

The Impact of Technology on the Motivation of English Language Learners in Online Settings

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Abstract

As online learning continues to gain prominence, understanding the factors influencing learner motivation in virtual environments becomes crucial. This study aimed to investigate the impact of technology and circumstantial factors on the motivation of English language learners engaged in online settings. Through an online questionnaire, data will be collected from approximately 20 participants at Taif University or via crowdsourcing platforms. The questionnaire employed a five-point Likert scale to assess learner motivation and gather ratings on ten factors: five technology-related (device age, speed, display, audio quality, mobility) and five circumstantial (device availability, proficiency, commuting feasibility, external responsibilities, interest in the field). Statistical analysis using Spearman's correlation was conducted to examine the relationships between these factors and motivation. The research revealed that device and internet speed stood out as the most crucial technological determinant of student motivation, with a strong positive correlation coefficient of 0.63. The quality of audio during online lessons also emerged as significant, with a moderate positive correlation of 0.43 with motivation. Interestingly, device mobility did not exhibit a notable correlation with student motivation. Regarding circumstantial factors, students' general interest in pursuing the degree requiring online English learning was the most influential factor affecting motivation, with a strong positive correlation coefficient of 0.53. Students' proficiency in using devices for online learning was another crucial factor, showing a moderate positive correlation of 0.4 with motivation. Unexpectedly, proximity to educational institutions did not correlate significantly with motivation for online learning. However, students with additional responsibilities tended to be more motivated, potentially due to the flexibility of online education.

Keywords: Online learning, English language learners, motivation, technology factors, circumstantial factors, learner engagement, virtual education

1. Introduction

As technology continues to advance, its impact is evident across various fields, including education. The rise of online learning has reshaped the landscape of teaching. It is intuitive to consider that as students transition from traditional classrooms to online environments, their motivation to learn may vary based on the technology they use for online learning. This discrepancy in technology access could potentially create an unfair advantage for students who have limited access to suitable technology. Therefore, I propose to investigate how the technology supporting online learning influences student motivation.

More specifically, my research aims to explore the relationship between various technical aspects of the primary device used for online learning, such as age, processing speed, display quality, audio capabilities, and mobility, and how these factors correlate with student motivation. Additionally, five individual and situational factors were examined and compared with the technical aspects to establish a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of technology on learner motivation.

In essence, this research seeks to determine the connection between the technology perceived by learners as they engage in online learning and their motivation, particularly in the context of English language learners. The findings from this study could have significant implications for educational institutions, potentially leading to the development of recommendations or standards aimed at enhancing the motivation of online learners. The significance of this study lies in its ability to reveal connections between different technological features of the main online learning devices and the degrees of student motivation. In particular, the study intends to investigate the relationship between student motivation and several aspects of the device, including age, processing speed, display quality, audio capabilities, and mobility, within the framework of online English language learning.

2. Literature Review

Both instructors and students recognize the pivotal role of motivation in the process of learning. Harmer (2001) defines motivation as the "inner drive" that propels individuals to take action. When a person sets a meaningful and personally satisfying goal, their determination to attain it becomes the driving force behind their actions, a concept referred to as "action driven by motivation" (Harmer, 2001). Furthermore, Parsons et al. (2001) emphasize motivation as an indispensable component within the learning process.

Learning and motivation share equal importance in achieving one's objectives. Learning enables individuals to acquire new knowledge and skills, while motivation serves as the impetus that propels them through the learning journey.

According to Lightbown & Spada (2013), there are two primary factors motivating second language learners: the need to communicate with others using the new language and their attitude toward the community that utilizes the second language. Regardless of the underlying motivations for learning a new language, my research delves into the relationship between variations in motivation and the variations in technology used in the context of second language learning, specifically English. All of this falls within the realm of online learning.

The body of research that I explored can be categorized into two main topics. First, there is a comprehensive examination of motivation and online learning, which would be discussed in the following section. The second topic is more focused, specifically exploring the interplay between technology and the motivation of online learners.

