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An Elaboration on the School Well-being Structural Model based on Emotional Regulation, Test Anxiety, and Academic Self-Efficacy: The Mediating Role of Academic Emotions

Mehrdad Salimi[1], Houshang Jadidi[2*], Zekrollah Morovati[3], Ali Taghvaei[4]

1- Ph.D. Student of Educational Psychology, Sanandaj Branch, Islamic Azad University, Sanandaj, Iran

2- Department of Educational Psychology, Sanandaj Branch, Islamic Azad University, Sanandaj, Iran

3- Department of Psychology, University of Zanjan, Zanjan, Iran

4- Department of Psychology, Yasouj University, Yasouj, Iran

* Corresponding author's Email: jadidi.hooshang@yahoo.com

Abstract: The present study examines the structural relationship of school well-being based on emotional regulation, test anxiety, and academic self-efficacy, considering students' academic emotions as a mediating variable. The study was conducted as a descriptive-analytical work with a correlative nature. The sample group consisted of 384 male 9th-grade students in Islam Abad Gharb (Kermanshah Province, Iran). The participants were selected through multiple cluster sampling. The required data were gathered using the following five questionnaires: Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (Gross and John, 2003), Test Examination Questionnaire (Friedman, Bendas-Jacob's, 1997), Academic Self-Efficacy Questionnaire (Jinks & Morgan, 1999), Academic Emotions Questionnaire (Pekran, 2006), and School Well-Being Questionnaire (Konu et al., 2002). The collected data were analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM). Overall, the results indicated that emotion regulation (r = 0.40), test anxiety (r = -0.36), and academic self-efficacy (r = 0.31) had a significant and direct effect on school well-being. In addition, the mediating role of academic emotions in the relationship of school well-being with emotional regulation, test anxiety, and academic self-efficacy was confirmed (P < 0.05). As can be inferred from these data, teachers, school principals, and educational officials can prepare the grounds for enhancing emotional regulation, academic self-efficacy, and test anxiety reduction. As a result, these factors can improve the students' well-being.

Keywords: Test anxiety; School well-being; Emotional regulation; Academic self-efficacy; Academic emotions

Introduction

The perception and improvement of optimum life experiences of the youth are highly important in different fields. Schools are among the key fields to facilitate lifetime growth, optimum life experiences, and public well-being. Therefore, improving students' well-being at school is a critical objective for school officials (Ghanbari Talab et al., 2019). School well-being is a multi-aspect construct featuring a set of positive specifications such as educational achievement, better coping skills with hardships, physical and mental health, and healthier and satisfactory interpersonal relationships (Loft and Walfogel, 2021). School well-being of students motivates educational and learning engagement in different fields of education and, thus, results in positive educational outcomes (Kaya and Erdem, 2021). In addition to more efficient educational achievements, well-being leads to higher coping and flexibility skills in the face of hardships, physical and psychological health, and satisfactory interpersonal relationships (Gonzalez et al., 2021).

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School well-being is an integral part of humans' emotional and social aspects. This issue is rooted in experiences such as positive emotions, happiness, health, self-actualization, social relationships, and satisfaction with life (Nourali et al., 2018). By improving students' positive emotional experience and social knowledge, emotional regulation results in enhanced school well-being (Haghbin & Sheik-al-Islami, 2019). Emotional regulation involves all the conscious and unconscious approaches used for improving, preserving, and attenuating emotional, behavioral, and cognitive elements of an emotional response. Emotional responses provide valuable information about one's experience with others. The available information enables people to learn how to deal with emotions and express emotional experiences using words. In addition, it helps them recognize which approach is the best to answer emotions and how to treat others with special emotions (Tamir, 2021). The ability to regulate emotions teaches individuals how to show sympathy and empathy to themselves and others. Sympathy and mindfulness without prejudice modify and enhance one's beliefs and experiences and change their attitude about themselves and their abilities, thereby improving their school well-being (Nourali et al., 2018). Greenier, Derakhshan, and Fathi (2021) highlighted the positive role of emotion regulation in improving school well-being. Also, Nourali et al. (2018) reported a positive relationship between emotion regulation skills and school well-being.

