

Badminton as a Recreational Activity for Teacher Well-Being: Perspectives from EFL Educators in Southern Thailand

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ABSTRACT

Balancing teaching responsibilities highlights the importance of teacher well-being (TWB). This study explores the experiences of seven English language teachers in Southern Thailand who play badminton recreationally, revealing both benefits and challenges. It contributes to the limited literature on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher burnout, recreation among ASEAN teachers, and TWB in Asian contexts. Unlike most TWB research that used quantitative methods, this study employed a qualitative approach using convenience sampling. Data were collected through an open-ended questionnaire, and key themes emerged. Findings indicate that teachers recognize badminton's role in *Holistic Well-Being* and *Motivation Enhancement*. *Efficiency Optimization* was both a challenge and coping strategy in managing work and recreation. *Instructional Integration* also emerged, where recreational topics in English lessons can enhance student engagement and confidence. Future research should explore proactive TWB strategies in ASEAN contexts and beyond.

Keywords: EFL, recreation, teacher well-being (TWB)

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Introduction

A healthy and functional community must be built upon the well-being of its members. However, instances of depression worldwide rose by 18%, and anxiety rates increased by 15% between the years 2005 and 2017, and half of those who were affected are found in Southeast Asia (Ratanasiripong et al., 2022). In Ratanasiripong et al.'s (2022) findings, mental health-related issues, which included depression (3.2%), anxiety (11.2%), and stress (6.0%) were encountered by Thai teachers who participated in the study.

In education, teacher stress and burnout remain significant issues among teachers worldwide, potentially due to the inherently stressful nature of the profession, which may lead to depression and anxiety, resulting in reduced work performance, decreased job satisfaction, and burnout (Agyapong et al., 2022). Despite the increasing recognition of TWB as a crucial factor in education, theoretical research specifically considering the distinct aspects of the teaching profession remains insufficient (Hascher & Waber, 2021). Limited research exists on teacher burnout in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education (e.g., Chang, 2022), highlighting the need for studies exploring recreation promoting TWB.

This study examines the impact of badminton on the TWB of EFL teachers in Southern Thailand, contributing to existing TWB literature and suggesting practical insights into how recreation can support teachers. Additionally, there appears to be a lack of comprehensive research on teacher burnout, particularly within the EFL context (Chang, 2022; Roohani & Dayeri, 2019).

In this study, badminton for recreation was considered due to its health benefits (British Heart Foundation, 2014), popularity in Thailand (Connor, 2025), accessibility of facility, and its engaging, competitive nature, making it an attractive and beneficial choice for EFL teachers with limited resources and time beyond their professional duties.

Research Questions

1. What are the perceived benefits of playing badminton as a recreational activity for EFL teachers in Southern Thailand?
2. What are the perceived challenges in playing badminton that EFL teachers in Southern Thailand experience, and how do they cope with such challenges?

Literature review

Burnout among EFL Teachers

Burnout is more common among foreign language teachers, particularly English language teachers, due to job-related anxiety and complex demands (Meidani et al., 2019, as cited in Cheng, 2022). In ASEAN, in Malaysia, Mukundan and Khandehroo (2010) linked high levels of burnout, characterized by emotional exhaustion, reduced personal accomplishment, and personalization, among English educators to workload and age factors. Ratanasiripong et al. (2022) studied Thai public school teachers and recommended increasing physical activity, among others. Finally, Saelee and Katenga (2025) found that among Thai English teachers in their study, workload and administrative

responsibilities were the significant factors contributing to burnout.

Such findings support this study by exploring badminton as a coping means for burnout and TWB, shifting the focus from burnout causes to proactive measures.

Recreation

Quality of life can be reflected in sports engagement, as Güler and Çolakoğlu (2020) postulate that regular participation in sports promotes social integration and a healthier, higher-quality life and can reduce stress-related illnesses.

