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Islamic Religious Education Teachers' Strategies in Cultivating Spiritual Literacy among Students

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Abstract

This study is motivated by the critical role of strengthening students' spiritual literacy as a core objective of Islamic education. Islamic education teachers play a central role in nurturing religious habits, modelling spiritual behavior, and implementing reflective and contextual learning strategies. To analyze how religious habituation, Islamic education teacher exemplarity, and reflection-based learning strategies collectively contribute to strengthening students' spiritual literacy. Employing a qualitative descriptive method, the research collects data through observations of school religious activities, interviews with teachers and students, and documentation of school religious programs. The findings reveal that strategies such as daily Qur'an recitation (*tadarus*), collective prayers, congregational Dhuha prayers, and Qur'anic literacy programs effectively enhance students' discipline in worship and spiritual awareness. Teacher exemplarity and active student participation further reinforce the internalization of religious values, while reflective and humanistic learning approaches enable students to cognitively understand, internalize, and apply these teachings in daily life. The study concludes that religious habituation, teacher role modelling, and reflective learning are essential in strengthening spiritual literacy, emphasizing the need for institutional support and innovative, sustainable Islamic education programs.

Keywords

Islamic Education, Reflective Learning, Religious Habits, Spiritual Literacy, Teacher Exemplary Behavior.

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of declining spiritual values among students is a critical issue in modern education. The rapid development of technology, globalization, and the dominance of entertainment culture often divert students' attention from spiritual dimensions toward materialistic orientations and instant gratification (Zahrah et al., 2025). Education, however, should not focus solely on intellectual intelligence but also on character development, morality, and spiritual awareness. Field observations indicate that low spiritual awareness impacts negative behaviors, such as decreased politeness, low empathy, and increased juvenile delinquency. In this context, Islamic Religious Education (*Pendidikan Agama Islam*/PAI) teachers play a vital role as moral guides, spiritual exemplars, and value mentors for students in schools (Salmah et al., 2025).

Various studies have shown that PAI teachers contribute significantly to fostering students' religious and spiritual literacy through diverse learning strategies and religious habituation (Sahrowi et al., 2025). Sawitri (2020) found that a 15-minute reading habit before lessons, combined with the use of social media and libraries, strengthened students' religious literacy. Anisa (2022) reported that religious practices such as greetings, Asmaul Husna recitation, *kultum*, and Friday *infaq* positioned PAI teachers as frontline agents in spiritual strengthening. Research by Mutmainah (2018) and Isnaeni and Maya (2022) highlighted the importance of PAI teachers in exemplifying, motivating, inspiring, and evaluating students' spiritual development. This underscores the strategic role of PAI teachers in shaping students' spirituality.

This study draws on humanistic educational theory, which emphasizes holistic human development, cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions (Sultani & Alfitri, 2023). Maslow (1954) asserts that the pinnacle of human needs is self-actualization, the ability to reach one's highest potential and a spiritually meaningful life (Vázquez-Colunga & Pando-Moreno, 2017). Anisa (2022) emphasizes student-centered learning, where teachers act as facilitators helping students discover values, meaning, and life goals through meaningful learning experiences (Jenkins & Penafiel, 2018). Consequently, PAI teachers' strategies go beyond delivering content to guide students to understand, internalize, and express spiritual values in daily life.

Although many studies have discussed PAI teachers' roles in character and religiosity development, research focusing specifically on spiritual literacy at the junior high school level remains limited (Affandi, 2025). Studies on PAI teachers' strategies in local contexts, such as SMPN 1 Ciawigebang, are also scarce. Previous research often emphasizes general religious learning without analyzing in depth the relationship between teacher strategies, school environment, and students' spiritual literacy achievement (Ikhsan & Rafi, 2025). Therefore, there is a need for more applicable, comprehensive, and contextual research on PAI teachers' strategies in fostering spiritual literacy at the junior high school level. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on spiritual literacy as a form of character strengthening, particularly at SMPN 1 Ciawigebang. Unlike prior research, this study highlights PAI teachers as facilitators of spiritual literacy through an integrative approach that encompasses learning processes, religious habituation, school literacy culture, and digital media use, while offering concrete, contextual, and relevant spiritual literacy indicators for modern students.

