

Understanding Generation Z's Ecotourism Motivation and Perception in Central Sulawesi



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The emergence of Generation Z, which constitutes the majority of Indonesia's population, has the potential to drive national progress and promote environmental sustainability. This study aims to explore Generation Z's motivations toward ecotourism and examine their perceptions of ecotourism in Central Sulawesi. A qualitative research approach was employed, utilizing interviews and questionnaires as data collection methods. Respondents consisted of individuals from Generation Z (aged 11–27 years) residing in Central Sulawesi. Likert scale analysis was used to measure the level of motivation and perception among Generation Z regarding ecotourism. The findings reveal that Generation Z's motivation for ecotourism is influenced by both internal and external factors, with internal motivation being slightly more dominant (a difference of 0.23%). Furthermore, the study indicates that Generation Z's perception of ecotourism in Central Sulawesi reflects limited awareness and understanding of conservation values and environmental sustainability. Improvements in facilities and service quality were found to positively influence Generation Z's perception of ecotourism. The study concludes that enhanced development efforts can strengthen both motivation and perception, thereby increasing participation levels and fostering a positive impact on ecotourism.

Keywords: Central Sulawesi, Destination attractiveness, Ecotourism, Environmental awareness, Generation Z

1. Introduction

Tourism is a sector with significant social, economic, and ecological impacts. From the perspective of the Socio-Ecological System Framework (SESF) developed by (Ostrom, 2009), social and ecological systems in tourism interact with each other, creating a balance between economic interests, environmental sustainability, and the well-being of local communities. As a form of nature-based tourism, Ecotourism is a relevant approach in this context, by prioritizing the principles of conservation, education, and empowerment of local communities. According to Law No. 10 of 2009 concerning Tourism, tourism is defined as travel activities undertaken by

individuals or groups to visit specific destinations for recreational purposes, personal development, or to explore the unique attractions of the visited location for a temporary period. Currently, tourism activities are not solely focused on economic gains but are increasingly considering environmental aspects. One form of tourism that has gained popularity is ecotourism. Ecotourism refers to travel to natural areas aimed at protecting the environment, as well as the life and well-being of local communities (Izwar, 2017). According to (Cobbinah, 2015), the principles of ecotourism generally revolve around conservation, education, economic benefits, cultural preservation, and community participation.

The development of ecotourism aims to enhance the attractiveness of a destination for tourists. There are seven indicators of ecotourism development, including environmental, economic, socio-cultural, religious, and policy aspects (Theingthae, 2017). According to (Rajab et al. 2021), ecotourism development must be based on ecological conditions and the carrying capacity of the area. Tourists visiting ecotourism sites must also understand and be aware of environmental conservation to preserve the ecosystem and biodiversity of the location. Based on data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) in 2023, the number of domestic tourists in Central Sulawesi Province increased steadily from 2020 to 2022 following the pandemic. In 2020, the number of domestic tourists in Central Sulawesi reached 1.3 million, followed by an increase in the next two years to 1.7 million and 5.2 million tourists, respectively. This rise in tourist numbers aligns with government policies easing restrictions on outdoor activities. This presents an opportunity for both central and local governments to develop tourism potential to support the regional economy. In ecotourism management, community involvement plays a positive and impactful role (Wahyuni et al., 2015). The role of the community in ecotourism management is facilitated by accommodating their perceptions and motivations toward ecotourism. The Push and Pull Motivation theory by (Crompton, 1979) categorizes tourism motivation into two main aspects: push factors, which stem from an individual's internal needs, and pull factors, such as the natural beauty and facilities available at the destination. Perception is one of the most important psychological aspects for humans in responding to various phenomena around them (Nugraha et al., 2018). Meanwhile, motivation is a determining factor in shaping a person's attitudes and actions (Keliwar & Nurcahyo, 2015). The stronger the push factors, the greater the motivation for someone to act. Generation Z, born between 1996 and 2012 (Stillman & Stillman, 2017), is also known as the information and technology generation. Having grown up with technology, Generation Z is accustomed to accessing global information. This presents a challenge in environmental management to understand and enhance Generation Z's sensitivity to environmental conservation. Ecotourism has become a popular form of tourism among Generation Z in recent years. The term "*healing*" is interpreted as an activity that reduces fatigue and boredom while providing space for personal rest (Hikmah et al., 2022). This activity involves visiting ecotourism sites, cultural tourism sites, or other destinations as an alternative to reducing stress. A study on Generation Z's perceptions and motivations toward ecotourism in Central Sulawesi is necessary to align the tourism needs of the local community with their knowledge and awareness of environmental conservation in ecotourism areas. The scope of this study focuses on understanding Generation Z's perceptions of ecotourism and conservation values in Central Sulawesi, as well as

identifying the key driving factors that motivate their visits to ecotourism sites in the region.

