



TECHNOLOGY-ENHANCED LANGUAGE EDUCATION UNDER THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE: A QUALITATIVE LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH TEACHING IN MULTICULTURAL CLASSROOMS

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Abstract

This is a qualitative study that aims to explore the representation of technology-mediated English education in policies and studies related to multicultural classrooms in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Data collection: A purposive analytical corpus of 17 documents was created from four domains, namely, BRI education and language policy, technology-enhanced language learning, multilingual/English-as-a-lingua-franca pedagogy, and international guidance on digital education. Qualitative document analysis and thematic reflexivity were used for the analysis of documents that have been published between 2003 and 2024. The analysis was directed towards issues of access, interaction, linguistic norms, multilingual mediation, interculturality, assessment, and algorithmic authority. Findings: Five themes were developed. First, English is placed as a connecting resource, whereas implementing in English can result in unequal language authority. Secondly, the educational potential of technology is mainly those that enable people to interact with each other across borders, repair, revise and reflect on. Third, translanguaging and multimodality are not barriers to the learning of English. Fourth, digital participation is still dependent on the infrastructure, the accessibility, teacher mediation and data governance. Fifthly, automated systems can restrict legitimate variation in English and must be controlled by human use, critically examined. Originality: The study brings together language-policy studies in the context of BRI and technology-enhanced language learning and multilingual applied linguistics within one analytical frame. It suggests an iterative pedagogical cycle and assessment model of the digital English teaching responsive to language. Limitations: The results only refer to document representation and conceptual relations and are not indicative of classroom effectiveness or causality. The framework needs to be tested at multiple sites in classrooms.

Keywords: Belt and Road Initiative; Qualitative Document Analysis; Technology-Enhanced Language Learning; English as a Lingua Franca; Multicultural Classrooms; Translanguaging; Generative AI

1. Introduction

The education aspect of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is generally summarized as institutional partnership, student mobility, resource sharing, and people-to-people exchange alongside infrastructure development and regional connectivity and trade. The Education Action Plan for the Belt and Road Initiative clearly connect educational cooperation with an open and integrated development (Ministry of Education of



the People's Republic of China, 2016). These exchanges represent a very diverse linguistic repertoire, educational background, and access to digital infrastructure among participants. English is often a shared contact language, but there are also other languages spoken, such as Chinese, Russian, Arabic, Urdu, Malay, Kazakh, and many other national, regional and heritage languages (Usman et al., 2024).

Technology has been an integral part of this contact. Geographically distributed learners can be connected through videoconferencing, learning-management systems, mobile applications, collaborative documents, machine translation, automated feedback, speech recognition, and generative artificial intelligence, so that interaction can take place, or be replayed later for analysis. Research reviews have pinpointed computer-mediated communication, multimedia, mobile learning, and collaboration as significant areas of technology-enhanced language learning (TELL) (Hasumi & Chiu, 2024; Shadiev & Yang, 2020; Zainuddin et al., 2023). Technology can, however, also produce digital inequality, monolingual language ideologies, a single model of accent, and unclear algorithmic evaluations. UNESCO (2023a) thus proposes that the appropriateness, equity, evidence, scalability and sustainability of the use of educational technology be considered.

The problem is not just about whether a platform is available, but also requires a linguistic analysis. It is about the English which are legitimate, the way misunderstandings are resolved, whether students can access their entire repertoire, how cultural meanings are negotiated, and who is authoritative in the evaluation process. English-as-a-lingua-franca (ELF) scholarship focuses on the intelligibility, accommodation and agency of the multilingual users, instead of imitation of a single native-speaker community (Canagarajah, 2007; Kirkpatrick, 2011; Seidlhofer, 2004). The central tenets of translanguaging scholarship are that moving between languages and modes of expression is a process of coordinated meaning making (Arshad et al., 2024; García & Li Wei, 2014).

Previous BRI research has focused on education policy, the internationalization of higher education and language planning (Gao, 2020; Peters, 2020; Woo, 2022; Xu, 2021). TELL, on the other hand, tend to measure tools or learning outcomes in isolation, without embedding them in the geopolitical and multilingual landscape of BRI classrooms. The present study tackles this separation and examines policy and research documents in both fields.

