FACTORS INFLUENCING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN CHILDREN'S ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING: A CASE STUDY OF B40 AND T20 FAMILIES IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract *Parental involvement (PI) is crucial for children's educational success, particularly in learning English as a Second Language (ESL). In Malaysia, PI in their children's ESL learning could be insufficient, with parents potentially not providing adequate support for their children's education. Socioeconomic disparities may also impact the level and nature of parental engagement in children's education. This qualitative study explores factors influencing parental involvement in ESL learning among low-income (B40) and high-income (T20) families in Malaysia. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 parents of children attending Malaysian primary public schools, with 6 parents from each income group, selected through purposive sampling. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the findings, focusing on motivational beliefs, perceptions of invitations, and life contexts as influencing factors. Despite facing financial constraints and time limitations, B40 parents demonstrated resourcefulness and dedication, while T20 parents had more opportunities to support their children. The study underscores the importance of enhancing communication, implementing targeted support programs, and fostering a more inclusive school environment to empower all parents as active partners in their children's ESL learning journey.*

Keywords: ESL learning, parental involvement, primary school, qualitative study, socioeconomic status.

INTRODUCTION

Parental involvement (PI) is a fundamental aspect of improving children's educational outcomes, as highlighted in the National Key Result Areas and the 12th Malaysian plan (2021-2025) (MOE, 2013). Besides that, the education system should "have a shared responsibility between parents and teachers to ensure quality learning for students" (MOE, 2013). Developmental psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory positions parents within the innermost circle of a child's environment, known as the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This proximity makes them the closest and most influential figures in a child's life, impacting their academic journey, including ESL acquisition. Studies by Pek and Mee (2020) also add that parents play a vital role as a socializing agent, significantly impacting a child's educational success. The Malaysia Ministry of Education's (MOE) toolkit on PI produced in Malaysia further reinforces its importance (MOE, 2012). This toolkit highlights the multifaceted benefits of PI, including fostering a positive learning atmosphere, sparking social connections, strengthening parent-child communication, and providing academic assistance.

Research indicates that PI in their children's English language education, such as supplying necessary textbooks, helping with homework, and showing interest in their academic progress, is closely linked to better academic outcomes (Suh, 2022). In addition to that, another study highlights that PI greatly impact children's ability to learn a second language, and the educational level of parents also contributes to this dynamic (Alawawda & Razi, 2020). Furthermore, research by Getie (2020) suggests a connection between parents' attitudes towards English and their children's attitudes, which can influence learning outcomes. This aligns with Masyitoh (2007) who suggests that parents acting as role models by using English at home and Alias et al. (2023) who find home-based involvement, such as assisting children with homework and reading activities, significantly impact learning. PI can be influenced by a few factors such as perceived life context, motivational beliefs and invitations from school, teacher and children (Green et al., 2007). Socioeconomic status (SES) is one of the crucial factors influencing PI. A well-established link exists between family financial

resources and children's academic achievement (e.g., Ahmad & Sulaiman, 2020). Malaysia categorizes households into three income groups: B40, M40, and T20. The B40 group includes parents with a monthly household income below RM 4,850. The M40 group consists of parents earning between RM 4,851 and RM 10,959 per month. The T20 group comprises parents with a monthly household income above RM 10,959 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2021).

Past studies reveal how PI varies with SES. Lee (2010) reported, all parents, regardless of their educational and financial backgrounds, showed interest in supporting their children's ESL learning. In particular, the parents provided homework assistance and saw themselves as assistants to their child's learning. For high SES parents, they engaged more actively and had more resources while low SES parents relied heavily on teachers and sought free resources from relatives. Another study by Wati (2005) also found that parents, regardless of educational level and economic status, had positive attitudes towards English and were committed to their children's ESL education. For high SES parents, they provided various resources such as English storybooks and DVDs as well as sent children to extra English lessons. For low SES parents, despite the limited resources and educational limitations, they involved other siblings to help with learning problems. Kamal (2020) revealed that some parents in her study faced financial issues and could not provide learning materials to their children.

