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## Primary Education in Serbia and Czechia. Are There Similarities?

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**Abstract:** In Serbia, primary education is compulsory, and it lasts eight years with two educational cycles, while in the Czech Republic, primary education lasts nine years with three cycles. Analysis of the teachers' attitudes toward primary education in Serbia and the Czech Republic has a goal to determine the current educational state in the two countries. Also, in this research it has been shown if there are similarities, as well as differences between the two educational systems. Views of the teachers on this topic are significant for this paper, so the survey was used as an instrument. The survey should have revealed whether the primary education was in line with the need of modernization and enhancement of young people's intellectual potential. It was necessary to reveal if the education in the two countries is in accordance with the modern world and whether the teachers agree with this. One of the aims of the research was to determine whether there are statistically significant differences in the teachers' answers and to relate those differences to the general educational situation in Serbia and Czechia.

*Keywords:* primary education, comparative analysis, teachers' attitudes, Europe.

### Introduction

The end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was marked by plenty of seminars, scientific meetings, and conferences of an international character. The most distinguished experts in pedagogy, methodology, didactics, and relevant teachers gathered and discussed the condition of educational systems in developed countries (Wadi, 1997). They initiated a question about changes in education. The quality and level of education affect the national economy, life standard, and international reputation. In a lot of countries, goals are independently arranged. Educational aims define the appropriate phase of education, while goals directly elaborate them (Mehisto, 1993; Đukičin Vučković et al., 2021). Compulsory education is arranged into two cycles, but every country (sometimes parts of a country) has specifics in its system. For instance, the organisation of compulsory education in German provinces varies from province to province. In Italy, for example, the first level of compulsory education is divided into two cycles. The first cycle lasts two years, while the second is three years long (Maksimović, 1997; Đukičin Vučković et al., 2021).

Most of the general educational characteristics of primary education are determined by the curriculums. Eric Donald Hirsch set up a base for a definition for a core of curriculums. He defines the "core of curriculums" as the main canon of fact learning knowledge in which it is stated what should be learned (Ministry of Education, Science, and Technological Development (2020)). The concept "curriculum" is related to pedagogy from the baroque period and means "the flow of education". This concept, in its educational meaning, has been used in Anglo-Saxon countries up to now (Đere, 1985; Đukičin Vučković et al., 2021). In most European countries, the concept has been accepted again in the sixties of the last century and is still being used (Romelić and Ivanović Bibić, 2015). A significant difference between traditional teaching plans and the development of the curriculum, which came as a reaction to them, should be looked for in the fact that the goals of teaching and learning in the curriculum are specified in a way that they list pupils' verifiable and perceptive reactions. European educationalists define the term curriculum

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as “the first draft of the learning and teaching process in which the statements on content, goals, learning conditions, teaching methods, and evaluation processes are collected in one place” (Ivanović, 1997; Ratković, 1997; Romelić and Ivanović Bibić, 2015). Curriculums differ from traditional plans in a tendency of the systematic concept, rationalization, and hierarchy schedule of teachers’ goals. Teaching aids are continuously developed and applied for the realization of teaching goals and used together with prepared instructions for learning and teaching. Overall success is based on the curriculum that systematically evaluates achieved educational goals and other effects (Komlenović, 2004).

Compulsory education represents, regardless of the structure of education in a particular country, a law-regulated compulsory education of children of different ages. The realization of goals and tasks of primary education is influenced by the following: age of a child in a process of education, organization and duration of primary education, ways and methods of teaching and educational process, quantity and quality of a curriculum, and the structure of the content of primary education (Đukićin Vučković et al., 2021). The case study of Serbia and the Czech Republic was taken into consideration to discover if there were similarities or differences in the primary education of countries which shared similar historical backgrounds (the communist era). Opposite to the communist era, their recent historical conditions for the development of primary education were completely different. That is why such case studies may be appealing.

### **Primary education in the Republic of Serbia and the Czech Republic**

According to the data from the [Ministry of Education, Science, and Technological Development \(2020\)](#), primary education in Serbia is compulsory and lasts eight years, and it is divided into two cycles. The first cycle includes first, second, third, and fourth grade. In the first cycle, subject teaching is organized only for foreign language, elective and facultative subjects. The second cycle includes fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth grade. For students of the second cycle, subject teaching is organized. For the members of national minorities, subject teaching is organized in the Serbian language and in the language of a national minority with elements of the national culture of that national minority from the first grade.

