



Artificial Intelligence and Academic Research: Exploring Postgraduate Students' Perceptions on the Opportunities, Challenges, and Ethical Concerns

Ahmed Abdi Aden

Somali Disaster Management Agency (SoDMA), Federal Government of Somalia,
Mogadishu, Somalia

Email: d.ahmedabdi77@gmail.com

Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to explore the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in academic writing, as AI technologies have become an integral part of improving the structural aspects of academic research. The study investigated postgraduate students' perceptions of the opportunities of applying AI tools in academic writing and the accompanying challenges, as well as the ethical concerns of using AI technologies. The study employed a quantitative research method, using a questionnaire as a data collection instrument, and involved descriptive analysis of the perceptions of 25 postgraduate students enrolled in the Master of Educational Leadership and Management degree at Somali National University in Mogadishu, Somalia. The findings of the study revealed students' awareness of the value and utility of AI tools in academic writing, as they developed research concepts, synthesized literature, improved language structure, and maintained academic integrity through the application of plagiarism detection. On the other hand, the study found that using AI in academic writing is not without challenges, as it raises ethical concerns such as academic integrity, technological dependence that compromises the critical thinking process, reduces creativity, and diminishes the active effort of human intellect. In conclusion, the study recommended the critical role of higher education institutions in introducing and mainstreaming AI programs and courses with well-established technological infrastructure. The study also recommended enacting a robust AI regulatory framework and policy guideline, in addition to formulating strong guidance for research ethics and academic integrity, particularly for postgraduate students engaging with AI tools.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, Academic research, Postgraduate, Students' perceptions, Ethical Concerns.

1. Introduction

The emergence of artificial intelligence, or AI, as a technological tool with the ability to perform tasks that usually require human intelligence has had a significant influence on all walks of life and has brought forth a range of challenges and opportunities across various sectors, including the education sector in general and the realm of academic research in particular (Jose & Jayaron Jose, 2024). According to Obura and Emoiti (2024), AI has revolutionized the education sector and specifically transformed academic writing and research skills, marking a major paradigm shift in writing term papers, publications, and the entire research process.

The utilization of AI tools in academic research has become essential for the academic landscape, particularly for postgraduate students (Chauke et al., 2024; Kenchakkanavar & Kokatanur, 2025). Therefore, AI tools have become an integral and pivotal element in navigating academic discourse through the complexities of generating researchable ideas, synthesizing literature reviews, analyzing large data sets, and maintaining accurate citations and well-structured referencing (Malik et al., 2023). The profound impact of artificial intelligence on academic research has been increasingly acknowledged and widely recognized as an invaluable tool in academic writing. AI-powered tools contribute to improving the efficiency and quality of academic writing (Khalifa & Albadawy, 2024).

Among the AI tools, ChatGPT is most commonly used by postgraduate students. Accordingly, various studies that surveyed students on their opinions about ChatGPT have indicated positive responses among students across countries, as some students expressed appreciation for the usefulness of ChatGPT in education in terms of saving time and providing a wide range of information, as well as improving learning efficiency (Nelson et al., 2025). Numerous studies have documented that ChatGPT is widely used by postgraduate students in higher education, especially to improve their writing skills in academic assignments and refine the final submission of theses and dissertations (Chauke et al., 2024; Kenchakkanavar & Kokatanur, 2025). Similarly, the study conducted by Farhi et al. (2023) reported that students in the United Arab Emirates explicitly pointed out that they benefited from ChatGPT as a virtual tutor, language practice partner, and writing support system.

As highlighted by Chauke et al. (2024), AI tools like ChatGPT contribute significantly to supporting postgraduate students, specifically in the research aspects of higher education institutions. Thus, AI is a crucial and valuable tool for assisting academics and students in overcoming challenges associated with academic writing and analyzing large and complex data sets (Chauke et al., 2024). However, using AI tools in academia is not without challenges and concerns; it has raised various issues related to academic integrity and ethical considerations. Overreliance on generative artificial intelligence could negatively influence the creativity, critical thinking, and logical reasoning of students who frequently use AI in their academic work and research projects (Aljuaid, 2024).