In Malaysia, PI in schools is deemed lacking, and parents may not be adequately supporting their children's education (Ansit et al., 2024; Ibrahim, 2012). This insufficient PI negatively affects students' learning performance in Malaysia (Ishak et al., 2020). PI has been the focus of considerable research interest at an international level, but Malaysia itself remains somewhat understudied. Besides that, there is a dearth of research focusing on PI in the context of ESL learning among primary school students, particularly, studies that consider parents from different SES as participants. Additionally, while previous research has explored PI in subjects like Science and Mathematics (Ghani, 2020; Abdullah et al., 2015), there is a scarcity of research focusing specifically on its role in children's ESL learning within the Malaysian context. Considering the critical role

English plays in communication, education, and career opportunities, this study seeks to identify factors influencing PI, including aspects of parents' motivational beliefs, perceptions of invitations from schools and teachers, and their perceived life context. The research question of this study is: What are the factors that influence PI in their children's ESL learning?

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review explores the constructs of PI, theory related to PI and factors influencing PI in their children's ESL learning. The influencing factors are categorised into a few main themes: Parental SES, parental background, and educational institutions factors.

Multiple constructs of PI have been utilised by the scholars in past studies (Kamal et al., 2022; 2023) including a situation in which parents actively engage in their children's education through interaction with teachers regarding their children's progress and assisting their children with their education (Ntekane, 2018). Another definition of PI is an investment that parents can make in their children, which can significantly contribute to their academic success (Gupta, 2022). PI can also be explained by using two categories namely home-based and school- based (Ribeiro et al., 2021; Satar et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2023). While home-based encompasses among others providing assistance in homework, conducting reading activities, watching cartoons and listening to songs (Kamal et al., 2021), school-based comprises attending parent-teacher meeting (Bromley & Yazdanpanah, 2021).

Walker et al. (2005) in his PI model also classify PI into two categories: school-based and home-based, which revises the conceptualization of PI introduced by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995, 1997). The model proposes three psychological factors to elucidate why parents choose to participate in their children's learning: (a) parents' motivational beliefs, (b) parents' perceptions of invitations for involvement from others, and (c) parents' perceived life context. Parents' motivational beliefs encompass parents' role construction and parental self-efficacy. Role construction

pertains to parents' beliefs about how they should engage with their children to enhance their educational performance. Parental self-efficacy relates to parents' confidence in their ability to engage effectively and produce positive outcomes for their children's education (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005: 14),

Parents perceptions of invitation for involvement from others suggest how they perceive the school's general invitation as well as individual invitations from teachers and their children. Lastly, parents' perceived life context refers to their perceptions of their capacity to allocate time, effort, skills, and knowledge—factors that could impact their children's education. The model was later revised by Green et al. (2007), who added socioeconomic status as one of the perceived life contexts of parents. This PI model can provide guidance and explanation for the findings of studies on PI and the factors influencing such involvement. It suggests PI beliefs and practices are constructed based on a number of factors that related to their psychological aspects (beliefs and perceptions of parents on themselves.

Socioeconomic status and parental education level are two key factors impacting PI. Studies by Calzada et al. (2015) and Tekin (2011) suggest that parents from lower SES backgrounds may have lower involvement due to limited resources, time constraints, or a lack of confidence in their ability to support their child's academic work. Conversely, Lee and Bowen (2006) found that parents with higher educational attainment tend to participate more actively in school-related events and hold higher academic expectations for their children. However, Pena (2000) presents a contrasting viewpoint, suggesting that parents with lower education may participate more in school activities, potentially due to feeling less equipped to assist with academics at home. Kamal (2020), on the other hand, revealed that low-income parents had few invitations to participate in ESL learning activities at school.

Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) and Kiernan and Mensah (2011) further explore the link between parental education and PI. Their research suggests that parents with lower educational backgrounds may have lower self-esteem and feel hesitant to be actively involved in their children's

education due to insecurities about their own knowledge and abilities as parents. Despite this, research by Hashim et al. (2018) highlights that these parents often continue traditional methods of involvement with their children, even if these methods become habitual rather than strategic. Sime and Sheridan's (2014) study reinforces the challenges faced by parents from lower SES backgrounds. Their research indicates that these parents may have limited resources to provide their children with additional learning materials like books or after-school classes that could support their ESL development. Furthermore, the study suggests that parents with low academic backgrounds may themselves feel discouraged or lack the confidence to motivate their children in their ESL learning. While PI is generally viewed positively, it's important to acknowledge the findings of Baeck (2010) that some parents with higher education backgrounds may report a lack of time for involvement due to work commitments.

