of the pro bono legal aid experience. In this regard, Awareness of Social Responsibility emphasises the civic duty and community driven reasons for involvement in engaging in pro bono legal aid. Law school pro bono programmes seek to instil a sense of social responsibility among law students that spurs them to utilise their skills on behalf of the public good. In regard to mandatory pro bono service in legal education, Achieng (2017) explains the potential of pro bono to inculcate a commitment to social justice in law students thus suggesting that pro bono be adopted as a means of producing more socially responsible lawyers. Students' recognition of their role in working to solve societal issues is closely aligned with the goal of producing socially conscious legal professionals, thus this factor is reliable in the PBLASA questionnaire.

Legal Practise Skills highlights the practical skills that students develop through providing pro bono legal aid, such as legal research, drafting and client consultation. These are skills that it's important for professionals to have and pro bono legal aid offers the necessary hands-on experience to bridge theory and practise. However, as argued by Cantatore, et al. (2020), pro bono clinics provide important experiential learning that improves a student's practical capabilities and enables them for legal practise. This factor also has a high reliability in the PBLASA questionnaire, leading to the conclusion that pro bono legal aid plays an essential role in developing students with these legal skills, affirming the significance of experiential learning in professional development.

Communication Skills is a snapshot of students engaging in client interaction, something critical in pro bono legal aid. Communication is also essential to client relationships, especially in a pro bono environment where clients may not have legal knowledge or may be intimidated by the legal process. Communication is highlighted as a fundamental component of client-centred legal practise, especially in cases involving marginalised or vulnerable clients, by Lawton (2017). The inclusion of this factor is indicative of the importance of communication in providing accessible and effective legal aid and underscores communication's role in helping to develop client entered legal professionals. Attitudes towards PBLA in LCC represents the students' overall viewpoints regarding pro bono legal aid integration in a Legal Clinic Course (LCC). In fact, this is the factor with greatest reliability, which suggests that students have a positive perception of their pro bono activities and value the educational and societal benefits. According to Dickson (2014), students with positive attitudes towards pro bono work are more likely to be involved in public interest law in the future, implying that early exposure to pro bono activities influences future professional views. This dimension of the PBLASA questionnaire illustrates how pro bono legal aid can serve as a conduit for instilling lasting values and commitments within future legal professionals.

The findings of the PBLASA questionnaire are consistent with pro bono legal aid and clinical legal education research findings, which suggest that the scale measures pro bono related skills and attitudes. Cantatore (2015) and McKeown (2015) further note that clinical legal education offers a range of multidimensional advantages: The factors endorsed by the PBLASA questionnaire are skill development, ethical awareness and social responsibility that are well aligned with the fourth factor of inculcating the value system. Author's like Achieng (2017) and Karmakar and Lama (2017) support their claim that pro bono work embeds into a lawyer's psyche the notion of ethical and socially responsible legal practise, factors such as Professional ethics and Social Responsibility.

In this regard, both Legal Practise Skills and PBLASA questionnaire lay more emphasis on the development of practical skills which is in accordance with the study by Cantatore et al. (2020) on

the role of pro bono in contribution of employability and professional readiness. More specifically, this alignment demonstrates how pro bono legal aid can bridge the gap between the theory and practice of legal education by serving as a springboard in a student's legal career. It is also evident that they echo Lawton (2017) in the fact that clinical programmes do not only enhance technical skills but also develop priceless interpersonal skills; such as Confidence and Communication Skills. Graves-Poller (2015) found that those who have a positive pro bono legal aid are more likely to provide legal service to underrepresented communities in the future; this factor of Attitudes toward PBLA in LCC on the PBLASA questionnaire measured by professional values is consistent with her finding. Therefore, clinical legal education may impact long term professional perspectives through having students involved in pro bono work being more likely to take part in public interest law than other students.

The findings are of importance for pro bono programmes in legal education, particularly with regard to their design and implementation. The PBLASA questionnaire provides a structured framework for the assessment of students' pro bono legal aid related competences, enabling educators to assess and improve the effectiveness of the programme. Dimensions of pro bono engagement identified by the PBLASA questionnaire can then be used to guide programme improvements that create pro bono experiences that promote legal skills, ethical awareness, and social justice commitment. For instance, where students score poorly on Communication Skills, modules can be added that train students to communicate with clients so that they can better handle realities of legal practise. Furthermore, the paper emphasises the advantages of establishing pro bono programmes for filling the gap between the theoretical and practical sides, which can be observed in legal education. According to Bartlett and Cantatore (2023), experiential learning opportunities aid in educating practise ready graduates. In validating the PBLASA questionnaire, pro bono legal aid experiences can be incorporated into legal curricula, illustrating that pro bono legal aid are not mere add on to a core legal training but should be an integral part of legal training.

In addition, factors including Professional Ethics and Awareness of Social Responsibility in the PBLASA questionnaire indicate that pro bono legal aid cultivate an ethically aware and socially responsible legal professional. The expansion of these dimensions perfectly coincides with the values of many legal education frameworks, like the American Bar Association (2024), emphasising that pro bono work is crucial for the improvement of the justice system effectiveness. Furthering the mission of legal education to benefit society, pro bono legal aid serves to instil a commitment to ethical and civic responsibilities and to prepare students to confront societal challenges.

## CONCLUSION

Current study shows that the Pro Bono Legal Aid Skills and Attitudes (PBLASA) questionnaire is a valid instrument for evaluating law students' pro bono legal aid engagement. The Cronbach's alpha is high, and it is an indicator of the internal consistency of the scale, since it is measuring a cohesive construct of students pro bono attitudes, competencies and ethical awareness. The exploratory factor analysis identified 8 factors which highlighted that students generally perceive pro bono work as a holistic experience that includes working explicitly with practical skills and making ethical decisions, but also instilling a sense of social duty in students. Item total correlations also further proved the scale's reliability, with most items showing positive correlations to the scale; however, some items demonstrated low or negative correlations, some areas which would benefit from refinement.

Although the PBLASA questionnaire has been shown to have strong reliability and validity, this study has limitations. However, the findings are limited to a sample of second-year law students in a single university. Including students at a wide range of developmental stages, at various types of institutions, and across a diverse range of service projects will provide more robust insights about how students develop pro bono legal aid. Furthermore, the utilisation of self-reported data means that the responses from the students could not only be socially desirable, but could potentially be idealised rather than actual attitudes. This bias could be mitigated in future studies by including observational or third-party assessments to provide a more holistic evaluation of pro bono competencies. There is interest in further research on the applicability of PBLASA questionnaire in different cultural and legal contexts. Because pro bono work differs worldwide, scaling the pro bono practice to reflect the local legal systems may uncover both common and indigenous attitudes to pro bono law. The questionnaire's predictive validity could also be examined using longitudinal studies

to examine whether high PBLA scores predict sustained pro bono or public interest work after graduation. Such insights would reinforce the utility of the PBLASA questionnaire as a tool for assessing the students' current competencies, but also for predicting students' long term professional commitment to social justice.

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