Based on the above, the main problem of this research is how PAI teachers implement strategies to foster students' spiritual literacy at SMPN 1 Ciawigebang, along with supporting and inhibiting factors. This study aims to examine the role of religious habituation programs in fostering students' spiritual awareness, discipline, and character development, to analyze the influence of PAI teacher exemplarity on student participation and the formation of spiritual attitudes and behaviors, and to

investigate the effectiveness of reflection-based and contextual Islamic Religious Education learning strategies in internalizing Islamic values and developing students' religious character. The findings are anticipated to serve as a reference for PAI teachers in designing more effective, innovative strategies aligned with students' developmental needs. For schools, the results can serve as a basis for strengthening religious culture and spiritual development programs. Furthermore, in the field of Islamic education scholarship, this study is expected to offer insights into enhancing students' spiritual literacy as a response to the increasingly complex challenges of globalization and technological advancement.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Teacher Exemplarity

The literature indicates that Islamic education teacher exemplarity is a fundamental factor in developing students' spiritual literacy. Discipline habituation that is rooted in teacher exemplarity provides a practical and contextually appropriate approach to reinforcing character education in schools, while also making a significant contribution to the wider discourse on character-based education within religious educational settings (Yakub et al., 2025). Islamic education teachers do not merely serve as content deliverers but also act as role models who demonstrate religious practices in daily life. Fitriani (2016) emphasizes that teachers who consistently display religious behaviors, such as disciplined worship, courtesy, empathy, and mature spiritual attitudes, can foster students' spiritual intelligence and religious awareness. This is reinforced by Iswanto (2023), who found that teachers' exemplary behavior significantly contributes to enhancing students' spirituality, as students learn more effectively through direct modelling than through verbal instructions alone.

Moreover, teacher exemplarity is reflected in active participation in school religious activities such as *tadarus*, congregational prayers, *rohis* activities, and Islamic holiday commemorations. Maulida (2021) demonstrates that teachers' attitudes and behaviors aligned with Islamic values positively influence the formation of students' morals and religious character. Similarly, Prihatini (2024) asserts that teachers who consistently act as role models in responsibility, discipline, and noble character can create a religious culture in schools, thereby fostering strong student spirituality. Thus, PAI teacher exemplarity serves as an effective strategy to enhance spiritual literacy by creating meaningful learning through real-life examples.

2.2. Religious Habituation and Reflective Learning

The literature also highlights that religious habituation in schools is a key pillar in developing students' spiritual literacy. Habituation programs such as Qur'an recitation (*tadarus*), collective prayers, Dhuha prayers, and structured religious activities have been shown to internalize religious values within students. Salim (2024) and Suhartini et al. (2025) notes that religious habituation contributes to improving spiritual attitudes, worship discipline, and appreciation of religious values. Iswanto (2023) adds that consistent religious habituation can cultivate a school culture of religiosity, allowing Islamic values to be not only cognitively understood but also affectively internalized and manifested in behavior. This indicates that sustained and structured religious practices play a crucial role in bridging the gap between religious knowledge and its practical application in students' daily lives.

In addition to religious habituation, spiritual-reflective learning strategies play a crucial role in fostering students' spiritual literacy. Reflective approaches encourage students to contemplate Islamic teachings and relate them to real-life situations. Kana'ati (2025) and Asnah (2016) emphasize that learning activities that provide

space for spiritual reflection, dialogue, and comprehension of religious meaning strengthen the internalization of spiritual values. Lestari (2024) further indicates that humanistic and dialogical approaches in PAI are effective in enhancing spiritual intelligence because students actively participate in the process of spiritual development. Consequently, the combination of religious habituation and reflective learning strategies forms a strong foundation for strengthening students' spiritual literacy in the school environment.

3. Methods

This study employs a qualitative research design with a descriptive approach, as it aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the strategies used by Islamic Religious Education teachers in fostering students' spiritual literacy at SMPN 1 Ciawigebang, rather than measuring variables statistically (Moleong, 2017). The descriptive approach was selected to allow the researcher to explore the meanings, practices, and lived experiences of PAI teachers in the context of learning, religious habituation, and spiritual exemplarity (Sapiudin, 2025). This design enables a comprehensive depiction of phenomena, including the processes, dynamics, and strategies applied by teachers to enhance students' spiritual literacy.