The approach adopted by schools and teachers towards PI significantly influences its effectiveness. Pakter and Chen (2013) highlight that schools with open communication channels and active encouragement of parental participation see higher levels of PI. Similarly, Moosa et al. (2001) emphasize the role of teachers who value PI and implement strategies to engage parents in the classroom, fostering a more supportive learning environment for children. Effective PI necessitates collaboration between parents, teachers, and schools (Kalayci & Ergul, 2020). When all parties work together to create a supportive environment that values parental input, it leads to improved learning outcomes for children. Apart from schools, children's invitations for involvement are strongly linked to parental engagement both at home and at school (Reininger & Lopez, 2017). Children may not ask for help if their parents lack confidence in their abilities (Kamal, 2020).

METHODS

This study utilizes a qualitative method, immersing itself in the lived experiences of individuals in natural settings and employing non-numerical data such as interviews, observations, and documents (Denny & Weckesser, 2022). This approach offers a deep understanding of social life for this study

(Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) which aimed to comprehend a real-world situation involving a group of people (Awasthy, 2019). This is particularly useful when exploring topics with limited existing knowledge (Kumar, 2011).

This study was conducted in two settings in Kuala Lumpur (urban and rural) where parents form T20 and B40 can be easily obtained. Using purposive sampling, participants were carefully selected based on their relevance to the research questions and objectives (Andrade, 2020). Six parents from B40 group (low income) and six parents from T20 (high income) were selected to understand the experiences and perceptions of the participants, this study employed semi-structured interviews. Each parent was interviewed for 30 to 60 minutes regarding their PI in their children's ESL education. The interviews were conducted in Malay, the participants' preferred language. Since the interviews were conducted in Malay, the researchers conducted a forward translation immediately after each interview session. The purpose was to accurately capture the respondents' messages without altering their original meaning (Toma et al., 2017). To ensure the translations were accurate, we compared the forward translations with the original documents. Additionally, two lecturers specializing in Malay and TESOL reviewed the translations for accuracy. The data was then analysed using thematic analysis, a method commonly employed in qualitative studies. The thematic analysis involves identifying specific data and recognizing repeated patterns within it (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The recorded interviews were listened to, transcribed, and analyzed. Codes, sub-themes, and themes were identified and finalized. Findings are reported using themes, and excerpts from the parents' interviews are used to support the presented and discussed themes. Quotes presented in this study are non-verbatim paraphrased translations from the original Malay interviews to English. Paraphrasing was done to ensure clarity and to convey the meaning accurately while maintaining the original intent and context expressed by the participants.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section explains the findings from the study, derived from the analysis: school-organised activities, knowledge in English, availability of time, financial issues, invitations from teachers regarding their children's ESL learning, and invitations from children to engage in their children's ESL learning. Each theme is elaborated alongside excerpts from the interviews with parents.

Factors that influence PI in their children's ESL learning

Theme 1: School-Organised Activities

The first theme is school-organised activities, highlighting the differing experiences of parents from B40 and T20 families regarding the school-organised activities related to their children's ESL learning at their children's school. B40 parents (Parent C) and (Parent F) indicate a lack of such activities, with Parent C noting that there are very few or none at all, and Parent F mentioning the absence of activities since the Movement Control Order. The B40 parent mentioned that, "As far as I know, the school doesn't organise many activities related to English language skills. There are very few or none at all." Another B40 parent stated, "Currently, there are no activities as there haven't been any since the Movement Control Order (PKP)."

On the other hand, T20 parents (Parent J) and (Parent L) report a different experience, indicating that there are a lot of activities related to English language skills at their children's school. Parent J's daughter is actively involved in various activities such as singing competitions, reciting poems, and pop quizzes, suggesting a rich and engaging English language learning environment. For instance, T20 parent stated that, "Yes, there are a lot of activities, and my daughter is very active. Her teacher always chooses her, and she consistently takes part in singing competitions, reciting poems, and pop quizzes." Another T20 parent stated, "Yes, definitely. My daughter always takes part in it especially in English activities."

