

Navigating English Learning Challenges During the Pandemic: Insights from the National Learning Camp and Subsequent Performance Trends

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Abstract. The study aimed to investigate the correlation between students' performance in English 8, the challenges they faced in learning English during the pandemic, and their performance after the National Learning Camp. The researcher utilized descriptive-correlational and comparative designs and employed the systematic sampling technique in identifying the 240 respondents from the Grades 9 learners of Dumaguete City National High School. The researcher used validated questionnaires and employed percentage, weighted mean, and multiple regression analysis in treating the data. The study revealed that the National Learning Camp (NLC) has shown a positive impact on the students' performance in English 8. The students' performance improved after the NLC, with a statistically significant difference. Additionally, the data revealed that the challenges faced by students in terms of access, equity, quality, resiliency, and well-being are moderate. There is a significant relationship between the extent of students' challenges in learning English during the pandemic in terms of access, suggesting that these issues may have influenced their performance.

Keywords: English language learning; Learning camp; Pandemic.

1.0 Introduction

A well-educated populace is more able to achieve its full potential and contribute to society. Educational competency is one key factor that drives a country's social and economic development (Mulenga and Kabombwe, 2019). Therefore, countries need to implement rigorous learning assessments for monitoring and supporting universal learning (Gafforov and Abdulkhay, 2022). This is because assessment results are used to form educational policies and practices (Raudonyte, 2019). Notably, academic performance is a vital criterion for determining educational quality. For that reason, academic performance is a major issue not only for those involved in the education sector but also for the general population and the students themselves (Affuso et al., 2022). In addition, student assessment involves systematically gathering and analyzing information to enhance student learning. Its purposes include providing feedback to both instructors and students about the achievement of learning objectives, validating meaningful learning, and informing instructional decisions to contribute to student success. (Fisher and Bandy, 2019)

Meanwhile, learning assessments in the Philippines show worrying academic performance results. Bernardo et al. (2021) said that the percentage of learners who are not proficient in reading is increasing. In addition, the 2019 Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA- PLM) revealed that 27% of Grade 5 Filipino students could only recognize single words, with only 10 % possessing sufficient reading skills for a successful transition to high school (Haw and Trinidad. 2021). This had a direct effect on the Philippines' ranking on the English Proficiency Index

(EPI) in 2020. According to Education First (EF), the Philippines dropped to 27th place this year (Baclig, 2020). Addressing poor reading proficiency requires a holistic approach that considers individual well-being, educational policies, and teacher development. By prioritizing literacy, the Philippines can empower its learners and improve overall educational outcomes (Albert, et al., 2023).

For twenty years, national learning assessments have gained significance in measuring educational achievement and tracking advancements toward Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 (Kioupi and Voulvoulis, 2019). This is one of the main reasons why most national learning assessments target students transitioning from elementary school to junior high school and from junior high school to senior high school, respectively, since both are critical periods in the student's educational journey. National learning assessments during critical transitions have implications for educational quality, student well-being, and policy decisions. By addressing these implications, the education system can better support learners' growth and success (Minkos and Gilbar, 2021).

Although numerous studies proved the importance of these assessments, only a handful of these studies delved deeper into the roots of the underachievement and hindrances in academic progress (Özer, 2020). Hence, this study is a novelty since it deals with the student's performance in English 8 and the results of their performance particularly after the National Learning Camp (NLC). This learning gap recovery program was created to address learning losses caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (DepEd Order No. 014, s. 2023). Also, this initiative is a response to the country's underperformance in international assessments of students' reading, science, and mathematical skills. The opportunities to learn from this study are numerous, especially in understanding the students' performance in their English 8 subject. Also, if the performance of the students is seen to have improved after the said learning camp, this can be used for the development of other interventions to enhance the delivery of instruction and to make informed decisions for curriculum implementation. This study has implications for policy, instruction, equity, and curriculum development. By analyzing NLC outcomes, educators and policymakers can make informed decisions to enhance student learning and bridge educational gaps. Therefore, this study aims to explore the relationship between student's English learning challenges during the pandemic and their subsequent academic performance after participating in the National Learning Camp (NLC).

