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CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING THE ROLE OF THE PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHER IN PROMOTING PROACTIVE BEHAVIOR AMONG MIDDLE SCHOOL PUPILS

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Abstract

Aim. The present research aims to investigate the influence of the physical education teacher's role in promoting proactive behavior among middle school pupils.

Methods. 303 middle school pupils participated, coming from educational institutions from Romania, both rural and urban areas, aged between 10 and 14 years. A questionnaire administered via Google Forms was distributed in 6 educational institutions in urban areas and 3 educational institutions in rural areas. The questionnaire was distributed in April 2024 and the link to questionnaire was active until June 2024. The questionnaire includes 28 items, which aim to identify the role of the teacher in promoting proactive behavior among middle school pupils.

Results. Descriptive statistics was used in analyzing and interpreting the results. Thus, 93,38% of the interviewed pupils participate in physical education and sports classes. A percentage of 79,87% of pupils find the activity within physical education classes attractive. 84,82% of pupils are motivated by the teacher's involvement during physical education classes. 71,62% of the surveyed pupils stated that they practice physical exercises in their free time.

Conclusions. The physical education teacher has to actively participate alongside the pupils during physical education lessons and must use a specialized vocabulary, adapted to pupils' level of understanding.

Keywords: active lifestyle, teacher, model, healthy habits, active participation.

Introduction

A large part of the research on the activity of physical education teachers claims that they can play a crucial role in promoting physical activity among pupils (Van Doren et al., 2021; McKenzie & Lounsbery, 2013; McDavid, Cox, & Amorose, 2012; Smuka, 2012; Pate et al., 2006), the development of attitudes and skills for practicing physical exercises becoming a cornerstone of the educational process.

Facilitating the promotion of physical activity among pupils falls under the responsibility of the physical education teacher (Aibar et al., 2015), whose role in this direction is essential (Rachele et al., 2016), identifying themselves as a viable behavior model (Yager et al., 2019).

For many pupils, physical education lessons are the only opportunities to practice physical exercises, thus physical education becomes an important framework for developing an active and healthy lifestyle (Guo et al., 2023). Therefore, the physical education teacher becomes an important promoter of an active lifestyle (Abarca-Sos et al., 2015).

Physical education becomes a way for pupils to experience a type of holistic learning, which is based on the development of self-confidence and social skills (Aulia et al., 2024; Bessa et al., 2021; Bailey, 2006; Stănescu et al., 2020).

During physical education lessons, the teacher must create an environment for modifying pupils' behavior to become active (Aibar et al., 2015) and to establish healthy lifestyle habits (Bystritskaya et al., 2021) by equipping them with skills and knowledge for active lifestyle (Anderssen & Wold, 1992; Sallis & McKenzie, 1991; Erturan İlker & Aşçı, 2019) for long-term facilitating the older adult to have a healthy lifestyle (Urzeala et al., 2021).

In this context, the teacher-pupil interaction (Smuka, 2012) in forming proactive behavior is extremely important. Therefore, the tone of voice, facial expressions, gestures, verbal, intuitive and action-based teaching methods must be carefully selected and adapted to the particularities of the pupils they work with.

The determination to form long-term proactive behavior is conditioned by the active participation of pupils during physical education lessons (Guo et al., 2023).

Objectives

The present research aims to investigate the influence of the physical education teacher's role in promoting proactive behavior among middle school pupils,

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Research question

Can the application of a specially designed questionnaire identify the role of the physical education teacher in promoting proactive behavior among middle school pupils?

Materials and methods

Participants

Initially, the questionnaire was administrated on a total of 308 middle school pupils, but 5 of them, on the first question: "Do you participate in the physical education and sports lessons from the school curriculum?", stated that they do not participate in physical education lessons, being exempt from physical effort. Therefore, the questionnaire was subsequently completed by a number of 303 pupils.

Thus, the research targeted the responses of 303 middle school pupils who participated in physical education lessons from school curriculum, from which 178 were male and 125 were female. Depending on the residence environment, a number of 216 come from urban areas, while 87 attend schools in rural areas. From the perspective of the year of study, 65 of the pupils are in the 5th grade, 78 pupils are in the 6th grade, 83 pupils are in the 7th grade, and 77 pupils are in the 8th grade. In terms of age, a number of 32 pupils are 10 years old, 67 pupils are 11 years old, 68 pupils are 12 years, 75 pupils are 13 years, and 61 pupils are 14 years old (table 1).