Overall, these findings suggest disparities in the availability of English language-related activities at schools, between low-income and high-income families. The findings echoed Kamal (2020) who discovered a lack of invitations for low-income parents to ESL programs at school by schools. It has been argues that, schools with proactive encouragement of parental participation observe higher levels of PI (Pakter & Chen, 2013). B40 parents may not be aware of the availability of the ESL programme due to low connection with the school. This lack of awareness could be due to factors like communication channels between the school administration and B40 families. This also suggests a potential lack of resources or prioritization of ESL activities in schools serving B40 families, which may impact their children's exposure to and proficiency in English language skills. This statement can be supported by MOE (2013) stressed that parent-teacher partnership is important for a student's success in academics.

Theme 2: Knowledge in English

The second theme, knowledge in English, was derived based on responses that showed varying levels of PI in supporting their children's English language learning, particularly in terms of the parents' own proficiency in English and their efforts to assist their children. B40 parents (Parent A) and (Parent B) both express limitations in their ability to help their children with English due to their own lack of proficiency in the language. Parent A specifically states having zero knowledge in English, while Parent B mentions not being proficient and needing help themselves. For example, one B40 parent said, "No at all because I have zero knowledge in English." Another B40 parent said, "I don't think so because I'm not proficient in English and I haven't helped much because I'm not proficient in English. They usually help me instead."

In contrast, T20 parents (Parent H) and (Parent K) indicate a more proactive role in supporting their children's English language learning. For example, one T20 parent stated, I think yes, I did use my knowledge. I remember I used flashcards during my son was still young. I used to tell him what I knew and it helps him today. Another T20 parent stated, "Yes, I can help a bit in terms of vocabulary and spelling. I also communicate with him using English."

Overall, these findings highlight the importance of parental proficiency in English and its impact on the level of support parents can provide to their children in learning the language. It has been shown that T20 parents can engaged more in their children's learning as they have more knowledge of the language (Lee, 2010), whereas due to lack of confidence, B40 parents cannot fully involve in their children's learning (Calzada et al., 2015; Tekin (2011). They also underscore the potential disparities in parental involvement in English language learning between low-income and high-income families, which may contribute to differences in English language proficiency among children from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

Theme 3: Availability of Time

The third theme, availability of time, highlights the varying approaches and challenges faced by B40 and T20 parents in spending time with their children to support their education, particularly in English language learning.

B40 parents (Parent C) and (Parent D) both emphasize the importance of spending time with their children to enhance their educational outcomes. Parent C acknowledges the challenge of being a working parent and coming home late at night but still makes an effort to spend one to one and a half hours every night for revision together. Parent D believes that allocating time to spend with children contributes to their future success and suggests that even short sessions of 20 to 30 minutes can be effective. For example, the B40 parent said;

For all subjects, we must work together with our children. However, it is a challenge for working parents like me who come home late at night. Despite this, we make an effort to spend time with our children, usually about one to one and a half hours every night for revision together.

Another B40 parent stated,

I believe that allocating time to spend with children contributes to brightening their future. When comparing busy parents with those who make time, the latter tend to be more successful. Relying solely on school is not sufficient as teachers have many students to attend to.

> The allocated time shouldn't be too long, perhaps around 20 minutes to half an hour, as children can't focus for too extended periods, and longer sessions may lead to boredom.

Similarly, high income family (Parent J) and (Parent K) also prioritize spending time with their children but approach it in different ways. Parent J, a working mother, utilizes weekends to assist her child with English, encouraging communication in English and correcting mistakes. Parent J's approach is flexible, incorporating English into regular interactions to prevent boredom. Parent K mentions assisting their child with revision whenever asked, indicating a more reactive approach to supporting their child's education. The T20 parent mentioned;

As a working mother, it's challenging for me, but I make use of the available time during the weekends to assist her with English. I encourage her to communicate in English and correct any mistakes. I don't have a specific allocated time for English communication since I try to incorporate it into our interactions regularly. This approach is quite flexible to prevent them from getting bored.

