

## ARTICLE

# Effect of Blended Learning Approach on ESL Students' Hotel English Service Skills and Attitudes Towards Active Learning

Yumei Ma<sup>1</sup> , Roderick Julian Robillos<sup>2\*</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> School of Foreign Languages, Lijiang Normal University, Lijiang 674100, China

<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Education, Khon Kaen University, Khon Kaen 40002, Thailand

## ABSTRACT

This study aims to enhance ESL students' Hotel English service skills, promote active learning, and explore learner experiences using a blended learning approach via the Treenity platform. A Sequential Mixed Methods design combined quantitative pre- and post-tests with questionnaires and qualitative observations and interviews. 49 students from Tourism English majors at Lijiang Normal University taking a Hotel English course participated. The intervention covered three modules based on real-life hotel scenarios aligned with WorldSkills Occupational Standards. Blended learning combined Treenity's asynchronous online tasks with face-to-face role-plays, discussions, and feedback. Results showed significant overall improvement (pre-test  $M = 43.44$ , post-test  $M = 57.79$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ). The "Checking In" module had the largest gain (pre-test  $M = 30.03$  to post-test  $M = 66.92$ ), "Checking Out" improved moderately (pre-test  $M = 43.28$  to post-test  $M = 52.40$ ), while "Room Reservations" declined slightly (pre-test  $M = 57.02$  to post-test  $M = 54.05$ ), likely due to higher initial scores and task complexity. Student perceptions were positive ( $M = 4.12$ , "agree"), valuing Treenity's flexibility and autonomy. Engagement was strong, with 81% spending over 30 minutes on Lesson Plan #3 tasks and 96% participating in group work. Qualitative feedback confirmed the model's effectiveness in providing context-rich, practical learning, though some learners required additional scaffolding. This study contributes novel evidence supporting the integration of blended learning platforms tailored for vocational ESP contexts, demonstrating how combining authentic industry standards with flexible digital tools can significantly improve language proficiency, engagement, and learner autonomy in specialized ESL settings.

**Keywords:** Blended Learning; ESL Students; Hotel Service Skills; Attitudes Towards Active Learning; Treenity

### \*CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Roderick Julian Robillos, Faculty of Education, Khon Kaen University, Khon Kaen 40002, Thailand; Email: [rodero@kku.ac.th](mailto:rodero@kku.ac.th)

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# 1. Introduction

The hospitality industry has witnessed rapid growth in recent years, creating an increasing demand for professionals equipped with both technical expertise and effective communication skills, particularly in English<sup>[1]</sup>. In China alone, nearly 755,000 new hotel rooms were added between 2020 and 2022, generating approximately 1.2 million job opportunities<sup>[1]</sup>. Despite this expansion, many tourism and hotel enterprises continue to struggle with talent shortages, especially in roles that require foreign language proficiency to meet the service expectations of international guests. As the industry recovers and adapts in the post-pandemic era, higher education institutions are under increasing pressure to prepare graduates who are not only knowledgeable but also capable of handling authentic communication tasks essential to the hospitality sector.

However, vocational college graduates, particularly those majoring in Tourism English, remain underprepared in essential skills such as spoken Hotel English, real-life service communication, and customer problem-solving<sup>[2]</sup>. Teaching methods in many vocational institutions continue to focus heavily on theoretical content, neglecting to bridge the gap between language knowledge and its practical application in hotel settings. Classroom observations and teaching experience have revealed that students often lack confidence, teamwork skills, and the ability to engage meaningfully in service interactions—competencies crucial to success in the hospitality industry. These shortcomings highlight a serious misalignment between existing educational practices and the actual demands of the field, signalling the need for a pedagogical shift that not only builds language competence but also promotes active learning.

In light of these possibilities, recent studies have shown that blended learning enhances learners' motivation, independence, and academic achievement in language courses<sup>[3,4]</sup>. Blended learning combines face-to-face and online instruction to create a flexible and engaging learning environment. It allows students to access diverse resources, practice skills in various contexts, and receive timely feedback. This approach supports autonomy, active participation, and collaboration, which are important for developing effective communication and problem-solving abilities<sup>[3–5]</sup>. In vocational contexts, tools like Rain Classroom and Xuexitong have supported the delivery of content and skills development

effectively. Treenity, in particular, offers distinct advantages for applied courses, including ease of material distribution, facilitation of group collaboration, and flexible assessment options. Despite the growing application of these technologies in general higher education, their impact on specialized vocational English training—such as Hotel English for ESL learners—remains underexplored<sup>[6,7]</sup>, leaving a critical gap in our understanding of how these tools translate into improved practical performance in real-life service situations.

Although research has addressed blended learning in general English and hospitality management education<sup>[6]</sup>, few studies have investigated its role in directly improving Hotel English service skills and fostering active learning attitudes among ESL students in vocational settings<sup>[3,4,8,9]</sup>. Whether blended learning, particularly when implemented via Treenity, can effectively bridge the divide between theoretical instruction and applied hospitality communication skills remains uncertain. Addressing these gaps, this study investigates the effect of a blended learning approach using Treenity on ESL students' Hotel English service skills and attitudes toward active learning in a mandatory Hotel English course at Lijiang Normal University. By focusing on practical hotel scenarios aligned with industry standards, the study aims to provide empirical evidence on how blended learning influences vocational English competencies such as those of Hotel English service and active learning. This study offers valuable insights into the pedagogical integration of technology in hospitality education, contributing to the modernization of ESL instruction tailored to the evolving demands of the hospitality sector.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Blended Learning in Higher and Vocational Education: Models, Benefits, and Challenges

Blended learning, defined as the intentional integration of face-to-face and online learning experiences<sup>[5,10,11]</sup>, has become a dominant instructional model globally, especially accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>[3–6]</sup>. It leverages the flexibility of asynchronous digital resources alongside the interpersonal engagement of traditional classrooms, aiming to enhance learning effectiveness and efficiency<sup>[12]</sup>. Scholars have demonstrated its potential to foster critical thinking<sup>[13]</sup>

and deeper learning by redesigning how teaching and learning relationship's function<sup>[3]</sup>. However, the complexity of implementing blended learning varies by context, and its suitability depends on factors such as course content and learner preferences<sup>[14]</sup>. Consequently, educational institutions must consider flexible options that accommodate diverse student needs and course requirements.

