

Research Article

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Constructing a School Leadership Philosophy Model for High School Principals in Guizhou: A Delphi-Based Study

Jiang Wu, Yaoping Liu, Yangjun Li, Junaidi Junaidi

Abstract

Background/purpose. The study aims to investigate the role of school leadership policy in enhancing education performance towards developing a governance philosophy model for high school principals in Guizhou, focusing on ideology, culture, and leadership in secondary education. Sixteen informants were invited to this study.

Materials/methods. A Delphi-based method was used to examine research questions, which were developed and evaluated by three experts. The model includes three primary, eleven secondary, and forty-five tertiary indicators related to principal attributes, school factors, and social influences.

Results. This framework equips high school principals with a comprehensive tool for implementing effective governance strategies, thereby enhancing educational management and leadership.

Conclusion. The study enriches theoretical insights into school leadership philosophy and provides practical recommendations for improving secondary education towards incorporating both domestic and international perspectives,. The findings contribute to the broader dialogue on educational innovation and the pursuit of high-quality education across diverse socio-cultural environments.

1. Introduction

Globally, this transformation reflects a broader trend where nations recognize education as a key driver of economic competitiveness and social mobility. Hence, the vigorous and expedited advancement of secondary education, including in China, is a multifaceted undertaking that centers on many critical factors, including government policy, economic growth, and societal demands. This is due to China's approach to secondary education, which is increasingly influenced by international standards and practices, fostering a more holistic educational environment that prepares students for a globalized workforce (Liu et al., 2025). The emphasis on management of education has become paramount, with significant investments aimed at improving infrastructure, teacher training, and curriculum development. This program encompasses the implementation of comprehensive educational reforms aimed at enhancing curriculum development, instructional strategies, and assessment frameworks (Yang et al., 2024; Yu, 2024). Hence, constructing a school leadership philosophy is crucial for enhancing educational quality and improving student performance, thereby establishing a clear vision, setting goals, and implementing effective teaching practices. It fosters a positive school culture that encourages collaboration among educators, students, and the community.

Effective school leadership has a direct impact on teaching and learning conditions, which are crucial for student success. Leaders who prioritize professional development and support for teachers create an environment where educators can thrive, ultimately benefiting students. Research indicates that strong leadership practices correlate with improved student outcomes, as leaders can motivate and inspire their staff to adopt innovative teaching strategies. Moreover, a leadership philosophy that emphasizes inclusivity and equity ensures that all students receive the support they need to succeed. School leaders can create tailored interventions that enhance learning experiences and address the unique challenges faced by diverse student populations. A strong dedication to fostering an atmosphere of academic quality, creativity, and critical thinking serves as the foundation for these initiatives (Alam & Mohanty, 2023; Junaidi et al., 2025). Furthermore, the growing emphasis on teacher professional development highlights the understanding that the standard of education is inextricably linked to the level of instruction. For instance, China's commitment to building a secondary education system that equips pupils to handle the challenges of the twenty-first century is exemplified by this coordinated endeavor.

The rate of educational growth, however, changes considerably between locations and contexts, and even within the same region under the same circumstances. Even though there is no denying that outside influences have a significant impact on educational development, correcting educational development imbalances is becoming a more pressing issue. It is necessary to stress "thrift" in addition to "open source" tactics and creating difficult circumstances. This calls for an emphasis on creating soft conditions, which entails a thorough investigation, evaluation, and comprehension of the opinions of relevant groups, with a focus on the "leader" group the high school administrators.

2. Literature Review

The philosophy construction model for high school principals is a well-crafted framework that makes it easier to formulate and express a principal's pedagogical beliefs and values (Franks, 2019). This model serves as a foundational tool for school leaders, guiding their decision-making processes and shaping the educational environment. This model is usually based on a number of basic components, including the principal's own experiences, current theories of education, social norms, and the unique requirements of the school community (Caramat & Caballes, 2023). Moreover, this framework encourages reflection and self-assessment, allowing principals to evaluate education practices. It fosters a culture of transparency and accountability, as stakeholders can understand and engage with the principal's vision (Junaidi et al., 2023; Widiyanti & Raharjo, 2018). The leadership

philosophy not only enhances the principal's effectiveness but also positively impacts the entire school community, leading to better-quality educational quality.

