

Akanksha Mishra, Dr. Alka Muddgal. (2022). Integral philosophy, education, thinking: Policy and praxis in India. *International Journal of Early Childhood Special Education (INT-JECSE)*, 14(1): 190-197. DOI: 10.9756/INT-JECSE/V14I1.221024

**Received: 12.09.2021 Accepted: 30.11.2021**

Akanksha Mishra<sup>1</sup>  
Dr. Alka Muddgal<sup>2</sup>

# Integral Philosophy, Education, Thinking: Policy and Praxis in India

## Abstract

*Well elucidated and defined education policy is the most essential criteria for comprehensive progress of all human beings. From the time immemorial it is known that progress can be ushered only through education. A futuristic education policy both at the school and university level is extremely imperative. Countries at the global level have been adopting effective education policies to meet the changing needs of education and society at large. There is a need to shift educational approach from rote learning to understanding, from exhaustive learning techniques to excitement of discovery and towards the joyful exploration. True education must encompass a synchronized working of body, mind and spirit. The ultimate aim of education must be to help the growing soul draw out the best and make it perfect for a noble use. The aim of education is not only to prepare an individual to succeed in life and society, but to reach the optimum. With this background, the paper is attempting at the theoretical level, to study the Integral philosophy, in the light of NEP 2020. It also tries to inquire into the modalities of Integral thinking, propose the application of the same in education and pedagogies to characterize its practice and goals in Integral Education.*

*Keywords: Integral Philosophy, Integral Thinking, Integral Education, Sri Aurobindo, Education, Education Policy.*

## Introduction

Education is aimed at bringing out learners who are knowledgeable, skilled, liberated, dynamic, creative and responsible. At the same time, the National Education also aims to produce a man who is faithful, pious and noble. Central to this is the concept of 'Thinking', which is the base of all cognitive activities or processes and is unique to human beings.

Thinking involves the manipulation and analysis of information received from the environment. Such manipulation and analysis involve means of abstracting, reasoning, imagining, problem-solving, judging and decision making. (Gallifa, J. 2019).

Thinking enables a learner to feel and experience the world. The kind of thoughts which come across one's mind determines whether the experience will be pleasant or unpleasant. It is one's belief which causes the feelings such as depression, anxiety, rage, or anger. It is the

belief and not a particular event that contributes to unhealthy feelings and problematic behaviors. Having a clutter-free mind is the core ingredient in holistic growth. A clean mind leads to the feeling of contentment and in turn leads to a comprehensive development of the individual. In other words, it is the clean mind which ushers Integral thinking and the Integral mind.

The term Integral cannot be defined in a limited capacity, instead, it means many things to many people, and it is rather a generic term that encompasses various progressive theories and alternative ways of thinking. It is not constrained to one particular founder or model, instead, it embraces most of the values and principles embodied in progressive thought. (Ghosh, A. 1972).

Integral philosophy embraces consciousness and awareness in a worldview. It is a larger trans-disciplinary idea about culture, psychology, philosophy, science and much

Akanksha Mishra<sup>1</sup>, Research Scholar, Amity Institute of Education, Amity University Uttar Pradesh, India. Email: akanksha.mishra3@student.amity.edu  
Dr. Alka Muddgal<sup>2</sup>, Professor, Amity Institute of Education, Amity University Uttar Pradesh, India. Email: amuddgal@amity.edu

more. In a way, it goes beyond the surface consciousness to a larger life of the inner-being and self-realization. An individual is not only a physical, vital, mental or spiritual being, rather is an amalgamation of all these aspects and much more. The Integral philosophy tries to integrate the material/physical aspects of the individual with the spiritual. Along the same lines, Integral thinking promotes the thought of a comprehensive and all-inclusive being.

A being according to the integral philosophy and yoga exists on five different planes, i.e., the physical, vital, mental, psychic and spiritual. The development of being does not stop within these domains and, goes 'within' as a movement in one's consciousness and becomes a part of the whole process of development termed as, 'Evolution' and 'Involution'. This involves progress and perfection from within. (Ghosh, A. 1972).

