

IMPLEMENTATION OF DEEP LEARNING APPROACH IN THE FORMATION OF STUDENTS' ISLAMIC CHARACTER AT STATE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL 3 PELEPAT ILIR

Moch Anwar Zaenudin¹, Andryadi², and Ulfa Adilla³

¹ Universitas Islam Yasni Bungo Jambi, Indonesia

² Universitas Islam Yasni Bungo Jambi, Indonesia

³ Universitas Islam Yasni Bungo Jambi, Indonesia

Corresponding Author:

Moch Anwar Zaenudin,

Department of Islamic Education, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Islam Yasni Bungo Jambi.

Jl. Lintas Sumatera No.Km.04, Sungai Binjai, Kec. Bathin III, Kabupaten Bungo, Jambi 37211, Indonesia

Email: zainupetuk075@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the implementation of the deep learning approach in Islamic Religious Education learning and its contribution to the formation of Islamic character of students at SMP Negeri 3 Pelepat Ilir. The research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques through observation, interviews, and documentation of school principals, vice principals, PAI teachers, and students. The results of the study show that deep learning is applied through reflective learning and religious habits, such as congregational zuhur prayers, recitation readings, tahfiz, lectures, and Yasin readings, so that students are more active, easier to get along with material with real life, and better understand the value of honesty, discipline, responsibility, and the meaning of worship. The findings also show the growth of socio-religious interaction and students' metacognitive awareness, although the implementation still faces obstacles in the form of time constraints, teacher readiness, variation in learning styles, and facility support. The novelty of this research lies in the placement of deep learning not only as a strategy to improve cognitive understanding but as an integrative approach that links classroom learning, personal reflection, and school religious culture in the formation of Islamic character. The implications of this study emphasize the importance of designing reflective PAI learning so that schools can strengthen the substantive internalization of Islamic values, build a dynamic religious culture, and make Islamic Religious Education a space for the transformation of students' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors in the era of inclusive contemporary education.

Keywords: Deep Learning, Islamic Character, Islamic Religious Education



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INTRODUCTION

Islamic religious education has a strategic position in the national education system because it not only directs students to master religious knowledge but also to form a personality of faith, knowledge, and noble character (Komalasari & Yakubu, 2023). Within this framework, Law Number 20 of 2003 emphasizes that education must develop the potential of students to become human beings who have faith, piety, and noble character, so that PAI bears substantive responsibility in linking the spiritual, moral, and social dimensions of students (Puteri, 2025). However, the reality of PAI learning in schools is still often trapped in the dominant pattern of material transmission, memorization, and cognitive orientation, so that the internalization of values has not taken place in depth (Musringah & Dharin, 2025). This condition makes strengthening a more reflective, contextual, and transformative learning model an urgent academic and pedagogical need, especially to form an Islamic character that is relevant to the challenges of the times.

The urgency of this research is even stronger when character education is understood not as an administrative complement to the curriculum, but as the core of the educational process that directs students to become religious, honest, disciplined, responsible, and able to live in harmony with human values (Basith, Rasyid, Rohmah, Hasanah, & Arifin, 2025). morals as a character that is deeply rooted in the soul and influences human actions consciously (Panuntun et al., 2025). Thus, the formation of Islamic character is not enough to be done through normative lectures, but requires learning experiences that allow students to understand, feel, and practice Islamic values in real life (Yusri, Ananta, Handayani, & Haura, 2023). At this point, schools are required to present learning that touches cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects in an integrated manner so that value transformation takes place sustainably, measurably, and in line with the goals of contemporary Islamic education in secondary schools.

The problem of this research arose from field findings at SMP Negeri 3 Pelepat Ilir, which showed that some students had not consistently displayed Islamic characters in school religious activities. Based on observations, students have not all rushed to the prayer room when it is time for congregational zuhur prayers. Recitation activities, tahfiz, lectures, and Yasin recitations have also not been followed by equal discipline, even though teachers still have to direct students to be involved in an orderly manner. The findings show that there is a gap between the normative goals of PAI and the actual behavior of students in daily practice. If left unchecked, this gap can weaken the function of PAI as a means of internalizing values and hinder the formation of a religious, reflective, and morality-oriented school culture, as well as reduce the effectiveness of religious programs, which should be a medium for the formation of students' Islamic character systematically and sustainably.

