HEAL 4 ALL

Higher Education Alliance for Innovative Healthcare and Education

HEAL4ALL ONLINE LEARNING PROGRAMME
STUDENT SELF-ASSESSMENT

Modules 1–3 | Descriptive review of retrospective Before–After questionnaires

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1. Purpose and role of the assessment

Systematic collection of evidence is an important part of educational design. Its value is not limited to demonstrating that an activity has taken place or documenting participant satisfaction. Evidence from learners can help educators examine whether intended learning areas are being recognised, where students perceive the greatest development, where prior competence is already strong, and which elements should be retained, strengthened or redesigned. In this sense, assessment supports an iterative cycle of design, implementation, reflection and improvement, while also informing the design of future learning programmes.

This assessment reviews student self-assessment data from the three HEAL4ALL online learning modules: Module 1 on existential wellbeing, Module 2 on meaningful ageing, and Module 3 on existential caregiving in practice. The purpose is to describe the pattern of students' perceived development, identify areas that appear particularly valuable, and generate practical evidence for refinement of HEAL4ALL learning activities and future educational designs.

The analysis is intentionally proportionate to the data available. It provides more than a simple reporting of questionnaire responses, but it does not treat a small educational feedback dataset as a formal effectiveness study. The emphasis is therefore on transparent descriptive evidence, careful interpretation and usefulness for educational improvement.

2. Method and analytical decisions

The available questionnaires use a five-point self-rating scale and ask students to consider their perceived level before and after the module. Because the Before and After ratings were entered in the same questionnaire after the learning experience, the design is best understood as a retrospective Before–After, or Then–Now, self-assessment. The findings therefore describe perceived development rather than independently measured learning gain.

Paired responses were available for Module 1 (n = 10), Module 2 (n = 7) and Module 3 (n = 5). The samples are small and uneven, and respondents were predominantly from the University of Split. The results are consequently used to understand the learning experience of these respondents, not to estimate effects for a wider student population or to compare institutions.

For each module, item-level Before and After ratings were converted to the corresponding numerical scale values (1–5) and summarised descriptively. Means are used as a compact summary of the pattern across ordinal ratings, together with counts of increased, unchanged and decreased paired responses. No statistical significance tests, effect sizes, reliability coefficients or inferential comparisons were applied. With samples of this size, such analyses would give an impression of precision that the data cannot support.

Open-ended reflections in Modules 2 and 3 were reviewed using a light descriptive thematic approach. Recurring ideas were identified to help interpret the numerical findings, without presenting the comments as a formal qualitative study.

A critical adjustment to the Module 1 analysis

A review of the questionnaire structure identified an important issue in Module 1. Items 25–35 are phrased as direct statements about change or module contribution (for example, “Compared to before…” or “Module 1 helped me…”), but were nevertheless presented with both Before and After response columns. A Before rating is not conceptually meaningful for an item that explicitly attributes an experience to a module that has not yet occurred. For this reason, these 11 items are excluded from the primary Before–After calculations in this report.

The main Module 1 analysis therefore uses the 24 core items covering Knowledge, Skills and Mindset. Items 25–35 are retained as useful post-module feedback and interpreted using the After responses only. This produces a slightly different, and methodologically cleaner, Module 1 summary than an analysis that pools all 35 paired items.

Several additional Before-only questionnaires are expected to become available. Unless those records can be reliably linked to corresponding After responses, they should be reported separately as baseline context rather than added to the paired change calculations.

3. Overall pattern across the three modules

Across the core paired items, mean self-ratings increased from 3.47 to 4.53 in Module 1, from 3.74 to 4.71 in Module 2, and from 3.67 to 4.51 in Module 3. These values should be read as descriptive summaries of item ratings, not as validated composite competence scores.

The direction of change is notably consistent. Across the analysed paired item responses, Module 1 contained 168 increases and 72 unchanged ratings, Module 2 contained 96 increases and 44 unchanged ratings, and Module 3 contained 70 increases and 30 unchanged ratings. No paired rating decreased in the available datasets. This consistency is encouraging, but should be interpreted alongside the retrospective design: students completed both judgements at the same time and may have reassessed what "before" meant after learning more about the topic.