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The study utilized the descriptive-correlational research design. The descriptive nature was used to gain information on the student's performance in English 8 before and after the pandemic. Also, the descriptive process would go beyond gathering and tabulating data but also the elements of interpretation of the meaning and significance of what was to be described. On the other hand, it is also correlational because it examines the relationship between the variables identified in the study.

2.2 Research Participants

The respondents of the study are the Grade 9 students of Dumaguete City National High School for School Year 2023-2024. The grade level is composed of ten (10) sections with forty-seven (47). The respondents of the study came from the 10 sections and were randomly selected using the systematic sampling technique wherein every 2nd student in the list was chosen to be the respondent.

2.3 Research Instrument

The study used a validated questionnaire with reliable items to examine every construct of the challenges met by students in learning English during the pandemic. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficients are the following: access was 0.701, equity was 0.712, quality was 0.703, and resiliency and well-being were 0.723.

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

After the design hearing, the researcher integrated all the corrections and suggestions of the panel members. The researcher wrote a letter asking permission to conduct the study to the Schools Division Superintendent of the Division of Dumaguete City upon the endorsement of the Dean of the Graduate School of Foundation University. After the permission was granted, the researcher gave a copy of the letter to the school principal, the provincial head of Grade 9, and the respective advisers of the students. During the distribution of the survey questionnaires and the test questionnaires, the researcher explained to the students the purpose and importance of the research.

The retrieval of the survey questionnaires and test questionnaires was done right after the students had answered them. Furthermore, the results were tallied using MS Excel and the free statistical software after which they were analyzed and interpreted.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

All necessary ethical considerations and protocols for the entire duration of the study were stringently followed. The researcher also maintained the confidentiality of all data obtained, including the student's identity as well as their answers and raw scores. Moreover, the researcher secured ethical approval from the Ethical Committee of the University Research Office.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Students' Performance in English before the NLC

Table 1 presents the data showing the students' performance in English before the NLC. The said performance includes their raw scores in their fourth grading examination in English 8. Generally, the results show that the student's performance falls in the "very satisfactory" classification as evident in the weighted mean value of 87.33%. This result implies that the students have developed the fundamental knowledge and skills in English, have attained a core understanding of the subject's concepts, and can self-sufficiently apply this knowledge and skills through authentic performance tasks (DO 73. S. 2012).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of students' performance in English before the NLC (n = 277)

Rating	Verbal Description	Frequency	Percentage
90% - 100%	Outstanding	101	42.08
85% - 89%	Very Satisfactory	52	21.67
80% - 84%	Satisfactory	48	20.00
75% - 79%	Fairly Satisfactory	39	16.25
Mean = 87.33%			
SD = 6.74			

Meanwhile, the table also displays that a minority of the students' performance in English falls in the "fairly satisfactory" category as evident in the percentage of 16.35. This implies that there may be room for improvement in the overall English proficiency of the student population. This may also indicate the need for targeted interventions to address any gaps in learning and ensure that all students can succeed in their English language studies. A study by Eden, et al. 2024 stated that addressing language proficiency gaps requires a holistic approach involving educators, students, parents, and the community. Also, a study by Ramzan, et al., 2023 mentioned that by implementing targeted strategies, schools can create an environment where all students can succeed in their English language studies.

3.2 Students' Performance in English after the NLC

Table 2 reflects the level of performance of the students in English after the NLC. Generally, the results show that the students' performance falls in the "very satisfactory" classification as evident in the mean value of 88.10%.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of students' performance in English after the NLC (n = 277)

Rating	Verbal Description	Frequency	Percentage
90% - 100%	Outstanding	116	48.33
85% - 89%	Very Satisfactory	46	19.17
80% - 84%	Satisfactory	45	18.75
75% - 79%	Fairly Satisfactory	33	13.75
Mean = 88.10%			
SD = 6.70			

This result is supported by the study of Rachmawati et al. (2020). They reviewed twenty-five scientific publications related to Fun English Camp as an English learning approach for beginner students. Through this review, they found scientific evidence supporting the idea that introducing a learning method like Fun English Camp can have a positive impact on promoting language learning among elementary school children in Indonesia. This suggests that the Fun English Camp method could be an effective and engaging approach to incorporate into the curriculum design for elementary schools in Indonesia. Participants demonstrated improved vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, grammar, comprehension, and self-confidence. Another study by Frimaulia and Azmi

(2023) revealed that English Fun Camp had a positive impact on public speaking skills. Participants demonstrated improved vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, grammar, comprehension, and self-confidence by leveraging this method, educators may enhance language learning outcomes and create a more engaging and effective learning environment for students.