While research on teachers' recreation in ASEAN is limited, studies from other regions highlight its significance. Gunel and Hacicaferoglu (2022) observed that female teachers in the experimental group in Antalya showed significantly higher levels of assertiveness and reduced hopelessness after 12 weeks of regular participation in recreational activities. In Yücedağ and Çetin's (2020) study in Turkey with 939 EFL teachers, the researchers recommended offering professional development and leisure management activities online for teachers. In a study by Cheng and Liu (2024) which involved 364 EFL teachers from China, the participants were asked how often they participated in intense physical activities, citing weightlifting, rapid cycling, and exercise classes as examples, and in which they engaged in the activities for a minimum of 10 minutes per day during the past week. The researchers recommended that physical activity-related initiatives that promote well-being holistically be prioritized by policymakers and educational institutions as such activities can be beneficial not only for teachers but also for the wider educational setting.

In terms of badminton studies in ASEAN, Pamungkas et al. (2022) identified significant correlations between endurance, agility, and badminton skills among Indonesian students. Zubir et al. (2022) found that Malaysian elderly participants who played badminton frequently had better blood pressure profiles.

This study addresses a key gap, highlighting sports-based interventions' role in TWB.

Framework

Theoretical Framework

Teacher Well-being

TWB as defined by the World Health Organization is "the complete physical, mental, and social well-being of teachers" (as cited in Aziku & Zhang, 2024). Prioritizing TWB can enhance the learning environment and improve educational quality, as student and teacher well-being are interconnected (Zulkifli et al., 2022). TWB may be closely related to Ryan and Deci's (2000) Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which examines the propensities of natural development and the psychological needs of individuals, serving as the source of their motivation and personality integration, including circumstances that cultivate such positive developments. Mukba (2023) cited Deci and Ryan (2014) and Shouket and Dildar (2020) that to maintain psychological well-being and experience life satisfaction, people must fulfill three universal psychological needs: competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Participating in sports may help meet the psychological needs of EFL teachers. Badminton, as a self-directed activity, may support autonomy, fostering intrinsic motivation since it is played voluntarily due to

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its recreational purpose. Competence may be reflected in their sense of accomplishment as they develop their badminton skills, while their need for relatedness is met through the social component of the sport, as it is played in pairs or teams.

Another supporting model for TWB is that of Jennings and Greenberg (2009, as cited in Dreer, 2023), which is based on the prosocial classroom model. It postulates that positive relationships between teachers and students, social-emotional learning, and the constructive management of the school, which are all connected to learners' academic, emotional, and social outcomes and a healthy classroom environment, are impacted by one of the main factors, which is TWB. As such, badminton could help improve TWB as the sport can help reduce stress, maintain fitness, and foster interactions. While SDT emphasizes psychological aspects for well-being, the prosocial model shows how such aspects are translated into classroom environments.

To achieve quality education, investing in teachers is crucial. UNICEF (2019) reported that educators in six Southeast Asian countries face workplace challenges. Education systems often fail to sufficiently address teacher preparation, support, and recruitment despite teachers being one of the most critical determinants of learning outcomes (UNICEF, 2019). In fact, TWB plays such a significant role that the Association of Southeast Asian Teacher Education Network (AsTEN) identified "teacher professionalism and well-being" as one of its research priorities (Ramos, 2024). Therefore, TWB must be supported.

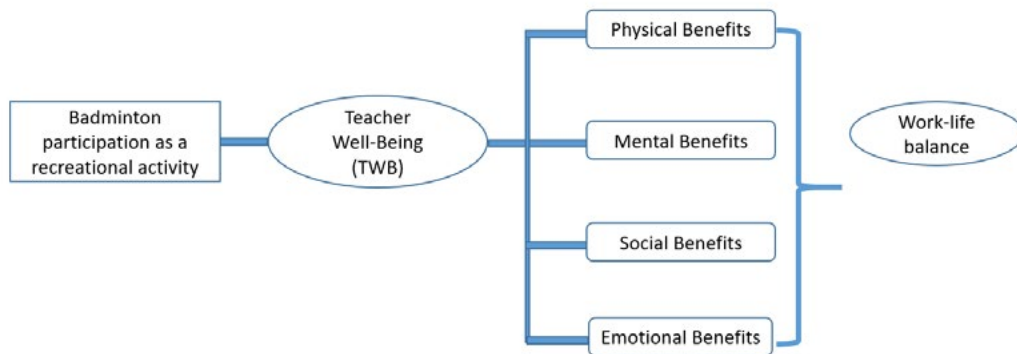
Despite TWB's link to student well-being (Zulkifli et al., 2022), research in Asian contexts

remains scarce. A review of TWB research in Asia (1973–2021) by Yu et al. (2022) found that most empirical studies came from Mainland China (36 articles), followed by Hong Kong (25), India (18), and Israel (17) and in ASEAN, Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Singapore had 12, 7, 5, and 3 articles, respectively. Research on educator burnout and mental health in Thailand remains limited (Ratanasiripong et al., 2022), underscoring the need to explore TWB in the region.

