

Beyond Fandom: Academic Support, Achievement Motivation, and Informal Learning in an Indonesian K-Pop Dance-Cover Community

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Abstract

K-Pop fandom is often discussed as entertainment consumption, yet fan communities can also become spaces of peer support, informal learning, and identity development. This qualitative intrinsic case study examines five high-school students who were members of JT Entertainment, a K-Pop dance-cover community in Padang, Indonesia. The 27 informants included students, teachers, parents, siblings, community members, the founder, and a mentor. Data were collected through active participant observation, repeated in-depth interviews, and documentation, then interpreted through interactive thematic analysis. The findings identify four interconnected support domains: community-based subject mentoring and study groups; school participation and tutoring; family monitoring and encouragement; and individual confidence, competition, and achievement motivation. The community allowed temporary withdrawal from dance during examinations, indicating negotiated boundaries between fandom and schooling. Rather than claiming that K-Pop participation caused higher achievement, the study argues that fandom can provide social capital and learning routines that participants perceive as supporting academic motivation.

Keywords: academic motivation; informal learning; K-Pop fandom; social capital; youth community.

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Introduction

K-Pop has become one of the most visible forms of transnational popular culture among young people. Music, choreography, fashion, language, social media, and fan practices circulate across national boundaries and are reworked in local communities. In Indonesia, K-Pop fandom is not limited to listening to music or following celebrities online. Fans form dance-cover groups, organize events, create digital content, study Korean vocabulary, exchange information, build friendships, and participate in communities with their own rules and hierarchies. These activities make fandom a social environment in which young people spend time, develop skills, and construct identities.

Public discussion about youth fandom often oscillates between two simplified positions. One presents K-Pop as a distraction that consumes students' time, money, and attention. The other celebrates fandom as automatically creative, cosmopolitan, and empowering. Both perspectives can overlook the institutional organization of fan communities. The educational consequences of fandom depend on what participants actually do, how community expectations are structured, how families negotiate participation, and whether fan activities compete with or support school responsibilities.

The original study focused on JT Entertainment, a K-Pop dance-cover community in Padang, West Sumatra. The community brought together young people with an interest in Korean popular music and dance. Five focal

participants were high-school students who were active in the community. What attracted the researchers' attention was not simply that these students liked K-Pop, but that they were also described by themselves and significant others as maintaining or improving academic achievement. The original article therefore asked what factors supported their school performance while they participated in the community.

The earlier interpretation used David McClelland's need-for-achievement theory. (McClelland, 1961) argued that people differ in the strength of motives related to achievement, affiliation, and power. The theory is relevant because students in the study described desires to perform well, compete, make their families proud, and pursue future goals. Yet achievement motivation alone does not explain the social organization through which study support became available. The revised article therefore retains achievement motivation while adding concepts of social capital, participatory culture, communities of practice, and informal learning.

Social capital directs attention to resources embedded in relationships. (Putnam, 2002) emphasizes networks, norms, and reciprocity that can facilitate coordinated action. In a youth community, social capital may take the form of information, emotional support, access to mentors, peer expectations, or trust. Fandom research increasingly shows that fan networks can generate capacities extending beyond media consumption. (Ranieses, 2024), examining K-Pop fandom and entrepreneurial intention, highlights the relationship between fandom social capital and participants' sense of agency. Although entrepreneurship differs from school achievement, the study demonstrates that fan communities can mobilize resources and attitudes that participants use outside entertainment itself.

Participatory-culture theory provides another lens. (Wendland, 2026) describe participatory cultures as environments with relatively low barriers to creative expression, support for sharing creations, informal mentorship, and a sense that contributions matter. K-Pop dance-cover communities fit many of these characteristics. Members learn choreography by observing and practicing, receive feedback from peers, perform publicly, and often move from novice to more experienced roles. (Asfinawati & Farhan, 2025) show that K-Pop participatory culture can enable young people to discover talents and develop forms of self-expression. Dance-cover participation has similarly been studied as a site of identity performance and transnational cultural connection (Oh, 2020).

