

Exploring Implementation of Inclusive Education: A Case of Selected Technical and Vocational Education and Training Colleges Campuses in the Northwest Province of South Africa

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Abstract

This study explores the implementation of Inclusive Education in three selected Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) college campuses in the Northwest province of South Africa. The aim of implementing Inclusive Education in South African Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges is to alleviate student exclusion, however, its efficacy and wide-ranging implementation have drawn criticism. The aim of this study was to explore the implementation of Inclusive Education in TVET colleges adopting a qualitative approach. The question the study asks is: How is Inclusive Education implemented in three TVET college campuses in the Northwest Province? Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. A purposive sampling technique was used to select the participants from three campuses. A case study design was applied in this study. Thematic data analysis was used to analyse the collected data. This study is underpinned by Social Inclusion Theory (SIT). The study revealed that the implementation of Inclusive Education in TVET colleges remains a challenge despite the existence of inclusive programmes. The study recommends adequate funding from DHET and support to be provided to staff to develop their capacity to implement IE, online studying, and the use of technology to develop practical strategies for the implementation of IE.

Keywords

Implementation, Education, Leadership, Management, TVET, Inclusive Education

1. Introduction

The implementation of Inclusive Education (IE) in TVET colleges seems to be a challenge for TVET colleges and it warrants examining. It appears that many students, particularly those who encounter learning barriers, are still denied full access to quality and equitable educational opportunities in mainstream schools and TVET colleges, despite efforts made across the globe to ensure quality education for all students through (IE).

There is a growing body of research that lists obstacles to the implementation of IE because of IE's inability to establish a firm foothold in educational institutions around the globe. In South Africa, [Delubom et al. \(2020: p. 1509\)](#) reveal that there is still limited access and support to students with disabilities in TVET colleges. Some of the obstacles to effective implementation of IE in TVET colleges include ongoing prejudice and discrimination, unfavourable attitudes towards inclusion, and a lack of information ([Braun 2020](#); [Genova, 2015](#); [Sharma, 2020](#)). These obstacles are still experienced in TVET colleges ([Delubom & Marongwe, 2022](#)) and pose challenges which college management must confront.

IE in South African TVET colleges aims to “address student exclusion but faces criticism for its broad application and effectiveness” ([Bhilitane et al., 2024: p. 104](#)). The criticism for IE stems from challenges with its implementation and the perceived lack of effectiveness of its implementation. The arguments are that students still experience discrimination in TVET colleges, and this problem does not seem to be addressed. The challenges which are experienced with the implementation of IE in TVET colleges include infrastructure, lack of training for lecturers, funding, and staffing ([Delubom & Marongwe, 2022](#)). In addition, [Sithole et al. \(2022: p. 87\)](#) maintain that “not much support is given to the management structure to implement policies and legislative objectives” to enhance management systems in TVET colleges. However, the focus of this study is on how Inclusive Education is implemented in the selected TVET colleges.

In this vein, it can be argued that the implementation of IE in TVET colleges is a process which needs support from management. [Mosagae and Bekker \(2020: p. 1\)](#) concur that access to education in general and access to vocational education are primary means of enhancing career and employment opportunities for all people including those with disabilities. Accordingly, people with disabilities are often at the receiving end of limited opportunities to enhance their career prospects. It is in this vein that the study focussed on understanding the implementation of IE in TVET colleges by asking the following question: How is Inclusive Education implemented in three TVET college campuses in the Northwest Province?

2. Literature Review

2.1. The State of Implementing Inclusive Education in TVET Colleges

According to researchers like [Mabale \(2012\)](#), [Ngwato \(2020\)](#), [Nthako \(2020\)](#), TVET colleges confront a variety of difficulties because of ineffective leadership.

This is one of the main causes for which the function of educational leadership needs to be improved and tailored toward effective management techniques at the proper time, with the proper people, and in the proper location. Lack of adequate teaching and learning resources, poor infrastructure, unmotivated employees, high staff turnover, crowded classrooms, and a lack of course options for inclusive education are some other causes of ineffective leadership (Badenhorst & Radile, 2018).