Serving as a blueprint for decision-making, leadership style, and cultivating a school culture that bolsters student success, this model underscores the iterative nature of constructing this philosophy, necessitating perpetual reflection and adaptation in response to the evolving educational landscape. Although this construction model has advanced significantly, there are still holes that need to be filled by more academic research (Chan, 2022). The dynamic nature of educational environments is one such gap, which calls for the model to be flexible and responsive to changes in student needs, educational policies, and society expectations (Sebastian et al., 2016). Furthermore, it has not yet been thoroughly investigated if the model can be applied in a variety of cultural and socioeconomic circumstances (Messa et al., 2023). These gaps highlight the complexity of developing a high school principal's philosophy and the need for ongoing study to improve the model and increase its usefulness in promoting high-quality education.

The extensive index system is designed to provide high school education with a more focused and efficient pathway toward high-quality development (Can et al., 2023). This model will enable high school principals to align with educational leadership practices with regard to establishing clear benchmarks and guidelines (Qi et al., 2025). The study's ultimate goal is to add to the continuing conversation on good school leadership by offering insightful information that can be used in a variety of educational settings (Can et al., 2023). The high school principals can create a culture of excellence that promotes student achievement and wellbeing towards enhancing the level of school management, educational instruction and idea (Qi et al., 2025). It emphasizes the abstract and intangible character of an idea by conceptualizing it as an ideal, timeless, and spiritual universal paradigm (Aziez et al., 2025; Rösch et al., 2023). It is commonly thought of as a cognitive construct that captures a person's comprehension or conceptualization of a certain experience or idea (Civera et al., 2025; Zhong et al., 2025). Ideas form the bedrock of intellectual discourse, fostering innovation, creativity, and critical thinking (Slabbinck & Van Witteloostuijn, 2020). Conversely, an idea can also be perceived more concretely understood as a concept, thought, or notion (Al Awan et al., 2025; Bathia et al., 2024). It also facilitates student achievement and wellbeing, creating an environment where students are empowered to thrive academically and personally. This concept is rooted in the understanding that knowledge acquisition among students is a key factor (Sangeetha, 2021).

Students, education, and the school are at the center of the "education philosophy," which is a collection of educational concepts, views, and value aspirations that represent the school's principles and faith. As the school, teachers, and students grow, so does the principal's vision for school management, which reflects the principal's idealistic aspirations and logical reasoning (Memela & Ramathan, 2022). The concept of school administration is shaped by all educators who adhere to the principles of educational growth, which involves a logical understanding and pursuit of values in school development (Lewin, 2022). They continuously reflect and rebuild based on school management practices. On the other hand, by direct interaction with the learning environment, the "idea" is continuously improved and redefined in experiential learning. Learning is a dynamic process that results in a deeper and more sophisticated grasp of the subject matter as the "idea" changes in response to the learner's experiences (Qi et al., 2025). It demonstrates how important the logical concept is to both primary and experiential learning, acting as the learner's intellectual compass as they progress through the stages of knowledge acquisition and cognitive growth (Sangeetha, 2021). In fact, essential concepts such as "school culture," "school spirit," and "value leadership of the principal" are inextricably linked to the idea of school administration from various theoretical perspectives (Alpaydin et al., 2022).

The overall mental outlook of a school embodies the ideas, value systems, group psychological characteristics, and spiritual value traditions formed through long-term educational practice (Lim,

2024). Its the cornerstone of school culture and educational thought (Memela & Ramrathan, 2022). The concept of "principal leadership" is systematically examined within the framework of leadership theory, which emphasizes the development of a key set of values under the leadership of the principal, fostering consensus between teachers and students (Huang et al., 2024). Every student adheres to this concept-oriented behavior pattern, which represents a shared value. The school management concept is a focused reflection of educational thought; the management philosophy, which forms the basis of school spirit, is a unique expression of the school management ideal; and the function and application of the management philosophy are the sole standards by which the school management concept is evaluated (Moya & Toledano, 2025). The principal's function and goals for student development significantly impact their conduct, way of thinking, and general approach to school administration (Dinata et al., 2023). Finally, the philosophy of the principle, developed in the classroom and via team experiences, directs the development of concepts and value systems, emphasizing the opinions of parents, teachers, and students and putting them into practice (Nadeem, 2024).