In China, blended learning aligns with national education reforms emphasizing technology integration in vocational and higher education. Platforms like Rain Classroom, Xuexitong, and Treenity exemplify efforts to bridge online and offline learning, offering personalized content delivery and collaborative opportunities<sup>[2]</sup>. Research indicates these tools support autonomy and engagement, fostering inquiry-based and project-driven learning. Despite such technological integration, evidence remains limited on how these blended environments impact practical skill acquisition in specialized vocational areas<sup>[6,15]</sup> such as Hotel English. Furthermore, challenges like uneven digital literacy and motivation levels affect learning outcomes, underscoring the need for empirical evaluation within local educational settings.

While blended learning promises pedagogical innovation<sup>[3,4,6,15]</sup>, significant gaps remain in understanding its contextual effectiveness in English for Specific Purposes or ESP and vocational courses in China. Most studies focus on general benefits or technology adoption rather than measuring concrete outcomes like service skill improvements or active learning attitudes. This scarcity of targeted research is particularly evident in hospitality education, where practical language application is critical. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates the specific effects of a Treenity-supported blended learning approach on Chinese ESL students' Hotel English competencies and engagement, thereby contributing valuable localized insights.

## **2.2. The Role of Blended Learning in Developing ESP: Focus on Hotel English**

ESP is essential in hospitality for effective communication and service quality<sup>[16]</sup>. Western studies show that blended learning—combining real tasks with digital tools—boosts motivation and practical skills through hotel operation simulations<sup>[17–20]</sup>. However, research on blended learning in Hotel English in China is scarce, with few stud-

ies examining its impact on practical service language<sup>[21,22]</sup>. While Jiang et al.<sup>[23]</sup> emphasized online autonomy and offline tasks in a cloud-based model, gains in intercultural skills (e.g., appropriately greeting international guests, using culturally suitable expressions during check-in or room service interactions, and recognizing guests' cultural preferences in service delivery) were noted; however, their direct impact on hands-on hotel service skills (e.g., managing room reservations, handling guest requests, or addressing complaints using specific Hotel English expressions) remained underexplored. These gaps highlight the need to investigate blended learning's role in developing real-world hospitality communication skills in Chinese contexts.

Existing research on blended ESP instruction has largely focused on course design and theoretical outcomes, leaving practical communication skills in hospitality contexts underexamined. Additionally, the influence of blended learning on students' active participation and self-directed learning—key factors for vocational success—remains insufficiently explored. This highlights the need for empirical studies that bridge theory and practice by investigating how blended learning can enhance both Hotel English service skills and learner autonomy in vocational English settings.

## **2.3. Active Learning Approaches and Learner Autonomy in Blended Learning Environments**

Active learning engages students in meaningful, reflective tasks through cooperative, problem-based, or experiential activities, which are essential for developing deeper understanding and practical skills<sup>[24–26]</sup>. In vocational education, especially Hotel English training, techniques such as role-plays and simulations play a critical role in enhancing communication and service problem-solving abilities. De Bruijn-Smolters and Prinsen<sup>[3]</sup> noted that well-designed blended learning environments promote learner activation by combining online and offline experiences that encourage critical thinking and active participation. However, fostering positive learning attitudes among Chinese vocational students remains challenging, as traditional teacher-centered approaches often limit students' engagement and encourage passivity<sup>[27]</sup>. While blended platforms like Treenity offer opportunities to boost engagement, their effectiveness relies heavily on providing appropriate scaffolding and motivation

tailored to diverse learner needs<sup>[2]</sup>.

Empirical research investigating the influence of blended learning on ESL students' active learning attitudes within ESP contexts remains sparse. Local studies tend to focus on cognitive or linguistic gains, overlooking the affective domain crucial for vocational success. Addressing this gap, the current study examines how the blended learning approach shapes ESL students' attitudes towards active learning alongside their Hotel English service skill development. By integrating technological tools with interactive pedagogies, this research contributes to understanding how to foster learner autonomy and motivation in hospitality English education. In light of these identified gaps, the present study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. How does the use of Blended Learning Approach (utilizing the Trinity platform) improve the ESL students' Hotel English service skills?
2. Did students show a greater inclination towards active learning after the implementation of the Blended Learning Approach?
3. What learning experiences have the students gained in improving their hotel English service skills using Blended Learning Approach?

### 3. Materials and Methods

#### 3.1. Design

This study employed a sequential Mixed Methods Research (MMR) design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches<sup>[28]</sup> to provide a comprehensive understanding of the effects of blended learning on ESL students' Hotel English service skills and attitudes towards active learning. This mixed design allowed the researcher to capture both objective measures of student performance and the subjective experiences that shaped learning outcomes, offering nuanced insights into the intervention's effectiveness.

Quantitatively, the study measured students' progress through pre- and post-tests assessing Hotel English service skills, along with a post-intervention questionnaire evaluating attitudes toward active learning. Qualitatively, semi-structured interviews gathered in-depth reflections on the blended learning experience using the Treenity platform, combining online learning with face-to-face classroom ac-

tivities. This integration of data sources enabled a holistic analysis of how blended learning influenced both skill development and learner perceptions within the vocational English context.

#### 3.2. Participants

This study employed a single-group pre- and post-test design involving students from the School of Foreign Languages at Lijiang Normal University, China. Out of over 700 English majors, only two classes (186 students) were required to take the Hotel English course. The target group for this study consisted of 49 Tourism English majors, purposively selected based on their relevance to the research objectives. Purposive sampling<sup>[29]</sup> involves intentionally choosing participants who meet specific criteria. This method ensured the sample accurately represented students directly involved in the course, allowing for a targeted examination of blended learning's effects on their Hotel English service skills and attitudes towards active learning.

Despite initial recruitment, four students dropped out or faced technical difficulties, and some were absent during the intervention, resulting in 42 participants completing both pre- and post-tests. Meanwhile, 45 students who accessed the online materials via the QQ chatroom actively participated in group work and completed the post-intervention questionnaire. Then 10 students will join a semi-structure interview afterwards. This sampling approach allowed for rich, relevant data collection from those best suited to provide insights into how blended learning influenced their language skills and learning attitudes within the Tourism English context.