Table 1. Research table

Gender	Number of pupils	Percentage
Male	178	58.75%
Female	125	41.25%
Residence	Number of participants	Percentage
Urban	216	71.29%
Rural	87	28.71%
Grade	Number of pupils	Percentage
5th	65	21.45%
6th	78	25.74%
7th	83	27.40%
8th	77	25.41%
Age	Number of pupils	Percentage
10 years	32	10.56%
11 years	67	22.11%
12 years	68	22.44%
13 years	75	24.76%
14 years	61	20.13%

Procedure

Between April and June 2024, a questionnaire regarding the identification of the role of the physical education teacher in promoting proactive behavior among middle school pupils was administered via Google Forms, which was distributed online to several educational institutions in different areas of the capital and outside of it. The urban educational institutions were: Școala Gimnazială no. 165, Școala Gimnazială no. 119, Școala Gimnazială no. 156, Școala Gimnazială no. 142, Școala Gimnazială no. 190 and Școala Gimnazială no. 143. The rural educational institutions were represented by Școala Gimnazială Ferigile, comuna Costești, județul Vâlcea, Școala Gimnazială Alexandru Odobescu – Chiajna and Școala Gimnazială Nr. 2 Jilava.

The questionnaire included 28 items, with closed and open response options for expressing one's own opinion, as well as Likert scale questions.

Results

Questionnaire regarding the identification of the role of the physical education teacher in promoting proactive behavior among middle school pupils

At item no. 1 "Do you participate in the physical education and sports lessons from the school curriculum?" the percentage of the pupils who participate in the activity within the physical education and sports lessons is 98.38% (303 pupils), and a percentage of 1.62% (5 pupils) answered that they do not participate in physical education lessons. The 5 pupils who stated that they don't participate in the physical education lessons from the school curriculum because they are exempt from physical education, did not complete the rest of the questionnaire items. Therefore, only the pupils who stated that they participate in physical education lessons were allowed to answer the rest of the following questions.

At item no. 2 *"To what extent do you participate in physical education lessons?"*, the Likert scale was used, with values ranging from 1 to 5 (To a very small extent – 1; To a small extent – 2; To a moderate extent – 3; To a large extent – 4; To a very large extent – 5). It appears that only 2 pupils (0.66%) stated that they participate to a very small extent, 6 pupils (1.98%) participate in a small extent, 34 pupils (11.22%) participate in a moderate extent, 89 pupils (29.37%) participate in a large extent, and the rest of 172 pupils (56.77%) participate in a very large extent. It is found that a total of 86.14% of pupils participate to a large and a very large extent in physical education and sports lessons.

Item no. 3 *"What do you understand by active participation in the physical education lesson?"* aims to capture pupils' perception of active participation in physical education and sports lessons. It appears that 142 pupils consider active participation to be involved during the lessons, 175 of pupils indicate compliance with the requirements imposed by the teacher, 233 pupils mention performing physical exercises and 56 pupils suggest helping colleagues in performing physical exercises. Item no. 3 was a question with multiple-choice questions, and pupils were not required to choose only one option to indicate the significance of their active participation in the physical education lesson.

Question no. 4 *"Do you find physical education and sports lessons attractive?"* aims to assess the level of attractiveness of physical education and sports lessons. From the analysis of the results, it appears that 2.64% (8 pupils) find it very unattractive, 5.61% (17 pupils) find it slightly attractive, 11.88% (36 pupils) find the lesson moderate attractive, 29.04% (88 pupils) find it largely attractive, and the rest of 50.83% (154 pupils) find the physical education and sports lesson very attractive. Therefore, a total of 79.87% of the surveyed students find the activity carried out during the physical education and sports lesson attractive.

Item no. 5 *"What do you think about the physical education teacher?"* seeks the pupils' opinion about the teacher specialized in physical education and sports. The interpretation of the results shows that 1% (3 pupils) of the pupils have a very poor opinion of the teacher, 2.64% (8 pupils) have a poor opinion, 8.91% (27 pupils) have a neutral opinion, 18.15% (55 pupils) have a good opinion, and the rest of 69.3% (210 pupils) have a very good opinion about the physical education and sports teacher. Thus, it is found that a percentage of 87.45% from the pupils have a positive opinion about the physical education and sports teacher.

