

Original Article

Story-Based Learning as a Strategy for Vocabulary Development in Early Language Education

Shar Malou Joy A. Cadeliña, Maribeth O. Galamiton , Celestino Jr. E. Dahunan, Jenelyn O. Ancheta

Author Information:

Bohol State University, Bohol, Philippines

Correspondence:

sharmaloujoy.ramos@deped.gov.ph

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Abstract. This study examined the effectiveness of storytelling as a strategy for improving vocabulary development among Grade 1 pupils at Canuba Elementary School, District of Jagna, Division of Bohol, during the School Year 2025–2026. Early vocabulary growth is essential to later literacy; it is important to use approaches that truly engage young learners; however, classroom practices are often limited in their interactivity and motivation. To address this concern, the study examined storytelling as a more learner-centered and participatory instructional strategy. A quasi-experimental pretest–posttest design was used, with 14 pupils assigned to either an experimental or a control group based on their Oral Reading Verification Test (ORVT) results. Vocabulary assessments were administered before and after the intervention, and a questionnaire was used to gather pupils' perceptions of the instructional approach. Results indicated that while both groups improved from pretest to posttest, the experimental group that received storytelling instruction achieved significantly greater gains in vocabulary development than the control group. Pupils also described positive learning experiences, noting that storytelling increased their engagement, interest, and participation during lessons. Overall, the findings suggest that storytelling can strengthen vocabulary development and support an active, meaningful classroom environment. The study underscores the value of integrating storytelling into early grade instruction to promote language acquisition and comprehension. It also points to the need for teachers to have the skills and resources required to implement storytelling effectively. In addition, the study encourages parental involvement in storytelling activities at home to reinforce learning and further support literacy development. Future research may explore storytelling across different grade levels, subject areas, and educational contexts to confirm and extend these results.

Keywords: Filipino language; Pupils; Quasi-experimental; Story-based learning; Vocabulary.

Vocabulary development is a foundational component of literacy and lifelong learning because it enables learners to comprehend spoken and written language and express ideas effectively. A strong vocabulary in the early grades, particularly among Grade 1 pupils, is essential for reading fluency, comprehension, and overall academic success. Without sufficient vocabulary knowledge, learners may struggle to understand texts and participate meaningfully in classroom activities. However, in many classroom settings, vocabulary instruction still relies heavily on rote memorization of word lists, which often limits engagement and long-term retention among young learners (Mayang Ledy et al., 2023). This gap between the importance of vocabulary

development and the limitations of traditional teaching methods highlights the need for more meaningful and engaging instructional approaches.

One promising alternative is storytelling, an instructional strategy that presents language through meaningful narratives. Storytelling involves the use of characters, settings, conflict, and resolution to communicate ideas in a structured and engaging way, allowing learners to connect vocabulary with context (Khamasuk & Whanchit, 2021). Recent studies emphasize that storytelling enhances learners' reading engagement, comprehension, and emotional development, making it particularly suitable for early grade learners (Satrini, 2019; Fitri & Ginting, 2021). It also supports creativity, empathy, and confidence while fostering deeper cognitive processing of language (La, A., Santoso et al., 2023). More recent research further confirms that narrative-based instruction improves vocabulary acquisition by helping learners retain and understand new words more effectively through contextual learning experiences (Journal of Language Studies, 2025).

Despite these positive findings, most existing studies remain general in scope. They are not specifically focused on Filipino vocabulary development among early-grade learners in local Philippine classroom settings, particularly through an intervention tailored to pupils selected based on vocabulary weaknesses. In the study by Lusaran et al. (2026), participants encountered difficulties in both reading and numeracy, as indicated by PHILI IRI results. According to Cano et al. (2026), language anxiety is a feeling of tension, apprehension, and nervousness associated with learning a language. It has been a common emotional reaction against learning a language. At Canuba Elementary School, District of Jagna, Division of Bohol, several Grade 1 pupils demonstrated poor to very poor performance on the Oral Reading Vocabulary Test (ORVT) during the School Year 2025–2026, indicating limited comprehension of Filipino vocabulary. This reflects a clear gap between instructional practice and learner needs, with traditional rote-based methods appearing insufficient to address early language difficulties. More importantly, there is limited localized evidence on how storytelling can specifically support Filipino vocabulary development among struggling learners in primary education.

