



Pseudo social status among Mobile Legends Bang Bang gamers in the M05ENG Community of Bangkalan, Indonesia

Diana Putri¹, Mohtazul Farid^{2*}

^{1,2}Department of Sociology, Universitas Trunodjoyo Madura, Bangkalan, Indonesia

*Corresponding author

Email address: santai.pemuda@gmail.com

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Keywords: gamers pseudo social status Mobile Legends Bang Bang online game M05ENG community	This study examines the phenomenon of pseudo social status among players of the online game Mobile Legends Bang Bang within the M05ENG community in Bangkalan, Madura. Social interaction among online gamers extends beyond entertainment, giving rise to social structures and status hierarchies in virtual spaces. Gamers construct their identities and self-images through rank achievements, skin ownership, top-up activities, and social media influence. Employing a qualitative method with Edmund Husserl's phenomenological approach, this study reveals the emergence of pseudo social status in the virtual world. Informants selected through purposive sampling expressed pride in the social status they attained in the virtual environment, despite recognizing its illusory nature. Competition among gamers in the M05ENG community is driven not only by the pursuit of victory but also by the desire to gain social validation and symbolic status. The findings further reveal behavioral differences that reflect variations in gaming skills, playing experience, values, attitudes toward other players, and emotional regulation. In addition, the presence of cosplayers who portray Mobile Legends Bang Bang heroes through costumes, accessories, and character-like behaviors reinforces the perception that in-game characters exist beyond the digital realm, creating a powerful illusion of reality.

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Introduction

Progress can be understood as a gradual yet continuous process of improvement experienced by human societies, moving from relatively simple cultural conditions toward more advanced levels of civilization. Human beings continuously strive to improve their lives across various social, political, and cultural dimensions (Sztompka, 2004). This process of improvement is reflected in humanity's ability to adapt to changing circumstances and refine existing systems to achieve a better quality of life (Ansar & Harefa, 2024). Technological advancement has generated both positive and negative consequences. On the one hand, technology facilitates daily human activities and enhances efficiency. On the other hand, it may also produce adverse effects, as individuals can become excessively dependent on technology (Ramaita et al., 2019). One of the most significant impacts of technological progress is the transformation of traditional games into virtual games. As virtual games increasingly replace traditional forms of play, traditional games are often perceived as less attractive, while virtual games are regarded as more enjoyable and accessible (Apriati, 2021).

The internet has also enabled the gaming industry to develop online games that can be played through internet-connected computers and smartphones. The rapid growth of internet users in Indonesia has been accompanied by a substantial increase in the number of online gamers, as internet connectivity is essential for interacting with other players in online gaming environments (Satria et al., 2021). The game industry has experienced continuous growth both globally and domestically. Indonesia ranks as the third-largest country in the world in terms of the number of video game players. According to a report, 94.5% of Indonesian

internet users aged 16–64 played video games as of January 2022 (Ndun, 2024). Mobile Legends Bang Bang, one of the most popular Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA) games in Indonesia, has attracted players from diverse demographic backgrounds. Developed by Moonton, the game is available on Android, iOS, and Microsoft platforms. Approximately 20 million accounts across Asia have downloaded the game through Google Play and the App Store (Jorgi et al., 2024).

Mobile Legends Bang Bang creates a social status hierarchy based on each player's skills and competitive achievements. This hierarchy determines players' positions within the game, where recognition from fellow players becomes an important objective. The formation of social status in the gaming environment also produces distinctive and complex social dynamics within gaming communities. In Mobile Legends Bang Bang, social status is commonly measured by achieving the highest competitive tier or winning tournaments such as the MLBB Championship League (MCL), both of which enhance a player's social standing within the community. This phenomenon has also emerged among gamers in Bancaran Village, Bangkalan Regency. Players in Bancaran actively seek to establish strong social networks and gain respect from other gamers. Consequently, many players purchase in-game currency through top-up transactions to upgrade their accounts to premium status. By obtaining membership privileges, they gain unlimited access to various premium features available in the game. Such practices may develop into an obsession that contributes to gaming addiction, particularly among players who aspire to maintain premium or membership-based gaming experiences.