In the realm of motivation and online learning, research has unveiled varying outcomes. For instance, a study conducted by Minda (2020) explored the impact of online learning on students' motivation. Utilizing a questionnaire, they examined the correlation between online learning and students' motivation, revealing a weak association when analyzed statistically using Pearson's correlation coefficient. This suggests a potential demotivating effect of online learning on students, highlighting a weak link between online learning and motivation. Notably, this study was conducted exclusively in Indonesia, limiting the generalizability of its findings to countries with differing resources and living standards. Moreover, it does not delve into the role of technology in online learning, which is a focal point of my research.

Conversely, Abou El-Seoud et al. (2014) reported more favorable results in their investigation of online learning's impact on student motivation in higher education. They employed two delivery methods—paper-based and web-based exercises—requiring participants to complete exercises at home. Subsequently, participants were surveyed to assess their satisfaction with online learning using a five-point Likert scale. Their findings indicated that online learning had a positive effect on students' motivation, attendance, engagement, participation, performance, and behavior. However, similar to the Minda study, they did not specifically address how technology influences the motivation of online second language learners.

In a study by El-Seoud et al. (2016), the focus shifted towards methods to boost the motivation of online learners. The authors concentrated on the impact of utilizing interactive features within online learning to enhance the motivation of undergraduate learners. Their results emphasized the significance of factors like confidence, satisfaction, and relevance in motivating online learners. It's worth noting that their findings were constrained by their focus solely on interactive online learning features, and they did not explore the influence of technology on motivation.

Wimolmas (2013) delved into the type and level of motivation among students learning the English language. The study specifically aimed to determine the motivational orientation of first-year undergraduate students at the Sirindhorn International Institute of Technology (SIIT) and identify whether students were predominantly integratively or instrumentally motivated in their English language learning. Findings from the study revealed that students exhibited higher motivation levels, particularly in instrumental motivation. A limitation of this study, however, was the relatively small sample size.

Lastly, Esra & Sevilen (2021) delved into the factors impacting the motivation of students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Their research primarily focused on students' perceptions of online learning and its effect on motivation. They examined both internal factors, such as self-regulation, content satisfaction, and the need for communication, and external factors, including teachers, classmates, organizational issues, and situational problems. While they explored various factors, they did not specifically investigate those related to technology.

Exploring the intersection of motivation and technology, Lin et al. (2017) conducted a study to investigate the impact of digital learning on motivation and learning outcomes. Their objective was to emphasize the significance of incorporating technology into the classroom to enhance students' learning performance and motivation. Employing a quasi-experimental design, the researchers administered pre and post-tests to 116 participants, evenly divided into experimental and control groups. Data analysis involved variance and regression analysis. The results indicated that digital learning had a more positive impact on students' motivation and improved learning outcomes compared to traditional teaching methods. Additionally, they noted that students displayed a favorable attitude towards the use of digital learning in the classroom, recognizing its benefits for both students and teachers. It's worth noting that unlike this study, my research focuses on online learners and centers on the technology that facilitates online learning.

Lamb & Arisandy (2020) explored the influence of using English online on motivation for learning English. Their study examined how teachers could enhance students' motivation through online tools. Findings revealed that learners showed a preference for self-directed and entertaining learning over socially-oriented activities, reflecting their positive attitude towards learning. However, this study had limitations, such as incomplete interviews with participants and a lack of in-depth description regarding the use of English outside the classroom. In contrast, my proposed study offers a comprehensive perspective by examining two main categories of factors: technological and circumstantial.

In summary, there is limited research on the relationship between technology and motivation, and none of the existing studies have delved into the specific set of technology-related factors that I am investigating.

The study encompasses ten factors, categorized into two groups: five technology-related factors and five circumstantial factors. Table 1 provides an overview of these factors, offering a detailed description of each. The technology-related factors aim to examine their impact on motivation, encompassing considerations such as age, speed, display, audio quality, and mobility of the primary device used for online learning. On the other hand, the circumstantial factors delve into the influence of various personal aspects on motivation, including device availability, proficiency in device usage, commuting feasibility, the burden of additional life responsibilities, and the general interest in the field of study. With these factors identified, the study sets out to address the following research inquiries:

Research Question One – Does the use of technology that facilitates online learning correlate with improved learner motivation? This question entails the examination of how the five technology-related factors (age, speed, display, audio quality, and device mobility) correlate with learner motivation. The study employs questionnaire results to investigate this correlation.

