

Beyond Curriculum Compliance: Informal Religious Governance and the Cultural Production of Student Morality in a Vocational Boarding School

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Abstract

Purpose: This study examines how religious values are institutionalized and sustained through informal governance mechanisms within a vocational boarding school setting. Rather than treating religious education as a curricular outcome, the study seeks to understand how everyday practices, cultural routines, and non-formal authority structures collectively shape student morality. By situating religious value formation within the intersection of culture and institutional administration, the study addresses a gap in international literature that often overlooks informal governance as a constitutive dimension of educational regulation.

Method: The research adopts a qualitative descriptive design grounded in field-based inquiry. Data were collected through prolonged observation, in-depth interviews with school leaders, religious teachers, and students, as well as institutional document analysis. Analytical procedures followed iterative stages of data condensation, thematic display, and interpretive verification, supported by triangulation across data sources. The analysis focused on identifying patterns of informal regulation, cultural legitimation, and pedagogical authority operating beyond formal policy instruments.

Findings: The findings reveal that religious value formation is governed less by formal curriculum mandates than by embedded cultural practices adapted from pesantren traditions. Daily rituals, habituation strategies, moral exemplification, and corrective sanctions function as informal regulatory instruments that normalize religious discipline and ethical conduct. These practices operate through moral authority and communal expectations rather than coercive enforcement. However, the study also identifies structural constraints, particularly the influence of global youth culture and limitations in institutional infrastructure, which complicate the sustainability of these governance arrangements.

Significance: This study contributes to socio-legal and educational governance scholarship by conceptualizing religious education as a form of informal cultural governance. It extends discussions within law, culture, and administration by demonstrating how moral regulation in educational institutions is produced through negotiated practices rather than formal legal compliance alone, offering a transferable analytical framework for comparable contexts globally.

INTRODUCTION

Educational institutions across diverse societies are increasingly confronted with moral fragmentation shaped by globalization, digital exposure, and the erosion of traditional authority, a condition widely discussed in governance-oriented cultural studies

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by (Hien et al., 2025). In response to this condition, schools are frequently positioned as regulatory spaces where moral conduct is produced through institutional routines rather than formal legal enforcement, as argued in socio-legal theory by (Casati & Pasquetti, 2022; Routh, 2022). Research on religious education, however, has predominantly framed moral development as a curricular outcome, overlooking how authority and discipline are enacted through everyday practices, a limitation identified by Hasan, (2025) and Khoo, (2025) in institutional governance analysis. In vocational and boarding school settings, religious norms are embedded in daily life through rituals, habituation, and symbolic authority that function beyond formal administrative instruments. Studies on cultural governance emphasize that such practices operate as informal regulatory systems that shape behavior through legitimacy and shared norms rather than coercion, as illustrated by (Blanco et al., 2022; Rahayu et al., 2025). Despite this insight, educational governance literature rarely conceptualizes religious schooling as a site of informal governance. Instead, moral education is often reduced to program evaluation and behavioral indicators. This gap underscores the urgency of examining how religious values are governed through cultural and administrative interaction.

The urgency of this research is further intensified by the growing disjunction between formal educational regulation and lived institutional practice. Governance scholarship demonstrates that compliance-based administrative models frequently fail to capture how authority operates through culture, habit, and moral legitimacy, a problem emphasized by (Muallidin, 2025; Perlman et al., 2023). In religiously oriented schools, moral discipline is rarely enforced through codified sanctions but is sustained through collective expectations, peer monitoring, and exemplary conduct. Such mechanisms align with what Finefter-Rosenbluh, (2022) describes as moral regulation embedded in social interaction rather than formal rule enforcement. However, international studies on religious education tend to generalize institutional behavior without examining internal governance dynamics. This tendency obscures how moral authority is negotiated within specific organizational contexts. Research on Islamic boarding schools, such as Krasnopevtseva et al., (2024); Melhem et al., (2024), highlights leadership and management but does not interrogate informal regulatory mechanisms. As a result, the governance dimension of religious education remains theoretically underdeveloped. Addressing this limitation is essential for advancing interdisciplinary debates in law, culture, and administration.