Hence, this study addresses gaps in TWB research. First, TWB studies in the ASEAN region remain scarce. Second, most TWB research relies on quantitative methods (Aziku & Zhang, 2024), overlooking nuanced qualitative insights. Finally, while past research (e.g., Aziku & Zhang, 2024) has highlighted wellness programs for mitigating burnout, proactive strategies are underexplored.

Conceptual Framework

Badminton can enhance TWB by providing various benefits, contributing to work-life balance. Mental and physical wellness can influence job satisfaction and retention, emphasizing the need to promote TWB (Richter et al., 2022, as cited in Aziku & Zhang, 2024). Hence, it is vital to explore how engagement in badminton by EFL teachers can help manage their work-life balance since the sport has been shown to impact health positively based on previous studies. Moreover, to the researcher's knowledge, there seems to be an absence of studies exploring badminton as a recreational sport, specifically for EFL teachers. Finally, TWB can serve as a framework to analyze the insights and experiences of EFL teachers who play badminton for recreation.

Figure 1*Conceptual Framework***Methodology****Design**

This study differs from previous research in using qualitative research design to gain insights into EFL teachers' experiences. Key themes were identified through a thematic approach.

Participants

Seven EFL teachers in Southern Thailand were selected by convenience in terms of accessibility and willingness to participate through the researcher's contacts. Two of them were recruited by one of the participants. Three were Indian males, two Filipino males, and two Filipino females. Convenience sampling entails the availability and reachability of the participants from the target population (Rahi, 2017, as cited in Golzar et al., 2022), suitable for studies that aim to identify the attitudes and perceptions of people (Nikolopoulou, 2023), and the investigation is conducted if consent is given (Alvi, 2016).

However, this study's limitations included a small sample size, and its findings cannot be generalized outside the sample. Generalizability is limited as participants are from the same region, possibly sharing similar experiences, beliefs, or contexts which may differ from others. Finally, since the participants were non-Thai, it is possible that the sport may ease homesickness, support cultural adaptation, build social connections, and promote well-being in a new environment. These factors may have influenced the study's results, as badminton participation may not only be based on personal interest but also their need for belonging and adaptation.

Instrument

An open-ended questionnaire containing five questions was developed and later validated by four experts, three of whom were English language educators. Two are Thai teachers with Ph.D.s, while one is an English native speaker with an M.A. degree. The fourth validator is a Filipino Physical Education teacher with a Ph.D. They assessed the relevance of the questions and

provided feedback. Content validity was assessed using item-objective congruency (IOC). Thirteen of 16 items had 100% agreement, while three scored 0.75, which remains acceptable (Brown, 2005, as cited in Ismail & Zubairi, 2022).

Procedure

Data collection was conducted with the assistance of the researcher's colleague in consultation with the ethics committee. The instrument was developed and validated using IOC. Participants were selected through convenience sampling. The study's purpose was explained, and informed consent was obtained, ensuring anonymity and voluntary participation. Data were collected for three months. A thematic analysis approach was used to identify patterns from the responses. This inductive method allowed themes to emerge from coded responses, providing flexibility in data interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2006, as cited in Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Because of the study's exploratory nature and small sample size, the thematic analysis was done by the researcher. It is an initial investigation into the role of badminton as a recreational activity

among EFL teachers since to the researcher's knowledge, there seems to be no previous studies that explored such a phenomenon. Therefore, the focus was on generating preliminary themes. The responses were read and re-read, and initial codes were generated based on key words and ideas. Related codes were categorized, where central themes emerged. While there are no strict rules for what constitutes a theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006, as cited in Maguire & Delahunt, 2017) significance is a characteristic of a theme, and it is possible that overlaps may occur between the phases of identifying codes and initial themes when there is a small data set (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The themes were cross-checked with codes and categories, and were described using participant responses as basis. However, the lack of intercoder reliability may limit the results' dependability.