Integral thinking promotes thinking about the whole human being instead of isolated parts. Therefore consequently, there arises a need for education by which character is formed, the strength of mind is increased, intellect is expanded, and one can achieve freedom. (Swami Vivekananda, Vol-5). Integral education encompasses a wide range of philosophical and academic practices. It tries to focus on completeness and attempts to avoid even the minuscule of human experiences. It also proposes that the academic experiences must nurture a less materialistic and more spiritual world view, with this it also promotes a more balanced development of the different aspects of the individual.

The idea of education as conceived by the Integral philosophy is, as an instrument for the organic growth of the individual. It draws on the ways in which various faculties could be developed and integrated. It combines the various pursuits of knowledge, power, harmony and skills, with an inclination towards *swabhava* (inherent behavior) and *swadharma* (inner nature). The integral approach encourages the natural process of the harmonious development of a learner. Education, says Aurobindo, is independent from the perfection of moral, emotional and physical aspects is injurious to learner's progress. For him, every learner is an inquirer, an investigator and an analyst. Education must provide the ground for fulfillment of all the curiosities in the learner's mind and encourage him to use the imaginative powers latent in them. The doctrine of Integral Education, philosophy and thinking is intricately linked to the futuristic vision. It can provide manifold opportunities to discover, realize and visualize a system of education with endless potentialities.

## Meaning of Integral

Etymologically the word 'Integral' originated from the Latin term '*integralis*' which signifies composed parts that together constitute the whole. The Integral philosophy aims at seeing the whole as complete and at the same time make part of a larger unit. It is inclusive and does not try to privilege particular parts over others. The Integral philosophy is a large system of reconciliation and integration which synthesizes world views and philosophical notions. The synthetic approach of integral philosophy bridges the gap between the learner and society. The integral philosophy believes in the social development and transformation of the whole of humanity. The approach of Integral philosophy is eclectic and inclusive which fosters more of a spiritual worldview rather than limiting to the materialistic possessions, it proposes a more dynamic and holistic view of reality (Majethiya, H.V. 2015).

The term 'Integral' is used in wide-ranging domains such as philosophy, psychology, thought, approach, consciousness, paradigm and worldview. The major theme of this range encompasses an integrated development of all the aspects such as the body, mind, soul and spirit. Sri Aurobindo's Integral Philosophy is intended to equip the learners to attain a conscious identity with inner self and the divine. It also aims to transform one's body, mind and life to become a perfect instrument for spiritual and conscious life on earth. As an approach, it tries to synthesize various processes, systems, skills and other elements into a complex whole that serves as a means of learning and a better understanding of life.

It is not merely an idea but a complete system of education, in the words of The Mother, education to be complete must be founded on the five principle aspects in relation to the five principle domains of the human being. The Integral Education in the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo can be explicated in two different senses, firstly, as the five aspects, i.e., physical, mental, vital, psychic and spiritual. Secondly, as the process of evolution and involution, i.e., education isn't just for an individual, instead it transforms the nation and ultimately the whole of humanity. The process of Integral Education gives a wider scope to the learners, equipping them with all requisite life skills. (Modak, K. 2014).

Dr. Kireet Joshi elucidates the concept of Integral Education as something which brings the desirable changes in the individual, by facilitating them with self-control, knowledge, capacity and power. Dr. Joshi also explains that there is a need for an unparalleled education system that can suit the varied need of each learner, which is based on in-depth inquiry and

can synthesize knowledge and culture. (Joshi, K. 2011).

Integral education is mainly concerned with the transformation of the internal and external nature of the learners and educators. The renowned psychologists such as Piaget, Vygotsky and Bruner have also supported the premise that humans construct knowledge and meaning from their experiences. Learning under Integral Education is an active process where learners discover principles, concepts and facts on their own. The process of learning hence becomes, both subjective and objective. Through innovative practices, thinking and alternative approaches, integral education gives a conducive environment to the learners in order to discover their true self, the inherent gifts and how they can utilize them for their own betterment as well as for the greater good of society. It tries to integrate the modern aim of knowledge with the ancient wisdom of self-realization. The hands-on learning experiences within integral education helps in inculcating curiosity, creativity, innovation, engagement, imagination and critical thinking abilities among learners. It fosters a joyous and meaningful learning experience as it a constantly evolving process, it allows the learners to discover their purpose for life and cultivate physical, mental and emotional capabilities. (Partho, Towards An Integral Education, 2007).

