Perceived external prestige and organizational identification: mediating impact of person-organization fit

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
	The aim of this study is to explore the relationship between teachers perceived external prestige (PEP), person-organization fit (POF), and organizational identification (OI). Based on the social identity theory (SIT), 220 teachers from 9 private undergraduate colleges in Yunnan Province, China, were the participants. The data were analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM). The analysis reveals that OI is positively and significantly influenced by teachers' PEP and POF. Furthermore, POF mediates the connection of PEP with OI. Additionally, recognizing the importance of POF for private school teachers, as well as the significance of meeting social and psychological needs, is crucial. Therefore, private colleges in Yunnan should enhance their external prestige while optimizing the mediating mechanism of POF to strengthen teachers' OI. *This is an open access article under the CC BY-SA license.*

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1.   INTRODUCTION

As China's education system continues to be reformed, the development of the educational sector has become an important part of the national strategy [1]. The government and education authorities have developed a range of policies aimed at advancing the reform and high-quality development of education [2]. Concurrently, the competition among colleges has been growing increasingly fierce, and teachers are receiving more and more attention and emphasis as the key force in promoting educational reform and development [3]. Therefore, teachers' stability and loyalty directly impact the quality of education in China [4]. In institutions of higher learning, teachers are not only disseminators of knowledge, but also important participants in the realization of organizational goals [5]. Organizational identification (OI) affects teachers' job performance, loyalty, and contribution to the university's development [6]–[9]. It ensures that employees' personal goals align with those of the organization, reducing goal conflicts to more effectively realize organizational aims [10]. Moreover, it is particularly important for enhancing colleges' competitiveness and their ability to attract and retain outstanding talent [9], [11].

Organizational external prestige is considered a significant element contributing positively to OI [12]. When teachers perceive their school as highly prestigious externally, their self-esteem and sense of identification are enhanced correspondingly [13]. According to social identity theory (SIT), individuals tend to enhance their self-esteem by associating themselves with groups that are positively evaluated [3]. Therefore, teachers' sense of OI can be significantly improved if they associate with an organization that has good external prestige, making them more willing to make a long-term commitment to the organization. Additionally, person-organization fit (POF), indicating the alignment of personal values with those of the

organization is another significant variable affecting OI [14], [15]. This is because when individuals integrate the organization's values with their self-concept and feel consistent with the organization, OI arises [15]. A significant alignment of teachers' personal values and the organization's values not only deepens their connection to the organization but also enhances their job satisfaction and work engagement [16]. Enhancing teachers' sense of OI, thereby building a stable and efficient team of teachers, has become a crucial goal in the management of China's colleges [17].

Private ordinary undergraduate colleges, an important component of China's higher education system, face greater developmental challenges than public institutions. These challenges include limited resources, low teacher compensation, and high turnover rates, especially in frontier and economically disadvantaged regions such as Yunnan Province [18]–[22]. These difficulties highlight the urgent need for private colleges to enhance teachers' sense of OI to reduce teacher turnover and improve school competitiveness. The purpose of this study is to examine how teachers' perceptions of external prestige affect their OI. Additionally, it explores the mediating role of personal fit with the organization.

SIT is used in this study as the basis to explore the effect of teachers perceived external prestige (PEP) on OI at private undergraduate institutions in Yunnan Province, China, and the mediating role of POF in this context. The innovation of this study lies in revealing the mediating role of POF in the connection of teachers' PEP with OI. This finding extends the use of SIT in education while offering university administrators a novel perspective. Optimizing POF can enhance teachers' OI more effectively. Moreover, by focusing on private university teachers in Yunnan Province, China, this study provides new insights into understanding teacher behavior within different regional and educational contexts.

OI denotes the cognitive bond that an individual develops with their organization, with the core being the definition of self-concept through the identity of an organizational member [23]. Typically, members with stronger OI typically participate more actively in the organization's activities, exhibit greater responsibility, and align their behaviors with the organization's goals [24]. SIT serves as a theoretical foundation for understanding OI, indicating that individuals enhance their self-esteem by associating themselves with groups that are positively evaluated [25]. OI is essentially a specific manifestation of social identification, and it follows these principles: persons enhance their social identity by associating themselves with the organization, ultimately obtaining a positive self-concept and self-esteem [13], [15]. Consequently, this sense of identity encourages individuals' behavior and attitudes to be consistent with the organization's values and goals [25].