Findings and Discussion

Badminton offers physical health benefits. The British Heart Foundation (2014) states that heart muscle strength can be improved, and the risk of

Table 1

Interest in Badminton

Codes-Extracts	Categories	Themes	Descriptions
1. Entertainment "...one of the most <i>entertaining games</i> ..."*(P1)	1. Recreational Engagement (Code: Entertainment)	1. Holistic Well-Being	Badminton's perceived physical, social, and mental benefits influence interest in the sport.
2. Physical Fitness "...for <i>maintaining physical fitness</i> ..."(P1)	2. Well-being (Codes: Physical Fitness and Stress Relief)		
3. Stress Relief "...an <i>antidote to stress</i> "(P1) "... <i>relaxing and rejuvenating</i> "(P2)			

4. Social Interaction “...I get to <i>socialize and interact with lots of people</i> ”(P1) “Since I don’t know someone who plays volleyball. So I chose to play badminton <i>because my friends play it</i> ”(P4) “ <i>Make friends</i> of all cultures, religions, countries, languages, etc.”(P6)	3. Social and Emotional Connection (Codes: Social Interaction and Childhood Memories)	2. Emotional and Nostalgic Connections	Badminton conjures up childhood memories and stirs personal enjoyment of the activity.
5. Childhood Memories “...one of my <i>childhood activities</i> ...”(P2) “...I can say that it was the <i>best memories of my childhood</i> .”(P3)			
6. Skills Development and Competitiveness “... <i>requires skills and experience</i> ... Also, it’s fun and exciting when you <i>begin to count scores</i> ”(P2) “... <i>you have to play both smart and hard...the techniques are as crucial as your physical strength</i> ”(P7)	4. Skills and Competitiveness (Code: Skills Development and Competitiveness)	3. Challenges and Competitiveness	Badminton’s techniques and competitive nature impact both challenge and interest in the sport.

*Participant no.

blood vessel blockages can be reduced through regular badminton. Badminton England (2020) highlights its role in easing stress, depression, and anxiety, making it beneficial for both physical and mental well-being.

Badminton fosters social and emotional connections. Two participants developed an interest in badminton from childhood experiences, while others emphasized friendship-building across cultures, highlighting the sport’s inclusivity. P4 lacked friends with similar volleyball interests, aligning with Aksoy and Arslan’s (2019) assertion that companionship is essential in team sports. Ustun et al. (2017) identified this “lack of friends” as a constraint in leisure participation, while some participants in this study valued badminton for making new friends. For foreign teachers (i.e., participants), sports may help

combat homesickness and possibly aid cultural adaptation, foster camaraderie, and enhance TWB through recreation. In terms of challenge and competitiveness, badminton is a fast-paced racket sport that requires speed, flexibility, power, precision, agility, and endurance for optimal performance (Pamungkas et al., 2022).

RQ1: Perceived benefits of badminton**Table 2***Perceived Benefits*

Codes-Extracts	Categories	Themes	Descriptions
1. Social Skills and Interaction “ <i>Getting to know people and learning how to socialize in the badminton court has tremendously impacted on how to socialize with the students, as good rapport is the key factor particularly in the Asian context to gain confidence of the students to speak</i> ”(P1)	1. Development of Social Skills and Interaction (Code: Social Skills and Interaction)	1. Holistic Well-Being	The physical fitness, social connections, mental focus, and stress-relieving components contribute to the perceived benefits of badminton.
2. Stress Relief “ <i>As an EFL teacher it helps release stress and pressure from handling students all day</i> ” (P2) “ <i>...reduce my stress especially after a long day of teaching and stress at work</i> ”(P4)	2. Well-Being (Codes: Stress Relief, Physical Fitness, and Mental Balance)		
3. Physical Fitness “ <i>...makes you healthy and active...</i> ”(P2) “ <i>It doesn’t just help me [to be] physically strong...</i> ”(P3)			
4. Mental Balance “ <i>...helps me [to be] mentally balanced and focused</i> ”(P3)			
5. Enjoyment “ <i>...one of my favorite sports up to now</i> ”(P3)	3. Motivation (Codes: Enjoyment, and Motivation to Work)	2. Motivation Enhancement	Sport engagement may help increase the drive to work.
6. Motivation to Work “ <i>I feel more driven to work</i> ” (P3) “ <i>Being active in the sport itself influences the kind of energy I want to radiate in the class</i> ” (P7)			

