



TEACHERS' READINESS TO IMPLEMENT THE MERDEKA CURRICULUM IN LANGUAGE AND LITERACY LEARNING: A MIXED-METHOD STUDY

Helminsyah^{1*}

Universitas Bina Bangsa Getsempena, Banda Aceh, Indonesia

helminsyah@bbg.ac.id

Nurul Zikri Filina²

Universitas Bina Bangsa Getsempena, Banda Aceh, Indonesia

nurulzikrifilina@bbg.ac.id

*Corresponding author: helminsyah@bbg.ac.id

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Abstract

Teacher readiness is a decisive factor in curriculum implementation because teachers are responsible for translating curriculum principles into classroom planning, instructional practice, assessment, and learning reflection. In Indonesia, the Merdeka Curriculum requires teachers to implement learner-centered instruction, differentiated learning, formative assessment, project-based learning, and literacy-oriented pedagogy. However, many language teachers still experience difficulties in understanding curriculum documents, designing differentiated literacy activities, developing teaching modules, using diagnostic assessment, and aligning language learning with students' needs. This study aims to examine teachers' readiness to implement the Merdeka Curriculum in language and literacy learning and to identify the factors that support or hinder classroom implementation. The study employed a mixed-method design involving a survey of 112 language teachers and semi-structured interviews with 16 selected teachers. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and correlation analysis, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically. The findings showed that teachers demonstrated moderate-to-high readiness, with the highest readiness in pedagogical attitude and the lowest readiness in assessment literacy and differentiated material development. Teachers perceived the Merdeka Curriculum as relevant to literacy learning because it provides flexibility, contextualization, and student-centered learning opportunities. However, implementation challenges included limited training, uneven digital competence, heavy administrative workload, lack of exemplar modules, and difficulty designing literacy assessments. The study concludes that teacher readiness should be strengthened through continuous professional development, collaborative lesson design, curriculum mentoring, assessment training, and contextual literacy resources.

Keywords: *Merdeka Curriculum; teacher readiness; literacy learning; language education; curriculum implementation*

A. Introduction

Curriculum reform is a complex educational process because it requires changes not only in policy documents but also in teachers' beliefs, knowledge, classroom practices, assessment procedures, and professional identity. A curriculum may be carefully designed at the policy level, but its success depends on how teachers understand, interpret, adapt, and implement it in real classrooms. Teachers are therefore central actors in curriculum implementation. Their readiness determines whether curriculum reform becomes meaningful instructional change or remains an administrative requirement.

In Indonesia, the Merdeka Curriculum has been introduced as a curriculum framework that emphasizes flexibility, student-centered learning, differentiated instruction, formative assessment, project-based learning, and the strengthening of students' competencies and character. The curriculum gives schools and teachers more space to adapt learning according to students' needs, local contexts, and learning readiness. In language and literacy learning, this reform is important because students need not only grammatical knowledge and text comprehension but also critical literacy, communication skills, cultural awareness, creativity, and the ability to use language for meaningful purposes.

Language and literacy learning has a strategic position in the Merdeka Curriculum. Literacy is not merely the ability to decode written texts; it involves understanding, interpreting, evaluating, and producing meanings across different contexts. Language teachers are expected to design learning activities that encourage students to read critically, write purposefully, speak confidently, listen actively, and connect texts with social and cultural realities. This expectation requires teachers to shift from textbook-centered instruction toward contextual, reflective, and competency-based learning.

However, implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in language and literacy learning is not simple. Teachers need to understand curriculum principles, learning outcomes, teaching modules, diagnostic assessment, differentiated instruction, formative assessment, and literacy-oriented pedagogy. They also need to develop materials that respond to students' diverse readiness levels, interests, cultural backgrounds, and language proficiency. Without sufficient readiness, teachers may implement the Merdeka Curriculum only

superficially, for example by changing lesson plan formats without transforming classroom practice.

Teacher readiness includes several dimensions. It involves cognitive readiness, such as teachers' understanding of curriculum concepts and learning outcomes. It includes pedagogical readiness, such as the ability to design learner-centered, differentiated, and literacy-rich instruction. It also includes assessment readiness, such as the ability to use diagnostic, formative, and authentic assessment. In addition, it includes technological readiness, collaborative readiness, and affective readiness, including teachers' confidence, motivation, and openness to change. These dimensions are interrelated and shape the quality of curriculum enactment.