Perceived external organizational prestige reflects how individuals perceive the external evaluation of the organization, indicating its status, achievements, and social impact in the industry [26], [27]. SIT is founded on the principle that individuals are disposed to identify more with groups that are evaluated as more positive than other potential social categories, as this can enhance their self-esteem and identity [28], [29]. Fuller et al. [30] found that teachers who perceive the benefits of their school's positive reputation often identify with the school, as it indirectly boosts their perception of their own abilities and self-worth. Therefore, the first hypothesis (H1) proposes: teachers' perception of the organization's external prestige has a substantial positive influence on their OI.

The alignment between individuals and organizations can be understood as the consistency of individual values with organizational norms and values [31]. The consistency of values is the most prevalent form, mainly due to the fact that values are a fundamental component in shaping a person's self-identity and significantly influence their attitudes, judgments, and behaviors [32]. Once an individual's values match those of the organization, they tend to identify with the organization more readily, leading them to strive for better job performance and a stronger sense of belonging [33], [34]. Previous research has shown that good alignment between individuals and organizations can enhance teachers' self-efficacy, work engagement, and willingness to remain with the organization [35], [36]. Given this, the second hypothesis (H2) is formulated: the alignment between teachers and the organization significantly enhances their OI.

SIT also suggests that positive evaluations from out-groups can enhance in-group members' self-esteem and identity [25]. High external prestige can elevate members' social status, strengthen teachers' self-esteem and group identity, thereby promoting consistency with the organization's core beliefs and aims and enhancing POF [27], [34]. Kakar et al. [12] found that high organizational prestige can enhance the OI of teachers in higher education, making them more disposed to align with the organization's core beliefs and aims. Therefore, the third hypothesis (H3) is proposed: teachers' perception of an organization's external prestige significantly enhances the POF.

SIT posits that individuals tend to categorize themselves into groups with positive images and enhance their self-esteem through alignment with these groups [25], [34]. Existing research has confirmed the pairwise associations between perceived organizational prestige, POF, and organizational identity [12], [29], [34]. Furthermore, previous studies have revealed the mediating role of POF in individual psychological and behavioral outcomes, as well as its importance in different organizational variables [37]–[39]. These results imply that the alignment between personal and organizational values might serve as

a potential mediator in the connection of perceived external organizational prestige with teacher organizational identity. Given this, the current research focuses on the teacher population at private undergraduate institutions in Yunnan Province, China, aiming to investigate whether POF mediates the connection of teachers' perception of external organizational prestige with their organizational identity. Based on the previous research and theories, the fourth hypothesis (H4) suggests: POF mediates the connection linking teachers' perception of organizational external prestige to OI.

2. METHOD

The research framework is based on the discussion and hypotheses proposed in the aforementioned literature. According to SIT, this research examines the influence of PEP in OI of teachers from private undergraduate colleges in Yunnan Province. It also explores how POF acts as a mediator that links PEP to OI. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used for data analysis and model verification. The research framework is shown in Figure 1.
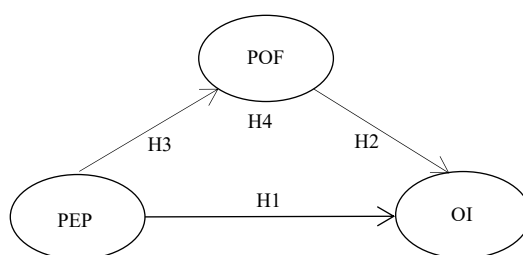

Figure 1. Research model

Currently, there are 32 ordinary undergraduate colleges in Yunnan Province, 9 of which are private. In these colleges, both the proportion of students at the same educational level and the student-teacher ratio exceed the national average [20]. The development of these colleges has been challenged by the instability of the teaching staff in terms of actual work. Teachers from the existing 9 private ordinary undergraduate colleges in Yunnan Province are taken as the research subjects in this research to examine the factors influencing OI.

SEM was used for data analysis in this research. By using purposive sampling method, 30 copies were distributed at each college, ultimately leading to the distribution of 270 formal surveys in total, with the sample size exceeding the standard of 200 [40]. The electronic questionnaires were distributed to teachers for their voluntary participation. After excluding invalid responses, the final sample consisted of 220 valid responses, with a response rate of 81.48%. Regarding gender distribution: 158 respondents (71.80%) were female, while 62 (28.20%) were male. In terms of age: 11 respondents (5%) were 25 years old or younger; 116 (52.74%) were aged between 26 and 35; 80 (36.36%) were between 36 and 45; 12 (5.45%) were between 46 and 55; and 1 respondent (0.45%) was over 55 years old.