The data also reflects the standard deviation of the academic performance of the students. This standard deviation is used to measure how dispersed the data is with the mean. With a result of 6.70, this indicates that the data are far from the mean, or the data are scattered.

3.3 Difference in the Performance of the Students Before and After the NLC

Table 3 indicates a significant difference existing in the learners' academic performance before and after the NLC ($p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$). This result affirms the finding of Tamba and Panggabean (2020) that the learners use their prior knowledge to establish new knowledge or respond to new information. Being unable to have the necessary knowledge leads to difficulties since there is a conflict between prior knowledge and new knowledge. In other words, prior knowledge and current knowledge are related. Meanwhile, another study by Firmansyah et. al (2023) asserts that the *learners' internal and external factors of motivation are the pulling forces of learning English*.

Table 3. Analysis for the difference in the performance of the students before and after the NLC (n = 240)

Test	Mean	SD	t	p	Decision	Remark
Before	87.33	6.74	4.341	0.000	Reject H_{01}	Significant
After	88.10	6.70				

Level of significance = 0.05

These findings imply that the NLC greatly helped the students in learning the subject. The properly laid out concepts and well-crafted activities like interactive workshops, hands-on projects, team-building exercises, group discussions, educational games, outdoor activities, cultural exchanges, and presentations. of the said camp enabled them to comprehend the lessons and even to work independently. These have also been agreed by Irwansyah et al. (2021) who said that learning materials including learning exercises and evaluations, must use a language that is easy to understand and can be used independently. It was further observed that the wider range of skills can be applied to practical activities, and sharing and discussing ideas can play a key role in deepening one's understanding of a particular subject area.

Indeed, according to Kiyasova, et al. (2022), interactive learning is extremely effective not only in terms of gaining knowledge but also in terms of the formation of personal skills and the development of the character of students. This is supported by the study of Xalilova, et al, (2021). They stated that Interactive English teaching methods are more effective than traditional classical lessons. Interactive approaches empower learners to express their opinions.

3.4 Students' Challenges in Learning English during the Pandemic In Terms of Access

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of students' challenges in learning English during the pandemic in terms of access (n = 240)

Indicators	Mean	Interpretation	Extent
1. I had no one to ask when I encountered problems related to the lessons in English.	3.10	Moderately Agree	Moderate
2. I lacked access to online platforms due to internet -related problems.	2.85	Moderately Agree	Moderate
3. I had difficulty dropping and picking my modules on time due to financial constraints.	3.14	Moderately Agree	Moderate
4. I experienced a lack of access to academic sources from home.	3.17	Moderately Agree	Moderate
Composite	3.06	Moderately Agree	Moderate

Table 4 shows the data in identifying the level of challenges in learning English during the pandemic in terms of access. It is reflected in the composite mean of 3.06. Generally, it shows that students classify the challenges met as "moderate". This means that access is in the adequate range. Specifically, it shows that students consider having no one to ask when they encountered problems related to the lesson in English as "moderate" with a composite mean of 3.10, lacking access to online platforms due to internet- related problems as "moderate" with a composite mean of 2.85, having difficulty dropping and picking modules on time due to financial constraints as "moderate"

with a composite mean of 3.14 and lacking access to academic sources from home as “moderate” with a composite mean of 3.17.

These findings are in line with the results of the study of Maphosa (2021) wherein he revealed that there is a significant loss of learning due to the unavailability of technology and the cost of data. Nevertheless, students agreed that online learning represents the future of teaching and learning. The findings also show that subsidized access to resources and materials is critical for the effective adoption of e-learning. This is also supported by the study of Jaca (2020) which revealed that one of the challenges encountered by participants in online learning was a poor and unstable internet connection. Another study by Ferri and Guzzo (2020) revealed that the technological difficulties primarily stem from unreliable internet connections and the insufficient availability of electronic devices among students.