Many gamers have also been observed displaying toxic behavior toward players

with lower skill levels, lower competitive tiers, or fewer skins. Such players are often perceived as liabilities who reduce the team's chances of winning. Among gamers in Bancaran, these unhealthy patterns of interaction have extended beyond the virtual environment into everyday life. They tend to use offensive language more frequently and exhibit heightened emotional reactions whenever they experience frustration or discomfort. Based on these observations, several fundamental questions warrant further investigation. First, examining the phenomenon of pseudo social status among Mobile Legends Bang Bang gamers within the M05ENG community is essential for developing a deeper understanding of how virtual symbols shape social interactions among gamers.

Second, it is important to explore the processes through which identity and social status recognition are constructed in digital spaces. Finally, this study seeks to understand how gamers interpret social status in virtual environments, identify the factors that influence its construction, and examine its implications for social relationships among members of the M05ENG Mobile Legends Bang Bang community in Bangkalan.

Method

This qualitative study employed a phenomenological approach. The researcher joined the Mobile Legends Bang Bang gaming community in Bangkalan to obtain accurate and in-depth data. Edmund Husserl's phenomenological approach emphasized the lived experiences from which phenomena emerged (Arianto, 2024). This approach enabled the researcher to gain insights into the perceptions, beliefs, ideas, values, and attitudes of Mobile Legends Bang Bang gamers within the M05ENG

community in Bancaran Village, Bangkalan Regency.

Purposive sampling was used to select informants based on specific considerations. Individuals were chosen because they possessed relevant knowledge or occupied positions that enabled the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the research setting and the social phenomena under investigation (Sugiyono, 2015). The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with selected informants to obtain data for analysis. Using purposive sampling, the researcher selected three categories of gamers representing different levels of playing skills to distinguish the variations in social status within the online gaming environment of Mobile Legends Bang Bang. The study also employed documentation, including photographs, field notes, and audio recordings collected during interviews and observations involving members of the Mobile Legends Bang Bang M05ENG community in Bancaran Village, Bangkalan District, Bangkalan Regency.

Data were analyzed using a data reduction process, which involved collecting, summarizing, and selecting the most relevant information concerning the pseudo social status of Mobile Legends Bang Bang gamers within the M05ENG community in Bancaran Village, Bangkalan Regency. This process provided a clearer representation of the research findings and facilitated subsequent stages of analysis. The reduced data were then systematically organized and presented to illustrate the phenomenon of pseudo social status among members of the M05ENG community. Finally, conclusions were drawn based on the findings obtained from the observations and in-depth interviews following the data reduction and presentation processes.

The trustworthiness of the data was established through data triangulation. Data triangulation refers to the integration of multiple methods and sources to examine interconnected social phenomena from different perspectives (Abdul, 2020). In this study, source triangulation was employed to verify the credibility of the data by comparing information obtained from multiple informants. This process was used to examine how indicators of social status, such as the number of followers and players' skill levels in Mobile Legends Bang Bang, influenced the social structure, behavior, and interaction patterns within the gaming community. Accordingly, data were collected and cross-checked among Mobile Legends Bang Bang players. Differences in perspectives identified through this process were subsequently described and categorized to strengthen the credibility of the research findings.

Results and Discussion

The transformation of social status in the digital era

Most aspects of social life and culture have undergone significant changes alongside digital transformation (Wismawati, 2023). The rapid advancement and sophistication of technology, as an integral component of digital transformation, have become indispensable to contemporary society. Nearly every aspect of human activity now relies on digital technology (Emanuel, 2025). Lifestyles, patterns of behavior, identity construction, and social validation are increasingly shaped within digital environments, extending even to highly sacred domains such as religion (Koritelu & Tutkey, 2025). Whereas social status was traditionally determined by factors such as

family background, educational attainment, occupation, and economic capital, it is now increasingly influenced by social interactions, online activities, and individuals' visibility within virtual spaces (Life & Gaia, 2014).

Digital space has evolved into a new public sphere in which individuals interact beyond the constraints of the physical world. Increasingly, people prefer to establish social relationships, construct personal identities, and pursue social status in virtual environments rather than through face-to-face interactions. Consequently, social validation in online environments has become more important than recognition in offline settings (Salsabila & Nur, 2025). The construction of social status and personal identity is no longer derived solely from achievements in the physical world but also from digital symbols that signify prestige, popularity, competence, and influence within virtual communities. Digital validation is commonly reflected in the number of likes, comments, and other forms of engagement across social media platforms (Putri et al., 2025; Agma, 2025; Haq & Tegal, 2026).

