




## Transformational Leadership of School Principals in the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Article history:</b> Submission November 20, 2024 Revised December 1, 2024 Accepted March 7, 2025 Published April 12, 2025</p> <hr/> <p><b>Keywords:</b> <i>Transformational Leadership School Principals Independent Curriculum</i></p> 	<p>Implementing the Independent Curriculum faces challenges; principals' transformational leadership is needed to improve teacher readiness and performance. This study aims to analyze the principal's transformational leadership implementation in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at State Senior High School 6, Jambi City by reviewing four main aspects: ideal influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. This research uses qualitative methods with a case study approach through observation, interviews, and documentation of school principals, deputy principal for curriculum, and teachers. The research results show that in the aspect of ideal influence, the school principal has been optimal in providing an example through integrity and commitment. Regarding inspirational motivation, school principals have not been optimal in encouraging teachers to innovate, so learning innovation is still limited. Regarding intellectual stimulation, school principals have not been optimal in encouraging teacher creativity and critical thinking, especially in developing project-based and differentiated learning models. Regarding individual consideration, the principal has been optimal in providing personal support through mentoring and training. Supporting factors include the principal's commitment, training, and adequate facilities. The obstacle faced is the lack of teacher skills in methods. In the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project, conventional methods are still used, and teaching materials are limited. The solutions implemented include regular training, mentoring by young teachers, and collaboration with external parties to support project-based learning.</p>



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## A. INTRODUCTION

The school principal is an adaptive leader who inspires and encourages curriculum development and teacher performance improvement through visionary policies (Baidowi, 2022; Varelasawi et al., 2023). The principal needs to exert a positive influence by motivating, guiding, and inspiring teachers to continue developing through transformational leadership, which includes ideal influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration (Suzannaa & Rizky, 2022; Permatasari et al., 2023).

Teachers are less prepared and skilled in implementing project-based learning, while research emphasizes the principal's transformational leadership, with roles and strategies achieving 80.83% in intelligence and innovation development (Irawati & Susanto, 2022; Djafri, 2025). The empowerment of principals is influenced by access to resources, stakeholder support, and structural and psychological challenges, as well as the importance of focusing on instructional leadership through continuous training and higher accountability (Tsegaye & Botha, 2020; Alsarawi & Cieminski, 2024).

The principal shapes the school's mission by integrating personal beliefs, educational agendas, curriculum policies, reflective practices, teacher motivation, a favorable climate, and the importance of professional development and policy recognition (Ralebese et al., 2025). The readiness of principals and teachers affects the success of the Merdeka Curriculum, while transformational leadership helps overcome obstacles and drives innovation, although challenges such as limited learning variation and digital access remain (Hutabarat et al., 2022; Handri, 2020; Nelisma, 2022).

Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum across educational levels shapes students' character, emphasizing mutual cooperation, independence, and global diversity through the project to strengthen the Pancasila student profile (Rahayuningsih, 2022; Rohmah et al., 2023). The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum still faces various challenges due to the limited preparedness of educational institutions, teachers, and schools to implement it optimally (Marliyani et al., 2023; Rosadi, 2020; Rusmiati et al., 2023).

Out of the 4 million teachers in Indonesia, only 10% (400,000 teachers) are truly ready to implement the Merdeka Curriculum; 48% due to government requirements, 34% due to benefits, 4% due to facilities, 41% are not ready, and 32% need competency improvement (Sasmita & Darmansyah, 2022; Mawarni et al., 2023). Strategic leadership from principals is needed to motivate teachers, translate the vision and mission, and adapt to educational changes in a responsive and visionary way (Marliyani et al., 2023; Masaong, 2022; Baidowi, 2024).

The principal's leadership behavior affects autonomy and develops strategies and effective learning processes (Akgöz et al., 2024). School leadership development is crucial for school improvement, as strong leadership encourages effective leadership practices by involving stakeholders (Naidoo, 2019). School leadership through school organization integration programs improves student outcomes (Sebastian et al., 2016). Frameworks, benchmarks, and professional standards are important for development, accreditation, certification, and the educational implications of leadership for school leaders (McMahon & Torrance, 2023).