2.1.1. Using Technology to Assist Students with Disabilities

There is a global need to incorporate technology into TVET college inclusive programs to enhance their effectiveness. It should be mentioned that in the case of vocational studies, exposure to, and experience with, cutting-edge technologies transfers readily into employable skills for graduates (Oroni, 2012).

The continued reliance on technology requires that colleges are flexible in their design to include and allow for new technological devices and methodologies to deliver inclusive teaching and learning (Haleem, Javaid, Qadri, & Suman, 2022). The impact of technology suggests that TVET colleges ought to continuously initiate lecturer development programs that rigorously enable employees to become accustomed to such technologies. However, the downside to the rapidly changing technologies means that equipment, study material, and machines are rendered outdated relatively quickly (Chen & Schulz, 2016).

2.1.2. Relationships amongst the College Principal and Campus Managers

In the case of TVET colleges, this would necessitate that at top management level, the principal of the college has a close working relationship with campus managers and deputy principals of the college to manage inclusive education in totality. In some TVET programs, students struggle to understand theory as well as practice (Ngwato, 2020). Despite efforts to reorient the TVET curriculum, this issue persists.

To close the gap between ability and disability imbalances, something should be done. This gap has been detected; thus, it merits examination. According to Rose, Feldman, and Jankowski (2011), a variety of factors affect students' academic progress. Many students from traditional schools enrol in a variety of courses at TVET institutions with the intention of earning their qualifications and pursuing employment or business. Students from various backgrounds enrol in schools in the pursuit of a formal education. Due to the diversity of their backgrounds and personal challenges, such as disabilities, some students may struggle to cope with the curriculum. Campus managers have a crucial role to play to identify students with disabilities so that they can support them with the help of the college principal.

2.1.3. Performance of TVET College Students

According to a DHET survey from 2016 (Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), 2016), just 15% of instructors in public TVET colleges were

assessed to be academically and professionally competent for the TVET industry in 2014. Some 38.2% were judged academically qualified but professionally unqualified, while 12% were found to be both academically and professionally unqualified. Of these, 34.8% were evaluated to be academically and professionally qualified, but for teaching in schools rather than TVET institutions.

Budgets for TVET colleges always devote a sizeable portion of their funds to training and development. Based on the aforementioned survey results (Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), 2016), it appears that funding for skills development and training is only just budgeted for, but that there is a lack of management of bursaries and funding for lecturers' training (Ngwato, 2020), which further reflects ineffective management and a lack of effective leadership for maintaining sustainability to the level necessary for the current situations and success in the future (Shonubi, 2012).

2.1.4. Inclusion of Students with Special Education Needs

Regular inclusion of students with special education needs is still lacking in higher education institutions, which is a deficit that has been noted. According to Badenhorst and Radile (2018), TVET colleges continue to encounter difficult obstacles. These include issues with the funding of TVET colleges, accessibility to community members, and a lack of industry and commerciality. Lack of student assistance, lack of housing for students, a confusing mix of program quality, and inadequate and incompetent management and governance are all issues of concern (Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), 2013).

The College Council, the College Principal, the College Student Representative Council (SRC), and other college structures like the Academic Board (Continuing Education) all play major roles in the college's governance, management, and leadership. The FET Colleges Act of 2006 outlines some of the particularly significant responsibilities of some of these leadership and governance organisations, including strategic planning, budgetary planning, and curriculum implementation. Without understanding the college management, organisational culture, and climate, it may be assumed that a failing educational institution has issues with its leadership and governance structures at the strategic and operational levels (Rajbhandari, 2017). The implementation of IE in TVET colleges is invariably impacted by management, leadership, and governance failures.

3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework which underpinned this study is Social Inclusion Theory (SIT). The idea of social inclusion "can be traced back at least to the 19th century's work of a German sociologist, Max Weber" (Gidley et al., 2010: p. 129), who laid a strong foundation for SIT. SIT is relevant to this study because it advocates for non-discrimination against other people, including students with disabilities.

Although inclusion initially focused on students with disabilities, UNESCO clarifies that the concept also includes areas such as background, ability, characteristics, and learning needs. [Gidley et al. \(2010: p. 124\)](#) explain that the principles

of SIT include “access, participation, and success, and can be seen to reflect degrees of social inclusion applicable to students with disabilities”. Access in this context refers to providing opportunities to students who are disabled or different in one way or another to access education of good quality. Equitable access is ensuring all students have equal access to learning materials, technology, support services and opportunities to participate fully in all aspects of life (Gidley et al., 2010: p. 124).