First, badminton is recognized for its physical benefits. Of the badminton studies reviewed by Cabello-Manrique et al. (2022), the physical health benefit was mostly investigated and that significant physical, social, affective-emotional, and mental benefits have been linked to regular physical activities. To some extent, the perceived health benefits reported in this study

align with other health benefits of badminton identified in studies conducted in ASEAN countries. Significant correlations were found between endurance, agility, and badminton skills among Indonesian male students (Pamungkas et al., 2022) while Malaysian elderly participants who frequently played badminton had better blood pressure profiles (Zubir et al., 2022).

Second, the participants acknowledged the sport's role in stress management. Badminton serves as a stress reliever, potentially alleviating depression and anxiety (Badminton England, 2020). Notably, the workload was highlighted in some responses. This particular finding is similar to that of Saelee and Katenga's (2025) study situated in the ASEAN context, particularly among Thai English teachers. Among their recommendations to alleviate teacher burnout is reducing the workload. The findings suggest that, despite time constraints, the perceived benefits of badminton seemingly outweigh the workload demands for the participants in this study.

Third, the participants highlighted badminton's social benefits. P1 noted improved social skills, which could boost students' confidence in speaking by establishing rapport with them. Confidence is crucial in language learning since a strong correlation between self-confidence and speaking skills was found (Gurler, 2015). In the ASEAN context, Utari et al. (2022) also found a positive relationship between speaking skills and self-confidence among students in a university in Indonesia. Social support perception and extraversion also have a positive relationship with job satisfaction and teacher retention intention (Richter et al., 2022). Another finding suggests how overseas teachers can develop their social skills through badminton, possibly aiding their cultural adaptation and alleviating homesickness.

Motivation Enhancement

Motivation Enhancement refers to the drive derived from playing badminton. P7's response about the energy being radiated in class also lends support to Jennings and Greenberg's (2009, as cited in Dreer, 2023) model of the prosocial classroom. Aksoy and Arslan (2019) highlight that physical and psychological rejuvenation can be recreation outcomes, further supporting that TWB can influence teachers' interactions and instruction. Thus, while motivating students is very important, teacher motivation is crucial for effective teaching and student engagement.

While scarce in ASEAN, previous studies support the current findings. Gunel and Hacicaferoglu (2022) examined the assertiveness and hopelessness levels of female teachers at state educational institutions in Antalya. The experimental group showed significantly higher levels of assertiveness and lower levels of hopelessness after twelve weeks of regular participation in recreational activities. They engaged in brisk walking exercises for an hour thrice a week. Among EFL teachers in Yücedağ and Çetin's (2020) study, it was found that the teachers often participated in leisure activities such as spending time on social media and watching movies or TV series, among others while they sometimes engaged in sports at the time of home isolation during COVID, with the research suggesting that professional development and leisure management activities for teachers be offered online. Overall, the findings of this study support recreation's role in enhancing EFL teachers' TWB.

*RQ2: Challenges encountered and ways to cope***Table 3***Challenges Encountered*

Codes-Extracts	Categories	Theme	Descriptions
1. Distraction “Sometimes, I get distracted”(P1)	1. Time Management (Codes: Distraction, and Time)	1. Efficiency Optimization	Balancing work and recreation requires prioritizing, scheduling, and managing time unforeseen events.
2. Time “I think when you have to train students for competition, you don’t have much time doing your daily exercises” (P2) “Family time...”(P6)			
3. Accidents “...accidents”(P6)	2. Unexpected Incidents (Code: Accidents)		