> Another T20 parent stated, "Yes, it is important for us to spend time together, and I assist him during his revision. There's no specific time, but I always help him when he asks."

Overall, these findings demonstrate the importance of PI and time spent with children in supporting their children's English language learning. The findings also highlight the different strategies and challenges faced by parents from low-income and high-income families in balancing work commitments with supporting their children's education. T20 parents, despite their ability to teach their children, face challenges in spending time with them, as shown in the study by Baeck (2010). B40 parents, similar to past studies by Calzada et al. (2015) and Tekin (2011), reported time constraints as one of the issues in PI.

Theme 4: Financial issues

The fourth theme, financial issues, highlights the financial challenges faced by parents from B40 families in supporting their children's education, particularly in English subjects. B40 parents (Parent A) and (Parent C) both express concerns about financial constraints impacting their ability to support their children's education. Parent A specifically mentions difficulties in affording tuition for their children, while Parent C mentions struggling to purchase revision books due to the high cost of living. For instance, the B40 parent stated, "To be honest, yes. I have financial issues in helping my children for their English subjects. For example, I have not enough money to send them to tuition."Another B40 parent stated, "I have to say that it is true that sometimes I am facing financial problems for my children's education. Furthermore, things are so expensive nowadays that sometimes I feel hard to buy my children with revision books."

In contrast, T20 parents (Parent J) and (Parent L) both indicates that they do not face financial issues that would impact their children's education. One T20 parent stated, "No, I don't have any problems with money". Another T20 parent also stated, "No, money is not a problem to me" for the questions asked regarding the financial issues.

Overall, these findings highlight the impact of SES on parents' ability to support their children's education, particularly in terms of affording additional resources such as tuition or revision books. They underscore the challenges faced by B40 parents in providing the same level of support and resources for their children's education, similar to the study conducted by Kamal (2020), Sime and Sheridan (2014) and Wati (2015) compared to high-income families.

Theme 5: Invitation from the teacher regarding their children's ESL learning

Theme 5, invitation from the teacher regarding their children's ESL learning, illustrates the varying degrees of communication and involvement between parents and teachers concerning ESL activities and events, highlighting differences between B40 and T20 families. B40 parent (Parent A) indicates

limited communication and involvement, noting that while teachers update about homework, there is no invitation to discuss ESL activities except for parent-teacher meetings. On the other hand, Parent B mentions receiving invitations from the teacher for specific ESL events, such as an English poetry competition that their daughter participated in. This suggests that communication and involvement vary even within B40 family. One B40 parent stated, "The teachers did update everything in group including their homework but as for invitation to discuss for ESL activities, no at all except for parent-teacher meeting." Another B40 parent stated, "The teacher did inform and invite me to the ESL discussion. For example, there was an English poetry competition that my daughter joined so I did receive the invitation from the teacher to discuss further."

> Among T20 parents, Parent H mentions being invited to join English activities by teachers but was unable to due to a tight schedule. However, Parent J indicates regular and proactive communication from the teacher, inviting them to ESL activities and competitions to provide moral support to their child. One T20 parent stated, "The teachers did invite me to join the English activities. However, my schedule was so tight that I could not join it." Another T20 parent mentioned, "The teacher did inform and invite me every time my daughter has ESL activities or competition at school. She invited me to come and give moral support to my child."

> *(Parent J (T20), Semi-structured interview)*

Overall, these findings suggest that while there are variations within income groups, high-income families may experience more proactive communication and involvement from teachers regarding ESL activities compared to low-income families. This difference in communication and involvement may impact the level of support and engagement of parents in their children's ESL education. Moosa et al. (2001) emphasize that teachers who value PI and employ strategies to engage parents in the classroom contribute to a supportive learning environment for children. Effective PI relies on collaboration among parents, teachers, and schools (Kalayci & Ergul, 2020).

Theme 6: Invitation from children to engage in their children's ESL learning

Theme 6, invitation from children to engage in their children's ESL learning, highlights the ways in which parents from low-income and high-income families are invited to participate in English language activities with their children, showcasing varying levels of engagement and interaction.