Social inclusion theory is rooted in inclusive education in several key concepts; social exclusion, social capital, and universal design for learning (UDL) (Gidley et al., 2010: p. 124). That is, a socially inclusive management and leadership is where all students feel valued, their differences are respected, and their basic needs are met so they can live in dignity (Gidley et al., 2010: p. 124). For the successful provision of inclusive education, it is necessary to adopt inclusive practices which will transform, in practice, the principles of inclusion to support diversity and provide equal learning opportunities for everyone (Rogahang et al., 2023). Participation points to the creation of an enabling environment where students with disabilities can take part in educational programs which will result in them earning a qualification at the end of their studies. Success refers to the ability of students with disabilities to complete their studies in record time.

SIT provides a framework for understanding social inclusion in organisations like TVET colleges. Accordingly, students in TVET colleges deserve to be given access to participate in various TVET college programs so that they can eventually be successful in terms of completing their studies and eventually finding employment. The management and leadership of TVET colleges must be mindful of this imperative and ensure the inclusion of students who are different. In the South African education system, which includes TVET colleges, inclusion must do more with non-discrimination, which is one of the values of the South African Constitution. In this vein, Jobir (2024) adds that inclusion plays an important role in transforming South African education. Moreover, the inclusion or IE is regarded as a human rights and social issue (Engelbrecht, 2020).

Inclusive Education is broader than formal schooling and acknowledge that learning also occurs in the home and community, and within formal and informal modes and structures; it is about changing attitudes, behaviour, teaching methodologies, curricula and the environment to meet the needs of all students; it is about maximising the participation of all students in the culture and the curricula of educational institutions and uncovering and minimising barriers to learning; and it is about empowering students by developing their individual strengths and enabling them to participate critically in the process of learning. An understanding of these principles can ensure that IE is implemented successfully in TVET colleges and students are not denied access, participation, and success, in line with SIT.

4. Methodology

The components of a research methodology that include the research paradigm,

methodology, design, population and sampling, data collection and analysis are discussed in the paragraphs that follow.

4.1. Research Paradigm

The paradigm from which this study was viewed was interpretivism. The interpretivism paradigm seeks to comprehend the world in which participants “work and live, utilising subjective interpretations” (Nieuwenhuis, 2020: p. 66).

In this study, interpretivism enabled the researcher to understand how Inclusive Education is implemented in the selected TVET colleges campuses of the Northwest province in South Africa. Through virtual interviews, the researcher was able to hear the voices of participants on how IE is implemented in the selected TVET colleges.

4.2. Research Approach

A qualitative research approach was used in this study. A qualitative research approach is best described as “a planned move from philosophical worldviews to the specific selection of participants, data collection, and data analysis methods” (Nieuwenhuis, 2020: p. 80). A qualitative approach enabled the researchers to conduct research in a natural setting and to become personally involved in a study, especially during data collection. Therefore, the researchers were able to conduct research in a naturalistic environment, wherein the emphasis was on how IE is implemented in the selected TVET colleges.

4.3. Research Design

The researchers adopted a case study research design to accomplish the objectives of the study. According to Coombs (2022), case study research requires in-depth investigation conducted into an individual, group, or an event to gain an understanding of a real-life phenomenon. A case study design is appropriate for this study because the researchers were able to explore, analyse, and describe the subjective but accurate experiences, perceptions, and feelings of TVET college campuses leadership in their natural settings on the implementation of Inclusive Education (Lauer, 2006). Each of the three campuses is considered a case in the study. The actual verbatim accounts of the participants on the implementation of inclusive Education are reflected in the data analysis section. Adopting a case study as the design for this study enabled an understanding of how IE is implemented in TVET colleges.

4.4. Sampling

Sampling refers to the “selection of a portion of the greater population that has a direct interest in the research or study” (Makwana et al., 2023: p. 763). The most important aspect to consider during sampling is how big or small the sample is. Sample size can be regarded because of the “planned study’s theoretical and practical considerations” (Cresswell & Clark, 2011). Some of the considerations for

sample size include the financial, time, and accuracy implications (Maree, 2012: p. 220).