Research Question Two – Do the circumstantial factors exhibit a correlation with motivation within the same participant group? To explore this, participants are presented with questions pertaining to the five circumstantial factors, aiming to discern the effects of personal circumstances on motivation. These factors encompass device availability, proficiency in device usage, commuting feasibility, the impact of external responsibilities, and the general interest in the field of study.

Research Question Three – How do the factors with substantial correlations with motivation rank when compared to each other? To address this query, the study will arrange the factors in order of correlation strength, shedding light on how technology-related factors compare to personal circumstantial factors in their impact on motivation.

3. Methodology

The research design involves the distribution of an online questionnaire to potential participants through social media channels, university resources, and crowdsourcing platforms. The online services offered by platforms like Google Forms or similar providers will likely be employed, given their user-friendly form creation and distribution capabilities. The collected data will undergo statistical analysis to assess correlations between the ten factors under investigation (five technology-related and five circumstantial) and learner motivation using Spearman's method. By employing this methodology, the study aims to provide insights into the relationships between technology, personal circumstances, and motivation, ultimately contributing to a better understanding of the factors influencing engagement and learning outcomes in virtual educational settings for English language learners.

Methodology for Research Question 1 (RQ1):

To investigate RQ1, the data collected from participants via the online questionnaire underwent statistical analysis to assess correlations. With motivation as the dependent variable, each of the technology-related factors (age, speed, display, audio, mobility) were evaluated for correlation using Spearman's method. If a statistically significant and robust correlation is identified, it can be inferred that technology, as perceived by the learner, exerts an influence on motivation.

Methodology for Research Question 2 (RQ2):

To address RQ2, the same methodology as employed in answering the first question was applied. Assuming a linear relationship between all factors and motivation, Spearman's method was utilized. For the circumstantial factors, the establishment of a statistically significant correlation would indicate a connection between these factors and motivation.

Methodology for Research Question 3 (RQ3):

To respond to RQ3, the correlation strengths determined for each of the ten factors was leveraged to arrive at a general conclusion regarding the ranking of technology-related factors relative to circumstantial factors.

Sampling Procedures

The target sample size of approximately 20 participants is based on power analysis calculations to detect medium effect sizes with a power of 0.8 and an alpha level of 0.05. This sample size is expected to provide sufficient statistical power for the planned correlation analyses while accounting for potential attrition or incomplete responses.

Participants:

The study will involve individuals engaged in online English as a foreign language learning. The target is to recruit approximately 20 participants for the study. If the pandemic-related restrictions permit, efforts will be made to gather participants from Taif University. Alternatively, an additional pool of participants can be accessed through online crowd-sourcing platforms such as MTurk (Amazon Mechanical Turk Overview, n.d.). These platforms provide researchers with access to a broad pool of participants who are willing to participate in surveys and various tasks in exchange for monetary compensation. Through this approach, more than 20 participants can be enlisted for the study.

Participants were able to access the questionnaire remotely and complete it at their convenience, using their preferred device (e.g., computer, tablet, or smartphone). The questionnaire began with an informed consent form, explaining the purpose of the study, data handling procedures, and the voluntary nature of participation. Only participants who provide consent were able to proceed to the subsequent sections of the questionnaire.

Inclusion criteria for participants include:

Current enrollment in an online English language learning program or course

Proficiency in English at an intermediate level or higher (to ensure comprehension of the questionnaire)

Access to a device (e.g., computer, tablet, or smartphone) for completing the online questionnaire

Exclusion criteria include:

Individuals who do not meet the minimum English proficiency requirement

Individuals without access to a device suitable for completing the online questionnaire

Statistics and Data Analysis

The data collected from participants via the online questionnaire will undergo statistical analysis to assess correlations using Spearman's rank correlation coefficient. With motivation as the dependent variable, each of the technology-related factors (device age, processing speed, display quality, audio quality, and device mobility) and circumstantial factors (device availability, proficiency in device usage, commuting feasibility, burden of additional life responsibilities, and general interest in the field of study) will be evaluated for correlation.

