



## English Master's Students' Idiomatic Expressions Understanding: Effect of Gender, Causes of Difficulties and Learning Strategies

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose of the study:** Many Master's students in English Language Education struggle to achieve the minimum TOEFL score. However, limited research has explored how gender influences their understanding of idioms. This study examined: (1) students' idiomatic understanding by gender; (2) gender effects on idiom comprehension; (3) causes of difficulty; and (4) learning strategies used.

**Methodology:** A mixed-methods design involving 212 English Master's students. Data were collected with tests, questionnaires, and interviews. Descriptive statistics were used to assess students' idiom comprehension levels, and the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was used to assess the relationship between idiom comprehension and other variables. For stages of qualitative analysis - data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing - were applied.

**Main Findings:** The study reveals a medium level of idiomatic competence and no significant gender effect—challenging prevailing assumptions of gendered pragmatic advantages. Key difficulties include limited exposure to authentic input, unfamiliarity with figurative meaning, infrequent reading, and forgetfulness. Students rely on strategies such as reading idiom materials, using dictionaries, making contextual inferences, and using multimedia.

**Novelty/Originality of this study:** The main challenges stem from limited exposure, literal interpretation, and insufficient cultural and contextual knowledge. Nevertheless, students demonstrated learner autonomy by employing diverse strategies such as using idiom dictionaries, engaging with authentic media, and contextual guessing. The study offers 'novel' insights for integrating idiomatic instruction to enhance postgraduate pragmatic competence and TOEFL outcomes.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Understanding idiomatic expressions is a key indicator of pragmatic competence in second language acquisition, especially at advanced levels such as English Master's programs. At Universitas Mataram, students are required to achieve a minimum TOEFL score of 500 to graduate, yet a significant number continue to underperform—particularly in the Listening section. One frequently reported challenge is the difficulty in comprehending idiomatic and colloquial expressions embedded in spoken English. This phenomenon is

surprising given the expectation that postgraduate students possess high proficiency in both literal and figurative language comprehension.

Despite a growing body of research on idiom acquisition among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, most studies have treated the causes of idiomatic difficulty and learning strategies in isolation. Very few have explored the intersection of gender, difficulty causes, and learning strategies, particularly among postgraduate learners who are expected to demonstrate advanced pragmatic and communicative competence. Idioms, as culturally loaded and non-transparent language units, are often excluded from formal instruction, and their interpretation requires a nuanced understanding of context, culture, and figurative meaning, skills many students have limited access to due to the lack of immersive, authentic language environments.

This study addresses these gaps by investigating the comprehension of idiomatic expressions among English Master's students at two universities. Specifically, it explores the level of idiom understanding, the influence of gender on idiomatic comprehension, the underlying causes of students' difficulties, and the strategies employed to overcome them. By integrating these variables, this research contributes a multidimensional perspective to the field of English language education and offers practical implications for curriculum design, language instruction, and assessment preparation, particularly for high-stakes tests like the TOEFL.

The research questions under investigation: 1) What is the overall level of English Master's students' understanding of idiomatic expressions? 2) To what extent does gender influence the understanding of idiomatic expressions among English Master's students? 3) What are the main factors that contribute to the difficulties experienced by English Master's students in understanding idiomatic expressions? 4) What learning strategies do English Master's students employ to understand and acquire idiomatic expressions?

Related to research question 2, below is the hypothesis: "Gender does not affect idiomatic expressions understanding of the English language master's degree students.". Idiomatic expressions are defined as fixed combinations of words whose meanings cannot be deduced from their individual components. Their figurative, non-compositional nature presents significant challenges for EFL learners, particularly in listening contexts such as the TOEFL test, where idioms frequently appear in authentic, rapid dialogue. Research has long confirmed that even advanced learners struggle with idiomatic comprehension due to cultural unfamiliarity, lack of systematic instruction, and minimal exposure to authentic usage in informal contexts [1]-[3]. These difficulties are magnified when idioms reflect culturally specific knowledge or historical references, which are rarely taught in formal settings [4].