To select participants for this study, purposive sampling was used. The twelve selected participants from the three TVET college campuses included three student support managers, three campus managers, three heads of departments (HODs), and three students. The selection of the three student support managers was because they are part of the management and can share relevant information regarding the implementation of Inclusive Education at colleges. The campus managers were selected because they also form part of management and have relevant information regarding the implementation of Inclusive Education. The Heads of Departments are also part of management and have relevant information regarding the implementation of Inclusive Education, that is why they were selected as participants in the study. The SRC was selected because they are the key stakeholders, and the implementation process affects them directly. One SRC participant lives with a disability and shared relevant information. The three TVET college campuses were selected due to them being in the Bojanala Platinum District Municipality which is convenient for the researchers to access and get relevant information (Table 1).

Table 1. Biographical details of the participants.

PARTICIPANTS		GENDER	YEARS OF CAMPUS MANAGEMENT EXPERIENCE	QUALIFICATIONS
CAMPUS MANAGERS				
College A	CMA1	Male	13 years	BEd
College B	CMB1	Female	09 years	Post Graduate Diploma in TVET
College C	CMC1	Male	06 years	University Diploma in Education
STUDENT SUPPORT MANAGERS				
College A	SSA2	Female	08 years	BA in Psychology
College B	SSB2	Female	06 years	BA in Psychology
College C	SSC2	Male	07 years	BA Honours in Economics
HEAD OF DEPARTMENTS				
College A	HOA3	Female	06 years	BEd Honours in Organisational Psychology
College B	HOB3	Male	03 years	BCom in Business Management and PGCE
College C	HOC3	Male	12 years	Secondary Teachers Diploma and Advanced Certificate in Education
STUDENTS (SRC)				
College A	STA4	Male	1 year SRC Chairperson	N5 Public Management
College B	STB4	Male	1 year SRC Chairperson	NCV Hospitality L3
College C	STC4	Female	2 years (re-elected) as SRC Deputy Chairperson	NCV L4 Management and N5 Financial Management

4.5. Data Collection

Individual, semi-structured interviews were used to collect data for this study. The interviews occurred on days chosen by the researcher in accordance with the research timeline, one-on-one interviews with each of the 12 participants were conducted. Each interview lasted for not more than 40 minutes and was conducted at a time convenient for the interviewees. The semi-structured interviews were conducted virtually because it was convenient for the participants.

4.6. Data Analysis

Thematic data analysis was used to analyse the data gathered for this project. Braun and Clarke (2006) define thematic analysis as an analysis where the data set is analysed and interpreted in such a way as to identify the possible recurrence of information and themes amongst different participants. Data analysis in this study followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework which involves: 1. Familiarisation with data, 2. Generating initial codes, 3. Searching for themes, 4. Reviewing themes, 5. Defining and naming themes, and 6. Writing the report. Thematic analysis enabled the researchers to identify common themes and generated codes on the implementation of IE at selected TVET colleges.

5. Findings

The findings are presented according to the themes that emerged from the data, guided by the research questions and the theoretical framework to understand the experiences of stakeholders on how Inclusive Education is implemented in TVET colleges. During the data analysis, the following codes which led to the themes were generated: Challenges, led to theme 1: Implementation challenges; support, led to theme 2: Support for IE implementation, and, approaches led to theme 3: Approaches of IE implementation.

5.1. Theme One: Implementation Challenges for IE in TVET Colleges

The participants brought up several concerns as challenges in the implementation of IE in TVET colleges, such as financial challenges and insufficient resources. The participants ascribe these challenges to inadequate funding from the DHET. The research questions led to the emergence of themes and sub-themes from the data. The first theme that emerged is management challenges for IE in TVET colleges. This theme is in line with the first research question.

In analysing this theme and the sub-theme, the verbatim quotations from the participants are presented. This theme is in line with what was highlighted in the literature review. Each theme and its sub-themes are systematically presented below.