From the perspective of the postmodern sociologist Jean Baudrillard, the stratification and social status emerging within virtual environments represent a form of pseudo social status. Baudrillard introduced the concepts of simulation and hyperreality, arguing that contemporary society exists in a world dominated by signs, symbols, and images that gradually replace reality itself. Within digital spaces, individuals may obtain recognition, prestige, and social standing not because of their actual social conditions but because of the self-representations they construct through virtual symbols (Baktiono, 2009; Djati & Series, 2023; Meitikasari, 2022). This perspective is consistent with the findings of the present study involving the Mobile Legends Bang Bang gaming community in Bangkalan, Madura. The game functions as a new social arena

in which individuals construct self-images and gain recognition based on virtual achievements rather than offline accomplishments (Ananda et al., 2022; Angelina et al., 2021).

Attributes such as player rank, the number of skins (collectible characters or premium in-game items), and account popularity have become primary symbols of status and prestige in virtual environments. Through these symbols, players construct digital social identities that often differ from their social status in everyday life (Renal, 2023). The ownership of skins symbolizes both economic capacity and gaming expertise, while competitive tiers represent players' skill levels within the game (Fakhrezi et al., 2025; Rahman, 2024). This phenomenon demonstrates that social status in the digital era is fluid and dynamic. Social stratification increasingly depends on individuals' ability to utilize digital technologies and adapt to the norms governing virtual communities.

Within the Mobile Legends Bang Bang community, players who attain high competitive ranks and enjoy broad recognition may acquire social acknowledgment, respect, and influence comparable to—or even exceeding—that of individuals with high status in the physical world. These findings indicate a transformation in the basis of social stratification, shifting from economic and educational capital toward virtual symbolic capital. Digital environments create social spaces in which recognition is no longer determined primarily by material reality but by symbolic representations constructed through online activities (Agma, 2025). This transformation suggests that social status should be understood not only as a structural position but also as a performative achievement, shaped by how individuals present themselves and gain recognition within digital environments.

Digital identity refers to the representation of the self that is constructed, displayed, and continuously negotiated through digital media. According to Buckingham (2008), digital identity can be understood as the product of interactions between individuals, technology, and their surrounding social environments. Such identities reflect not only personal characteristics but also the sociocultural dynamics that shape virtual spaces. The phenomenon of self-presentation on social media constitutes one of the principal mechanisms through which digital identities are constructed. Through photographs, videos, status updates, and comments, individuals consciously or unconsciously create narratives about who they are, what they believe, and how they wish to be perceived by others (Goffman, 1959; Walther, 2007).

A critique of the classical concept of social status

The emergence of digital culture has fundamentally transformed the construction of social status (Nuresa, 2025). In classical sociology, social status has traditionally been associated with economic resources, educational attainment, prestige, honor, and occupational position. However, these conventional indicators of social status and social roles are no longer sufficient to explain status formation within networked societies. In classical sociological thought, social status refers to an individual's position within the social structure. Karl Marx, for example, identified capital and ownership of the means of production as the primary determinants of social status. Accordingly, social status was inseparable from the economic structure, and those seeking power and influence were expected to control economic resources.

Max Weber (1864) conceptualized social status through three interrelated

dimensions: economic class, social prestige or honor, and political power. In networked societies, however, individuals no longer need to possess these three dimensions to attain social recognition. Likewise, Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) argued that an individual's social position emerged from the social division of labor. Social status and roles were determined by individuals' functions and contributions to society, implying that increasing occupational specialization would generate greater heterogeneity in social status.

In contrast, Manuel Castells argued that social status in virtual environments is primarily determined by social recognition and validation within digital spaces. Indicators such as the number of followers, likes, shares, and comments have become key measures of social value and status. Moreover, the intensity and quality of individuals' engagement in online environments contribute to the recognition they receive from others (Zulli & Zulli, 2020). The logic of viral culture evaluates popularity according to visibility in digital spaces rather than in the physical world. This new regime introduces a different logic of status formation, whereby social visibility depends less on economic capital or family lineage than on the ability to attract and sustain collective attention (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012).