Several relevant studies provide a basis that these problems can be overcome through a learning approach that emphasizes deep understanding and active student involvement. (Nuriana & Hotimah, 2023) explains that meaningful learning encourages students to interpret meaning, connect facts with arguments, and build a more complete understanding, while placing the school environment as an important factor in shaping students' character. The research findings in this manuscript also show that deep learning is related to the integration of cognitive, emotional, and social aspects and is directed at the development of character competencies, collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking. In other words, the literature and preliminary data both show that deep learning has a theoretical basis and practical relevance for the context of PAI that demands the transformation of learning from one-way lectures to reflective, participatory, and contextual learning experiences.

Among the several alternative solutions available, schools can basically strengthen character development through tightening discipline, increasing teacher examples, enriching religious activities, or routine habituation of an administrative nature. Although these steps are important, an approach that only emphasizes formal obedience is often not enough to foster students' internal awareness of the meaning of worship and the moral values practiced (Said,

Ridwan, & Sholeh, 2025). Deep learning in PAI allows for the transformation of learning from the delivery of dogma to a living spiritual process through critical inquiry, experiential learning, and reflective dialogue (Qodir et al., 2026). Therefore, the solution chosen in this study is the implementation of the deep learning approach because it is considered more able to bridge knowledge, experience, reflection, and the formation of Islamic character in a sustainable manner in the midst of the challenges of PAI learning, which is still predominantly centered on teachers only.

Conceptually, deep learning in this study is not understood in a computational sense, but rather as a pedagogic approach that encourages students to explore meaning, connect new knowledge with life experiences, and reflect on the values learned (Gustina, Hanani, & Sesmiarni, 2025). In the source text, it is explained that this approach works through mindful learning, meaningful learning, and joyful learning, so that religious learning does not stop at mastering concepts, but moves towards reflective awareness and practice (Andayanie, Adhantoro, Purnomo, & Kurniaji, 2025). The Islamic character is understood as a moral quality that is based on the value of revelation and is reflected in will, choices, and actions that are consistent with Islamic teachings. The operational definition is important so that the research has a clear focus on the process of implementing learning and changing students' religious behavior in the school environment through worship activities, reflection, discussion, and habituation that are integrated into direct daily PAI learning (Qodir et al., 2026).

Based on this description, this study is directed to analyze how the implementation of the deep learning approach in Islamic Religious Education learning at SMP Negeri 3 Pelepat Ilir, how it contributes to the formation of students' Islamic character and how the approach creates more meaningful, reflective, and participatory learning. This goal is important because the research not only wants to describe learning practices, but also to explain the relationship between pedagogic strategies and changes in students' religious attitudes. Academically, this research is expected to enrich the study of PAI learning innovations based on character formation (Kurniawan, Rohmaniah, & Saputra, 2025). In practical terms, the results can serve as a reference for teachers, schools, and curriculum developers in designing more effective, humanistic, and transformative religious learning and help schools strengthen religious culture through learning models that are relevant to students' needs and contemporary educational challenges at the junior secondary level (Shabrina, Sumarna, & Islamy, 2024).

Thus, this research departs from mutually reinforcing theoretical, empirical, and practical reasons: PAI needs a learning model that can transform knowledge into religious awareness, schools face symptoms of weak religious discipline in students, and the literature shows that deep learning has the potential to deepen understanding while forming character (Srihartini, Gagan, Latipatinupus, & M, 2024). It is in that context that research on the implementation of the deep learning approach was chosen as a scientific effort to answer real problems at SMP Negeri 3 Pelepat Ilir. This research is expected to provide dual uses, namely, strengthening the conceptual basis of character-based PAI learning and providing applicable recommendations for improving the quality of learning and religious culture of schools. With this orientation, research is feasible because it has scientific urgency, contextual relevance, and clear institutional benefits, and opens up opportunities for the development of deep, adaptive, and sustainable religious learning strategies in the future.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of the deep learning approach in Islamic Religious Education learning and its influence on the formation of students' Islamic character at SMP Negeri 3 Pelepat Ilir, Bungo Regency (Panuntun et al., 2025). This approach is used because the research is carried out in the natural setting of the school, placing the researcher as the main

