

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Fourth Grade Primary School Students' Self-Efficacy and Engagement Levels in Social Studies Course*

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ABSTRACT

Students' perceptions of self-efficacy and their levels of engagement can be considered important factors affecting the effectiveness and quality of the teaching process. This study aims to describe the self-efficacy of fourth-grade primary school students regarding the social studies course and their levels of engagement in the course, as well as to explain the relationship between these two variables. The descriptive survey model and the explanatory correlational model were employed together in the study. The study population consisted of fourth-grade students attending schools in Kırşehir province during the 2024–2025 academic year. The sample comprised 488 students from schools with different socioeconomic levels, selected using stratified and typical sampling methods. Data were collected using the Social Studies Self-Efficacy Scale and the Social Studies Engagement Scale. The collected data were analyzed using parametric statistical methods. The findings revealed that students' self-efficacy and engagement in social studies were at a high level. While no significant difference was found in students' self-efficacy in terms of gender, female students were found to have significantly higher levels of engagement in the social studies course. Significant differences were found between the two dependent variables (self-efficacy and engagement) and the educational levels of students' parents, as well as the socioeconomic levels of the schools attended by the students. Moreover, a high, positive, and statistically significant correlation was found between students' self-efficacy and their engagement in the social studies course. Students' self-efficacy was found to be a significant predictor of their engagement and explained 49% of the variance in engagement. This result indicates that elementary school students' perceptions of self-efficacy influence their engagement in the social studies course. Therefore, it is recommended that educational environments be structured in ways that support students' self-efficacy in order to enhance their active engagement in social studies courses.

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1. Introduction

Social studies is a multidisciplinary field of education that aims to equip individuals with the knowledge, skills, and values they need in social issues in a changing and evolving world. Accordingly, the 2024 Social Studies Curriculum adopts a holistic approach to skills, attitudes, values, and literacies, aiming to effectively support students' multidimensional development (Ministry of National Education [MoNE], 2024).

The self-efficacy construct and social participation skills included in the curriculum can be regarded as fundamental elements that support individuals' personal development and their participation in social life as active and responsible citizens. It can be suggested that individual variables such as students' attitudes toward the course, their perceptions of self-efficacy, and their levels of engagement in the course may have significant effects on the learning process. Therefore, understanding the dynamics that facilitate students' active

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participation in achieving the objectives of the social studies course can be considered important in terms of identifying and enhancing students' levels of self-efficacy and improving the quality of learning environments.

One of the most fundamental concepts of Social Learning Theory, the concept of self-efficacy, is defined by Bandura (1997) as 'an individual's personal belief in their ability to plan and execute the actions necessary to achieve specified goals' (p. 3). Schunk (1989) referred to the educational manifestation of self-efficacy as "learning self-efficacy" and defined it as students' beliefs in their own capabilities to effectively use their existing knowledge and skills and, through this process, to acquire new cognitive skills (p. 14). Based on these definitions, it can be suggested that self-efficacy determines an individual's belief in their ability to accomplish a task and, through this belief, plays an influential role in the initiation, persistence, and completion of behavior. Research findings indicate that individuals with high levels of self-efficacy exert greater effort to accomplish a task, persist and remain resilient in the face of adversity rather than giving up easily, and that students with high levels of learning self-efficacy demonstrate greater effort in academic tasks, show higher resilience in the face of failure, and participate more willingly and effectively in the learning process (Aşkar & Umay, 2001; Cassidy, 2015; Ekici, 2009; Qamar & Akhter, 2020; Wulandari & Istiani, 2021). Considering these findings, it can be suggested that self-efficacy is a fundamental disposition that determines both the quality of learning processes and students' academic achievement, and therefore should be given priority in educational practices. Students' perceptions of self-efficacy may vary depending on variables such as gender, age, subject area, culture, and socio-economic factors (Huang, 2013; Sakız, 2013). For example, some studies indicate that male students have higher levels of self-efficacy in subjects such as mathematics and science, while female students demonstrate higher self-efficacy in language and social sciences (Huang, 2013). This situation demonstrates that self-efficacy is not only individual but also a dynamic structure shaped by cultural and environmental factors. From this perspective, it can be suggested that self-efficacy is continuously shaped by individual's past experiences, environmental conditions, and the characteristics of the learning environment in which they are situated. Therefore, it may be argued that structuring instructional processes in ways that support students' self-efficacy perceptions and enhance their engagement through direct learning experiences are of great importance. Indeed, it is emphasized that one of the most influential factors in the development of students' self-efficacy perceptions is direct experiences (Sakız, 2013). It is observed that positive learning experiences acquired at an early age—particularly during primary school education—through direct experience support the development of self-efficacy beliefs and, as indicated by research findings (Aşkar & Umay, 2001; Cassidy, 2015; Ekici,

2009; Qamar & Akhter, 2020; Wulandari & Istiani, 2021), contribute to students' more active participation in educational processes. From this perspective, the primary school period is considered a critical developmental stage during which students' characteristics such as learning attitudes, collaboration skills, sense of achievement, academic self-confidence, and self-efficacy are shaped. Indeed, Erikson (1968), in his Psychosocial Development Theory, defines this period as the stage of 'industry versus inferiority.' During this period, the sense of achievement helps children develop a positive attitude toward themselves and their abilities, laying the foundation for their future academic self-confidence (Senemoğlu, 2012). Therefore, a strong sense of self-efficacy acquired during this period also facilitates students' ability to cope more effectively with academic and emotional challenges they may encounter in subsequent educational stages (Sakız, 2013). In the social studies course, which is introduced from the fourth grade of primary school, creating learning environments that support the development of students' self-efficacy is considered to contribute to the early acquisition of these positive effects emphasized in the literature. Accordingly, describing students' self-efficacy levels toward the social studies course in terms of various variables is thought to enhance the quality of instructional processes as well as provide a meaningful contribution to the literature.