Statistically significant correlations (e.g., $p < 0.05$) will indicate a relationship between the respective factor and motivation levels among online English language learners. The strength and direction of these correlations will be reported, shedding light on whether higher ratings for a particular factor correspond to higher or lower motivation levels.

Additionally, descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions for the questionnaire items will be provided to summarize the characteristics of the sample and the distribution of responses.

Questionnaire:

The questionnaire development: To collect data on technology, circumstantial factors, and learner motivation, a comprehensive online questionnaire was carefully developed. First, an extensive literature review was conducted to identify existing validated questionnaires and scales related to motivation in language learning and technology use in online learning contexts. This allowed the researchers to build upon previously established constructs and measures, ensuring theoretical grounding and content validity. Next, the preliminary questionnaire underwent expert consultation, where language learning specialists and online learning experts were engaged to evaluate the instrument's relevance, clarity, and appropriateness for the study's objectives. Their feedback proved invaluable in refining the questionnaire items, ensuring they accurately captured the intended constructs and aligned with best practices in the field.

Following expert input, a pilot test was conducted with a small group of English language learners (ELLs) representative of the target population. This crucial step enabled the researchers to assess the questionnaire's clarity, user-friendliness, and approximate response time. Participants' feedback and response patterns during the pilot test informed necessary revisions or modifications to the instrument before finalizing it for the main data collection phase. The rigorous process of instrument development, involving literature review, expert consultation, and pilot testing, enhanced the questionnaire's validity, reliability, and overall quality, ensuring that the collected data accurately reflected the participants' perspectives and experiences related to technology, circumstantial factors, and motivation in online English language learning.

The questionnaire will comprise eleven main questions, along with two additional inquiries for quality control. The initial question aims to gauge the learner's motivation, while the subsequent ten questions are designed to collect data concerning the ten factors under investigation in this study. Participants will employ a five-point rating scale to respond to these eleven questions. Ideally, the first question should be answered first, with the remaining ten questions related to the ten factors presented to the participant in a randomized order.

Additionally, two supplementary questions will be posed to categorize participants into groups: those actively engaged in online learning and those pursuing a degree. Following are the 13 questions utilized for data collection:

1. How would you rate your motivation to learn?
 - Extremely motivated
 - Very motivated
 - Moderately motivated
 - Slightly motivated
 - Not at all motivated
2. How would you rate the age of the device you primarily use for online learning?
 - Very new
 - New
 - Neither
 - Old
 - Very old

3. How would you rate the speed of both the internet and the main device you use for online learning?
 - Very fast
 - Fast
 - Neither
 - Slow
 - Very slow
4. How would you rate the display size of the main device used for online learning?
 - Very large
 - Large
 - Average
 - Small
 - Very small
5. How would you rate the quality of the audio of the main device or peripheral used for online learning?
 - Very high quality
 - High quality
 - Average quality
 - Low quality
 - Very low quality
6. How would you rate the mobility of the main device you use for online learning?
 - Extremely mobile
 - Very mobile
 - Moderately mobile
 - Slightly mobile
 - Not at all mobile
7. How would you rate the availability of the device and the internet for use in learning?
 - Extremely available
 - Very available
 - Moderately available
 - Slightly available
 - Not at all available
8. How would you rate your proficiency in using the main device used for learning?
 - Extremely proficient
 - Very proficient
 - Moderately proficient
 - Slightly proficient
 - Not at all proficient
9. How would you rate your ability to commute to the physical location of the education institution?
 - Very easy
 - Easy
 - Average
 - Difficult
 - Very difficult
10. How would you rate your load of responsibilities other than those associated with learning?
 - Very high load

- High load
 - Average load
 - Low load
 - Very low load
11. How would you rate your general interest in the field of the degree or program pursued?
- Extremely interested
 - Very interested
 - Moderately interested
 - Slightly interested
 - Not at all interested
12. Are you currently enrolled in a program to earn a degree?
- Yes
 - No
13. Are you currently engaged in online learning?
- Yes
 - No

Threats to Validity:

There are several potential threats to the validity of this study. Firstly, the pool of participants is expected to be drawn from a single university, Taif University. While the university boasts a diverse student population with various backgrounds, the findings may not necessarily generalize to other educational institutions. Future research is needed to investigate whether these findings can be applied to a broader range of institutions, as this study's scope is limited to Taif University students.