The research population consists of all PAI teachers and students at SMPN 1 Ciawigebang, with purposive sampling used to select participants relevant to the study's objectives. PAI teachers serve as the primary data source due to their role as facilitators of spiritual literacy, while students provide perspectives on the effectiveness of the strategies implemented. Secondary data were obtained from school documents, archives of religious activities, photographs of school events, and PAI learning materials, supporting a contextual understanding of teaching practices and the school's religious culture.

Data collection techniques included participatory observation of learning activities and religious practices, in-depth interviews with teachers and students, and documentation. Participatory observation allowed the researcher to understand real practices and teacher-student interactions in shaping spiritual literacy, while in-depth interviews explored teachers' and students' experiences, motivations, and perceptions regarding the strategies employed. Documentation was used to validate findings and enrich field data.

Data were analyzed using a qualitative analysis model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Sugiyono, 2019). Data validity was ensured through source triangulation, method triangulation, and member checking, enhancing the credibility and reliability of the findings. This methodology not only provides academic insights into PAI teachers' strategies but also offers practical implications, serving as a basis for developing effective PAI teaching strategies to foster spiritual literacy among junior high school students, particularly at SMPN 1 Ciawigebang.

4. Results

4.1. Religious Habituation as the Foundation for Students' Spiritual Literacy

Religious habituation at SMPN 1 Ciawigebang has proven to be a key pillar in fostering students' spiritual literacy. Research data indicate that the school consistently implements daily worship activities, including rotating Qur'an recitation (*tadarus*) each morning, collective prayers before lessons, and short verse readings at the start of classes. These routines not only cultivate a religious atmosphere but also internalize religious values in students' daily lives. Consistent with findings at the elementary level, Qur'anic literacy programs and religious habituation positively influence students' spiritual attitudes and behaviors (Salim & Saprijal, 2024).

In addition to daily activities, the school applies structured habituation programs, such as “15 minutes of Qur'an or religious book reading after recess” and routine congregational Dhuha prayers. These practices serve not merely as ceremonial activities but as means to develop lasting religious awareness among students. Research confirms that integrating religious habituation within Islamic Religious Education effectively strengthens students' spirituality (Iswanto et al., 2023; Abadi et al., 2025).

From a spiritual development perspective, religious habituation provides students opportunities to express faith, practice spiritual discipline, and build sustainable positive habits (Shodiq, 2024). Consistent implementation allows spiritual values to be internalized cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally. Activities such as *tadarus* and congregational prayers are effective mediums for instilling Islamic values in students' attitudes and behaviors (Firmadani et al., 2025). The success of these practices depends heavily on PAI teachers, who act as facilitators, motivators, and spiritual exemplars, guiding students so that religious activities become meaningful and enjoyable experiences (Isnaini, 2024; Salim & Saprijal, 2024).

However, challenges remain. Not all students exhibit the same enthusiasm; some are less accustomed to religious routines and lack adequate spiritual awareness. Limited worship facilities also affect the comfort and intensity of religious practices (Siregar et al., 2025). Therefore, strengthening facilities, continuous guidance, and innovative religious programs are necessary to embed habituation as a sustainable school culture. Religious habituation at SMPN 1 Ciawigebang effectively enhances spiritual literacy and supports character formation, cultivating values such as discipline, empathy, responsibility, and social care, demonstrating its crucial role in achieving the objectives of Islamic education.

Table 1. Religious Habits and the Impact on Spiritual Literacy

Form of Religious Habituation	Implementer	Impact on Spiritual Literacy	Information
Morning Qur'an Recitation (<i>Tadarus</i>)	PAI Teacher & Class Guardian	Enhances students' closeness to the Qur'an	Conducted routinely before lessons
Collective Prayer & Short Verse Recitation	Teachers & Students	Fosters spiritual awareness from the beginning of lessons	Creates a religious learning atmosphere
Congregational Dhuha Prayer	PAI Teacher & School Staff	Trains worship, discipline, and spiritual development	Scheduled regularly
15-Minute Qur'anic Literacy Program	PAI Teacher	Strengthens religious culture and habituation of worship	Conducted after recess
School Religious Activities (Islamic Holidays & Rohis Programs)	School & Students	Internalizes religious values through real experiences	Based on active student participation

Based on Table 1, the consistent implementation of religious practices at SMPN 1 Ciawigebang has proven to be a strong foundation for building students' spiritual literacy. Through Islamic recitation (*tadarus*), communal prayer, congregational prayer, and other religious programs, students not only learn about religion but also practice and internalize spiritual values in their daily lives. Teacher support as spiritual role models, program sustainability, and improved facilities are crucial factors in the success of religious practices as a strategy to strengthen spiritual literacy in the school environment (Anisa, 2022).