Item no. 6 *"Is the physical education and sports teacher's vocabulary accessible?"* aims to assess the pupils' level of understanding of the vocabulary used by the physical education and sports teacher during lessons. It appears that 4 pupils (1.32%) understand the vocabulary used very rarely, 2 pupils (0.66%) understand it rarely, 22 pupils (7.26%) understand it at an average level, 44 pupils (14.52%) understand it often, and 231 pupils (76.24%) understand the vocabulary used by the physical education and sports teacher very often. Therefore, a percentage of 90.76% of pupils understand the requirements and expressions used by the teacher during physical education and sports lessons.

Item no. 7 *"Can the use of academic and specialized vocabulary influence your participation in physical education and sports lessons?"* aims to assess the potential influence of using academic and specialized vocabulary in stimulation or not the more active participation of pupils in physical education and sports lessons. A percentage of 31.68% (96 pupils) state that they are not influenced by a more academic language, and 68.32% (207 pupils) consider that they can be motivated by such methods. Therefore, the use of academic and specialized vocabulary motivates and influences pupils' participation in physical education and sports lessons.

At item no. 8 *"Does the physical education and sports teacher demonstrate, participate and perform physical exercises together with you?"* expresses the direct involvement of the physical education and sports teacher with the pupils through various teaching methods. It is observed that 69 pupils (22.77%) do not benefit from such a teacher, and 234 pupils (77.23%) experience the teacher's involvement through demonstrations, participation or performing physical exercises alongside them. There is a significant involvement of physical education and sports teachers in using intuitive teaching methods.

Item no. 9 *"Do you consider that the active involvement of the physical education and sports teacher in demonstrating and performing physical exercises can motivate you to participate in physical education and sports lessons?"* divides pupils' opinions on the teacher's involvement and its potential motivational impact. 15.18% of them (46 pupils) believe that the teacher's involvement in motor activities does not motivate them to participate more in the lessons, while 84.82% (257 pupils) are motivated by this involvement of the teacher. Thus, it is found that the teacher's involvement motivates pupils' activity during physical education lessons.

Item no. 10 *"Do you practice physical exercises independently?"* aims to assess the pupils' independent activity regarding the practice of the physical exercises. 28.05% of them (85 pupils) don't perform physical activities independently, and 71.95% of the pupils (218 pupils) perform physical activities independently. Thus, it is observed that a large part of the pupils are active in terms of physical activities outside of physical education and sports lessons.

Item no. 11 *"What is the appropriate tone, in your opinion, for a teacher to use during physical education and sports lessons?"* presents the pupils' opinion about the tone that the teacher should have. According to 130 pupils (42.91%), a high tone for both male and female teachers is beneficial, 115 pupils (37.95%) consider a low tone for both genders to be appropriate, 33 pupils (10.89%) believe that a male teacher should have a low tone, while the female teacher should have a high tone, 20 pupils (6.60%) consider the opposite, that the male teacher should have a high tone and the female teacher should have a low tone. One pupil states that regardless of the teacher's gender, the tone should be high during the physical education and sports lessons (0.33%), another one believes the tone should be firm (0.33%),

another one consider that the tone should be high or low, regardless of the teacher's gender, but depending on the situation (0.33%), one pupil state the tone should be high when necessary and low when necessary (0.33%) and another pupil think the tone does not matter (0.33%). Therefore, based on the opinions expressed by the students in the questionnaire, a high tone regardless of the teacher's gender is more appropriate during physical education and sports lessons.

Item no. 12 *"To what extent are you influenced by the facial expressions of the physical education teacher during the lessons?"* presents the extent to which the teacher's facial expressions have influenced or not the pupils' activity during the lessons. It is observed that 16.50% (50 pupils) are influenced to a very small extent, 11.88% (36 pupils) are influenced to a small extent, 26.73% (81 pupils) are moderately influenced, 19.47% (59 pupils) are gratefully influenced and the rest of 25.42% (77 pupils) are very influenced. Thus, it is found that a percentage of 44.89% of pupils are influenced by the facial expressions of the physical education and sports teacher during the lessons.