Numerous factors contribute to learners' poor idiomatic competence. Chief among these are the absence of idioms in EFL curricula, traditional teaching methods that neglect figurative language, and the lack of real-life exposure to idiomatic expressions [5], [6]. Idioms are also complex due to their syntactic irregularities and unpredictable meanings, which cannot be inferred solely from their constituent words [7], [8]. Cross-cultural differences and the absence of equivalent expressions in the learners' first language further complicate understanding [9], [10]. In the context of English education in Indonesia, it is urgent to study the issues and the use of idiomatic expressions understanding because idiomatic expressions are not formally taught in schools.

Gender has also emerged as a variable of interest in idiomatic and pragmatic comprehension. Some studies suggest that female students outperform male students in tasks requiring inference, indirect meaning interpretation, and figurative language processing [11]-[14]. These findings are supported by neurocognitive research showing that women tend to use more indirect language and demonstrate broader brain activation in comprehension tasks [15]. However, other studies present inconclusive or contradictory results, indicating no significant gender-based differences [16]-[18], thereby creating a research 'gap' that this study aims to address.

The role of strategy in idiomatic learning is equally significant. Effective strategies such as contextual inference, paraphrasing, translation, visualization, and the use of multimedia have been shown to improve idiomatic understanding [19]-[21]. Integrated instruction combining listening, reading, and speaking is recommended to promote deeper idiomatic competence [22], [23]. However, these strategies are rarely emphasized at the graduate level, where students are often assumed to have already mastered idiomatic comprehension, an assumption not supported by empirical evidence.

Furthermore, prior studies have largely focused on undergraduate learners or general EFL populations, leaving postgraduate learners—particularly those preparing for professional and academic communication—understudied. Little is known about how Master's students, who are expected to have high language proficiency, actually perform in idiomatic tasks, what obstacles they face, and how they navigate those challenges. This study seeks to bridge that gap by adopting a comprehensive approach that examines gender differences, perceived difficulty causes, and learning strategies in a single framework. In doing so, it offers new insights, as a 'novelty' of this study, for enhancing pragmatic instruction and supporting advanced learners in mastering idiomatic English. This is the 'urgency' of this current study.

Thus, the 'novelty' of this study lies in its integrative approach, which 'aims' at examining: 1) The influence of gender on idiomatic understanding; 2) The underlying causes of difficulty in idiom comprehension; 3) The strategies employed by learners; and 4) All within the context of English master's students preparing for

professional and academic language use. This multidimensional perspective provides deeper insight into how idiomatic competence can be developed in advanced EFL contexts and contributes to the design of more targeted idiom instruction.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a mixed-methods design integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to achieve a comprehensive understanding of students' idiomatic expression comprehension. The research design adopted was ex-post-facto, as the study examined variables that were already present without manipulation [24]. Quantitative data were used to assess levels of idiomatic understanding and analyze gender-based differences, while qualitative data provided depth to explore causes of difficulty and strategies used by students. The rationale for choosing a mixed-methods approach was to triangulate findings across instruments and enhance the validity of the results [25]. This approach is particularly relevant when exploring language phenomena influenced by both cognitive and sociocultural variables, such as idiom comprehension and pragmatic processing.

The population consisted of 476 English Master's degree students enrolled at two universities in Indonesia. Using simple random sampling, 212 participants were selected, comprising 106 male and 106 female students across various semesters. The participants represented a diverse range of academic backgrounds within English education, and all had previously taken at least one standardized TOEFL-like assessment. The stratified balance between male and female participants was deliberate, to facilitate an equitable analysis of gender differences. All students voluntarily consented to participate in the study.

Three primary instruments were used for data collection: an idiomatic expression test, a questionnaire, and a semi-structured interview guide. These instruments were validated by experts, or expert validation (or judgment). A diagnostic test comprising 50 items (35 recognition and 15 production items) was designed to evaluate students' idiomatic understanding. The test was adapted from validated TOEFL materials and idiom proficiency studies [26], [27]. The test was piloted and revised for content validity through expert judgment, and its reliability was confirmed with Cronbach's alpha. A 25-item questionnaire was used to identify perceived difficulties in understanding idioms. Items were constructed using a Likert scale and reviewed for content validity by three applied linguistics experts. The questionnaire was administered digitally via Google Forms, and responses were automatically compiled. The structure focused on frequency of exposure, cultural familiarity, and knowledge of figurative meaning. A semi-structured interview was conducted with 20 randomly selected participants (10 males and 10 females from different semesters). The interviews aimed to delve deeper into the specific challenges and learning strategies students used. The guide was aligned with the questionnaire items and refined through expert validation. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using thematic content analysis [28].