According to the Regulation of Primary Schools e.g. for 2018/2019, the school year in Serbia in primary school was divided into two semesters. The first semester started on the first working day of September. The second semester started in the middle of February and ended in the middle of June. Eight-grade students usually end primary education at the end of May. The school year for students of the eighth grade lasts 34 school weeks (from Monday through Friday) or 170 teaching days.

Decentralization of schools and their autonomy became key slogans in the reforms of school administration. The first reason is the natural reaction of educators and parents to the experience of the totalitarian system and the second is the evaluated decentralization trend which is manifested in many western countries (Komlenović, 2004; Đukićin Vučković et al., 2021). In the communist era, the Czech Republic adopted the Soviet model of public authority designed on a local regional committee. The first overall concept of education in the Czech Republic was adopted in the “White Book”, which is a national program of educational development. In the Czech Republic, in the year of 2002, a long-term plan for education and the development of the educational system was adopted (Adámková, 2007).

According to the data from the [Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports \(2020\)](#), in the Czech Republic, primary education lasts nine years with three educational cycles. Primary education starts at the age of six. The nine-year primary school started in the school year 1999/2000 (only in well prepared primary schools), and for all others in the school year 2003/2004. Education in the Czech Republic is divided into several levels. The first is preschool education (0.5-6 years), which lasts five or six years. The second is primary education from age six to age fifteen. After the primary education the high school starts. High school lasts from the age of 15 through the age of 19. After four years of high school, students can go to the next level, which is higher education.

The school year in the Czech Republic starts on the first working day of September and ends at the end of June. Exceptions are the students in the ninth grade who end the school year in the middle of June. The school year consists of two semesters. Teaching lasts 38 weeks during five working days (from Monday through Friday), which is 190 days in a school year ([Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports, 2020](#)).

In the curriculums for the first cycle of primary education (from the first to the fourth year) in Serbia, students have eight subjects during a school year. Mandatory subjects are the same for all grades in the first cycle except World around Us, which is taught in the first and second grades. In the third and fourth grades, students have Nature and Social Studies. Serbian Language and Mathematics are the most present in the curriculum with five classes a week, followed by Physical Education with three classes a week. The subjects with the fewest classes are Music and Art. The curriculum for the second cycle, or the

fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth grades, includes 12 mandatory subjects. Students in the fifth grade have 10 mandatory subjects and get new ones, such as Biology, Geography, History, Technical Education, and Information and Communication Technology. From the fifth grade, students do not have Nature and Social Studies. This subject is further studied in more detail within Geography, Biology, and History. The Serbian language is the most included in the curriculum with five classes a week, followed by Mathematics with four classes a week. Other subjects are taught twice a week, except for Geography and History with one class. Students in the sixth grade get Physics (twice a week) and study it as a subject for the next three years. In the seventh grade, students get Chemistry (twice a week), which is also taught in the eighth grade ([Regulation of Teaching Plans for the Second Cycle of Primary Education in the Republic of Serbia, 2018](#)).

On the first level of primary education in the Czech Republic, the Czech Language is the most present subject, which is similar to the primary education in Serbia. In the second and third year, two more hours are included for practicing reading and writing in the Czech Language. Also, in the fourth and fifth year, two more hours are added, but this time to develop efficient communication among students. The second most important subject is Mathematics with four hours a week, which is an evident similarity with the primary education in Serbia. In the first, second, and third year of primary education, students have seven subjects: the Czech Language, Mathematics, the English Language, Art, Science, Physical Education, and Practical Activities. Science about the Country (or society) and Basics of Natural Sciences are the subjects that students get in the fourth grade with one hour a week. The noticeable difference is that in Serbian primary education subject Nature and Social Studies is taught from the third grade. In the fifth grade, students in Czechia get Nature and Science of the Homeland, which is a difference regarding Serbian primary education. In the second level of compulsory primary education, Czech students move to subject teaching, similar to Serbian education. In the sixth grade, students have the Czech Language and Literature, the English Language, Second Foreign Language (German, French, or Russian), Informatics, Mathematics, History, Geography, Biology, Physics, Music, Art, and Physical Education, almost the same as in Serbia. Additionally, in the seventh grade in Czechia, Health Education is taught, while in the eighth grade, students get Chemistry ([Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports, 2020](#)).