B40 parents (Parent C) and (Parent E) mention being asked to sit together with their children during revision time or when help is needed with homework. This suggests a more passive form of participation, where the parents are present but may not actively engage in English language activities beyond assisting with homework. For example, one B40 parent stated, "Yes, they will ask me to sit together during their revision time". Another B40 parent stated, "Yes, when he needs help with his homework."

In contrast, T20 parents (Parent H) and (Parent L) describe more active forms of participation. Parent H perceives their child's attempt to communicate in English as an invitation, indicating that the child's willingness to speak English with them is seen as a form of engagement. Parent L mentions being invited by their child to play English games and listen to English songs together, actively participating in these activities to follow their child's lead. For instance, one T20 parent stated, "Yes, my child will try to communicate in English with me. I considered that as an invitation because my child were brave enough to speak English with me." Another T20 parent stated, "Yes, she will invite me to play English games and listen to English songs together. I will follow her rhythm when I have my free time."

(Parent L (T20), Semi-structured interview)

Overall, these findings suggest that parents from both low-income and high-income families are invited to participate in English language activities with their children. However, the nature of their involvement may differ. Past study highlighted that inivtations from children can enhance PI (Reininger, T., & López, 2017). Apart from that, T20 parents may engage more actively in English language activities with their children, while B40 parents' involvement may be more passive or focused on academic support.

Theoretical discussion on the findings

The findings illustrate that parents from both B40 and T20 groups are involved in home-based PI (Green et al., 2007). However, B40 parents lack school-based involvement due to receiving fewer invitations from schools. Constraints such as limited English knowledge and financial resources (Green et al., 2007) limit their participation in their children's education. Nevertheless, similar to T20 parents, B40 parents have positive self-efficacy and a positive role construction (Green et al., 2007), which influence their dedication to their children's learning. Self-efficacy refers to the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations. For B40 parents, this belief in their ability to contribute positively to their children's education remains robust, even in the face of external limitations. Positive role construction, on the other hand, reflects parents' perception of their role in supporting their children's education. This involves recognizing their responsibility and influence over their children's learning outcomes, which drives their dedication and involvement.

Table 1

Summary of findings

	THEME	B40 parents	T20 parents
1.	School-organised activity	Few to no activities	Many activities
2.	Knowledge in English	Limited proficiency	Active support
3.	Availability of time	Limited but dedicated time	Flexible and available support
4.	Financial issues	Financial constraints	No financial issues
5.	Teacher invitations	Limited invitations to some invitations	Regular invitations
6.	Children's invitations	Passive involvement	Active participation

CONCLUSION

This study investigated factors influencing parental involvement (PI) in children's English as a Second Language (ESL) learning. The findings, analyzed through the lens of the Green et al. (2007 model, revealed disparities in PI between low-income (B40) and high-income (T20) families in Malaysia. B40 parents face numerous challenges, including limited school-organized activities, restricted English proficiency, financial constraints, and fewer invitations from teachers and children for involvement, which hinder their active participation in their children's education. Despite these obstacles, B40 parents demonstrate dedication and a positive role construction, emphasizing their commitment to supporting their children's learning within their constraints. In contrast, T20 parents benefit from numerous school-organized activities, greater English proficiency, financial stability, and regular invitations for involvement, enabling them to provide active and flexible support for their children's ESL learning. Schools and teachers can play a crucial role by fostering a more inclusive environment through improved communication, targeted support programs, and acknowledging the realities faced by B40 families. By working collaboratively, schools, teachers, and families can create a more equitable learning environment that empowers all parents to become active partners in their children's ESL learning journey.

The study's limitations include a small sample size, which may not fully represent the broader population. Additionally, the qualitative nature of the research limits the generalizability of the findings to other contexts. Future research could explore the effectiveness of specific interventions designed to enhance PI in ESL learning among B40 families. Investigating the perspectives of teachers and school administrators could also provide valuable insights into creating a more supportive environment for all students. Ultimately, by understanding the factors influencing PI and developing effective strategies for engagement, we can ensure that all children have the opportunity to thrive in their ESL learning.

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The authors confirm that they contributed equally to this work.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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