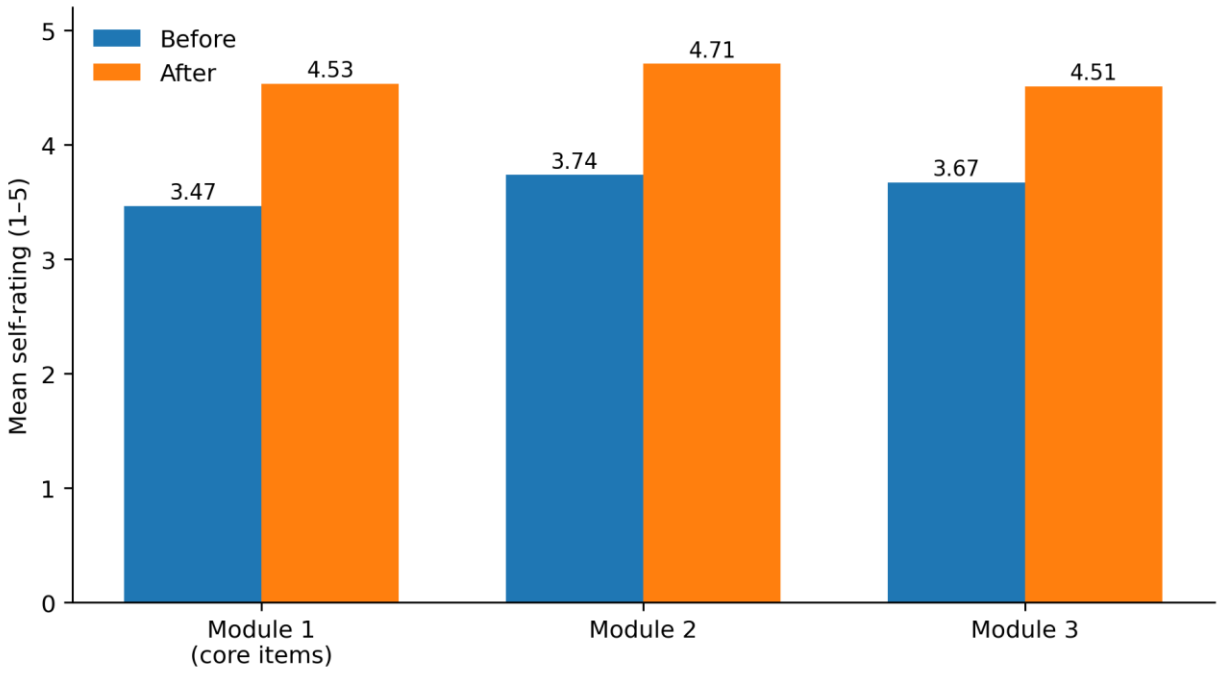

Figure 1. Mean Before and After self-ratings across the three modules. Module 1 includes the 24 core Knowledge, Skills and Mindset items; all ratings use a five-point scale.

4. Module 1 – Foundations of Existential Wellbeing

Module 1 showed the largest overall shift in the core learning items, with the mean across the 24 analysed items increasing from 3.47 to 4.53. The pattern was strongest in Knowledge, where the mean increased from 3.29 to 4.59. Skills increased from 3.47 to 4.46 and Mindset from 3.82 to 4.56.

This profile is educationally plausible for an introductory module. Students entered with relatively strong self-perceptions in areas such as empathy, openness and personal reflection, while several specialised conceptual areas were less familiar. The greatest perceived

development therefore occurred where the module supplied new terminology and conceptual distinctions rather than where students already regarded themselves as interpersonally capable.

