

Reading for Pleasure in Formal Education: A Narrative Review of Pedagogical Practices, Opportunities, and Constraints

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ABSTRACT

Reading for Pleasure (RfP) is associated with literacy development and reading enjoyment, yet formal education can turn reading into an assessment-driven obligation. This narrative review examines how formal education conceptualizes RfP and how it relates to reading pedagogy. Ten peer-reviewed studies published between 2014 and 2024 were identified through Scopus and Google Scholar and synthesized thematically. The corpus spans school and university contexts in the United States, Australia, Ghana, Nigeria, Spain, Indonesia, and the United Kingdom, as well as non-site-specific conceptual and practice-design analyses. Across the studies, RfP is best understood as a continuum from externally required reading through supported choice and developing enjoyment to more autonomous reading. Meaningful text choice, multimodal and personalized activities, social and private reading opportunities, learner participation, and supportive classroom and library environments emerge as promising approaches, although the heterogeneous evidence does not support uniform causal claims. Teachers and librarians help preserve access, choice, and low-stakes participation, while institutional support can sustain the conditions needed for reader autonomy. RfP can be integrated into formal education when pedagogical structure protects voluntariness and enjoyment. Longitudinal and mixed-method research is needed to assess whether RfP initiatives in formal education produce sustained voluntary reading beyond intervention periods.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Reading culture is widely used as an indicator of a society's literacy development, yet international assessments repeatedly show that voluntary reading engagement is under

strain. In the 2021 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), 18% of ten-year-olds across participating education systems reported that they did not like reading, and reading enjoyment was strongly associated with achievement [1]. A large-scale analysis of the OECD Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) similarly found that frequent fiction reading undertaken by choice was associated with stronger reading performance than frequent reading of non-fiction, magazines, or newspapers [2]. In Indonesia, a 2025 GoodStats survey reported that only one in five respondents read books daily [3]; because this source is not peer-reviewed, it is used here only as contextual evidence rather than as part of the scholarly evidence base. Together, these indicators point to a continuing challenge: formal education must support reading competence without allowing reading to become solely an externally imposed activity.

Governments have responded with school-based literacy initiatives, yet policy uptake alone has not resolved the tension between academic utility and voluntary engagement. Reading in many school systems is still valued chiefly as a means of obtaining marks, completing assignments, and passing examinations [4]. Reading for Pleasure (RfP), by contrast, is commonly associated with vocabulary growth, comprehension, and intrinsic motivation [5], but the distinction should not be treated as an absolute binary. Within formal education, reading can move along a continuum from externally required reading, to supported choice, to developing enjoyment, and eventually to more autonomous RfP. A teacher-initiated activity may become pleasurable when students retain meaningful choice, while voluntary reading may simultaneously serve academic, social, and identity-related purposes. This continuum makes reader autonomy, motivation, text choice, enjoyment, social participation, and institutional context central to understanding how RfP is enacted in formal educational settings.

The persistence of an achievement-first paradigm is reproduced through everyday pedagogical practice. Pedagogy, understood as the theory and practice of teaching and the ways teachers organize learning, interact with students, and pursue instructional goals [6], often remains oriented toward measurable skill acquisition rather than reading enjoyment. International evidence indicates that this challenge is not confined to one national context. More than a quarter of prospective teachers in a ten-university UK study could not name a single strategy for supporting children's reading for pleasure, and over a third could suggest no more than one or two [7]. An international comparative study likewise found that pre-service teachers who did not see themselves as readers of children's literature cited time pressure, low perceived relevance, and limited confidence as barriers to enacting RfP-oriented practice [8]. Where such pedagogical content knowledge is thin, curriculum coverage and assessment demands can crowd out the experiential and affective dimensions of reading, even when teachers value reading for pleasure in principle.

Taken together, the literature indicates that RfP occupies an unresolved position in formal education: it is valued for enjoyment, wellbeing, literacy development, and reader identity, yet is structurally vulnerable to being converted into another assessed school task. Recent reviews have already scrutinized the broad RfP evidence base [5] and mapped current RfP research across contexts [15]. The present review differs by focusing specifically on pedagogical enactment within formal education, including the roles of teachers and school

librarians and the tension between academic obligation and learner autonomy. Rather than asking only whether RfP is beneficial, this review examines how educational institutions define RfP and which pedagogical conditions appear to preserve or erode its voluntary character. Accordingly, the review is organized around two questions:

- (1) How is Reading for Pleasure understood within the context of formal education?
- (2) What is the relationship between RfP and reading pedagogy within formal educational settings?