These developments suggest that classical conceptions of social status, social stratification, and social mobility can no longer be regarded as the sole explanatory framework. Digital transformation has produced two interconnected yet distinct social arenas: the physical world and the virtual world. Consequently, individuals increasingly experience a duality of social status. Those who occupy prestigious positions in offline society may not necessarily enjoy comparable status in virtual

environments, and vice versa, although some individuals successfully attain recognition in both domains simultaneously. Digital social status has also evolved into a form of social capital that can be converted into economic and symbolic capital. Influencers, for example, have emerged as new symbols of authority and power capable of challenging the dominance of traditional institutions (Zulli & Zulli, 2020).

According to Soerjono Soekanto, social status refers to an individual's position within society, which determines social roles and relationships with others. Such status may be acquired through either ascribed status, obtained by birth without personal effort, or achieved status, attained through individual effort, competence, and achievement. In modern societies, achieved status has generally been associated with tangible accomplishments such as educational attainment, professional careers, or contributions to society (Soekanto, 1990). In virtual environments, however, social status is not inherited through ascribed status. Instead, it is almost entirely constructed through individual participation and performance in digital spaces. This observation represents a critical reconsideration of conventional understandings of social status.

Although digital social status is commonly associated with social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, the findings of this study demonstrate that online gaming communities also generate distinctive forms of social status and stratification. Within communities centered on Mobile Legends Bang Bang, Weber's perspective appears particularly relevant. Competitive ranks such as Mythic, exclusive skins, follower counts, and player reputation function as symbols of prestige and social honor that shape an individual's status within the virtual community. Such

status is not necessarily linked to wealth or offline social position but is instead acquired through recognition from fellow community members. This phenomenon illustrates that social status can be constructed through symbolic recognition and collective esteem, consistent with Weber's conception of status groups and social prestige.

The findings from the M05ENG community in Bangkalan further reveal the emergence of a new form of achieved status rooted in digital environments, particularly through participation in Mobile Legends Bang Bang. Players construct their social status through virtual accomplishments, including competitive rankings, the accumulation of skins, and prestigious titles such as MCL Champion. These forms of status are attained through sustained effort, competitive success, and investment in digital assets, thereby fulfilling Soekanto's criteria for achieved status. Nevertheless, these achievements remain symbolic or pseudo in nature because they possess limited social relevance beyond the digital environment. The recognition and prestige received by players are largely confined to the virtual space of the M05ENG community and do not automatically translate into higher positions within the broader social structure of Bancaran Village. In other words, the social mobility experienced by these players remains largely restricted to the virtual realm and does not produce corresponding changes in their offline social status.

These findings suggest that Soerjono Soekanto's theory of social status can be reinterpreted within the context of the digital era. Whereas achieved status in traditional societies was associated with concrete accomplishments such as educational qualifications and professional occupations, digital societies increasingly construct status through virtual symbols that represent digital prestige. However, because these symbols

possess little material or institutional value beyond digital networks, the resulting form of status can appropriately be conceptualized as pseudo social status.

Accordingly, within the Mobile Legends Bang Bang community, social status is no longer determined primarily by an individual's position in offline society but rather by the ability to construct a compelling digital identity and gain recognition within virtual environments. These findings reinforce the argument that the digital era has generated a new form of social stratification which, although resembling conventional social hierarchies, possesses only symbolic and temporary validity within cyberspace.

The phenomenon of status display and the need for social recognition

The findings of this study reveal that members of the Mobile Legends Bang Bang community in Bancaran Village engage in behaviors that can be described as status display, whereby individuals deliberately showcase digital status symbols as a strategy for self-presentation and social recognition. Players frequently display exclusive skins, rare visual effects, premium avatars, and limited-edition profile frames to represent their identities and prestige within the virtual community. These practices extend beyond aesthetic preferences and carry important social meanings. From a sociological perspective, such behaviors reflect the fundamental human need for social recognition, which serves as a central motivation in social interaction. Players seek to demonstrate their presence, competence, and superiority through virtual symbols that are readily recognized by fellow community members. Consequently, digital attributes function as symbolic markers of honor that define an individual's position within the community's social hierarchy.