A principal's school philosophy into subjective and objective groups based on a variety of characteristics, including work attitude, communication skills, educational capacity, self-regulation, tenure, policy support, and environmental implications (Brundin et al., 2022). The principal's interpretation of the school philosophy, professional credentials, and school experience are examples of internal factors found in studies on ethnic primary schools, whereas the social environment and the awareness of preserving and safeguarding national culture are examples of external factors (Mohtar & Manan, 2014). Under the exploration and beyond paradigm, these impacts are separated into social, academic, and school-related components. Research on the factors influencing a principal's school philosophy, both domestically and globally, has a wide range of focal areas and classification schemes (Ryan & Krupnikov, 2021).

The pedagogical philosophy of vocational middle school principals is based on a number of factors, such as their individual traits, educational experiences, policies, and historical background (Shaked, 2024). The development and effectiveness of education principals has three main areas of influence on principals: the school environment, the individual principle, and the broader social backdrop (Caramat & Caballes, 2023). A study that examines how principals' leadership attributes impact the formation of school culture for effective principals, including skill sets, motivating characteristics, and personality traits (Jayasuriya et al., 2024). The globalization of education perspective states that strategic planning, innovative implementation, resource integration, cultural development, national communication, and interpersonal communication skills should be among the leadership attributes of university presidents (Civera et al., 2025).

3. Method

The Delphi method is an organized communication strategy that successfully collects professional viewpoints to reach an agreement on difficult problems (Thompson, 2009). Its justification lies in its ability to leverage the insights of knowledgeable individuals, ensuring that the findings are well-informed and reflective of current best practices. The method taps into a diverse range of perspectives, which enriches the discussion and enhances the quality of the outcomes towards utilizing a panel of experts (Landeta & Lertxundi, 2024). The anonymity afforded to participants encourages honest and open feedback, thereby reducing the influence of dominant voices and facilitating a more equitable exchange of ideas. This aspect is particularly important in fostering an environment where all experts feel comfortable sharing their insights without fear of judgment. It allows for multiple rounds of questioning, enabling experts to refine their opinions based on the collective feedback of their peers. This process not only clarifies and deepens understanding but also helps to mitigate individual biases, leading to a more balanced view of the topic at hand. The flexibility of the Delphi method makes it applicable across various contexts, from educational

leadership to policy development, and it is particularly effective for forecasting future trends. By synthesizing expert opinions in a systematic manner, the Delphi method enhances the reliability and validity of the findings, construction it a appreciated instrument for addressing complex issues and informing decision-making processes.

Selecting the educational idea index is an important first step, particularly during the early screening phase. Scholars have used content analysis in the preliminary screening index to increase the body of literature because there is a lack of study on the educational philosophies of high school leaders (Mohtar & Manan, 2014). These research have concentrated on completing information retrieval and analysis as well as defining the principal's educational idea (Franks, 2019). In order to identify relevant index aspects of high school administrators' educational philosophies, this approach has made it simpler to group concepts into "educational philosophy," "characteristics," "principal leadership values," and "school spirit," among other names (Salimova et al., 2024). A quantitative study of the frequency of pertinent school philosophy indicators was conducted after 49 credible papers were chosen from a comprehensive review and analysis of the literature on the school philosophies (See table 1).

Table 1. The Frequency of School Index

The concept	Frequency	The characteristics	Frequency	Concept characteristics	Frequency
Management school	18	Leadership	15	Competency	11
Campus culture	10	Implementation capacity	10	Exotic environment	9
Management system	9	Personal charisma	9	Communication skills	9
Recognition system	8	Responsibility	8	Teaching body	8
Superior department	7	Articulation	7	Pluralism	6
Conceptual knowledge	6	Pertinence	6	Management system	6
Guarantee mechanism	5	Work experience	5	Cooperative consciousness	5
Adaptability	4	Deepen the Reform	4	personal ability	4
Campus environment	4	Consequence	3	Role positioning	3
Broad Mind	3	Professional knowledge	3	Learning ability	2
Clean	2	Aggressiveness	2	Cultural construction	2
Tolerant	2	Adhere to sth	1	Psychokinesis	1
Flexibility	1	Love teachers and students	1	Insight ability	1
Prospective	1	School administration	1	Credibility	1

Initiative	1	Professional quality	1	Full body into	1
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The advisory panel consisted of 16 experts, who were selected in accordance with the study's knowledge domain and expert selection guidelines. Nine specialists between the ages of 46 and 55, five under 45, and two over 56 make up the panel. Twelve of the members have worked for 16 to 25 years, two for 26 to 35 years, and two for more than 36 years. The group is diverse in terms of roles and qualifications; three have doctorates, seven have senior titles, and 13 have held or are currently presidents, including three vice principals and seven who have been principals of two schools (see table 2).