By synthesizing studies across school and university settings, this review aims to clarify the conceptual ambivalence surrounding RfP and identify pedagogical entry points through which teachers, teacher educators, librarians, and institutional leaders can support reading enjoyment without turning it into excessive assessment. Its contribution is therefore both conceptual and practical: it frames RfP as a continuum of autonomy rather than a simple opposition between pleasure and academic reading, and it identifies safeguards that can help formal education integrate RfP while preserving meaningful choice, enjoyment, and low-stakes participation.

Literature Review

The Concept of Reading for Pleasure

Reading for Pleasure (RfP) is commonly understood as voluntary reading undertaken for enjoyment and mood regulation [9]. Related terms include recreational reading, volitional reading, habitual reading, choice-based reading, and independent reading [5]. The International Literacy Association describes children's right to read in terms that emphasize access, choice, and meaningful engagement [10]. In this review, these ideas are treated as overlapping dimensions rather than as a single all-or-nothing category: RfP may involve differing degrees of autonomy depending on who initiates the activity, how much text choice is available, and whether participation is tied to evaluation.

The pleasure derived from reading is closely tied to readers' preferences and moods, which are shaped by attitudes toward reading and by affective experience [11]-[13]. Howard identifies educational, social, and personal dimensions of reading enjoyment, including literacy development, empathy, relaxation, and self-understanding [14]. These outcomes should nevertheless be distinguished conceptually from the activity of RfP itself. Reading enjoyment, motivation, frequency, engagement, achievement, and reader identity are related constructs, but they are not interchangeable and may be measured differently across studies.

RfP is not confined to any particular genre and is generally associated with non-compulsory or choice-oriented reading characterized by engagement and enjoyment [15]. For less proficient readers, however, the effort required to comprehend a text may reduce the pleasure obtained from it. The social dimension is also important: enjoyment may increase when reading experiences can be shared with others [16]. Large-scale PISA evidence shows an association between frequent voluntary fiction reading and reading achievement [2], but this correlational evidence does not establish that pleasure reading independently causes higher achievement. It is therefore more appropriate to treat RfP as one component within a wider literacy ecology shaped by proficiency, choice, motivation, social interaction, and instructional context.

2. METHOD

This study used a narrative literature review to interpret how RfP is conceptualized and pedagogically enacted across heterogeneous formal educational settings [17]. A narrative design was selected because the research questions concern conceptual meanings, institutional tensions, and pedagogical practices rather than estimating a pooled effect size. The unit of analysis was the published study; no human participants were recruited directly for this review, so no new participant-level data were collected. The corpus includes empirical, document-analytic, and practice-oriented conceptual contributions when they directly address RfP in formal education.

Data Sources and Search Strategy

Relevant studies were identified through Google Scholar and Scopus. The search used the English terms “reading for pleasure,” “reading for entertainment,” “reading habit,” and “pedagogy,” together with the Indonesian equivalents membaca untuk kesenangan, membaca untuk hiburan, kebiasaan membaca, and pedagogi, applied individually and in combinations. Because “pedagogy” is a broad term, we retained records retrieved through it only when title and abstract screening confirmed that RfP was a central construct. The search was restricted to publications from 2014 to 2024. Sources outside this range were used only for contextual or methodological framing and were not eligible for inclusion in the ten-study corpus. The Scopus search was conducted on 25-27 January 2026, and the Google Scholar search was conducted on 28-31 January 2026. For Scopus, the search was operationalized as TITLE-ABS-KEY((“reading for pleasure” OR “reading for entertainment” OR “reading habit” OR “membaca untuk kesenangan” OR “membaca untuk hiburan” OR “kebiasaan membaca”) AND (pedagogy* OR education* OR school* OR university*)) AND PUBYEAR > 2013 AND PUBYEAR < 2025. Google Scholar was searched using the exact phrases “reading for pleasure,” “reading for entertainment,” “reading habit,” “membaca untuk kesenangan,” “membaca untuk hiburan,” and “kebiasaan membaca,” separately and in combination with “pedagogy” or “pedagogi”; results were sorted by relevance and screened against the same eligibility criteria applied to the Scopus records. The ten-study total reported in this article refers to the final combined corpus from the two databases, not to ten studies retrieved independently from each database.