#### 3.3. Instruments and Data Collection

##### 3.3.1. Lesson Plans

The lesson plans in this study, grounded in real hotel work scenarios and the WorldSkills Occupational Standards (WSOS) for hotel reception, focused on three core modules: room reservations, checking in, and checking out. Each module was carefully structured into pre-class, in-class, and post-class activities to support blended learning via the Treenity platform. Pre-class tasks involved self-directed learning and pre-tests designed to build foundational knowledge. In-class sessions emphasized interactive, practical learning through group discussions, case analyses, role-plays, and skill demon-

strations, supplemented by teacher and peer feedback. Post-class activities reinforced learning with expanded online tasks, multimedia group work recordings, and follow-up assessments when needed. The lesson plans were iteratively refined mid-term to optimize the integration and sequencing of online and offline materials, ensuring alignment with blended learning principles and the evolving needs of the students. Furthermore, the revised lesson plans were presented to three experts who evaluated their appropriateness using the Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) method, ensuring the instructional design was both valid and aligned with the study's objectives.

### **3.3.2. Before Record Observation Notes**

The study employed Record Observation Notes as an important instrument to capture comprehensive insights into students' participation, performance, and interactions during offline learning sessions focused on Hotel English service skills. The teacher systematically observed and recorded three main areas: the amount of time each student spent actively engaged in learning, categorized into intervals of 0 minutes, less than 10 minutes, 10–20 minutes, 20–30 minutes, or more than 30 minutes; the degree of participation in collaborative and individual tasks, rated as "Never," "Seldom," "Occasionally," "Frequently," or "Actively"; and performance during a variety of practical activities, such as answering questions, individual sharing, group work, role-plays, and presentations. This detailed observation allowed the teacher to monitor not only the quantity but the quality of student engagement, highlighting how effectively students applied Hotel English service skills in realistic, interactive contexts.

### **3.3.3. Pre-Test**

**Pre-Test.** The pre-test was designed to encourage students' proactive learning before class by administering a series of multiple-choice, translation, and open-ended questions via the Treenity platform, which automatically scored responses. Each topic—room reservation, checking in, and checking out—featured 2 to 3 question types aligned with service procedures based on the researcher's extensive practical experience in five-star hotels, participation in provincial competitions, and the WSOS for hotel reception. The inclusion of WSOS marked a novel integration into the Hotel English course curriculum. Throughout the learning process,

any difficulties arising from the pre-test questions were clarified to support comprehension and readiness for in-class activities. Furthermore, to ensure validity, the pre-test was reviewed by three experts who assessed its appropriateness using the IOC method, confirming alignment with the study's objectives and instructional design.

### **3.3.4. Post-Test**

The post-test aimed to consolidate students' knowledge and promote deeper learning by using multiple-choice, gap-filling, and situational questions, again delivered through Treenity with automated scoring. These questions reflected the service procedures covered, referencing authentic workplace videos and WSOS standards, supplemented by translation and role-play tasks drawn from the textbook. To ensure test validity and reliability, the researcher systematically developed the assessments by analyzing educational requirements for Tourism English majors, reviewing relevant test design theories, and constructing items covering multiple formats. The instruments underwent rigorous expert validation using IOC, iterative revisions based on advisor and expert feedback, and pilot testing with participants to finalize the test quality before full implementation. The study employed these pre- and post-tests within a pre-experimental design to quantitatively measure improvements in Hotel English service skills and active learning attitudes.

### **3.3.5. Questionnaire on Students' Attitudes towards Active Learning**

After six periods of blended learning intervention, all participating students completed a self-designed questionnaire assessing their attitudes towards active learning, which was validated by the advisor and three experts using IOC. Administered online via the WJX.cn platform and accessible through a QR code, the 14-item questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) to measure students' preferences for the Treenity blended learning approach, satisfaction with the method, and self-perceived improvements in Hotel English service skills. The researcher followed rigorous development procedures, including a theoretical study on questionnaire design, expert review, and iterative revisions. A pilot test with 45 students from a related course demonstrated high reliability, with a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.87, confirming strong internal consistency. Data collected through the platform were

analyzed and downloadable in graphical and Excel formats, with the survey available until the end of the academic term to maximize participation.

### 3.3.6. Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured Interviews were conducted with voluntary participants to gain in-depth insights into their experiences with blended learning and its impact on their Hotel English service skills and attitudes toward active learning. Guided by five core questions and accompanying sub-questions aligned with the study's key themes, the interviews explored the effects of blended learning on practical language skills and student engagement in both online and offline environments. These questions were grounded in existing literature on blended and active learning, addressing a notable gap concerning ESL students' application of Hotel English service skills in specific vocational contexts. The predetermined themes focused on participants' interactions with the blended learning intervention, their engagement across learning modes, and their overall language development relevant to hospitality settings, providing a theoretical and practical foundation for understanding how blended learning influences skill acquisition and learner attitudes.

### 3.4. Intervention

The present research was completed via Treenity online and the traditional classroom offline. The whole learning process consisted of the following three stages: online preliminary learning stage (pre-class activities), offline deep learning stage (offline/ in-class activities) and online and offline consolidation and expansion stage (post-class activities). To illustrate:

In the pre-class stage, the focus was on stimulating students' motivation and encouraging independent learning to build foundational knowledge. Using the Treenity platform, the teacher uploaded learning materials such as PowerPoint slides, recorded explanations, topic-related questions, or pre-tests, allowing students to study individually or collaboratively at their own pace. After completing these tasks, students identified and noted their learning difficulties, while the teacher reviewed their performance to prepare for the next stage.

In the in-class stage, the emphasis shifted to developing students' problem-solving skills through guided learning and collaboration. The teacher addressed the difficulties noted

during the pre-class stage, providing further explanations and clarifications. Students engaged in group discussions, problem-solving activities, and cooperative learning to apply their knowledge to practical cases, deepening their understanding through interaction and case-based practice tailored to the lesson topics.

In the post-class stage, students consolidated and extended their knowledge and skills acquired from the previous stages. This was achieved through a combination of Treenity-based post-tests, offline assignments, and practical activities such as role-play and drama, allowing them to reinforce and apply their learning in varied, real-world contexts that matched the differentiated topics and objectives of the lesson.