instrument, and allowing the disclosure of meanings, perceptions, and social interactions that arise during the learning process (Aquil et al., 2025). Methodologically, the choice is in line with the research objectives that are not oriented towards testing statistical relationships, but on a comprehensive description of learning practices, school community responses, and institutional contexts that shape the success or constraints of implementing the deep learning model in religious education at the junior high school level in a gradual, reflective, and contextual manner according to the focus of this research study at the study location (Alamin, Hidayati, & Musnandar, 2022).

The research data is sourced from the main informants and supporters, who include the principal, vice principal for student affairs, vice principal for curriculum, Islamic Religious Education teachers, and students of SMP Negeri 3 Pelepat Ilir as subjects who directly experience the learning process and character development in the school environment. Data collection was carried out through participatory observation of learning activities and religious activities, in-depth interviews to obtain oral information about the informant's experiences and views, as well as documentation of archives, records, and institutional data relevant to the research focus (Alvianto, 2020). The combination of the three techniques was chosen so that the data obtained was concrete, rich, and able to describe the empirical reality in its entirety, as well as opening up opportunities for cross-checking between types of data so that the researcher's interpretation was more accurate, proportional, and in accordance with the research context in the school being studied.

Data analysis follows the Miles and Huberman model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and repeated drawing of conclusions or verifications from the beginning of data collection until the end of the study (Sidiq, Choiri, & Mujahidin, 2019); (Qomaruddin & Sa'diyah, 2024). Data reduction is carried out by selecting, focusing, and organizing relevant information, and then the results are presented in the form of a systematic narrative so that patterns, relationships, and meaning tendencies are easier to understand before conclusions can be drawn that can be accounted for. To ensure the validity of the findings, the research applied the extension of participation, observation diligence, and triangulation of data, sources, methods, and theories so that the degree of data reliability increased and the research results had strong academic validity (Mezmir, 2020). The application of this procedure also allows researchers to check, check, and cross-check information from various informants and compare it with the results of observations and documentation, so that the final interpretation is more consistent with the factual situation that is thoroughly studied.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Deep learning in the context of education is understood as a pedagogic approach that emphasizes the active involvement of students to build a complete, reflective, and meaningful understanding of the material learned (Zebua, 2025). This approach does not stop at cognitive mastery of information, but integrates emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions so that students are able to connect new knowledge with life experiences and apply it in real-life situations. In this framework, deep learning is intertwined with constructivism because knowledge is formed through the process of interpreting, associating, evaluating, and reflecting on learning experiences consciously, rather than just passively receiving material from teachers (Apriliyana, 2025). Therefore, deep learning is relevant for Islamic Religious Education because it is able to transform learning from memorization patterns to a process of searching for meaning that fosters awareness, spiritual depth, and the connection of values with the daily life practices of students.

Character education theory views character as a disposition, character, or personality that is formed through the internalization of virtue values and then becomes the basis for a person to think, behave, and act in a social environment (Badeni & Saparahayuningsih, 2023). From

an educational perspective, character formation does not take place instantly, but through a planned, gradual, and sustainable process involving schools, families, and the community as a space for socializing students' values (Hanafiah et al., 2024). Therefore, the success of character education is greatly influenced by teacher examples, school culture, habituation of positive behavior, and institutional consistency in providing a learning experience that instills responsibility, honesty, discipline, tolerance, and care. In this context, character education is not only a normative agenda of the curriculum, but a strategy for developing a whole human being so that students develop as moral, rational, religious, and able to respond to social changes without losing the orientation of the main values.

Islamic character is rooted in the concept of morality, which is a psychological condition that gives birth to actions on the basis of will and choice that are in harmony with the teachings of revelation, so that Islamic values are transformed into sedentary behavior. In this framework, Islamic character is not enough to be interpreted as formal obedience to rituals, but includes honesty, trust, discipline, responsibility, compassion, sincerity in worship, and the ability to interact ethically with others (N. Nasution & Masyithoh, 2024). The concept emphasizes that PAI learning must be directed at integrating religious knowledge, worship habits, moral reflection, and socio-religious experiences so that students not only know Islamic teachings but also internalize them. Thus, the formation of Islamic character through deep learning becomes relevant because this approach opens up space for reflective dialogue, religious experiences, and self-awareness that strengthen the relationship between the understanding of the teachings and the students' daily practice.