Eligibility Criteria

Records retrieved through the two databases were screened against the following inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Inclusion criteria:

1. Studies had to examine RfP directly within a formal educational setting, defined here as school or higher-education environments and the professional practices that support them, including student, teacher, librarian, and institution-focused studies;
 2. Empirical, document-analytic, and practice-oriented conceptual studies were eligible when RfP was a central construct, and the article contributed directly to understanding educational practice;
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3. Articles had to be peer-reviewed and available in sufficient full text for appraisal. Open-access availability was treated as a practical access condition rather than as an indicator of research quality;
4. Articles had to be published in English or Indonesian between 2014 and 2024, with no restriction on country or region.

Exclusion criteria:

1. Articles that mentioned RfP only incidentally, without treating it as a central construct;
2. Studies situated primarily outside formal education, or broad reviews and theoretical papers that did not contribute directly to the review questions on RfP conceptualization or pedagogical enactment;
3. Records for which sufficient full text could not be obtained for screening and synthesis.

Screening Procedure

Screening was conducted in three sequential stages: title and abstract screening, full-text assessment against the eligibility criteria, and final verification of relevance and full-text availability. Records retrieved from Scopus and Google Scholar were combined, duplicate records were removed, and the remaining records were screened against the stated inclusion and exclusion criteria. After full-text assessment and final relevance verification, 10 studies were retained in the final corpus. The included sources span school and university settings and include participant-based studies, secondary-data analysis, document analysis, and conceptually oriented practice/design work. Table 1 reports the educational context and evidence type for each source so that participant findings, document-based findings, and author recommendations are not treated as equivalent forms of evidence.

Analytical Approach

The ten studies were read in full and coded thematically with reference to the two research questions. Coding distinguished (1) how RfP was defined, including voluntariness, text choice, enjoyment, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and institutional pressure; (2) whose perspective was represented, including students, teachers, librarians, or the source authors; (3) the type of evidence, distinguishing participant reports, statistical associations, document analysis, intervention-related findings, and author recommendations; and (4) educational level and context. Recurring themes were synthesized narratively rather than converted into pooled effect estimates. No formal quality-appraisal score was applied, and the review does not treat descriptive or correlational findings as causal evidence. These methodological constraints are considered again in the limitations section.

Table 1. Reference studies included in the literature review

No.	Title (Year)	Author(s)	Key Finding
1	Pleasure reading behavior and attitude of non-academic ESL students: A replication study (2014)	Ro & Chen [18]	United States; questionnaire study of 60 advanced non-academic ESL learners. Students understood RfP as voluntary rather than obligatory, and the study examined reading attitude in relation to reading behavior.