One of the key concepts that positively influences student development and contributes to the learning process is engagement in the course (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). In the educational context, engagement refers to the level of attention, curiosity, interest, and motivation that students demonstrate during the learning process (URL-1, 2025). In this regard, Fredricks et al. (2004) conceptualized engagement in three main dimensions: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral, emphasizing that effective engagement requires the fulfillment of all three dimensions. Within this framework, it can be argued that one of the factors influencing students' engagement in the course is self-efficacy, which can be considered part of the emotional dimension. According to Bandura (1997), an individual's belief in their own competence determines whether they will take advantage of a learning opportunity. From this perspective, students with high self-efficacy are expected to be more willing to engage in learning opportunities and to demonstrate higher engagement in the learning process. Furthermore, Ocakçı and Samancı (2024) emphasize that, for instruction to be effective, students' levels of engagement in the course should be identified and, when necessary, enhanced through appropriate interventions. Therefore, understanding the relationship between students' self-efficacy and their levels of engagement in the course can be argued to contribute to the more effective structuring of learning environments. In this context, examining primary school students' self-efficacy toward the social studies course and their levels of engagement

in the course is of importance in both theoretical and practical terms.

A review of the literature reveals that the majority of studies on the concept of self-efficacy in social studies focus on social studies teachers (Akhan, 2015; Aydin, et al., 2022; Daş, 2021; Dönmez & Uslu, 2014; Sözcü, et al., 2016; Tatlieşme & Gürgil, 2025; Tekin, 2019; Üztemur & Metin, 2015) and social studies teacher candidates (Akkuş, 2013; Ateş, 2018; Karadeniz, 2005; Koçak, 2023; Şahin & Katılmış, 2016; Üçarkuş & Yeşilbursa, 2024; Ünlü et al., 2017). However, the number of studies that directly focus on students' self-efficacy perceptions is limited (Al Demerdash, 2020; Taş et al., 2024). Furthermore, some studies have addressed the relationship between self-efficacy perception and students' metacognitive awareness levels (Kurtuluş & Öztürk, 2017; Oğuz & Kutlu Kalender, 2018). In the field of social studies, Zimmerman et al. (1992) examined the relationship between self-efficacy and goal setting in high school students; Doğan et al. (2012) examined students' self-efficacy towards social studies; Özkal (2013) examined the relationship between attitudes and self-efficacy; Tünkler (2019) examined competence expectations; and Akcan and Çakmak (2024) examined digital security self-efficacy. It has been identified that studies focusing on engagement in the social studies field are limited in number; however, existing research has addressed issues such as the development of measurement instruments, the effects of learning environments, the role of digital methods, and the views of teachers and preservice teachers (Coşkun et al., 2022; Ocakçı & Samancı, 2021, 2024; Öğdür & Uzunöz, 2023; Sarıtepeçi, 2012; Sarıtepeçi & Çakır, 2015; Uygun & Günhan, 2025; Ünal, 2006). However, no study has been identified that simultaneously examines students' self-efficacy levels toward the social studies course and their levels of engagement in the course. In this context, the present study fills a unique gap in terms of both subject matter and sample level. The fact that the relationship between self-efficacy and class engagement has not been examined at primary school level, particularly in the context of social studies, increases the importance of this research. This research is expected to contribute to the field by revealing the effect of students' self-efficacy perceptions and their level of engagement in the course on the process of achieving the objectives of active citizenship, social engagement and democratic awareness, which form the basis of social studies course. The findings are expected to provide guidance to teachers, education policy developers, and researchers, contributing to the development of practices that increase student engagement and self-efficacy in social studies teaching, the evaluation of programme effectiveness, and the organisation of learning environments. In this context, this study, which examines the relationship between primary school students' self-efficacy perceptions and their levels of engagement in class, is considered an important step towards improving the quality of social studies teaching and developing active citizenship awareness at an early age.

The primary objective of this study was to determine fourth-grade primary school students' perceived self-efficacy and levels of engagement in social studies, to examine the relationship between these two variables, and to identify whether significant differences exist based on gender, parental education level, and the socioeconomic status of the school. To this end, the following research questions were addressed:

- 1) What are the levels of self-efficacy and engagement in social studies among 4th grade primary school students?
- 2) Do 4th grade primary school students' self-efficacy and engagement levels in social studies significantly vary based on different variables (gender, family education level, and school socio-economic status)?
- 3) Is there a significant relationship between 4th grade primary school students' self-efficacy and engagement levels in social studies?
- 4) Do 4th grade primary school students' self-efficacy significantly predict their engagement levels in social studies?

2. Method

The study protocol was approved by the Kırşehir Ahi Evran University Social and Human Sciences Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee with a decision dated 28/05/2025 and numbered 2025/10/10.

2.1. Research Design

In this study, two quantitative research designs—the descriptive survey model and the predictive correlational model—were employed together. The descriptive survey model aims to describe an existing situation as it is and seeks to reach general conclusions about the population based on data collected from the entire population or a selected sample (Karasar, 2023). Accordingly, the descriptive survey model was used to determine primary school fourth-grade students' self-efficacy perceptions toward the social studies course and their levels of engagement in the course, and to generalize these findings to the population.

In predictive correlational research, the aim is to determine the relationship between two or more variables and to predict the status of one variable based on another (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). In this study, this model was employed to examine the relationship between fourth-grade primary school students' self-efficacy perceptions toward the social studies course and their levels of engagement in the course, as well as to determine whether self-efficacy perceptions predict engagement in the course.

The combined use of these two models enabled both the description of the current status of the research variables and the examination of the relationships and predictive effects

among them, thereby allowing the research objectives to be addressed in a comprehensive and holistic manner.

2.2. Population and Sample

The population of this study consisted of fourth-grade primary school students enrolled in schools in Kırşehir Province during the 2024–2025 academic year. Stratified sampling was employed in order to obtain homogeneous subgroups and to ensure better representation of subgroups with different characteristics (Creswell, 2014).

Schools in Kırşehir province were classified into three strata—lower, middle, and upper—by the researchers based on their geographical location, socioeconomic characteristics, and student population, using information obtained from the Provincial Directorate of National Education and school administrations. In accordance with the stratified sampling approach, an effort was made to balance the number of students within each stratum. Accordingly, in order to ensure an equal

distribution of the sample across strata, four schools from the upper stratum, four schools from the middle stratum, and five schools from the lower stratum were included in the study. However, due to reasons such as student absenteeism on the day of data collection, participation in extracurricular activities, and incomplete completion of the measurement scales by some participants, data loss occurred across all three strata, resulting in differences in the final distribution of participants among the groups.