2. Method

Interviews were conducted with Generation Z individuals (born between 1995 and 2012) residing in 12 regencies and cities in Central Sulawesi Province. The questionnaire was designed to collect information on Generation Z's perceptions and motivations toward ecotourism in Central Sulawesi. Data were collected by distributing questionnaires to 50 respondents using a simple random sampling technique.

The questionnaire consisted of 12 questions related to perceptions and motivations. These questions covered various aspects, including visitors' perceptions of accessibility, facilities, entrance fees, travel purposes, and their perceptions of environmental conservation. Each question was assessed using a scoring system based on a Likert scale.

The evaluation of Generation Z's perceptions and motivations toward ecotourism was conducted using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. The Likert scale has been widely used to assess visitor perceptions of ecotourism (Lalika et al., 2020). The Likert scale data were then converted into intervals to enable descriptive statistical analysis using a scale range formula (Equation 1) (Sugiono, 2010).

$$RS = \frac{n(m-1)}{5}$$

$$RS = \frac{50(5-1)}{5}$$

Note:

Rs = scale range

n = number of sample

m = number of answare alternatives

Based on the equation above, the scale and scoring categories can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Scale for Respondents' Motivation and Perception

Attitude	Score	Scale range
Strongly agree	5	211 - 250
Agree	4	171 - 210
Neutral	3	131 - 170
Disagree	2	91 - 130
Strongly disagree	1	50 - 90

The results of the Likert scale were used for qualitative descriptive analysis. The assessment results were grouped and processed using the one-score, one-indicator technique, where one value was assigned to each question (Sari et al., 2020).

3. Result and Discussion

1) Respondent Characteristic

The respondents were from Generation Z, aged 11 to 27 years (born between 1996 and 2012). The distribution of respondents by age and gender is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Respondent Characteristics

Characteristics	Category	n	%
Age	11 - 15 years	2	4
	16 - 20 years	13	26
	21 - 25 years	34	68
	25 - 27 years	1	2
Total		50	100
Gender	Male	30	60
	Female	20	40

Based on the age frequency data, the majority of respondents (34 respondents or 68%) were in the 21–25 age group. Within this group, 23-year-olds were the most represented, with 13 respondents. The data also show an increasing percentage of respondents from the youngest to the older age groups.

Age is one of the factors influencing a person's tendency to travel. According to (Hudiono, 2022), age has a clear positive influence on a person's desire to travel. As individuals mature, they are more likely to choose travel destinations that are meaningful and beneficial to themselves and those around them. Older individuals tend to seek out tourist destinations that offer new and exciting experiences.

In terms of gender distribution, the percentages of male and female respondents were relatively similar, with 60% male and 40% female. This indicates that both genders have an equal tendency to be interested in ecotourism.

2) Motivation of Generation Z Towards Ecotourism

An individual's motivation for engaging in tourism generally arises from push and pull factors that influence their decision to travel. According to (Santoso and Kartika, 2018), motivation involves three types of perceptions when visiting a destination: individual perception, experience, and information about the tourism site. Motivation is categorised into two factors: internal and external factors.

Internal factors refer to intrinsic drives originating from the individual. These factors are related to a person's purpose in visiting an ecotourism site. Tourist motivation driven by internal factors is associated with physical, cultural, social, and status-related motivations (Hariyadi et al., 2021). The results of the analysis of Generation Z's internal motivation towards ecotourism are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Internal Motivation of Generation Z Towards Ecotourism