No.	Title (Year)	Author(s)	Key Finding
2	Reading for pleasure among junior high school students: case study of the Saint Andrew's Anglican Complex Junior High School, Sekondi (2015)	Kavi, Tackie, & Bugyei [19]	Ghana; case study involving 93 participants (87 students, 5 teachers, and 1 headteacher). RfP was associated with voluntary choice and enjoyment, while examination-oriented reading and limited access to reading materials constrained participation.
3	Personalized reading for pleasure with digital libraries: towards a pedagogy of practice and design (2018)	Kucirkova & Cremin [16]	Practice/design synthesis with content analysis of digital-library features rather than a single participant site. The paper argues that personalized digital reading can support RfP when teachers act as listeners, mentors, and co-readers rather than only as monitors.
4	School librarians supporting students' reading for pleasure: A job description analysis (2021)	Merga & Ferguson [20]	United States and Australia; hybrid content analysis of school-librarian job descriptions. RfP was framed as volitional reading, and the analysis highlighted librarians' professional role in literature advocacy and access.
5	Pressured or Pleasure Reading: A Survey of Reading Preferences of Secondary School Students during COVID-19 Lockdown (2021)	Abimbola, Shabi, & Aramide [21]	Nigeria; descriptive cross-sectional survey of secondary students. Respondents distinguished RfP from pressured reading and linked it to entertainment, information, relaxation, and self-satisfaction.
6	The Impact of Reading for Pleasure – Examining the Role of Videos as a Tool for Improving Reading Comprehension (2022)	Chireac, Morón Olivares, & Devís Arbona [22]	Spain; study of 80 university teacher-education students using video-supported activities. The findings relate to reading comprehension and engagement in a specific multimodal learning context and should not be generalized as a universal effect of RfP.
7	The role of students' perceptions of teachers' direct instruction and feedback on students' reading enjoyment (2023)	Rola, Faridah, Surya, & Bukit [23]	Indonesia; secondary analysis of PISA 2018 data from 12,098 fifteen-year-olds. Reading enjoyment varied more by student-level factors than by school-level factors, while perceived teacher instruction and feedback were significant predictors.
8	More than Somebody's Pleasure: the Analysis of Reading for Pleasure in Education using Cognitive Psychology Perspective (2023)	Ulivia, Fatihul Alwan, & Hayati Dahlan [24]	Conceptually oriented cognitive-psychology analysis drawing on existing empirical findings rather than a new participant sample. The paper links RfP with flexible text and time selection and discusses possible cognitive processes associated with pleasurable reading.
9	Reading for pleasure practices in school: children's perspectives and experiences (2023)	Oxley & McGeown [25]	United Kingdom; literature-informed qualitative study with 59 children aged 8–11 from four primary schools in Scotland and England. Children valued enjoyment and text choice, while their experiences showed that school practices can either support or constrain reader agency.
10	Reading for Pleasure: Exploring Female Students' Motivation in Reading Stories (2024)	Afnitasari & Maharani [26]	Indonesia; quantitative survey of female students in grades 10–12 at an Islamic senior high school in Semarang. Reading motivation combined intrinsic dimensions such as curiosity and challenge with extrinsic dimensions such as grades, recognition, social interaction, and teacher-assigned activity.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Reading for Pleasure in Formal Education

This subsection addresses the first research question: how RfP is understood within formal education. Nine of the ten included sources describe voluntariness, meaningful choice, or enjoyment as a defining feature of RfP, while at least five explicitly contrast such reading with academic or external pressure [18]–[26]. However, the evidence comes from different perspectives and designs. Student-focused studies describe how learners experience choice, pressure, and motivation [18], [19], [21], [23], [25], [26]; the school-librarian study provides a professional and document-based framing [20]; and the practice/design and cognitive papers articulate author-led conceptual interpretations [16], [24]. The corpus therefore supports a common emphasis on autonomy and enjoyment, but not a single uniform definition.

Across the author-led and professional framings, RfP is generally positioned as reading undertaken for enjoyment rather than primarily for grades, task completion, or examination performance. Merga and Ferguson [20] frame RfP as volitional reading and show how institutional job expectations can recognize or marginalize librarians' role in supporting it. Abimbola et al. [21] distinguish pleasure reading from pressured reading, while Kucirkova and Cremin [16] emphasize personalization and the teacher's role as listener, mentor, and co-reader. These accounts suggest that autonomy is not simply an individual trait; institutions partly produce it through the choices, resources, and forms of participation they make available.

Student perspectives add an important tension to this definition. Ro and Chen [18], Kavi et al. [19], Oxley and McGeown [25], and Afnitasari and Maharani [26] show that enjoyment and choice can coexist with school requirements, limited access, recognition, grades, and teacher-assigned activity. Rather than dividing reading into two opposing categories, these findings are better represented as a continuum that moves from externally required reading to supported choice, developing enjoyment, and ultimately more autonomous RfP. A school-initiated activity can therefore become pleasurable when students retain meaningful agency, while voluntary reading can still serve academic, social, or identity-related purposes. This continuum helps explain why RfP may be present within formal education even when participation is not completely free from institutional structure.

Claims regarding the cognitive outcomes of RfP should be interpreted cautiously. Within the corpus, cognitive claims derive mainly from the conceptually oriented analysis by Ulivia et al. [24] and from the specific video-supported higher-education study by Chireac et al. [22]. These sources do not establish a general causal effect of RfP on sustained attention, recall, cognitive flexibility, or achievement across educational settings. PISA and PIRLS findings are supplementary evidence outside the ten-study corpus: they show associations between voluntary fiction reading, reading enjoyment, and achievement [1], [2], but they do not independently prove that pleasure reading causes higher achievement. The strongest synthesis supported here is therefore that RfP is consistently linked to positive affective and literacy-related experiences, while the magnitude and causal direction of cognitive effects remain underdetermined.