Descriptive statistics were used to assess students' idiom comprehension levels. These were classified into five categories: very high (95–100), high (80–94), medium (60–79), low (40–59), and very low (0–39). To examine gender-based differences in comprehension, the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was used. Statistical significance was set at  $p < .05$ . Interview data were coded and analyzed thematically following [25] stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The goal was to capture recurring themes about learners' difficulties and strategies. Triangulation was ensured by comparing interview responses with questionnaire data, and emergent themes were confirmed by peer debriefing and respondent validation. This study combines both performance-based measures and reflective responses, in line with contemporary idiomatic research emphasizing triangulation and learner agency [29], [30].

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Level the Students' Understanding of Idiomatic Expressions

The students were tested with the idiomatic expressions understanding test, which contains 35 recognition test items and 15 'production' test items. The test contains 50 items. The following are the total scores and means of idiomatic expressions understanding of the entire test items (50) of 124 students of the English language master's degree at the University of Mataram and Mandalika University of Mataram. The scores of idiomatic expressions understanding of male and female students are put in Appendix.

The understanding of idiomatic expressions in English can be categorized into five levels based on the score ranges achieved by learners. These levels of understanding, namely: Very High level (95–100), High level (80–94), Medium level (60–79), Low level (40–59) and Very Low level (0–39).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Female	75.06	8.61	106

Male	65.66	6.59	106
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Based on the data in Appendix and by using these criteria, the results from an idiomatic expression test administered to 212 Master's students revealed an overall mean score of 70.36, placing the group within the *Medium* level. When broken down by gender, female students achieved an average score of 75.07, while male students averaged 65.66. These findings indicate that, despite being enrolled in graduate-level English language programs, the students had not yet attained a high level of idiomatic proficiency. The results suggest the following key points: Female participants achieved a higher average score (74.29) than their male counterparts (71.65), indicating a better overall understanding of idiomatic expressions among females. This outcome is particularly noteworthy given their advanced academic background in English. It may be reasonably assumed, therefore, that students from non-English majors would encounter even greater difficulties in mastering idiomatic expressions.

The difficulty in understanding idioms among second-language learners is well-documented. Idioms are among the most difficult aspects of language learning due to their figurative meanings and cultural embeddedness [31]. Similarly, It is reported that foreign language learners often struggle with both the comprehension and usage of idiomatic expressions [1], [32]. These findings are supported by [33], who identifies idioms as part of broader challenges related to colloquial language, such as reduced forms and shared cultural references. The current study reinforces the concerns raised in prior research regarding low idiomatic competence even among upper-level EFL learners [34], [35]. According to [31], this persistent difficulty is largely attributed to the culturally specific nature of idioms and the limited systematic exposure learners receive. In this context, idioms are not merely linguistic ornaments but are central to effective real-life and academic communication. A lack of idiomatic proficiency can therefore hinder learners' pragmatic competence, which is essential for nuanced and contextually appropriate language use.

Further insights into the causes of idiomatic difficulty are provided by [36], who identify several contributing factors: learners' struggle to derive the figurative meaning of idioms from the literal meanings of individual words; the infrequent use of idioms in everyday English exposure; the limited discussion of idioms in classroom settings; and the often ambiguous distinction between idiomatic and non-idiomatic expressions. These pedagogical gaps result in a significant discrepancy between learners' academic level and their pragmatic language abilities. Consequently, the medium-level performance observed among Master's students underscores the need for explicit instruction and targeted practice in idiomatic language use. As supported by [38], idiomatic competence cannot be assumed based solely on learners' academic standing. Without systematic and contextualized exposure, students are unlikely to internalize this critical component of language proficiency.