Table 4*Ways to Cope with the Challenges*

Codes-Extracts	Categories	Themes	Descriptions
1. Lesson Integration “I incorporate topics of the lesson with the games for daily conversation. Students love it!”(P1)	1. Instructional Impact (Code: Lesson Integration)	1. Instructional Integration	Recreation can become part of EFL instruction.
2. Other Means to Improve Health “I think do other activities that will keep you active and healthy...”(P2)	2. Proactive Health Management (Code: Other Means to Improve Health)	2. Efficiency Optimization	Prioritizing, scheduling, and time management support proactive health coping amid time constraints.
3. Prioritization “I made a work list to do...”(P4)	3. Time Management (Code: Prioritization)		

Efficiency Optimization was identified as a challenge by P1, who turned distraction into an opportunity for student engagement. P2 and P6 identified time constraints as a challenge, aligning with studies that cited time as a barrier to leisure (e.g., Aksoy & Arslan, 2019). *Proactive Health Management* addresses time constraints by finding other ways to maintain a healthy lifestyle despite professional demands. Finally, *Unexpected Incidents*, disrupting work and

recreation, align with *Efficiency Optimization*, highlighting time management and the need for rest to support recovery before resuming activities.

Overall, *Efficiency Optimization* is characterized by balancing between work and recreation, requiring prioritizing, scheduling, and managing distractions and time.

Related to EFL teaching is *Instructional Integration*, which allows recreation to support instruction through language practice. P1 emphasized rapport as key to boosting students' confidence in speaking, particularly in Asian contexts (Table 2). Confidence-building through recreational activities benefits both students and teachers. Engaging in activities such as badminton can enhance teachers' confidence in interacting with diverse individuals, reinforcing their role as models for student confidence development. In ASEAN, Mukminin et al. (2015) identified low vocabulary and self-esteem as anxiety sources for Indonesian students. Thaksanan (2024) found that Thai university students struggle with public speaking due to limited language resources and topic knowledge. Sioson (2023) noted badminton builds communication skills through coordination, especially in playing doubles. Its informal, competitive setting fosters socialization, which can enhance EFL teaching. Creating a relaxed classroom, incorporating interest-based discussions, and teaching sports-related vocabulary can ease speaking anxiety caused by limited vocabulary or topic knowledge. Beyond conversations, EFL learners can analyze or create sports commentaries, integrating language proficiency with enjoyable, relevant content for meaningful communication practice.

Conclusion

This study examines how badminton supports EFL teachers' TWB and addressing ASEAN research gaps.

Findings revealed that badminton contributes to *Holistic Well-Being*. *Motivation Enhancement* underscores its role in boosting drive to work. *Efficiency Optimization* emerged as a coping strategy, while *Instructional Integration*

illustrates how teachers can creatively incorporate recreation-related topics into lessons, promoting student interaction and confidence.

The study highlights the potential of badminton as a strategy for improving TWB, providing practical guidance for teachers, policymakers, and the ASEAN teacher education network. Teachers may be encouraged to engage in recreational activities while institutions might incorporate recreational sports or creative pursuits (e.g., poetry) into professional development programs. Logistical considerations such as time, facilities, safety measures, and technical and medical assistance must be considered in consultation with the experts in the field. As regards the ASEAN teacher education network, it has been identified that one of the research priorities of AsTEN is the well-being of teachers (Ramos, 2024). Collaborative research and development can guide recreational programs, helping institutions adapt best practices and address challenges.

However, this study's limitations include a small, convenience-based sample in Southern Thailand, restricting the results' generalizability. Using self-reported data and open-ended responses may not fully capture the complexity of the teachers' experiences. While qualitative design may result in in-depth insights, it limits broad statistical conclusions drawn from the study. Hence, future research should expand sample size and setting, employ mixed methods, consider intercoder reliability, and explore other recreational activities. Investigating different leisure pursuits can offer deeper insights into how recreation enhances teacher satisfaction, job performance, and overall educational quality in the ASEAN region and beyond.

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AI in Scientific Writing

While preparing the manuscript, the author utilized AI to improve sentence structures and language, and proofread the work, after that, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed.

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Ethical Approval

The conduct of this study was done in consultation with the ethics committee through the assistance of the researcher's colleague and was given the acknowledgment to pursue the data collection. At the time of the study, the specific guidelines for the conduct of the study by foreign lecturers in the institution were still being established.

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Bionote

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