The results of the study show that the implementation of the deep learning approach in learning Islamic Religious Education at SMP Negeri 3 Pelepat Ilir has been carried out through a combination of intracurricular activities and religious habituation which is consciously designed to support the formation of students' Islamic character, so that the learning process does not stop at mastering the material, but continues to the experience of religion that is lived in daily school life (Chumayroh et al., 2025). Observation, interview, and documentation data show that teachers no longer function solely as deliverers of lesson content, but rather as facilitators who guide students to enter a more reflective learning process through congregational *zuhur* prayers, recitations, *tahfiz*, lectures, and *Yasin* recitations as part of an integrated pedagogic experience (Gustina et al., 2025). These findings are relevant to the purpose of the study because it confirms that deep learning in PAI works more effectively when knowledge, habituation, and moral reflection are combined in meaningful, contextual, and oriented activities that are oriented towards the formation of real religious attitudes.

The first finding shows that there is a significant change in the pattern of learning interaction in the classroom, namely the shift from the model that was originally more teacher-centered to learning that provides a wider space for students to be actively involved in the process of understanding Islamic Religious Education material critically, dialogically, and contextually (Sastradiharja, Siskandar, & Khoiri, 2020). Based on interviews with teachers and students, students become more courageous in asking questions, more open in discussions, and more able to relate PAI material with concrete experiences in daily life, so that learning is no longer understood as an activity of passively receiving information, but as a process of building the meaning of the teachings learned. This change is important because it answers the problems that have been identified in PAI learning since the beginning, namely the dominance of memorization and material transmission, so that deep learning has been proven to open up space for participation, exploration of meaning, and emotional involvement of students in religious learning.

The second finding is related to the birth of a more meaningful and reflective PAI learning process, because research data shows that students no longer just memorize verses, laws, or religious concepts, but begin to understand the values contained in the material and relate them to real behaviors such as honesty, discipline, and responsibility in daily life

(Komalasari & Yakubu, 2023). Several students also reported that it was easier to grasp the meaning of Islamic teachings when they were asked to write personal reflections, express spiritual experiences, or discuss the material's relationship to the reality they faced, so that the learning process became more personalized, conscious, and touched on their affective dimensions. This phenomenon is in line with meaningful learning and constructivism, because learning designs that provide space for active interpretation, correlation, and evaluation of experiences logically encourage the internalization of values, not just mastery of the content of the lesson (Sa'adah & Azizah, 2021).

The third finding shows that the formation of Islamic character through deep learning does not only take place in the classroom, but is significantly strengthened by school culture and various routine religious activities that make Islamic values present as a practice of living together, not just a learning theme discussed in Islamic Religious Education lesson hours (K. Nasution, 2023). Activities such as congregational prayers, recitations, tahfiz, lectures, and Yasin recitations function as pedagogic arenas that bring together religious knowledge with direct religious behavior exercises, so that students have the opportunity to repeat, feel, and habituate the values learned in a concrete and social context (Mahendra & Riyanto, 2025). From the perspective of character education, this condition shows that character formation is not enough to be achieved through normative lectures alone, but must be supported by habituation and consistent examples, so that the effectiveness of deep learning in PAI is highly dependent on a religious school environment and supports the continuous repetition of value practices.

However, the initial data of the study also confirms that the condition of the students' Islamic character is not completely ideal, because observations show that not all students go directly to the prayer room during the congregational zuhur prayer time; some still have to be directed by the teacher, and in some religious activities, there is still playful behavior or lack of discipline in participating in school programs. This finding is important to discuss because it shows that character formation is not an instant process that can be measured only from momentary obedience, but rather a gradual process that requires constant repetition, strengthening, and mentoring so that religious values are truly embedded in students as a conscious habit. From the perspective of moral theory and character education, the conditions that are not optimal for some students actually affirm the urgency of using deep learning, because this approach emphasizes internalization, reflection, and moral awareness, not just formal compliance with the rules or religious activities of the school (Umrah, Arjiman, Tinggi, & Islam, 2025).