In addition, typical case sampling, one of the purposive sampling methods, was employed in determining the classes to be included in the study. Within this framework, classes considered to be representative of the lower, middle, and upper strata were included in the research. As a result, a total of 488 fourth-grade primary school students enrolled in the schools selected through stratified and typical sampling methods constituted the sample of the study. Demographic characteristics of the study sample are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the sample.

Variable	Group	f	%
Gender	Female	256	52.5
	Male	232	47.5
Mother's Education Level	Primary School	93	19.1
	Secondary School	79	16.2
	High School	165	33.8
	University	151	30.9
Father's Education Level	Primary School	54	11.1
	Secondary School	65	13.3
	High School	145	29.7
	University	224	45.9
Socio-Economic Status of the School	Lower	175	35.9
	Middle	122	25.0
	Upper	191	39.1
Total		488	100

2.3. Data Collection Tools

In this study, conducted to describe fourth-grade primary school students' self-efficacy perceptions toward the social studies course and their levels of engagement in the course, and to determine whether a significant relationship exists between these variables, two scales were employed. The first scale used in the study is the *Social Studies Course Self-Efficacy Scale*, developed by Doğan et al. (2012), which aims to determine students' self-efficacy perceptions toward the social studies course. This scale was preferred because the literature review revealed that there is no scale specifically designed to measure self-efficacy in social studies at the primary school level, and it is the scale most appropriate for primary school students. The scale consists of 25 items in a single dimension and is structured on a five-point Likert-type format. The reliability coefficient

(Cronbach's alpha) of the scale was reported as $\alpha = .95$, indicating that the scale is valid and reliable (Doğan et al., 2012). In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated as $\alpha = .88$.

The second dimension of the study focuses on determining students' engagement in the social studies course. For this purpose, the *Social Studies Course Engagement Scale* developed by Ocakçı (2022) was employed, as it is the only scale in the literature specifically designed for fourth-grade primary school students. The scale consists of 12 items structured on a four-point Likert-type format and comprises two factors. Although the scale was used as a whole in this study, the first factor represents individual engagement, while the second factor represents interactive engagement. The overall reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) of the scale was

reported as $\alpha = .81$, indicating that the scale is valid and reliable (Ocakçı, 2022). In the present study, the scale was used as a single measure, and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated as $\alpha = .77$.

2.4. Data Collection Process and Analysis of Data

After obtaining parental consent forms from the 488 fourth-grade students included in the study sample, the Social Studies Self-Efficacy Scale and the Social Studies Course Engagement

Scale were administered to the students. The data obtained from the research were analysed using a statistical programme. First, the data were tested for normal distribution. For this purpose, the distribution of the data for each independent variable was examined using skewness and kurtosis values, histograms, the coefficient of variation, detrended plots, and the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests. The skewness and kurtosis coefficients and the histogram graphs are presented in Table 2 and Figures 1 and 2.

Table 2. Normality analysis of the self-efficacy and course engagement scales.

Variables	N	M	SD	df	Skewness	Kurtosis
Social Studies Self-Efficacy Scale	488	3.96	.54	487	-.353	-.554
Social Studies Course Engagement Scale	488	3.01	.50	487	-.136	-.447

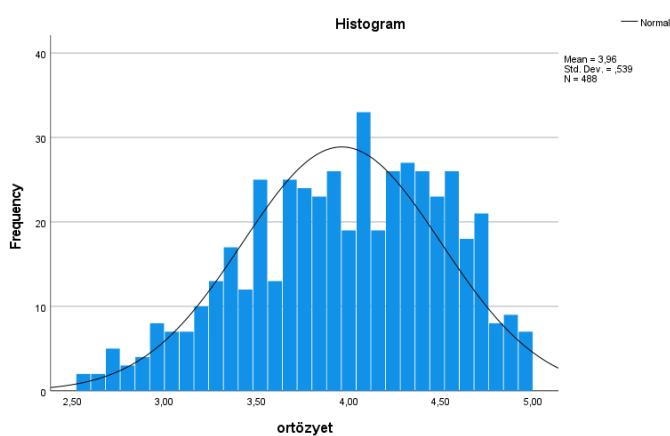


Figure 1. Histogram of the social studies course self-efficacy scale.

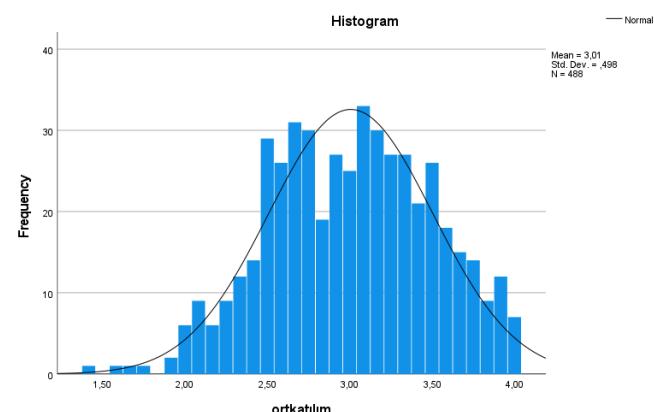


Figure 2. histogram of the social studies course engagement scale.

According to Table 2, the skewness and kurtosis values fall within the range of -1.96 to +1.96 (Can, 2021), and the distributions shown in Figures 1 and 2 indicate that the data obtained from the Social Studies Course Self-Efficacy Scale

and the Social Studies Course Engagement Scale conform to a normal distribution. Additionally, the coefficient of variation, detrended plots, and the results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests further confirm that the data from both scales are normally distributed. Accordingly, parametric tests were employed in the analysis of the data. To determine students' self-efficacy perceptions and engagement levels in social studies course, a one-sample t-test was used, and an independent samples t-test was used to determine whether the variables showed a significant difference according to the students' gender. A one-way analysis of variance was used to test whether students' self-efficacy perceptions and levels of engagement in the course showed a significant difference in terms of parental education levels and the socio-economic region in which the school was located. Furthermore, Pearson's Correlation test was applied to determine the relationship between students' self-efficacy perceptions towards social studies and their level of engagement in the course, and Simple Linear Regression Analysis was applied to determine whether self-efficacy perception predicted the level of engagement in the course. The analysis results were presented through frequency graphs and tables.