Interestingly, this phenomenon is particularly evident among adolescents who experience economic or social constraints in their offline lives. For these individuals, the digital environment provided by Mobile Legends Bang Bang serves as an alternative arena for attaining prestige and recognition that may otherwise be difficult to achieve. Players from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are able to attain high virtual status through sustained effort, strategic gameplay, and substantial time investment. These findings suggest that digital environments offer a mechanism of social compensation, enabling individuals to construct identities that differ from their offline social realities. The practice of status display further illustrates the symbolic transformation of social status in the digital era. Whereas status in traditional societies was commonly expressed through tangible material possessions such as vehicles, clothing, or occupational positions, digital status is increasingly communicated through visual attributes and virtual symbols that possess shared social meaning within specific online communities.

Accordingly, digital symbols have become effective instruments for communicating social status, giving rise to a new form of symbolically based social stratification. Overall, these findings demonstrate that the desire for social recognition remains a fundamental human motivation, although the medium and forms of its expression have shifted toward digital environments. Status display in Mobile Legends Bang Bang represents a manifestation of contemporary social dynamics in which identity, prestige, and social recognition are constructed through virtual symbols that possess considerable social value within digital communities despite lacking material value in the physical world.

The construction of virtual social status

The findings further indicate that within the M05ENG community, Mobile Legends Bang Bang functions not only as a source of entertainment but also as a platform for constructing a virtual social hierarchy that closely resembles social structures in offline society. Players' social status is determined by digital achievements and symbolic attributes associated with their gaming accounts, including competitive tier rankings, the ownership of rare skins, and account popularity across social media platforms. These digital symbols serve as indicators of prestige and constitute the primary basis for evaluating an individual's standing within the community.

Players occupying the highest positions within the community typically possess premium accounts, exclusive skins, and thousands of social media followers. These digital advantages establish them as respected figures and role models for other members. They are frequently entrusted with leadership roles during competitive matches and exert considerable influence over team strategies and community decisions. These findings demonstrate that virtual social status can generate symbolic legitimacy and authority within digital environments, even though such recognition does not necessarily translate into offline social status. Conversely, players with lower competitive tiers often experience symbolic marginalization. They are frequently perceived as "burden players" or regarded as less competent, despite remaining active participants in community activities. This phenomenon reflects the emergence of an internal system of social stratification based primarily on digital competencies and symbolic attributes rather than on economic resources or educational attainment, as is characteristic of traditional societies.

The M05ENG community therefore illustrates the reproduction of social structures within virtual environments, where prestige and social recognition have shifted from material resources to representational digital symbols. From the perspective of Soerjono Soekanto's theory of social status, individuals' positions within this community can be categorized as a form of achieved status because they are attained through personal effort, competence, and sustained participation. Nevertheless, these achievements remain symbolic and temporary, as they are recognized only within the digital environment. The elevated status enjoyed by top players does not automatically alter their positions within the broader social structure of Bancaran Village. Consequently, the status constructed through gameplay may appropriately be conceptualized as pseudo social status, whose legitimacy exists only within the sphere of virtual interaction.

This virtual hierarchy further demonstrates that digital environments have generated a new form of social stratification in which recognition and influence no longer depend primarily on wealth or inherited status but instead on technological competence, time investment, gaming performance, and the ability to construct a prestigious digital identity. In this sense, Mobile Legends Bang Bang has become a social arena in which players continuously construct, negotiate, and perform their social status through virtual symbols that possess significant social meaning within the community.

Pseudo social status and virtual recognition

Social status refers to an individual's position within society, reflecting the roles, prestige, and respect conferred by

the surrounding social environment. It serves as a social indicator that shapes how individuals are perceived, treated, and valued by others (Soekanto, 1990). However, within the Mobile Legends Bang Bang M05ENG community in Bancaran Village, the meaning of social status has undergone a fundamental transformation. Social status is no longer determined by traditional factors such as occupation, educational attainment, or social roles in offline society but rather by symbolic recognition within virtual environments.