The meaning of RfP in formal education cannot be separated from structural and cultural conditions. Curricula, assessment systems, available reading time, collection diversity, and expectations about measurable performance shape how much autonomy students actually experience. The reviewed studies show that enjoyment is often negotiated within these constraints rather than occurring outside them. This explains the review's central conceptual tension: RfP is ideally associated with choice and intrinsic enjoyment, yet in schools it may begin through externally organized activity and remain partly influenced by academic demands. The relevant question is therefore not whether school involvement automatically destroys voluntariness, but which forms of institutional support preserve meaningful choice, low-stakes participation, and the possibility for students to develop their own reading purposes.

The Relationship between Reading for Pleasure and Reading Pedagogy in Formal Educational Settings

This subsection addresses the second research question, concerning the relationship between RfP and reading pedagogy. Several included sources directly foreground or provide evidence relevant to pedagogical practice [16], [20]-[23], [25], [26]. Their evidence is not equivalent: Afnitasari and Maharani [26], Abimbola et al. [21], and Oxley and McGeown [25] report student motivations, preferences, or experiences; Rola et al. [23] analyse students' perceptions of teacher instruction and feedback using secondary PISA data; Chireac et al. [22] examine a specific multimodal learning activity; Merga and Ferguson [20] analyse professional job-description documents; and Kucirkova and Cremin [16] develop a practice/design synthesis. The pedagogical conclusions below therefore distinguish participant-reported experience, secondary-data associations, tested activity, document-based evidence, and author recommendation rather than treating all strategies as empirically proven interventions.

RfP and reading pedagogy share a concern with developing readers who are both competent and willing to read. Abimbola et al. [21] show that school reading may be experienced as pressured when examinations, parental expectations, or task completion dominate it. This finding does not mean that academic reading and pleasure reading are mutually exclusive. Instead, it indicates that pedagogy affects the motivational quality of reading: the same scheduled activity may be experienced as controlling when choice is narrow and evaluation is heavy, or as supportive when students have room to select texts, respond personally, and read without constant performance demands.

Afnitasari and Maharani [26] provide a clear example of movement along this continuum: teacher-assigned reading can coexist with curiosity, challenge, recognition, and social motivation. This suggests that externally initiated activity may become more intrinsically meaningful when pedagogy creates real space for choice. Wilhelm [27] similarly argues that text selection and pleasure are often neglected in classroom practice. Dedicated reading time should therefore not be labeled wholly voluntary merely because students choose a book; when attendance is compulsory, voluntariness is better preserved through meaningful text choice, freedom in the form of response, low-stakes participation, and permission to discontinue a text that is unappealing.

Multimodal and personalized approaches provide additional entry points, but interpret their evidence in context. Chireac et al. [22] studied 80 teacher-education students in Spain and found positive outcomes from a video-supported reading activity, so its relevance to school RfP is suggestive rather than directly transferable. Kucirkova and Cremin [16] argue that digital libraries can support personalized RfP when technology expands meaningful choice rather than turning teachers into monitors of reading behavior. These findings underline a broader distinction between print and digital environments: technology can widen access and personalization, but it can also introduce new forms of monitoring or task structure that reduce autonomy.

Teachers' role is therefore substantial but not sufficient on its own. Teachers design classroom experiences, model reader identity, provide feedback, and create opportunities for text choice and discussion. Evidence from pre-service teacher education shows that pedagogical repertoire for RfP requires deliberate development rather than simply personal enthusiasm for reading [7], [28]. This supports a practical interpretation of the corpus: sustainable RfP depends on institutional time, professional knowledge, and curricular space as well as on individual teacher disposition.

The synthesis points to related but distinct institutional roles for librarians and school leadership. School librarians support access, collection diversity, reader advisory, and reading communities [20], while teachers shape the day-to-day classroom experience. Cremin et al. [29] emphasize responsibility for text knowledge, rigor in planning, and relevance to readers' lives, principles that also inform collection development and reader guidance. At the institutional level, school leadership can influence whether time, staffing, resources, and policy expectations permit these practices to continue. This synthesis therefore frames RfP as a whole-school literacy responsibility rather than as the product of teacher enthusiasm alone.