4.2. PAI Teacher Exemplarity and Student Participation

The exemplarity of PAI teachers at SMPN 1 Ciawigebang has proven to be a crucial factor in shaping students' spiritual awareness. Teachers do not merely serve as content deliverers, but also as figures who practice religious values in their daily lives (Prihatini, 2024). This exemplarity is evident in teachers' habits, such as performing prayers on time, greeting students politely, displaying courteous behavior, showing patience, and demonstrating empathy. By observing these concrete examples, students gain a clear understanding of how religious teachings are applied in real life, encouraging the development of spirituality that is not only cognitive but also affective and behavioral.

Beyond personal exemplarity, PAI teachers actively foster a religious environment through direct involvement in various school religious activities, including congregational prayers, Qur'an recitation (*tadarus*), Islamic study sessions, and celebrations of Islamic holidays. This active participation creates a vibrant religious culture where students are not merely instructed to participate but are guided through modeling. These findings align with previous studies, such as those by Fitriani (2016), Maulida (2021), Nadilla (2022), and Prihatini (2024), which indicate that teachers who consistently provide moral and spiritual exemplars significantly enhance students' spiritual intelligence, religious character, and moral behavior.

Student participation in school religious activities also shows positive development. Many students voluntarily engage in worship, demonstrate more discipline in religious activities, and exhibit stronger religious attitudes, such as honesty, social concern, disciplined worship, and tolerance. This indicates that teacher exemplarity has a tangible impact on shaping students' spiritual awareness, where students not only understand religious values cognitively but also begin to internalize them as part of their behavior and identity (Iqbal, 2024). However, the study also found that not all teachers are able to optimally serve as spiritual role models. Some face administrative burdens, insufficient spiritual guidance, and limited teacher personality development programs. These conditions can reduce the consistency of expected exemplarity. Therefore, institutional support, such as training, mentoring, and strengthening school culture, is necessary to enable PAI teachers to perform their strategic role effectively.

Thus, PAI teacher exemplarity and active student participation in religious activities are closely related and contribute significantly to the formation of students' spiritual awareness. When teachers serve as tangible spiritual role models and school religious activities are implemented systematically, a conducive educational ecosystem is established for the growth of students' spiritual literacy (Prihatini, 2024). This aligns with the concept that religious education not only imparts knowledge but also shapes spiritual consciousness and character that are embodied in students' daily lives.

Table 2. Analysis of Teacher Exemplary Behavior and Student Participation

Aspect	Key Findings	Impact on Spiritual Awareness	Information
Teacher Exemplarity	Teachers serve as role models in worship, morals, and social behavior	Encourages students to emulate religious behavior	Highly influential
Teacher Involvement in Religious Activities	Teachers actively lead and participate in activities	Establishes a religious school culture	Consistent and tangible

Aspect	Key Findings	Impact on Spiritual Awareness	Information
Student Participation	Students increasingly engage in worship and religious activities	Enhances faith, discipline, and social care	Shows significant improvement
Inhibiting Factors	Administrative burden and limited spiritual guidance for teachers	Partial exemplarity is not fully realized	Requires institutional support
Overall Impact	Formation of a healthy religious ecosystem in school	Students' spiritual awareness is strengthened and well-directed	Relevant and effective

Table 2 shows that PAI teacher exemplarity and student participation in religious activities play a strategic role in strengthening spiritual awareness at SMPN 1 Ciawigebang. Teachers who serve as exemplars in worship and moral conduct, supported by active student engagement in religious activities, successfully create a religious and conducive school culture for fostering spiritual literacy (Fitriani, 2016). Despite challenges faced by some teachers, teacher exemplarity overall proves effective and relevant as a strategy to enhance students' spiritual awareness.