Therefore, this study investigates the effectiveness of Story-Based Learning through storytelling in improving the Filipino vocabulary of Grade 1 pupils with low vocabulary performance. It also examines how repeated exposure to storytelling activities can enhance comprehension, word recognition, and engagement in learning. By analyzing pre-test and post-test results after a structured intervention, this study aims to contribute empirical evidence on the effectiveness of storytelling as a learner-centered instructional strategy. Ultimately, the findings are expected to provide meaningful implications for teachers, curriculum planners, and researchers in strengthening early literacy instruction through more engaging and context-based teaching approaches.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a quasi-experimental pre-test, post-test design with a control group to assess the effectiveness of story-based learning on Grade 1 pupils' Filipino vocabulary at Canuba Elementary School. This design was selected because the main research question seeks to determine whether there is a significant difference in vocabulary performance between pupils exposed to story-based learning and those taught using traditional methods. A quasi-experimental approach is most suitable for this purpose, as it allows the researcher to measure the effect of an instructional intervention in a real classroom setting, where random assignment of learners is not fully feasible. By using both experimental and control groups, the design provides a fair basis for comparison and strengthens the validity of the findings by controlling for normal classroom learning conditions.

Fourteen Grade 1 pupils were selected based on their ORVT results, which showed a class average raw score of 39 in word recognition and 80 in comprehension, reflecting a 50% overall literacy rate. The pupils were equally assigned to two groups: seven in the experimental group and seven in the control group. Both groups were given a pre-test to assess their initial knowledge of Filipino vocabulary. The experimental group was exposed to a two-week Story-Based Learning intervention, where pupils listened to stories, discussed unfamiliar vocabulary, and practiced using new words in meaningful contexts. Meanwhile, the control group continued with the traditional vocabulary instruction used in the school. After the intervention, both groups were administered a post-test to measure any improvement in vocabulary performance. In addition, classroom observations were conducted to document pupils' engagement, participation, and responsiveness during the storytelling sessions. The pre-test and post-test results were then compared to determine the effectiveness of story-based learning in improving Filipino vocabulary among Grade 1 pupils.

Participants and Sampling Technique

This study involved 14 Grade 1 pupils from Canuba Elementary School, Jagna, Bohol, during the School Year 2025–2026. The participants were selected through purposive sampling because the study required learners who met specific conditions aligned with the intervention and objectives. In educational research, purposive sampling is often used when participants are intentionally chosen based on particular characteristics relevant to the study, especially in small-scale classroom-based studies where controlled conditions are needed (Campbell et al., 2020). For this study, the inclusion criteria focused on pupils who were officially enrolled in Grade 1 and who could understand and follow simple instructions in Filipino. This was important to ensure that learners could actively participate in the storytelling activities and vocabulary tasks without difficulty. Pupils who were frequently absent were excluded to avoid interruptions in exposure to the intervention, while those with more severe learning difficulties that could affect consistent participation were also excluded. These criteria helped ensure that the learning conditions were as fair and consistent as possible for all participants. By carefully setting these inclusion and exclusion criteria, the study reduced factors that could affect the results, such as uneven participation or inconsistent exposure to lessons. This made it easier to focus on the actual effect of the story-based learning approach on vocabulary development. The pupils were then divided into two groups: an experimental group that was exposed to story-based learning and a control group that continued with traditional vocabulary instruction. Both groups were matched on pre-test scores to ensure they started at a similar level, enabling a fair comparison of results after the intervention. Overall, this sampling approach helped ensure that the findings were more reliable and that any improvements were made.