Based on interviews and observations, Jambi City State High School 6 has implemented the Independent Curriculum since 2022 to improve educational quality through flexible and project-based learning. The school principal strongly supports this initiative, but several challenges have

emerged, particularly in the Project for Strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile. A significant issue is that some teachers struggle with implementing project-based learning and still rely on monotonous methods such as written reports and basic presentations. This limits students' interactive learning experiences, even though the project is designed to foster contextual and practical learning. Differentiated learning faces hurdles, as many teachers continue using lecture-based, one-way teaching styles. The lack of diverse teaching materials, like textbooks and printed guides, also hampers creative instructional development.

Based on these problems, this research examines how principals apply transformational leadership in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at Senior High School 6 in Jambi City. This research will explore how transformational leadership can help teachers face the challenges of implementing the Independent Curriculum, especially in implementing project-based learning and differentiated learning methods. School principals can create a dynamic and innovative educational environment through a visionary leadership approach, ensuring that the Merdeka Curriculum can be implemented optimally to improve the quality of education and student learning outcomes.

## B. RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study type. This approach was chosen because the research aims to understand in depth the form of transformational leadership of school principals in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at State Senior High School 6 in Jambi City. Case studies allow researchers to explore phenomena contextually through in-depth interview techniques, participant observation, and documentation, enabling researchers to thoroughly explore the practices, challenges, and leadership strategies of school principals in driving educational change in schools. The data collection techniques through interviews, observation, and documentation are explained in the following table:

Table 1. Data Collection Technique: Grid of transformational leadership of school principals in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum

Research Focus	Sub-Focus	Indicators	Data Collection Techniques	Data source
Analyzing the transformational leadership of school principals in implementing the Independent Curriculum	The Influence of the Principal's Ideal	Modeling, integrity, and the influence of school principals on teachers	Observation, Interview, Documentation	Principal, Deputy Principal for curriculum, and teachers
	Inspirational Motivation	The vision, passion, and motivation that are instilled in teachers and mamu increase the enthusiasm of teachers in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum	Interview, Observation	Principal, Deputy Principal for curriculum, and teachers

	Principal's Intellectual Stimulation	Encouragement of innovation, encouragement to think critically and creatively, training, and professional development of teachers	Observation, Interview, Documentation	Principal, Deputy Principal for curriculum, and teachers
	Individual Principal Considerations	Attention to individual teacher needs, and able to be a mentor for personal and professional support	Interview, Observation	Principal, Deputy Principal for curriculum, and teachers
Identifying supporting, inhibiting factors, and solutions to the principal's transformational leadership in implementing the independent curriculum	Supporting and inhibiting factors in implementing the independent curriculum	Availability of resources, training, and school culture	Observation, Interview, Documentation	Principal, Deputy Principal for curriculum, and teachers
	Solutions to Obstacles in Implementing the Independent Curriculum	School principal strategies in overcoming obstacles to an independent curriculum	Interview, Observation	Principal, Deputy Principal for curriculum, and teachers

Table 2. Observation Framework at State High School 6 Jambi City

No	Document Type	Available	Not available
1.	Decree on the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum at State Senior High School 6 in Jambi City	✓	
2.	Schedule and report on teacher training activities related to the Independent Curriculum	✓	
3.	Education Unit Operational Curriculum Document at State Senior High School 6 in Jambi City	✓	
4.	Learning Implementation Plan or Teaching Module based on the Independent Curriculum	✓	
5.	Minutes of curriculum implementation or project development meetings	✓	
6.	Photos of teacher training activities and implementation of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project	✓	
7.	Documents of evaluation results and reflections on the implementation of the Independent Curriculum by teachers or school principals	✓	
8.	Data on Educators, Students, and School Facilities	✓	
9.	Documentation of observations and interviews	✓	

The data analysis technique used in this research refers to the opinion of Miles and

Huberman, which states that the data analysis process is carried out through three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification (Sugiyono, 2019). Researchers reduce data by simplifying, selecting, and focusing on relevant data so that it is easier to understand and analyze further. Furthermore, the reduced data is presented in narrative or visual form to make it easier to see patterns and relationships between data. The final stage is drawing conclusions and verification, where the researcher concludes the analysis results and ensures the data's validity.