### **Geography curriculum as an illustration of similarities**

Developing and practicing geographical knowledge and skills is an important goal in teaching geography, besides knowledge itself. Not only are they connected with the capacity of geography-related problem solving, gathering and processing information, communicating and presenting, but they also extend one's reasoning abilities necessary to understand the Earth and society. Geography provides students with the most relevant knowledge on wide variety of natural and social topics, which is the main reason for presenting its curriculum. It is a subject that helps students acquire skills applicable to everyday life which is one more reason for the interest in its curriculum ([Geography For Life: National Geography Standards, 2012](#); [Handoyo, Amirudin and Soekamto, 2017](#)). The National Geographic and Improvement Project (2012) stated that geographical skills give the vital apparatus and strategies for us to think geographically. They are key to geography's distinctive way to grasp Earth's physical and human social patterns and cycles. These skills are utilized in making decisions significant for regular daily existence, e.g. where to purchase or lease a home; where to seek a new job; how to get to work or to friend's home; where to shop, go on a vacation, or how to go to class. All of these decisions involve the ability to acquire, arrange, and process geographic information. Making daily choices and taking a part in social activities are linked to systematic spatial thinking of nature and community related issues. According to all of the above, there are at least six applications of geographical skills, namely: (1) as a frame of reference to think geographically; (2) in everyday life decision making process, (3) making daily systematical decisions about community activities related to spatial issues considering the social environment, such as where to place the industries, schools, and residential areas; (4) acquire geographic data for business and government in the use of resources or international trade with the placement of the best locations, such as the location of regional airports and supermarkets; (5) help people make reasonable political decisions, such as foreign affairs and international economic policy or zoning on local land; (6) collection and analyses of information to come to a conclusion and make a plan of action ([Handoyo, Amirudin and Soekamto, 2017](#)).

A goal of geography teaching in both countries is to develop conditions where students can achieve basic language and scientific literacy, to develop a realization of educational standards of achievement, to train for solving problems and tasks in a new and unknown situations, to express and explain their opinion and discuss with others, to develop motivation for learning and interests for certain subjects ([Ivkov, 2002](#); [Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports, 2020](#)).

**Table 1**  
*Geographical curriculum in primary schools of Serbia and Czechia*

Grade	Geography content in Serbia	Grade	Geography content in Czechia
Fifth	Earth as a whole	Sixth	Earth, its parts and geographical indicators
Sixth	Regional geography of Europe (general regionalization)	Seventh	Regional geography of non-European continents
Seventh	Regional geography of Europe and non-European continents	Eighth	Regional geography of Europe and social geography
Eight	National geography-serbia	Ninth	National geography – czech republic

Source: [Regulation of teaching plans for the second cycle of Primary Education in Republic of Serbia, 2018](#); [Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports, 2020](#).

Students need to meet and understand geographical objects, laws, and occurrences in space, to develop their casual consequences and relations, and to develop geographical literacy and geographical way of thinking (Ivkov, 2002; [Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports, 2020](#)).

Geography as a subject in primary schools in Serbia starts in the fifth grade, while in the Czech Republic it starts in the sixth grade. Before the sixth grade, students in the Czech Republic have the subject which includes the basics of physics, chemistry, biology, and history. This subject is being taught in the first, second, and third year with two and three hours (third grade) a week. From the fourth grade, the subject divides into Natural Sciences and Social Sciences with two lessons a week ([Liberty Square Elementary School 3, 2020](#)).

According to Table 1, the geographical content in primary schools in Serbia and Czechia is similar. The main difference is that geography teaching starts in the fifth grade in Serbia and in the sixth in the Czech Republic. The final year is dedicated to the national geography, which makes students be aware of natural, social, and regional content related to the country they live in. On the whole, they gain knowledge that is beneficial in their everyday life, which is highly regarded in both countries.