In Somalia, universities mostly integrate ICT curricula into computer science programs, but the AI infrastructure is not well established (Sancar et al., 2025). Hirsi and Sharif (2026) also stated that some universities in Mogadishu have introduced AI-related programs, indicating the level of existing AI technologies in academia and the potential for a transformative digital learning environment. Nonetheless, there are constraints in terms of infrastructure, institutional capacity, and limited resources, particularly in the post-conflict context. Therefore, this study attempts to explore the perspectives of postgraduate students on the opportunities of AI use in academic writing and examines their views on the implications of AI utility in terms of the challenges and ethical concerns associated with AI tool engagement. This research aims to fill the gap in the literature on AI use in academic writing among postgraduate students in Somalia.

The main purpose of the study is to explore the role of AI tools in the academic field by garnering the perceptions of the postgraduate students on the benefits, challenges, and ethical concerns of using AI tools in academic writing. The study specifically aims to identify how postgraduate students from the faculty of education at Somali National University perceive the opportunities of utilizing AI technologies and the challenges they experience in academic writing while engaging with AI tools like ChatGPT.

Specifically, the study aims to explore

1. The postgraduate students' knowledge of artificial intelligence tools.
2. How postgraduate students use artificial intelligence tools in academic writing.
3. The challenges associated with utilizing artificial intelligence tools in academic writing.

4. The ethical concerns of using artificial intelligence tools.

2. Literature Review

Artificial Intelligence (AI), as the apex of technological advancement, has become a vital tool in every aspect of contemporary life across a wide range of domains and industries. Artificial Intelligence precisely entails machine learning that performs similarly to human intelligence, even though it is not a substitute for the logical processes of the human brain and expertise, and as a result, it is not flawless; without meticulous design, testing, and supervision, AI can make mistakes or generate biased outcomes (Jose & Jayaron Jose, 2024). According to Scott-Kennel et al. (2025), AI-powered platforms such as chatbots enable computers to perform human-like tasks, including logical perception, knowledge representation, problem-solving, and synthesis of information, which raises their potential to improve performance in search, data analysis, and academic writing, thus accelerating the research process and increasing productivity. Furthermore, the efficiency of these tools in processing datasets at speed has improved methodologies, literature review, and hypothesis generation, enhancing the writing process and the creation of academic content. It is evidently documented that AI tools excel at specific tasks, including analyzing huge datasets with great precision and efficiency. However, this is not comparable to the human faculties of creativity, intuition, and empathy, which are fundamental to human learning and communication (Jose & Jayaron Jose, 2024).

AI tools support academic writing in core research activities based on their primary functions, as outlined by some researchers (Khalifa & Albadawy, 2024; Agbor et al., 2024). These domains include the generation of ideas and the development of research design, as AI assists in the creation of research concepts and contributes to the inception of the study design and the formation of the basic thoughts underlying the research method and design. By utilizing AI tools, new ideas are generated, and fresh concepts are developed with better structure and organization of thought (Floris & Renandya, 2025). The other main domain relates to content development and structuring. In this domain, AI's role is to assist and enrich academic writing, presenting research coherently and engagingly by integrating visual and multimedia elements, such as graphics and a presentable layout, into the research report.

Additionally, AI assists with one of the core components of any research, which is the literature review and synthesis. In this core function, AI tools possess the ability to scan a large volume of research articles and academic papers within limited time and space and retrieve relevant information and data for analysis. The synthesis of literature through AI represents an advanced level of automated literature synthesis, offering a comprehensive and nuanced perspective of existing research. Floris and Renandya (2025) further explain that AI tools such as Elicit, Research Rabbit, and Semantic Scholar play a significant role in the quick and effective review of large and dispersed sources and, at the same time, have changed this process significantly by making it quicker while simultaneously generating well-organized references and bibliographies.

It is further elaborated by Khalifa and Albadawy (2024) and Agbor et al. (2024) that AI supports the domain of data management and analysis. AI tools have a vast capacity for data analysis to “identify patterns, correlations, and trends that may not be easily discernible through traditional methods.” As a result, AI can help with efficient statistical analyses of huge amounts of information, providing substantial interpretation and visualization that transforms raw data sets into comprehensible and accessible concepts (Floris & Renandya, 2025). Moreover, AI takes the role of a critical ally in refining academic writing through grammar checkers, accurate editing, reliable citations, and organized references. Its assistance in the publishing process, including the detection of plagiarism, the handling of questionable submissions, and the detection of data modification, is indispensable to the scholarly publication cycle. Therefore, many postgraduate students at institutions of higher learning employ a multitude of artificial

intelligence tools to enrich their academic research. Most students, especially master's students and doctoral candidates, use tools like ChatGPT as a crucial assistant for expediting their research processes and academic tasks in the areas of data analysis, literature synthesis, and academic writing (Chauke et al., 2024; Zaki et al., 2025).