In a collective sense 'Integral' means unifying the parts in such a way that the parts are blended and get transformed into something new. Similarly, the different dimensions of the learners, i.e., the physical, mental, vital, psychic and spiritual are blended into a complete individual and a transformed character.

### Conceptualization of Integral Philosophy and Thinking

The integral approach involves an equilibrated, balanced and irreplaceable presence of the essential parts to integrate the separate units into a whole. Within the integral, there are numerous structural stages of

consciousness such as mythical, rational, pluralistic and holistic. Integrality is a level beyond these mentioned stages. It tries to transcend from one level to the other but also integrates them with each other.

The term 'integration' necessarily unites the parts into a whole in a way that they are blended and transformed simultaneously into a new character. Sri Aurobindo's Integral philosophy explicates two different aspects, i.e.

- Including all aspects of the individual being: physical, vital, mental, psychic and spiritual.
- It is integral in the sense that, the integrality leads to a multifold evolution. The evolution of the individual, the nation and ultimately the humanity.

Along the similar lines of thought, Krishnamurti writes.

*For the brighter hopes of our future, the unity of life and the oneness of its purpose should be clearly taught to the young in schools.* (Krishnamurti, J. 1974).

Education based on the Integral philosophy must involve multiple layers of meaning and experience through direct engagement with nature. It must follow the premise that a particular individual finds identity, meaning and purpose in life through connections with the natural world, community, compassion and peace. (Miller, R.1997).

The practical implementation of the Integral philosophy depends on the instrument of Education. Sri Aurobindo holds that, Education must begin at birth and continue throughout life. An integral approach to personal and community education encourages a change in society and makes it susceptible to progress. It nurtures self-realization, the discovery of vocation and the purpose of life. It transmits cultural wealth by soaring the spirit of learners and promoting wisdom. It uses pedagogy and pedagogical institutions such as family, school, community and state to stimulate the process of evolution.



**Figure 1.1**

*The dimensions of Integral Human Development*

A human being essentially comprises of a soul with the body, life, energy and the mind. He needs to develop and grow in a harmonious way. Integral education tries to provide the fullest possible development of all the dimensions and helps in channelizing life energy in pursuits that contribute to the growth of their personality. The aim of education, as The Mother said, must not only be to excel in life and society but to increase perfection to its utmost. It recognizes the innate potential of every individual and respects their creative impulses.

The basic assumption of integral education is to prepare students to face the challenges of life; it motivates an intrinsic and passionate love for learning. It enables them to inquire, question, and probe the challenges. Integral education can foster all the capacities of human beings – intellectual, aesthetic, physical, emotional, social, moral and ethical. This kind of education can result in a complete transformation and transfiguration of the being in its entirety. It can help in developing all facets of the personality and awaken the latent possibilities in order to acquire a beautiful, healthy and strong mind and body. Integral Education helps the individual to integrate with its true self, surroundings, society and humanity. (Gallifa, J. 2021).

To Aurobindo, the mind was the primary means of manifestation in the individual, also to him mind was separate from the brain. It is more related to a process instead of being just an organ. The mind has greater functions such as expressing the higher mental processes, feelings, emotions, memory and attention. In his philosophy the mind exists on different planes, which are namely: a) the ordinary mind b) the higher mind c) the illuminated mind d) the intuitive mind e) the over mind f) the supermind. The ordinary mind is further divided into three different parts – thinking mind (concerned with ideas and knowledge), dynamic mind (realization of ideas) and externalizing mind (expression of ideas). The thinking mind plays the most crucial role in life as it involves actions such as to doubt, to question, to argue and to reason. It also helps in rejecting an idea if uncertain and in repeating the process again. Super mind on the other hand is the divine gnosis (having ultimate knowledge). It is omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient. The super mind represents a state of consciousness that one acquires gradually. One can acquire this stage through training of mind and body or through yoga. (Chaudhuri, 1972).

### **Integral Philosophy, Education and Thinking in the Education System of India**

All means to education can only be justified when the ends can suffice universality of the man (Sri Aurobindo, *The Hour of God*. 1972).

The prerequisite for education is to maintain a balance between the learner himself, life, mind and the soul. Individual being a part in them, is also an inseparable entity of university, it is with this premise that education must aim at the comprehensive and holistic development of the learners.