School well-being is a multi-aspect construct rooted in the interaction of several factors, including environmental, personal, and individual factors. Test anxiety is one of the individual and personality factors in school well-being (Steinmayr et al 2018). This type of anxiety is a general term to refer to a specific type of anxiety or social fear that makes one doubt their capabilities. Such anxiety degrades one's ability to face situations like tests and situations in which the individual is evaluated and requires problem-solving. Therefore, a student with test anxiety is like someone who knows the answers but the anxiety stops them from representing their knowledge during the test as they should (Ewell, Josefson, and Ballen, 2022). In addition to an unpleasant experience, test anxiety affects attitudes, motivations, and beliefs. As a result, individuals fail to employ their skills and capabilities in social interactions with other students at school, thereby declining the school well-being of these individuals (Ziaie and Alizadeh, 2019). These studies also showed that test anxiety had a negative impact on the sense of belonging to the school and degraded school well-being. Steinmayer et al. (2018) argued that test anxiety was one of the factors in school well-being.

Other factors in school well-being are the active role of students and personal factors (Behrouzi et al., 2018). In his modified theory, Bandura argued that personal factors in school well-being have several main aspects, and among them, self-efficacy beliefs are the basis of individual agency (Bandura and Hull, 2018). Self-efficacy refers to one's perceptions and beliefs about their capabilities to learn or have a specific level of performance. Self-efficacy is the belief about what an individual sees themselves capable of doing. The concept is one of the subcategories of personal capability and a positive human characteristic with a major role in the face of stresses and threats in life and their negative impacts (Ahmadi et al., 2019). With higher self-efficacy, learners can achieve higher educational performance.

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Hence, they will have a higher capability and resilience than those with lower self-efficacy (Trautner and Schwinger, 2020). The sense of self-confidence, self-respect, and self-efficacy improves students' motivation to perform growth tasks and safely overcome educational challenges. These students do not retreat even in the face of failure and instead try to find new ways to achieve success and higher performance, thereby improving school well-being (Behrouzi et al., 2018). Supporting these findings, Bayanfar, Vafaienejad (2021) showed that school well-being could be predicted based on educational vitality and self-efficacy, with students' educational stress as a mediating variable. Moreover, Matteucci and Soncini (2021) emphasized academic self-efficacy's positive and significant role in students' educational well-being.

Basically, school well-being is a multi-aspect construct that cannot be examined using a simple linear structure. Therefore, academic emotions were considered a mediating variable to understand better the relationship between school well-being with emotional regulation, test anxiety, and academic self-efficacy. Based on theoretical and research evidence, test anxiety and academic self-efficacy are strongly related to educational achievements and outcomes. Accordingly, they play a key role in psychological well-being and social-cognitive functions. In fact, they lead to higher motivation and affect the educational achievement of learners by affecting self-regulation and other-regulation (Sheikh-al-Islami & Ghanbaritalab, 2018). Academic emotions have a direct relationship with educational activities and results. Therefore, the emotions pertinent to educational activities are categorized as academic emotions. The joy of learning, the tiredness of class activities, and the failure and hardships of hard home assignments are examples of the emotions pertinent to educational activities (Pekrun, 2006). Emotions in cognitive, motivational, and behavioral aspects can have a major role in nurturing positive relationships at school, improving students' motivation, attenuating behavioral problems, and enhancing educational achievement, academic self-efficacy, and educational engagement (Sheikh-al-Islami & Ghanbaritalab, 2018). Hajizade and Zeinali (2019) showed that positive educational emotion and their aspects (i.e., joy, hope, and pride) and negative educational emotion and its aspect (i.e., anger, anxiety, shame, hopelessness, and fatigue) has a significant relationship with mental health and educational well-being. In addition, Sheikh-al-Islami and Ghanbaritalab, 2018 (2018) showed that academic emotions (hope, sin, and shame) had a considerable role in students' school well-being.