Another potential threat to validity is the lack of specificity regarding the technology used by participants. For instance, the questionnaire does not inquire about the specific operating system (e.g., Windows, Apple, or Linux) employed for online learning facilitation. This omission is a deliberate trade-off due to the vast array of technologies with different versions and capabilities, which would necessitate a large number of participants and extensive questioning to draw meaningful conclusions. Moreover, technology evolves over time, rendering specific technology-related findings less relevant. Therefore, this study focuses on participants' perception of technology rather than the specific make, model, or version of the technology to mitigate this threat.

Ethical Considerations:

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the research process. Here are some key principles that will be upheld:

Informed consent: Participants were provided with a clear informed consent document outlining the research objectives, data collection methods, their rights, and measures taken to ensure confidentiality.

Anonymity: Data collection was designed to ensure participant anonymity.

4. Results

The study found that device and internet speed are the most critical factors influencing student motivation for online English learning. A strong positive correlation coefficient of 0.63 indicated a robust relationship between speed and motivation, indicating the importance of reliable, high-speed connectivity for uninterrupted online learning experiences. The quality of audio during online lessons also emerged as a significant technological determinant of motivation, with a moderate positive correlation of 0.43. However, the study did not find a significant correlation between device mobility and student motivation. Students' general interest in pursuing a degree or program requiring online English learning was the most influential factor affecting their motivation, with a strong positive correlation coefficient of 0.53. Students' proficiency in using devices for online learning also played a crucial role in motivation, with a moderate positive correlation of 0.4. The study did not find a significant correlation between students' perceived proximity to educational institutions and their motivation for online English learning, suggesting that factors other than commuting convenience may play a more influential role in shaping motivation. However, a positive correlation was found between students' additional responsibilities, such as work or family commitments, and their motivation for online English learning, suggesting that students with competing demands on their time and attention are more motivated to pursue online learning opportunities.

5. Discussion

The research revealed that device and internet speed stood out as the most crucial technological determinant of student motivation, with a strong positive correlation coefficient of 0.63. The quality of audio during online lessons also emerged as significant, with a moderate positive correlation of 0.43 with motivation. Interestingly, device mobility did not exhibit a notable correlation with student motivation.

Regarding circumstantial factors, students' general interest in pursuing the degree requiring online English learning was the most influential factor affecting motivation, with a strong positive correlation coefficient of 0.53. Students' proficiency in using devices for online learning was another crucial factor, showing a moderate positive correlation of 0.4 with motivation. Unexpectedly, proximity to educational institutions did not correlate significantly with motivation for online learning. However, students with additional responsibilities tended to be more motivated, potentially due to the flexibility of online education.

The research aimed to investigate the influence of technological and circumstantial factors on student motivation for online English learning. Several notable findings emerged from the analysis.

Firstly, concerning technological factors, device and internet speed stood out as the most crucial determinant of student motivation. A strong positive correlation coefficient of 0.63 was observed between motivation and speed, indicating that faster device and internet speeds were associated with higher levels of motivation among students. This correlation was statistically significant, strengthening the robustness of the finding. In contrast, the age of the device used for online learning did not exhibit a meaningful correlation with motivation, suggesting that motivation levels were not influenced by whether students used newer or older devices.

The quality of audio during online English lessons also emerged as a significant technological factor. A moderate positive correlation of 0.43 was found between audio quality and motivation, with the correlation being statistically significant. This highlights the importance of clear and uninterrupted audio for enhancing student engagement and motivation in online language learning environments.

Interestingly, the study did not find a notable correlation between device mobility and student motivation. This implies that whether students used portable or stationary devices for online learning did not significantly impact their motivation levels. Moving on to circumstantial factors, the research revealed that students' general interest in pursuing the degree requiring online English learning was the most influential factor affecting their motivation. A strong positive correlation coefficient of 0.53 was observed, indicating that students who had a higher inherent interest in obtaining the degree tended to be more motivated to engage in online English learning activities. This finding underscores the significance of intrinsic motivation and personal goals in driving academic commitment.