Integral Education as a terminology has never been used by Sri Aurobindo, instead, he only speaks about 'Integral Yoga' which encompasses Integral Education. 'Integral Education' was used by The Mother (Mirra Alfasa, Spiritual partner to Sri Aurobindo) in her message to the Kothari Education Commission, which contains the essence of Integral Education. Sri Aurobindo and The Mother in their writings *On Education* explain that true and living education must help in bringing out the full advantage and scope of human life; it must prepare them for life and must establish a relationship with the mind and spirit (Sri Aurobindo, 1972). The three things must be taken into account by the Education:

- a. The man as an individual in his commonness and as a unique being.
- b. The nation and its people.
- c. Universal humanity.

An education system that confines within the walls of just imparting knowledge and providing the information is just like an empty shell, it must be a nucleus of creation and new discovery. Education must aim at evoking knowledge from within.

The education policy of 1968 and the recommendations by the Kothari commission (1964-1966) called for a radical change and restructuring, the later policies in 1986 and 1992 also emphasized on the need for revamping the education system of India, on the basis of which in the year 2005, the government adopted a new policy based on 'child-centered' approaches and the 'Common Minimum Program. In the 1996, under the leadership of Jacques Delors, former President of the European Commission and the former French Minister of Economy and Finance along with 14 members from different countries like, China, France, Japan, Poland, India etc., a report titled '*Learning- the treasure within*' was created and submitted to UNESCO, which proposed an integrated vision of education based on two key concepts: 'learning throughout life' and 'the four pillars of learning', namely-

Learning to know: involves general knowledge with an opportunity to work in depth on a smaller number of subjects.

Learning to do: acquire occupational skills with the competence to deal with any situation and develop team working capacity.

Learning to be: develop learner's personality with growing autonomy, judgment and personal responsibility.

Learning to live together: developing an understanding of other people and appreciation of interdependence.

The Delors report and its recommendations were more humanistic and reform based, as it was closely aligned with the moral and intellectual principles of UNESCO. The Delors report identified a number of strains rising from technological, economic and social changes, such as within the global and local; the universal and the particular; tradition and modernity; the spiritual and the material; long term and short term considerations; competition and ideal of equal opportunity and the expansion of knowledge and the capacity to assimilate that knowledge. These strains pointed out in the Delors report formed the foundation of norms for implementation of policies along the lines of human rights. On the other hand, the four pillars as encompassed in the report determine the essential domains of sustainable human development. Human society is faced by many challenges with the changing needs; Education hence becomes an indispensable asset to attain the ideals as it fosters deeper and more harmonious form of human development. (UNESCO, Rethinking education and learning).

This report reaffirmed the view of learning as harnessing what is already present in a person, "the treasure within". According to the Delors report, learning constitutes "the heartbeat of society".

Formal education systems tend to emphasize acquisition of knowledge through conventional methodologies of learning, but it is now vital to venture into education with new vision.

Keeping in view the suggestive policies in the field of academia, the rapid changes that world is undergoing, and the need for synergetic education practices, the government of India also welcomed New Education Policy (NEP) in the year 2020.

The comprehensive framework of the NEP, 2020 acknowledges the long tradition of holistic and multidisciplinary learning in India. It derives its inspiration from the ancient literary works of the Indian philosophers, saints and academicians. The National Education Policy recognizes that the very idea of creative human endeavor, the pedagogical practices, vocational, professional and soft skills have a distinct Indian origin. The 21<sup>st</sup> century education requires a liberal notion of the arts, for which an integrated approach is needed. Education based on the Integral and multidisciplinary approaches would aim to develop all capacities of learners such as, intellectual, aesthetic, physical, emotional, social and moral. Such education would help in nurturing well-rounded learners. Flexible and imaginative pedagogical practices will enable a creative combination of disciplines and would get

rid of the prevalent rigid boundaries of learning. (Aithal & Aithal, 2020).

In synchronization with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the year 2000, the agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted by 193 countries at the United Nations General Assembly in the year 2015. This agenda is recognized as transformative, universal and integrated, it embraces responsibility of transforming the lives of people. For addressing the SDG's pertaining to education and lifelong learning, the society needs to be transformed.