According to Obura and Emoiti (2024), AI tools enhance efficiency in academic writing and research and can also enhance academic integrity. Universities utilize AI technologies to detect academic malpractice, such as plagiarism, and to verify research originality. Kenchakkanavar and Kokatanur (2025) also stated that generative artificial intelligence significantly improves college students' academic achievement and can enhance their performance in research projects, academic assignments, and overall coursework. However, integrating AI in education requires careful consideration of ethical guidelines, implementation strategies, and teacher training to ensure responsible and effective use. As extensively cited in Ahmed-Nor et al. (2025), there are growing worries about the originality and authenticity of academic works submitted by students who use AI tools, due to the possibility of misuse of AI-created content and its implications for academic integrity, which risks academic dishonesty and a decline in students' critical thinking due to overreliance on ChatGPT. Similarly, some studies (Nelson et al., 2025) have revealed that students have expressed their views that AI tools cannot replicate human interaction and mentorship, which poses challenges in enhancing personal growth and emotional support.

Notwithstanding the advantages and benefits of using AI technologies in academic writing, integrating AI into academic work is not without challenges and concerns, because dependence on AI assistance in academic writing may diminish reasoning and critical thinking abilities and weaken analytical skills (Zaki et al., 2025). On the other hand, academic integrity and ethical concerns have become serious matters when using AI-driven technologies. For instance, using AI-generated results is susceptible to plagiarism, inaccurate sources of information, and unreliable references, which may pose risks to the credibility of academic work (Chauke et al., 2024). Accordingly, there is apprehension and hesitation among academics and educational practitioners, who argue that adopting AI tools in academic discourse could encourage some students to over-rely on generative AI to produce entire academic works, from idea generation, research design, and literature synthesis to data analysis, interpretation, and publishing, instead of using AI tools merely as a guiding element. This poses an ethical dilemma that severely degrades academic integrity (Obura & Emoiti, 2024).

3. Data and Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design to investigate the perceptions of postgraduate students on the Opportunities, Challenges, and Ethical Concerns of using Artificial Intelligence in academic writing. This research method involved utilizing a questionnaire as a data collection tool, in which data were coded and analyzed descriptively using SPSS software Version 27, and results were summarized, with percentages calculated and presented in tabular form.

3.2 Sampling and Participants

The population of the study comprised the Postgraduate Students from the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research at Somali National University who are enrolled in the Master of Educational Leadership and Management. The study employed purposive sampling to select a cohort of 25 postgraduate students enrolled in a postgraduate course in Education. This non-probability sampling technique is commonly utilized in research to deliberately choose participants who align closely with the study objectives.

3.3 Instruments

This study used a survey instrument, which is a questionnaire, to collect data from the participants. The questionnaire consisted of 26 statements comprising three components (11, 7, and 8 statements, respectively): knowledge of AI, opportunities of using AI, and challenges and ethical concerns of using AI in academic writing.

4. Results

The study explored the perceptions of postgraduate students on using AI-driven tools in academic writing, specifically regarding the extent of their knowledge about the utilization of AI in academic essays, the benefits and opportunities of using AI technologies, and the challenges and ethical concerns associated with AI engagement in academic research. The study used SPSS software version 27 and performed descriptive analysis to obtain students' perspectives on AI usage in academic writing. The results of the three components under study are presented in the following sections.