Research Instrument

This study utilized a combination of adapted and researcher-made instruments to measure Filipino vocabulary development and pupils' attitudes toward learning among Grade 1 learners. These included the Oral Reading Verification Test (ORVT), story-based learning worksheets, a pre-test and post-test, and a Likert-scale questionnaire. The Oral Reading Verification Test (ORVT) served as the main tool for assessing pupils' vocabulary performance. This standardized instrument evaluates word recognition, pronunciation, and comprehension in context (Department of Education, 2020). It was administered as both a pre-test and a post-test to measure pupils' baseline vocabulary knowledge and their improvement after the intervention. The intervention materials consisted of five story-based learning sessions conducted over two weeks. Each session introduced 5–7 target Filipino vocabulary words embedded within age-appropriate stories. To reinforce learning, pupils completed worksheets after each session, which included activities such as picture-word matching, coloring, sentence completion, and identifying meanings. These tasks were designed to promote active participation and contextual understanding of vocabulary. A 10-item Likert-scale questionnaire was used to assess pupils' attitudes toward vocabulary learning through storytelling. This instrument was adapted from established early literacy studies (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Ledy et al., 2023) and modified for Grade 1 learners using a 3-point scale: 1 = "Hindi Kailanman," 2 = "Minsan," and 3 = "Palagi." It measured pupils' interest, enjoyment, and confidence in learning new vocabulary. The questionnaire was pilot-tested with 14 Grade 1 pupils from a different section to ensure clarity and appropriateness. Results showed acceptable reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.76, indicating good internal consistency. Based on this result, the instrument was considered suitable for use in the main study. Overall, these instruments provided both quantitative data on vocabulary development and attitudinal data on learner engagement, allowing for a comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of story-based learning.

Data Gathering Procedure

The data were gathered over two weeks during the pupils' regular reading and literacy classes. Seven pupils were assigned to the experimental group and seven to the control group based on their ORVT 2026 results, with a focus on those who performed below average on vocabulary. This helped ensure that both groups started at a similar level, making the comparison fair. To keep the process consistent, each session followed a prepared lesson guide, ensuring the same objectives, target vocabulary, and time allocation were observed throughout the study. The researcher also closely observed the sessions to ensure the activities were carried out as planned. This helped maintain consistency across all sessions and ensured that the results were not affected by differences in how the lessons were delivered. The experimental group took part in story-based learning three times a week, with each session lasting about 20 to 30 minutes. During these sessions, pupils listened to stories and engaged in simple but meaningful activities such as matching words to pictures, drawing, and forming short sentences. These activities helped them understand and remember new Filipino words more easily. On the other hand, the control group continued with the usual classroom approach, which included repetition, worksheets, and teacher-led drills. Both

groups were given equal instruction time to ensure a fair comparison. After the two-week intervention, both groups took a post-test to check any improvement in their vocabulary. They also answered a simple 10-item questionnaire to share their experiences and attitudes toward the learning activities, focusing on their interest, enjoyment, and confidence. All activities were done inside the classroom under normal teaching conditions so that the results would reflect real classroom learning. This made it possible to clearly see the difference between storytelling-based instruction and traditional teaching methods.

Data Analysis Procedure

The data gathered in this study were carefully organized and analyzed to determine the effectiveness of the instructional intervention. To begin with, the pre-test and post-test scores of both the experimental and control groups were tabulated and summarized. Descriptive statistics, specifically the mean (M) and standard deviation (SD), were used to describe the learners' overall performance before and after the intervention and to show how their scores varied within each group. These descriptive measures provided a clear picture of the pupils' vocabulary level, but further analysis was needed to determine whether the changes in scores were statistically significant. For this reason, a paired t-test was used to compare the pre-test and post-test results within each group. This test is appropriate because it assesses whether there is a meaningful improvement within the same group of learners following an intervention. In addition, an independent t-test was used to compare the post-test scores of the experimental and control groups. This allowed the researcher to determine whether the pupils exposed to story-based learning performed significantly better than those who received traditional instruction. This test is suitable for comparing two groups to identify differences in outcomes associated with different teaching methods. Furthermore, the responses from the Likert-scale questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The mean scores per item and the overall mean were computed to describe pupils' attitudes, particularly their interest, enjoyment, and confidence during the learning process. These results were then summarized and interpreted in relation to the study's objectives. Observational notes taken during the sessions were also used to support the quantitative findings. These helped provide additional insights into pupils' engagement, participation, and actual use of vocabulary during activities. Overall, these statistical tools were chosen because they directly align with the research objectives of assessing improvement within and between groups, enabling a clear and meaningful interpretation of the effectiveness of story-based learning for Filipino vocabulary development.