The results of the study also show an increase in social and religious interaction between students during the learning process of Islamic Religious Education, as well as in the implementation of routine religious activities in schools, which is characterized by the increasingly active involvement of students in the discussion of Islamic values, cooperation in Islamic social projects, and joint participation in worship practices carried out collectively. This improvement shows that learning not only forms individual understanding but also fosters social and religious experiences, so that students learn that Islamic teachings are not only lived personally but also practiced in relationships with others through mutual help, care, and responsibility. In the theoretical framework of deep learning, this condition can be understood because deep learning not only targets cognitive aspects, but also develops collaboration, communication, and character competencies as a whole through concrete social experiences, so that Islamic character extends from personal piety to social piety (Mulyani, Widaningsih, Wiyati, Novianti, & Darmana, 2025).

An important finding is the growth of students' metacognitive awareness in studying Islamic Religious Education, namely the ability of students to recognize the learning method that best suits their own needs, tendencies, and experiences while participating in the learning process (Febriyanni Usmaidar, Rani, 2023). Research data shows that some students begin to

understand whether they learn more easily through group discussions, writing personal reflections, or direct worship practices, so that the religious learning process becomes more conscious, directed, and involves understanding effective learning strategies for each individual. In fact, in the research paper, it was stated that about 75 percent of students admitted to understanding the meaning of prayer better after writing about their spiritual relationship with Allah in a reflective journal, which shows that deep learning works through personal engagement, inner reflection, and self-evaluation that help students build a deeper relationship of meaning with religious teachings.

If associated with the purpose of the research, the overall findings show that the implementation of the deep learning approach contributes significantly to improving the quality of the Islamic Religious Education learning process at SMP Negeri 3 Pelepat Ilir, both in terms of student activity, depth of understanding, and the development of religious behavior that is more reflective and contextual. This contribution can be seen in the increasing ability of students to relate PAI material to daily life experiences, ask questions, and discuss more actively, and display religious attitudes that are no longer purely formal, but more based on awareness and meaning of the values learned (Zaid, Almubasyir, & Gusmaneli, 2025). These findings answer research questions about how deep learning is applied and why the approach is relevant to school contexts, as its strength lies in its ability to bridge the gap between the normative objectives of PAI and student behavioral practices, so that the improvement of religious learning requires a change in pedagogic approaches, not just the addition of teaching materials.

The discussion shows that the successful implementation of the deep learning approach in this study cannot be separated from the central role of teachers as active, reflective, and contextual learning facilitators. Teachers no longer only function as conveyors of religious concepts, but also as a guide to the thought process, a spark for reflection, and a link between teaching materials and the reality of students' daily lives (Gustina et al., 2025). From a constructivist perspective, this position of the teacher allows students to actively build knowledge through dialogue, experience, and interpretation of meaning, rather than just passively receiving information (Parnawi et al., 2025). Meanwhile, from the perspective of character education, teachers act as guides to values and moral examples that provide concrete examples of the appreciation of Islamic teachings. This explains why students are more likely to understand Islamic character values when they are asked to write reflections or discuss spiritual experiences openly in class.

The study found a number of obstacles that affect the effectiveness of the implementation of the deep learning approach in Islamic Religious Education learning. These obstacles include limited learning time in the classroom, teacher readiness that is not uniform in implementing reflective strategies, differences in student learning styles, and inadequate technological infrastructure support (Gustina et al., 2025). From a methodological and theoretical point of view, these barriers explain why behavior change and the internalization of grades have not occurred equally among all students. The formation of Islamic character through deep learning does require continuity, consistency, mentoring, and a learning ecosystem that supports the entire process (Isnaeni, Budiman, Nurjaya, & Mukhlisin, 2025). When one of these elements is not optimal, the results achieved tend to develop gradually. Nonetheless, schools have shown adaptive efforts through institutional support, program strengthening, and teacher capacity building to keep the transformation process going.