Regarding the mentioned studies, educational life can be considered among the most important and constructive stages of life that affect mental health and efficient learning in the future (Kaya and Erdem, 2021; Gonzalo et al., 2021). Furthermore, school well-being is related to several positive outcomes, such as a sense of satisfaction and happiness, a sense of efficacy, success, and educational achievement. Therefore, identifying the factors that predict school well-being can improve mental health, happiness, and vitality in students, teachers, and other school officials. The outcome can be a decrease in stress and higher mental health, sharpness, and energy to carry out activities in an educational environment. This outcome highlights the imperativeness of studies in the field of school well-being. In addition, studies on school well-being are one of the positive factors in the face of challenges, educational obstacles, and educational achievement. Since this topic is a nascent study field in Iran, the school well-being rate in

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Iran is at a low level (Ahmadi et al., 2019). In addition, according to previous studies, emotional regulation (Greenier et al. 2021), test anxiety (Steinmayr et al., 2018), academic self-efficacy (Matteucci and Soncini, 2021), and academic emotions (Hajizade and Zeinali, 2019) have a positive impact on school well-being. Therefore, the present study is an attempt to examine a causal model of school well-being based on the elements of emotional regulation, test anxiety, and academic self-efficacy with educational emotion as a mediator variable.

Material and Methods

The study was carried out as a correlative work through structural relationship modeling. The study population consisted of male 9th-grade students in the academic year 2020-2021. Female students were not included in the study was the necessity of filling out the questionnaire in the presence of the authors, but girl high school principals did not allow conducting the study at their schools. The study was based on structural equation modeling (SEM). In total, 384 participants entered the study as the minimum sample size required for this research. The required permissions were collected from the Sanandaj Branch of Azad Islamic University. Then, the authors made the required arrangements with the Education Organization of Islam Abad Gharb City to conduct the study at boy high schools. Afterward, six schools were selected through a multi-step cluster sampling among junior boy high schools. Two classes were selected from each school, and 32 participants were selected from each class. The authors briefed the school principals and made arrangements with schools to perform the studies. Parents of the selected students were invited to a meeting arranged by the school principals. After briefing the parents about the study and its objectives, those interested in the study were asked to sign an informed consent form. Four of those who signed the consent form left the study for personal reasons. Afterward, the questionnaires were provided to the students, and 380 completed questionnaires were returned to the authors. The participants received information about the study to observe the research ethics. Also, they were assured of the confidentiality of their information and that their data will be only used for research purposes. Participants' identity was not recorded such that to respect their privacy. In the end, all the participants signed an informed consent form. Research tools are explained in the following sections:

Emotion regulation questionnaire: The questionnaire was developed by Gross and John (2003) with two subscales of reassessment with six items and suppression with four items. The participants answered the items based on a Likert's seven-point scale (very disagree = 1, …, highly agree = 7). Gross and John reported internal correlation for reassessment and suppression are 0.79 and 0.73, respectively (Gross and John, 2003). Lotfi et al. (2019) measured the validity and reliability of the tool in Iranian children and juveniles. According to these authors, Cronbach's alpha for the whole tool is 0.81, while it is 0.79 and 0.68 for reassessment and suppression subscales, respectively, indicating the tool's high psychometric specifications.

Test anxiety questionnaire: This 23-item questionnaire was developed by Friedman and Bendas-Jacob in 1997. The participants answer each item by choosing one of the four alternatives for each item

(completely disagree = 0; disagree = 1; agree = 2; and completely disagree = 3). The questionnaire contains three subscales: social humiliation, cognitive error, and stress. The score of each subscale is measured by calculating the total score of the items pertinent to that subscale. After calculating the total score of the whole tool, the higher the score, the lower the test anxiety, and vice versa. In this questionnaire, Cronbach's alpha for social humiliation, cognitive error, and stress are 0.91, 0.85, and 0.81, respectively (Friedman and Bendas-Jacob, 1997). Shabazian Khounigh and Hasani (2017) obtained Cronbach's alpha of the tool equal to 0.86, indicating the tool's higher reliability.

Academic self-efficacy questionnaire: The tool, designed by Jinks and Morgan (1999), has 30 items and three subscales, namely talent (10 items), texture factor (10 items), and coordinated attempt factor (10 items). The items are designed based on Likert's four-item scale from one to four. According to Morgan Jinks, the entire questionnaire's reliability is 0.82, while it is 0.78, 0.66, and 0.70 for the talent, attempt, and texture subscales, respectively (Jinks and Morgan, 1993). Sayadi and Soleiman (2022) obtained Cronbach's alpha for the whole tool, talent, texture, and attempt as 0.79, 0.76, 0.68, and 0.64, respectively.