Table 2. The Participant Demographic

Description	Total	Percentage(%)
Gender		
Male	10	62.5
Female	6	27.5
Age		
≤45	4	25.0
46 to 55	6	37.4
56 to 65	3	18.8
≥66	3	18.8
Working life		
≤15	3	18.8
16 to 25	7	43.6
26 to 35	3	18.8
≥36	3	18.8
Academic degree		
Doctor	4	25.0
Master	3	18.8
Bachelor	9	56.2

In the first two rounds, experts were invited to assess and score the first-, second-, and third-level indicators based on their relevance and importance (Xing et al., 2024). The results of the second round, which did not include open-ended questions, utilized a five-point Likert scale. This allowed experts to offer specific suggestions for modifying the indicators. Furthermore, the positive coefficient of experts, which reflects the engagement of experts in the study (Yao et al., 2022) (See table 3).

Table 3. The Expert Judgment Basis

Description	Large	Medium	Small
Theoretical analysis	0.3	0.2	0.1
Practical experience	0.5	0.4	0.3
Related information	0.1	0.1	0.1

Instinct	0.1	0.1	0.1
Total	1.0	0.8	0.6

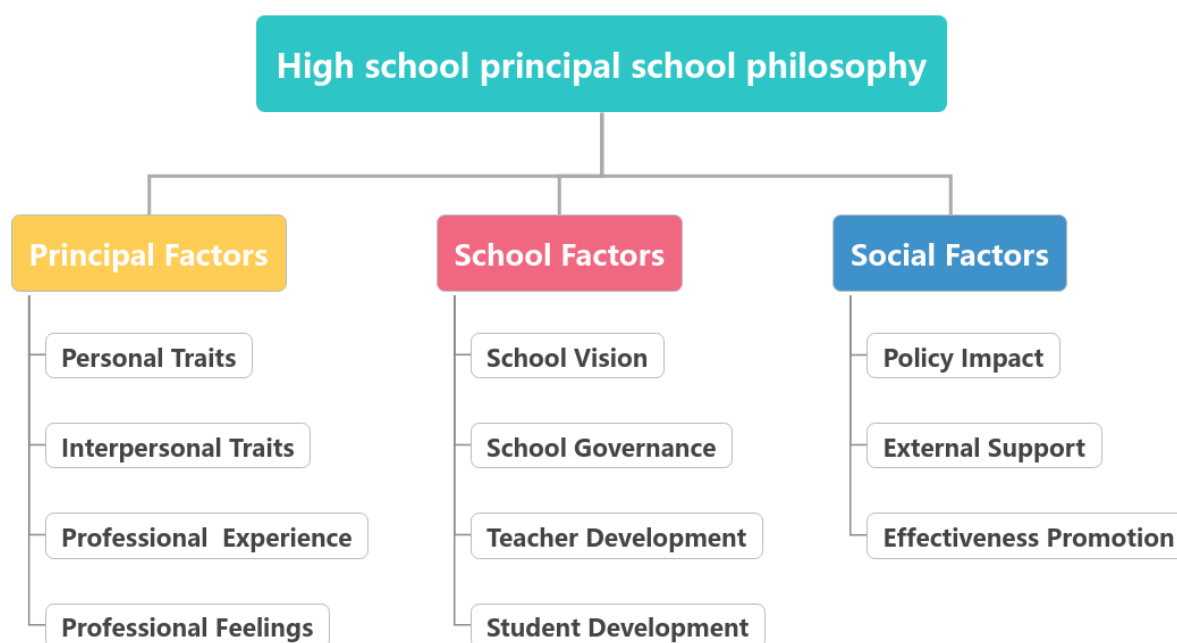
4. Results

The consultation form and the selection of consultation experts were necessary steps in the process of developing the school philosophy indicators. To get their thoughts and assessments, 16 experts were sent the Guizhou Province High School Principals Consultation Form (first round) by email and WeChat. After almost two months, 16 feedback surveys were received at the end of the first round of consultation, yielding a 100% response rate. The professionals took an active part, offering insightful opinions and recommendations. The correlation and containment linkages between the primary, secondary, and tertiary level indicators, however, raised concerns from several specialists. They drew attention to problems with the individual indices' clarity, the possible duplication of some indicators, and the degree to which some indices correspond with modern terminology. These remarks emphasized the necessity of further improving each indicator's dimension in order to increase its relevance and clarity.