The rationale of this study emerges from the need to reposition religious education within governance theory rather than pedagogical assessment. Existing research often separates moral education from administrative regulation, creating an analytical divide noted in institutional theory by (Risi et al., 2023). While religious values are commonly discussed as ethical or spiritual constructs, governance studies emphasize that norms become effective only when embedded in organizational routines and authority relations. Informal governance theory suggests that regulation frequently occurs through cultural legitimacy rather than formal law, a perspective reinforced by Nakpodia et al., (2023) in studies of religion and governance. In boarding school environments, religious discipline is produced through continuous interaction between administrators, teachers, and students. This interaction forms a governance ecology where authority is moral rather

than juridical. Understanding this ecology requires analytical tools that bridge education, governance, and cultural regulation. This study adopts such an approach to capture the lived reality of moral governance. By doing so, it responds to calls for more process-oriented analyses in socio-legal research.

Recent Scopus-indexed studies on governance have emphasized formal regulatory frameworks, particularly in policy-driven contexts such as climate governance and sustainability administration, as demonstrated by Oh-Seng et al., (2025). Cultural governance research expands this focus by examining how norms and values structure institutional behavior, an approach exemplified in spatial governance studies by Zhang & Li, (2025). Studies on religion and governance highlight the role of moral authority in shaping social order outside formal legal systems, as argued by (Nanthambwe, 2025). In educational contexts, Hamdanah et al., (2025) analyze leadership in Islamic boarding schools but prioritize managerial effectiveness over regulatory processes. Research on indigenous and customary governance by Bonye et al., (2026) further illustrates how informal authority sustains normative order. These studies collectively suggest that governance operates through culture as much as through law. However, they rarely address micro-level moral regulation in schools. As a result, religious education remains weakly integrated into governance theory.

Other relevant studies explore morality and regulation across diverse domains, including environmental morality policies examined by (Beerli, 2025). Research on halal regulation by Jaelani & Kusumaningtyas, (2025) demonstrates how religious norms influence administrative compliance but focuses primarily on policy outcomes. Jurisprudential analyses by Crowe et al., (2025) provide philosophical grounding for the relationship between law and theology. Cultural authority studies by Ha, (2025) reveal how legitimacy operates within community-based governance structures. Despite their contributions, these works seldom engage with everyday institutional practices in education. Most treat schools as sites of implementation rather than governance. This limits their explanatory power for understanding moral discipline. By integrating these strands, the present study advances a governance-centered reading of religious education.

Although existing literature recognizes the importance of culture and religion in governance, few studies explicitly conceptualize religious education as a form of informal governance within schools. Most research isolates moral education from administrative regulation, treating it as either pedagogical content or ethical formation. Studies rarely analyze how authority is exercised through routine, habituation, and moral exemplification. Vocational boarding schools are particularly underrepresented in governance research. This absence results in a limited understanding of how moral norms are sustained institutionally. Moreover, informal regulation remains theoretically marginal in educational studies. The lack of process-oriented analysis creates a significant empirical and conceptual gap. Addressing this gap enables the articulation of moral governance as an institutional phenomenon. This study responds directly to that omission.

The purpose of this study is to examine how religious values are governed through informal cultural and administrative mechanisms within a vocational boarding school. It seeks to analyze how daily routines, ritual practices, and moral exemplification regulate student conduct. The study investigates how authority operates beyond formal curricular

and legal frameworks. It also explores how religious legitimacy is constructed and maintained within institutional life. By adopting a qualitative governance perspective, the research examines the interaction between culture and administration. This approach reframes religious education as a regulatory process rather than an instructional outcome. The study contributes to socio-legal debates on informal governance. Ultimately, it offers a transferable analytical framework for understanding moral regulation in educational institutions.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design grounded in governance-oriented institutional analysis to examine how religious values are regulated through informal mechanisms within an educational organization. Qualitative inquiry was selected because it enables close examination of everyday practices, authority relations, and cultural routines that cannot be captured through formal policy analysis, as emphasized in qualitative governance studies by (Sun & Zhu, 2024; Telaky & Mwanyoka, 2024). Rather than evaluating program effectiveness, the design focused on mapping processes of moral regulation embedded in institutional life. The research adopted a descriptive-interpretive orientation to capture how governance operates through habit, ritual, and symbolic authority, aligning with institutional ethnography principles articulated by (Jewell, 2024). Field-based inquiry allowed the researcher to observe how informal governance emerges through repeated interaction rather than explicit rules. This design is consistent with socio-legal approaches that conceptualize regulation as practice rather than statute, as discussed by (Sullivan, 2022). The study treated the school as a governance arena where culture and administration intersect. Such a design is appropriate for advancing interdisciplinary analysis within law, culture, and administration scholarship.

