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Integrating 21st Century Character Education in Mathematics Learning for Elementary School Students

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ABSTRACT

Background: The integration of 21st-century character education in mathematics learning is crucial for developing students' academic and personal skills, ensuring they are prepared for future challenges. **Objective:** This study aims to describe the implementation of 21st-century character education in mathematics learning for elementary school students, specifically focusing on how these values are integrated into the curriculum at SD Negeri 2 Sukorejo, Klaten. **Method:** The research used a descriptive qualitative approach, involving the principal, teachers, and students as subjects. Data was collected through observation, interviews, and documentation, with validity ensured through source triangulation. Data analysis followed the steps of collection, reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing. **Results:** The study found that the implementation of 21st-century character education at SD Negeri 2 Sukorejo was effectively integrated into the Learning Implementation Plan (RPP). This integration helped promote essential character values such as responsibility, critical thinking, and collaboration within mathematics learning. **Conclusion:** The implementation of 21st-century character education at SD Negeri 2 Sukorejo demonstrates that integrating character values into mathematics lessons can enhance students' academic skills and moral development. This approach contributes to preparing students for the challenges of the modern world. **Originality/Value:** This study offers empirical novelty in the field of primary education and mathematics learning by revealing the structured integration of 21st-century character values (responsibility, critical thinking, and collaboration) into lesson plans (RPP) and instructional practices concerning holistic student character development within the context of primary school mathematics learning, an area that has remained insufficiently documented. These findings enrich empirical evidence and provide a strategic reference for designing character-based mathematics instructional frameworks and pedagogical professional development for primary educators.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The paradigm of learning change in the industrial era 4.0 in education emphasizes the 21st-century skills that must be possessed by human resources (Kahar et al., 2021). These skills are expected to encourage the formation of 21st-century abilities and changes in the learning paradigm in the classroom (Muliastri, 2020). Where previous learning from teacher-centered can change to student-centered from the existence of this 21st-century skills ability. This learning paradigm emphasizes students to be able to learn more and teachers here as facilitators in learning. 21st-century skills in the learning process that must be possessed by students include character quality (Angga et

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al., 2022). The quality of character is in the form of character education which aims to develop students' character values.

Character education is expected to equip character qualities for students in adapting to a dynamic environment (Nimatuzahroh et al., 2020). According to Utomo & Alawiyah (2022), character education is a system of instilling values (character) in school residents which includes knowledge, awareness or willingness, and action to implement values both towards God Almighty, self, fellow environment, and nationality so that they become insan kamil. Shaping student character in an educational environment is a form of school support in supporting the goals of National education. Teachers have an important role in shaping student character within the school (Nantara, 2022). Apart from teachers, parents also have a very strong role because the family is the main character formation of a child (Zubaedi & Utomo, 2021). So that teachers and students can work well together in building and shaping student character.

Building students' character education is certainly based on the purpose of strengthening character education, namely preparing to build and equip students as the golden generation of Indonesia in 2045 (Iswatiningsih, 2019). By this, in building the golden generation of 2045 students are given 18 criteria contained in 21st century learning. These character criteria include religion, honesty, tolerance, discipline, hard work, creativity, independence, democracy, curiosity, nationalism, love for the country, respect for achievement, communication, peaceloving, fondness of reading, environmental care, social care, and responsibility. Mathematics is one of the subjects that can integrate character education into the learning process. Mathematics has various definitions, one of which according to Nurhayanti et al (2021) that the nature of mathematics is logical and efficient reasoning and a treasury of creative and amazing ideas and patterns so mathematics is also called the art of creative thinking.

Elementary schools have an important role in shaping student character. Elementary school is a strong foundation, so the a need for knowledge about character education for all teachers so that it can be integrated into the learning process (Rachmadyanti, 2017). Character education has been applied indirectly since long ago, but currently in the curriculum the application of character education has changed slightly, namely by integrating character education in all subjects (Santika & Sudiana, 2021). The integration of character education in learning at school is by applying the knowledge taught to everyday life by integrating subjects with good characters. Integrating character education in the learning process can be through several ways in learning, namely through learning methods, teaching materials, teaching aids, and learning tools in the learning process (Latifah, 2014). So to achieve success in integrating character education, there needs to be support from various parties with the intention that character education can be integrated optimally (Utomo et al., 2022).