The educational significance of such communities becomes clearer through the concept of informal learning. Informal learning occurs outside formal curriculum structures but can involve substantial acquisition of knowledge, skills, language, and social competence. Fan participation increasingly intersects with language learning. Urbar-Serrano and Hernandez-Lopez (2024) show that online fandom participation can create opportunities for informal English learning. K-Pop also motivates some Indonesian youth to learn Korean because language becomes linked to meaningful cultural participation. This suggests that fandom can generate learning motives that are self-initiated rather than externally assigned.

Recent Indonesian fandom studies reinforce the importance of identity and community. (Putri & Fazli, 2024) found that social identity contributed substantially to conformity among K-Pop fans, showing that group membership influences attitudes and behavior. (Asyraaf Roslan et al., 2024) likewise examine conformity in K-Pop fan communities. (Rumra & Mulyana, 2026) link fandom identity with celebrity-worship dynamics among Indonesian fans. These studies warn against romanticizing community influence: strong identity can generate support, but it can also produce pressure to conform. The educational question is therefore how group norms are directed.

JT Entertainment is analytically interesting because its internal norms did not focus exclusively on dance. According to participants, older or university-educated members became subject mentors for school students. Study groups were organized. A Korean-language class developed from the community's cultural interests. Members were allowed to take a temporary "vacuum" from dance practice during examinations, national tests, university obligations, or serious family matters. These practices indicate that the community established boundaries between fandom participation and formal educational responsibilities.

Family relationships added another layer. Parents generally permitted participation on the condition that school responsibilities were maintained. Some parents trusted community mentors enough to ask them to provide tutoring at home. Such arrangements show that fandom was embedded in family negotiation rather than existing in opposition to it. The community's legitimacy partly depended on demonstrating that participation would not undermine education.

School was equally important. The focal students' learning did not occur only in the fan community. The source describes active participation in class, extracurricular activities, private tutoring, note-taking, and discussion with school peers. Consequently, it would be methodologically inappropriate to claim that JT Entertainment caused academic improvement. Achievement was supported by overlapping contexts: school instruction, tutoring, family expectations, individual motivation, and community-based resources.

This point is especially important when revisiting the original article. The title referred to the "learning achievement" of K-Pop fans, and the conclusion described factors associated with increasing achievement.

However, the study did not report longitudinal grades, standardized test scores, or a comparison group of non-fans. Its evidence consists of qualitative accounts of support practices and perceived academic development. The revised article therefore reframes the outcome as *academic support and achievement motivation*. This is more faithful to the data while allowing a stronger sociological interpretation.

Recent work also makes this reframing timely. (Rahmadani et al., 2024) report a positive relationship between K-Pop culture and learning motivation among senior-high-school students, but motivational relationships should not be interpreted as evidence that fandom itself raises grades. (Seregina & Schouten, 2017) shows that fandom social capital can be converted into intention and agency in another domain. (Roslan et al., 2026) examine hedonic motivation and social-media use among K-Pop fans, illustrating how pleasure and community engagement shape participation. The present case adds a different dimension: an offline dance-cover community organized explicit educational support within the fandom itself.

The article addresses two questions. First, what social practices within JT Entertainment, school, family, and individual life were described as supporting the focal students' academic motivation and learning routines? Second, how can these practices be understood through achievement motivation, social capital, and informal-learning perspectives? The central argument is that fandom is not an educational variable with a fixed positive or negative effect. Its consequences are mediated by community organization. In this case, mentorship, peer study, negotiated time boundaries, family monitoring, and individual aspirations transformed a leisure community into a partial learning infrastructure.

Method

The study used a qualitative intrinsic case-study design (Yin, 2018). The case was JT Entertainment, a K-Pop dance-cover community located in the Ulak Karang area of Padang, Indonesia, with particular attention to five high-school student members. The community met regularly for dance practice and evaluation, creating an appropriate setting for observing interaction among student members, older members, mentors, and organizers.

Informants were selected purposively because the study required people who could provide different perspectives on the focal students' school lives and community participation. The total informant set comprised 27 people: five high-school student members of JT Entertainment, five teachers associated with the students, five parents, two siblings, eight other community members, one community founder, and one community mentor. This multi-perspective design allowed student accounts to be compared with observations from adults and peers.

Data collection combined active participant observation, repeated in-depth interviews, and documentation. Active participation meant that the researcher entered the community setting and took part sufficiently to observe routines, interaction, practice sessions, and informal exchanges from within the social environment. This was especially relevant because some educational support occurred during breaks, scheduling discussions, or conversations that would be difficult to capture through formal interviews alone.