Participants

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to capture multiple layers of authority and experience within the institutional governance structure. The study involved school administrators, religious subject teachers, boarding supervisors, and students who actively participated in daily religious routines. This selection strategy reflects governance research recommendations that emphasize inclusion of actors occupying both formal and informal authority positions, as noted by (Chumo et al., 2023; Melhem et al., 2024). Administrators were included to provide insight into institutional norms and administrative expectations. Teachers and supervisors contributed perspectives on how moral discipline is enacted and legitimized in daily interaction. Students were included as key subjects of governance rather than passive recipients of instruction, following participatory perspectives in educational governance research. Participant diversity enabled triangulation across hierarchical and experiential positions. This composition strengthened analytical depth by revealing how governance is negotiated across institutional roles.

Instruments

Data collection employed three primary instruments, namely non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Observation protocols were designed to capture recurring religious practices, disciplinary routines, and informal interactions that signal moral regulation, consistent with observational strategies outlined by Miles, (Basha et al., 2024; Miles-Johnson, 2024). Semi-structured interview guides were developed to explore perceptions of authority, legitimacy, and moral responsibility among participants. Interview questions were open-ended to allow participants to articulate governance experiences in their own terms, a practice recommended in qualitative institutional research by (Dunwoodie et al., 2023; Hendren et al., 2023). Institutional documents, including schedules, internal guidelines, and activity records, were analyzed to contextualize observed practices within administrative frameworks. These documents were not treated as regulatory determinants but as symbolic references within governance processes. The integration of multiple instruments enabled methodological triangulation. This approach enhanced credibility while maintaining sensitivity to informal governance dynamics.

Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis followed an iterative and reflexive process informed by thematic governance analysis. Initial coding focused on identifying patterns of informal regulation, moral authority, and routine practices, drawing on coding strategies proposed by (Locke et al., 2022). Codes were then clustered into higher-order categories representing governance mechanisms such as habituation, exemplification, and communal enforcement. Analytical memos were used to trace relationships between cultural practices and administrative expectations, consistent with interpretive qualitative analysis described by (Alodhialah, 2025; Sheard, 2022). The analysis emphasized process rather than outcome, aligning with governance theory that views regulation as ongoing negotiation. Triangulation across observation, interview, and document data was employed to enhance analytical validity. Reflexive comparison was conducted to avoid privileging formal administrative narratives over lived practice. This analytical strategy enabled the articulation of informal religious governance as a coherent institutional phenomenon.

Methodological Contribution

Although no statistical tables were required, the methodological contribution of this study lies in its analytical framework rather than measurement instruments. By positioning religious education as informal governance, the method advances a rarely articulated approach in Scopus-indexed educational research. The integration of governance theory into qualitative educational inquiry strengthens interdisciplinary relevance. This methodological orientation aligns closely with the aims of journals focusing on law, culture, and administration. It also provides a transferable template for analyzing moral regulation in comparable institutional contexts. The method prioritizes depth over generalization while maintaining conceptual rigor. Such an approach responds to calls for process-oriented governance research. It therefore enhances both empirical richness and theoretical contribution.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

The results show that religious value formation in the vocational boarding school is governed primarily through informal and recurring institutional practices rather than formal curricular enforcement. Daily religious routines such as collective prayers, scripture recitation, and moral reminders function as regulatory mechanisms that structure students' behavior across time and space. These practices are embedded in the school's daily rhythm, creating predictable moral expectations without reliance on written sanctions. Authority is exercised implicitly through teacher presence, ritual leadership, and consistent modeling of conduct. Students gradually internalize moral norms through repetition and social exposure rather than explicit instruction. Moral discipline is reinforced through communal observation, where conformity is normalized and deviation is socially visible. Administrative actors provide symbolic endorsement of these practices without direct intervention in daily regulation. As a result, moral governance operates as a continuous process rather than episodic disciplinary action.