4.3. Islamic Education Learning Strategy Based on Spiritual Reflection

The PAI learning strategies based on spiritual reflection implemented by teachers at SMPN 1 Ciawigebang have been shown to play a significant role in developing students' religious character. PAI teachers do not merely transmit religious knowledge cognitively but also guide students to contemplate the meaning of Islamic teachings in real life. This is evident in reflective activities such as discussing personal religious experiences at the beginning of lessons and assigning individual reflection tasks at the end of lessons regarding the relevance of Islamic teachings to students' lives. This approach enables students not only to understand religious concepts but also to internalize their values, thereby promoting stronger spiritual internalization (Iswanto, 2023).

In addition, contextual learning strategies constitute a major strength in fostering spiritual literacy. Teachers link PAI material to real-life situations of students, such as social media ethics, responsibilities as students, social interactions, and surrounding social issues. Consequently, students can see the relevance of Islamic teachings in modern life and recognize that religious values are not merely doctrinal but serve as practical life guidelines. These findings align with research by Asnah (2016) and Kana'ati (2025) which indicate that reflection-based learning and transinternal approaches enhance students' spiritual experience.

PAI teachers also employ a humanistic approach, emphasizing empathy, appreciation of students' religious experiences, and opportunities for open discussion (Sahrowi et al., 2025). This approach provides students with freedom to think, engage in dialogue, and express spiritual awareness more personally. Students are positioned not merely as recipients of knowledge but as active subjects in the reflection process. This is consistent with Lestari (2024), who found that humanistic approaches in PAI effectively enhance spiritual intelligence through meaningful and dialogic learning experiences.

Furthermore, teachers integrate character- and Qur'an-based learning. Lesson materials are connected to noble moral values such as honesty, responsibility, cooperation, and applicable social ethics. This strategy ensures that religious teachings are not solely theoretical but shape students' habits and real-life behavior.

Hasanah and Albina (2024) also confirm that character-based learning in PAI significantly contributes to enhancing students' spirituality and religious behavior.

Nevertheless, the study identified certain challenges in implementation. Limited instructional time, a dense curriculum, and variations in student motivation pose obstacles to optimizing spiritual reflection. Some students remain passive and are not accustomed to deep reflection practices. Therefore, teachers need to develop motivational strategies, interactive methods, and a supportive learning environment to facilitate consistent spiritual reflection (Yocum, 2014). However, the implementation of reflective learning strategies by PAI teachers at SMPN 1 Ciawigebang has had a tangible impact on strengthening spiritual literacy and developing students' religious character.

Table 3. Analysis of Islamic Religious Education Reflective Learning Strategies

Aspect	Key Findings	Impact on Religious Character	Information
Spiritual Reflection Strategy	Discussion of religious experiences & written reflection	Enhances self-awareness and appreciation of religious values	Effective
Contextual Learning	Links material to students' real-life situations	Facilitates internalization of Islamic values in daily life	Relevant
Humanistic Approach	Empathy, dialogue, and appreciation of students' experiences	Promotes spiritual openness and critical thinking	Positive
Character-Based Learning	Integration of Qur'anic values and morals into lessons	Shapes observable religious behavior	Significant
Inhibiting Factors	Limited time & varied student motivation	Reduces the intensity of spiritual reflection	Needs reinforcement

Table 3 shows that PAI learning strategies based on spiritual reflection at SMPN 1 Ciawigebang have proven effective in developing students' religious character. Through reflective strategies, contextual learning, humanistic approaches, and integration of Islamic character values, students not only understand religious teachings theoretically but also internalize and apply them in real life. Despite challenges such as limited time and variations in student motivation, these strategies continue to make a significant contribution to strengthening spiritual literacy and fostering students' religious behavior.