The expert opinions based on the input obtained from the initial round of consultation. The following changes have been made: Due to issues with its internal logic and linguistic clarity, the principal factor which has two dimensions: "personal traits" and "interpersonal traits" was reorganized. The five dimensions were combined into four: "initiative" was added to the list of personal qualities, and "honesty" was reclassified from individual traits to interpersonal traits. The two primary aspects of "love for education" and "educational pursuits" were collective into a single component known as "love for education." Professional experience was included to this dimension along with "learning experience," giving a more comprehensive picture of the principal's upbringing. Management and leadership skills that emphasize the index system and professionalism of expression to improve professionalism and clarity, as well as "humanistic knowledge quality" and "educational professional quality." By making these changes, the index system was intended to become more coherent and relevant, better representing the fundamental traits and backgrounds of high school principals.

The coefficient of variance for the "Teacher Beliefs" indicator. The idea of teachers' views was somewhat nebulous and did not align well with the "Student Development" index that followed. Consequently, the suggestion was made to change this indicator to "Teacher Development." Furthermore, some experts recommended rearranging the indicators' logical sequence such that "Professional Experience" appears before "Educational Feelings." The suggested change was approved since it was thought to be a fair order. It was proposed that this signal be replaced with "educational thought." The three primary indicators that comprise this method are societal, school, and principal influences. These primary indicators comprise 45 tertiary indicators and 11 subsidiary indicators. A solid basis for assessing the many duties and responsibilities of high school principals is provided by this comprehensive approach.

The three-level index system that was developed for high school principals has a lot of value and significance. This System was created through a rigorous process for regular high school principals, expert opinions gathered during three rounds of consultation, and knowledge from earlier studies on the educational philosophy of high school principals. This approach offers a solid foundation for evaluating the many responsibilities and duties of high school principals, which enhances educational leadership and administration.



5. Discussion

This exercise contributes to the theoretical framework of principle leadership and is essential in revealing the relationship between implicit and explicit concepts. As commander and manager of school operations, the principal is in charge of developing and implementing the school's pedagogical philosophy (Mohtar & Manan, 2014). School management as a whole and the principal's own educational philosophy are intimately related to the school's performance. (Hasan et al., 2023). The implicit educational idea, which is intangible but has a big impact, is the principal's metaphysical concept. However, the explicit pedagogical philosophy permeates every facet of the school's administrative practices, impacting attitudes, self-perception, interpersonal interactions, and the overall environment (Franks, 2019; Sebastian et al., 2016). This dynamic encourages principals to engage in continuous learning, self-reflection, and development. This study proposes an index system of school philosophy from the perspectives of society, the school, and the individual, despite the lack of thorough debates in previous studies. The elements determining effective school administration are developed and enhanced by investigating the relationship between implicit and explicit school philosophies. It has been demonstrated that the educational system is accelerating its conceptual shift by adopting a more expansive perspective on education and considering the state of society as a whole in light of new strategic missions and historical responsibilities (Anriani et al., 2022; Li, 2017).

The education policy has increasingly revised the duties and obligations of principals (Shaked, 2024). As a result of this shift, principals are no longer traditional management figures but rather leaders who demonstrate professional leadership qualities. A school's success is still elusive in the absence of a dedicated leader who is dedicated to enhancing students' learning results and overall development (Franks, 2019). In actuality, the cornerstone of a successful school is a capable principal. This assertion is supported by empirical data, which shows that effective classroom instruction is critical to kids' learning and development in a school environment and that the principal's team of teachers significantly affects educational standards (Huang et al., 2024; Memela & Ramrathan, 2022). As crucial practitioners in the field of education, high school principals are responsible for reassessing their educational philosophies, enhancing the quality of teaching and learning, promoting high-quality development in high schools, and offering instruction that meets the needs and expectations of the general public (Chen et al., 2019; Jimerson & Chen, 2022; Mohtar & Manan, 2014). The

objective of this index system is to support these objectives by providing a systematic framework for evaluating and improving high school teaching practices.