The thematic analysis identified three dominant patterns of informal governance: habituation, moral exemplification, and peer-based reinforcement. Habituation emerges through the repetition of religious routines that organize daily life and normalize moral discipline. Moral exemplification is enacted by teachers and boarding supervisors who embody expected conduct in everyday interaction. Peer-based reinforcement operates through informal monitoring, mutual reminders, and collective participation in rituals. These patterns do not function independently but reinforce one another within the institutional environment. Students are not passive recipients of governance but active participants in sustaining moral order. Informal correction occurs through social cues rather than formal punishment. This structure allows governance to operate with minimal coercion. The findings indicate that informal mechanisms are central to institutional regulation.

Table 1. Informal Religious Governance Mechanisms Identified in the Study

Main Theme	Sub-Mechanism	Primary Actors	Regulatory Function
Habituation	Daily religious routines	Teachers, students	Normalization of moral discipline
Moral exemplification	Role modeling	Teachers, supervisors	Legitimation of authority
Peer reinforcement	Informal monitoring	Students	Sustaining compliance

The interaction among these governance mechanisms forms a cyclical regulatory process rather than a linear chain of command. Moral expectations are introduced through routines, legitimized through exemplification, and sustained through peer interaction. When deviations occur, correction is enacted informally through reminders or social pressure. Administrative authority stabilizes this cycle by endorsing practices without codifying them into rigid rules. This arrangement allows flexibility while maintaining normative consistency. External cultural influences occasionally disrupt the cycle, particularly through digital exposure. However, the internal governance structure adapts

by reasserting communal routines. This adaptive capacity highlights the resilience of informal governance.

Table 2. Thematic Structure of Informal Religious Governance

Analytical Theme	Data Source	Manifestation in Practice
Habitation	Observation, documents	Repetitive religious scheduling
Moral authority	Interviews	Teacher modeling of conduct
Social enforcement	Observation, interviews	Peer reminders and correction

The processual dimension of moral regulation reveals how governance unfolds over time. Initial exposure to routines introduces moral expectations to students. Continued participation leads to internalization and normalization of conduct. Legitimacy is reinforced through consistent exemplification by authority figures. Peer reinforcement sustains compliance within student communities. Administrative endorsement stabilizes the process institutionally. External challenges prompt adaptive responses rather than structural breakdown. Moral regulation is reproduced daily through practice. This processual flow illustrates governance as lived experience.

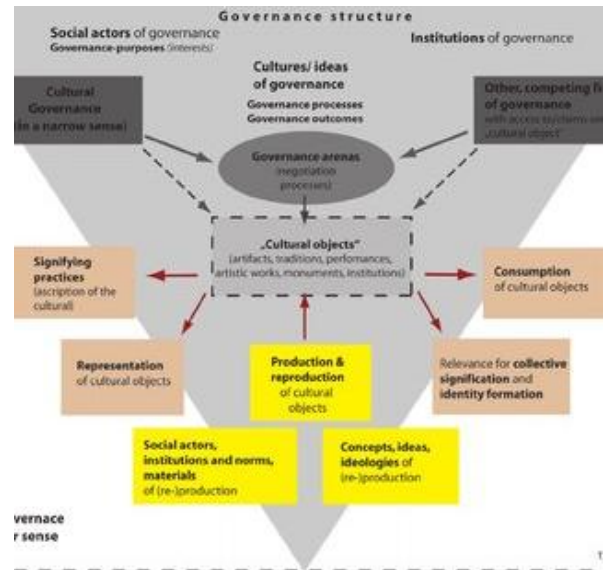


Figure 1. Analytical Framework of Informal Religious Governance

Figure 1 illustrates the analytical framework of informal religious governance operating within the vocational boarding school. The figure shows how moral regulation emerges from the interaction between religious routines, symbolic authority, peer reinforcement, and administrative legitimacy. Rather than functioning in a linear hierarchy, these elements form a cyclical governance structure that continuously shapes student conduct. The framework emphasizes that governance is sustained through legitimacy and repetition rather than formal sanctions. This visualization clarifies how moral order is institutionally produced through everyday practices.