Academic emotions questionnaire: The questionnaire, introduced by Pekran (2006), shows the subscales of class emotions (e.g., enjoying the class, hope, anger, anxiety, and fatigue). The tool has 50 items designed based on Likert's five-point scale (1 = lowest academic emotions, …, 5 = highest academic emotions). Pekran (2006) obtained Cronbach's alpha of 0.86 for this tool and reported that the internal correlation for the three subscales was acceptable. Hayat et al. (2017) in Iran supported the acceptable correlation of the questionnaire and reported Cronbach's alpha for the subscales between 0.78 and 0.85.

School well-being questionnaire: This seven-item tool was designed by Konu, Rimpela, and Lintonen (2002) with subscales of school condition (two questions), social relationships at school (two questions), self-actualization at school (1 question), and school conditions (2 questions). The questions are designed as multiple-alternative questions. Konu et al. (2002) reported that the internal consistency of the questions was acceptable and obtained Cronbach's alpha for school condition, social relationship, self-actualization, and health condition equal to 0.84, 0.62, 0.81, and 0.81, respectively. Bayanfar and Vafaienejad (2021) obtained Cronbach's alpha of the tool equal to 0.75.

In the present study, the collected data were analyzed using the SEM method in SPSS and LISREL software packages.

Results

Among the 380 male 9th-grade students living in Islam Abad Gharb who participated in the study, 22.7% were 14, 36.7% were 15, 16.9% were 16, 12.5% were 17, and 11.2% were 18 years old. Most students (37.2%) stated that their mid-term GPA was higher than 18 out of 20, and a small share of them (2.3%) had a GPA of less than 14 out of 20. In addition, the GPA of 20.5% of the students was less than 16 out of 20.

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Table 1. Correlation coefficient matrix of the variables

Variables	Mean	Standard deviation (SD)	School well-being	Emotion regulation	Educational emotion	Academic self-efficacy	Test anxiety
School well-being	20.86	4.34	-				
Emotion regulation	27.64	3.57	0.39**	-			
Educational emotion	117.63	3.56	0.39**	0.42**	-		
Academic self-efficacy	85.52	3.93	0.35**	0.29**	0.41**	-	
Test anxiety	26.4	3.67	-0.38**	-0.45**	-0.51**	0.33**	-

** P< 0.001

Table 1 lists the mean, standard deviation, and coefficient of determination (R^2) of school well-being, emotional regulation, educational emotion, academic self-efficacy, and test anxiety. The table shows the mean scores of school well-being (20.86), emotional regulation (27.64), academic emotions (117.63), academic self-efficacy (85.52), and test anxiety (26.4). As can be seen, the highest correlation is obtained for educational emotion (-0.57), and the lowest correlation is obtained for the relationship between test anxiety and educational emotion (-0.33).

Path analysis was conducted in LISREL to test the mediating role of academic emotions between school well-being and emotion regulation, test anxiety, and academic self-efficacy. Figs. 1 and Table 3 illustrate the results of the main hypothesis test through path analysis. Also, Fig. 1 exhibits the correlation coefficient (R) of the proposed causal relationship between school well-being and emotional regulation, test anxiety, and academic self-efficacy, with academic emotions as a mediator.