Sub-Theme 1: Financial Challenges

Financial challenges were mentioned as a serious challenge in the implementation of IE in TVET colleges. The procurement of IE resources, budgeting, and insufficient funds were the major concerns. These financial challenges ranged from the

management down to the student leadership positions. If funds are set aside for the implementation of IE, the transition will be viewed more positively. It has been mentioned by the participants that managers end up using their own money to support the management of IE Participant CMC 1 said:

"I think...it is the financial resources and the red tape. At times you would end up taking money from your own pocket... It took a long time to maintain ramps needed for wheelchair access"

This concern was echoed by STC4, who stressed that inadequate funding undermines efforts to ensure equitable access:

"One major challenge is the limited budget of IE resources, which hampers our ability to provide comprehensive support and access to all students"

Similarly, CMB1 highlighted that while campus management is tasked with creating inclusive environments, funding constraints remain a recurring obstacle:

"Managing the campus entails supervising resources and buildings to accommodate all students with learning barriers; however, we experience budget constraints that prevent us from being fully inclusive"

Student STC4 made mention that limited budget continues to be a challenge to procure resources needed for IE:

"One major challenge is the limited budget of IE resources, which hampers our ability to provide comprehensive support and access to all students... Procurement of resources for inclusive education takes long and is not prioritised"

Similarly, participant CMB1 stressed that funding shortages restrict the ability to upgrade essential facilities:

"The biggest need is to have enough funds available. For example, bathroom facilities need to be upgraded, and other students sometimes misuse, or damage facilities meant for learners with disabilities"

Sharing the same sentiment, SSA1 stated that:

"Operating within student support section, we always experience shortages regarding facilities that should be available to make students life bearable. The challenge always has to do with funding."

Furthermore, STA4 emphasised that:

"It is a pity that despite our long-standing requests for infrastructure and the necessary equipment for better implementation of Inclusive Education, the constant response is a standard lack of funds response. Instead of progress, we always take a step or two backward."

The participants above acknowledged that colleges operate with restricted and limited funds as they are not treated as autonomous as universities. The participants' responses illustrated the need for an inclusive environment that is accessible to all students, thus avoiding embarrassment and inaccessibility if implementation plans for IE will bring fruition. Although, principals are supposed to envision the future needs of the college, and to take initiatives of prioritising IE as part of the set of strategic objectives, insufficient funds remain a challenge. Management needs to be alert to this reality because no general way of managing is appli-

cable to all situations. According to Van der Westhuizen and Maree (2010: p. 80), “situational management requires that the manager analyse different situations and to formulate and apply a management strategy which will work best for the situation”. This is because each situation requires a different management approach. Donohue and Bornman (2014) assert that the management and implementation of inclusive education is at an apparent standstill because of ambiguity about the means through which inclusive education can be achieved.

5.2. Theme Two: Support for IE at TVET Colleges

Sufficient funding and support from DHET are essential for inclusion and yet it is rare. TVET colleges lack acceptable facilities, lecturer empowerment through training, appropriate resources, and specialised learning materials and equipment to support students with disabilities in colleges. The participants mentioned that there was red tape when it came to financial support, little knowledge regarding IE in the TVET colleges, slow progress in implementing IE, unfair treatment, and no profiling of disabled students and policies. These problems were experienced despite the White Paper on the PSET system which clarifies how support should be provided to students with disabilities.

Sub-Theme 1: Lack of Support from Management and DHET in Implementing IE

As indicated above, sufficient funding and support from DHET is essential yet rare. Wildeman & Nomdo (2007: p. 55) state that poor funding is an important cause of delay in the non-implementation of policies. This sub-theme relates to lack of support from both TVET management and DHET. In response to the question posed about support given to students with disabilities, HOB3 explained:

“To be honest, with the little knowledge I have pertaining to inclusive education, I do not think we are doing enough in... Yes, there is progress, but it is very slow.”

Inadequate support for lecturers by HODs affects the provision of effective IE to students with disabilities because management support is needed for this important program. Nkambule and Ngubane (2023: p. 134) concur that there are “systemic issues preventing students with disabilities from entering higher education”, and inadequate managerial support compounds these barriers.

In the same vein, HOA3 acknowledged weaknesses in identifying and profiling students:

“We do not profile our students, so how do you give support when you do not even know the kind of students we have? The system itself is also giving a problem as we are not interlinked with student support”.

This finding is reinforced by Jobir (2024) who stresses that implementing inclusive education requires adaptive systems capable of addressing the diverse needs of students with disabilities.