3. Findings

3.1. Findings Related to the First Sub-Problem

3.1.1. What is the level of self-efficacy of 4th grade primary school students towards social studies course?

It was determined that the responses of the 4th grade primary school students participating in the study to the Social Studies Course Self-Efficacy Scale showed a normal distribution, and the data were subjected to the Single Sample T-test, a parametric test, to determine the students' self-efficacy levels. The relevant data are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Self-efficacy levels of 4th grade primary school students.

	N	M	SD	Expected Average	df	t	p	Cohen's d
Social Studies Self-Efficacy Scale	488	3.96	.54	3	487	39.428	.000	1.785

An examination of Table 3 indicates that students' self-efficacy levels toward the social studies course are significantly high and positive ($t_{(487)} = 39.428$; $p < .05$). In addition, the effect size, as indicated by Cohen's d value of 1.785, falls within the "large effect" category (Cohen, 1988), revealing that students' self-efficacy levels toward the social studies course are remarkably strong.).

3.1.2. What is the engagement level of 4th grade primary school students in social studies course?

It was determined that the responses of the 4th grade primary school students' engagement in the study to the Social Studies Course Engagement Scale showed a normal distribution, and the data were subjected to a parametric Single Sample T-test to determine the students' level of course engagement. The relevant data are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Engagement levels of 4th grade primary school students.

	N	M	SD	Expected Average	df	t	p	Cohen's d
Social Studies Course Engagement Scale	488	3.01	.50	2.5	487	22.476	.000	1.017

As shown in Table 4, fourth-grade primary school students' levels of engagement in the social studies course are statistically significantly high and positive ($t_{(487)} = 22.476$; $p < .05$). The effect size (Cohen's d = 1.017) falls within the "large effect" category, indicating that students' engagement in the social studies course is notably strong.

3.2. Findings Related to the Second Sub-Problem

3.2.1. Is there a significant difference between the gender of 4th grade primary school students and their self-efficacy towards social studies course?

Table 5. Independent samples t-test results of self-efficacy scores by gender.

Gender	N	M	SD	df	t	p	Cohen's d
Female	256	4.00	.52	486	1.672	.09	.152
Male	232	3.92	.56				

The findings revealed no statistically significant difference between female and male students' self-efficacy perceptions toward the social studies course ($t_{(486)} = 1.672$; $p > .05$). In addition, the effect size was quite small, as indicated by Cohen's d = .152.

An Independent Samples t-test was conducted to examine whether there was a significant difference in social studies self-efficacy levels between female and male fourth-grade primary school students. According to the results of Levene's test, one of the assumptions of the analysis, the p-value was greater than .05 ($p = .586$), indicating that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was met (Pallant, 2020). Accordingly, the results of the Independent Samples t-test are presented in Table 5.

3.2.2. Is there a significant difference between the education levels of families and the students' self-efficacy perceptions towards social studies courses?

To determine whether there is a significant difference in social studies self-efficacy levels based on the mothers' educational attainment of fourth-grade primary school students, the data were analyzed using One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The Scheffé test was employed for post-hoc comparisons. The results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. ANOVA Results of self-efficacy scores by mothers' educational level.

Variable		N	M	SD
Mother's Education Level	(1) Primary School	79	3.88	.51
	(2) Secondary School	79	3.88	.51
	(3) High School	165	3.90	.51
	(4) University	151	4.17	.51
Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	sd	Mean Squares	F
Intergroup	10.149	3	3.383	12.455
Within Groups	131.461	484	.272	.000
Total	141.610	487		.072
			p	η^2
				Significant Difference

According to Table 6, there is a statistically significant difference between fourth-grade primary school students' self-efficacy levels toward the social studies course and their mothers' educational levels ($F_{(3, 484)} = 12.455$, $p < .05$). The

effect size of mothers' educational level is at a moderate level ($\eta^2 = .072$). The results of the Scheffé post hoc test indicating the groups between which the significant differences occurred are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Scheffé test results according to mothers' educational levels.

(I) Mother's Educational Level	(J) Mother's Educational Level	Mean Difference (I-J)	p
(1) Primary School	(4) University	-.36907*	.000
(2) Secondary School	(4) University	-.29014*	.001
(3) High School	(4) University	-.27178*	.000

A statistically significant difference was found between students whose mothers had a primary, middle, or high school level of education and those whose mothers were university graduates. This difference was in favor of students whose mothers had completed higher education.

To determine whether there was a significant difference in fourth-grade primary school students' social studies self-efficacy levels based on their fathers' educational levels, the data were analyzed using a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). The Scheffé test was employed for post-hoc analyses. The results are presented in Tables 8 and 9.

Table 8. Results of the ANOVA on self-efficacy scores by fathers' educational level.

Variable		N	M	SD
Father's Education Level	(1) Primary School	54	3.80	.54
	(2) Secondary School	65	3.86	.51
	(3) High School	145	3.89	.50
	(4) University	224	4.08	.55
Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	sd	Mean Squares	F
Intergroup	5.958	3	1.986	7.086
Within Groups	13.652	484	.280	.000
Total	141.610	487		.042
			p	η^2
				Significant Difference

According to Table 8, a statistically significant difference was found between fourth-grade primary school students' self-efficacy levels in the social studies course and their fathers'

educational levels ($F_{(3, 484)} = 7.086$, $p < .05$). The calculated effect size ($\eta^2 = .042$) indicates that fathers' educational level has a small effect on students' self-efficacy scores.

Table 9. Scheffé test results according to fathers' educational levels.

(I) Father's Education Level	(J) Father's Education Level	Mean Difference (I-J)	p
(1) Primary School	(4) University	-.28302*	.006
(2) Secondary School	(4) University	-.22196*	.032
(3) High School	(4) University	-18588*	.006

As presented in Table 9, a significant difference was found between the self-efficacy levels of students whose fathers had primary, secondary, or high school education and those whose fathers were university graduates. This finding indicates that the difference is in favor of students whose fathers have a university-level education.