Item no. 13 *"Do you consider the teacher's gestures a factor that can influence pupils' behavior during the physical education and sports lessons?"* aims to assess the extent to which pupils consider gestures as a factor influencing their behavior. The results show that 11.55% of them (35 pupils) consider gestures to influence their behavior to a very small extent, 8.25% (25 pupils) to a small extent, 29.37% (89 pupils) believe that gesture have a moderate influence, 20.79% (63 pupils) are influenced in a high extent, and 30.04% (91 pupils) are very gratefully influenced. Thus, a percentage of 59.83% from the pupils consider gestures to be a factor influencing their behavior.

Item no. 14 *"Do you consider that the physical education and sports teacher is passionate about this profession?"* indicates the pupils' opinion regarding the teachers' passion for the chosen profession. Thus, 1.32% of them (4 pupils) consider to a very small extent that the teacher is passionate about this profession, 2.64% (8 pupils) consider to a small extent, 3.96% (12 pupils) have a moderate opinion, 12.87% (39 pupils) consider to a large extent, and 79.21% (240 pupils) consider to a very high extent. Therefore, it is found that 92.08% of pupils consider that the physical education and sports teacher is passionate about this profession.

Item no. 15 *"How much does the teacher encourage your participation and involvement during physical education and sports lessons?"* demonstrates that 2.64% of pupils (8 pupils) consider the teacher's involvement to be very small, 3.30% (10 pupils) consider his involvement to be small, 9.24% (28 pupils) believe that the teacher's participation is moderate, 20.46% (62 pupils) say it is significant, and 64.36% (195 pupils) appreciate the teacher's involvement in conducting the lessons to a very large extent. Thus, it is found that 84.82% of pupils appreciate the teacher's activity from the perspective of involvement to a large extent or more.

Item no. 16 *"Do you consider that the physical education and sports teacher is a role model for you in practicing physical exercises?"* establishes the pupils' opinion about whether the teacher is a role model in practicing physical exercises. The analysis of the results shows that 3.30% (10 pupils) of the pupils consider the teacher to be a role model to a very small extent, 4.95% (15 pupils) to a small extent, 15.51% (47 pupils) to a moderate extent, 16.17% (49 pupils) to a large extent, and 60.07% (182 pupils) to a very large extent. Thus, a total of 76.24% of the pupils consider the teacher to be a role model in practicing physical exercises.

Analysing the answers to item no. 17 *"Does the physical education and sports teacher show patience and calm when you cannot perform certain physical exercises?"* it appears that a percentage of 3.30% (10 pupils) of the pupils believe that the teacher shows very little calm, 5.28% (16 pupils) claim that the teacher shows little calm, 10.89% (33 pupils) has a moderate opinion, 22.77% (69 pupils) believe the teacher is largely calm, and 57.76% (175 pupils) claim that the teacher is very patient. As a result of the findings, the physical education and sports teacher shows patience and calm to a large extent in the opinion of 80.53% of the pupils.

At item no. 18 *"Does the physical education teacher motivate you in practicing physical exercises?"*, 4.29% (13 pupils) of the pupils consider that the teacher motivate them to a very small extent, 4.62% (14 pupils) state that to a small extent, 8.91% (27 pupils) have a moderate opinion, 21.78% (66 pupils) consider the teacher is motivating them to a large extent, and 60.40% (183 pupils) to a very large extent. Thus, it is found that 82.2% of the pupils think the physical education and sports teacher is motivating them largely or more.

At item no. 19 *"Is the physical education teacher present and providing support in performing more difficult physical tasks?"* it can be observed that 2.64% (8 pupils) of them consider that the teacher's presence in difficult moments existed very rarely, 1.98% (6 pupils) consider that the intervention existed rarely, 9.57% (29 pupils) claim that the intervention existed at a moderate level, 21.78% (66 pupils) state that the intervention existed to a large extent, while 64.03% (194 pupils) from the pupils consider that the presence of the teacher existed to a very large extent. Thus, it appears that 85.8% from the pupils state that the teacher's involvement in difficult moments of physical tasks existed to a large or very large extent.