## Materials and Methods

In this research, the method of a survey was used. The design of the questionnaire was based on the original study, which was in accordance with similar previous studies in the field of education ([Višnić et al., 2017](#); [Đukičin Vučković et al., 2021](#); [Lukić et al., 2019](#)). The respondents were informed of the general purpose of the study and that the participation is anonymous and voluntary. Cronbach's alpha test was run to estimate the reliability of the questionnaire and the obtained value was 0.74. Bearing in mind that reliability coefficients higher than 0.7 are considered satisfactory, the used questionnaire has acceptable reliability ([Mišćević-Kadijević, 2009](#)).

The questionnaire consisted of 12 questions, and it was divided into three segments. The first part (from the first to the third question) involved items related to the socio-demographic profile of the respondents. The second part (from the fourth to the eleventh question) of the survey included questions about different aspects of teachers' attitudes about the primary education. All the questions in the second part were measured by using a 5-point Likert scale (1 - strongly disagree, 2-disagree, 3- neutral, 4- agree, 5- strongly agree) ([Likert, 1932](#)). The third part (the twelfth question) of the survey included a question where respondents had to answer with 'yes' or 'no'. The survey was conducted in order to answer and follow trends of education of students in Serbia and Czechia. The survey has proven to be a successful tool in the research related to the education ([Višnić et al., 2017](#); [Đukičin Vučković et al., 2019](#); [Lukić et al., 2019](#)).

The survey was conducted during the school year of 2019/2020. After filling the surveys, their total number was 43 in Serbia and 43 in Czechia. Respondents were of different gender, working experiences, place where school was located, and subject they teach. All respondents were employed in primary schools.

One of the goals of the research was to compare educational systems in both countries. The goal was also to gather a great number of teachers, whether teaching single or multiple subjects, to find out their opinion about the primary education in the countries where they teach. It was supposed that the

teachers from both countries are likely to have different experiences about working in primary schools and that they are likely to agree with some general questions about education. Having in mind that there are respondents of different gender and working experience, certain differences in their attitudes were expected. Because of all mentioned above, the first hypothesis is that there are statistical differences in the answers of the respondents who work in primary education regarding their gender. The second hypothesis of this paper is that there are statistically significant differences between the answers of respondents regarding the duration of working in a school.

The results obtained in this work were analyzed using the SPSS statistical program initially applying descriptive statistical analysis followed by the independent samples t-test and the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). Post-hoc Scheffe test was used to determine how significant the difference among individual groups was. The independent samples t-test was applied to compare the responses of the two groups of respondents: male and female. ANOVA was used to examine if there is a statistical difference between dependent variables (items related to attitudes of the respondents) and independent variables (social characteristics of the respondents). Some previous studies in the field of education successfully applied mentioned statistical procedures (Langdon and Vesper, 2000; Lukić et al., 2019).

## Results and Discussions

When the work experience of the respondents is concerned (Figure 1), the greatest number of teachers work in a school between 6 and 15 years (44%), followed by the teachers with more than 26 years of experience, or 26%. Next are teachers working in a school between 16 and 25 years (16%) and the least number of teachers are the ones working in a school for less than 5 years. The equal number of respondents working in Serbia and Czechia participated in this study. The majority of respondents were female (74%), while 26% were male. Teachers who teach 15 different subjects took part in this research. The greatest number of respondents are teachers (belonging to the first cycle of education) (24), followed by the teachers of mathematics, and English (14) and teachers of the Slovak, Czech, and Serbian language. Teachers belonging to the first cycle of primary education, together with Mathematics, Serbian, Czech and English language teachers represent vast majority of examined teachers in both countries. The teachers of history, chemistry, geography, physics, art, physical education, biology, and teachers of foreign languages are present in the smallest number.