The organizational external prestige [23], POF [14], and OI [23] scales served as measurement instruments in this research. These scales were back-translated and pre-tested before the formal data collection to refine them. Each item was assessed using a 5-points Likert scale. Participants rated their level of agreement with each statement, where 1 means they completely disagree and 5 means they completely agree. Higher scores indicate a stronger level of agreement. To assess the reliability, convergent validity, and model fit of each scale, reliability analysis and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) were performed on the formal data set. For each item, standard factor loadings, average variance extracted (AVE), and composite reliability (CR) values were evaluated to establish the convergent validity of the scales. If the measurement model meets the following criteria, it has convergent validity: factor loadings greater than 0.400, CR value greater than 0.700, AVE value greater than 0.500 [41]. Model fit standards include the following criteria: $\chi^2/df \leq 5$, goodness-of-fit index (GFI)≥0.900, parsimony goodness-of-fit index (PGFI)≥0.500, standardized root mean square residual (SRMR)≤0.050, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)≤0.080, comparative fit index (CFI)≥0.900, normed fit index (NFI)≥0.900, incremental fit index (IFI)≥0.900, parsimony normed fit index (PNFI)≥0.500, and adjusted goodness of fit (AGFI)≥0.900 [40].

Ashforth and Mael [23] developed the OI scale, which includes 6 items such as *"The success of this college is my success."* In this research, the scale's Cronbach's alpha (α) was 0.903. CFA was used to examine the OI scale. The factor loadings for every item varied between 0.665 and 0.873. The CR value of the latent variable was 0.905, and the AVE was 0.614. Model fit indices included: χ^2/df=4.148, SRMR=0.034, IFI=0.964, CFI=0.964, GFI=0.945, NFI=0.953, RMSEA=0.180, AGFI=0.873, PNFI=0.572,

and PGFI=0.405. The analysis indicates that the OI scale has sufficient reliability and convergent validity, thus meeting the requirements for model fit.

The perceived organizational external prestige scale established by Ashforth and Mael [23], which consists of 8 items, such as *"The college is considered to be one of the best."* After the pretest, 4 items were retained, and the reverse items in the scale were recalculated in the opposite direction. The α of the scale verified in this study was 0.838. CFA was employed to validate the perceived organizational external prestige scale. The factor loadings for every item varied between 0.725 and 0.865. The CR value for the latent variable was 0.842, and the AVE was 0.573. Model fit indices: χ^2/df=8.085, SRMR=0.038, IFI=0.961, CFI=0.960, GFI=0.965, NFI=0.955, AGFI=0.826, RMSEA=0.180, PNFI=0.318, and PGFI=0.193, the study results indicate that the indicators of this scale have sufficient possess adequate consistency and construct validity to satisfy the fit criteria.

Cable and DeRue [14] created the POF scale, comprising 3 dimensions: value fit, needs-supplies fit, and requirements-abilities fit. Each dimension includes 3 items, totaling 9 items, such as *"My personal values are very similar to those of the college."* In this study, the overall α for personal-organization fit is 0.941, with α values for value consistency, need-supply fit, and requirements-abilities fit being 0.954, 0.931, and 0.926, respectively. CFA was conducted to examine the POF scale. The factor loadings for every item varied between 0.872 and 0.944. The CR values for the latent variables were 0.955, 0.932, and 0.927, and the AVE values were 0.875, 0.821, and 0.808. Model fit indices included: χ^2/df=2.935, SRMR=0.027, IFI=0.978, CFI=0.978, GFI=0.934, NFI=0.967, RMSEA=0.094. AGFI=0.876, PNFI=0.645, and PGFI=0.498. These results indicate that the POF scale's indicators possess sufficient reliability and convergent validity to satisfy the fit requirements.

The data analysis in this study was conducted using the statistical software SPSS 22.0 and AMOS 21.0. Descriptive statistical analysis and a correlation analysis were conducted to understand the distribution of each variable and their interrelationships. Before using SEM to analyze teachers' perceptions of the connection between external organizational prestige and OI, the overall fit of the measurement model needs to be evaluated first [42]. In the SEM analysis, the main effect model between external organizational prestige and OI was tested first to determine whether there is a direct impact between them. Subsequently, the study explored both the direct impact and the indirect impact (through POF) using a mediation model.