Education for sustainable development will empower learners with skills, values, knowledge and attitudes, and can enable them to take informed decisions. It is a lifelong learning and an integral part of quality education. However, operationalization and implementation of a model justifying the SDGs would require a metamorphic change in the existing practices of teaching and learning. The main challenges on the road to this transformation is to ensure a pedagogical and learning environment conducive for integral development of the learners, for which there is a need to employ interactive, project based and learner-centred pedagogy. Transformation of all the aspects of learning to enable the learners to live what they learn and learn what they live. The academic practices must be re-designed by integrating the sustainability issues, into all kinds of learning. The learning outcomes must actively contribute to the societal transformation and building a more sustainable world. (UNESCO, Education for Sustainable Development).

The gap between the current practices of learning and the required changes must be bridged through the major reforms that can induce quality, equity and integrity through education. The vision of the National Education Policy is to have an education system that is rooted in the Indian ethos. It envisages a curriculum and pedagogy that can develop respect towards the Fundamental Duties, constitutional values, ethics and conscious awareness with responsibility towards the world. An integral classroom can only be created with an environment that concerns with the deepest and truest part in students, with a consciously integrated teaching-learning process (Huppel, N. 2004).

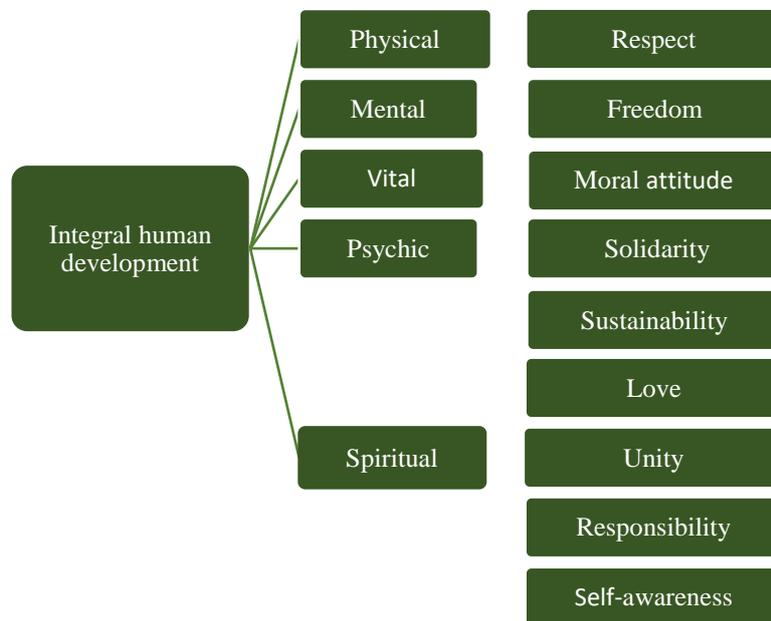
True education must be an instrument for the unification of spirit, mind and body. Integral Education with its distinguished learning practices can cultivate a mental, intellectual, ethical, dynamic, practical, vital, aesthetic and physical being. And, India being a holy land of culture and values has an inherent power to assimilate the different forms of culture, along the similar thoughts the National Education Policy is also aiming at implementing an education system that can unify and blend the

existing system with the rich academic heritage of India. A possible amalgamation of Integral Education with the prevalent curricular practices can provide a free and conducive environment for learning to the students, it can also enable them to discover their true self and their inherent qualities. (Wexler, 2007) Also, the practical application of Integral Education requires a change in the existing environment of education. There is a need for a non-competitive psychological environment that can encourage questioning, critical thinking, brainstorming and intellectual risk-taking. Integral Education can only be implemented in an environment, which can promote a sincere pursuit of the truth and seeks progressive harmony in every sense. (Esbjorn-Hargens et al., 2010)

The education must aim at making of a man; it must prepare the learner to work first as

a human being, then as a member of the nation. Hence, the learner has to develop first as a human being, then as a citizen and finally as an individual. The learning which is founded on the natural processes, effective techniques and does not strain a learner's mind is Integral Education. The most important aspects of Integral Education are:

- a) Strong mental and physical aspects.
- b) The five principle aspects and their synonymous development
- c) Development of different aspects truth, love, respect, unity and solidarity.
- d) Development of the means of truth i.e., freedom, respect, responsibility and self-awareness.