4.1 Knowledge of AI tools for Academic Writing

The data analysis presented in Table 1 indicates the extent of postgraduate students' understanding of AI tools in academic writing. The survey instrument used in the study, the questionnaire, comprised a component assessing students' level of knowledge about AI-powered tools and their relevance to academic discourse. The component of the questionnaire "Knowledge of AI tools for Academic Writing" consisted of statements that measured the level of AI knowledge. As a result, a vast majority of the respondents (92%) indicated that they know about AI tools, and a significant percentage (76%) reported that they have "employed AI tools generating creative ideas for academic research," while a significant number of respondents (68%) indicated that they "use AI tools regularly in academic writing." In this regard, a great majority of the respondents (84%) indicated their familiarity with AI tools for "grammar correction and spelling check," followed by 64% who reported that they know about "AI-generated citation and reference work." Additionally, 60% of the respondents were aware of AI technology for "plagiarism detection to ensure the originality of academic work." Even though the postgraduate students who participated in the study expressed their knowledge and familiarity with AI tools in relation to academic writing, a preponderance of the participants (76%) indicated that they need training or awareness programs for using AI tools. Overall, the participants showed familiarity with AI tools in connection to academic writing, which reflects that AI-powered tools are commonly used by postgraduate students for research purposes.

Table 1: Participants' Responses on Knowledge of AI tools for Academic Writing

		SD	DA	N	A	SA
No	Items	(n) %	(n) %	(n) %	(n) %	(n) %
1	I don't know about AI tools and I have never used in academic writing.	(23) 92	(1) 4	- -	- -	(1) 4
2	I need Training or Awareness programs for using AI tools	(1) 4	(3) 12	(2) 8	(13) 52	(6) 24
3	I rarely have used AI tools in my academic writing	(2) 8	(11) 44	(2) 8	(6) 24	(4) 16
4	I use AI tools regularly in my academic writing	(4) 16	(2) 8	(2) 8	(13) 52	(4) 16
5	I know more about AI and familiar with the different tools used.	(2) 8	(5) 20	(6) 24	(8) 32	(4) 16

6	I employed AI tools generating creative ideas for my research projects, assignments, or presentations	(1) 4	(5) 20	--	(11) 44	(8) 32
7	I know AI tools used for grammar and spelling checkers.	(1) 4	(1) 4	(2) 8	(7) 28	(14) 56
8	I know AI tools used plagiarism detection to ensure the originality of my academic work	--	(7) 28	(3) 12	(3) 12	(12) 48
9	I am familiar with AI-generated citation and reference tools that I use to prepare my academic work.	(4) 16	(2) 8	(3) 12	(11) 44	(5) 20
10	I am aware of AI-powered services that recommend research topics and sources for research preparation.	(2) 8	(8) 32	(2) 8	(10) 40	(3) 12
11	Using AI technologies in my academic writing has enhanced my general writing ability.	(2) 8	(5) 20	(2) 8	(12) 48	(4) 16

n= number of the respondents SD = Strongly Disagree DA=Disagree N= Neutral A= Agree
SA = Strongly Agree

4.2 Opportunities for using AI tools in academic writing

The responses provided by the participants of the study, as shown in Table 2, regarding the perceptions of postgraduate students on the benefits and opportunities of using AI tools in academic writing, indicated that a great majority of the participants (88%) “employed AI tools to help in paraphrasing to improve academic writing.” A significant percentage (84%) “used AI tools for improving grammar, spelling, and the overall structure of the academic essay.” A remarkable number of participants (80%) engaged AI tools to synthesize “literature review to extract essential concepts and reliable information for study citations and references,” while a great number of the participants (64%) “used AI tools for developing my questionnaire.” Overall, a considerable number of participants (80%) expressed that “the use of AI technologies has improved writing abilities and greatly impacted academic writing.” In contrast, less than half of the participants (48%) indicated using AI-based plagiarism detection tools to improve academic work, while the lowest percentage of the participants (40%) reported that “AI technologies helped automatically generate citations and references in a variety of formats.”

Table 2: Participants’ Responses on Opportunities of using AI tools in your academic writing

No	Items	SD (n) %	DA (n) %	N (n) %	A (n) %	SA (n) %
1	AI tools assisted me in my literature review to extract essential concepts and reliable information for my studies.	(3) 12	(1) 4	(1) 4	(10) 40	(10) 40
2	I used AI tools for Improving grammar, spelling and overall structure of my research	(1) 4	(3) 12	--	(7) 28	(14) 56
3	I used AI tools for developing my questionnaire	--	(6) 24	(3) 12	(11) 44	(5) 20
4	AI technologies helped me generate citations and references in a variety of formats automatically	(7) 28	(6) 24	(2) 8	(3) 12	(7) 28