The study seeks answers to the following question:

RQ1. What is the position of English in the language learning field of technology-enriched multicultural BRI education?

RQ2. What mechanisms are linked with productively using technology in foreign language acquisition?

RQ3. What access tensions and language ideologies, assessment tensions, and algorithmic tensions arise in the documents?

RQ4. Which didactic concept has developed from the themes identified?

2. Methodology

2.1 Research design

The qualitative document analysis was a process of systematically examining documents for their meaning, context and emerging patterns (Bowen, 2009). This design was suitable as it relates to the research questions which focus on the relationship between BRI cooperation, English, multilingualism and educational technology as constructed by policies and scholarly fields. No classroom observations, interviews, surveys or proficiency scores were collected in this study, nor were any human participants recruited.

Reflexive thematic analysis was used for analysis. Like Braun and Clarke, the researcher's interpretive role was considered as a component of the production of knowledge, not as a hidden behind a claim of purely mechanical coding (Braun & Clarke, 2021, 2022). Themes developed by repeated reading, coding, comparison and revision. They are not numerical variables or effect estimates but represent patterned meaning over the corpus.

2.2 Corpus construction

A purposive corpus of 17 documents was specially built to be representative of the conceptual overlap in the center of the study. The requirement for inclusion was that the document should have to make a



substantive contribution in at least one of four areas: (a) BRI education or language policy; (b) BRI-related higher-education or English-policy analysis; (c) synthesis of technology-enhanced language learning (TELL) or digital education; or (d) a linguistic framework directly relevant to multicultural English interaction. The following types of publications were included in the corpus: Policy texts, institutional reports, peer-reviewed empirical or policy studies, systematic reviews, and basic publications in applied-linguistics.

The time span was 2003–2024. Both the starting point allowed for the introduction of the telecollaboration and the ELF work needed to interpret the further BRI documents, and the endpoint was able to encompass recent research on English-policy research and TELL that was available at the time of the corpus formation. Sources were rejected if they only referenced the BRI or technology, without considering education, language, interaction, access, and pedagogy. The sample was not intended to be a full representative of the bibliography.

2.3 Data extraction and coding

All documents were read for their purpose, in their educational context, for their linguistic assumptions, in terms of the role of technology, in terms of opportunities reported in all documents, in terms of constraints reported by all documents and in terms of pedagogical or policy implications. Initial codes were related to lingua franca, native speaker norm, multilingual repertoire, translation, multimodality, intercultural contact, negotiation of meaning, access, teacher mediation, automated feedback, data governance, and assessment validity.

The coding was done in four steps. Firstly, explicit claims were captured using descriptive codes. Second, related codes were clustered in candidate patterns. Third, the pattern types were compared to each other, ensuring that the policy aspiration was not assumed to be equivalent to an empirical observation. Fourth, the themes were discussed with the research questions and given a name to represent the central organizing concept. The type of source and status of evidence for each claim was maintained in a matrix.

2.4 Analytical rigour and ethics.

Rigor was achieved by a source-type comparison, a clear documentation of a source's code to a theme, focus on disconfirming tensions, and explicit distinction between documentation of a claim vs. interpretation by the present author. For instance, it was not assumed that a policy commitment to connectivity meant there was learning gains, nor was it assumed that a technological affordance meant equitable use. The corpus and analytical categories are presented in such a way that allows someone else to question or expand the interpretation.

No personal data were collected as the data were all publicly available documents. Nevertheless, ethical consideration was still needed as policy texts and technologies of learning can place languages and communities in an unequal position. The analysis therefore focused on who was normalized in their English, the importance attached to minority-language resources and the authority shift that occurred through the use of automated systems.

Table 1.