### 3.5. Data Analysis

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were utilized for comprehensive data analysis. Descriptive statistics (frequency, mean, standard deviation) and inferential analysis were applied to compare pre- and post-test results. For qualitative data, responses from semi-structured interviews were thematically coded<sup>[28]</sup> to uncover emerging themes related to students' experiences and attitudes. The interview questions, designed around the study's objectives, were piloted with non-participants and validated by English experts for clarity and relevance. Consistency was ensured by asking all participants the same questions, and findings were triangulated with quantitative results to enhance the study's credibility.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Quantitative Analysis

#### 4.1.1. Students' Overall Pre- and Post-Tests

The data in **Table 1** show an overall improvement in students' Hotel English performance, with the mean score increasing from 43.44 (SD = 16.67) in the pre-test to 57.79 (SD = 24.60) in the post-test; this change is statistically significant ( $t = 0.308, p = 0.004$ ). By topic, "Checking In" exhibited the largest gain, with mean scores rising from 30.03 (SD = 19.78) to 66.92 (SD = 27.88), showing a highly significant difference ( $t = -8.038, p = 0.000$ ). The "Checking Out" topic showed moderate improvement, increasing from 43.28 (SD = 13.57) to 52.40 (SD = 24.21) ( $t = -2.244, p = 0.003$ ). In contrast, "Room Reservation" scores slightly decreased

from 57.02 (SD = 16.68) to 54.05 (SD = 21.73), though the difference remained statistically significant ( $t = 0.840$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ). Standard deviation values increased across all topics, indicating greater variability in student performance post-intervention: for example, SD rose from 16.67 to 24.60

overall, 19.78 to 27.88 in “Checking In,” 13.57 to 24.21 in “Checking Out,” and 16.68 to 21.73 in “Room Reservation.” This suggests heterogeneity in learning outcomes, with some students showing significant gains while others showed less improvement or decline.

**Table 1.** Students’ overall performance before and after the implementation of the intervention.

Hotel English Topics	Pre-test		Post-test		<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
Room Reservation	57.02	16.68	54.05	21.73	0.840	0.004
Checking In	30.03	19.78	66.92	27.88	−8.038	0.000
Checking Out	43.28	13.57	52.40	24.21	−2.244	0.003
Overall	43.44	16.67	57.79	24.60	0.308	0.004

#### 4.1.2. Students’ Attitudes Towards Active Learning after the Implementation of the Intervention

**Table 2** shows students’ overall positive attitudes toward active learning in the blended Hotel English course, with a general mean of 4.12 (SD = 0.765), indicating agreement with the approach. High scores were noted for flexibility and engagement, including learning at their own pace (M = 4.24, SD = 0.802) and combining online with in-class practice (M = 4.24, SD = 0.800). Students remarked, “The flexibility of blended learning allowed me to engage with materials at my own pace and revisit them as needed to reinforce understanding,” and “I found myself more engaged in learning when I could combine online exploration with in-class practice.” Digital tools like PowerPoints, quizzes, and videos were also appreciated (M = 4.18, SD = 0.834), alongside the Treenity platform (M = 4.16, SD = 0.852), with feedback such as “The digital tools used encouraged me to interact with content rather than just passively read or watch,” and “The online platform motivated me to participate more actively in the course activities.” The strong alignment between online and offline content (M = 4.11, SD = 0.910) further supported student engagement: “The online materials supported my active engagement with the course content and connected well with in-class learning.”

In-class activities were also well-received, with students reporting active participation in discussions, pair work, and group activities (M = 4.20, SD = 0.815), highlighted by “I actively participated in discussions, pair work, and group activities during in-class sessions.” Personalized learning choices contributed to sustained involvement (M = 4.20, SD = 0.786), with one student noting, “The option to choose learning tasks or focus areas helped me stay engaged and more involved in the learning process.” Students strongly agreed that the active blended approach improved their Hotel English communication skills (M = 4.22, SD = 0.795), supported by comments like “The combination of interactive activities and varied materials helped improve my Hotel English service communication skills.” Preference for active methods over traditional lectures was also evident (M = 4.18, SD = 0.806), as expressed in “I would prefer learning methods that include active and interactive activities rather than only traditional lectures.” Overall, students felt the blended format fostered greater responsibility for their learning (M = 3.91, SD = 0.949) and deeper understanding through task integration (M = 4.18, SD = 0.860), with remarks such as “The blended learning format helped me take more responsibility for my own learning in both online and in-class activities,” and “The integration of online and offline components encouraged deeper understanding through active participation in tasks.”

**Table 2.** Mean and Standard Deviation Results on the students’ attitudes towards active learning.

Statements	Mean	SD	Description
1. The pre-class and post-class activities encouraged me to actively prepare and reflect on the Hotel English lessons.	3.67	1.087	Agree
2. The blended learning format helped me take more responsibility for my own learning in both online and in-class activities.	3.91	0.949	Agree

Table 2. *Cont.*

Statements	Mean	SD	Description
3. The integration of online and offline components encouraged deeper understanding through active participation in tasks.	4.18	0.860	Agree
4. The online materials supported my active engagement with the course content and connected well with in-class learning.	4.11	0.910	Agree
5. The online platform (Treenity) motivated me to participate more actively in the course activities.	4.16	0.852	Agree
6. The digital tools used (e.g., PowerPoints, quizzes, videos) encouraged me to interact with content rather than just passively read or watch.	4.18	0.834	Agree
7. The flexibility of blended learning allowed me to engage with materials at my own pace and revisit them as needed to reinforce understanding.	4.24	0.802	Agree
8. The option to choose learning tasks or focus areas helped me stay engaged and more involved in the learning process.	4.20	0.786	Agree
9. The combination of interactive activities and varied materials helped improve my Hotel English service communication skills.	4.22	0.795	Agree
10. I actively participated in discussions, pair work, and group activities during in-class sessions.	4.20	0.815	Agree
11. I found myself more engaged in learning when I could combine online exploration with in-class practice.	4.24	0.802	Strongly Agree
12. I would prefer learning methods that include active and interactive activities rather than only traditional lectures.	4.18	0.806	Agree
13. I would choose a blended learning approach in future courses if it includes meaningful interaction and practice opportunities.	4.13	0.842	Agree
14. I felt comfortable and motivated to share my thoughts and opinions during both online and in-class activities.	4.07	0.963	Agree
Overall	4.12	0.765	Agree