To maintain the credibility of the data, source triangulation was carried out by comparing information from school principals, teachers, and school documents. In addition, technical triangulation was carried out by combining the results of interviews, observations, and documentation. This step aims to ensure data validity and avoid interpretation bias. This research is described as follows:

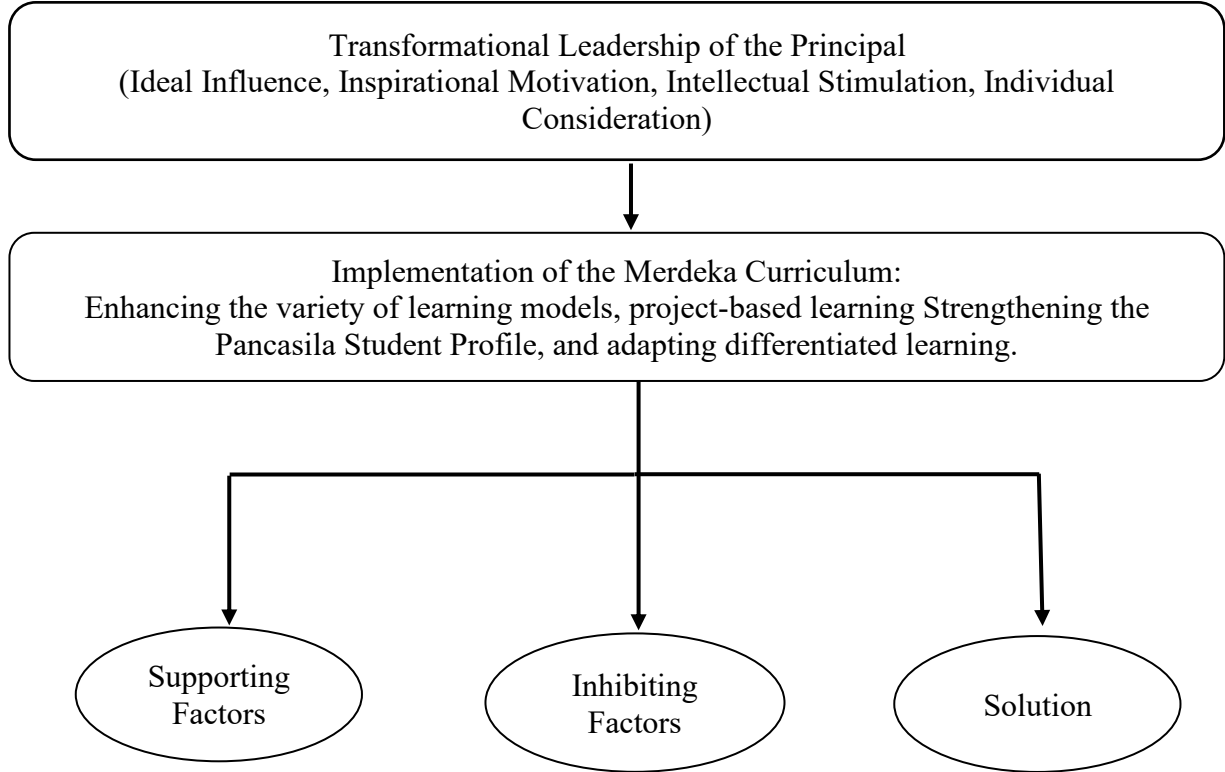


Figure 1. Research Design

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Transformational Leadership of School Principals in Implementing the Independent Curriculum at State Senior High School 6 Jambi City

Based on observations and interviews conducted at State High School 6, Jambi City, the school principal demonstrated a significant transformational leadership role in implementing the Independent Curriculum. The school principal carries out administrative functions and is the main driver of change. In an interview, the principal stated that, "We started by developing a vision and strategy with the teacher, agreeing on the direction of project-based learning, and conducting regular evaluations together." This approach reflects a participatory and transformative leadership style, involving the entire school community in the change process. Transformational leadership is rooted in transactional leadership, where

the leader initially guides members through clear task explanations. This leadership then develops by providing individual attention, encouraging intellectual stimulation, and showing charisma in influencing the environment (Kuncoro, 2021).