3.2.3. Is there a significant difference between the self-efficacy perceptions of 4th grade primary school students towards social studies course according to the socio-economic region variable where the schools are located?

To determine whether there is a significant difference between the socioeconomic status of the schools attended by the participating students and their self-efficacy levels toward the social studies course, the data were analyzed using One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The results are presented in Table 10.

Table 10. ANOVA Results of self-efficacy scores by socioeconomic status.

Variable		N	M	SD			
Socio-Economic Status of the School	(1) Lower	175	3.79	.51			
	(2) Middle	122	4.00	.52			
	(3) Upper	191	4.09	.54			
	Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	sd	Mean Squares	F	p	η^2
	Intergroup	8.349	2	4.175	15.193	.000	.058
	Within Groups	133.261	485	.275			
	Total	141.610	487				
							Significant Difference
							3>1 2>1

A statistically significant difference was found between the socioeconomic status of the schools attended by fourth-grade primary school students and their self-efficacy levels toward the social studies course ($F_{(2, 485)} = 15.193$, $p < .05$). The calculated effect size ($\eta^2 = .058$) indicates that the socioeconomic status of

the schools has a moderate effect on students' self-efficacy scores. To identify the source of this difference, post-hoc analyses were conducted using the Scheffé test, and the results are presented in Table 11.

Table 11. Scheffé test results according to school socioeconomic status.

(I) School Socioeconomic Status	(J) School Socioeconomic Status	Mean Difference (I-J)	p
(1) Lower	(2) Middle	-,20725*	,004
	(3) Upper	-,29788*	,000

This difference is in favor of students attending schools in middle socioeconomic regions compared to those in lower socioeconomic regions. Likewise, a significant difference was found between students attending schools in upper socioeconomic regions and those in lower socioeconomic regions, favoring students in upper socioeconomic regions.

3.2.4. Is there a significant difference between the gender of 4th grade primary school students and their engagement in social studies course?

Levene's test indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was met for the scores obtained from the Social Studies Engagement Scale by fourth-grade female and male students, as the p value was greater than .05 ($p = .096$) (Pallant, 2020). Accordingly, the results of the Independent Samples t-test are presented in Table 12.

Table 12. Independent samples t-test results of engagement scores by gender.

Gender	N	M	SD	df	t	p	Cohen's d
Female	256	3.08	.47	486	3.381	.000	.306
Male	232	2.93	.52				

Accordingly, it was found that there was a significant difference between the engagement of female and male students in social studies course ($t_{(486)}=3.381$; $p<.05$). It was understood that the engagement level of female students ($M=3.08$) was higher than that of male students ($M=2.93$). The calculated Cohen's d value of .306 indicates that the effect of gender on students' engagement in the course is small.

3.2.5. Is there a relationship between families' level of education and students' engagement in social studies course?

The Social Studies Engagement Scale and the demographic information form were used to determine the educational levels of students' mothers and fathers. The collected data were analyzed using One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The relationships between students' engagement in the social studies course and their parents' educational levels are presented in Tables 13 and 15.

Table 13. Independent samples t-test results of engagement scores by gender.

Variable			N	M	SD			
	(1)	Primary School	93	2.83	.46			
	(2)	Secondary School	79	2.99	.42			
	(3)	High School	165	3.00	.55			
	(4)	Primary School	151	3.13	.47			
Mother's Education Level	Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	sd	Mean Squares	F	p	η^2	Significant Difference
	Intergroup	5.298	3	1.766	7.403	.000	.044	
	Within Groups	115.465	484	.239				4>1
	Total	120.763	487					

The results presented in Table 13 indicate a statistically significant difference between students' engagement in the social studies course and their mothers' education levels ($F_{(3,484)} = 7.403$, $p < .05$). The calculated effect size ($\eta^2 = .044$)

suggests that mothers' education level has a small effect on students' engagement scores. To identify the source of this significant difference, post hoc analyses were conducted using the Scheffé test, and the results are presented in Table 14.

Table 14. Scheffé test results according to mothers' educational levels.

(I) Mother's Educational Level	(J) Mother's Educational Level	Mean Difference (I-J)	p
(1) Primary School	(4) University	-,30229*	.000

A statistically significant difference was found between the engagement levels of students whose mothers had a university degree and those whose mothers had a primary school

education. This difference was in favor of students whose mothers were university graduates.

Table 15. ANOVA Results of students' engagement scores by father education level.

Variable		N	M	SD
Father's Education Level	(1) Primary School	54	2.86	.48
	(2) Secondary School	65	2.96	.45
	(3) High School	145	2.97	.51
	(4) University	224	3.08	.50
Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	sd	Mean Squares	F
Intergroup	2.716	3	.905	3.712
Within Groups	118.047	484	.244	
Total	120.763	487		
			p	η^2
				.022
				4>1

The results presented in Table 15 indicate a statistically significant difference between students' engagement in the social studies course and their fathers' education levels ($F_{(3, 484)} = 3.712$, $p < .05$). The calculated effect size ($\eta^2 = .022$) suggests

that fathers' education level has a small effect on students' engagement scores. To determine the source of this significant difference, post hoc analyses were conducted using the Scheffé test, and the results are presented in Table 16.

Table 16. Scheffé test results according to fathers' educational levels.

(I) Father's Education Level	(J) Father's Education Level	Mean Difference (I-J)	p
(1) Primary School	(4) University	-.22042*	.035

A significant difference was found in the engagement levels of students whose fathers are university graduates compared to those whose fathers are primary school graduates. This difference favors students whose fathers have a university education.

3.2.6. Is there a significant difference in the level of engagement in social studies course among fourth-grade primary school students based on the socio-economic status of the area where the schools are located?

Students' engagement levels in the social studies course were examined according to the socioeconomic status of the schools they attended. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine the relationship between the socioeconomic status of schools, categorized as low, medium, and high, and students' engagement levels. Scheffe post-hoc tests were used to identify the source of any significant differences. The results are presented in Tables 17 and 18.

Table 17. ANOVA Results of students' engagement scores by socioeconomic status.