Motivation	Indicator	Number of Individuals					Σ Score	Category
		SD	D	N	A	SA		
Physical	Desire for recreation, escaping daily routine fatigue, enjoying natural beauty, seeking a change of scenery, and similar motivations.	0	0	2	13	35	233	Strongly Agree
Cultural	Interest in understanding local community behaviour, observing cultural traditions and customs, exploring the uniqueness of tourist attractions, and similar motivations..	1	1	6	21	21	210	Agree
Social	Desire to gather with family, meet new friends, engage in social interactions, gain new experiences in a different environment, and similar motivations.	0	0	6	23	21	215	Strongly Agree
Status	Pursuit of hobbies, acquiring new knowledge and insights, using ecotourism as research reference, enhancing social status, and similar motivations.	1	3	8	14	24	207	Agree

Note: SD = Strongly disagree D = Disagree, N = Neutral, A = Agree, SA = Strongly agree

The analysis of tourist motivation based on several internal motivation indicators reveals diverse findings. As shown in Table 3, Generation Z exhibits a strong inclination towards physical motivation as a primary reason for visiting ecotourism destinations. The total score for physical motivation is 233, with 35 respondents strongly agreeing that this factor is relevant to their ecotourism motivation. The key aspects driving Generation Z's visits to ecotourism sites include seeking recreation, alleviating boredom, enjoying natural beauty, and experiencing a new environment.

According to (Sabila and Purwanti, 2019), the primary physical motivation for visiting ecotourism destinations is the desire to alleviate boredom. Additionally, tourists are drawn to ecotourism sites to appreciate natural beauty and the authenticity and sustainability of these environments. As noted by (Anggela et al. 2017), tourist perceptions of an ecotourism site's attractiveness are often shaped by scenic landscapes, fresh air, and the preserved natural environment. These aspects contribute to Generation Z's ability to experience relaxation and relief from the stress of daily routines.

Conversely, status motivation does not significantly influence Generation Z's ecotourism preferences. Activities related to hobbies and social status are not typically associated with ecotourism. This is evident

from the status motivation category receiving the lowest score (207) among all internal motivational factors, with only 24 individuals (<50%) strongly agreeing with this motivation. This finding aligns with the behaviour of Generation Z, whose daily activities heavily involve digital devices for social interaction. In remote ecotourism locations, where network access is limited, engaging in such activities becomes challenging. As a result, status-driven tourism ranks the lowest among Generation Z's internal motivations. Tourists visiting ecotourism sites are more inclined towards environmental appreciation, nature exploration, and educational experiences. In contrast, status-based tourism is closely linked to exclusive services and luxurious amenities, which are not typical of ecotourism settings.

In addition to internal factors, external factors also influence Generation Z's motivation to engage in ecotourism. External factors refer to attractions that originate outside the individual and shape their decision-making process. According to (Anggela et al. 2017), these factors include tourist attractions, accessibility, facilities, and additional services provided by stakeholders, all of which play a crucial role in influencing visitors' choices. The analysis of Generation Z's external motivation for ecotourism is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Generation Z's external motivation for ecotourism

Motivation	Indicator	Number of Individuals					Σ Score	Category
		SD	D	N	A	SA		
<i>Attraction</i>	Considerations regarding the appeal of ecotourism destinations, including scenic beauty, fresh air, uniqueness, and memorable experiences.	0	0	0	18	32	232	Strongly Agree
<i>Accessibility</i>	Consideration of distance and ease of access to the location.	0	1	7	15	27	218	Strongly agree
<i>Amenities</i>	Consideration of the availability and adequacy of supporting facilities at the ecotourism site.	2	5	7	15	21	198	Agree
<i>Ancillary service</i>	Consideration of entrance fees and the availability of comprehensive information at the site.	1	1	7	14	27	215	Strongly agree

Note: SD = Strongly disagree D = Disagree, N = Neutral, A = Agree, SA = Strongly agree

Based on Table 4, the most influential external motivation factor for Generation Z in ecotourism is attraction. The attraction motivation received the highest total score of 232, with 32 individuals (64%) strongly agreeing with this indicator. Generation Z tends to be drawn to tourism attractions that offer scenic natural beauty, well-preserved environments, fresh air, and a strong aesthetic appeal. Among the 50 respondents, only two response alternatives were selected regarding attraction motivation: agree (18 individuals) and strongly agree (32 individuals). This finding indicates that nearly all Generation Z respondents strongly resonate with this pull factor.