One of the important strategies implemented is strengthening teacher capacity through internal training or In-House Training. Based on interviews with the deputy principal for curriculum, this training is routinely carried out to discuss the technical implementation of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project and differentiated learning models. In these activities, the school principal is always present and provides materials. The principal also actively listens to teacher input and follows up through follow-up programs. The school principal not only focuses on teachers, but also involves the school committee and community leaders in supporting curriculum changes in the school environment. Implementation of the project to strengthen the Pancasila Student Profile includes preparing the principal's work program, evaluating the vision and mission, fulfilling infrastructure, coordinating with the deputy principal, and maintaining effective communication with all school parties to ensure the smoothness and success of the learning process (Yani et al., 2024).

One teacher said the principal was always open to input and respected teachers' ideas. "When we found it difficult to develop project-based teaching tools, the principal immediately conducted additional training and provided special time for joint discussions," he said. Another teacher added that the principal gave orders and was a role model in carrying out innovative tasks, especially when preparing plans for implementing character and independence-based learning. School principals who can build a shared vision, empower teachers, and encourage collaboration will be more successful in managing curriculum change (Kefi & Rosnelli, 2024). Emphasize the importance of involving all school elements to create an environment responsive to new education policies (Botutihe et al., 2023).

The school principal also encourages the use of technology in the learning process. From classroom observations and school digital documentation, it was found that the principal facilitated using digital media to share teaching materials and report learning results. Teachers are given training regarding digital platforms so that learning remains flexible, interactive, and tailored to students' needs. This aligns with the Independent Curriculum's learning principles, which encourage diversity, contextuality, and student independence (Suyatno, 2021).

Thus, the transformational leadership of the principal at State Senior High School 6 in Jambi City is not only structural, but also substantive and inspirational. The principal succeeded in building a collaborative and adaptive school culture and becoming a driving force for educational innovation centered on developing students' potential and empowering teaching staff. School principals, teaching staff, and strategies that include communication, direction, motivation, and rewards emphasize the importance of collaboration and teamwork in educational institutions. A leader will not be successful without the support of a team in achieving common goals (Faqihudin, 2024).

The principal's transformational leadership in implementing the Independent Curriculum consists of the following four aspects:

a. Ideal Influence

Based on the results of interviews with teachers at State High School 6, Jambi City, the school principal showed a strong role model in implementing the Independent



Curriculum. History teachers stated that the principal provided direction and actively participated in training and prepared learning implementation plans with the teacher. He explained, "The principal is often the first person to come and is immediately involved in training discussions, even trying to develop teaching tools with us." This shows that the principal does not just give orders, but is a real example in the field. School principals need to show a persuasive attitude and be a role model. These two attitudes will influence his leadership style, including the coaching process. The enthusiasm of the school principal in carrying out his duties also raises the teachers' enthusiasm (Septiani et al., 2022).

In observing internal training activities, the principal was seen accompanying teachers, providing motivational reinforcement, and emphasizing the importance of the teacher's role as a driver of character-based learning. The school principal is also involved in direct assistance during the implementation of the Strengthening Pancasila Student Profile Project activities, which is the central part of the Merdeka Curriculum. A teacher said that the principal was willing to come directly when students carried out project activities, including providing evaluations of the progress of the activities and reflecting on the results with the teacher. The evaluation carried out is not only a form of responsibility. However, it is also expected to produce practical recommendations that support strengthening and improving the quality of students' character education and provide adaptive learning models relevant to the demands of the modern era (Suyitno et al., 2024).