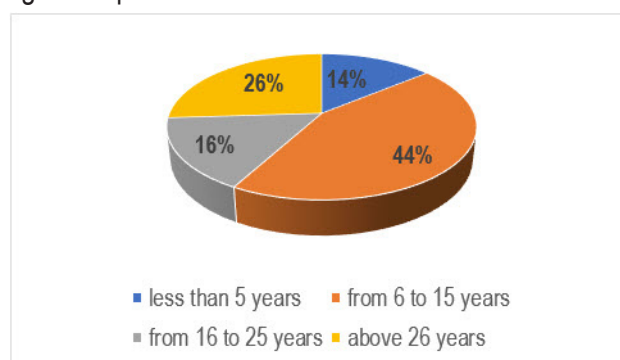


Figure 1. Length of working experience at school (%)

In Table 2, the mean values of the respondents' answers were shown. Most of the respondents agreed with the statements, or their attitudes were neutral. Regarding Serbian respondents, the statement: "Education is the most important and the most complex factor of modern society" was the highest rated. Teachers who work in Serbian schools expressed a high level of agreement with an average value of 4.82. In the Czech Republic, respondents mostly agree with the statement: "Primary education needs to provide more than the teaching of fluid reading, writing, and calculating", with an average value of 4.77. A statement that respondents from Serbia agreed the least is: "Autonomy of schools is one of the factors that can have a big role in the development of quality of education", with an average value of 3.96, while the respondents in the Czech Republic agreed the least with the statement: "Processes of globalization affect national educational systems and their development", with an average value of 4.13.

**Table 2**  
*Mean values of the respondents' answers*

Statement	Country	Mean value
Education is the most important and the most complex factor of modern society.	Serbia	4.82
	Czech	4.63
Democratization in education is necessary in the 21 <sup>st</sup> century.	Serbia	4.37
	Czech	4.17
Modernization of education develops scientific attitudes of children, creativity, critical spirit, objectivity, accuracy, and students' skills.	Serbia	4.26
	Czech	4.44
The main goal of modern education is to encourage the development of creative capabilities, students' skills, and the raising of intellectual potentials of the youngsters.	Serbia	4.30
	Czech	4.44
Processes of globalization affect national educational systems and their development.	Serbia	4.51
	Czech	4.13
Primary education needs to provide more than teaching of fluid reading, writing, and calculating.	Serbia	4.67
	Czech	4.77
Autonomy of schools is one of the factors that can have a big role in the development of the quality of education.	Serbia	3.96
	Czech	4.23
The open curriculum is a step toward greater autonomy of schools, and a step toward more innovations and creativity of teachers.	Serbia	4.27
	Czech	4.54

Regarding the mean values of the respondents' answers from both countries, it is abundantly clear that teachers have similar attitudes toward some general questions about primary education. This means that not only do primary school systems in both countries have similarities, but the teachers' attitudes are also similar.

The Independent samples t-test was applied to analyze the responses of the two population groups, male and female. The statistical difference in the responses of male and female respondents is observed in three out of nine tested statements (Table 3). There is a significant difference in the answers of the respondents from Serbia in two statements and only in one for the respondents from the Czechia. The biggest difference is in the statement: "Open curriculum is a step toward bigger autonomy of schools, and a step toward more innovations and creativity of teachers". These values clearly show that the hypothesis about the statistically significant differences in attitudes of teachers of different gender is partially confirmed due to the fact that statistically significant difference is noticeable only in three out of nine statements. It is very important to take into consideration the fact that there are more female than male teachers, which means that women participate more in the research related to primary education (Gal, Schreier and Engel-Yeger, 2010; Haq and Mundia, 2012).

**Table 3**  
*The results of the t-test for male and female respondents*

Statement/question	Country	p	F
Education is the most important and the most complex factor of modern society.	Serbia	<b>0.019</b>	7.056
	Czech		0.549
			0.436
Democratization in education is necessary in the 21 <sup>st</sup> century.	Serbia	0.443	0.289
	Czech		0.126
			0.726
Modernization of education develops scientific attitudes of children, creativity, critical spirit, objectivity, accuracy, and students' skills.	Serbia	<b>0.001</b>	11.752
	Czech		0.031
			0.918
The main goal of modern education is to encourage the development of creative capabilities, students' skills, and the raising of intellectual potentials of the youngsters.	Serbia	0.643	0.334
	Czech		0.223
			0.577
Processes of globalization affect national educational systems and their development.	Serbia	0.392	1.187
	Czech		0.001
			0.962
Primary education needs to provide more than teaching of fluid reading, writing, and calculating.	Serbia	0.507	0.712
	Czech		3.626
			0.059
Autonomy of schools is one of the factors that can have a big role in the development of the quality of education.	Serbia	0.773	0.101
	Czech		3.671
			0.433
The open curriculum is a step toward greater autonomy of schools, and a step toward more innovations and the creativity of teachers.	Serbia	0.135	2.363
	Czech		20.329
			<b>0.000</b>
Do you think that educational system in your country is at the satisfactory level?	Serbia	0.332	1.345
	Czech		1.552
			0.219