According to (Krisnadevi et al. 2020), natural attractions significantly influence visitors' travel decisions, with tourists' appreciation of natural beauty being a key motivator for engaging in ecotourism. Similarly, (Rani et al. 2020) found that an unspoiled natural environment is a crucial attraction that drives ecotourism motivation. The importance of attraction motivation is further reinforced in various studies, which highlight that attractions serve as a major pull factor encouraging tourists to visit ecotourism destinations.

Beyond attraction, other external motivations such as accessibility, ancillary services, and amenities also

play a role in Generation Z's decision to engage in ecotourism. The total scores for these factors are 218, 215, and 198, respectively. However, the availability of adequate facilities is not a top priority for Generation Z when choosing an ecotourism destination. This is evident in the data, where only 21 individuals (42%) strongly agreed with this factor, while 14% of respondents expressed disagreement (disagree option).

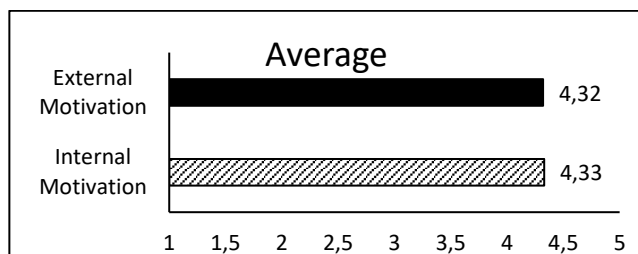


Figure 1. Comparison on Internal and External motivation in Ecotourism

Based on Figure 1, it is evident that internal motivation has a slightly greater influence on Generation Z's ecotourism preferences. The average response score for internal motivation is 4.33, compared to 4.32 for external motivation, resulting in a minimal difference of 0.01 points or 0.23%. This indicates that, for Generation Z, intrinsic motivation tends to have a stronger impact than external pull

factors when deciding to engage in ecotourism. However, the small difference suggests that external motivation is also an important consideration, albeit not the primary determinant in their ecotourism choices.

3) Generation Z's preferences for ecotourism in Central Sulawesi

A study on Generation Z's ecotourism preferences in Central Sulawesi Province assessed several ecotourism sites in the region, which served as reference points for respondents in evaluating their perceptions of ecotourism. The destinations listed in the questionnaire included Rano Kalimpaa/Tambing Lake (Poso Regency), Mount Nokilalaki Hiking Trail (Sigi Regency), Wera Nature Tourism Park (Sigi Regency), Bancea Nature Tourism Park at Poso Lake (Poso Regency), Malenge and Papan Islands in the Togean Archipelago (Tojo Una-Una Regency), and Marion Lake in the Togean Archipelago (Tojo Una-Una Regency). In addition to these predefined options, respondents were allowed to mention other ecotourism destinations they had visited at least twice a year.

Based on the survey responses from Generation Z in Central Sulawesi, Figure 2 presents the distribution of the three most frequently visited ecotourism locations, based on the number of individuals who had visited these sites at least twice a year.