Legend:

1.00–1.49 = Strongly Disagree

1.50–2.49 = Disagree

2.50–3.49 = Neutral

3.50–4.49 = Agree

4.50–5.0 = Strongly Agree

#### 4.1.3. Students' Participation and Performance During Offline Stage over the course of the intervention manifested in Record Observation Notes

In Lesson Plan #1 shown in **Table 3**, students exhibited significant participation and engagement during offline activities, with the majority of students (61%) dedicating more than 30 minutes to their learning activities. This extended time allocation corresponds with the highest participation levels in activities such as group work and practicing tasks, where 94% and 91% of students engaged actively, respectively. Additionally, 65% of students were found to engage frequently and actively in practicing activities, highlighting that the lesson allowed for ample opportunity for students to apply their knowledge in a hands-on manner. Despite this, there was a smaller group (13%) who participated for

less than 10 minutes in offline activities, possibly indicating either disengagement or a need for further motivation or scaffolding in the initial stages of learning.

Regarding performance during practicing activities, the table reveals that 60% of students actively answered questions, with 72% engaging in individual sharing. Group work also saw significant participation (91%), but group dynamics seem to have been less of a focal point compared to the individual and practice-oriented aspects of the lesson. These statistics suggest that while the lesson plan encouraged active participation, the more structured group work and presentation segments might require further refinement to ensure that all students contribute equally to the group learning process. Overall, the blend of offline activities, ranging from answering questions to practicing and presenting, facilitated an active learning environment that catered to varying degrees of student participation.



**Table 3.** Students' Participation and Performance During Offline Stage (Lesson Plan #1).

Time of Learning										
Statements	0 mins		≤ 10		10–20 mins		20–30 mins		≥30	
Participation in offline activities	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
					6	13	10	22	28	61
Degrees of Participating										
	Never		Seldom		Occasionally		Frequently		Actively	
Participation in offline activities	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
					7	15	8	17	30	65
Performance in Practicing Activities										
	Answering Questions		Individual Sharing		Group Work		Practicing		Presentation	
Performance in practicing activities	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
	28	60	33	72	42	91	43	94	26	57

In Lesson Plan #2 demonstrated in **Table 4**, students demonstrated continued engagement in offline activities, with 65% of the class spending more than 30 minutes involved in learning tasks, reflecting a consistent commitment to their learning time. The overall distribution of time shows that the majority of students were engaged in activities for varying durations, with 24% dedicating 20–30 minutes and 11% allocating less than 10 minutes to their offline learning. This indicates a more balanced approach in terms of time spent on activities, although it is worth noting that a portion of students (5%) engaged very briefly in offline activities, suggesting that these students may need additional support to maintain consistent participation.

Performance during practicing activities in Lesson Plan #2 was notably high across all areas, with 100% of students participating in group work and practicing tasks. Notably, 96% of students engaged in practicing, with a strong showing in answering questions (76%) and individual sharing (63%). This further demonstrates that the lesson plan successfully engaged students in collaborative learning, with group work and practicing exercises being the most prominent features of student performance. Given the high engagement in interactive activities, it is evident that Lesson Plan #2 fostered a highly participatory learning environment, though slight differences in participation rates across activities (e.g., individual sharing) suggest areas for continued refinement to promote further inclusivity.

**Table 4.** Students' Participation and Performance During Offline Stage (Lesson Plan #2).

Time of Learning										
Statements	0 mins		≤ 10		10–20 mins		20–30 mins		≥30	
Participation in offline activities	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
					5	11	11	24	30	65
Degrees of Participating										
	Never		Seldom		Occasionally		Frequently		Actively	
Participation in offline activities	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
					4	11	13	28	29	63
Performance in Practicing Activities										
	Answering Questions		Individual Sharing		Group Work		Practicing		Presentation	
Performance in practicing activities	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
	35	76	29	63	46	100	44	96	29	63

In Lesson Plan #3 as presented in **Table 5** saw an increase in overall participation compared to the previous two lessons, with 81% of students spending more than 30 minutes on offline activities. The distribution of time spent by

students across different intervals of learning time reveals that 31% of students engaged for 30 minutes or more, with 15% devoting less than 10 minutes to offline activities. This pattern suggests that a core group of students was highly

committed to spending extended time on offline activities, while a smaller group still showed a brief commitment, which could reflect differing levels of intrinsic motivation or the varying complexity of the tasks at hand.

In terms of performance, the results show that group work and practicing activities were once again the most significant areas of engagement, with 91% of students participating in answering questions and practicing tasks, and 96% actively involved in group work. The overall performance in

these activities, including the presentation phase, indicates that students were well-engaged in applying their learning through collaborative and individual efforts. The high participation in these areas underscores the success of active learning strategies in facilitating deep learning and interaction. This lesson plan also emphasizes the importance of group collaboration and individual practice in supporting active student participation, which ultimately promotes a more effective and engaging learning environment.

**Table 5.** Students' Participation and Performance During Offline Stage (Lesson Plan #3).

Time of Learning										
Statements	0 mins		≤ 10		10–20 mins		20–30 mins		≥30	
Participation in offline activities	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
							7	15	37	81
Degrees of Participating										
	Never		Seldom		Occasionally		Frequently		Actively	
Participation in offline activities	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
							7	15	37	81
Performance in Practicing Activities										
	Answering Questions		Individual Sharing		Group Work		Practicing		Presentation	
Performance in practicing activities	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
	42	91	44	96	44	9	44	96	40	87

## 4.2. Qualitative Analysis

### 4.2.1. Theme 1: The Affordances Provided by Treenity for Online Learning

- More Interesting and Enjoyable Learning Process

Students emphasized how Treenity made online learning more enjoyable and engaging by transforming traditional lessons into interactive experiences. The platform's use of multimedia and dynamic activities created a motivating atmosphere that encouraged active participation and sustained interest throughout the course. This shift from textbook reading to interactive learning helped deepen students' connection with the content and made the learning process feel fresh and exciting. By integrating videos, quizzes, and role-play simulations, Treenity not only captured students' attention but also supported diverse learning styles, making the material more accessible and appealing to a wider range of learners. As P1, P3, and P7 conveyed:

*"The online activities were enjoyable and made us excited when doing this"* —P1

*"The whole online learning part was interesting"* —P3

*"It's interesting not just reading the dialogues in the textbook all the time"* —P7

- More Active and Convenient Interaction Activities

A notable strength of Treenity, as highlighted by students, lies in its ability to foster more active and convenient interaction during online learning. Many learners shared that the digital environment enabled them to participate more confidently and freely in communicative tasks and group activities—something they found challenging in traditional classroom settings. For instance, one participant (P2) reflected on her personal growth, saying,

*"I myself was a shy girl. But I found myself engaging actively with my group members online."* —P2

Enhanced Learning of Hotel English and Active Participation. When the interviewees were asked about their opinions regarding the effect of the blended learning approach

on the Hotel English course, all participants unanimously and immediately described it as effective, reflecting strong and consistent positive perceptions. Without hesitation, they expressed appreciation for the learning experience, particularly emphasizing how the integration of both online and face-to-face components enhanced their overall engagement and understanding. Students highlighted that communicating with their classmates in both settings was not only enjoyable but also highly beneficial. The online discussions offered a comfortable space to express ideas, while in-class activities allowed them to apply and reinforce what they had learned. This combination of flexibility, interaction, and real-time collaboration made the learning process more dynamic, meaningful, and aligned with their personal and professional growth in English for hotel services. As conveyed by P1 and P5:

*“Blended learning could increase my understanding of the topic and the course. Because it improves my Hotel English service skills as well as made me participate actively.” —P1*

*“The activities through Blended learning were helpful because it enhanced my Hotel English service skills and really effectively improved my sense of participation even though it had only 6 periods in total.” —P5*

#### 4.2.2. Theme 2: Challenges Faced in Traditional Classroom Learning

Time limitation emerged as a prominent issue affecting both teaching and learning processes in the traditional classroom. Students expressed frustration over the insufficient time allocated for speaking practice, interaction, and completing group tasks during class hours. Hotel English, as a subject that relies heavily on situational practice, communication drills, and memorization of dialogues, was found to be particularly affected by these constraints. Due to rigid school schedules, instructors often had to prioritize content delivery over interactive engagement, leaving little time for deep reflection, role-play activities, or scaffolded learning. This pressure was particularly evident when students were expected to learn and perform complex tasks in short periods. For instance, P2 commented,

*“The English dialogue in the video was difficult to remember quickly with too many*

*long sentences. I thought it’s time consuming to finish this in the classroom.” —P2*

Limited Student Engagement and Participation. Another core challenge identified in traditional classroom learning was the limited engagement and participation among students. Many learners expressed discomfort speaking up in a large group setting, often due to anxiety or fear of making mistakes in front of their peers. For instance, P10 shared,

*“I was too shy to answer or ask questions during class because I didn’t want to say something wrong in front of everyone.” —P10*

#### 4.2.3. Theme 3: Favorable Views on Blended Learning for Hotel English Service Skills

##### • Enhanced Flexibility and Learning Autonomy

One of the key advantages students highlighted in the blended learning setup was flexibility, particularly regarding time and access to learning resources. The asynchronous component of Treenity allowed students to revisit course materials, such as instructional videos and role-play models, at their own pace. This was especially valuable for learners who needed more time to absorb vocabulary, sentence patterns, or cultural nuances in service dialogues. Learners felt empowered to take more control over their learning process, which in turn built their confidence and accountability. The ability to pause, rewatch, and practice with online content provided a low-pressure environment where mistakes could be made and corrected independently—something not always possible in live classroom settings. As P8 narrated:

*“With online parts, I could review the videos and do the tests when I felt ready. It helped me to understand better and not feel rushed.” —P8*

##### • Improved Practice and Real-Life Application

Another major benefit identified was the increased opportunity for meaningful language practice—a crucial factor in acquiring communicative competence in Hotel English. Students appreciated that blended learning created more time and space for role-plays, simulations, and guest interaction scenarios. The online materials offered pre-task exposure and preparation, while the classroom sessions allowed students to apply what they had learned in interactive ways. This

integration of theory and practice was particularly effective in building practical service skills, such as greeting guests, handling complaints, or offering recommendations—core competencies in the hospitality industry. As expressed by P1 and P7:

*“The role plays became easier when we already saw the videos and practiced online before class.” —P1*

*“I felt more ready to speak and do the presentations because I already learned what to say online.” —P7*

The ability to prepare and then perform increased students’ confidence and fluency, supporting a gradual, scaffolded learning progression. This finding resonates with communicative language teaching principles and reinforces the blended learning model as an effective medium for skills-based instruction.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Students’ Overall Performance in Hotel English Service Skills

The findings indicate a statistically significant improvement in students’ overall performance in Hotel English service skills after the intervention. The mean score increased from 43.44 (SD = 16.67) in the pre-test to 57.79 (SD = 24.60) in the post-test, with a  $p$ -value of 0.004 confirming the significance of this gain. This improvement supports previous research that blended learning can enhance language acquisition, particularly in vocational contexts like hotel service. For instance, Yizhen<sup>[2]</sup> and Yalçinkaya<sup>[7]</sup> noted that blended learning frameworks, which integrate online and face-to-face elements, significantly benefit learners’ engagement and retention. Additionally, Sun et al.<sup>[22]</sup> and Jiang et al.<sup>[23]</sup> emphasized the motivational benefits of blended learning by aligning with self-determination theory, highlighting how students’ intrinsic motivation increases when they are provided with flexible and interactive learning environments.

One student’s comment about the enjoyment and engagement with online activities reinforces the motivational benefits of blended learning, aligning with Robillos<sup>[29]</sup> who found that self-determined learners showed more interest and engagement in online learning environments. Bonwell and

Eison<sup>[26]</sup> also emphasized the importance of active learning in maintaining students’ interest, which likely contributed to the improvements observed in this study. One student shared, “I really enjoy the online activities. They are engaging, and I feel more motivated to learn.” This comment reflects how the online elements of the course helped to sustain student engagement.