This multidimensional view is grounded in the curriculum change literature. Fullan (2007) argues that reform fails when it is treated as the distribution of documents rather than as a process of meaning-making, and Remillard (2005) shows that teachers do not simply deliver a curriculum but actively interpret and reshape it. Van den Akker (2010) makes the same point from a design perspective, noting that curriculum components must be internally consistent before teachers can enact them coherently. What teachers believe therefore matters as much as what they know. Fives and Buehl (2012) and Borg (2015) demonstrate that teacher beliefs filter the adoption of new practices, and Biesta, Priestley, and Robinson (2015) and Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson (2015) show that the capacity to act on those beliefs, that is teacher agency, is shaped by the school environment rather than residing in the individual alone.

Recent Indonesian studies show that teachers are still adapting to the Merdeka Curriculum. Some teachers show positive attitudes and willingness to implement the curriculum, but many still need support in understanding curriculum documents, designing differentiated learning, preparing teaching modules, using assessment data, and integrating digital platforms (Kaluge, Setyosari, & Sulton, 2024; Syofyan, Rosyid, Fadli, & Yusuff, 2024). This indicates that teacher readiness should be studied empirically, particularly in the area of language and literacy learning, where curriculum implementation requires both linguistic and pedagogical competence.

Despite the growing number of studies on the Merdeka Curriculum, research focusing specifically on teachers' readiness in language and literacy learning remains limited. Many studies discuss teacher readiness in general school contexts, while fewer examine how language teachers understand and implement curriculum principles in literacy-oriented instruction. This gap is important because language teachers face specific challenges related to text selection, reading

comprehension, writing instruction, speaking practice, vocabulary development, and assessment of language performance.

Therefore, this study aims to examine teachers' readiness to implement the Merdeka Curriculum in language and literacy learning. The study addresses four research questions: what is the level of teachers' readiness to implement the Merdeka Curriculum in language and literacy learning; which dimensions of readiness are strongest and weakest among language teachers; what factors support teachers' readiness; and what challenges hinder implementation in language and literacy learning.

B. Method

This study employed a mixed-method research design. The quantitative component used a teacher readiness survey to identify general patterns of readiness among language teachers. The qualitative component used semi-structured interviews to explore teachers' experiences, perceptions, supporting factors, and challenges in greater depth. A mixed-method design was selected because teacher readiness involves both measurable dimensions and contextual professional experiences.

The participants were 112 language teachers from junior and senior secondary schools. The teachers taught Indonesian language, English, or local language subjects. Their teaching experience ranged from less than five years to more than twenty years. The participants were selected using purposive sampling because they had implemented or were preparing to implement the Merdeka Curriculum in language and literacy learning. From the survey participants, 16 teachers were selected for interviews. The interview participants represented high, moderate, and low readiness scores.

The quantitative instrument was the Teachers' Readiness for Merdeka Curriculum in Language and Literacy Learning questionnaire. The instrument consisted of 40 items grouped into five dimensions: curriculum understanding, pedagogical readiness, differentiated literacy instruction, assessment readiness, and digital-professional readiness. Each item used a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1, strongly disagree, to 5, strongly agree. Curriculum understanding measured teachers' comprehension of curriculum principles, learning outcomes, and teaching module requirements. Pedagogical readiness measured teachers' ability to design student-centered language and literacy learning. Differentiated literacy instruction measured teachers' ability to adapt materials, tasks, and support based on students' needs. Assessment readiness measured teachers' ability to conduct

diagnostic, formative, authentic, and reflective assessment. Digital-professional readiness measured teachers' ability to use digital platforms and collaborate professionally.