The findings demonstrate that social status within the M05ENG community is pseudo or artificial because its legitimacy exists solely in digital spaces. Players acquire social recognition through in-game attributes such as the number of skins they own, their competitive rank, and participation in tournaments, all of which function as symbols of prestige among fellow community members. However, such recognition does not reflect the players' actual economic conditions or social positions in everyday life. Consequently, the status constructed within the virtual environment is temporary, symbolic, and lacks social significance beyond the context of the game. Interestingly, several players with limited economic resources exhibited highly consumptive behaviors in an effort to maintain their virtual social status. Some informants acknowledged spending excessive amounts on top-up transactions to purchase exclusive skins and premium items in order to avoid being perceived as "low-tier" or "noob" players by other members of the community. This finding suggests that the basis of social recognition has shifted from tangible achievements in everyday life to financial investment in digital environments.

In this context, digital symbols function as mechanisms of social differentiation, replacing the role traditionally played

by material possessions in determining an individual's position within the social structure of the virtual community. Such behavior reflects implicit social expectations within digital communities, where recognition depends upon the ability to display symbols of virtual luxury. This condition resembles the concept of status consumption, in which individuals purchase goods not because of their functional utility but to maintain a desired social image. Within the digital environment, virtual recognition has become a new form of symbolic prestige driven by the desire to gain acceptance and appreciation from other community members.

Accordingly, pseudo social status within the M05ENG community can be understood as the product of symbolic construction emerging through digital interaction. It demonstrates how virtual environments are capable of replicating—and in some respects replacing—the systems of social recognition traditionally embedded in offline reality. Nevertheless, because such status is not grounded in concrete economic or social realities, it remains temporary, fragile, and dependent upon continued participation in the gaming environment.

Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that Mobile Legends Bang Bang functions not merely as a form of digital entertainment but also as a platform for constructing social identity, symbolic prestige, and new forms of social interaction among adolescents and young adults in Bancaran Village, Bangkalan Regency. According to Soerjono Soekanto's theory, social status refers to an individual's position within society, reflecting the roles, rights, obligations, and prestige attributed to that individual. Within virtual environments such as Mobile Legends Bang Bang, however,

this concept has undergone a significant transformation. Social status is no longer determined primarily by economic position, occupation, or educational attainment but instead by virtual accomplishments, including competitive rankings, accumulated victories, ownership of exclusive skins, and recognition from fellow players.

These findings indicate a shift toward what can be conceptualized as pseudo social status, namely a form of status that is recognized within digital environments but possesses limited relevance in broader social reality. Players construct their identities and obtain social recognition through in-game attributes, giving rise to a new hierarchy within the online gaming community. Observations and interviews revealed that pseudo social status substantially influences patterns of interaction among community members. Players with high competitive ranks or rare skins are regarded as symbols of success, whereas those occupying lower positions are frequently perceived as burdens to their teams. This pattern closely resembles conventional systems of social stratification in which differences in status and prestige produce distinct social hierarchies. Furthermore, the study found that social pressure and the desire for recognition often encouraged players to engage in excessive top-up expenditures to obtain exclusive skins and premium items that enhanced their symbolic status within the community. Such behavior reflects the emergence of excessive consumerism driven by the pursuit of virtual prestige.

Overall, the findings suggest that the pseudo social status observed among Mobile Legends Bang Bang players in Bancaran Village represents a manifestation of broader social transformations resulting from digital technological advancement. Virtual environments have become alternative arenas in which individuals seek recognition,

visibility, and social appreciation, despite the symbolic rather than material nature of these achievements. This phenomenon further illustrates how digital technologies have reshaped the ways individuals construct self-identity, interact with others, and negotiate social status in contemporary society.

Future research should investigate similar phenomena across different online gaming communities to provide broader comparative insights and further refine the concept of pseudo social status in digital environments. Comparative studies conducted in different geographical and cultural contexts would also contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how gamers perceive and construct social status in virtual communities. Finally, although online gaming can facilitate meaningful social interaction, players should maintain a healthy balance between virtual engagement and offline relationships with family and friends. Such balance is essential to ensuring that gaming activities support, rather than undermine, psychological well-being and everyday social functioning.

Declaration of Ownership

This article is our original work.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest to declare in this article.

Ethical Clearance

This study was approved by the institution.

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