Interviews were open and repeated. Participants were invited to explain how students balanced school and dance, how study support was organized, what parents expected, what motivated students, and how the community responded during examinations or other high-pressure school periods. The original research described the interviews as unstructured in-depth conversations. This allowed informants to raise forms of support that the researcher had not necessarily anticipated, such as subject mentoring and community-sanctioned temporary withdrawal from dance.

Documentation included community profiles and information about member activities. School achievement was discussed through participant accounts and contextual documentation, but the study did not report a consistent longitudinal dataset of grades for the five students. Accordingly, the revised analysis does not calculate academic change or classify students quantitatively as high achievers. Instead, it focuses on practices and perceptions that participants associated with maintaining or improving school performance.

Trustworthiness was addressed through triangulation of sources, techniques, and time. Student statements were compared with teacher, parent, sibling, and community accounts; interview data were compared with observation and documentation; and repeated contact provided opportunities to check consistency. These procedures are appropriate for a case in which different social settings may generate different accounts of the same student.

The original analysis followed the interactive model associated with Miles and Huberman: data collection, reduction, display, and conclusion drawing occurred recursively. For the revised article, the source material was recoded around forms of educational resource and regulation. Initial codes included subject mentoring, peer study, Korean-language learning, time withdrawal, classroom participation, extracurricular activity, private tutoring, parental conditions, confidence, competition, aspiration, and peer networks. These codes were grouped into four Results themes: community learning infrastructure, negotiated temporal boundaries, school-family reinforcement, and individual achievement orientation.

The Discussion interprets these themes using McClelland's achievement motivation, social capital, participatory culture, and informal-learning perspectives. This theoretical expansion does not change the original evidence. It provides a more sociological explanation of how a leisure community can generate resources that become relevant to schooling.

The study has clear boundaries. It is based on one community and five focal student members. The informant network is broader, but it does not provide a representative sample of Indonesian K-Pop fans. The data cannot establish that fandom causes academic achievement, and the original study does not provide objective before-after achievement scores. The case instead supports analytic propositions about conditions under which organized fandom may coexist with and support educational motivation.

Results and Discussion

Community-based mentoring converted peer networks into academic resources

The most distinctive finding was that JT Entertainment developed academic-support practices inside a community initially formed around dance. Older members and university students were identified as mentors for school subjects aligned with their educational backgrounds. Areas mentioned in the original data included mathematics, Indonesian, English, sociology, chemistry, economics, and biology. Students could ask mentors for help with assignments, either during breaks in dance practice or in separately arranged sessions.

This arrangement emerged from recurring behavior. Student members frequently used rest periods to ask older members about homework or school tasks. Because these questions became common and could disrupt other activities, the community formalized a learning structure. The founder selected or coordinated mentors, and members agreed on roles. A spontaneous form of peer assistance therefore became an institutionalized community resource.

The significance of this practice is not that community mentors replaced school teachers. Rather, they reduced the cost of seeking help. Students already knew the mentors through fandom, so academic questions could be asked within an existing relationship of trust. The community thus converted bonding relationships into educational support.

Some parents reportedly extended this trust beyond the community space by inviting mentors to tutor students at home. This is a strong indication of cross-context legitimacy. The fan community was not treated only as entertainment; at least some families recognized specific members as credible educational helpers.

Study groups and language classes made learning part of community participation

Mentorship was accompanied by study or discussion groups. Members arranged times and places, sometimes coordinating through group communication, to work with subject mentors. These sessions could bring several students and mentors together. The practice meant that studying was not necessarily an individual activity performed in opposition to fandom time. It could occur through the same peer network.

The community also organized Korean-language learning. The immediate purpose was connected to K-Pop performance and cultural interest: members wanted to understand language used by idols and reproduce aspects of performance more accurately. They practiced expressions in everyday community interaction and used Korean forms of address.

From an educational perspective, the Korean class illustrates interest-driven informal learning. The learning objective did not originate in a school curriculum. It emerged because language had use-value within the community. The motivational structure was therefore different from compulsory school learning. Members studied because linguistic competence increased cultural participation and performance authenticity.