The SEM framework was used for path analysis to test the proposed hypotheses. A hypothesis is considered supported when its significance value is less than 0.05 [40]. Additionally, following the recommendation of Shrout and Bolger [43], the bootstrap method was employed to validate the overall research model. When examining the mediating effect, if the confidence interval of the indirect effect excludes 0, it suggests the presence of a mediating effect. On this basis, the direct effect is further examined. A direct effect confidence interval that excludes 0 points to a partial mediating effect; however, if 0 is within the direct effect's confidence interval, this indicates a complete mediating effect.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Result

3.1.1. Descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients of variables

The descriptive statistics, including the mean and standard deviation (SD) of every variable, and the results of correlation analysis are presented in Table 1. The mean and standard deviation for PEP (M=3.813, SD=0.794), POF (M=3.687, SD=0.793), and OI (M=4.179, SD=0.735) indicate high levels of perception. As detailed in Table 1, significant positive correlations were observed for PEP with OI (r=0.296, p<0.001), PEP with POF (r=0.375, p<0.001), and POF with OI (r=0.678, p<0.001). The correlation coefficients between PEP, POF, and OI varied from 0.296 to 0.678. Since these values did not surpass 0.800, multicollinearity was not an issue, allowing the SEM analysis to proceed.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations

Variable	*Mean*	*SD*	1	2	3
1. PEP	3.813	0.794	1		
2. POF	3.687	0.793	0.375***	1	
3. OI	4.179	0.735	0.296***	0.678***	1

Note1: ***p<0.001.

3.1.2. SEM analysis

The main effect model of teachers' perception of external organizational prestige on OI is illustrated in Figure 2. The overall model fit indices included: χ^2/df=2.341, SRMR=0.043, GFI=0.934, AGFI=0.894,

IFI=0.961, CFI=0.961, NFI=0.934, PNFI=0.706, PGFI=0.578, and RMSEA=0.078. Although some fit indices do not reach optimal levels, they remain within an acceptable range overall. Therefore, the fit between the theoretical construct and observed results is deemed satisfactory. In private undergraduate institutions in Yunnan Province, the standardized coefficient of teachers' perception of external organizational prestige on OI is 0.344 (p<0.001), indicating a direct and significant positive impact. Thus, H1 is supported.

The mediation model involving POF, which links teachers' perception of external organizational prestige to OI is shown in Figure 3. The overall fit indices indicated: χ^2/df=2.313, SRMR=0.054, GFI=0.864, AGFI=0.823, IFI=0.946, CFI=0.946, NFI=0.909, PNFI=0.776, PGFI=0.664, and RMSEA=0.077. Although not all fit indices are optimal, the overall fit remains within an acceptable range. Therefore, the fit between the theoretical construct and observed results is found to be sufficient.

The results of the SEM mediation effect model test are shown in Table 2 and Figure 3. In the direct effect examination, the standardized coefficient for the connection of teachers' perception of the organization's external prestige with their OI at private undergraduate colleges in Yunnan Province is -0.024, which does not reach statistical significance (p>0.05). This suggests that the direct influence of teachers' perception of organizational external prestige on their OI is insignificant when taking the mediating variable of POF into account. The standardized coefficient for the impact of POF on OI is 0.757 (p<0.01), which indicates a significant direct effect, thereby supporting H2. Similarly, the standardized coefficient for the influence of teachers' perception of external organizational prestige on POF is 0.481 (p<0.01), also indicating a significant direct effect. This supports H3.
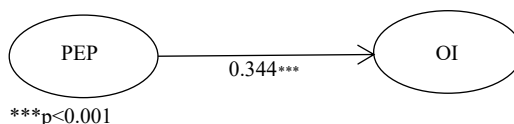