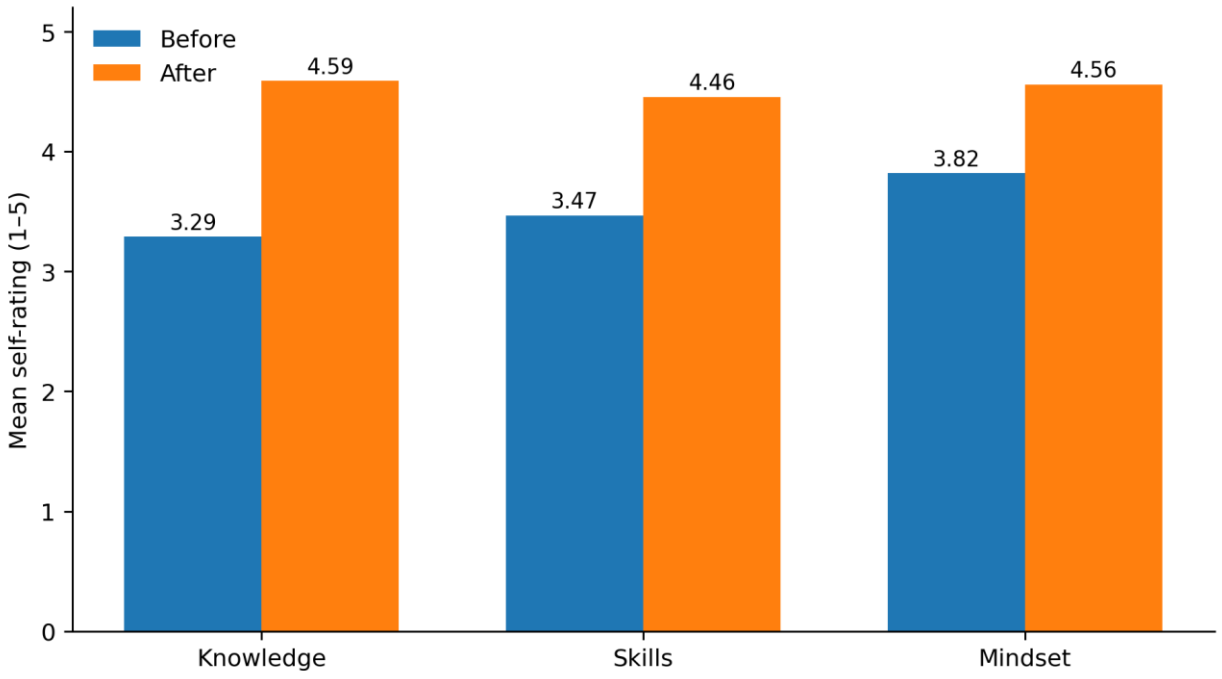

Figure 2. Module 1 mean self-ratings by core domain (n = 10). The 11 module-attribution items are not included in these domain comparisons.

Areas of strongest perceived development

The largest item-level increases were reported for familiarity with hedonia and eudaimonia (+1.70), distinguishing “meaning of life” from “meaning in life” (+1.60), understanding how people create meaning in difficult situations (+1.50), understanding existential wellbeing (+1.40), and explaining complex wellbeing concepts (+1.40).