The reliability coefficient of the overall questionnaire was 0.91, indicating strong internal consistency. The reliability coefficients for each dimension were also acceptable: curriculum understanding 0.86, pedagogical readiness 0.88, differentiated literacy instruction 0.84, assessment readiness 0.85, and digital-professional readiness 0.87. The qualitative instrument was a semi-structured interview guide. The interview questions explored teachers' understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum, experiences in preparing teaching modules, literacy learning practices, differentiated instruction, assessment strategies, use of digital platforms, professional development experiences, and perceived barriers. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes and was recorded with participant consent.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations. The interpretation of readiness used the following categories: 1.00-1.80 very low, 1.81-2.60 low, 2.61-3.40 moderate, 3.41-4.20 high, and 4.21-5.00 very high. Correlation analysis was used to examine relationships among readiness dimensions. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically through data familiarization, coding, theme identification, theme review, and interpretation. Data integration was conducted by comparing quantitative patterns with qualitative explanations. To ensure trustworthiness, the study used methodological triangulation by comparing survey and interview data. Member checking was conducted with selected teachers to verify interview interpretations. Ethical procedures were applied by obtaining participant consent, anonymizing identities, and using the data only for academic purposes.

Instrument quality and analytical rigour were examined before the main study. The questionnaire was reviewed by three experts in curriculum and language education, with Aiken validity indices between 0.79 and 0.94, and was piloted with 35 teachers outside the sample, where corrected item-total correlations ranged from 0.36 to 0.71. Confirmatory factor analysis supported the five-dimension structure, CFI = 0.94, TLI = 0.93, RMSEA = 0.052, SRMR = 0.048. For the qualitative strand, 30% of the transcripts were coded independently by two researchers, producing a Cohen's kappa of 0.83, and survey and interview evidence were compared through joint display analysis so that convergent and divergent findings could be identified explicitly.

C. Finding and Discussion

1. Finding

The findings are presented in four parts. The first part reports the overall level of teachers' readiness. The second part explains readiness across dimensions. The third part presents supporting factors for curriculum implementation. The fourth part describes challenges experienced by teachers in language and literacy learning.

Teachers' Overall Readiness to Implement the Merdeka Curriculum

The survey findings showed that teachers' overall readiness to implement the Merdeka Curriculum in language and literacy learning was in the high category. The overall mean score was 3.78 with a standard deviation of 0.52. This indicates that most teachers had positive readiness but still needed further support in specific areas.

Table 1 Overall Teacher Readiness

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Teachers' readiness to implement Merdeka Curriculum	112	3.78	0.52	High

Source: Processed from teacher readiness questionnaire data.

The high readiness score suggests that teachers generally accepted the Merdeka Curriculum and recognized its relevance for language and literacy learning. Teachers perceived the curriculum as providing flexibility for contextual learning, student-centered instruction, and literacy activities that connect texts with students' experiences. However, the standard deviation indicates variation among teachers. Some teachers were highly prepared, while others still experienced uncertainty.

Interview data supported this finding. Teachers stated that they understood the general principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, especially flexibility, student-centered learning, differentiated instruction, and formative assessment. Nevertheless, several teachers admitted that they were still unsure how to translate these principles into daily classroom practice. They understood the terms but needed more examples and mentoring.

Readiness across Curriculum, Pedagogy, Differentiation, Assessment, and Digital Practice

The analysis of readiness dimensions showed that pedagogical readiness received the highest mean score, while assessment readiness received the lowest mean score.

Table 2 Dimensions of Teacher Readiness

Dimension	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Curriculum understanding	3.82	0.56	High
Pedagogical readiness	3.96	0.49	High
Differentiated literacy instruction	3.61	0.58	High
Assessment readiness	3.42	0.64	High
Digital-professional readiness	3.73	0.60	High

Source: Processed from teacher readiness questionnaire data.

Pedagogical readiness was the strongest dimension. Teachers reported that they were willing to design more active, contextual, and student-centered language learning. They also expressed confidence in facilitating classroom discussion, group work, text-based learning, and literacy activities. Teachers believed that language learning should not only focus on grammar or textbook exercises but also on communication, text interpretation, and student expression.

Curriculum understanding was also high. Teachers understood the general structure of the Merdeka Curriculum, including learning outcomes, teaching modules, and flexibility in instructional planning. However, interview data showed that teachers' understanding was often stronger at the conceptual level than at the technical level. Some teachers could explain curriculum principles but still struggled to formulate learning objectives and assessment criteria.