### 5.2. Students’ Performances in Hotel English Service Skills across the Three Topics

The “Checking In” topic demonstrated the most notable improvement, with scores rising from 30.03 (SD = 19.78) to 66.92 (SD = 27.88), underscoring the effectiveness of blended, task-based learning in building essential hotel service communication skills. Ravichandran & Mahapatra<sup>[8]</sup> emphasized that real-world simulations in blended learning environments significantly benefit vocational education by providing context-rich, practical language use. Students echoed this benefit, as one remarked, “The role-play and video demonstrations helped me understand the hotel service processes much better, and it made the learning experience more enjoyable,” highlighting the value of multimodal materials. This aligns with Howell<sup>[24]</sup> and Prince<sup>[25]</sup> who noted that video resources and active learning improve practical language abilities, and with Robillos and Thongpai<sup>[30]</sup> who emphasized that task-based simulations enhance language retention through contextualized learning.

For the “Checking Out” topic, there was also a significant improvement from 43.28 (SD = 13.57) to 52.40 (SD = 24.21) ( $p = 0.003$ ), suggesting that structured support, such as guided practice and role-play activities, effectively reinforced students’ learning. Yalçinkaya<sup>[7]</sup> found similar benefits of role-play and visual aids in vocational English courses, enhancing comprehension in service contexts like hospitality. This was reflected in student feedback; one stated, “I found the varied materials very helpful. I was especially more confident in the ‘checking out’ process after practicing online,” indicating that the diverse, multimodal approach bolstered their confidence. These outcomes are also consistent with Chen<sup>[1]</sup>, who asserted that multimodal learning promotes better understanding and application of language skills in practical scenarios.

Conversely, the “Room Reservation” topic saw a slight decline in post-test scores, from 57.02 (SD = 16.68) to 54.05

(SD = 21.73) ( $p = 0.004$ ), possibly due to a ceiling effect from high pre-test scores and the increased complexity of the language required. Moreover, the cognitive demands of handling complex structures such as conditional expressions may have contributed to this outcome. Nonetheless, the online platform appeared to reduce learners' anxiety, as one student noted, "I was nervous about the language for room reservations, but the online platform helped me practice, so I felt less anxious when discussing it in class." This aligns with Jiang et al.<sup>[23]</sup> who found that technology-supported learning environments reduce anxiety and foster engagement. Additionally, Robillos & Bustos<sup>[31]</sup> argued that working through linguistically challenging tasks, even with fluctuating performance, can promote deeper cognitive processing and long-term language development.

### 5.3. Students' Attitudes towards Active Learning

This study revealed students' strong positive attitudes toward active learning in the blended Hotel English course, with an overall mean score of 4.12 (SD = 0.765), showing broad agreement with the approach. The highest ratings reflected appreciation for flexibility and self-paced learning (M = 4.24, SD = 0.802) and the integration of online and in-class activities (M = 4.24, SD = 0.800). One student remarked, "I like to learn in my own time. Blended learning made it easier to manage my learning when I was free," underscoring the value of learner autonomy. These findings support Lopez-Garrido<sup>[32]</sup> self-determination theory, which highlights autonomy as a key factor in fostering motivation and engagement.

Positive perceptions of flexibility and engagement in the blended learning model were further confirmed through semi-structured interviews. Students found the online components enjoyable and stimulating; one remarked, "The online activities were enjoyable and made us excited when doing this," while another noted, "The whole online learning part was interesting," emphasizing the fresh and engaging nature of the digital content. Additionally, students valued multimedia materials such as PowerPoints, quizzes, and videos, for enhancing interactive learning. As one student reflected, "The interesting and useful learning materials provided more chance for me to practice, and in the end helped to improve my Hotel English service skills, especially in terms of my

communicative skills," supporting Robillos and Bustos'<sup>[31]</sup> and Abdulrahman et al.<sup>[33]</sup> who stressed the importance of multimedia in developing practical language abilities in blended learning environments.

The use of Treenity, an online platform, was similarly well-received (M = 4.16, SD = 0.852), contributing to a more interactive and participatory learning experience. This aligns with students' perceptions that the technology-enhanced activities helped them engage in the course content in ways that were both convenient and motivating. As one student reflected, "With online parts, I could review the videos and do the tests when I felt ready. It helped me to understand better and not feel rushed." This finding echoes the work of Jiang et al.<sup>[23]</sup> and Sun et al.<sup>[22]</sup> who emphasized the value of integrating online platforms with face-to-face learning to provide students with flexibility, while also maintaining their engagement in real-time activities.

In-class activities, including discussions, pair work, and group projects, were also highly rated (M = 4.20, SD = 0.815). The interviews revealed that these activities encouraged students to participate actively, even those who were typically more reserved. Additionally, another student appreciated the opportunity to practice speaking skills before class: "The role plays became easier when we already saw the videos and practiced online before class." This illustrates how the blended model supported students in preparing for in-person activities, fostering a more comfortable and confident learning experience. These findings align with Prince's<sup>[25]</sup> and Bonwell and Eison's<sup>[26]</sup> assertion that active learning strategies, especially those combining real-world practice and pre-class preparation, foster greater student participation and reduce anxiety in communication tasks.

Despite the overall positive responses, some challenges emerged. Students noted difficulties with the complexity and length of English dialogues in the videos, which made quick memorization difficult and time-consuming in class. One student expressed discomfort with in-class presentations; for example, "It's stressful to discuss with my group members and then present to the whole class in a short time". This concern highlights lingering challenges with face-to-face interactions in blended settings, especially for students lacking confidence in public speaking. This finding is consistent with Li et al.<sup>[34]</sup>, who noted that while blended learning promotes positive attitudes, presentation anxiety remains a barrier for

some learners, particularly those with lower language proficiency.

The study demonstrates that the blended, active learning approach effectively fostered student engagement, knowledge acquisition, and skill development in Hotel English. The combination of online preparation and interactive in-class tasks enabled students to build communication confidence and deepen their understanding of course content. One student shared, “I felt more ready to speak and do the presentations because I already learned what to say online,” reflecting the preparatory value of the online components. These findings align with Yalçinkaya<sup>[7]</sup> who emphasized that blended learning environments equip students with the readiness and assurance needed for practical, real-world applications in vocational contexts like Hotel English.