Item no. 20 *"Has the physical education teacher presented the beneficial effects of practicing physical exercises to you?"* indicates that 3.63% (11 pupils) of them have been presented with the beneficial effects of practicing physical exercises very rarely, 6.93% (21 pupils) have been presented with them rarely, 13.86% (42 pupils) have been presented constantly, 21.45% (65 pupils) have been presented many times, while 54.13% (164 pupils) have been presented very often. Therefore, it is found that a percentage of 75.58% from the pupils have been presented with these beneficial effects of practicing physical exercises.

Item no. 21 *"Do you consider that you have sufficient knowledge to practice physical exercises independently?"* presents the level of knowledge that pupils believe they possess regarding the practice of physical exercises independently. Following the interpretation of the results, 2.31% of them (7 pupils) consider they possess knowledge in a very small extent, 4.95% of pupils (15 pupils) in a small extent, 21.12% (64 pupils) consider they possess knowledge in a moderate extent, 33.66% (102 pupils) to a large extent, iar 37.96% (115 pupils) consider they possess knowledge to a very large extent. Thus, it is found that 71.62% from the pupils consider they possess sufficient knowledge to practice exercises independently.

Item no. 22 *"During the physical education and sports lesson do you use varied equipment and materials?"* aims to assess the extent to which necessary equipment and materials are used during the physical education and sports lessons. The results show that 3.63% (11 pupils) of them consider that the necessary equipment and materials were used very rarely, 6.27% (19 pupils) consider they were used rarely, 16.83% (51 pupils) claim they were used moderately, 24.09% (73 pupils) believe the equipment and materials were used often and the rest of 49.18% (149 pupils) consider they were used very often. Therefore, 73.27% of the pupils state that the necessary equipment and materials were used often or very often during the physical education and sports lessons.

At item no. 23 *"Have you ever received homework or tasks to complete at home?"* it shows that 61.06% of them (185 pupils) have received homework or tasks very rarely, 18.48% (56 pupils) rarely, 9.24% (28 pupils) moderately, 5.61% (17 pupils) often, and 5.61% (17 pupils) very often. Therefore, it is found that 79.54% of them receive homework or tasks to complete at home very rarely, from the physical education and sports teacher.

Item no. 24 *"During the physical education lesson, does the teacher offer different options/possibilities for performing physical exercises?"* aims to assess the variety of options provided by the physical education and sports teacher for performing an exercise. thus, 4.95% of them (15 pupils) consider that the variety of options existed very rarely, 7.59% (23 pupils) consider that the variety of options existed rarely, 25.74% (78 pupils) state that it existed moderately, 22.44% (68 pupils) claim that the variety of options existed often, while 39.28% (119 pupils) think that the variety of options existed very often. Therefore, it is found that 61.7% of the pupils consider that the physical education and sports teacher often presents them multiple options for performing an exercise.

Item no. 25 *"In your opinion, how much do you appreciate the activity and involvement of the physical education and sports teacher during the lessons?"* presents pupils' opinions regarding the teacher's involvement during the physical education and sports lessons. In this context, 2.64% of them (8 pupils) appreciate the teacher's involvement as very little, 3.96% (12 pupils) appreciate it as little, 8.25% (25 pupils) appreciate it as moderate, 13.53% (41 pupils) appreciate the teacher's involvement as big, while 71.62% (217 pupils) appreciate a lot the involvement of their physical education and sports teacher. Thus, it is found that 85.15% of the pupils have high or very high appreciation of their physical education and sports teacher.

Item no. 26 *"Does the physical education and sports teacher represent a behavioral model that inspires you to participate in physical education lessons?"* aims to determine whether the physical education and sports teacher is a source of inspiration or a behavioral model regarding pupils' participation to physical education and sports lessons. 19.14% of the pupils (58 pupils) consider the teacher does not represent a model, and 80.86% (245 pupils) consider that the physical education and sports teacher is a source of inspiration of participating in lessons. It is found that the teacher has an influence on the students and represents a model.

At item no. 27 *"In your opinion, what is the main aspect that the physical education teacher should achieve to encourage you to actively participate in physical education and sports lessons?"* responses focused on the teacher's unconditional encouragement and support in performing difficult exercises, the teacher's active involvement in presenting and performing the proposed exercises, the use of an appropriate and accessible language, the absence of obligation and coercion in performing certain physical exercises, the teacher's understanding in accepting suggestions for using certain physical exercises, the presentation of varied and diverse activities adapted to the participants' physical abilities, the adoption of a firm, calm and patient attitude, as well as the proposal of attractive and fun lessons.