Composition of the purposive analytical corpus (N = 17)

Document domain	n	Included documents	Analytical contribution
BRI education and language policy/analysis	6	Ministry of Education (2016); Gao (2020); Peters (2020); Xu (2021); Woo (2022); Hu et al. (2024)	Policy purposes, internationalization, language planning, and changing English-education priorities
TELL, virtual exchange, and digital guidance	7	Belz (2003); O'Dowd (2018); Shadiev & Yang (2020); UNESCO (2023a, 2023b); Zainuddin et al. (2023); Hasumi & Chiu (2024)	Technology affordances, interaction, access, governance, and evidence limitations
Multilingual and ELF frameworks	4	Seidlhofer (2004); Canagarajah (2007); Kirkpatrick (2011); García & Li Wei (2014)	Intelligibility, accommodation, legitimate variation, and translanguaging

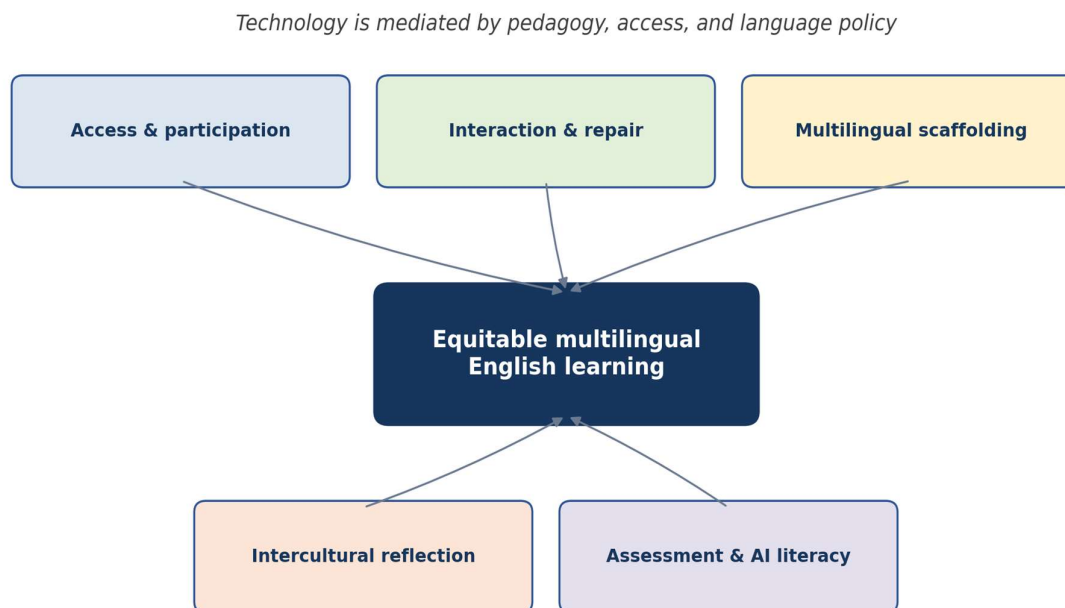


3. Findings

Five themes emerged: English as a connective infrastructure that is uneven; technology as an interactional record; multilingual mediation as a learning mechanism; participation as a sociotechnical achievement; and algorithmic feedback as contested linguistic authority. The themes address the research questions by linking macro level policy commitments and micro level processes of classroom meaning making.

Figure 1

Conceptual framework for equitable technology-enhanced English learning in BRI classrooms



3.1 English as connective but unequal linguistic infrastructure

From the documents that are oriented toward the BRI, it can be seen that language capacity is linked to exchange in education, international cooperation, and mobility. English is often used as a means of bridging between co-participants who do not share a first language. Gao (2020) demonstrates how the BRI has contributed to the discourse on language planning in settings that participate in the BRI, and Peters (2020) and Xu (2021) link the BRI with the increase in internationalization in higher education. Hu et al. (2024) provide a description of the shift of discourse in Chinese English-education policy from examination issue to intercultural communication and international involvement.

An additional tension emerged in the cross-document comparison: when English is perceived as the only legitimate medium, the connectivity of English can be set up as a hierarchy. Learners come with different pre-existing access to English and standardized forms can be confused as communicative competence. An alternative view is offered by ELF scholarship, which focuses on the legitimacy of multilingual speakers as users, the importance of accommodating, making intelligible, repairing, and being aware of the audience (Kirkpatrick, 2011; Seidlhofer, 2004). The first is not that English should be replaced, but that its bridging role is best served when it is one way of communicating in a multilingual ecology.

3.2 Technology as an interaction and reflective log

Digital environments were always connected with increased access to input, repeated practice, communication, and collaboration and feedback (Hasumi & Chiu, 2024; Shadiev & Yang, 2020; Zainuddin et al., 2023). These affordances were not, of course, technology per se, but rather the linguistic mechanism that makes them possible. They were all given the chance to do the communicative activities: asking for clarification, reformulating an utterance, comparing expressions, revising a text, and adapting language to an audience.