#### **5.4. Students’ Participation and Performances During Offline Stage**

The findings of this study reveal that students actively engaged in offline activities across all three lesson plans, though with varying degrees of participation. In Lesson Plan #1, 61% of students spent over 30 minutes on tasks, supporting Bonwell and Eison’s<sup>[26]</sup> claim that active involvement enhances learning. High participation in group work (94%) and practice tasks (91%) further reflects Ravichandran and Mahapatra’s<sup>[8]</sup> assertion that active engagement correlates with better learning outcomes. Yet, 13% of students spent less than 10 minutes on tasks, indicating the need for greater motivational support, as suggested by Lopez-Garrido’s<sup>[32]</sup> self-determination theory. Student feedback also highlighted the value of online activities in boosting enthusiasm; one noted, “The whole online learning part was interesting,” underscoring the role of digital tools in enhancing engagement. However, challenges in face-to-face participation remained, with a student admitting, “I was too shy to answer or ask questions during class because I didn’t want to say something wrong in front of everyone,” suggesting the importance of offering more online practice to support less confident learners.

In Lesson Plan #2, 65% of students engaged in offline activities for over 30 minutes, showing sustained commitment and a balanced approach to learning. This supports Robillos and Bustos<sup>[31]</sup>, who noted that blended models combining individual and group tasks cater to diverse learning

needs. Full participation in group work (100%) and high involvement in practice tasks (96%). Furthermore, one student remarked, “Blended learning could increase my understanding of the topic and the course. Because it improves my Hotel English service skills as well as made me participate actively,” highlighting both skill development and active involvement. However, lower participation in individual sharing (63%) and question answering (76%) suggests the need for strategies to ensure more equal contribution, echoing Ravichandran and Mahapatra<sup>[8]</sup> observation that maintaining consistent motivation across all activity types remains a challenge in blended learning environments.

Lesson Plan #3 showed a notable rise in participation, with 81% of students spending over 30 minutes on offline activities, suggesting increased motivation as they became more comfortable with the learning structure, supporting Rahmadani et al.’s<sup>[35]</sup> view that competence fosters engagement. High involvement in group work (96%) and practice tasks (91%) reinforced the effectiveness of collaborative activities, echoing Abdulrahman et al.<sup>[33]</sup>, who emphasized the role of group-based tasks in enhancing participation and deep learning in ESP contexts. One student shared, “The role plays became easier when we already saw the videos and practiced online before class,” highlighting the value of online preparation in building confidence for in-class tasks.

Across all three lesson plans, active learning through group work and practical tasks proved highly effective in sustaining engagement. A student noted, “I felt more ready to speak and do the presentations because I already learned what to say online,” illustrating how online activities eased classroom anxiety by enabling self-paced preparation. Nonetheless, gaps remain in ensuring equal participation among less engaged or reserved students, pointing to the need for tailored scaffolding and motivation strategies as advised by Bonwell and Eison<sup>[26]</sup> to support diverse learner needs and maintain consistent involvement.

## **6. Conclusions**

The study illuminates the effectiveness of blended learning in enhancing students’ Hotel English service skills by integrating situational and interactive tasks that promote authentic language use, particularly evident in the improvement of the “Checking In” module. This approach fostered

greater learner autonomy, responsibility, and engagement through the use of digital tools like Treenity, supporting the shift from passive reception to active, task-based learning. However, the uneven progress among students and the decline in the “Room Reservation” component signal the need for more balanced task design and attention to individual learning differences.

Pedagogically, the study highlights the importance of blended, active learning in ESP contexts, offering learners practical, meaningful opportunities to apply language in realistic scenarios. The need for differentiated scaffolding remains essential to ensure all learners benefit from such interventions. The study’s novel contribution lies in showcasing how digital platforms, when integrated with experiential tasks, can transform ESP instruction by bridging classroom learning with real-world communicative demands, setting a foundation for more responsive and personalized language teaching practices.

## 7. Limitations

Despite the promising outcomes, this study has several limitations that warrant consideration. First, the design of the learning process could be refined to minimize inconsistencies in test performance during implementation. Ensuring that test difficulty levels and task complexities remain consistent across stages is essential to accurately measure learning gains and prevent potential declines in specific modules. Variations in task demands may have inadvertently affected students’ performance, underscoring the need for more carefully calibrated instructional materials.

Another limitation lies in the lack of customized, school-based learning resources. While digital materials such as videos, PowerPoint presentations, and case studies supported both online and offline learning, the absence of a tailored course book or structured handouts may have constrained the coherence and continuity of the learning experience. Developing context-specific materials remains a long-term task for future research. Furthermore, the considerable variability in students’ post-test scores, as indicated by high standard deviations, points to the intervention’s insufficient accommodation of learners’ diverse proficiency levels, styles, and needs. This suggests that while the blended approach benefited many, it was not uniformly effective, thereby lim-

iting the broader applicability of the findings across varied learner populations.

## Author Contributions

All authors made substantial contributions to the conception and design of the study. Y.M. was primarily responsible for data collection and analysis, as well as drafting the initial version of the manuscript. R.J.R. significantly contributed to the development of the research framework and provided critical revisions to enhance the manuscript’s clarity and rigor. Both authors jointly participated in the final editing and refinement of the paper. All authors have reviewed and approved the final version for publication.

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## Institutional Review Board Statement

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the Khon Kaen University Ethics Committee for Human Research (Approval No. HE673359). Informed consent was duly obtained from all participants, including students and experts. For those under 18 years of age, parental consent was secured in addition to age-appropriate assent. Data collection proceeded only after all institutional approvals had been obtained. Throughout the study, strict protocols were observed to maintain confidentiality and uphold participants’ rights, including the right to withdraw at any stage without adverse consequences.

## Informed Consent Statement

All participants, including experts and students, provided informed consent through formal documentation. For participants under 18 years of age, parental consent was obtained alongside age-appropriate assent forms. The research instruments and procedures were rigorously reviewed for ethical compliance, adhering to the principles outlined in the Belmont Report and the Good Clinical Practice (GCP) guidelines for Social and Behavioral Research. Data collection commenced only after securing all necessary institutional approvals, with strict protocols in place to ensure confiden-

tiality and protect participants' rights, including the right to withdraw from the study without any repercussions.

## Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the results of this study are available from the corresponding author upon justified request.

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## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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