This pattern resonates with (Urbar-Serrano & Hernández-López, 2024) finding that fandom participation can support online informal language learning. It also suggests a broader mechanism: identity-related interest can create sustained reasons to acquire knowledge. The direct academic transfer may vary, but the experience of organizing study, practicing vocabulary, and learning from peers can contribute to a learner identity.

Temporary withdrawal from dance established educational boundaries

A third community practice was the possibility of taking a temporary "vacuum" from dance activities. Student members could pause participation during school examinations, national tests, major university obligations, or serious family matters. The duration was communicated to the owner or community members, and the student returned after the high-priority period.

This rule is sociologically important because it contradicts a simple image of fandom as unlimited commitment. The community explicitly recognized competing obligations and created a legitimate mechanism for prioritizing them. A student did not have to choose permanently between belonging to the dance group and preparing for an examination. Temporary withdrawal protected both roles.

Such boundary management likely reduced role conflict. Without a legitimate pause, students might experience pressure to attend practice even when school demands were high, or might leave the community entirely. By institutionalizing flexibility, JT Entertainment made educational responsibility compatible with membership.

The finding also shows that community norms can shape the consequences of leisure participation. A fan group that penalizes absence during examinations would create a different relationship with schooling from one that authorizes academic leave. Fandom itself does not determine the outcome; organizational rules mediate it.

School participation and tutoring remained central

The focal students' academic practices extended well beyond JT Entertainment. The original observations describe students participating in classroom learning, asking questions, taking notes, discussing material with classmates, joining extracurricular activities, and attending private tutoring. These findings are crucial because they prevent an exaggerated interpretation of community effects.

Students appeared to use different learning strategies. Some were more likely to ask questions, while others preferred detailed note-taking. Tutoring provided additional formal or semi-formal support outside school hours. Extracurricular participation also offered spaces for achievement and social involvement.

The fan community therefore operated within an ecosystem of learning supports. Community mentoring may have supplemented formal school instruction, but it did not replace it. A student's academic trajectory reflected interaction among school, tutoring, peers, family, and personal effort.

Family support combined permission with accountability

Parents were described as supportive of positive activities but often attached conditions to participation. One recurring logic was that students could continue dance activities as long as school performance did not decline. If grades fell, extracurricular or community participation could be restricted until performance recovered.

This arrangement combined autonomy and accountability. Parents did not necessarily prohibit K-Pop fandom; instead, they negotiated a contract around responsibility. The student was permitted to pursue an interest while being expected to manage consequences. Such family regulation may have strengthened time-management motives because participation depended on demonstrating that school obligations were being met.

Family support also operated emotionally. Students wanted to make parents proud and described educational achievement as personally meaningful. These motives align with McClelland's need for achievement but also show that achievement is relational: success mattered partly because it was recognized by significant others.

Confidence, competition, and aspiration shaped individual motivation

The final theme concerns individual orientation. Participants described greater confidence, wider friendship networks, and a desire to compete or perform well. Dance-cover activity involved rehearsal, public performance, and comparison with other groups, experiences that may normalize repeated practice and performance under evaluation. Students also expressed ambitions connected to future success, including educational opportunities and, for some, aspirations related to Korea.

The data do not establish that dance participation produced confidence or that confidence caused higher grades. What they show is that students and surrounding informants connected fandom with a more active sense of self. Members saw themselves as capable of learning choreography, performing, studying languages, and pursuing school goals.

Achievement motivation was therefore embedded in multiple domains. A student could seek recognition in dance and school, not one instead of the other. The coexistence of these achievement arenas may help explain why competition was not necessarily experienced as academically harmful. For some participants, the community broadened the number of settings in which effort and improvement were valued.

Discussion

Fandom as social capital rather than a simple media effect

The central sociological implication is that the educational relevance of fandom lies less in K-Pop content itself than in the social relationships organized around it. JT Entertainment provided access to older peers, mentors, study partners, linguistic knowledge, and supportive norms. These are forms of social capital: resources available through membership in a network.

Ranieses (2024) similarly shows that K-Pop fandom social capital can be connected with entrepreneurial intention. The outcome in that study is different, but the mechanism is comparable. Fan networks can generate information, confidence, and perceived behavioral capacity that members mobilize in other domains. In the present case, school questions could be directed to trusted community members, turning relational proximity into academic assistance.