Campus leaders further emphasised that support measures remain limited. CMA1 illustrated this point:

“Yes, we do have students with disabilities... The support we offer is applying

for concessions so that they can get extra time for typing during examinations”.

While concessions are a form of support, they are insufficient to guarantee holistic inclusion. Ntombela (2019) highlights the importance of training all staff, from senior management to lecturers, to ensure the effective implementation of Education White Paper 6. The policy explicitly mandates institutions to foster supportive centres of learning that empower all learners to achieve their potential.

Some participants expanded on different aspects of support. CMB1 drew attention to mental wellness:

“Supporting mental wellness of staff and students is one of the most critical issues that I personally feel needs attention at my campus”.

Similarly, SSC2 noted progress but expressed dissatisfaction with student outcomes:

“There is one student who has a writing problem. We have managed to get a tape recorder so that she can answer, and someone writes for her... I am not satisfied as very few graduated, in fact they end up dropping out”.

SSB2 provided a more critical view, emphasising the lack of inclusive infrastructure:

“The college is not doing the best to support them... There are students who are using wheelchairs and there are no ramps. Their movements are limited and sometimes the weather is not favouring them”.

Another Student Support Manager (SSB2) pointed to procurement delays and inefficiencies in public services:

“It is not doing enough... Procurement challenges delay us in buying assistive devices, and public hospitals are unable to assist due to inefficiency and red tape”.

5.3. Theme Three: Approaches that Could Bring about Efficiency in the Implementation of IE at TVET Colleges

Sub Theme 1: The Use of Technology

The participants noted that online applications and registrations present challenges for students with disabilities, particularly those without access to devices or reliable Internet. This digital divide exacerbates existing inequalities and hinders inclusive education. CMC1 explained how his campus manages registrations:

“We do online registration but because of the nature of where my institution is stationed, you have a problem of not getting enough students. So, others come physically and then we use our own labs to accommodate them and do online... Only during registration are students expected to disclose their learning barriers and impairments”.

Another student participant stressed the need for early awareness during the application process:

“...to be more vocal about it. To make students aware at the application point. That is when they should know the institution can accommodate all students with learning barriers”.

SSA2 added that although disability issues are raised in reports, they often remain unaddressed:

“Even now I am compiling a report to the academic board, so disability is part of my recommendations... Every time I tell them about the challenges around IE, those recommendations are never attended to”.

Similarly, HOB3 confirmed that while inclusive education is discussed, concrete action is lacking:

“Yes, we do talk about it, issues like ramps. The department has a draft and guidelines to accommodate students with learning barriers... It is more frustrating because we find ourselves powerless”.

These responses show that although technological solutions like online registration exist, they often neglect the needs of students with disabilities. The literature confirms that digital transformation without adequate planning, resources, and training can reinforce exclusion rather than inclusion (Nkambule & Ngubane, 2023). The inclusive use of technology requires deliberate strategies, including awareness campaigns, capacity building, and policy enforcement, to ensure that students with learning barriers are not disadvantaged.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, this study focused on a topical issue about the implementation of IE in TVET colleges and how this process can be undertaken to make life easier for students with disabilities, so that they can be accommodated into the mainstream programs of TVET colleges. The findings of the study show that much more still needs to be done to avoid discrimination based on disability, treat people with disabilities in a just manner, and create a conducive learning environment for them. If future studies can be conducted on the management of IE, it will provide enough evidence for TVET colleges on how to navigate the complex landscape of disability education. The recommendations made in this study are aimed at improving the practice of the implementation of IE and can provide an impetus for more research in this field. Through this study, the researchers I have come to understand that IE is not merely a teaching approach, but an ongoing process that requires empathy, patience, collaboration, and a willingness to challenge and improve our teaching practices. TVET colleges need to get support from DHET and management for effective implementation of Inclusive Education. Considering these realisations and findings, the study recommends the following:

Research could be conducted on the struggle to identify students with barriers to learning, from registration and enrolment stages at TVET colleges.

I also recommend that future studies explore the lack of capacitated lecturers to teach IE.

Research could be conducted on methods used to successfully implement Inclusive Education in TVET colleges for all lecturers to benefit from these effective methods.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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