Variable		N	M	SD
Socio-Economic Status of the School	(1) Lower	175	2.93	.43
	(2) Middle	122	3.04	.55
	(3) Upper	191	3.06	.52
	Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	sd	Mean Squares
	Intergroup	1.799	2	.900
	Within Groups	118.964	485	.245
	Total	120.763	487	
			p	η^2
				.015
				3>1

As shown in Table 17, the findings indicate a statistically significant difference between students' engagement levels in the social studies course and the socioeconomic status of their

schools ($F_{(2,485)} = 3.667$; $p < .05$). The calculated effect size ($\eta^2 = .015$) suggests that the socioeconomic status of schools has a small effect on students' engagement levels.

Table 18. Scheffe test results by school socioeconomic status.

(I) School Socioeconomic Status	(J) School Socioeconomic Status	Mean Difference (I-J)	p
(1) Lower	(3) Upper	-.13358*	.037

This difference favors students attending schools in the high socioeconomic status group compared to those in the low socioeconomic status group.

3.3. Findings Related to the Third Sub-Problem

3.3.1. Is there a relationship between fourth-grade primary school students' self-efficacy perceptions regarding social studies lessons and their level of engagement in the lesson?

Using data obtained from the social studies self-efficacy scale and the social studies course engagement scale, a Pearson correlation test was conducted to determine the relationship between fourth-grade primary school students' perceptions of self-efficacy and their levels of course engagement.

Table 19. The relationship between self-efficacy and engagement in the social studies course.

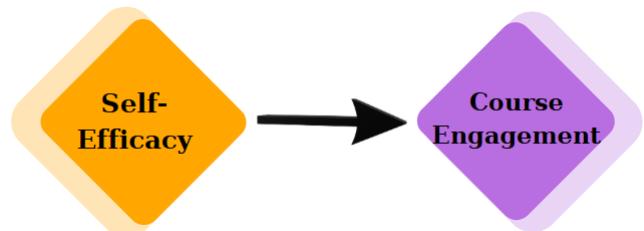
Course Engagement	
Pearson Correlation	.701
Self-efficacy	p
N	488

According to Table 19, there is a high level of positive and significant correlation between fourth-grade primary school students' self-efficacy perceptions regarding social studies course and their engagement in the course ($r=.701$; $p<.01$). Accordingly, it can be said that as fourth-grade primary school students' self-efficacy perceptions increase, their level of engagement in the course also increases. In other words, it can be said that students who feel competent participate more actively in the course.

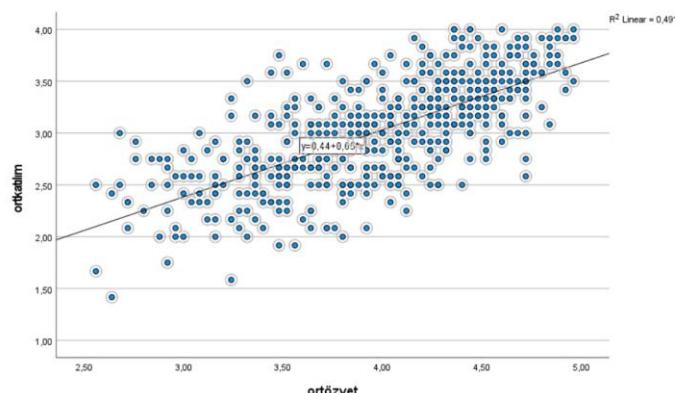
3.4. Findings Related to the Fourth Sub-Problem

3.4.1. Do fourth-grade primary school students' perceptions of self-efficacy in social studies course significantly predict their level of engagement in the course?

A simple linear regression model was established to determine whether 4th grade primary school students' self-efficacy in the social studies course is a significant predictor of their engagement levels in the course. The model is presented in Figure 3.

**Figure 3:** Simple linear regression model.

In the model established based on the hypothesis that self-efficacy significantly predicts course engagement, it was examined whether a linear relationship exists between the variables and whether the assumptions required for regression analysis are met. First, it was confirmed that both variables are continuous, interval-scaled, and normally distributed. The linear relationship between the variables is illustrated in Figure 4.

**Figure 4.** Linear relationship between the variables.

An examination of the presence of outliers indicated that the standardized residuals ranged from -2.696 to 2.975, and the Cook's Distance value was .038. These findings suggest that there are no outliers in the dataset that could adversely affect the regression analysis (George & Mallery, 2010). The normality of the errors was assessed, showing that the histogram exhibited a bell-shaped distribution, and the points in the Normal P-P Plot were aligned along the diagonal line. This indicates that the assumption of normally distributed errors was satisfied. The homoscedasticity assumption was evaluated by examining the scatterplot, and the residuals were observed to be spread in a rectangular pattern, confirming that this assumption was also met. Finally, the independence of errors was assessed, with a Durbin-Watson statistic of 1.30. According to George and Mallery (2010), this value indicates an acceptable level of independence among errors. Once these assumptions were confirmed, a simple linear regression

analysis was conducted. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 20.

Table 20. Regression analysis results for the effect of self-efficacy on course engagement .

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	B	β	sh	t	R	R ²	F	p
Self-efficacy	Course Engagement	.647	.701	.030	21.667	.701	.491	469.453	000

The table shows that primary school students' self-efficacy perceptions regarding social studies courses positively and significantly predict their level of engagement in the lesson ($\beta=.701$; $R^2=.491$; $F_{(1-486)}=469.453$; $t=21.667$; $p<.01$). This indicates that 49.1% of the variation in the course engagement variable in the model is explained by the self-efficacy variable. This result shows that primary school students' perceptions of self-efficacy in social studies influence their engagement in the course.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

It was determined that the self-efficacy levels of 4th grade primary school students toward the social studies course were significantly high and positive. A review of the literature indicates that no study has directly examined the self-efficacy levels of primary school students specifically for the social studies course. However, Uçak and Bağ (2012) found that primary school students exhibited high levels of self-efficacy in the science and technology course. Although the subjects of the courses differ, it can be argued that primary school students generally demonstrate high self-efficacy in their respective subjects. On the other hand, it has been reported that while middle school students show high self-efficacy in social studies, their self-efficacy levels tend to decrease as grade level increases (Doğan et al., 2012; Koç & Arslan, 2017; Özkal, 2013). The findings of the present study support the notion that 4th grade primary school students possess high levels of self-efficacy.