Differentiated literacy instruction received a lower score than pedagogical readiness. Teachers recognized the importance of adapting texts, tasks, and support based on students' readiness, but many found it difficult to implement differentiation consistently. In language and literacy learning, differentiation required teachers to provide varied reading texts, vocabulary support, writing scaffolds, and different levels of learning tasks. Teachers reported that preparing these materials required time and resources.

Assessment readiness was the weakest dimension. Teachers found it difficult to design diagnostic assessment, formative assessment, and authentic literacy assessment. They were familiar with written tests but less confident in assessing reading strategies, writing process, speaking performance, project-based literacy tasks, and student reflection. Several teachers also stated that they needed rubrics and examples of assessment instruments aligned with the Merdeka Curriculum.

Digital-professional readiness was in the high category but varied across teachers. Some teachers actively used digital platforms, online materials, and Merdeka Mengajar Platform resources. Others had limited digital confidence. Teachers with higher digital readiness were more likely to use online texts, digital worksheets, interactive quizzes, and collaborative documents for literacy learning.

Supporting Factors for Teacher Readiness

Qualitative analysis identified four supporting factors: professional development, peer collaboration, access to curriculum resources, and teacher motivation.

Table 3 Supporting Factors for Teacher Readiness

Supporting Factor	Evidence from Teacher Experience	Contribution to Readiness
Professional development	Teachers attended workshops, webinars, and school-based training	Improved curriculum understanding and confidence
Peer collaboration	Teachers discussed teaching modules and literacy activities with colleagues	Helped teachers develop practical classroom strategies
Access to curriculum resources	Teachers used official modules, digital platforms, and sample materials	Provided references for planning and adaptation
Teacher motivation	Teachers viewed the curriculum as relevant to student needs	Strengthened willingness to innovate
School leadership support	Principals encouraged collaborative planning and reflection	Created institutional support for implementation

Source: Synthesized from teacher interview data.

Professional development was the most frequently mentioned supporting factor. Teachers who had attended workshops or school-based training reported higher confidence in implementing the

curriculum. However, teachers also emphasized that one-time training was not enough. They needed continuous mentoring and practical examples.

Peer collaboration also supported readiness. Teachers stated that they learned more effectively when they discussed teaching modules, shared literacy materials, and reflected on classroom experiences with colleagues. Collaborative planning helped reduce workload and improve understanding.

Teacher motivation also influenced readiness. Teachers who believed that the Merdeka Curriculum could make language learning more meaningful were more willing to experiment with differentiated texts, discussion-based learning, and project-based literacy tasks. School leadership support strengthened this motivation by creating time and space for collaborative planning.

Challenges in Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in Language and Literacy Learning

Teachers reported several challenges, including limited practical training, administrative workload, difficulty designing differentiated materials, assessment complexity, and uneven student readiness.

Table 4 Challenges in Curriculum Implementation

Challenge	Classroom Evidence	Teacher Response
Limited practical training	Teachers understood concepts but lacked implementation examples	Sought webinars and peer discussions
Administrative workload	Teachers spent time preparing modules and reports	Used template-based planning
Differentiated material difficulty	Teachers struggled to prepare varied literacy tasks	Adapted textbook texts and online sources
Assessment complexity	Teachers lacked rubrics for literacy performance	Developed simple rubrics collaboratively
Uneven student readiness	Students had different reading and writing abilities	Used grouping and scaffolding

Source: Synthesized from teacher interviews.

Assessment complexity was one of the most significant challenges. Teachers were expected to use diagnostic and formative assessment, but many were not fully prepared to interpret assessment results and use them for instructional decisions. In literacy learning, this problem became more visible because reading, writing, speaking, and listening require different types of assessment.

Differentiated material development was another challenge. Teachers needed to provide varied texts and tasks, but they often lacked time and resources. Some teachers used textbook materials as the main source and modified them slightly. However, they acknowledged that deeper differentiation required better preparation.

Correlation among Readiness Dimensions

Correlation analysis showed that all readiness dimensions were positively related. The strongest correlation was found between curriculum understanding and pedagogical readiness, followed by assessment readiness and differentiated literacy instruction.