This interpretation also helps avoid technological determinism. K-Pop music or videos did not directly improve school learning. The relevant process was community organization. If the same students consumed K-Pop individually without mentorship, study groups, or time-management norms, the educational implications might be very different.

Participatory culture creates informal mentorship

(Jenkins & Ito, 2015) identify informal mentorship as a defining feature of participatory cultures. The JT Entertainment case offers a clear example. More experienced or educationally advanced members helped younger members, not because they were officially appointed school teachers but because the community made expertise visible and accessible.

This resembles a community of practice (Li et al., 2009). Newer members participate in shared activity, learn from more experienced members, and gradually acquire both technical skills and community knowledge. Dance is the obvious shared practice, but the same relational architecture can support other learning. Subject mentoring represents an extension of community practice into schooling.

(Mohd Jenol & Ahmad Pazil, 2022) found that K-Pop participatory culture can help young people discover talents. The present case suggests that talent development and academic support need not be separate. A community can value performance competence while also creating norms that protect educational responsibilities.

Learning motivation emerged from meaningful participation

The Korean-language class illustrates how interest can organize learning. Participants studied Korean because it increased access to valued cultural practices. This is consistent with informal-learning research showing that fandom can motivate language learning outside formal education (Urbar-Serrano & Hernández-López, 2024). The meaning of the activity was immediate: language helped members understand songs, communication, and performance conventions.

This differs from many school tasks in which the future usefulness of knowledge may be abstract. Interest-driven learning has a clear audience and purpose. The challenge for formal education is not to imitate fandom superficially but to recognize the motivational power of meaningful participation.

(Rahmadani et al., 2024) report a positive relationship between K-Pop culture and learning motivation among high-school students. The present qualitative findings provide a possible explanation for why such relationships may occur in some cases. Fandom can create goals, peers, and identities that make effort socially meaningful. However, this is conditional rather than universal.

Group identity can support and constrain

Strong fandom identity is not inherently positive. (Luu & Williams, 2025) show that social identity can contribute to conformity among K-Pop fans, and (Putri & Fazli, 2024) likewise examine conformity within fan communities. These findings are important because the same group mechanisms that support study can also create pressure.

JT Entertainment's academic norms appear to have directed some conformity toward responsible behavior. Members were expected to communicate when they needed leave, mentors were recognized, and educational obligations could justify temporary absence. In another community, norms might prioritize constant attendance, expensive consumption, or online activity at the expense of school.

The educational consequences of group identity therefore depend on norm content. Sociologists of education should ask not only how strongly students identify with a peer group, but what the group rewards, sanctions, and legitimizes.

Achievement motivation was socially scaffolded

McClelland's achievement motive remains useful for interpreting participants' desire to excel, compete, and make families proud. Yet the findings show that motivation did not operate as a purely internal trait. Students' motives were scaffolded by social conditions. Mentors made help available, parents attached conditions to participation, peers created comparison and support, and community rules protected examination time.

This suggests a synthesis between achievement motivation and social capital. A student may have a strong desire to succeed but still need access to resources and routines. Conversely, a resource-rich network may not produce academic effort if the student has no reason to use it. The case demonstrates how motive and structure intersect.

The role of confidence also fits this synthesis. Public dance performance may provide experiences of mastery and social recognition. These experiences can contribute to a broader sense of agency, although the data cannot establish direct transfer to academic self-efficacy. Future research could test whether confidence developed in fan performance predicts classroom participation or persistence after controlling for prior characteristics.

Temporal boundary management is an underappreciated mechanism

One of the most important findings is the "vacuum" rule. Educational discussions of extracurricular activity often focus on how many hours students spend outside school. Time quantity matters, but organizational flexibility may matter equally. JT Entertainment allowed members to reduce participation during high-stakes academic periods.

This mechanism transformed a potential role conflict into negotiated coexistence. Students could remain legitimate community members while temporarily prioritizing school. The rule also signaled that educational responsibility was part of good membership rather than evidence of weak fandom commitment.

This insight has implications beyond K-Pop. Sports clubs, gaming communities, religious youth groups, and arts organizations can either intensify school conflict or reduce it depending on how they structure attendance and deadlines. Educational outcomes are therefore partly shaped by the governance of extracurricular communities.