The self-efficacy levels of 4th grade primary school students toward the social studies course do not differ based on gender. Studies in the literature indicate that gender is not a determining factor for students' self-efficacy perceptions (Doğan et al., 2012; Er & Hayran, 2021; Kurbanoğlu & Takunyacı, 2012; Kurtuluş & Öztürk, 2017; Özkal, 2013; Pajares & Graham, 1999; Uçak & Bağ, 2012). For instance, Vardarlı (2005) found that general self-efficacy levels of middle school students were not predicted by gender. Similarly, research conducted in Spain on the relationships among emotional intelligence, social skills, and self-efficacy among secondary school students revealed no significant effect of gender on these variables (Salavera et al., 2017). These findings indicate that self-efficacy perceptions do not vary according to gender across different subject areas and educational levels. This observation is consistent with the results of the present study.

The educational level of parents influences the self-efficacy levels of 4th grade primary school students toward the social studies course. Students whose parents have higher educational attainment exhibit higher self-efficacy levels compared to their peers. Families with higher educational levels tend to participate more actively and consciously in their children's education, including monitoring and guiding academic performance, providing academic support, understanding and addressing learning needs, and communicating with teachers (Baker & Stevenson, 1986; Crosnoe, 2010; Guryan et al., 2008; Kotaman, 2008; Moreno & Lopez, 1999; Taşer & Demirkasimoğlu, 2021). These practices are likely to positively influence students' educational experiences and, consequently, their self-efficacy. Based on these findings, it can be inferred that as the educational level of parents increases, students' self-efficacy levels also rise. Studies conducted in various subjects and educational levels support this conclusion, showing that students with highly educated parents tend to have higher self-efficacy (Aktürk & Aylaz, 2013; Koç & Arslan, 2017; Mayer & Kim, 2000; Uçak & Bağ, 2012; Vardarlı, 2005; Yüründür, 2014). These findings indicate that parental education is a determining factor in students' self-efficacy toward the social studies course. Overall, it can be concluded that as parental educational levels increase, parents place greater emphasis on their children's education, which in turn can foster enriched learning environments that support students' self-efficacy and learning processes.

When maternal and paternal education levels are considered separately, maternal education level has a moderate effect on students' self-efficacy, whereas paternal education level has a low-level effect. Depending on parents' gender roles and the meanings attributed to these roles, their effects on children's lives may differ (Gökler & AtamTÜRK, 2021). According to Kuzucu (2011), in traditional social structures, it is commonly observed that fathers primarily assume the role of meeting the family's economic needs and therefore spend a limited amount of time with their children. However, various factors such as the child's age, the family's socioeconomic status, the occupations of the mother and father, the family structures in which parents were raised, and the traditional values they adopt determine the level of fathers' participation in childcare. Within this framework, the fact that responsibility for childcare is largely concentrated on mothers in traditional societies can be considered one of the main reasons why maternal education level has a more pronounced effect on children's self-efficacy

perceptions. In contrast, Şerifoğlu (2019) argues that there is no significant difference between students' self-efficacy and parental education status. This situation is thought to stem from differences in the socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of the participant groups. Indeed, the factors that determine parents' level of participation in childcare—such as family structure, parents' occupational status, and cultural values (Kuzucu, 2011)—may differentiate the effects of maternal and paternal education levels, and consequently, their effects on students' self-efficacy. In addition, families' socioeconomic positions, determined by indicators such as economic income, education level, health, and occupational status (Myer et al., 2008), also shape the socioeconomic characteristics of the schools that students attend. From this perspective, similar results are also observed between schools' socioeconomic positions and students' self-efficacy perceptions.

There is a significant difference between the socioeconomic status of the schools attended by 4th grade primary school students and both their self-efficacy toward the social studies course and their engagement levels in the course. Students attending schools in socioeconomically upper regions were found to have higher self-efficacy and engagement in the social studies course. This finding indicates that the socioeconomic environment in which students are situated influences their perceived self-efficacy in learning processes. However, while socioeconomic status has a moderate effect on students' self-efficacy, its impact on their engagement levels is relatively low. Individuals living in regions with higher welfare and educational levels tend to have higher perceptions of their own competence (Gür & Kurt, 2011). Qamar and Akhter (2020) reported that students living in urban areas (which can be considered as upper-level regions) have higher mean self-efficacy scores compared to students residing in rural areas (lower-level regions). Sezer et al. (2006) found that high school students living in apartment buildings have higher self-efficacy levels than those living in detached houses; similarly, youths raised in cities exhibited higher self-efficacy perceptions compared to those raised in districts and villages, while students from districts had higher levels than those from villages. Parents' socioeconomic status influences children's perceived family efficacy and academic self-efficacy, and these variables are significantly associated with children's own self-efficacy perceptions (Bandura et al., 2001). Vardarlı (2005) indicated that perceived high income is a predictor of middle school students' self-efficacy, and there is a positive significant relationship between overall self-efficacy levels and perceived high income. As family income increases, students' self-efficacy levels also increase (Aktürk & Aylaz, 2013). In classrooms where the majority of students come from families belonging to different socioeconomic levels, it is observed that as socioeconomic status improves, parents show greater involvement with their children (Vural, 2007). Taken together,

these findings suggest that the socioeconomic environment in which students are situated affects their beliefs about the learning process, and consequently, their self-efficacy toward the social studies course and their engagement in the course. The obtained results are also consistent with Bandura (1986)'s principle of reciprocal determinism, which posits that an individual's environment and behaviors mutually influence each other, shaping subsequent actions. In this context, students studying in environments with higher socioeconomic status are likely to have advantages in terms of access to educational resources, family support, and learning opportunities. These advantages can be argued to contribute to the strengthening of their self-efficacy perceptions and to their more active engagement in the learning process.

The fourth-grade primary school students' engagement levels in the social studies course were found to be significantly high and positive. This result indicates that students actively participate in class and that their engagement in the social studies course is notably strong. Although no study has directly examined primary school students' engagement in social studies, research on middle school students has shown that their engagement across all dimensions—cognitive, affective, behavioral, and social—in science and mathematics courses is high, reflecting multidimensional participation (Fırat & Açıkgül Fırat, 2021). Similar findings in other subject areas indirectly support this study and suggest that students generally exhibit an active participation tendency in their courses.