In Terms of Equity

Table 5 exposes the data in identifying the level of students’ challenges in learning English during the pandemic in terms of equity. It is reflected in the composite mean of 3.15. Generally, it shows that the students classify the challenges met as “moderate”. Specifically, the table shows that students classifies not given immediate feedback on the given activities as “moderate” with a composite of 3.06, had difficulty clarifying with their teachers on issues regarding assignments as “moderate” with a composite mean of 3.12, lacking some learning resources for any project or performance task as “moderate” with a composite mean of 3.25, overloading with a lot of remote learning tasks as “moderate” with a composite mean of 3.40, and having no adequate learning space at home as “moderate” with a composite mean of 2.94.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of students’ challenges in learning English during the pandemic in terms of equity (n = 240)

Indicators	Mean	Interpretation	Extent
1. I was not given immediate feedback on the given activities.	3.06	Moderately Agree	Moderate
2. I had difficulty clarifying with my teachers on issues regarding assignments.	3.12	Moderately Agree	Moderate
3. I lacked some learning resources for my projects or performance tasks.	3.25	Moderately Agree	Moderate
4. I was overloaded with a lot of remote learning tasks.	3.40	Moderately Agree	Moderate
5. I don’t have an adequate learning space at home.	2.94	Moderately Agree	Moderate
Composite	3.15	Moderately Agree	Moderate

According to Esteron (2021), equity in online learning refers to the principle of ensuring that all individuals have equal access to and opportunities for quality education in an online setting. It aims to eliminate barriers and promote inclusivity, ensuring that everyone, regardless of their background or circumstances, can benefit from online learning. Al-Jarf (2021) added that the initiatives and actions to overcome the lack of devices and internet access in online learning are like governorates donating tablets to disadvantaged students, charity organizations and affluent individuals providing tablets, laptops, and financial aid, teachers collecting money to purchase tablets for needy students.

In addition, Rotas and Cahapay’s (2020) study revealed that being overloaded with lesson activities is one of the difficulties faced by students in remote learning. However, a study conducted by Trotter and Czerniewicz (2022) contradicted this result. They found in their study that several contradictions and tensions emerged during this period concerning exacerbated inequities, pedagogical compromises, cultural anxieties, and psychological pressures that could not be fully resolved but only managed. Also, according to the study of Easterbrook et al. (2023) that amid the pandemic, students eligible for free school meals and from financially disadvantaged families faced difficulties with home learning due to noise, limited space, lack of technology, and inadequate internet access.

In Terms of Quality

Table 6 shows the data in identifying the level of challenges in learning English during the pandemic in terms of quality. This is reflected in the composite mean of 3.40. Generally, this figure shows that students classified those challenges as “moderate”. Specifically, the table shows that students classify confusion due to some errors in the modules as “high” with a composite mean of 3.53, unable to locate high-quality online sources as “moderate” with a composite mean of 3.13, difficulty understanding some of the contents due to lack of examples, illustrations, and sidenotes on presented lessons as “high” with a composite mean of 3.66, difficulty on some of

the assessments instructions as “high” with a composite mean of 3.59, and seldom receiving constructive feedback from their teachers as “moderate” with a composite mean of 3.10.

Table 6. Descriptive statistics of students’ challenges in learning English during the pandemic in terms of quality (n = 240)

Indicators	Mean	Interpretation	Extent
1. I was confused due to some errors in the modules.	3.53	Agree	High
2. I was unable to locate high-quality online sources.	3.13	Moderately Agree	Moderate
3. I had difficulty understanding some of the contents due to the lack of examples, illustrations, and sidenotes in the presented lessons.	3.66	Agree	High
4. I found some of the assessment instructions difficult to understand.	3.59	Agree	High
5. I seldom received constructive feedback from my teachers.	3.10	Moderately Agree	Moderate
Composite	3.40	Moderately Agree	Moderate

According to Nugroho et al. (2021), analysis of the quality of learning is crucial in the teaching and learning process to ensure that the quality of learning is well maintained. Learning quality assurance instruments are some of the tools to improve quality in education through evaluations produced by studies of students. Overall, the analysis of learning quality through evaluations and studies of students serves as valuable tools for educational institutions to maintain and improve the quality of education they provide. Moreover, the results obtained regarding the quality of learning with internet-based distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic indicate that it is perceived as good from a student's point of view.