Ethical Considerations

The study carefully upheld the rights, dignity, and welfare of all pupil participants throughout the research process. Prior to the conduct of the study, informed consent was obtained from parents or guardians after clearly explaining the purpose of the study, the procedures involved, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without any negative consequences. In addition, permission to conduct the study was secured from the school administration to ensure that all procedures were officially approved and aligned with school policies and standards. The study also followed ethical principles consistent with institutional and DepEd research guidelines, ensuring that all activities were appropriate, safe, and suitable for Grade 1 learners. The learning tasks were designed to be engaging and non-threatening, taking into consideration the age and developmental level of the participants. Confidentiality was strictly observed throughout the study. The identities of the pupils were kept anonymous, and all data collected were used solely for research purposes. All records were stored securely to prevent unauthorized access. To ensure fairness, both the experimental and control groups received equal instructional time, and classroom routines were minimally disrupted during the intervention. The study maintained neutrality in instruction and ensured that no group was disadvantaged. Overall, these ethical measures were implemented to protect the participants, maintain the integrity of the research process, and ensure that the study was conducted responsibly and in accordance with accepted educational research standards.

Results and Discussion

Table 1. Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores of Experimental and Control Groups

Group	Pre-test M $\pm$ SD	Post-test M $\pm$ SD	t (Pre-Post)	p	Interpretation
Experimental	5.00 $\pm$ 0.82	9.71 $\pm$ 0.49	13.13	< .001	Significant improvement
Control	7.71 $\pm$ 1.11	8.86 $\pm$ 0.38	3.36	.005	Significant improvement

Table 1 presents the pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental and control groups. The pre-test and post-test scores were analyzed using a paired t-test to determine the effectiveness of the intervention. As shown in the table, the experimental group's mean score increased from 5.00 $\pm$ 0.82 to 9.71 $\pm$ 0.49, indicating a significant

improvement ($t(6) = 13.13, p < .001$). The control group also showed improvement from 7.71 ± 1.11 to 8.86 ± 0.38 , which was statistically significant ($t(6) = 3.36, p = .005$), although the gain was comparatively smaller.

To further examine the intervention's effectiveness, an independent t-test was conducted on post-test scores. The results revealed that the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group ($t(12) = 3.63, p = .003$). This finding confirms that the story-based learning intervention had a stronger impact on vocabulary development than traditional instruction. Overall, this suggests that structured storytelling provides a more effective learning environment for vocabulary acquisition compared to routine classroom activities.

These findings are consistent with those of Losi et al. (2022), who emphasized that storytelling enhances vocabulary learning by presenting words in meaningful and engaging contexts. Similarly, Ledy et al. (2023) found that learners exposed to narrative-based instruction exhibited higher engagement and better retention than those taught through memorization. In this study, the improvement observed in the experimental group may be attributed to repeated exposure to target vocabulary embedded within meaningful story contexts, which strengthened comprehension and recall.

Table 2. Post-Test Comparison Between Experimental and Control Groups (Independent t-test)

Group	n	Post-test M $\pm$ SD	t	df	p	Interpretation
Experimental	7	9.71 $\pm$ 0.49	3.63	12	.003	The experimental group scored significantly higher than the control group.
Control	7	8.86 $\pm$ 0.38	—	—	—	

Table 2 further confirmed the effectiveness of the intervention. The experimental group obtained a higher mean score ($M = 9.71 \pm 0.49$) compared to the control group ($M = 8.86 \pm 0.38$). The difference was statistically significant ($t(12) = 3.63, p = .003$), indicating that pupils exposed to story-based learning performed better than those who received traditional instruction. This result reinforces the idea that contextualized, and narrative-based instruction supports deeper vocabulary understanding compared to repetitive drill-based methods.

These findings align with Otoluwa et al. (2022), who reported that storytelling significantly improves vocabulary mastery by making learning more meaningful and engaging. Likewise, Cajuizi and Mandarani (2023) emphasized that narratives allow learners to infer meanings, engage emotionally, and apply vocabulary in context. Such results suggest that storytelling supports not only cognitive learning but also emotional engagement, which may explain the experimental group's higher performance. From a practical perspective, these findings highlight the importance of integrating story-based strategies into early grade instruction. Teachers may enhance vocabulary instruction by using age-appropriate stories, guided discussions, and follow-up activities that encourage pupils to apply new words in context. Compared to traditional repetition-based instruction, storytelling provides a more interactive and meaningful learning experience that supports long-term retention.