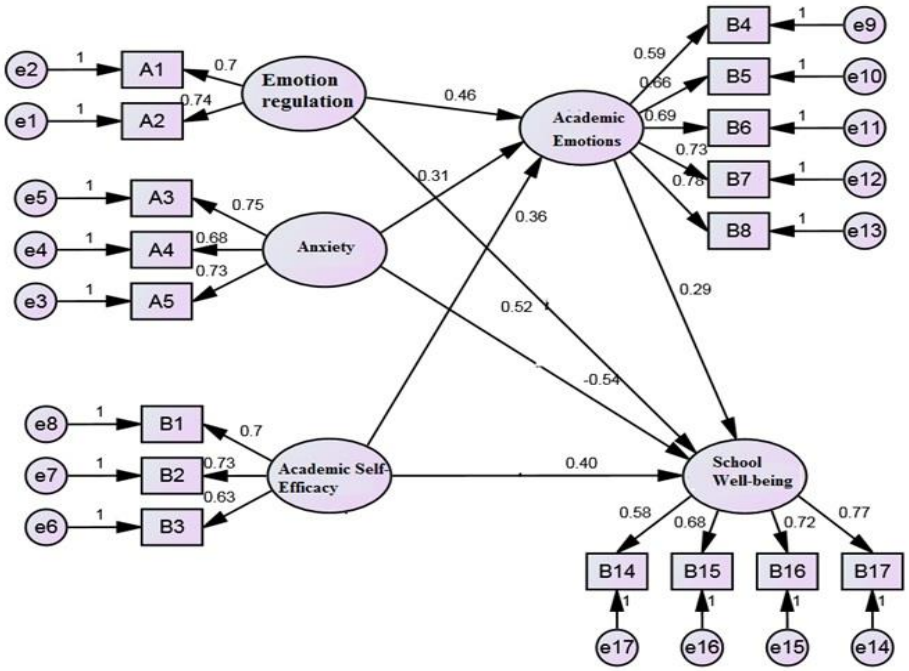

Fig. 1. The structural relationship of school well-being with emotional regulation, test anxiety, and academic self-efficacy with academic emotions as a mediator in standard estimate mode

Table 2. The goodness of fit indices of the study model

RMSEA	$\frac{x2}{df}$	GFI	AGFI	CFI	NFI	Sig
0.058	2.45	0.95	0.92	0.94	0.91	0.001

As listed in Table 2, the goodness of fit indices of the model is at a desirable level. Academic emotions in this model are considered mediating variables between school well-being and emotional regulation, test anxiety, and academic self-efficacy.

Table 3. Direct and indirect effects of research variables on each other

Path effects	Direct effect	t-value	Indirect effect	Total effect	Sig.
Emotion regulation – school well-being	0.40	4.22	0.25	0.65	P<0.05
Test anxiety - school well-being	-0.36	-3.12	-0.12	-0.48	P<0.05
Academic self-efficacy – school well-being	0.31	2.45	0.11	0.42	P<0.05

As listed in Table 3, emotional regulation (0.40), test anxiety (-0.36), and academic self-efficacy (0.31) have a direct and significant effect on school well-being. Besides, the indirect effect of emotion regulation (0.25), test anxiety (-0.48), and academic self-efficacy (0.42) on school well-being is significant. Furthermore, the total effect of emotional regulation, test anxiety, and academic self-efficacy on school well-being is statistically significant.

Discussion

This study proposes a structural model of school well-being based on emotional regulation, test anxiety, and academic self-efficacy, with academic emotions as a mediating variable. The results of the data analysis revealed that emotional regulation had a positive and significant effect on school well-being. These findings are consistent with those reported by Nikkhah and Yusefi (2021), Nourali et al. (2018), and Greener et al. (2021). As an interpretation of these results, emotional regulation skills enable individuals to sympathize with themselves and others. In this respect, one's beliefs and experiences are modified by sympathy, mindfulness, and unbiased and non-prejudiced attitudes. In addition, attitudes toward one's abilities are also changed, improving their well-being at school (Nourali et al., 2018). In fact, when students learn emotional regulation skills, they can manage their emotions and actions, thereby enhancing their positive emotions toward school assignments and other aspects of life. Individuals in this condition feel a higher level of peace and better handle challenging life events. They also can change their attitude toward themselves and their capabilities and enjoy a higher level of school well-being (Nikkhah and Yusefi, 2021).

The results also indicated that test anxiety negatively and significantly affected school well-being. This finding is consistent with Ziaie and Alizadeh (2019), Tahoon (2021), and Steinmayer et al. (2018). As an explanation for these results, test anxiety is a key factor in restlessness, fatigue, muscle cramps, and stomach aches in children before a test. Thus, test anxiety is a negative emotional reaction to the situation. This emotion is characterized by a subjective feeling of stress, concern, and autonomous nervous system arousal. Also, it has a destructive and inhibiting role in students' mental health and