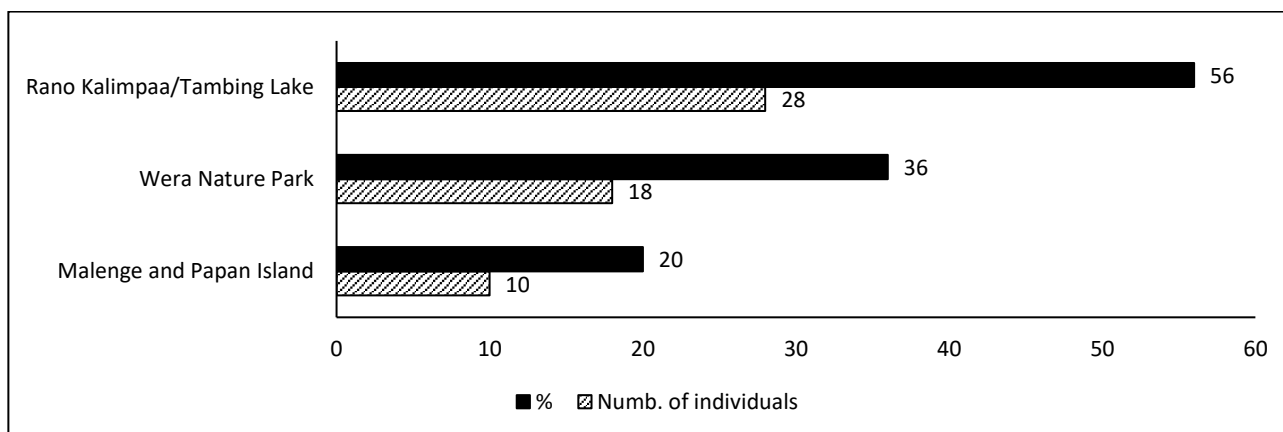


Figure 2. Generation Z's ecotourism location preferences

Based on Figure 2, it is evident that Rano Kalimpaa/Tambing Lake is the most preferred ecotourism destination, attracting 46% of Generation Z respondents (23 out of 50 individuals). The second and third most visited locations, based on a visitation frequency of twice a year, are Wera Nature Tourism Park and Malenge and Papan Islands, which were preferred by 18% and 12% of respondents, respectively.

An analysis of Generation Z's preferences for ecotourism destinations highlights several push factors that influence their choice of ecotourism sites. These motivational factors shaping their preferences are presented in Figure 3.

Based on Figure 3, it is evident that the attractiveness of ecotourism destinations is the most influential factor driving Generation Z's decision to

visit ecotourism sites. The natural beauty and well-preserved ecosystems are key indicators that attract Generation Z to these locations. A total of 44 out of 50 respondents (88%) selected ecotourism attractions as their primary preference when choosing a destination.

According to (Sari et al. 2020), cool temperatures and scenic landscapes are the most influential elements of ecotourism attractiveness compared to other factors. A well-preserved environment provides fresh air and a pleasant climate, enhancing visitors' comfort when exploring ecotourism sites. Moreover, the natural beauty offers a refreshing contrast to the daily routines of Generation Z, who are accustomed to digital interactions and virtual environments.

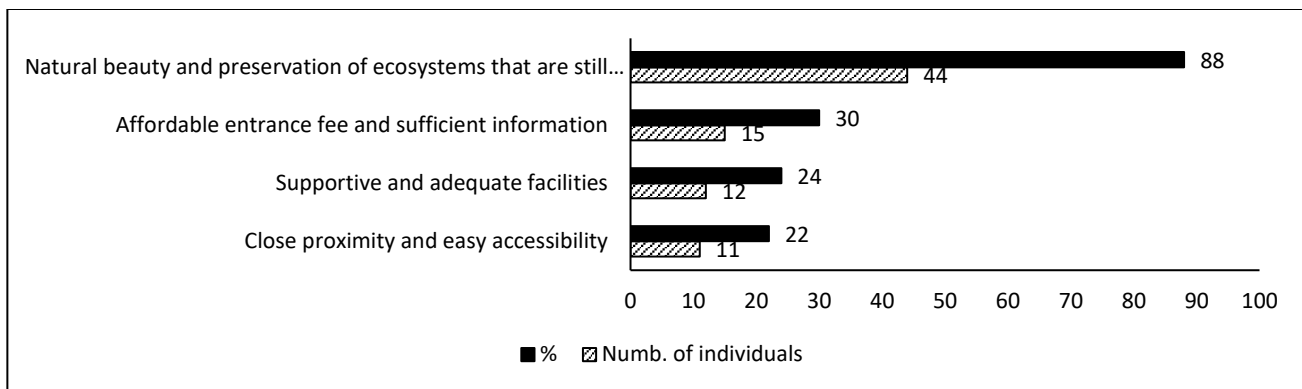


Figure 3. Factors that determine Generation Z's preferences for ecotourism

4) Generation Z's perception of ecotourism

The analysis of Generation Z's perception of ecotourism reveals that there are four key indicators used in their assessment. The indicators and corresponding results of Generation Z's perceptions of ecotourism are presented in Table 5.