Item no. 28 *"On a scale from 1 to 10, what grade do you give the physical education teacher for motivating you to participate in physical education and sports lessons?"* presents the grade given by the pupils, to the physical education and sports teacher for the motivation they provide to participate in lessons (table 2).

Table 2. Centralization of pupils' responses to item no. 28

Grade	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
No. of pupils	4	1	3	6	8	11	15	30	48	177
Percentage	1.32%	0.33%	0.99%	1.98%	2.64%	3.63%	4.95%	9.90%	15.84%	58.42%

Thus, a large percentage (58.42%) consider that the involvement and determination of pupils during the physical education and sports lessons and in promoting proactive behavior is due to the teacher, who receives a grade of 10 for this item.

Discussions

Creating a supportive environment by teachers is beneficial for pupils' involvement in their own process of forming proactive behavior (Guo et al., 2023), which may consist of forming a solid foundation of specialized knowledge for practicing physical exercises independently. .

Among the identified strategies for forming proactive behavior are the teacher's tone of voice, providing feedback and explanations, encouraging eutonomy and offering a rich variety of motor activities (Guo et al., 2023), the motivational style of teachers (Van Doren et al., 2021), stimulating the pupils' self confidence (Krause & Coates, 2008), active learning, through colaboration (Zhao & Kuh, 2004) counseling and controlling pupils, directing interpersonal relationships, the degree of involvement, the teacher becoming a role model in terms of civic and moral conduct (Truța & Mardar, 2007).

In this context, the teacher's role has to be very well defined and conceptualized because it represents a factor that influences pupils' education during their physical, motor, social-affective and cognitive development, contributing essentially to the formation of their personality.

Thus, a basic condition of the educational process falls to the physical education and sports teacher, whose task ist o identify an duse the most effective teaching methods and strategies for behavioral, emotional and physical development of the pupils.

It is recomended to present very often the beneficial effects that physical education exercises has on the human body, across all areas.

Conclusions

Based on the collected data, it can be observed that the physical education and sports teacher has a significant influence on the pupils through their participation, ivolvement, behavior, compunication – both verbal and non-verbal, implication, as well as demonstrations of exercises. All of this elements contribute to a stronger teacher-pupil relationship, with the teacher's influence becoming increasingly active, thereby enabeling the promotion of proactive behavior to a greater extent and with growing efficiency.

An analysis of the results shows that 79.87% of the questioned pupils (242 pupils) find the activities conducted during the physical education and sports lesson, to be engaging and fun. A percentage of 87.45% from pupils (265 pupils) have a positive opinion of their physical education teacher. The interviewed pupils highlighted that the use of an academic and field-specific vocabulary motivates them and positively influences their participation in physical education lessons.

The obtained results indicate that the teacher's involvement significantly motivates pupils during physical education and sports lessons.

A total of 231 pupils (76.24%) considers that the teacher is a model in practicing physical exercises, while 258 pupils (85.15%) presents high or very high appreciations towards the physical education and sports teacher.

80.86% (245 pupils) consider that the physical education teacher represents a source of inspiration regarding the participation in lessons. It can be concluded that the teacher has an influence on the pupils and acts as a role model.

A high percentage (58.42%), respectively 117 pupils consider that the involvement and determination in forming a proactive behavior can be attributed to the physical education and sports teacher

It is thus observed that 217 pupils (71.62%) consider they have enough knowledge to practice physical exercises independently.

As a result of this research, we can present a list of possible recommendations that can be used by the physical education teachers, based on the opinions and views expressed by the surveyed pupils: the teacher should demonstrate active participation with their pupils, particularly in the execution and demonstration of exercises, the teacher should use a balanced vocabulary that aligns both with the pupils' level of understanding and with appropriate terminology, the teacher should serve as an example or even a role model for pupils, in order to help shape their proactive acharacter, the teacher should show openness in listening to pupils' opinions and empathy in supporting the positive ideas proposed by them .

Authors` contribution

All authors have equally contributed to this study and should be considered as main authors.

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