**Figure 1.2**

*Dimensions of Integral human development and associated aspects*

The philosophy of Integral education believes in the fact that the learner, society and the institutions cannot exist in isolation, instead they are crucial elements of the whole evolution process and hence depends on each other. Education shall enable the learner to realize the inner self which is actually the part of integral-consciousness. Education must not be confined to the limitations of curriculum and textbooks; according to Sri Aurobindo "all life is education". Hence learning should be based on a multidisciplinary approach. Education must be the means to the end and not otherwise, the end being the development of a conscious human being. Sri Aurobindo strongly suggested a national system of education with the following points to keep in mind: Education must pave the

way towards modern knowledge and scientific progress but with the roots in the ancient Indian philosophy and teachings. Mere knowledge of science does not suffice, It must be related to the powers of the human mind and spirit and, education must augment the universal humanity. Therefore, the education system must evolve as a dynamic center for creative, innovative and joyful learning experiences. It should reflect as an ideal for the society which can provide inspiration and facilities for the harmonious development of the personality. The underlying objective of education must be the unification of knowledge, the oneness of mankind and, to prepare all for universal harmony.

## Conclusive Thoughts

The Integral philosophy is rooted in the critical and integral approaches, which produces knowledge, contextualizes and connects. Integral education elucidates that the knowledge is situated in the knower and the socially constructed realities. It tries to recognize the multi-dimensionality within the human being and the social system in which he exists. The integral approach towards education unifies the learning community and its individual members with the social construct. Hence, an integral approach initiates an epistemic understanding and invites the personal experiences of learners and educators in process of knowledge building. In a way, it conjoins the narrative world of learners with the classroom activities and life.

Integral philosophy tries to establish an approach that can fulfill the needs of learners from all different backgrounds. The Integral approach towards education is embedded with mindful learning techniques along with different aspects such as love, unity, responsibility, self-awareness and much more, which enriches the personality of the learners and helps them develop as complete human being. It promotes interdependence and connectedness within all that exists and, therefore creates a harmonious environment for growing. It is through Integral Education that, the hidden potential in a learner can be brought out, which are lying dormant.

“Integral” has become an all-inclusive term for progressive reforms and alternative educational practices. The integral approach can embrace the values, principles, the web of ideas, philosophy and science as a large trans-disciplinary web. It covers a wide range of concerns, for example- the different aspects of the human being (body, mind and spirit), the multiple order of human existence, i.e., the individual, parts of individual and the wider community, it allows wider ways of learning and gives attention to both internal and external realities.

The secret of Integral Education is contained in the knowledge of ancient Indian scriptures, Vedas and Upanishads. It is a synthesis of the ancient methodologies of synchronization between mind, body and the spirit. India has always seen a divinity in man, a soul enwrapped in the mind and body, hence education must also aim at preservation, strengthening and nourishment of these entities along with the scientific and technological advancements.

In the domain of education, the integral philosophy, thinking and education is not just limited to an approach or set of beliefs about teaching-learning processes, it rather indicates futuristic ways of making meaning of the educational process. There is a need for the

pedagogies to evolve and make the present learning process more experiential, integrated, holistic and inquiry-driven. The ultimate aim of the learning process must be character building, developing an ethical and rational human being. Integral philosophy in this sense provides a rational attempt to have a comprehensive view, it also endeavors to reach a stage of harmonious conception in the entire learning process. It goes beyond the surface reality and aims to achieve deeper levels of understanding, realization and liberation.

In this era of multidimensional evolution, the world is facing a transitional crisis, contradictions and discrepancies. As the night is darkest before dawn, the problems are upfront in these unprecedented times and the world is laden with the problem of conflict, separation and division. But, in a more positive sense, there is now a chance to work upon the fallibilities and reach the ultimate level of consciousness through the means of Integral philosophy, education and thinking. (Chaudhuri, H. 1979).

The core aim of integral philosophy is to facilitate the evolution process of the individual. If applied to education, the integral approach can lead to an evolution in the education system considered to a more elevated level of consciousness and awareness. It can help the purpose of emergent educative practices and agenda for the future.

## Declarations

1. The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.
2. The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.
3. All authors certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.
4. The authors have no financial or proprietary interests in any material discussed in this article.
5. The submitted work is original and has not been submitted or published anywhere else.
6. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.
7. The participant has consented to the publication of this work.

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