However, the study conducted by Wahidiyati and Purwokerto (2022) contradicts the result since the feedback provided by most participants highlights their dissatisfaction with the effectiveness and efficiency of online learning, specifically in the context of English teaching and learning. One of the reasons cited is the challenge posed by slow-speed internet, which hampers the smooth operation of online applications. As a result, participants feel that they are unable to fully benefit from their lecturers' knowledge and information during online teaching and learning activities. Also, the study of Pedriña et al. (2024) revealed that the poor quality of printed learning modules was one of the academic challenges that affected the learner’s ability to comprehend and finish the module effectively. This result is also support by the study of Meniano and Tan (2022). The findings revealed several challenges faced during the pandemic, including difficulty comprehending English instructions and subpar quality of educational modules.

In Terms of Resiliency and Well-Being

Table 7 shows the data in identifying the level of challenges in learning English during the pandemic in terms of resiliency and well-being. This is reflected in the composite mean of 3.41. Generally, this figure shows that the students classified struggled with school work which made them feel frustrated as “high” with a composite mean of 3.53, performing poorly in some of the activities which resulted in their poor self-esteem as “moderate” with a composite mean of 3.39, lacking motivation due to the absence of social interaction between and among students and teachers as “moderate” with a composite mean of 3.28, having no more time for themselves due to the demands of either the online or the modular classes as “moderate” with a composite mean of 3.17, and emotionally bothered because they relied on themselves in their learning and they were not sure if they did it right as “high” with a composite mean of 3.66.

Table 7. Descriptive statistics of students’ challenges in learning English during the pandemic in terms of resiliency and well-being (n = 240)

Indicators	Mean	Interpretation	Extent
1. I struggled with schoolwork which made me feel frustrated.	3.53	Agree	High
2. I performed poorly in some of the activities which resulted in my poor self-esteem.	3.39	Moderately Agree	Moderate
3. I lacked motivation due to the absence of social interaction between and among students and teachers.	3.28	Moderately Agree	Moderate
4. I had no more time for myself due to the demands of either the online or the modular classes.	3.17	Moderately Agree	Moderate
5. I was emotionally bothered because I relied on myself in my learning, and I was not sure if I did it right.	3.66	Agree	High
Composite	3.41	Agree	High

The research done by Valladolid (2021) indicates a significant relationship between resilience and well-being, suggesting that individuals with higher levels of resilience tend to experience better overall well-being.

Sood and Sharma (2021) investigated the factors influencing the psychological well-being (PWB) of students in higher education during the peri-traumatic phase of COVID-19. The results revealed that direct resilience is positively associated with PWB, meaning that individuals with higher levels of resilience tend to experience higher levels of psychological well-being. Indirectly, resilience can also influence PWB through various pathways. In addition, a study by Galvez (2022) found that students' resilience amidst the pandemic had significant effects on academic performance.

Also, the study conducted by Eva et al. (2022) contradicted this result. They found that resilience is crucial in online learning to maintain and improve the students' subjective well-being. Students with a high level of resilience tend to have a high level of subjective well-being as well, meaning that they can regulate their emotions better in addition to controlling internal pressures caused by online learning. This is also supported by the study of Rasheed et al. (2022) conducted with university students during the COVID-19 pandemic, participants reported normal to satisfactory levels of overall mental well-being. Notably, resilience played a mediating role, influencing the relationship between meaning in life (both the presence and search for meaning) and mental well-being¹. These findings underscore the importance of fostering resilience and promoting meaningful experiences to support students' mental health during challenging times. The study's results indicate that meaning in life and resilience play crucial roles in supporting mental well-being among university students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, it is essential to implement effective measures to enhance students' lives by fostering both meaning and resilience.