The educational process for the school, its faculty, and its students is greatly influenced by the principal's vision, which also establishes the course for the institution's expansion. Regardless of who originated the idea, the principal takes on the role of primary advocate, promoter, and defender. The principal's management style and educational philosophy have a big impact on the school's vision, even though they might not have the last word in how it develops (Caramat & Caballes, 2023). This highlights how crucial principals are in fostering an environment that encourages learning and growth, which ultimately impacts everyone's academic performance. Thus, the core ideas that direct the school's development crystallize into the management philosophy of the principal. The principal can be empowered in their multifarious role as a manager, leader, and the "producer" and "chief" of all aspects related to teaching by determining the elements that impact their educational vision, developing an index system of school philosophy, and promoting the development and application of this vision. Hence, the school's development with greater clarity and assurance, this empowerment lessens uncertainty in decision-making (Chan, 2022). It can also create an atmosphere that not only promotes academic performance but also places a high priority on each student's holistic development by coordinating the school's philosophy with the community's requirements.

The result of this study makes it easier to implement relevant policies towards creating a model of high school principals. The principals frequently hold specific views as individuals, but these beliefs will vary according on a variety of aspects, including innate genetic circumstances, acquired growing experiences, and different times and environments (Xing et al., 2024). This is also true of the principal's management style. Principals will have different opinions about how to run their schools because of their experiences growing up, their genetic composition, the time and places they work in, and the different schools they have attended (Shaked, 2024). Nowadays, some Chinese principals have a "not optimistic" attitude toward school administration, which hinders the effective implementation of educational goals and may prevent the country from developing a top-tier educational system. In response to this challenge, several scholars have attempted to look into these issues, sometimes employing case study methods (Li & Li, 2019; Xiang & Stillwell, 2023). However, generalizing from case studies can be difficult, and this kind of research occasionally falls short.

6. Conclusion

The significance and constructional value of a well-designed three-tier index system designed specifically for high school leaders are thoroughly investigated in this scholarly work. Building on earlier research on the pedagogical paradigms employed by high school leaders, this study incorporates the relevant standards outlined. An iterative process that included three rounds of rigorous debates and intellectual exchanges with subject matter experts, this research has successfully developed an index system that consists of three major indicators, eleven secondary indicators, and forty-five tertiary indicators. This index system is committed to fulfilling the pressing needs of the contemporary world while steadfastly maintaining its core mission of supporting the educational community in the pursuit of high-quality education. Thus, this study provides insight into enhancing high school principals in the context of contemporary education and significantly broadens our understanding of their professional needs. This index system seeks to promote effective leadership that eventually benefits students, teachers, and the larger educational environment by offering a methodical and thorough approach to assessing and enhancing the actions of school administrators. This study provides a helpful tool for considering the ideas of high school principals. It offers future researchers a practical tool for doing further empirical research and establishes a professional standard of education development.

7. Suggestion

This study has several limitations that warrant consideration. First, the results might have been affected by the fact that the original school philosophy model was created based on the author's prior research and value orientation. Furthermore, a major mistake in the study's early stages was that, while the Delphi method was employed to gain acceptance of the index system, it did not entail assigning weights to the indications. The survey results were not representative because of this geographic limitation, particularly with regard to the contributing factors. Consequently, the results may not be representative of the entire country. Second, the reliance on qualitative data from case studies may limit the generalizability of the findings, as the unique contexts of individual schools can influence the results. The subjective nature of principals' educational philosophies may lead to biases in interpretation, affecting the validity of the proposed index system. Future research should employ a mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative insights with quantitative data to enhance the robustness of findings. Expanding the scope to include elementary and middle school principals could provide a more comprehensive understanding of leadership dynamics across various educational stages.

Declarations

Author Contributions. Conceptualization: Jiang Wu, Yaoping Liu, Yanjun Li. Data curation: Jiang Wu, Yaoping, Liu. Formal analysis: Jiang Wu, Yanjun Li. Investigation: Jiang Wu, Yaoping, Liu, Yanjun Li. Methodology: Yaoping Liu, Yanjun Li. Resources: Jiang Wu, Yaoping Liu, Yanjun Li. Supervision: Yaoping Liu, Yanjun Li. Validation: Jiang Wu, Yaoping Liu, Yanjun Li. Writing – original draft: Jiang Wu, Yaoping Liu, Yanjun Li. Writing – review & editing: Jiang Wu Yaoping Liu, Yanjun Li

Conflict of interest. The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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Ethical approval. This study was conducted in accordance with ethical standards and guidelines for research involving human participants. Ethical approval was obtained from the Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University Research Ethics Committee (Approval No. R. 571 / 2024). Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and their privacy and confidentiality were fully respected throughout the study.

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