When viewed from the importance of character education and then associated with education in our country, the implementation of education in learning is expected by studying mathematics students can think logically and creatively. Students who think logically and creatively can shape students' characters into logical, creative, and imaginative individuals (Inayah & Sya, 2022). This is what was launched by the Ministry of Education regarding character education starting from the elementary school level followed by the middle and high school levels. Implementing character education in the learning process can be through several ways in learning, namely through learning methods, teaching materials, teaching aids, and learning tools in the learning process (Siswati et al., 2018). So to achieve success in implementing character education, there needs to be support from various parties with the intention that character education can be implemented optimally.

The reality in the field, especially at SD Negeri 2 Sukorejo, in learning mathematics, there are still many problems regarding student character, such as cheating, less active students, lack of discipline in entering class, and lack of responsibility for the tasks given by the teacher. So that motivates the author to analyze character education in mathematics learning. However, currently, the implementation of character education has been integrated into the Learning Implementation Plan used by teachers in learning activities has been implemented by teachers. Therefore, exemplary and supporting factors in implementing character education are very influential in achieving the goals of implementing character education in learning.

While the integration of 21st-century character education in mathematics learning at SD Negeri 2 Sukorejo has been effective in promoting key character values such as responsibility, critical thinking, and collaboration, there remains a gap in addressing the long-term impact of this integration on students' personal and academic growth. The study primarily focuses on the current implementation within the curriculum, but it lacks a comprehensive evaluation of how these character values influence students' behavior and performance over time. Additionally, the study does not explore the challenges teachers face in maintaining consistency in character education or the role of the broader school culture in supporting this integration. Future research could explore these aspects to provide a more holistic understanding of the effectiveness and sustainability of character education in mathematics learning.

The aim of this study is to describe the implementation of 21st-century character education in mathematics learning at SD Negeri 2 Sukorejo, Klaten. This research focuses on integrating 21st-century character education into mathematics learning for elementary school students, aiming to foster not only academic skills but also essential life skills such as critical thinking, responsibility, and collaboration. By incorporating character education values such as honesty, discipline, and perseverance within the context of mathematics, the study seeks to create a holistic learning experience that prepares students for the challenges of the modern world. The integration of these character traits is designed to enhance students' problem-solving abilities, encourage positive attitudes toward learning, and promote the development of well-rounded individuals who can contribute meaningfully to society. This approach aligns with the broader goal of educational reform, which emphasizes the development of both cognitive and moral competencies in students, ensuring they are equipped for success in the 21st century.

2. METHOD

2.1 Research Approach

This research method uses a type of qualitative research with descriptive analysis. Qualitative descriptive research is intended to describe and describe existing phenomena both natural and human engineering that pay more attention to the characteristics, quality, and interrelationships between activities (Walther et al., 2017). This research seeks to obtain an overview of the implementation of character education in mathematics learning where researchers must be able to understand what phenomena are experienced by research subjects to obtain descriptive data. Descriptive research does not provide treatment, manipulation, or alteration of variable data, but describes a condition as it is through observation, interviews, and documentation.

2.2 Research Subject

The research was conducted at SD Negeri 2 Sukorejo, located in Klaten Regency, over a period of three months. This duration covered various stages, including planning, data collection, and the final reporting of research results. The selection of this school was based on its active implementation of 21st-century character education within the mathematics curriculum, making it an ideal site for studying the integration of character education in a real-world classroom setting. The participants included the school principal, mathematics teachers, and students, as they were key stakeholders involved in or impacted by the educational practices being examined.

2.3 Data Collection

Data collection for this study involved three primary techniques: observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was used to assess how character education was integrated into mathematics lessons and how students responded to these practices. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the principal and teachers to gain insights into their perspectives on the integration process, the challenges they faced, and their overall evaluation of the character education approach. Documentation, including lesson plans (RPP), student work samples, and related educational materials, was analyzed to track how character education values were embedded in the curriculum and teaching practices. To ensure data validity and reliability, triangulation was employed, cross-checking information from various sources (observations, interviews, and documentation) to confirm the consistency of the findings.