Digital interaction creates digital footprints, too. Language choices can be made available for



reflection in the form of chat logs, shared-document histories, recorded presentations, captions and discussion threads. These signs allow a study of both who initiates the repair process, which accents are heard by whom, when an image fills a lexical gap, and how a group arrives at a shared formulation. Virtual exchange is particularly pertinent because it allows English to be used to accomplish a reciprocal cross-border task (Belz, 2003; O'Dowd, 2018). The finding therefore restates the concept of technology in terms of interactional records.

3.3 Multilingual mediation.

The corpus questioned the notion that other languages automatically impede the learning of English. Translanguaging offers a principled description of how learners can annotate an English text in another language, discuss a concept in two languages before writing, compare machine translations, or even mix up speech, image, map, and hyperlink to explain a concept (García & Li Wei, 2014). These practices can minimize avoidable processing blocks and promote focus on form, meaning, audience and cultural specificity.

The use of technology increases the resources available for such mediation. In collaborative glossaries, definitions, examples, pronunciation, images and equivalents in several languages can be included. Evaluation of parallel texts and subtitles can be done for what is not included or changed. When used as an interim translation to be checked, machine translation is a pedagogically useful tool. This theme is characterised by the notion of multilingualism that is not necessarily accompanied by unrestricted switching but involves strategic mediation and then accountable English production.

3.4 Participation as a sociotechnical achievement

The need to access was consistently linked to policy aspirations for connectivity. UNESCO (2023a) records the differences in devices, bandwidth, skills, language, access and locally relevant content. Asynchronous participation can help those who require additional time to plan, but is not a solution to unstable connectivity or inaccessibility of design. When a child does not speak in a dashboard, it can be an indicator of low motivation, limited language proficiency, disability, family responsibilities, surveillance issues, or technical problems.

The whole thing—infrastructure, task design, language policy, teacher facilitation, institutional support, privacy, and peer relations—coalesced into participation, as an outcome. The minimum access floor is represented by low bandwidth files, downloadable materials, flexible timing, accessible formats and a non-digital approach to core outcomes. This floor has the potential to raise the visibility of already privileged learners in an international project while presenting it as being inclusive of students around the world.

3.5 Automated feedback as contested linguistic authority

Rapid practice and alternative formulations can be provided by speech recognition, automated writing evaluation, machine translation, and the generative AI. However the logic of the documents together suggests that it is not safe to assume that the automated output is linguistically neutral. A system that is trained mostly to recognize high resource languages and standardized varieties might be misrecognition regionally accented varieties, or might suggest forms that are not suitable for a particular variety of language as a lingua franca.

The single point is power. If a numerical pronunciation score or grammar suggestion is considered to be final, the design of the platforms becomes a de facto language policy. For automated feedback to be used by a human, students need the ability to review, contrast, and criticize automated feedback and to explain their reasoning. Critical AI literacy therefore needs to be part of language education; learners should evaluate outputs in other languages and varieties, validate cultural claims, record accepted revisions and be aware of privacy issues. UNESCO's human centred guidance helps to keep control of learner agency and teacher responsibility (UNESCO, 2023b).



Table 2

Technology affordances, linguistic mechanisms, and implementation risks

Technology/ format	Primary linguistic mechanism	BRI-classroom application	Main risk or condition
Videoconferencing and virtual exchange	Negotiation of meaning, repair, accommodation, pragmatic awareness	Cross-border problem-solving and peer interviews	Bandwidth, time zones, unequal participation, safeguarding
Asynchronous forums and shared documents	Planned production, peer response, visible revision	Collaborative reports, multilingual glossaries, reflective dialogue	Silence may reflect access or confidence rather than disengagement
Digital corpora and multimodal resources	Noticing of collocation, register, variation, and form–meaning relations	Comparison of English varieties and disciplinary genres	Corpus representativeness and teacher mediation
Machine translation and multilingual tools	Cross-linguistic comparison and metalinguistic awareness	Evaluation of translated meanings and culturally specific terms	Uneven quality across languages; overreliance
Speech recognition and automated feedback	Repeated rehearsal and rapid formative response	Pronunciation practice and draft-level feedback	Accent bias; standardized norms; weak validity for high-stakes use
Generative AI	Audience simulation, reformulation, feedback comparison	Role-play, prompt comparison, critical AI-literacy tasks	Fabrication, privacy, cultural flattening, algorithmic bias