The findings from Table 5 reveal four statements, with two classified as positive and two as negative. These statements depict potential scenarios related to ecotourism management and Generation Z's responses to such situations. Generation Z's perception of ecotourism in Central Sulawesi highlights two key aspects: awareness of environmental conservation and the need for adequate facilities. These aspects are both recognised and considered essential by Generation Z when engaging in ecotourism in the region. The positive statements reflect attitudes that prioritise environmental protection and the preservation of

conservation areas in accordance with their ecological function. The results indicate that 54% of Generation Z agree that the ecosystems at ecotourism sites in Central Sulawesi remain well-preserved. Thus, ecotourism managers must continue their efforts to maintain ecosystem integrity, ensuring the sustained natural beauty of these locations. A well-preserved ecosystem supports biodiversity and helps regulate climate conditions, both of which are crucial for ecotourism sustainability. Additionally, the availability of adequate facilities is a recognised necessity among Generation Z. The data show that 54% of respondents strongly agree that developing facilities at ecotourism sites is essential to attracting visitors, provided that ecological considerations are upheld. However, infrastructure development must be carefully assessed to minimise threats to biodiversity and ecological balance

Table 5. Generation Z's perception of ecotourism

Statement Type	Indicator	Number of individual					Σ Score	Category
		SD	D	N	A	SA		
Positive	Based on the ecotourism locations presented in the previous section, these destinations offer natural beauty and well-preserved ecosystems.	0	2	1	20	27	222	Strongly agree
	The selected ecotourism sites should include additional facilities and supporting infrastructure such as toilets, prayer rooms, internet and telephone networks, and eco-friendly pathways.	1	1	4	17	27	218	Strongly agree
Negative	The selected ecotourism sites should add visitor comfort amenities, even at the expense of ecological aspects, such as glamping areas, shopping centres, restaurants, live music venues, and similar facilities.	10	2	12	13	13	167	Neutral
	Not interested in visiting the selected ecotourism sites due to past negative experiences and indifference towards conservation efforts.	26	7	10	4	3	101	Disagree

Note: SD = Strongly disagree D = Disagree, N = Neutral, A = Agree, SA = Strongly agree

The negative statements illustrate two concerns: the development of ecotourism infrastructure at the expense of ecological integrity and negative visitor experiences in Central Sulawesi's ecotourism destinations. The results indicate that 26% of respondents agree, and another 26% strongly agree, that infrastructure development should be prioritised even if it compromises ecological aspects. This perspective underscores the need for stakeholders to conduct awareness campaigns on conservation values targeted at Generation Z. A lack of understanding of conservation principles may contribute to a diminished sense of environmental responsibility. Therefore, innovative and modern educational approaches should be employed to enhance Generation Z's awareness of conservation ethics.

Regarding negative ecotourism experiences, 26 respondents reported having no negative experiences, but 8 respondents agreed and 6 strongly agreed that they had experienced poor ecotourism conditions. This finding highlights the importance of ensuring high-quality services and safety measures to enhance visitor comfort and satisfaction. According to (Ariani & Hayati, 2020), ecotourism knowledge is essential for achieving a balance between humans and nature, thereby preventing ecosystem and cultural degradation. Engaging younger generations in conservation efforts is a strategic approach to ensuring the sustainable preservation of biodiversity and natural resources.

4. Conclusion

Based on the study conducted, the data indicate that the majority of respondents were male (58%), while female respondents accounted for 42%. However, the findings suggest that gender does not significantly influence interest in ecotourism.

In terms of internal motivation, physical motivation—which includes seeking recreation, alleviating boredom, and experiencing nature—was the most dominant factor. Conversely, status-based motivation, such as seeking social recognition or personal prestige, had the least influence on Generation Z's ecotourism engagement. Regarding external motivation, the primary factor driving Generation Z's ecotourism choices was the attractiveness of ecotourism destinations, particularly natural beauty and environmental preservation.

The study also revealed clear preferences among Generation Z for ecotourism in Central Sulawesi. The most preferred destination was Rano Kalimpa'a (Tambing Lake). The key determinant influencing this preference was the appeal of an authentic and unspoiled natural experience, rather than facilities or accessibility factors.

While this study provides valuable insights into Generation Z's ecotourism motivations and preferences, further research is needed to examine the socio-economic factors influencing their ecotourism behaviour and to assess the long-term environmental impact of ecotourism on Generation Z's attitudes and behaviours toward conservation.

Understanding these aspects would help in developing more sustainable ecotourism strategies that align with both visitor expectations and environmental conservation goals.

5. Author Contributions

AR contributed to the writing of the scientific paper and data analysis. FM contributed to the research design, data analysis, and manuscript writing. DAGS contributed to the writing of the scientific paper.

6. Competing Interests

All authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in the writing of this scientific paper or during the research process.

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