2.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study followed the interactive model of analysis as described by Miles et al. (Elliott, 2018), which consists of three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification. In the first stage, data reduction, the raw data collected from observations, interviews, and documentation were systematically categorized and condensed to focus on the most relevant information related to the research questions. During the second stage, data presentation, the condensed data were organized into clear and coherent formats, such as tables and narrative descriptions, to facilitate analysis and interpretation. Finally, in the conclusion drawing/verification stage, the findings were analyzed to draw meaningful conclusions about the integration of character education in mathematics learning. This process also included verifying the findings through member checks and cross-referencing with existing literature to ensure the results were valid and well-supported.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

The research results are presented in four key findings, which are described below:

First, the implementation of 21st-century character education in mathematics learning at SD Negeri 2 Sukorejo is considered adequate, though it requires further development and improvement. Elementary school plays a critical role in shaping students' character, as it is the foundation for their future growth. Through character education, students are expected not only to achieve academic success but also to embody the character values they learn in their everyday lives. This integration will help students become well-rounded, qualified individuals who can contribute positively to society.

Second, the involvement of the family, school, and community environment has a significant impact on shaping a student's character. The research findings show that teachers at SD Negeri 2 Sukorejo have demonstrated exemplary attitudes by integrating character education into mathematics lessons. Teachers exhibit values such as discipline, responsibility, religious devotion, and self-confidence, which students can model and adopt in their own lives. These values play a crucial role in student development, both inside and outside the classroom.

Third, the principal plays a central role in supporting the integration of character education. The principal at SD Negeri 2 Sukorejo is highly supportive of this initiative, actively working with teachers to ensure the character-building process is continuously monitored. This collaboration between the principal and teachers is crucial to the program's success, ensuring that students not only excel academically but also develop strong moral character, which is reflected in both their school and home environments.

Fourth, the integration of character education at SD Negeri 2 Sukorejo is embedded in the learning process, particularly in mathematics lessons. Teachers incorporate character values into their teaching materials, aligning academic content with moral and ethical lessons. Both the principal and the fourth-grade teachers agree that instilling these character values is key to developing outstanding students and fostering an exceptional school environment. By embedding character education into the curriculum, the school ensures that students develop into individuals who are not only academically proficient but also morally responsible and well-prepared for the challenges of the future.

3.2. Discussion

3.2.1 Implementation of Character Education in Mathematics Learning

Character education is a positive life value for humans. The expected character values are the 5 main character values, namely religion, independence, integrity, cooperation, and nationalism. The implementation of character education is to carry out activities every morning before learning begins, namely getting used to students reading books or literacy before learning is carried out which can increase students' insight and knowledge. Starting with habits like this can shape the character of 21st-century students, but for further schools strengthen character-building again by implementing it into every lesson. The implementation of character education in mathematics learning is by integrating character values with the material to be delivered at the meeting. The integration is made in the lesson plan that the teacher will use to teach in detail.

The implementation of character education must begin with a plan. Joyo (2018) said that planning, implementation, and evaluation in student character building will get very satisfying results. Character building in mathematics learning must be carried out by the learning objectives with the intention that the results obtained are by the content of the material presented. This is also expressed by Norfika (2017) in her research explaining that in mathematics learning with character values, there must be a match between the learning objectives of mathematics, the competencies written in the curriculum, and character-building values.

Mathematics learning becomes a means of character building for students by integrating it into learning. This must get full support from several parties so that the integration of character education is well achieved. The commitment of the teacher significantly influences the character-building of students. Character building in this learning is expected so that students can implement good character values in their daily lives (Pertiwi et al., 2021). These character values can create a good attitude in students so that they do not violate or deviate in their environment whether in the family, school, or community.

The implementation of character education in mathematics learning at SD Negeri 2 Sukorejo has proven to be a successful approach to integrating moral and academic development. By embedding key character values such as responsibility, critical thinking, collaboration, and discipline within the mathematics curriculum, the school has created an environment where students not only acquire mathematical knowledge but also develop essential life skills. Teachers actively integrate character education into their lesson plans, encouraging students to apply these values both inside and outside the classroom. For example, students are taught to approach problems responsibly, think critically when solving mathematical tasks, and collaborate effectively with their peers during group activities.