4. Discussion

The results indicate that technology-enhanced English education under the BRI can be considered a sociolinguistic and sociotechnical system. Opportunities for mobility and partnership are created by policy, access and interaction are determined by platforms, participation is organized by teachers, and what constitutes legitimate opportunities for access is determined by linguistic ideologies. An assessment of any one tool is missing from the conditions through which learning becomes possible.

The analysis provides an answer to RQ1 by demonstrating that English is at the same time a bridge and a potential hierarchy. There are four mechanisms to respond to RQ2: purposeful interaction, visible repair and revision, multilingual mediation, and guided intercultural reflection. Recurrent tensions of unequal access, monolingual norms, privacy and governance, teacher workload, and algorithmic authority answer RQ3. The rationale for why these tensions manifest themselves is why the same platform could be expansive for some participation and restrictive for others.

The results also incorporate the ideas of ELF and translanguaging. Standard English is an important common tool to use, especially for academic and professional genres, but it is not the only indicator of communicative competence. Multicultural interaction is about intelligibility, accommodation, pragmatic judgment and strategic repertoire use. Therefore, rather than being at odds with accuracy, explicit instruction in form can coexist with recognition of legitimate variation and multilingual cognition.

5. Proposed Pedagogical Model

Thematic synthesis yielded a model consisting of five stages in an iterative fashion. Stage 1 identifies learners' repertoires, access conditions, accessibility needs, prior knowledge and safeguarding needs. Stage 2 offers input via several varieties of the English language, captioning, glossing, downloadable resources, and multilingual supporting materials. In stage 3, structures interact by sharing information, engaging in reciprocal roles, providing repair opportunities, and offering a shared responsibility output. In Stage 4, traces of

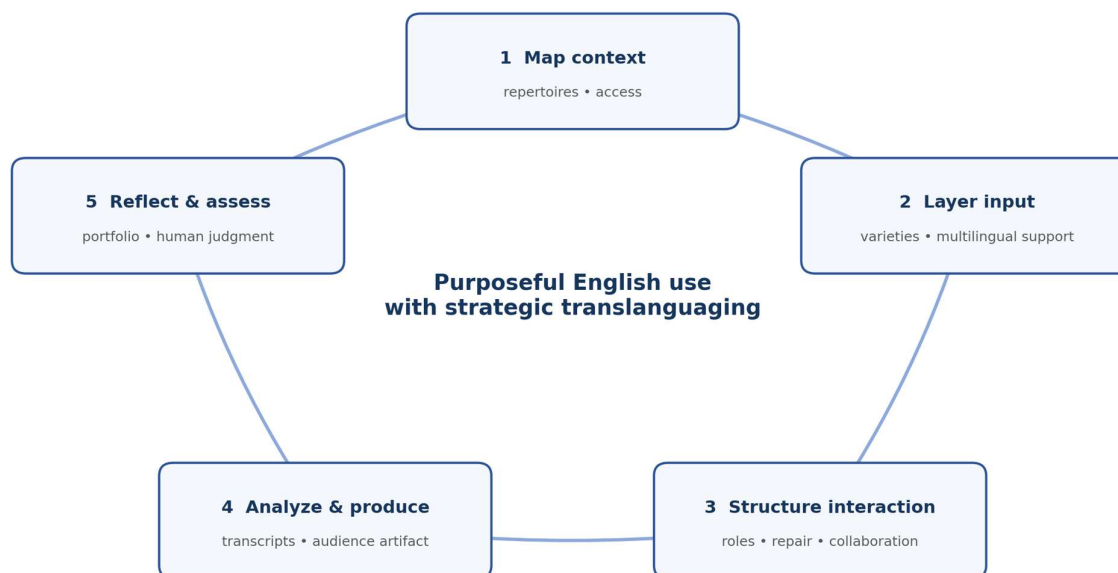


interaction are examined and an artefact is created for an audience. Stage 5 reflects & assesses via portfolios, peer response, human judgement, critical examination of automated feedback.