3.5 Difference in Students' Challenges in Learning English during the Pandemic and their Performance after the National Learning Camp

The data in Table 8 reveal the relationship between the students' challenges in learning English during the pandemic and their performance after the National Learning Camp. Using Multiple Linear Regression Analysis, the overall F-test significance or p-value (0.049) revealed to be less than the level of significance (0.05). This means that the sample data provide enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis for the entire population. This signifies that some of the explanatory or independent variables are significant predictors of students' performance after the NLC. The regression output indicates that the students' challenges in terms of access ($p = 0.049 < \alpha = 0.05$) are a significant predictor of students' performance. The negative sign of its coefficient signifies that there is an inverse or negative relationship between these variables. This further implies that students who experienced greater challenges in terms of access tend to obtain lower performance after the NLC.

Table 8. Multiple linear regression analysis between the extent of students' challenges in learning English during the pandemic and their performance after the national learning camp (n = 240)

Variables	Coefficients	SE	t Stat	P-value
Intercept	89.101	2.640	33.750	0.000
Access	-1.488	0.747	-1.993	0.049
Equity	-1.250	0.882	-1.416	0.158
Quality	1.354	0.901	1.504	0.134
Resiliency	0.849	0.728	1.166	0.245
R = 0.1992				
R ² = 0.0397				
adjusted R ² = 0.0233				
F-ratio = 2.428				
p-value = 0.049 (significant)				
Level of significance = 0.05				

Students who face greater challenges in terms of access during the pandemic may experience lower performance due to several reasons. Limited access to devices and reliable internet connection can hinder their ability to fully engage in online learning activities, resulting in reduced participation and interaction with educational materials (Nassr et al. 2020). This lack of access may also lead to difficulties in submitting assignments, accessing online resources, and communicating with teachers and peers. Additionally, students who do not have consistent access to technology and the internet may face challenges in keeping up with the pace of online instruction. They may struggle to access and understand the content, leading to gaps in their learning (Shikulo and Lekhetho, 2020). Limited access to support systems, such as teachers or tutors, can further exacerbate these challenges.

Moreover, the home environment plays a crucial role in a student's academic performance. Students facing access challenges may also have limited resources, quiet study spaces, or parental support, which can impact their ability to focus and concentrate on their studies (Barrot and del Rosario, 2021). It is important to recognize these disparities and work towards providing equitable access to resources and support for all students, especially those who faced greater challenges during the pandemic. By addressing these access barriers, providing additional support, and implementing inclusive educational strategies, the impact of limited access on student performance can be mitigated (Liu, 2021).

4.0 Conclusion

The National Learning Camp has a positive impact on the student's performance in English 8 based on the increase in their performance. This suggests that the camp is effective in enhancing students' English skills and can address some learning gaps faced by the students in their English 8. However, based on the findings, some other factors or interventions played a more influential role in determining the students' performance. The impact of the National Learning Camp (NLC) on student performance is a crucial area of study, and understanding its effectiveness and limitations can guide future research and improvements. Here are some recommendations for future research and the limitations of the present work:

Recommendations for Future Research:

1. Investigate the long-term effects of NLC participation. Does the positive impact persist beyond the immediate post-test scores? Longitudinal studies could provide valuable insights.
2. Explore the NLC's impact across different school contexts (urban, rural, socio-economic backgrounds). Understanding variations in effectiveness can inform targeted interventions.
3. Delve deeper into specific learning domains (e.g., reading comprehension, writing skills) to identify which areas benefit most from NLC participation.
4. Assess the effectiveness of teacher training programs related to NLC implementation.
5. Investigate the role of parental involvement during and after the NLC.

Limitations of the Present Work:

1. While the NLC positively impacted student performance, other external factors (e.g., home environment, socio-economic status) may have influenced outcomes. Future studies should control for these variables.
2. The study focused on a specific school (Dumaguete City National High School). Expanding the sample size and including diverse schools would enhance generalizability.
3. Although the NLC was associated with improved performance, establishing causality is challenging. Randomized controlled trials or quasi-experimental designs could address this limitation.
4. The proposed plan of action aims for sustainability, but assessing the NLC's long-term viability and scalability is essential.

5.0 Contributions of Authors

This study has a single author. The author herself contributed to the study conception and design, material preparation and data collection. The first draft of the manuscript was written by her. Her adviser, Eugenia N. Sedillo, read and approved her final manuscript.

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7.0 Conflict of Interests

The author declared that she has no conflicts of interest as far as this study is concerned.

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