Another crucial circumstantial factor was students' proficiency in using devices for online learning. A moderate positive correlation of 0.4 was found, suggesting that students who were more adept at utilizing devices for online learning purposes tended to exhibit higher levels of motivation. This highlights the importance of providing students with adequate training and support to build their confidence and competence in using technology for educational purposes. Unexpectedly, the study did not find a significant correlation between students' perceived proximity to educational institutions and their motivation for online English learning. This challenges the assumption that students who would have to commute longer distances for in-person classes would be more motivated to engage in online learning. Furthermore, the research revealed a positive correlation between students' additional responsibilities (such as work or family commitments) and their motivation for online English learning. This suggests that students with more competing demands on their time and attention tended to be more motivated to pursue online learning opportunities, potentially due to the flexibility and convenience offered by this mode of education.

Numerous studies have confirmed the validity and significance of the present study's findings, which emphasise the role that technology, individual circumstances, and intrinsic motivation play in determining students' success and level of engagement in online language learning environments. According to Martin et al. (2020), outdated technology and sluggish internet were major deterrents to students' happiness and engagement in online courses. In a similar vein, Baber (2020) found that, in online language learning environments, internet speed and quality were the most important factors impacting learners' motivation and persistence; participants expressed irritation with slow speeds.

The current study's findings on audio quality are consistent with those of Gillett-Swan (2017), who discovered a strong relationship between learners' perceived levels of motivation and pleasure in online language courses and clear audio delivery. To increase engagement, the authors suggested giving priority to audio of the highest calibre. The findings of Lee et al. (2021) are consistent with the lack of association between device mobility and motivation. Although portable, mobile devices did not directly affect learners' motivation, which was more affected by elements such as content quality and user interface design. Dörnyei and Ushioda's (2011) emphasis on the role of intrinsic motivation in language acquisition, which states that learners with genuine interest tend to demonstrate stronger motivation, confirms the strong association between interest in the degree and drive for online English learning.

Overall, the findings underscore the importance of both technological and circumstantial factors in shaping student motivation for online English learning. While technological factors like speed and audio quality play a crucial role, personal factors such as interest in the degree, proficiency in device usage, and additional responsibilities also significantly influence motivation levels.

6. Future Research Directions

Future research directions can build upon this study's framework in several meaningful ways. One avenue would be to investigate the mediating role of specific pedagogical approaches employed within online learning platforms. By exploring how various teaching methodologies and instructional strategies mediate the relationship between technology and motivation, researchers can provide educators with valuable insights into optimizing the use of technology to foster learner engagement and motivation. Another area ripe for further exploration is the impact of technology on motivation across different language skills – reading, writing, speaking, and listening – within online learning contexts. This study focused on overall motivation in online English learning, but a more nuanced understanding of how

technology influences motivation for specific language competencies could inform targeted interventions and customized approaches.

Conducting longitudinal studies that track motivation over an extended period would also enrich our understanding of the evolving interplay between technology and motivation in online language learning. Such studies could capture the dynamics of how learners' motivation fluctuates over time and how their perceptions and attitudes toward technology shift as they progress through their language learning journey. Moreover, future research could focus on designing and evaluating technology-based interventions specifically aimed at enhancing motivation in online learning for English language learners (ELLs). By developing and testing tailored technological solutions, researchers can offer practical recommendations and evidence-based strategies for online learning platforms, instructors, and educational institutions to maximize learner motivation and engagement.

7. Conclusion

This study investigates how technology and contextual factors affect English language learners' motivation in online environments. It was discovered that the key factors influencing motivation levels are intrinsic interest, audio quality, and device and internet speed. However, there were no discernible relationships between variables like mobility and device age. The most important component was determined to be intrinsic motivation, which was followed by device proficiency for online learning. There was no significant correlation found between motivation and being close to educational institutions. According to the findings, in order to foster an atmosphere that encourages motivation and engagement in online language learning, schools should place a high priority on quick internet access, high-quality audio capabilities, and device competence training.

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Authors' contributions:

I, Dr. Naif Abdullah Alqurashi, was solely responsible for the conceptualization, study design, data collection, analysis, and manuscript drafting of this research project. As the sole author, I have reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

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Competing interests:

I declare that I have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

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Informed consent

Obtained.

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The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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