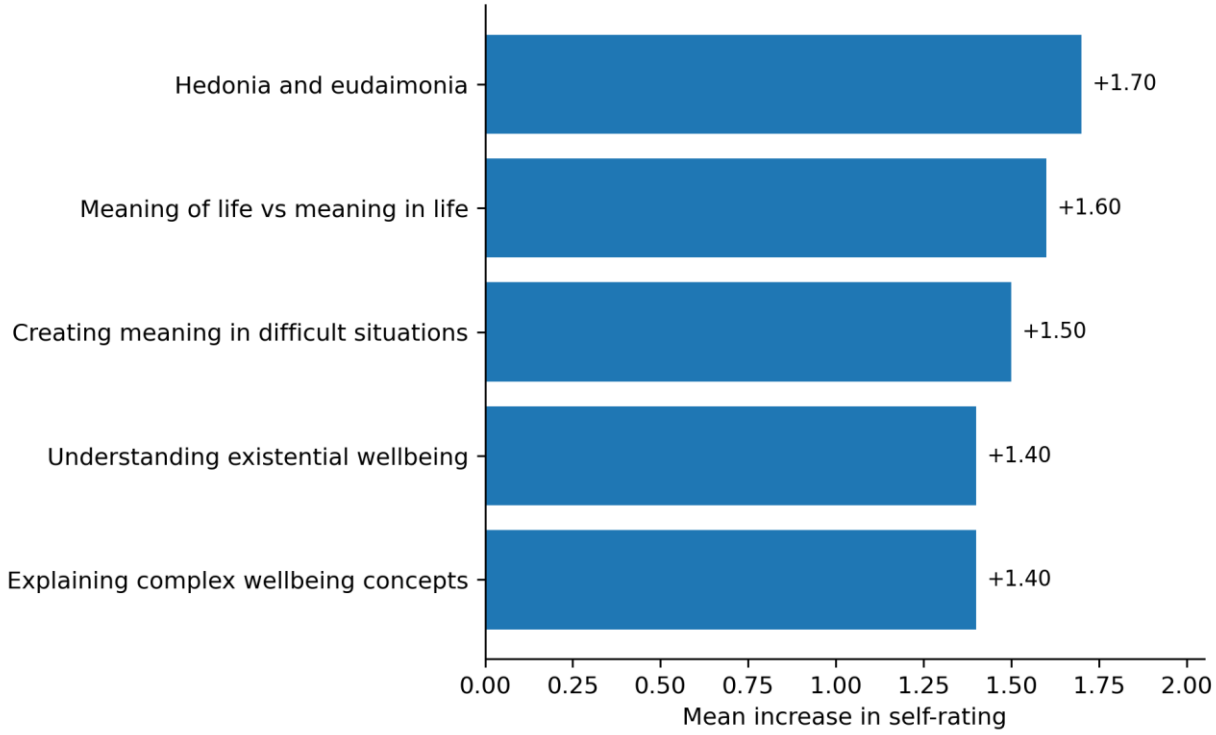

Figure 3. Module 1 items with the largest mean increases in self-rating. Values show descriptive change on the five-point scale.

The findings suggest that Module 1 is particularly useful as a conceptual foundation. It appears to give students a vocabulary for dimensions of wellbeing that they may previously have encountered intuitively but not been able to distinguish or articulate. For future iterations, these concept-building elements should be retained. Areas with already high baseline confidence, such as empathy and general openness, may be better developed through applied scenarios rather than additional introductory explanation.

Direct post-module feedback

The 11 statements explicitly describing module contribution were examined using the After ratings only. Their mean ratings ranged from 4.2 to 4.7. For each statement, between 8 and 10 of the 10 respondents selected 4 or 5. Particularly strong feedback concerned improved understanding of existential wellbeing, increased confidence discussing sensitive topics, and greater awareness of how to support existential wellbeing in personal and professional contexts. These items are useful evidence of perceived relevance, but they should not be represented as independent Before–After measures.

5. Module 2 – Meaningful Ageing

Module 2 mean self-ratings increased from 3.74 to 4.71 across 20 items. Post-module ratings were high across most areas, suggesting that students perceived the module as strengthening both conceptual understanding and the capacity to interpret ageing in a broader psychosocial and existential context.

Areas of strongest perceived development

The strongest increase concerned knowledge of self-transcendence, gerotranscendence and ego-integrity theories (+1.57). Other prominent areas included applying module concepts to real-life situations involving older adults (+1.29), explaining successful ageing (+1.14), understanding how meaning and purpose support later-life wellbeing (+1.14), and recognising cultural influences on ageing and care (+1.14).

