

## ARTICLE

# Students' Perceptions of English Courses for Workplace Readiness at Applied College at KFU

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the perceptions of diploma students regarding professional English courses at the Applied College at King Faisal University in Saudi Arabia, focusing on their relevance, teaching methods, challenges, and impact on workplace readiness. As Saudi Arabia diversifies its economy under Vision 2030, English proficiency has become vital for employability in fields such as business, accounting, and computer science. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected from 300 students via a structured questionnaire. Results indicated that 85% of students found the courses relevant to their field, 82% agreed with the content aligned with professional language needs, and 83% reported improved professional writing skills. However, 25% faced difficulties with technical terms, and 45% desired more interactive activities and real-world case studies. Despite these challenges, 84% felt more prepared for workplace English, and 81% recommended the courses. The findings highlighted the effectiveness of English for Specific Purposes courses in enhancing workplace readiness but suggested improvements, such as incorporating more interactive learning, technical vocabulary instruction, and authentic materials. This study provides actionable recommendations for curriculum development to better align English for Specific Purposes courses with students' professional needs and Saudi Arabia's economic goals.

**Keywords:** English for Specific Purposes (ESP); Workplace Readiness; Saudi Arabia; Professional English Courses; Student Perceptions

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# 1. Introduction

In today's globalized job market, English proficiency has become an important skill for learners seeking employment in business and computing fields. As Saudi Arabia continues diversifying its economy under Vision 2030, the demand for professionals with strong English communication skills is increasing<sup>[1]</sup>. Professional English courses play a critical role in equipping students with the necessary language skills for workplace communication, yet their effectiveness in preparing students for real-world professional settings remains an area of concern.

Research suggests that English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses designed for students' fields of study enhance language acquisition and job readiness<sup>[2]</sup>. However, students often face challenges such as limited exposure to workplace-specific vocabulary, insufficient interactive learning activities, and a lack of confidence in using English in professional contexts. In the Saudi Arabian context, where Arabic remains the dominant language in many workplaces, students' perceptions of these courses can provide valuable insights into their effectiveness and areas for improvement. However, while professional English courses are implemented to bridge this gap, their effectiveness in preparing diploma students for real-world professional settings remains underexplored.

This study aims to explore diploma students' perspectives on professional English courses offered at the Applied College at King Faisal University in Saudi Arabia, focusing on their perceived relevance, teaching methods, challenges, and overall impact on their readiness for the workplace. By analyzing students' feedback, this research seeks to identify key factors that influence the success of professional English instruction and propose recommendations for curriculum development to enhance students' employability. This study not only examines students' perceptions of ESP courses but also contributes to the broader discourse on workplace readiness by focusing on diploma students in Saudi Arabia, a demographic that has received limited attention in ESP research. The findings provide insights into the specific needs of students in business, accounting, and computer programs, offering implications for ESP curriculum development in similar educational and economic contexts.

Previous studies on ESP have demonstrated the importance of tailoring language instruction to students' professional fields<sup>[2, 3]</sup>. Research suggests that ESP courses

improve job readiness by focusing on industry-specific vocabulary and communication skills<sup>[4, 5]</sup>. However, existing research has predominantly examined undergraduate and postgraduate students in Western or highly industrialized settings<sup>[6, 7]</sup>, leaving a gap in understanding how ESP courses influence diploma students in non-English-dominant countries such as Saudi Arabia. Additionally, while studies highlight the role of ESP in technical and vocational education, they do not fully address students' perceptions of ESP effectiveness, challenges, and desired improvements<sup>[8]</sup>. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining diploma students' perspectives on ESP courses at King Faisal University's Applied College, providing insights that can inform curriculum development and better align ESP instruction with workplace expectations.

# 2. Methodology

This study uses a quantitative research approach using a structured questionnaire to gather data on students' perceptions of professional English courses at the Applied College. The questionnaire was designed to assess the relevance, effectiveness, and challenges of these courses in preparing students for workplace communication. The participants of this study were diploma students enrolled in business, accounting, and computer programs at the Applied College. A total of 300 students participated, selected through convenience sampling.