The principal also has high integrity, where actions are always based on what is said. An interview with another teacher stated that the principal "was always open to criticism, and showed consistency between his words and the policies taken." This attitude makes teachers feel appreciated and more confident in carrying out their duties because they feel supported by school leaders. As a form of appreciation from the school principal to teachers who actively participate in coaching and training activities, appreciation is given to motivate and recognize their commitment to improving competence (Septiani et al., 2022). These findings illustrate that the principal has fulfilled the elements of ideal influence in transformational leadership. Ideal influence is reflected when a leader becomes respected, trusted, and emulated by his followers. The ideal leader demonstrates high commitment and integrity and inspires change through example (Mulyana & Rukoyimah, 2021; Hasannah & Rudiyanto, 2024).

b. Inspirational Motivation

Based on the interviews with three teachers at State High School 6, Jambi City, the school principal was deemed capable of providing encouragement and enthusiasm in implementing the Independent Curriculum. One teacher stated that the principal regularly held informal meetings, such as weekly reflection forums, to discuss learning obstacles and provide motivation and reinforcement. The teacher explained, "The principal is always present and says that every teacher can adapt, as long as they keep learning. We feel like we are not alone in facing this change." The school principal's role is to design programs, manage personnel, motivate all educational staff, and optimize resources to support the effectiveness of school management (Munawwarah et al., 2024)

In implementing project-based learning, the principal forms a small team for teachers to share experiences and ideas. Several teachers said that this strategy helped them understand the essence of the Independent Curriculum, especially in the context of learning differentiation. However, from the other side, some teachers feel that the principal's motivational approach is still general and does not fully address each teacher's personal or technical needs. From the results of the observations, researchers noted that the principal provided discussion space and accompanied teachers in practical sessions to prepare teaching modules. However, support in the form of individual mentoring or training based on teachers' specific needs is still limited. More senior teachers, for example, feel they need more intensive guidance in using digital learning media and applying project-based methods. This shows the importance of an adaptive approach to individual teacher characteristics (Agustian et al., 2023).

The principal has attempted to build a supportive and motivating work climate. However, the effectiveness of inspirational motivation can be further enhanced through direct and continuous coaching and mentoring approaches. Inspirational motivation in transformational leadership involves verbal encouragement and technical and emotional support tailored to individual teachers' needs, fostering confidence and innovation in implementing the Independent Curriculum (Liu & Hallinger, 2022).

c. Intellectual Stimulation

Based on the results of interviews with teachers at State High School 6, Jambi City, the principal has tried to encourage teachers to think critically and creatively in the learning process. One of the teachers said that the principal gave the challenge to design a learning model relevant to the students' conditions and linking teaching material to real-life contexts. The teacher said, "We were asked not only to teach theory, but also to encourage students to think and find solutions to problems around them." This encouragement will later contribute to increasing students' abilities in critical, creative, collaborative, and communicative thinking and fostering awareness of the environment and a high sense of responsibility (Yani et al., 2024).

In implementing the Independent Curriculum, the principal provides an open discussion space for teachers to convey ideas and try new approaches. Workshops and training are facilitated as a forum for developing innovative learning methods. However, from the interview results, several teachers felt that this encouragement was not fully accompanied by in-depth technical guidance. Teachers stated that they still needed further direction to apply varied methods effectively. The results of classroom observations show that several teachers have tried to develop project-based learning. However, this approach has not worked optimally because teachers feel less prepared to design activities encouraging students' critical thinking. One of the teachers said that the principal was open to new ideas, but teachers still needed assistance developing concrete and contextual implementation steps (Yanti et al., 2024).

The principal has tried to build an exploratory culture in the school environment. However, school principals must strengthen mentoring strategies through direct practice-based training and individual mentoring to encourage optimal intellectual stimulation. This aligns with the opinion that transformational leaders can increase teachers' intellectual capacity by encouraging critical reflection, creativity, and courage in making



innovative decisions (Komala, 2023). Apart from that, the success of intellectual stimulation is also greatly influenced by the leader's willingness to be directly present in the change process and encourage teachers to get out of the comfort zone of conventional learning (Salsabilla et al., 2024).

d. Individual Considerations

Based on the results of interviews with teachers at State High School 6, Jambi City, the principal showed personal concern for each teacher's needs and conditions in facing the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. One teacher said that the principal not only communicated formally but also often invited casual discussions after teaching hours. The teacher stated, "We are often given space to convey problems without pressure. The principal listens, not immediately corrects." The principal's transformational leadership provides individual considerations (Kuncoro, 2021).