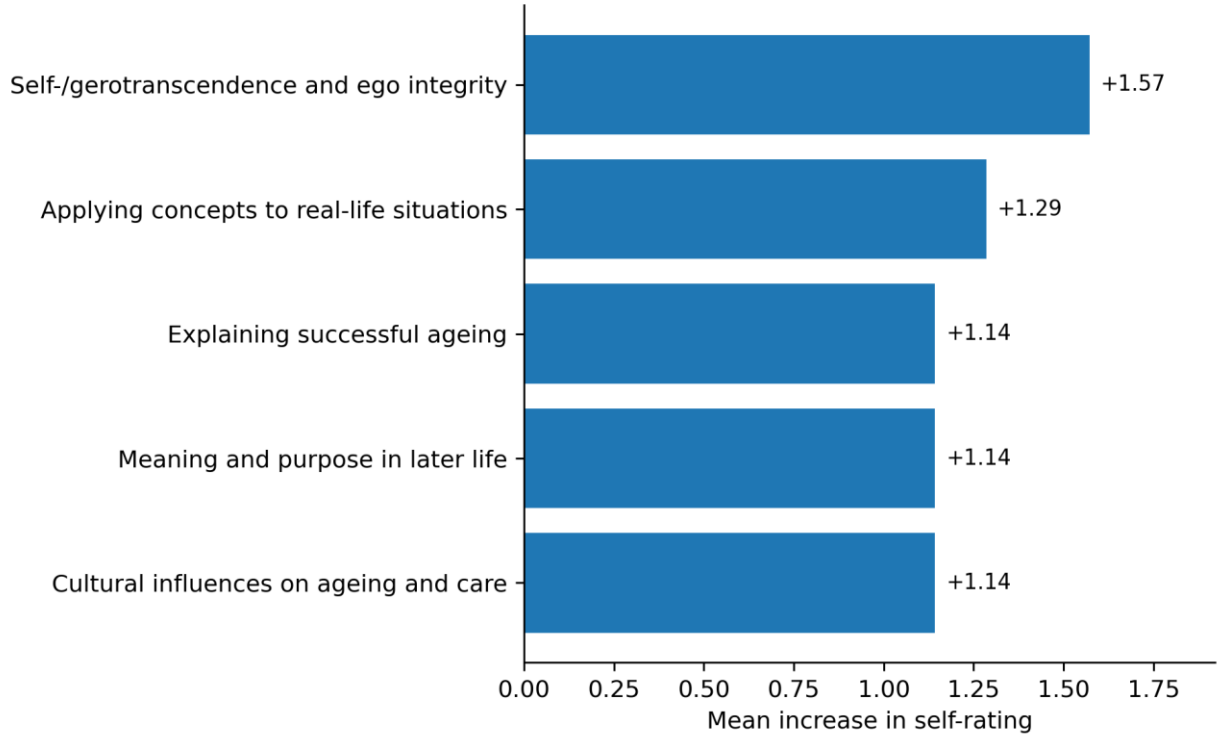

Figure 4. Module 2 items with the largest mean increases in self-rating (n = 7).

The open reflections help explain this pattern. Students repeatedly described ageing as more than physical decline and referred to life history, relationships, dignity, meaning, culture and

emotional or existential needs. Several responses explicitly connected this broader view with person-centred care and more sensitive communication with older adults.

For iterative design, the combination of new ageing theories with practical interpretation appears particularly valuable. The strongest future development opportunity would be to continue moving from conceptual understanding to concrete encounters: brief cases, conversations, cultural contrasts and practice situations in which students must decide what the theory changes in the way they respond to an older person.

6. Module 3 – Existential Caregiving in Practice

Module 3 mean self-ratings increased from 3.67 to 4.51 across 20 items. The smaller average increase compared with the first two modules should not be interpreted as weaker educational value. Students entered Module 3 with relatively high self-ratings in several communication and caring competencies, leaving less room for upward movement on a five-point scale.

Areas of strongest perceived development

The strongest changes occurred in areas that gave structure to professional caregiving: key concepts in existential caregiving (+1.60), the biopsychosocial-existential model (+1.40), distinguishing compassion from self-compassion (+1.40), understanding self-compassion in relation to stress and burnout (+1.20), and applying person-centred caregiving approaches (+1.20).