Table 5 Correlation among Readiness Dimensions

Variable	Curriculum Understanding	Pedagogical Readiness	Differentiated Instruction	Assessment Readiness	Digital-Professional Readiness
Curriculum understanding	1.00	0.62**	0.48**	0.44**	0.39**
Pedagogical readiness	0.62**	1.00	0.56**	0.47**	0.42**
Differentiated instruction	0.48**	0.56**	1.00	0.58**	0.45**
Assessment readiness	0.44**	0.47**	0.58**	1.00	0.41**
Digital-professional readiness	0.39**	0.42**	0.45**	0.41**	1.00

*Source: Processed from teacher readiness questionnaire data. Note: ** $p < .01$.*

2. Discussion

The findings show that teachers' readiness to implement the Merdeka Curriculum in language and literacy learning was generally high but uneven across dimensions. Teachers demonstrated strong pedagogical willingness and positive attitudes toward student-centered literacy learning. However, they still faced practical challenges in assessment, differentiated material design, and technical curriculum translation. This pattern indicates that teachers are not resistant to curriculum change; rather, they need sustained professional support to enact the curriculum effectively.

The high score in pedagogical readiness suggests that teachers are open to instructional change. They recognize that language and literacy

learning should involve active student participation, contextual texts, communication, discussion, and reflection. This is aligned with contemporary literacy pedagogy, which views literacy as meaning-making across social and cultural contexts rather than merely decoding written texts. It also supports the Merdeka Curriculum's emphasis on flexible and student-centered learning.

However, the lower score in assessment readiness reveals a critical issue. Curriculum reform often changes learning expectations but does not always provide teachers with sufficient assessment tools. In language and literacy learning, assessment is complex because teachers must evaluate comprehension, interpretation, text production, oral communication, collaboration, and reflection. Teachers need rubrics, examples, and training to assess these competencies. Without strong assessment readiness, teachers may return to conventional tests even when the curriculum expects formative and authentic assessment.

The difficulty in differentiated literacy instruction also reflects a common challenge in curriculum implementation. Differentiation requires teachers to understand students' readiness, select suitable texts, provide scaffolding, and design varied tasks. This is demanding in classrooms with diverse proficiency levels. The findings are consistent with studies showing that differentiated instruction is often valued by teachers but difficult to implement without resources, time, and professional development (Tomlinson, 2014).

The role of professional development emerged strongly in this study. Teachers who had attended training or worked collaboratively with colleagues were more confident. However, teachers emphasized that training must be practical, continuous, and contextual. This supports Fullan's (2007) view that educational change requires capacity building, not merely policy dissemination. Teachers need opportunities to practice designing modules, developing literacy tasks, using assessment data, and reflecting on classroom implementation.

Peer collaboration also played an important role. Curriculum implementation becomes easier when teachers work together. Collaborative planning allows teachers to share materials, discuss student difficulties, develop rubrics, and solve classroom problems. This finding aligns with professional learning community literature, which emphasizes teacher collaboration as a mechanism for instructional improvement (Hord, 2009; Little, 1993). In language and literacy learning, collaboration is especially useful because teachers can develop shared text banks, writing rubrics, reading tasks, and assessment models.

Comparison with Previous Studies

Evidence on how readiness is built points consistently to sustained, collaborative learning. Guskey (2002) argues that teacher change follows rather than precedes evidence of improved student outcomes, and Desimone (2009) and Kennedy (2016) identify content focus, active learning, coherence, and duration as the features that distinguish effective professional development from ineffective training. Avalos (2011) and Bakkenes, Vermunt, and Wubbels (2010) show that teacher learning is most productive when it is embedded in daily practice, while Little (1993) and Hord (2009) demonstrate that collegial structures such as professional learning communities sustain change after external support ends. Darling-Hammond, Hyler, and Gardner (2017) and Sahlberg (2011) reach a similar conclusion from different systems: reform succeeds where teachers are trusted with professional responsibility and supported over time.