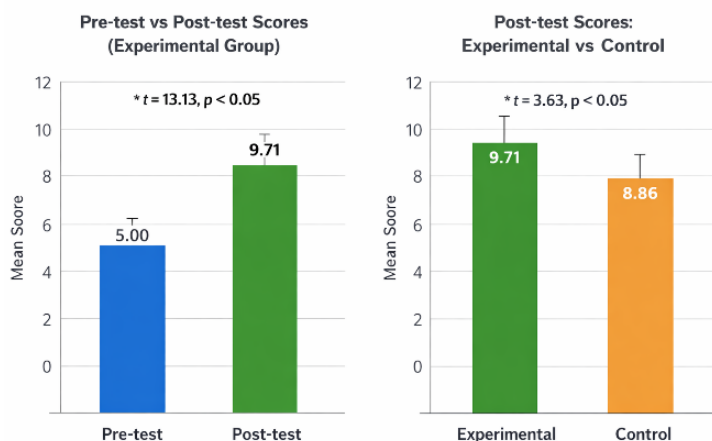


Figure 1. Mean Reading Scores Showing Significant Improvement Within the Experimental Group (Left) and Significant Difference Compared to the Control Group at Post-Test (Right).

The figure illustrates the clear improvement in both groups, with a more pronounced increase in the experimental

group. The experimental group improved from a baseline score of 5.00 to 9.71, indicating substantial vocabulary growth after the intervention. The control group also improved but at a slower rate, reaching 8.86. Instead of an informal interpretation, the results indicate that the intervention had a strong positive effect on learning outcomes, as reflected in the significant t-value ($t = 13.13$), confirming the effectiveness of the instructional approach. The difference between groups at post-test further supports the advantage of story-based learning.

Table 3a. *Likert Questionnaire Results of Experimental and Control Groups*

Item	Statement	Experimental M	Control M	Interpretation
1	Nag-eenjoy akong matuto ng bagong Filipino na salita.	3.00	2.85	The experimental group showed a slightly higher mean, indicating a more favorable perception.
2	Kumpiyansa akong gamitin ang bagong salita sa pangungusap.	4.25	4.25	Both groups showed equally high means, indicating a strong positive perception.
3	Nag-eenjoy akong magpraktis ng bagong bokabularyo sa klase.	3.00	2.85	The experimental group showed a slightly higher mean, indicating higher engagement.
4	Ang pagkatuto ng bagong salita ay nakakatulong sa pag-unawa ng mg kwento.	2.71	3.00	The control group showed a slightly higher mean, indicating a moderately higher perception for this item.
5	Gusto kong matuto ng mas maraming Filipino na salita araw-araw.	3.00	2.85	The experimental group showed a higher mean, indicating a more positive response.
6	Nakikinig ako ng mabuti kapag nagtuturo ang guro ng bagong salita.	3.00	3.00	Both groups showed equal means, indicating a consistently positive perception.
7	Nag-eenjoy akong ulitin ang salita pagkatapos ng guro upang maalala ito.	3.00	2.85	The experimental group showed a slightly higher mean, indicating better engagement.
8	Nag-eenjoy akong magkulay o magdrawing habang natututo ng bagong salita.	2.85	3.00	The control group showed a slightly higher mean, indicating a moderately higher perception for this item.
9	Sinubukan kong alalahanin ang mga salitang natutunan ko sa klase.	2.85	2.85	Both groups showed moderate means, indicating a neutral-to-slightly positive perception.
10	Masaya para sa akin ang matuto ng bagong salita.	2.85	2.85	Both groups showed moderate means, indicating a neutral-to-slightly positive response.
Group	Overall Mean (M)	Interpretation		
Experimental Group	3.05	Always		
Control Group	3.04	Always		

Table 3b. *Likert Questionnaire Interpretation of Experimental and Control Groups*

Descriptive Rating	Interpretation
3 Always	The behavior or statement is consistently observed or experienced by the pupil.
2 Sometimes	The behavior or statement is occasionally observed or experienced by the pupil.
1 Never	The behavior or statement is not observed or experienced by the pupil.