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educational performance. Therefore, test anxiety can affect many fields of students' lives and their emotional and cognitive elements (Steimayer et al., 2018). In fact, test anxiety makes an individual obsessively think about the test and its consequences such that they lose the clues in their memory of academic content. An individual with test anxiety cannot retrieve information in their memory due to the anxiety. Excessive emphasis on the score and the pressure of parents, teachers, and the education system on educational performance increase test anxiety and pressure. With test anxiety, students are deprived of peace of mind and fail to use proper strategies to fight educational challenges and problems. As a result, school well-being decreases in these students (Ziaie and Alizadeh, 2019). In short, test anxiety negatively affects school well-being through intensified worries and distractions. Hence, they have problems in remembering materials, lack of energy, restlessness, stress, irritability, speech problems, motor disorientation, higher heartbeat rate, hypertension, and mouth dryness (Tahoon, 2021). In addition, the results indicated that academic self-efficacy had a positive and significant effect on school well-being. This finding is consistent with Bayanfar and Vafaienejad (2021), Barikan etal. (2017), and Matucci and Sonsini (2021).

Students with higher self-efficacy believe they can successfully face challenges and hard conditions. Since they expect success in their attempt to solve challenges, they may show perseverance and high performance. These students tend to have a low level of doubt in their capabilities compared to students with lower self-efficacy. The former sees problems as challenges rather than threats. Therefore, they search for new situations thoroughly because, with high self-efficacy, they have less fear of failure, a higher level of wish, and a high capability to solve problems and imagine new solutions. These characteristics convince students not to give up easily and make them worthy of teachers' support and motivation. They feel more pride and happiness at school and thus have higher school well-being (Bayanfar and Vafaienejad, 2021). One may say that academic self-efficacy enhances learning motivation, resilience against challenges and educational obstacles, and educational performance. Therefore, it has a positive effect on the school's well-being of students (Matuccie and Sonsini, 2021).

The results indicated that academic emotions have a mediatory role between emotional regulation, test anxiety, academic self-efficacy, and school well-being. Our findings are consistent with those of Hajizadeh and Zeinali (2019) and Sheikh-al-Islami and Ghanbaritalab (2018). Positive academic emotions such as joy, hope, and price motivate students to have higher perseverance for educational matters and employ resilience techniques to solve these problems. Consequently, they feel a higher level of competency and self-confidence at school and see educational challenges and problems as exciting situations without stress and anxiety. This situation supports school well-being (Hajizadeh and Zeinali, 2019). On the other hand, negative academic emotions such as anger, anxiety, shame, hopelessness, and fatigue cause hopelessness and hesitation. These students have lower educational motivation and experience a higher level of helplessness. Accordingly, they see no point in trying harder and feel no desire to fight challenges and problems at school. Such educational burnout degrades school well-being (Sheikh-al-Islami & Ghanbaritalab, 2018). Therefore, positive academic emotions positively impact

school well-being by improving positive emotions and adaptive behaviors and increasing flexibility in the face of educational problems and obstacles. In addition, negative academic emotions have a negative impact on school well-being through increasing negative emotions, self-blame because of educational failure, and helplessness and hopelessness in the face of problems and challenges (Hajizadeh and Zeinali, 2019).

One of the limitations of the present study was the self-report nature of the research tools and the lack of control over intervening and adjusting variables. In addition, the study population was limited to male 9th-grade students in Islam Abad Garb, limiting the findings' generalizability. Future works are advised to focus on the adjusting effects of variables like gender, characteristics, education level, and socioeconomic classes on the variables studied here. Moreover, similar studies on boys and girls in other cities are recommended to achieve extensive findings. Future works may also encompass variables such as educational stress, educational engagement, educational negligence, and educational perfectionism in school well-being. Based on the obtained results, it is recommended to provide consultation services to students regarding emotional regulation and check their abilities in programming and personal/educational discipline teachers. Furthermore, it is possible to attenuate test anxiety in students by examining their negative and positive emotions and their abilities to control them and identifying symptoms of self-empowerment via direct observation at school, classroom, and home. Finally, enhancing school environments for students to extend friendships in students, increasing field trip opportunities and camping, supporting physical activities, discovering one's capabilities and advantages in life, meditation, experiencing the joy of loving others, and finding and changing useless beliefs all can enhance school well-being.

Conflict of interest: The authors state no conflict of interest in the study.

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