This holistic approach ensures that character education becomes an integral part of the learning process rather than a separate or secondary focus.

Despite the positive outcomes, the implementation of character education in mathematics learning also presents several challenges. One of the primary obstacles faced by teachers is maintaining consistency in applying character values across different lessons and subjects. While character education is embedded within the curriculum, ensuring that these values are consistently reinforced in all mathematics activities and across other school subjects can be difficult. Additionally, teachers face challenges in measuring the impact of character education on students' academic performance and behavior over time. As character development is often gradual and intangible, it can be difficult to assess its direct effect on students' academic achievements. Nevertheless, ongoing professional development and strong support from school leadership can help overcome these challenges, ensuring that character education remains a central focus in the school's learning environment.

3.2.2 Problems in Implementing Character Education in Mathematics Learning

Based on the research findings of 21st-century character building in mathematics learning, several factors support and hinder the implementation. The implementation of character education in learning mathematics encounters several supporting factors and obstacles in its activities. The implementation of 21st century education in mathematics learning is expected to be successful in shaping student character. This implementation will work well because of the support from all parties ranging from the principal to the participation of parents. In addition, support from school facilities such as books that support learning, classrooms, and other supporting facilities. The problems faced in the implementation of character education are the lack of support from parents in shaping the character of students, one of which is not monitored by children at home whose parents work and only live with relatives, the teacher's delivery of character education in the learning process is less sharp so that students find it difficult to implement it in their daily lives, the lack of supporting facilities and infrastructure at school, and the various characteristics of students that differ from one another.

This is reinforced by [Suarto's \(2017\)](#) opinion that the school environment and family environment are very influential on student character building. This support can have a major effect on character building. This is in line with the findings of [Suriansyah & Aslamiah \(2015\)](#) that the performance of the principal in using his leadership strategy to shape teacher exemplary, discipline, leadership, and empowerment of all school members can affect the character values of students. In addition, [Meifa et al. \(2016\)](#) stated that the supporting factors in the implementation of character education in learning include active students. So in this implementation, students must actively participate in participating in learning.

Implementing character education in mathematics learning at SD Negeri 2 Sukorejo, while beneficial, presents several challenges that impact its effectiveness. One significant issue is the limited time available to integrate character education into an already packed mathematics curriculum. Teachers often find it difficult to balance the demands of teaching mathematical concepts with the need to instill character values. As a result, character education may not receive the attention it deserves or may be incorporated in a superficial way rather than being deeply integrated into the learning process. The pressure to meet academic targets often leads to a focus on content delivery, leaving little room for meaningful character development activities, which can hinder the full realization of its potential.

Another problem lies in the inconsistent application of character education across different teachers and lessons. While some educators are enthusiastic and skilled at embedding character values into their teaching, others may not feel as confident or equipped to do so. This variability can lead to an uneven experience for students, where some may receive a strong foundation in character education, while others may not have the same level of integration. Additionally, there is a lack of standardized assessment tools to measure the effectiveness of character education, making it challenging to track students' progress in developing moral and social values. This inconsistency not only affects student outcomes but also creates difficulties for school leadership in ensuring that character education is applied uniformly across all classes.

3.2.3 Efforts to overcome Problems in the Implementation of character education in mathematics learning

The implementation of this implementation has obstacles that have been mentioned above, so with the obstacles the school has tried various things to overcome in the implementation of education in learning. Based on the findings in the research, the efforts made in overcoming these obstacles are that the school holds meetings between teachers and parents to convey the evaluation results of student learning ranging from learning outcomes to attitudes from the results of the formation of character values that teachers have implemented in learning. In addition, teachers also provide examples for students such as discipline on time, and allowing students to ask ques-

tions so that students do not harbor curiosity which ultimately cannot solve the problems they face during learning. Classroom teachers' efforts in providing solutions to overcoming obstacles in implementing character education in classroom learning are through efforts in learning and by meeting with parents. The activities that teachers do as a form of solution to overcoming these obstacles are providing examples of discipline on time, providing examples of obeying the rules, giving equal attention to all students even though their characteristics are different, and providing opportunities for students to express their opinions. In addition, a meeting was held between parents to convey the problems experienced by students while participating in learning at school.