5	I frequently used AI-based plagiarism detection tools to improve my academic work	(3) 12	(6) 24	(4) 16	(7) 28	(5) 20
6	I employed AI tools help in paraphrasing to improve academic writing	(1) 4	(1) 4	(1) 4	(6) 24	(16) 64
7	I feel that employing AI technologies has improved my writing abilities and greatly impacted my academic writing	(1) 4	(3) 12	(1) 4	(10) 40	(10) 40

n= number of the respondents SD = Strongly Disagree DA=Disagree N= Neutral A= Agree
SA = Strongly Agree

4.3 Challenges and Ethical Concerns of using AI tools in academic writing

For the third part of the questionnaire, the study explored postgraduate students' views and perceptions on items related to the challenges and ethical concerns of using AI tools in academic writing. As displayed in Table 3, the overwhelming majority of the responses clearly indicated the associated challenges and ethical concerns pertinent to using AI tools in academic writing. The highest percentage of the participants (92%) identified "using AI in academic writing generates dependence and reduces creativity" as a great challenge. Similarly, a considerable percentage of respondents (88%) expressed that "using AI tools in academic writing decreases active effort and the critical thinking process." Besides, most of the respondents (84%) expressed the same opinion, that "using AI in academic writing is susceptible to plagiarism that degrades academic integrity." A significant percentage of the participants (68%) opined that "AI's role in academic writing is not always disclosed," which is a critical matter undermining academic integrity and research ethics. On the issue of institutional capacity and governance for AI, the majority of the respondents (72%) indicated that "AI knowledge is very limited in academic institutions" and "AI tools' availability is limited in academic institutions" as well. Concerning AI governance, the majority of the participants opted that "the AI governance system is not well established" in the context of Somalia.

Table 3: Participants' Responses on Challenges and Ethical Concerns of using AI tools in academic writing

		SD	DA	N	A	SA
No	Items	(n) %	(n) %	(n) %	(n) %	(n) %
1	AI knowledge is very limited in academic institutions	(3) 12	(1) 4	(3) 12	(8) 32	(10) 40
2	AI tools availability is limited in academic institution	(1) 4	(2) 8	(4) 16	(5) 20	(13) 52
3	AI governance system is not established	- -	(1) 4	(7) 28	(7) 28	(10) 40
4	Using AI in Academic writing generates dependence and reduce creativity	- -	(1) 4	(1) 4	(11) 44	(12) 48
5	Using AI in academic writing is susceptible to plagiarism that degrade the academic integrity	- -	(1) 4	(3) 12	(11) 44	(10) 40
6	Using AI tools in academic writing decreases active effort and critical thinking process	- -	- -	(3) 12	(6) 24	(16) 64
7	Using AI tools may compromise the authenticity and appropriateness of the sources	(1) 4	(7) 28	(4) 16	(8) 32	(5) 20

8	AI role in academic writing is not always disclosed	(1) 4	(3) 12	(4) 16	(13) 52	(4) 16
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n= number of the respondents SD = Strongly Disagree DA=Disagree N= Neutral A= Agree
SA = Strongly Agree

5. Discussion

This study aimed to explore the perceptions of postgraduate students regarding the beneficial use of AI tools, alongside the challenges and ethical concerns of engaging with AI tools in academic writing. The analysis of the responses indicated that an overwhelming majority of the students were aware of AI tools and their beneficial uses for academic research, a finding in line with Ahmed et al. (2024), who reported good knowledge of AI tools among healthcare professionals in Mogadishu, indicating a significant level of familiarity with AI technologies. Similarly, as stated by Hirsi and Sharif (2026), most universities in Somalia offer academic programs in computer science, while some incorporate AI courses as a standalone subject in the ICT faculty curriculum. This familiarity with AI tools showed that students had exposure to AI knowledge, specifically in areas related to grammar and spelling checkers, as well as plagiarism detection. However, a considerable portion of the respondents expressed a need for more knowledge and training on AI tools, which reflects the necessity of establishing full-fledged AI academic programs.