When gender was considered in the study, a significant difference was observed between male and female students' engagement levels in the social studies course. Although the effect size of gender on engagement was low, female students demonstrated higher engagement levels compared to their male peers. While no significant difference was detected in self-efficacy levels according to gender, the higher engagement levels of female students remain noteworthy. This finding suggests that gender-based differences may emerge in students' affective and social participation in class. Supporting evidence exists in the literature. Kayabaşı et al. (2019) reported a significant gender difference favoring female students in 8th-grade middle school students' engagement in science and technology courses, indicating that girls participated at higher levels than boys. Similarly, Fırat and Açıkgül Fırat (2021) found significant differences favoring female students across cognitive, affective, behavioral, and social dimensions of engagement in science and mathematics courses. Other studies also support these findings (Güvenç & Koç, 2016; Kindermann, 2007; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2011). Accordingly, it can be inferred that female students tend to participate more actively in learning processes, whereas male students exhibit lower engagement. Overall, the results of this study indicate that students' engagement in the social studies course is high and that gender has a significant but low-level effect on engagement.

The results of the study indicate that there is a significant difference between students' engagement levels in the social studies course and their parents' educational levels. Students whose parents hold a university degree demonstrated significantly higher engagement compared to those whose parents have only completed primary education. These findings suggest that as parental education levels increase, students' engagement in social studies is positively affected. In contrast, Kayabaşı et al. (2019) found that, among 8th-grade middle school students, maternal education did not significantly affect engagement in science and technology courses, while paternal education had a strong effect on students' engagement. This discrepancy may be attributed to the modernization of societal life, which has led to relatively increased paternal involvement in childcare (McHale & Huston, 1984), differences in the courses examined, and variations in the demographic characteristics of the samples studied.

There is a strong, positive, and significant relationship between 4th grade primary school students' self-efficacy perceptions toward the social studies course and their engagement in the course. Accordingly, it can be stated that as students' self-efficacy perceptions increase, their engagement levels in the course also increase. In other words, students who perceive themselves as competent in social studies are more likely to participate actively and become more involved in the learning process. Moreover, it was found that 4th grade students' self-efficacy perceptions significantly and positively predict their engagement in the social studies course. The results indicate that 49.1% of the variance in course engagement is explained by self-efficacy. This finding demonstrates that students' self-efficacy perceptions have a considerable impact on their engagement in social studies. Bandura (1986) defines self-efficacy as an individual's belief in their capacity to successfully perform a specific task. A high level of self-efficacy in performing a particular activity leads individuals to engage more actively in that activity and to develop more positive attitudes toward it. Conversely, individuals with low self-efficacy are less likely to undertake specific tasks, which may contribute to the development of negative attitudes (Bandura et al., 1977). Accordingly, students with low self-efficacy in social studies may exhibit hesitation or reluctance toward engaging in the course. This finding aligns with previous research. Özkal (2013) reported that students' self-efficacy in social studies strongly predicted their positive attitudes toward the course. This suggests that self-efficacy influences not only cognitive performance but also students' affective approaches to the course. Moreover, the significant relationship between positive attitudes toward the course and course engagement (Vural, 2019) further supports the link between self-efficacy and engagement in social studies. Thus, it can be suggested that students with high self-efficacy in social studies are more likely to show greater interest in the course, demonstrate higher levels of engagement, and develop positive

attitudes toward learning. Conversely, when students' engagement levels are low, the course may be perceived as insufficiently engaging, which can negatively affect classroom management and discipline (Gülüm & Ulusoy, 2008). Fırat and Açıkgül Fırat (2021) reported that in science courses, students who perceived themselves as competent in designing projects exhibited significantly higher overall engagement, as well as greater cognitive, affective, and behavioral engagement. Compared to these findings, the results of the present study suggest that self-efficacy significantly predicts engagement; students with higher self-efficacy tend to engage more actively in the course, which in turn makes the course more appealing, fosters positive attitudes toward learning, and contributes to more effective classroom management.

The findings of the study indicate that primary school students' self-efficacy perceptions toward the social studies course have a decisive effect on their level of engagement in the course. This study fills a significant gap in the literature, as it is the first to examine the relationship between self-efficacy and course engagement in social studies at the primary school level. Furthermore, the results suggest that fostering students' self-efficacy in primary social studies education plays a crucial role in enhancing their engagement in the course, providing valuable guidance for both practitioners and researchers.

5. Recommendations

In line with the findings obtained from the research, recommendations were presented to teachers, education policy makers and researchers to increase students' self-efficacy perceptions and engagement levels in the social studies course:

According to the findings of the study, students' self-efficacy perceptions and engagement levels in the social studies course are significantly high. Considering the strong and positive relationship between self-efficacy and engagement, it is recommended that teachers plan their instruction in ways that positively support students' self-efficacy perceptions and, consequently, their engagement in the course.

Although no significant difference was found in self-efficacy perceptions based on gender, the higher engagement levels of female students suggest that teachers should develop strategies to increase male students' active participation and plan their instruction accordingly. Incorporating activities, materials, and examples that appeal to male students into the course content is recommended.

Differences in self-efficacy and engagement levels were observed based on students' socioeconomic status. Therefore, it is suggested that teachers create supportive learning environments tailored to students from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

The findings indicate that parental education level and the school's socioeconomic status influence students' self-efficacy

and engagement levels. Accordingly, it is recommended that education policymakers increase resources, materials, and guidance support for schools in disadvantaged areas and expand parent education programs, enriching their content in this regard.

This study explains the relationship between students' self-efficacy perceptions and engagement levels. Future research could incorporate additional variables such as learning motivation, academic achievement, or teacher attitudes to conduct more comprehensive analyses.

The sample of this study is limited to the primary school level. Similar studies conducted in different educational levels could reveal how the relationship between self-efficacy and engagement varies according to age and developmental stage.

This study employed a quantitative research design. In future research, qualitative studies could be conducted to provide a more detailed understanding of the factors affecting students' self-efficacy perceptions and engagement levels.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

The study protocol was approved by the Kırşehir Ahi Evran University Social and Human Sciences Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee with a decision dated 28/05/2025 and numbered 2025/10/10.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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