The wider literature supports the importance of personalization, social reading, and affective engagement [15], [30], [31], but contextual differences limit direct transfer across settings. The corpus spans primary, secondary, and university students; Anglophone and non-Anglophone settings; and both print-oriented and digital practices. It is too small and heterogeneous to establish whether the same strategies operate similarly in high-resource and low-resource institutions or across all cultural contexts. Comparative research should treat such differences as questions rather than assume them away in a general model of RfP pedagogy.

Practical integration of RfP should therefore include safeguards that preserve its defining qualities. These include meaningful text choice; flexible genres and formats; no compulsory written summary after every reading episode; limited performance assessment; student participation in collection selection; options for both private and social reading; and permission to abandon unappealing texts. These safeguards also require conceptual precision. Reading enjoyment, reading motivation, reading frequency, reading engagement, reading achievement, and reader identity may influence one another, but improvement in one should not automatically be interpreted as improvement in all. Overall, the pedagogy-relevant sources identify promising practices rather than a single proven intervention model, and the strongest conclusion is that RfP is more likely to be sustained when pedagogical

structure expands reader agency instead of converting pleasure reading into another high-stakes academic requirement.

4. CONCLUSION

This review set out to clarify how RfP is understood in formal education and how it relates to reading pedagogy. In relation to the first question, the evidence indicates that RfP is best understood as a continuum of reader autonomy rather than as the simple opposite of academic reading. Choice, enjoyment, and self-directed purpose are central features, but school-initiated activity may also become enjoyable when students retain meaningful agency. The corpus supports strong conceptual links between RfP, motivation, and reader identity, while claims about broad cognitive benefits should remain cautious because the included designs are heterogeneous and do not consistently permit causal inference.

In relation to the second question, the review identifies personalization, multimodal activity, social reading, protected reading time, and supportive classroom and library environments as promising pedagogical directions rather than uniformly proven interventions. The synthesis suggests differentiated contributions from teachers, librarians, and institutional leadership: teachers design and model reading experiences; librarians provide access, collection diversity, reader advisory, and reading communities; and institutional leadership can help secure time, resources, and policy support. Integration should preserve student choice, enjoyment, low-stakes participation, diverse reading materials, and freedom from excessive assessment.

The conclusion therefore applies broadly to formal education, including schools and, where relevant, higher-education settings represented in the corpus. RfP can be embedded within literacy culture without losing its distinctive character only when institutional support creates conditions for autonomy rather than simply adding another compulsory task. The review contributes a pedagogy-focused framework for understanding this balance between structure and voluntariness and offers practical safeguards for institutions seeking to support sustained, meaningful reading.

Limitations and directions for further research.

This review has several limitations. It draws on a modest and heterogeneous corpus of ten studies identified through only two databases; Google Scholar also has known reproducibility limitations. The full-text access requirement may have introduced availability bias, and the English/Indonesian language restriction may have excluded relevant work. The authors did not apply a formal quality-appraisal tool, and the manuscript does not document independent duplicate screening or coding, leaving it vulnerable to reviewer dependence. The corpus combines school and university contexts, participant studies, secondary-data analysis, document analysis, and conceptually oriented work, which limits direct comparability. Supplementary sources outside the 2014–2024 corpus were used only to contextualize discussion and should not be conflated with corpus findings. Future research should use larger systematic searches, transparent screening logs, and stronger quality appraisal. It should include longitudinal and mixed-method designs that assess not only achievement but also reading enjoyment, autonomy, sustained voluntary reading, reader

identity, post-intervention continuation, and students' experiences of pressure. Comparative work is particularly needed across Anglophone and non-Anglophone settings, different resource levels, print and digital environments, and primary, secondary, and university populations.

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AI DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The authors used Grammarly and Quillbot during the preparation of this work for English-language proofreading, including checking grammar, spelling, punctuation, and clarity. After using the service, the author thoroughly reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication. The authors declare that this research was prepared, researched, written, and edited without the aid of artificial intelligence (AI) techniques.