Two components of the Merdeka Curriculum place particular demands on teachers. The first is differentiated instruction, which Tomlinson (2014) describes as the systematic adjustment of content, process, and product to student readiness, and which requires far more planning than whole-class teaching. The second is assessment. Wiliam (2011) shows that formative assessment changes learning only when the evidence collected is actually used to adjust instruction, and Graham, Harris, and Hebert (2011) demonstrate the same principle for literacy tasks. Voogt and Roblin (2012) add that competence-based frameworks of this kind consistently underestimate the assessment expertise their implementation requires. Indonesian studies report a comparable pattern. Nurzen (2022) found that teachers in Sekolah Penggerak were mentally ready but still dependent on ministry-provided module templates, and Sephiawardani (2023) found that limited resources and uneven student readiness were the main obstacles at the elementary level. Pantiwati, Permana, Kusniarti, and Miharja (2023) further show that literacy programmes require explicit management structures rather than teacher goodwill alone, and Kucirkova (2019) notes that digital reading resources add a further layer of pedagogical decision-making.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, the findings support an ecological rather than an individual reading of teacher readiness. Readiness in this study was not simply an attribute that individual teachers possessed or lacked; it was distributed across professional knowledge, collegial structures, and the availability of curriculum resources. The consistently strong

correlations among the five dimensions indicate that readiness behaves as an integrated construct, so that a weakness in assessment literacy is unlikely to be repaired by training that addresses pedagogy alone. This is consistent with the argument that curriculum change requires meaning-making and capacity building at the school level rather than the dissemination of documents.

Practically, the results suggest three priorities for schools and policy makers. First, professional development for the Merdeka Curriculum should be reorganised around assessment literacy, which was the weakest dimension in this study. Teachers need concrete models of diagnostic assessment, formative feedback, and authentic literacy assessment, together with opportunities to trial these models in their own classrooms. Second, differentiated literacy instruction should be supported with ready-to-adapt text sets at several difficulty levels, because teachers reported that the main obstacle was preparation time rather than unwillingness. Third, teacher working groups should be treated as the main unit of professional learning, since collegial discussion was reported as the most immediate source of practical help. Short, isolated, one-off workshops are unlikely to produce the sustained change the curriculum requires.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, the quantitative data were collected through a self-report questionnaire, and self-report measures of readiness may be affected by social desirability. Teachers may report a level of confidence that is not fully reflected in their classroom practice. Second, the sample consisted of 112 teachers from a limited number of schools, so the findings describe the pattern in this setting rather than the national picture. Third, the design was cross-sectional, which means it captured readiness at one point in the implementation cycle and could not trace how readiness develops over time. Fourth, the study did not include classroom observation or student learning outcomes, so the relationship between reported readiness and actual instructional quality remains open. Future studies could combine self-report with classroom observation and document analysis, follow teachers longitudinally across several semesters, compare readiness between schools with different levels of implementation support, and examine whether teacher readiness predicts measurable gains in students' language and literacy achievement.

D. Conclusion

This study examined teachers' readiness to implement the Merdeka Curriculum in language and literacy learning. The findings showed

that teachers' overall readiness was high, with an overall mean score of 3.78. Pedagogical readiness was the strongest dimension, while assessment readiness was the weakest. Teachers generally perceived the Merdeka Curriculum as relevant to language and literacy learning because it supports flexibility, contextualization, student-centered learning, differentiated instruction, and formative assessment. However, teachers faced challenges related to limited practical training, administrative workload, difficulty designing differentiated literacy materials, assessment complexity, uneven student readiness, and varied digital competence. Supporting factors included professional development, peer collaboration, access to curriculum resources, teacher motivation, and school leadership support. Correlation analysis showed that readiness dimensions were positively related, indicating that curriculum understanding, pedagogy, differentiation, assessment, and digital-professional readiness should be developed together. The study concludes that teacher readiness is not only a matter of understanding policy but also a matter of practical pedagogical capacity. To strengthen implementation, teachers need continuous mentoring, collaborative lesson design, literacy assessment training, contextual teaching modules, and professional learning communities. Future research should examine classroom-based implementation, compare readiness across regions, and investigate how teacher readiness influences students' literacy outcomes.

Declaration of AI-Assisted Technologies

In preparing this manuscript, the authors used AI-assisted tools only to improve English language quality, grammar, readability, sentence clarity, and academic expression. The AI tools were not used to generate research data, conduct data analysis, produce findings, or draw conclusions. All conceptual arguments, data interpretation, methodological decisions, and scholarly conclusions remain the full responsibility of the authors. The authors carefully reviewed, edited, and verified all AI-assisted outputs to ensure the accuracy, integrity, and originality of the final manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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