In the researcher's observations, the principal actively builds interpersonal relationships through an informal approach that creates a sense of comfort for teachers. The school principal also maps teacher competency needs and recommends training or mentoring based on the results of this identification. For example, teachers who have difficulty using digital media are given additional training and asked to be accompanied by other teachers who are more skilled. Not only that, the principal also tries to keep communication going even though the teacher's time is limited. For this reason, digital media such as online discussion groups are used so that information, feedback, and guidance can still be provided on an ongoing basis. Teachers felt that this approach reflected concerns that were not only professional but also emotional and personal (Rosyadi et al., 2023).

This principal's approach shows the application of individual consideration in transformational leadership, namely, treating each teacher as an individual with different backgrounds, strengths, and needs. This aligns with the view that school principals who give genuine attention to teachers' professional development and welfare will create a healthy and productive school climate (Agustian et al., 2023). Individual consideration is also important in building harmonious relationships and fostering teacher loyalty to the school's educational vision (Wahyuni & Maunah, 2021).

**2. Supporting Factors, Barriers, and Solutions to Transformational Leadership for School Principals in Implementing the Independent Curriculum at State Senior High School 6 Jambi City**

Based on the observations and interviews, researchers found that implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in Jambi City State High School 6 faced several supporting and inhibiting factors evident in the field. School principals as transformational leaders have an important role in responding to these two things with strategic and applicable solutions. These factors are summarized in the following table based on direct findings from the field:

Table 3. Supporting Factors, Inhibitors, Solutions

No	Supporting Factors	Inhibiting Factors	Solution
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1.	The school principal firmly commits to encouraging teacher development through mentoring and training.	Some teachers still have difficulty understanding and implementing project-based learning methods.	The school principal holds regular training and accompanies teachers in preparing learning implementation plans.
2.	Internet facilities and discussion rooms are available for teacher reflection and collaboration activities.	Some teachers still use the one-way lecture method, which does not follow the principles of differentiated learning.	The principal encourages young teachers who master technology to accompany other teachers in implementing interactive methods.
3.	There is open communication between the principal and teachers through informal discussions and weekly meetings.	Limited teaching materials, physical books that suit the needs of the Independent Curriculum.	The school collaborates with outside agencies to obtain additional teaching materials and enrichment references.
4.	The principal encourages collaboration between teachers in developing teaching tools.	Some teachers are still hesitant or passive in conveying ideas and teaching experiences.	The school principal provides moral support and opens a discussion space to share good practices.

This finding aligns with research results showing that the principal's transformational leadership style significantly affects teacher commitment in implementing the Independent Curriculum. Their research explains that school principals who can inspire, motivate, and build emotional relationships with teachers will create a conducive work atmosphere and increase teacher involvement in the learning transformation process. The school principal is an administrator and an agent of change who can influence teachers to commit to the vision of independent learning (Idialita et al., 2024).

## D. CONCLUSION

The principal's transformational leadership at SMA Negeri 6 Jambi City plays an important role in implementing the Independent Curriculum. The school principal shows ideal influence by example and establishing a positive work culture. However, inspirational motivation is not fully optimal because it does not address the specific needs of teachers. In the aspect of intellectual stimulation, discussion and training space is available, but the encouragement of teacher creativity and innovation still needs to be strengthened. Personal support through training and informal discussions helps teachers' readiness to face curriculum changes. Supporting factors for implementing the Independent Curriculum include adaptive leadership, continuous training, adequate facilities, and teacher collaboration. Overall, transformational leadership positively contributes to the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum, although improvements are still needed in motivational and intellectual aspects (Iriana et al., 2025). Meanwhile, the main challenges include limited teacher skills in implementing project-based learning, the dominance of conventional methods, and a lack of teaching materials.

Recommended strategic solutions include innovative training, teacher mentoring, external partnerships, and consistent moral support. By strengthening teacher competency through targeted training and collaboration with external and internal parties, we can overcome obstacles in the Independent Curriculum (Effendi, 2022).

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## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

- Author 1 : Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.  
Author 2 : Conceptualization; Data curation; Investigation.  
Author 3 : Data curation; Investigation; Formal analysis; Methodology; Writing - original draft.

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