### Gender Affect Idiomatic Expressions Understanding Of The English Language Master's Degree Students

The output of correlation between gender and idiomatic expressions understanding is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Correlations between gender and idiomatic expressions understanding

		Female	Male
Female	Pearson correlation	1	.099
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.312
	N	106	106
Male	Pearson correlation	.099	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.312	
	N	106	106

Based on Table 2, the Pearson correlation analysis revealed no statistically significant relationship between gender and the comprehension of idiomatic expressions ( $r = 0.099$ ,  $p = 0.312$ ). The 95% confidence interval (.093 to .284) further supports the conclusion that gender does not have a meaningful effect on idiomatic understanding. These results suggest that gender does not significantly affect students' ability to comprehend idiomatic expressions. This finding contradicts earlier studies suggesting a gender-based difference in idiomatic comprehension. For instance, [11] reported that gender influences the understanding of idioms, highlighting a female advantage in pragmatic or figurative language interpretation. Similarly, [37] found that female auditors tended to interpret uncertainty expressions more conservatively than their male counterparts. These studies indicate that gender can influence how language, particularly figurative or nuanced expressions, is interpreted.

However, the present findings align with more recent research that reports no significant gender-based differences in idiomatic understanding. It shows that gender had no significant effect on the learning of English idiomatic and everyday expressions among Iranian EFL learners [15]. Likewise, It indicates that Afghan EFL students' gender did not significantly influence their responses to idiomatic expressions [17]. These converging findings suggest that the role of gender in idiomatic comprehension may be diminishing, particularly in contexts where learners have similar levels of educational access and exposure.

Several factors may explain the absence of a significant gender effect in this study. These include limited cultural knowledge of idioms, lack of exposure and experience in using idiomatic expressions, exclusion of idioms from formal syllabi and teaching materials, and insufficient opportunities for both male and female EFL learners to practice using idioms in authentic contexts [17][10]. Furthermore, It emphasizes that pragmatic comprehension is more strongly influenced by learners' strategies than by demographic variables such as gender. This perspective underscores the importance of instructional approaches that prioritize strategic learning over assumptions based on learner profiles [18].

### **English Language Master's Degree Students Difficult in Understanding Idiomatic Expressions**

Students enrolled in the English language master's programs at the University of Mataram and Mandalika University of Mataram face several obstacles in understanding idiomatic expressions. Qualitative data from interviews and questionnaires, supported by relevant literature, reveal that these difficulties stem from both cognitive and instructional factors. A primary obstacle is the lack of reading activities, which significantly impairs students' familiarity with idiomatic expressions. Idioms often resist literal translation, making it difficult for learners to decipher meaning based solely on individual lexical items. The absence of extensive reading reduces exposure to idiomatic forms, leading to limited understanding and poor retention. This aligns with [29], who emphasize that most students experience difficulties in acquiring, recognizing, and interpreting idioms due to insufficient reading practices.

Another major issue is low familiarity and pragmatic understanding of idioms. Students reported a limited knowledge base, infrequent use of idiomatic expressions in daily communication, and a struggle to grasp the figurative meanings embedded in such expressions. Idioms are rarely heard in academic or casual conversations, especially among non-native speakers. Although exposure through movies exists, students often fail to accurately interpret the idioms' intended meanings. Furthermore, idioms tend to be quickly forgotten because their meanings do not derive from the sum of their parts; individual words in idioms typically do not reflect their literal meanings. This finding echoes [4], who asserts that idiomatic meanings cannot be inferred literally, particularly when idioms are linked to specific socio-cultural, historical, or political contexts.

Students also encounter difficulty in predicting the figurative meanings of phrasal idioms, which often comprise complex structures not easily analyzed through traditional grammatical knowledge. However, presents an alternative view based on cognitive linguistics, arguing that the constituent words in idioms systematically contribute to the overall figurative meaning [38]. This perspective suggests that awareness of conceptual metaphors and figurative language may assist learners in decoding idioms more effectively. It emphasizes there is an interaction among context, metaphorical concepts, and the discourse situation in which metaphorical conceptualization takes place [39]. It indicates that living metaphors are more easily explained in the presence of a context, compared with idioms and proverbs [40]. In addition, living metaphors are interpretations of inconsistent complex meanings, which results in more than one interpretative option and brings about problems in interpretation [41].