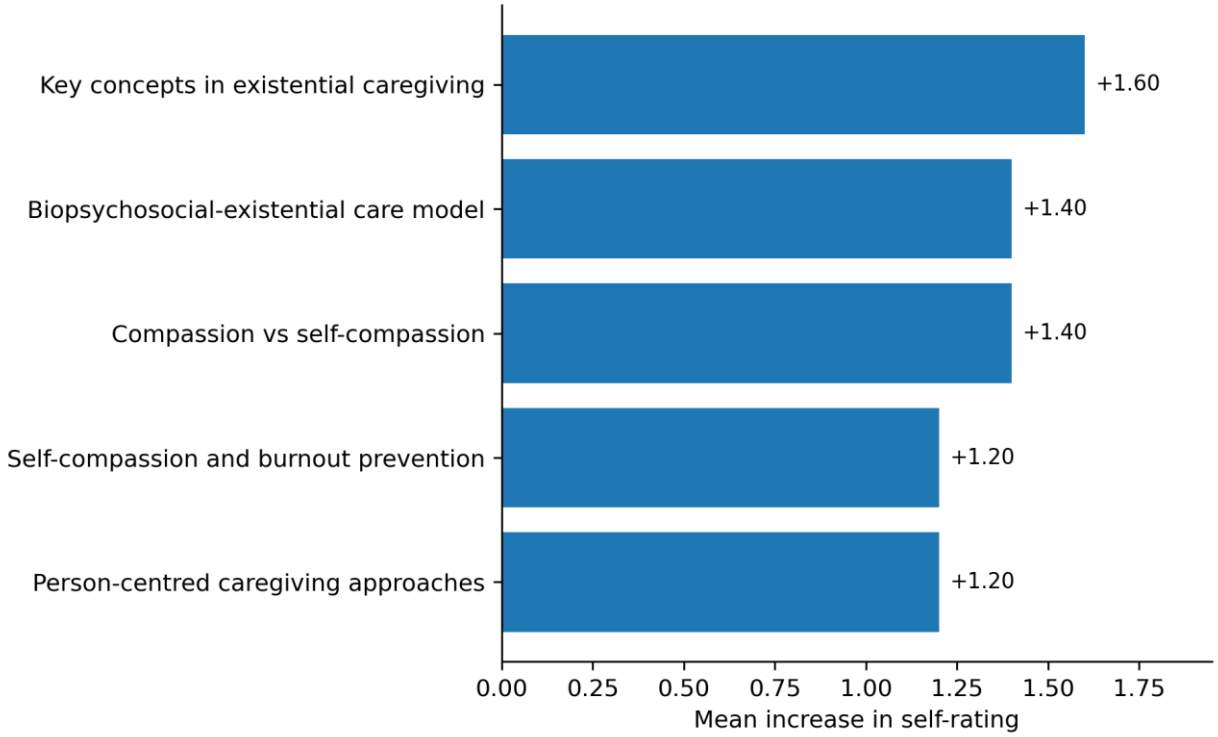

Figure 5. Module 3 items with the largest mean increases in self-rating (n = 5).

The reflections place particular emphasis on self-compassion, self-awareness, emotional regulation and active listening. Students described good caregiving as extending beyond clinical tasks to emotional presence, respect, reflection and support for the whole person. Interest in learning more about emotional resilience, burnout prevention, self-compassion and psychogeriatric care indicates that the module opened areas for continued professional development rather than simply closing a curriculum topic.

For future design, Module 3 would benefit especially from opportunities to demonstrate these competencies in practice. Because self-ratings of empathy and communication were already high, additional value may come from observation-based activities, scenario decisions, structured peer feedback or short practice encounters that make the difference between feeling confident and performing skilfully more visible.

7. Cross-module interpretation

Taken together, the three datasets are consistent with the intended progression of the HEAL4ALL curriculum: first developing a language for existential wellbeing, then applying that

perspective to ageing, and finally translating it into professional caregiving. The largest changes in Module 1 are concentrated in foundational concepts; Module 2 extends these concepts into later-life experience and cultural context; Module 3 gives professional structure to caregiving, self-awareness and self-care.