Implications for schools and families

Schools should avoid treating popular-culture communities only as risks. Teachers and counselors can ask what competencies and networks students develop through fandom. Dance-cover participation may involve practice discipline, teamwork, digital production, language exposure, event organization, and public performance. Recognizing these skills can create bridges between students' identities and formal learning.

At the same time, schools should not assume that all fandom participation is educational. The useful question is whether community practices support or undermine learning routines. Guidance can focus on time management, financial literacy, online safety, and balancing commitments rather than prohibition.

Families in the case used negotiated accountability. This appears more sophisticated than unconditional permission or blanket restriction. Parents allowed meaningful interests while retaining expectations about school responsibility. Such negotiation may support adolescents' development of self-regulation because they practice managing competing commitments.

Fan communities themselves can learn from the case. Formalizing peer mentoring, allowing examination leave, and valuing members' school achievements can strengthen the community's social legitimacy. Costello & Moore, (2007) and Chang & Park, (2019) show that fandom is capable of organized behavior extending beyond consumption; educational support is one possible extension.

Methodological implications and limitations

The strongest limitation is outcome measurement. The original study was framed around increasing learning achievement, but no systematic before-after grade dataset is presented. It is therefore impossible to determine whether the five students' grades actually increased after joining JT Entertainment, by how much, or relative to comparable non-members. The revised article deliberately avoids this causal claim.

Second, selection into the community is non-random. Students who join a dance-cover group may already be socially active, confident, motivated, or supported by families. These characteristics could explain both successful community participation and school performance. Third, retrospective accounts are vulnerable to positive storytelling. Participants may emphasize benefits because they want to defend a stigmatized interest.

The multi-informant design helps by providing teachers, parents, siblings, and peers as additional perspectives, but it does not remove selection bias. Future studies could compare several fan communities with different organizational cultures, follow students longitudinally, and use objective academic indicators alongside qualitative data.

Researchers should also examine negative and ambivalent cases. A balanced study would include students who struggle to manage fandom and school, members who leave communities, and parents who perceive conflict. Such cases would clarify the conditions under which social capital becomes educationally supportive rather than burdensome.

A further direction is to study the transfer of informal learning. Does learning Korean vocabulary through fandom increase general language-learning confidence? Do dance rehearsal routines transfer to study habits? Does event organization develop planning skills used in school projects? These are empirical questions, not assumptions.

Conclusion

The JT Entertainment case shows that a K-Pop dance-cover community can become more than a leisure space. Within this community, older members served as subject mentors, study groups were organized, Korean-language learning emerged from shared cultural interest, and students could temporarily withdraw from dance during examinations. These practices were reinforced by school participation, tutoring, family monitoring, and students' own achievement aspirations.

The findings do not demonstrate that K-Pop fandom caused higher academic achievement. The original evidence does not contain the longitudinal grades or comparison design needed for that conclusion. A more defensible interpretation is that the community provided social and organizational resources that participants perceived as supporting academic motivation and learning routines.

This distinction matters theoretically. Fandom should not be treated as a media exposure with a fixed educational effect. Its consequences depend on social organization. When group norms value responsibility, mentors are accessible, peer relationships carry useful knowledge, and time boundaries protect school obligations, a fan community can function as a partial learning infrastructure. When those conditions are absent, the same cultural interest may have very different consequences.

For sociology of education, the case demonstrates the value of looking beyond formal institutions. Young people's educational lives are distributed across schools, families, tutoring, peer groups, digital media, and leisure communities. Understanding achievement motivation therefore requires attention to the networks and identities through which learning becomes meaningful. In JT Entertainment, fandom and schooling were not simply competing worlds; they were negotiated domains connected by social capital, informal mentorship, and aspirations for achievement.

Declarations

Author contribution

Author 1: developed the main research idea and objectives, designed the research methodology, conducted data collection and investigation, performed the data analysis, and prepared the first draft of the manuscript. Author 2: contributed to the development and implementation of the research methodology, supported the data collection and investigation process, and reviewed and revised the manuscript to improve its academic quality, clarity, and structure. Author 3: provided input into the research concept and direction, supervised and guided the overall research process, reviewed and improved the manuscript, and contributed to obtaining financial support or research funding

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Conflict of Interest

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

Use of generative AI

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