In addition, students suffer from limited contextual familiarity, which hinders their ability to interpret idioms accurately. Comprehension of idiomatic expressions is strongly dependent on context, and idioms are rarely presented in authentic, meaningful situations within language instruction. This lack of context reduces learners' pragmatic competence. As reported in previous studies [42], [43], students who demonstrate higher levels of idiom familiarity and greater proficiency in reading and listening comprehension tend to outperform peers in idiom interpretation tasks. Familiarity and transparency ratings of idioms have also been positively correlated with comprehension success.

The qualitative analysis highlights five recurring themes related to students' difficulties: 1) Lack of Exposure: Idioms are rarely emphasized in textbooks, classroom activities, or academic content, resulting in minimal contact with authentic idiomatic usage; 2) Literal Interpretation Tendencies: Learners often rely on literal translations, which mislead their understanding. This phenomenon is consistent with findings from Irujo [44] and [7]; 3) Figurative Complexity: Cultural and lexical unfamiliarity increases the cognitive load required to infer idiomatic meanings [4]; 4) Forgetting and Retrieval Challenges: Due to lack of usage, idioms are not effectively internalized and are easily forgotten; and 5) Lack of Contextual Familiarity: The absence of idioms in context-rich environments hinders pragmatic comprehension and inhibits the development of idiomatic competence. These challenges support the assertions of [8] and [5], who highlight the structural neglect of idiomatic instruction in formal education. Rather than stemming from cognitive limitations, students' difficulties in mastering idioms reflect curricular shortcomings and insufficient integration of idiomatic language into pedagogical practice.

### **Strategies do the English Language Master's Degree Students at the University of Mataram and Mandalika University of Mataram apply to learn idiomatic expressions**

Students in the English language master's degree program employ various strategies to enhance their understanding of idiomatic expressions. These strategies are largely self-directed and reflect an adaptive shift

from traditional rote memorization to more contextual and interactional learning approaches. A common strategy reported is intensive reading and regular updating of idiomatic knowledge through idiomatic dictionaries, novels, and other English texts. This method allows learners to independently interpret meanings and use idiomatic expressions in real-life communication. As noted by Belousova [45], the ability to recognize and appropriately use idiomatic expressions serves as a key indicator of language proficiency. Therefore, exposure to authentic texts and sustained self-study play a crucial role in idiomatic competence.

Another frequently used approach is to first interpret idioms literally, then infer their figurative meanings. This two-step cognitive process helps learners transition from surface-level understanding to deeper semantic interpretation. It shows that similar strategies among EFL students in Jordan, who used paraphrasing followed by literal translation to grasp idiomatic meaning [19]. In addition, by identifying that predicting idiomatic meaning, translating to one's first language, and context-based guessing are among the most prevalent learner strategies [46]. In addition, listening to native speakers and watching video content such as YouTube or podcasts is widely adopted to practice both the pronunciation and contextual use of idioms. This strategy helps learners simulate native-like speech and understand idiomatic usage in natural discourse. It aligns with [36], who emphasizes the potential of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) tools in enhancing idiom acquisition.

Learners also seek clarification from peers or instructors, especially when encountering unfamiliar idiomatic expressions. This interactive strategy helps minimize misunderstanding and reinforces comprehension. This is significantly important, noting that insufficient understanding of idioms can significantly impair communication [47]. Story-telling was more effective than game and lexical awareness techniques, and storytelling is more effective English idiom comprehension, production and retention than semantic method [48]. Another critical strategy involves using intuition and contextual inference to derive meaning from the broader discourse rather than focusing solely on the literal phrasing. This is consistent with findings by [36], who observed that contextual inference is among the most effective strategies used by students dealing with idiomatic challenges. It is reported that contextualization was the most favored method among learners, encouraging teachers to emphasize key contextual clues when teaching idioms [49]. Additionally, visual tools and narrative texts have been shown to support idiomatic understanding, particularly in decomposable idioms [30], [50].