***p<0.001

Figure 2. Main effect model

Table 2. Results of path analysis and bootstrapping in testing the mediator

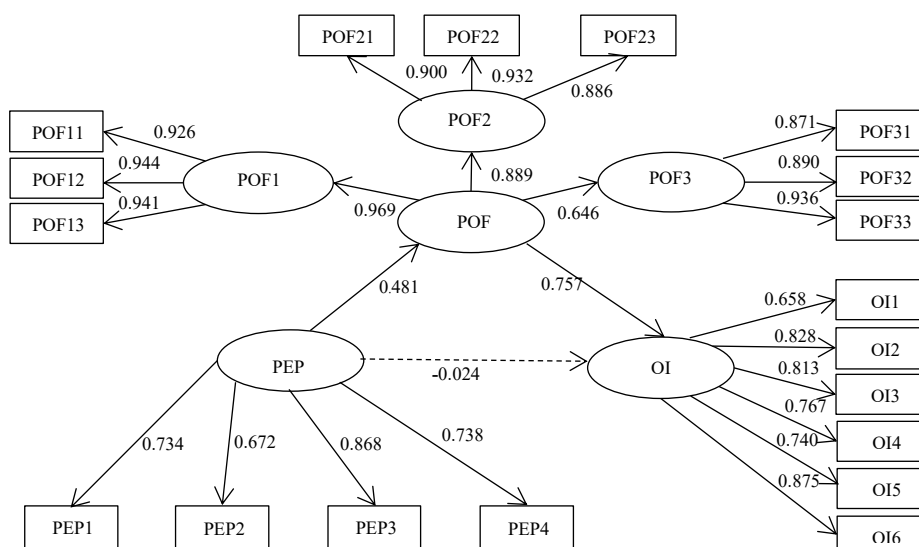| Path	Estimate	p	95% confidence interval
Direct paths			
PEP-->OI	-0.024	>0.05	[-0.194, 0.122]
PEP--->POF	0.481	<0.01	[0.318, 0.621]
POF-->OI	0.757	<0.01	[0.627, 0.859]
Indirect effect			
PEP--->POF--->OI	0.364	<0.001	[0.242, 0.502]
Total effect			
PEP--->OI	0.340	<0.001	[0.173, 0.489]

Note: data organized for this study

Figure 3. SEM path coefficient diagram

The results of testing the mediation model using bootstrap resampling method are shown in Table 2. Mediated by POF, the indirect effect of teachers' perception of external organizational prestige on OI is 0.364 (p<0.001). The 95% confidence interval ranges from [0.242, 0.502], which excludes 0, confirming the statistical significance of the mediation effect. In contrast, the direct effect of teachers' perception of external organizational prestige on OI is -0.024, confidence interval encompassing [-0.194, 0.122], which includes 0, suggesting that the direct effect lacks statistical significance. The total effect of PEP on OI is 0.340 (p < 0.001), with a confidence interval of [0.173, 0.489], which excludes 0, indicating that the total effect is statistically significant. These findings suggest that in private undergraduate institutions in Yunnan Province, human-organ fit completely mediates the connection of teachers' perception of external organizational prestige with their OI, as in Table 2 and Figure 3, thus supporting H4.

3.2. Discussion

The research model, derived from SIT, was used in this study as the basis on which to investigate the perception of teachers at private undergraduate colleges in Yunnan Province, China, perceive the impact of external prestige on OI, with POF as the mediating variable. The findings indicate that the perception of external prestige and POF can enhance the identification of teachers in Yunnan with private colleges. Moreover, teachers' perception of external prestige can indirectly enhance their sense of identification with the organization based on POF.

Teachers' perception of external prestige positively influences OI, which is consistent with the findings of [7], [29], [30], [44], [45]. The external prestige of an organization is a positive attribute that significantly influences teachers' identification with the organization [7]. When an organization enjoys a good reputation and attractiveness in the external environment, employees are more inclined to regard it as a desirable group to belong to, thereby strengthening their sense of OI [46]. For teachers, perceiving the external prestige of their university not only reflects the university's status, achievements, and social influence within the industry [26] [27], but also brings them a positive social identity and enhances their self-esteem [9]. When teachers believe that their university enjoys a good reputation externally, they gain a sense of superiority based on the organization's prestige, which further strengthens their identification with the university and increases their pride in it [44], [45].

The results of this research demonstrate that alignment between teachers and organizations, particularly in terms of values, is a core factor influencing teachers' OI. This conclusion resonates with the research results of scholars [14], [35], [47]–[49]. When the personal values of teachers closely match the organization's mission and goals, they are inclined to experience a greater feeling of belongingness within the organization, which in turn boosts their membership awareness. Furthermore, Kachchhap and Horo [49] also show that the higher the alignment between teachers and organizations concerning values, aims, and work environment, the stronger their OI. This further confirms the hypothesis presented in this research, which posits the fit between teachers and organizations significantly enhances their OI.