The second component the study explored was how students utilized the opportunities of AI tools in academic writing. The results of the data analysis revealed that a majority of the participants had employed AI-powered tools in academic writing, using them to assist with paraphrasing to improve academic writing, as English is a second language for the students who participated in the study. The beneficial role of AI as a language tool was also noted by a large number of respondents, who used it to improve the grammatical structure of sentences, correct spelling errors, refine writing abilities, and positively impact the overall composition of the academic essay. Additionally, the participants engaged AI tools to synthesize a literature review, extracting essential concepts and reliable information for study citations and references. This finding of valuable usage and benefits of AI tools corroborates a wider body of literature that has reported similar outcomes in different contexts (Kenchakkanavar & Kokatanur, 2025; Malik et al., 2023; Zaki et al., 2025).

Despite the opportunities and benefits of using AI tools in academic writing, there are associated challenges and ethical considerations in utilizing AI tools in academic writing, and this issue was the third component assessed by the study. In this regard, the highest number of participants expressed that the use of AI tools develops dependence, reduces creativity, and, similarly, decreases active effort and critical thinking, which are significant challenges as AI tools come to replace the human mind and individual intellect. Other challenges raised by the participants include the limited availability of AI knowledge infrastructure in higher education institutions and the lack of a governance system for AI in Somalia. Ethical considerations were of great concern among participants of the study, who clearly indicated that using AI in academic writing is susceptible to plagiarism that degrades academic integrity. The role of AI in academic writing is not always disclosed, which is a critical matter for academic integrity and research ethics. These findings on the challenges and ethical concerns of using AI align with other studies (Zaki et al., 2025; Obura & Emoiti, 2024; Isak & Dahir, 2026; Abdi & Abdullahi, 2026), which reported similar findings regarding the challenges and ethical concerns associated with using AI technologies in academic essays.

6. Conclusion

This study explored the views and perceptions of postgraduate students on using AI tools in academic writing, in terms of their knowledge of AI, and the benefits, challenges, and ethical concerns of utilizing AI technologies. The results of the data analysis revealed that participants had a good understanding of AI tools in relation to academic work. Most of the respondents indicated their familiarity with AI-powered writing tools used for generating ideas and correcting grammatical and spelling errors. It also showed the participants' awareness of AI tools for plagiarism detection and for extracting relevant references from diverse literature. As a result, knowledge of AI tools has enhanced their academic writing and, overall, the process and structure of the academic essay. However, the participants indicated a need for more exposure to AI education and training.

Despite the level of knowledge and usage of AI tools among postgraduate students, participants explicitly expressed undeniable challenges and ethical concerns associated with utilizing AI-powered tools in academic writing. These challenges involve the negative influence of AI tools on creativity, critical thinking, and logical reasoning, and the subsequent development of dependence on AI technologies, which adversely impacts the very essence of conducting academic research. Moreover, the study indicated that ethical concerns related to employing AI-driven tools are more evident regarding academic integrity, whereby the copyrights of other academic works might be violated, and the probability of committing plagiarism is high, as is the risk of relying on questionable sources. Similarly, the participants indicated that the limited availability of AI infrastructure in academic institutions and the lack of a governance system at the policy level are also part of the existing challenges in the academic setting under study.

In a nutshell, the study highlighted the prevalence of AI technologies and postgraduate students' familiarity with AI tools; however, the most crucial aspect is how to utilize AI technologies in an academic setting while maintaining a proper balance between opportunities and challenges. In conclusion, the study relied on self-reported data from postgraduate students, which may present limitations. Therefore, future research should include more diverse participants, including lecturers, to expand the scope of views and gain deeper insights. Utilizing a different research method, such as a qualitative approach, might also contribute to understanding the role of AI in academic writing.

Recommendations

After a thorough analysis of the data and subsequent discussion, the study has arrived at the following recommendations:

1. Establishing AI infrastructure in higher education institutions and integrating AI programs and courses in the curriculum content of the tertiary level.
2. Conducting structured AI training specifically designed for postgraduate students to ensure proper utilization of AI tools without developing dependence, passive thinking, or compromised creativity.
3. Consolidating research ethics and academic integrity, particularly for the postgraduate students, while engaging with AI-powered tools in academic writing.
4. Enacting a robust AI regulatory framework and policy guideline that governs the utility of the broad spectrum of AI Technologies.

Ethical Approval

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of Hormuud University. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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