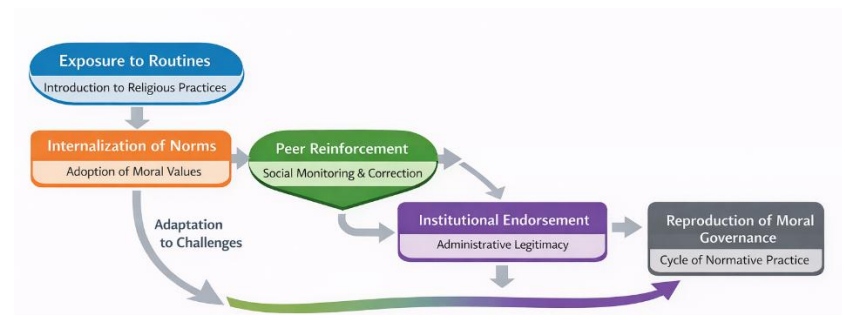


Figure 2. Processual Flow of Moral Regulation in Institutional Practice

Figure 2 presents the processual flow of moral regulation as it unfolds in institutional practice. The figure demonstrates how students are first exposed to religious routines, which are gradually internalized through repeated participation. Peer reinforcement plays a central role in stabilizing norms through social monitoring and informal correction. Institutional endorsement provides legitimacy that allows these practices to persist without bureaucratic enforcement. The flow highlights moral regulation as an adaptive and ongoing process rather than a fixed regulatory mechanism.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that religious education operates as a form of informal governance rather than as a curriculum-bounded instructional activity. This challenges dominant educational models that equate moral education with content delivery, an assumption problematized in governance theory by (Laursen & Madsen, 2025). Moral regulation in this study emerges through routine and legitimacy rather than formal authority, echoing Foucault's analysis of discipline as embedded in everyday practice. Unlike compliance-based administrative models, governance here functions through normalization and social expectation. This supports Pereira et al., (2025) argument that institutional stability often rests on cultural-cognitive mechanisms. By framing religious routines as regulatory instruments, the study extends cultural governance perspectives advanced by (Chi, 2024). The findings reposition religious education within socio-legal governance debates. This reframing aligns strongly with interdisciplinary law-culture scholarship.

The central role of moral exemplification highlights authority as symbolic rather than coercive. Teachers function as living references for acceptable conduct, reinforcing legitimacy through presence rather than enforcement, a dynamic resonant with Weberian authority discussed in contemporary governance studies. Research on Islamic boarding schools by Hastasari et al., (2022) emphasizes leadership effectiveness, yet does not theorize exemplification as regulation. This study fills that gap by demonstrating how authority is enacted performatively. Moral authority proves effective because it is embedded in daily interaction rather than institutional hierarchy. Similar legitimacy-based regulation is observed in religious governance contexts analyzed by (Fox & Breslawski, 2023). The findings suggest that authority is continuously reproduced through practice. This insight advances governance theory in educational settings. It also nuances existing leadership-centered interpretations.

Peer-based reinforcement emerges as a critical yet under-theorized dimension of governance. Students actively participate in sustaining moral order through observation

and informal correction, challenging views of learners as passive subjects. This aligns with social enforcement mechanisms discussed by (Ogbozor et al., 2025) and community governance studies by Ha (2025). Unlike surveillance-oriented control, peer regulation operates through shared norms and belonging. Such mechanisms distribute governance responsibility across the community. This distribution increases resilience but also introduces sensitivity to cultural disruption. Comparable dynamics are observed in moral policy enforcement examined by (Alibašić, 2025; Napier et al., 2024). The study thus extends peer governance concepts into educational institutions. It demonstrates governance as collective rather than centralized.

Administrative authority functions primarily as institutional legitimization rather than direct regulation. Leaders endorse religious practices symbolically, allowing cultural routines to retain authenticity, a pattern consistent with governance coordination models described by Oh-Seng, Klöck, and Deenapanray (2025). This administrative distance avoids bureaucratization of moral practice. However, it also limits the institution's capacity to respond to external normative pressures. Digital culture introduces competing moral frames that test internal governance. Similar tensions are identified in cultural-legal analyses by (Laursen & Madsen, 2025). The findings suggest informal governance is adaptive but contingent. Stability depends on alignment between culture and administration. This insight contributes to administrative governance theory.