This study also found that teachers at private colleges in Yunnan perceive the organization's external prestige, which significantly enhances their degree of POF. This outcome is consistent with the research of [12], [50]–[52]. The recognition of an organization's good reputation by external groups can be seen as a social and emotional resource for teachers, enhancing their trust and adaptability to the organization's goals, values, and culture [51], [52]. Teachers tend to believe that their personal values align with the school's mission and culture, and that the job requirements match their personal work abilities and needs [52]. In other words, perceiving their school's good external reputation can strengthen teachers' sense of POF [53]. Therefore, teachers in private colleges will feel that if the colleges have a good reputation, the colleges' goals and practices are consistent with their own beliefs and values. Therefore, the teachers will feel they fit well with the colleges.

However, the research findings also reveal that although teachers' perception of organizational external prestige directly affects their OI, when the mediation variable of POF is introduced, their perception of the organization's external prestige no longer directly impacts their OI. This indicates that POF plays a significant role in OI [29], highlighting the importance of matching private university teachers with colleges. That is, when teachers at private colleges in Yunnan perceive that their college has a better external reputation than others, their sense of pride and self-identification as members of the organization is satisfied, and their social-emotional needs are met. As a result, they also believe that the college's values and culture are aligned with their own, their capabilities match the job requirements, and the college can satisfy their needs. As they feel honored by the organization, their identification with it is enhanced. That is to say, in the influence of perceived external organizational prestige on organizational identity, the POF of teachers at private colleges plays a crucial role.

4. CONCLUSION

The perception of external prestige among teachers in private colleges in Yunnan Province, China, positively influences their sense of OI. This influence is mediated by the degree of POF, which is a key mediating variable in forming OI Precisely, POF directly affects OI and serves as a bridge between external prestige and OI. This finding reveals the underlying mechanism that connects external prestige to teachers' OI through POF, thereby innovating our understanding of how regional contexts shape teacher behavior. The research indicates that among teachers in private colleges in Yunnan, POF serves as a complete mediator linking external organizational prestige to OI, highlighting the significance of POF for teachers in private colleges. Therefore, private teachers' beliefs and values must be consistent with the school's organizational objectives, culture, and core beliefs. This is also the primary factor that private colleges pay attention to. First, the teacher-organization fit should be considered to improve the teachers OI.

The consistency between the values and aims of the school organization and the personal behaviours and attitudes can enhance teachers' OI. Therefore, schools should establish correct educational goals and values that align with teachers' educational beliefs to enhance teachers' sense of identification with the school organization. Secondly, improve the external reputation of private colleges. Improving the external prestige of the university by enhancing teaching quality, encouraging teachers' participation in research and industry cooperation, strengthening brand promotion, and highlighting successful alumni can further enhance teachers' OI. Moreover, this research found that POF is a pivotal factor in the OI of teachers in private colleges. Therefore, future research on the OI of teachers in private colleges can also focus more on the discussion of POF.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

This journal uses the Contributor Roles Taxonomy (CRediT) to recognize individual author contributions, reduce authorship disputes, and facilitate collaboration.

Name of Author	C	M	So	Va	Fo	I	R	D	O	E	Vi	Su	P	Fu
Yan Li	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Yuan-Cheng Chang	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	

C : **C**onceptualization	I : **I**nvestigation	Vi : **Vi**sualization
M : **M**ethodology	R : **R**esources	Su : **Su**pervision
So : **So**ftware	D : **D**ata Curation	P : **P**roject administration
Va : **Va**lidation	O : Writing - **O**riginal Draft	Fu : **Fu**nding acquisition
Fo : **Fo**rmal analysis	E : Writing - Review & **E**diting	

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

This research was conducted independently without any financial or personal influences. The authors have no conflicts of interest.

INFORMED CONSENT

We ensured that each participant was fully informed and had signed the consent form before the investigation began.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

We conducted studies covering human subjects, following the ethical principles of the Helsinki Declaration and complying with all relevant national statutes and institutional procedures. The study protocol was approved by the committee of Dhurakij Pundit University.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The evidence validating the study's results may be requested from the corresponding author, [Y-CC], for research purposes.

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