Recursive model, not linear. Assessment evidence is used as the basis for further identification of needs; interactional difficulty has its impact on subsequent inputs; and problems with access have implications for future redesign. Only when the communicative goal is specified does technology become an option. By doing this, platform novelty will not be given the opportunity to replace pedagogy.

Figure 2

Iterative pedagogical cycle for multicultural technology-enhanced language education



6. Assessment and Practical Implications

Assessment should be based on the skills that are relevant to multicultural digital communication. Language control, intelligibility, accommodation, interactional competence, intercultural interpretation, multimodal and multilingual mediation as well as critical digital or AI literacy are all relevant dimensions. Rubrics should not include terms that are subjectively interpreted, such as ‘native-like’ English or ‘natural’ English. Observed descriptors ought to involve whether listeners are able to understand what has been said, whether the learner is able to listen for comprehension, and whether the language and multimodal aspects are appropriate to the purpose and relationship.

Portfolio assessment can include draft, recording, discussion contributions, peer responses, glossary work, AI-comparison logs and reflective analysis. Use of automated feedback for consequential decisions is not justified unless there is evidence for validity with respect to the population, language variety, task and stakes. Students should be able to contradict a machine judgment, and have a human say what the explanation is.

Institutions should enable teachers to use easily accessible platforms, provide technical support, offer realistic class sizes, guide teachers through data governance, and offer professional learning opportunities in multilingual pedagogy and AI literacy. Consent procedures, moderation, or avoiding compulsory video are also necessary for cross-border projects, as are clarifications about recording, storage and access, and retention.



Table 3

Suggested assessment dimensions for multicultural digital English tasks

Dimension	Observable evidence	Appropriate evidence source
Language control	Form and vocabulary support clear meaning for the task and audience	Drafts, final artifact, annotated revisions
Intelligibility and accommodation	Speech is understandable; learner checks, clarifies, paraphrases, or reformulates	Recording, transcript, interaction excerpt
Interactional competence	Turns are linked, peers are invited, and misunderstandings are jointly managed	Chat log, video segment, peer account
Intercultural interpretation	Claims are evidence-based; multiple perspectives and uncertainty are acknowledged	Reflection, comparison commentary, exchange notes
Multimodal and multilingual mediation	Languages, visuals, links, and layout are selected to support the intended audience	Portfolio artifact and design rationale
Critical digital/AI literacy	Automated output is verified, bias is considered, and accepted feedback is justified	AI comparison log, source check, learner rationale

7. Limitations and Future Research

The study is based on a purposive corpus instead of an exhaustive one. It has strengths in conceptual integration but doesn't have the capacity to measure the frequency of themes in all BRI countries or at all education levels. To interpret linguistic concepts, foundational sources were added which results in a wide publication period and various forms of evidence. Policy aspirations, policy reviews, and empirical studies were compared in detail, but are not necessarily equivalent data.

The findings are documentary representations and theoretical relationships, and do not show how the proposed model enhances proficiency, engagement or intercultural competence. Multi-site designs within the specific BRI related institutions should be used in future studies. Repair/repertoire use can be explored through conversation analysis and multimodal discourse analysis, participant's interpretations through interviews and stimulated recall, and language development and equity outcomes through longitudinal mixed methods studies.

For automated systems, the report of performance should include the accuracy of each of the following: accent, first-language background, disability, and task type. Teachers and learners should be engaged in participatory studies to determine what is considered fair, feedback that is useful and acceptable data practices.

8. Conclusion

This study of the document analysis approach type is qualitative, and the results showed that the educational value of technology in multicultural BRI English classrooms had conditions, relationships, and languages. English can facilitate intercultural links, but such use is educationally defensible only if inequalities of access to and of use of English are acknowledged. Technology is most useful when it helps to facilitate meaningful interaction between peers, to make the repair/revision process transparent, to facilitate strategic mediation and where it is controlled by the teacher and the learners.

The proposed model is an iterative process of context mapping, layered input, structured interaction, analysis and production and a reflective assessment. It provides a framework based on research but does not state classroom effects that the document corpus is not able to prove. The next step is empirical testing in a variety of BRI settings.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Data Availability

The datasets generated during and analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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