A useful interpretation is therefore not that students learned to "care" where they previously did not. Baseline ratings suggest that many already regarded themselves as empathic, respectful and open to older adults. The programme appears instead to have helped students make that caring orientation more explicit: to name relevant concepts, recognise dimensions of existential wellbeing, connect them with ageing and professional practice, and reflect on their own role as caregivers.

This is an important distinction for educational design. When learners already bring positive attitudes, the next design challenge is not more persuasion but greater specificity: richer conceptual language, realistic situations, reflective depth and practical opportunities to translate values into professional action.

8. Evidence-informed improvements for future iterations

The present assessment provides several practical signals for refinement. These should be treated as design hypotheses to test in future cohorts rather than fixed conclusions.

- Retain the strong conceptual foundation in Module 1, especially the distinctions around meaning, hedonia/eudaimonia and existential wellbeing, because these were among the clearest areas of new perceived learning.
- Use high-baseline areas such as empathy, respect and general communication as starting points for more demanding application tasks rather than repeating introductory messages about their importance.
- Continue linking ageing theory to real-life and culturally varied situations in Module 2. The combination of new theoretical concepts and applied interpretation appears to be one of the module's strengths.

- Increase practice-based assessment in Module 3 through scenarios, role-play, structured peer observation or mentor feedback. This would complement confidence ratings with evidence of how students respond in concrete caregiving situations.
- Keep self-care and self-compassion visible as professional competencies. Student reflections indicate that these themes were not peripheral but strongly connected to how they understand sustainable compassionate care.
- Use a small shared set of core evaluation items across modules and cohorts where appropriate, while retaining module-specific questions. This would make longitudinal interpretation easier without overburdening students.

9. Limitations and recommendations for future evidence collection

The current evidence is useful for programme reflection, but several limitations define what can reasonably be concluded. Sample sizes are small, participation is uneven across institutions, and the data capture self-perception rather than objectively demonstrated competence. Retrospective Before–After ratings may reduce some problems of initial overestimation, but they can also introduce recall and response-shift effects because both judgements are made after the learning experience.

The absence of decreased ratings should therefore be treated as a pattern in this respondent group, not as proof that every student improved on every competence. Similarly, mean values provide a concise description of ordinal questionnaire responses but should not be interpreted as precise psychometric scores.

For future programme designs, evidence collection could remain light while becoming stronger. A short prospective baseline before learning, linked anonymously to the same student's post-module response, would allow a true paired pre–post comparison. One or two knowledge questions or short scenario-based tasks per module could complement self-assessment. For practice-oriented learning, structured observation or mentor feedback could provide evidence that students can apply the concepts, not only report confidence in them.

The aim should not be to turn every educational activity into research. Rather, a small number of well-chosen evidence sources can create a useful feedback loop: what students understood,

what they could apply, what they valued, where they struggled, and what should change in the next design cycle.

10. Conclusion

Within the limits of a small programme-evaluation dataset, the available evidence is consistently positive. Students reported higher self-ratings after all three modules, and the areas of greatest change align meaningfully with the intended educational progression of HEAL4ALL.

Module 1 appears strongest in creating conceptual clarity around existential wellbeing. Module 2 extends that understanding into a more holistic and culturally aware view of ageing. Module 3 helps students connect existential care with professional caregiving, self-awareness and sustainable compassionate practice. The qualitative reflections reinforce this interpretation by showing that students were able to relate the learning to how they understand older adults and their own future professional role.

The most useful role of these findings is forward-looking. They document what appears to be working, identify where the curriculum adds genuinely new understanding, and indicate where future iterations can move further from confidence and awareness towards demonstrated application. Used in this way, assessment becomes part of educational design itself: evidence informs improvement, and each cohort contributes to a stronger design for the next.

Data source: HEAL4ALL Module 1, Module 2 and Module 3 student self-assessment questionnaires. Analysis prepared for programme evaluation and iterative educational design.