5. Discussion

The research findings indicate that the strategies employed by PAI teachers to foster spiritual literacy at SMPN 1 Ciawigebang are relatively effective, particularly as they are supported by an established religious school culture. Routine religious activities such as morning Qur'an recitation (*tadarus*), collective prayers, congregational Dhuha prayers, and structured Qur'anic literacy programs create a consistent pattern of religious habituation among students. This finding aligns with Salim (2024), who argues that religious habituation significantly improves students' spiritual attitudes, worship discipline, and appreciation of religious values. Similarly, Iswanto (2023) emphasizes that continuous and structured religious practices contribute to building a strong culture of religiosity within schools, where Islamic values are not only cognitively understood but also affectively internalized and

expressed in behavior. Thus, the habituation observed in this study confirms that sustained religious routines play a crucial role in bridging the gap between knowledge and practice, enabling students to integrate Islamic teachings into their daily lives.

Furthermore, the exemplarity of PAI teachers emerges as a central reinforcing factor in strengthening students' spiritual literacy. Teachers function not only as transmitters of knowledge but also as role models who demonstrate religious values through daily behavior, including disciplined worship, courtesy, empathy, and moral integrity. This finding is consistent with Fitriani (2016), who highlights that teachers' consistent demonstration of religious behavior significantly enhances students' spiritual intelligence and awareness. In addition, Iswanto (2023) confirms that students tend to learn more effectively through direct modeling than through verbal instruction alone. The active involvement of teachers in religious activities, such as *tadarus*, congregational prayers, and Islamic celebrations, further strengthens their role as spiritual exemplars. This supports Maulida (2021) and Prihatini (2024), who found that teacher participation in religious practices fosters students' moral development and contributes to the creation of a religious school culture. Therefore, teacher exemplarity in this study not only reinforces habituation programs but also provides meaningful, lived examples that facilitate the internalization of spiritual values.

In addition to habituation and exemplarity, the implementation of reflective and contextual PAI learning strategies also plays a significant role in fostering students' spiritual literacy. Teachers encourage students to reflect on the meaning of Islamic teachings and relate them to real-life experiences through dialogic and humanistic approaches. This finding is in line with Kana'ati (2025) and Asnah (2016), who emphasize that reflective learning enhances the internalization of spiritual values by encouraging deeper understanding and personal engagement with religious teachings. Moreover, Lestari (2024) notes that humanistic and dialogical approaches in Islamic education promote active student participation and strengthen spiritual intelligence. The results of this study confirm that when students are given space to reflect, discuss, and connect religious concepts with their daily realities, they are more likely to internalize these values and apply them in their behavior.

However, the study also identifies several challenges, including variations in students' levels of religious awareness, limited worship facilities, and constrained instructional time for deeper reflection. These findings suggest that while the strategies are effective, their implementation requires continuous support and improvement. The combination of religious habituation, teacher exemplarity, and reflective learning strategies forms a comprehensive and synergistic approach to developing students' spiritual literacy, as also emphasized in previous literature.

6. Conclusion

Based on the research findings, PAI learning strategies at SMPN 1 Ciawigebang that emphasize spiritual reflection have proven effective in fostering students' religious character and spiritual literacy. These strategies engage students not only cognitively but also affectively and behaviourally, enabling them to internalize religious values through personal reflection and meaningful learning experiences. Teachers initiate lessons by exploring students' personal religious experiences, use contextualized learning media, and conclude with written reflections that connect religious teachings to students' daily lives. The humanistic approach, emphasizing empathy, appreciation of individual experiences, and discussion of moral and spiritual values, encourages critical thinking and awareness of the relationship between faith and real-life contexts. Integration of Islamic character values such as honesty, responsibility, social care, and ethical use of social media enhances the

practical relevance of learning, allowing students to apply religious principles in everyday behavior.

The study has practical implications for curriculum development and teaching practices, highlighting the importance of reflective, contextual, and experience-centered strategies in strengthening spiritual awareness and character formation. Schools are encouraged to provide adequate time, structured guidance, and supportive environments that reinforce students' reflective habits. However, limitations were identified, including variations in student motivation, limited instructional time, and the uneven habituation of spiritual reflection among some students. Future research is recommended to explore the longitudinal effects of reflective PAI learning, examine diverse school contexts, and investigate innovative methods to enhance student engagement in spiritual reflection. Such studies could provide further insights into optimizing strategies for developing spiritual literacy and religious character in junior high school students.

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Ethical approval was obtained for this study. The manuscript represents original work and has not been previously published, nor is it under consideration by another journal.

Data Disclosure Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.



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