The Likert questionnaire results indicate that both the experimental and control groups generally demonstrated positive attitudes toward vocabulary learning activities. Overall, the experimental group obtained a slightly higher mean score ($M = 3.05$) compared to the control group ($M = 3.04$), suggesting a marginal advantage in engagement, enjoyment, and motivation among pupils exposed to story-based learning. Although the difference between the two groups is minimal, the pattern of responses shows a consistent tendency for the experimental group to report more favorable learning experiences across several indicators. Instead of focusing on individual item scores, the overall trend suggests that storytelling-based instruction contributed to slightly higher levels of learner interest and participation, particularly in activities that involved repetition, engagement with new vocabulary, and classroom interaction. Both groups, however, still reflected generally positive perceptions, indicating that traditional instruction also provided a meaningful learning experience, though less consistently aligned with active engagement strategies.

Table 3b presents the interpretation of the Likert scale used in the study. A score of 3 corresponds to “Always,” indicating that the behavior or attitude is consistently observed; 2 corresponds to “Sometimes,” indicating occasional occurrence; and 1 corresponds to “Never,” indicating that the behavior is not observed. This simplified scale was appropriate for Grade 1 learners, allowing them to express their learning experiences easily.

Overall, these findings suggest that the intervention not only improved academic performance but also contributed to pupils’ motivation and positive attitudes toward learning, supporting the use of student-centered strategies that foster both cognitive and affective engagement (Bhuttah et al., 2024; Sahito et al., 2025). The story’s emotional tone helps convey its themes and shapes how readers interpret its messages. Many children’s stories follow a pattern that begins with neutral or negative situations and ends positively, highlighting growth and perseverance while making the narratives more relatable (Ampo & Amora, 2025). The findings revealed that story-based reading is an effective strategy for developing respondents’ Filipino vocabulary skills. This approach encourages learners to engage more actively in reading Filipino texts, thereby enhancing their vocabulary development. According to Ampo, Deguit, Cano, and Baguio (2025), integrating digitalization enables students to read, write, and transform text-based stories using various multimedia formats, making learning more engaging and relatable to their lived experiences. However, teachers must carefully select appropriate materials that suit the learners’ needs and developmental level.

Conclusion

This study establishes the value of story-based learning as an effective instructional approach for enhancing Filipino vocabulary development among Grade 1 pupils. Its key contribution lies in demonstrating that embedding vocabulary within meaningful narratives supports more natural language learning, allowing young learners to understand, retain, and use new words in context. This highlights storytelling as a practical, learner-centered alternative to traditional rote-based vocabulary instruction in early-grade classrooms.

In terms of classroom practice, the findings suggest clear and actionable strategies for teachers. Educators are encouraged to integrate storytelling into daily vocabulary instruction by introducing new words through stories, guiding pupils in understanding meanings within context, and providing opportunities for learners to apply vocabulary through speaking, drawing, or simple role-play activities. These approaches can make vocabulary learning more engaging and developmentally appropriate for young learners.

At the policy and school level, the study supports the integration of storytelling-based strategies into early language programs under DepEd initiatives. School administrators and curriculum planners may consider including structured storytelling activities in lesson guides and providing training and instructional materials to help teachers effectively implement narrative-based instruction. Strengthening support for such approaches can contribute to more interactive and meaningful literacy instruction in early education.

For future research, further studies may explore the long-term retention of vocabulary learned through storytelling and examine its effectiveness when combined with digital or multimedia tools. Research may also expand to other literacy areas, such as reading comprehension, writing development, and oral communication, and investigate its applicability across different grade levels and cultural contexts. Comparative studies between storytelling approaches in different languages or educational settings may also provide deeper insights into its broader effectiveness.

Overall, this study contributes to the growing evidence that contextualized and narrative-driven instruction plays a significant role in early language development and offers practical, policy-relevant, and research-based directions for improving vocabulary instruction in elementary education.

Contributions of Authors

Author 1: conceptualization, data gathering, data analysis, proposal writing

Author 2: data analysis, data gathering

Author 3: data analysis, data gathering

Author 4: data analysis, data gathering

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Conflict of Interests

The researchers declare that there are no conflicts of interest in the conduct and publication of this study. This research was carried out as part of academic requirements and was not influenced by any financial or personal interests.

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