Another effort is in conjunction with the Klaten Regency government which developed a book entitled "Buku Matur Jujur" as a guideline for daily student activities to develop aspects of student honesty which leads to character and character education. The development book from the Klaten district government developed student activities under the name 'Mathur Jujur' book as a guideline for students' daily activities both at school and outside school. This is also the right solution to the various obstacles that exist when implementing character education. So that the expected values will be achieved by filling in this book because it is monitored by parents and teachers.

Character education is very important to implement in the school environment because education is the right step in shaping student character (Subianto, 2013). However, it is not necessarily only through schools that children can be formed but the main role of the family environment is also very supportive.

The problems faced by students can be overcome by optimizing the strength of existing supporting factors. The existence of this strength, all problems faced can be pursued by strengthening the factors that support the achievement of this character building. This character building is intended with the aim that the implementation of character education can be carried out by integrating learning outcomes, synergizing the role of educational institutions and teachers acting as role models for their students (Kaimuddin, 2014).

Judging from the factors that support the implementation of character education, namely (1) support from the principal. The implementation of this implementation received support from various parties, one of which was from the principal, namely the principal was very supportive of the implementation of character education in learning. This is intended so that children who go to school at SD Negeri 2 Sukorejo become quality children and have good morals in the family and community environment; (2) provide examples for students with the intention that students can obey the rules; (3) another effort is the existence of the 'Honest Mathur' book developed by the district government which contains daily student activities both at school and outside the school. This book is also monitored by teachers and parents.

Meanwhile, the factors that hinder the implementation of character education according to Faiz et al. (2021) are (1) lack of control of students under parental supervision. The teacher stated that this factor is the main obstacle because students are difficult to work with in implementing this activity, because the lack of special attention from parents causes children to be unruly at school; and (2) lack of learning motivation. The implementation of this activity there are still some students who are invited to be active but cannot. This can be seen when the learning activities take place, many students are just silent when invited to discuss together or just to ask questions; (3) student characteristics that differ from one another. Characteristics are things that cannot be equated between students with one another. This is because each individual has a different disposition and character, which could be due to the inheritance from the family environment and the community environment, so for this, the teacher must be able to understand.

To overcome the challenges in implementing character education in mathematics learning, one key effort is to provide teachers with adequate training and professional development. This includes workshops and seminars focused on integrating character education into the curriculum without compromising the delivery of academic content. By equipping teachers with effective strategies and resources, they can more confidently and consistently incorporate character-building activities into their lessons. Furthermore, fostering a collaborative environment where teachers share best practices can help create a more cohesive approach to character education, ensuring that it is effectively embedded across different subjects and grade levels.

Another important effort is to allocate dedicated time within the curriculum for character education activities. Schools can schedule specific periods for character development, ensuring it is not sidelined by the demands of academic targets. Additionally, school leadership can play a crucial role in supporting the integration of character education by establishing clear policies, monitoring implementation, and providing regular feedback. To address the lack of standardized assessment tools, schools could develop customized evaluation methods to track students' progress in both academic and character development. This would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of character education on students' overall growth and help ensure its consistent application across the school.

4. IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

4.1 Research Implications

The implications of this study are that the integration of 21st-century character education into mathematics learning can significantly contribute to both the academic and moral development of elementary school students. The findings show that character education not only enhances students' academic abilities but also helps them develop essential values such as responsibility, critical thinking, and collaboration. Therefore, it is important for educators to actively integrate character values into all subjects, particularly mathematics, to better prepare students for future challenges. Additionally, the results of this study can serve as a reference for other schools to implement more holistic and structured character education programs and encourage the development of educational policies that support character formation from an early age.

4.2 Research Recommendation

The contribution of this study is to provide new insights into how the integration of 21st-century character education into mathematics learning can support both the academic and moral development of elementary school students. This research presents empirical evidence on the implementation of character values such as responsibility, critical thinking, and collaboration within the mathematics curriculum, and how this positively impacts student learning. Additionally, the findings offer practical guidance for educators on effectively integrating character education into mathematics instruction, as well as providing a reference for educational policies that better support character development from an early age. This study is expected to serve as a model for other schools in developing more structured and holistic character education programs.

5. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

5.1 Research Limitations

The limitations of this study lie in its focus on a single elementary school, SD Negeri 2 Sukorejo in Klaten, which may not fully represent conditions in other schools with different characteristics. Additionally, this study uses a descriptive qualitative approach, which provides an in-depth understanding of the implementation of character education but does not allow for broader generalizations regarding its effectiveness in various contexts. Another limitation is the lack of standardized tools to objectively measure the impact of character education, making the assessment of its effects subjective and dependent on the perceptions of teachers and students. Further research with a larger sample size and more quantitative methods is needed to confirm these findings and explore the long-term effects of integrating character education into mathematics learning.

5.2 Recommendation for Future Research

A recommendation for future research is to conduct studies with a larger sample, including multiple elementary schools with diverse characteristics, so that the findings can be generalized and provide a more representative picture of the implementation of character education in mathematics learning. It is also suggested to use a mixed-methods approach that combines both qualitative and quantitative data to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of character education on students' academic and moral development. Additionally, future studies should focus on developing standardized tools to objectively assess the impact of character education and include long-term evaluations to observe the lasting effects of integrating character education into the mathematics curriculum.

6. CONCLUSION

The integration of 21st-century character building in mathematics learning for grade IV students is achieved by embedding character values directly into the lesson plans alongside the learning materials. This approach allows the teacher to teach mathematical concepts while simultaneously nurturing character development. By incorporating values such as responsibility, confidence, and cooperation, the curriculum becomes a tool not only for academic learning but also for personal growth. The teacher employs various methods aligned with the 2013 curriculum, which encourages student participation and engagement, ensuring that character development is not secondary to academic learning but becomes a central aspect of the educational process. These methods are designed to keep students active in learning and promote critical life skills that will benefit them beyond the classroom.

In addition to the instructional strategies, teachers also assess student progress through evaluations that measure both academic competencies and character development. The assessments are designed to include Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) and direct observations of students' behavior during learning activities. This dual approach allows teachers to evaluate how well students are mastering both mathematical concepts and the character values embedded in the curriculum. Furthermore, the 'Mathur Jujur' book, a resource developed by the district government, plays a key role in tracking students' daily activities and promoting the application of character education both inside and outside the classroom. The book provides a structured framework for character development, offering students a tangible way to practice what they learn while also serving as a tool for teachers and parents to monitor progress.

To overcome challenges in implementing 21st-century character education in mathematics learning, the school's leadership and teachers have developed strategies to engage both students and their families. Regular meetings between teachers and parents are held to discuss students' progress, identify challenges, and work together to address any issues that arise during the learning process. By providing a clear line of communication between the school and home, students are better supported in their character education journey. Another important effort is the establishment of role models within the school community. Teachers and school staff demonstrate the character traits they wish to cultivate in students, helping them adhere to school regulations and fostering a positive school culture. This holistic approach, reinforced through both direct teaching and family involvement, ensures that character education becomes an integral part of the students' overall development.

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Author Contribution Statement

All authors discussed the results, contributed to the final manuscript, and approved the final version for publication. Desti Rahayu: Conceptualization and Design, Methodology, Writing - Original Draft. Sabar Narimo: Conceptualization; Performed data. Achmad Fathoni: Conceptualization, Review & Editing

Declaration of Generative AI (GenAI) Usage in Scientific Writing

The authors declare that Generative Artificial Intelligence ([Google Gemini](#)) tools were used during the planning of this essay. The suggestions provided were critically evaluated and modified to better align with the marking rubric for this essay. The authors selected the most relevant ideas to explore further through scholarly literature, including books and peer-reviewed journal articles. All instances of Generative AI usage in this article were conducted by the authors in accordance with the [IJCES Generative AI \(GenAI\) Policy](#), with the authors assuming full responsibility for the originality, accuracy, and integrity of the work.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that they have no significant competing financial, professional or personal interests that might have influenced the performance or presentation of the work described in this manuscript.

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