From the interview transcripts and responses to open-ended questionnaires, the most commonly mentioned strategies include: 1) Reading idiom-specific materials, including dictionaries and novels; 2) Watching videos and listening to native speakers through platforms such as YouTube or podcasts; 3) Guessing meanings based on context; 4) Using intuition and figurative inference; 5) Asking peers or instructors for clarification; and 6) Learning through application in daily communication. These strategies reflect learner-driven, multimodal approaches, consistent with [51] emphasis on contextual guessing, learning idioms outside the classroom, analyzing idiomatic structure, and using translation techniques. The prominent use of digital resources also illustrates students' ability to creatively compensate for limited formal instruction.

Several key insights emerge from this study: 1) Students' idiomatic proficiency remains moderate, indicating a need for more structured exposure to idioms at the graduate level; 2) Gender does not significantly influence idiomatic understanding, challenging common assumptions of gendered differences in pragmatic competence; 3) Major obstacles include limited exposure, cultural unfamiliarity, and insufficient contextual learning opportunities; and 4) Students demonstrate a wide range of self-directed strategies, many of which align with contemporary best practices in idiom instruction.

These findings support the growing scholarly consensus that idiomatic competence is shaped more by contextual exposure and learning strategies than by learner demographics such as gender or academic level [18], [29], [30]. In fact, major challenges in pragmatic competency include the absence of contextual teaching strategies and learners' low semantic awareness, and current textbooks and teaching methods remain structural and fail to engage pragmatic dimensions [52]. In addition, idiomatic expressions as a component of figurative language improve language and linguistic competence [53]. Understanding implicature in pragmatic contexts improves English proficiency, such as TOEFL scores [54]. Implicationally, curriculum designers and language educators are encouraged to integrate idiom learning into authentic, contextualized, and multimodal instructional settings.

The main challenges stem from limited exposure, literal interpretation, and insufficient cultural-contextual knowledge. The study offers 'novel' insights for integrating idiomatic instruction to enhance postgraduate pragmatic competence and TOEFL outcomes. In light of the novel insights and findings, the study presents several practical and pedagogical implications. Educators and curriculum designers should: 1) Integrate idiomatic expressions systematically into all levels of language instruction, particularly at the postgraduate level; 2) Employ contextualized learning methods that situate idioms within meaningful discourse rather than teaching them in isolation; 3) Leverage multimedia resources and interactive platforms to increase learner exposure and engagement; and 4) Encourage reflective and collaborative learning strategies, such as group discussions, peer teaching, and cross-cultural comparisons. Ultimately, idiomatic competence should be treated as a core component of pragmatic fluency, not an optional linguistic extra.

The reliance on self-reported data introduces potential bias, as participants may overestimate or underestimate their abilities. Additionally, the study focused solely on gender differences, without examining other influential variables such as language background, motivation, or learning environment. Nevertheless, this study offers a unique contribution by examining idiomatic comprehension at the Master's level, confirming that educational attainment alone does not guarantee pragmatic fluency. Addressing this will not only improve students' TOEFL performance but also prepare them for nuanced communication in academic and global contexts. So, the educations should encourage the students to actively learn and use idiomatic expressions in diverse contexts.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

These findings are important as they highlight a gap between academic proficiency and pragmatic competence among advanced EFL learners. Given the prevalence of idioms in tests like the TOEFL and in real-world communication, the results call for more explicit instruction and integration of idioms in curricula. Additionally, the study supports the value of multimodal, context-rich approaches to idiom acquisition, offering practical insights for educators and curriculum designers. This study found that English Master's students have a moderate level of idiomatic understanding, with no significant gender-based differences. The main challenges stem from limited exposure, literal interpretation, and insufficient cultural-contextual knowledge. Nevertheless, students demonstrated learner autonomy by employing diverse strategies such as using idiom dictionaries, engaging with authentic media, and contextual guessing.

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#### AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The first author prepared research proposal, negotiated the participants, collected the data, analysed the data, wrote research report, prepared paper for seminar, submitted the manuscript to JEE, revised the manuscript and actively corresponded with the editor. The second author also contributed to the negotiation with the institution and the participants, collected the data, analysed the data, prepared research report, and revised manuscript.

#### CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author(s) declare no conflict of interest.

#### USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGY

The authors declare that no artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used in the generation, analysis, or writing of this manuscript. All aspects of the research, including data collection, interpretation, and manuscript preparation, were carried out entirely by the authors without the assistance of AI-based technologies.

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