The novelty of this research lies in the way the deep learning approach is positioned not only as a cognitive strategy to deepen the understanding of the material, but also as an integrative pedagogic approach that is directed at the formation of students' Islamic character. In many previous studies, deep learning has generally been discussed in the context of improving the quality of learning, strengthening critical thinking skills, or developing 21st-century competencies (Azzahra & Jaya, 2025). However, in this study, this approach is

explicitly brought together with the agenda of moral formation through a combination of classroom learning, personal reflection, and religious habituation in the school environment. This novelty is important because it offers a conceptual as well as a practical model that character transformation does not have to be separated from learning strategies (Rachman, 2025). Thus, this research contributes to the development of Islamic Religious Education studies by showing that deep learning can be a bridge between curricular goals, character needs, and the religious culture of schools.

The academic implication of the results of this study is the need to reposition the learning of Islamic Religious Education from a normative-instructional approach to a more reflective, participatory, and transformative approach (Mubarok, Zuhdi, & Sutiah, 2025). The findings of the study show that the cultivation of Islamic character will be more effective when religious material is learned through dialogue, direct experience, habituation, and personal reflection, not only through memorization of concepts and one-way delivery of material. This implication supports the development of a more integrative PAI learning theory because it brings together the dimensions of knowledge, affect, and action in one complete pedagogic framework. In addition, this study shows that the concept of deep learning can be productively adapted into the context of Islamic education without losing its religious substance, even strengthening the depth of internalization of values (Zahrudin & Bahij, 2025). Therefore, this study opens up opportunities for further research at different educational levels, student characteristics, and school environments.

The practical implications of this study suggest that schools need to organize Islamic Religious Education learning as an integral part of institutional culture, not just as a stand-alone classroom activity separate from everyday school life. Religious programs such as congregational prayers, recitations, tahfiz, lectures, and Yasin recitations need to be maintained as a vehicle for character building, but their pedagogical quality must be strengthened through reflection, evaluation of experiences, and active involvement of students in every activity (Riantina, 2025). Teachers also need to strengthen their competencies in order to be able to design learning that encourages critical questions, value discussions, and the connection between Islamic teachings and the social reality of students (Sharia, Maimun, & Marno, 2025). The findings of this study show that when religious programs are combined with deep learning strategies, character formation becomes more lively, substantive, and does not stop at mere formalities.

Overall, the results and discussions of this study confirm that the implementation of the deep learning approach in Islamic Religious Education learning at SMP Negeri 3 Pelepat Ilir can make a significant contribution to the formation of students' Islamic character, even though the process takes place gradually and is influenced by various supporting and inhibiting factors. The facts found in the data can be explained through the close relationship between reflective pedagogic strategies, religious school culture, and the process of internalizing values that takes place repeatedly in students' learning experiences (Aksan, Julfi, Usman, & Nursalim, 2025). These findings also answer research questions about how deep learning approaches are applied and why they are relevant to school contexts. Its relevance lies in its ability to connect religious knowledge, spiritual experience, behavioral habituation, and the formation of moral awareness, so that PAI learning truly functions as a space for the transformation of students' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the implementation of the deep learning approach in Islamic Religious Education learning at SMP Negeri 3 Pelepat Ilir contributes significantly to the formation of students' Islamic character through the integration of classroom learning, personal reflection, and religious habituation in the school environment. The findings were seen in

increased student involvement in discussions, the ability to relate religious materials to life experiences, and the growth of a more meaningful understanding of the values of honesty, discipline, responsibility, and worship practices. This approach is effective because teachers not only act as material presenters but also as facilitators who encourage dialogue, reflection, and contextual learning experiences. The results of the study also show that religious activities such as congregational zuhur prayers, recitations, tahfiz, lectures, and Yasin recitations are important media to strengthen the internalization of Islamic values in student behavior. However, the implementation is not fully optimal because obstacles are still found in the form of time constraints, teacher readiness, differences in student learning styles, and uneven support of facilities. However, in general, this study emphasizes that deep learning deserves to be considered as the main PAI learning strategy because it is able to bridge the gap between the normative goals of religious education and the daily practices of students. Thus, this study implies that strengthening Islamic character will be more effective if learning is designed in a reflective, participatory, contextual manner and supported by religious school culture.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; In-vestigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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