The analysis of the variance was implemented to determine the statistically significant differences between dependent variables (attitudes of respondents) and independent variables (working experience). The analysis of the variance showed that there are no statistically significant differences between the attitudes of respondents of different working experience. Nine statements were tested and none of the statistically significant differences were noticed. Because of that, the hypothesis is not confirmed. The results of research in other countries on the topic of different attitudes of certain groups of teachers toward general educational questions correlate with the results of this research to a high extent. In the research groups of the teachers are of the opinion that it is necessary to involve modernization and the development of intellectual capacities of students as much as it is possible, which is in accordance with some results from this research (Dupoux et al., 2006; Sharma and Dunay, 2018; Đukičin Vučković et al., 2019). In this research, which is one of the initial studies concerning primary education in Serbia and Czechia, it was more important to collect and analyse data showing the attitudes of the teachers of different gender and with different working experience than to record statistically significant differences between their attitudes. This is important regarding future research that may pay thorough attentiveness to the differences between the respondents' attitudes. Conducting the research related to this issue may be beneficial for discovering the influence of gender or working experience on general educational beliefs.

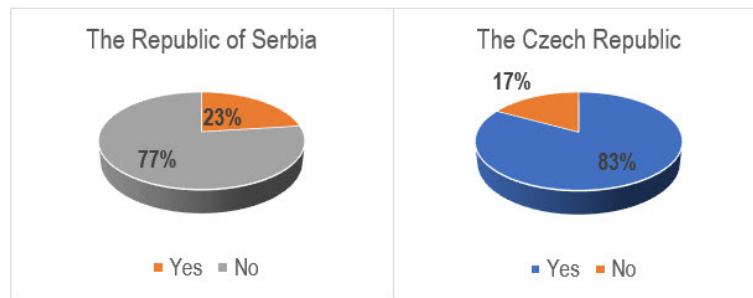


Figure 2. Do you think that the educational system in your country is at a satisfactory level?

The third part of the survey consists of a question: Do you think that the educational system in your country is at a satisfactory level? Respondents had to answer with 'yes' or 'no' (Figure 2). Most of the respondents from Serbia (77%) who participated in this survey think that the educational system in Serbia is not at a satisfactory level. Contrary to that, teachers from Czechia think that the educational system in their country is satisfactory (83%). Since most of the Serbian respondents think that educational system is not at a satisfactory level, it can be concluded that teachers are aware of the complexity of educational questions in Serbia and that the education needs improvements. At the same time, the vast majority of Czech respondents stated that they were satisfied with the educational system in their country which is the result of well-organized reforms and thoroughly precisely planned educational changes.

## Conclusions

The overall insight into the primary education of the two countries shows that there are many similarities in the organization and realization of this educational level. Distribution of teaching subjects through grades are similar, as well as the particular curriculum of the subject (the example of geography). This makes the idea of comparing primary education in these two countries justified.

Results show that the hypothesis about the statistically significant differences in attitudes of teachers of a different gender is partially confirmed due to the fact that statistically significant difference is noticeable only in three out of nine statements. Also, the analysis of the variance showed that there are no statistically significant differences between the answers of respondents with different working experience and the second hypothesis was not confirmed. Being aware of such results, it can be concluded that teachers with different working experiences responded remarkably similar.

The last question in this survey can be a perfect indicator for the further steps of educational enhancement in Serbia and Czechia. Teachers from the Czech Republic are satisfied with their educational system. On the other hand, Serbian teachers have a less positive overall opinion, which should lead to general educational improvement by following the example of other more developed countries. Some future studies about primary education should provide guidelines for enhancement.

Some of the limitations in the questionnaire-based research are that the authors cannot completely control the process of understanding and answering questions. The conditions in which the respondents give their answers also cannot be controlled (e.g. appropriate place that provides respondents with a suitable atmosphere for thinking).

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### Conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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