From a socio-legal perspective, the study reinforces critiques of regulation that prioritize formal rules over lived practice. Legal authority often derives its effectiveness from cultural legitimacy, a position articulated by Crowe, et al (2025). By extending this argument to education, the study bridges jurisprudence and institutional governance. Moral regulation is shown to exist without codified sanctions. This challenges narrow interpretations of educational law and compliance. The findings invite rethinking how regulation is conceptualized across institutional domains. They also open pathways for comparative governance research. The study thus contributes theoretical novelty. Its integration of law, culture, and administration strengthens interdisciplinary scholarship.

Limitations

This study is subject to several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, the research was conducted within a single vocational boarding school, which constrains the empirical scope and limits contextual generalization. While the qualitative design allows for deep institutional insight, it does not permit statistical comparison across different educational settings. Second, the study relies on participants' narratives and observed practices, which are shaped by situational interaction and may evolve over time. Third, external influences such as digital media and broader youth culture were identified but not examined through longitudinal observation. Fourth, the absence of direct comparison with secular or non-boarding schools restricts cross-institutional interpretation. Fifth, administrative documents were treated symbolically rather than normatively, which may underrepresent formal governance dimensions. Sixth, researcher presence during observation may have influenced participant behavior to some extent. Despite these limitations, the study maintains strong analytical validity through triangulation and thematic coherence.

Implications

The findings of this study carry important implications for educational governance, policy, and socio-legal scholarship. They suggest that moral regulation in schools cannot be fully understood through formal administrative frameworks alone. Informal cultural mechanisms such as habituation, exemplification, and peer reinforcement should be recognized as core governance instruments. For educational administrators, this implies that effective moral governance depends on legitimacy and routine rather than rule expansion. In policy terms, attempts to formalize moral education without engaging cultural practice risk weakening institutional coherence. From a legal perspective, the study highlights the limits of compliance-based regulation in capturing lived institutional order. The findings also imply that governance effectiveness should be assessed through process visibility rather than policy documentation alone. For interdisciplinary research, the study strengthens the analytical bridge between law, culture, and administration. These implications encourage a rethinking of how regulation is conceptualized in educational institutions.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research should expand this line of inquiry by examining informal religious governance across multiple institutional and cultural contexts. Comparative studies between vocational, general, and secular schools would allow clearer identification of governance variation. Longitudinal research designs could capture how informal moral regulation adapts to social and technological change. Incorporating digital ethnography would deepen understanding of how online culture intersects with institutional governance. Mixed-method approaches may complement qualitative insights without reducing analytical depth. Future studies should also explore tensions between informal governance and formal legal accountability. Investigating governance breakdowns or conflicts could further enrich theoretical development. Overall, sustained attention to governance as practice will advance interdisciplinary scholarship and policy relevance.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that religious education within a vocational boarding school operates fundamentally as a form of informal governance rather than as a curriculum-bound instructional activity. Moral regulation is produced through the continuous interaction of habituation, moral exemplification, peer reinforcement, and symbolic administrative endorsement. These mechanisms function collectively to sustain institutional order without reliance on formal sanctions or codified rules. The findings challenge compliance-oriented models of educational regulation by revealing governance as a lived and negotiated process embedded in daily practice. By foregrounding legitimacy and routine, the study shows how authority is stabilized through culture rather than imposed through administration alone. This perspective expands socio-legal understandings of regulation beyond formal law into institutional life. The study contributes theoretical novelty by integrating governance theory with qualitative educational analysis in a context rarely examined in international scholarship. Ultimately,

it offers a transferable analytical framework for understanding moral governance across educational institutions operating at the intersection of law, culture, and administration.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

M. Fikri Alamsyah was responsible for the conceptualization of the study, including the development of the research framework, theoretical positioning, and overall research design. He led the data collection process, conducted field observations and interviews, and performed the primary data analysis. He also drafted the original manuscript, integrated the analytical framework, and revised the article in response to conceptual and structural requirements for international publication. Mu'alimin contributed to the refinement of the theoretical perspective, particularly in relation to governance, culture, and religious education. He provided critical feedback on data interpretation, strengthened the discussion through theoretical validation, and reviewed the manuscript for intellectual coherence. Both authors jointly approved the final version of the manuscript and take responsibility for its academic integrity.

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