The questionnaire included four sections: Demographic information such as gender and major, course relevance and content (alignment with academic and professional needs), teaching and learning experience (perceptions of instructional methods and effectiveness), and challenges and suggestions (difficulties and recommendations for improvement). Most items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, and an open-ended question at the end allowed additional feedback. The questionnaire was distributed electronically via Google Forms.

The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, frequency, and percentage) to summarize students' responses. Open-ended responses were examined thematically to identify common patterns in students' challenges and suggestions.

### 3. Literature Review

The growing importance of English proficiency in the global job market has been widely documented in academic literature. ESP courses, which modify language instruction to the needs of specific professional fields, have emerged as a critical tool for enhancing workplace readiness<sup>[6, 9, 10]</sup>.

First, it is clear that English proficiency in the workplace is very important, as English has become the *lingua franca* of global business, science, and technology, making it an essential skill for graduates seeking employment in competitive job markets. Alrashidi et al. highlighted the increasing demand for English proficiency in Saudi Arabia, particularly as the country diversifies its economy under Vision 2030<sup>[1]</sup>. Similarly, Al-Seghayer emphasized the role of English in facilitating international collaboration and access to global knowledge resources<sup>[11]</sup>. These studies show the need for English language education that aligns with the demands of the workplace.

Moreover, ESP courses are designed to meet the specific language needs of students in particular disciplines, making them more effective than general English courses in preparing students for professional environments. Hutchinson et al. argued that ESP courses bridge the gap between academic learning and professional practice by focusing on the linguistic and communicative demands of specific fields<sup>[2]</sup>. This view is supported by Rus who emphasized the importance of specialized vocabulary and authentic materials in ESP instruction<sup>[7]</sup>.

Several studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of ESP courses in improving students' language skills and job readiness. For example, Belcher found that ESP courses significantly enhance students' ability to communicate in professional settings, while Golub and Tuzlukova et al. highlighted the role of ESP in developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills<sup>[4, 12, 13]</sup>. In the Saudi context, Al-Mahrooqi et al. reported that ESP courses are particularly valuable for students in technical and vocational fields, where English proficiency is essential for accessing international resources and opportunities<sup>[8]</sup>. Research has shown that interactive and experiential learning activities, such as case studies, role-playing, and group projects, are particularly effective in enhancing students' language skills and confidence. Researchers found that integrating gamification techniques in university English courses improved students' participation,

motivation, and overall language proficiency<sup>[4, 5, 7]</sup>. This suggests that ESP courses may benefit from incorporating interactive elements such as role-playing, simulations, and game-based assessments to create a more dynamic learning environment. Similarly, the use of authentic materials, such as industry-specific documents and multimedia resources, can help bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world professional contexts<sup>[3]</sup>.

Despite their potential, ESP courses face several challenges that can hinder their effectiveness. Sandwall identified limited exposure to workplace-specific vocabulary and insufficient opportunities for interactive learning as key barriers to language acquisition<sup>[14]</sup>. Similarly, Hyland noted that students often struggle to apply their language skills in real-world professional contexts due to a lack of confidence and practical experience<sup>[15]</sup>.

In Saudi Arabia, the dominance of Arabic in many workplaces presents additional challenges for ESP instruction. Faruk stated that students often perceive a disconnect between the content of English courses and the practical demands of their future careers<sup>[16]</sup>. This perception is compounded by the limited use of English in everyday life, which restricts students' opportunities to practice and reinforce their language skills<sup>[11]</sup>.

In the Saudi context, studies have highlighted the importance of creating a supportive learning environment that encourages students to practice speaking English without fear of making mistakes<sup>[8]</sup>. Additionally, the integration of technology-enhanced learning tools, such as virtual simulations and online collaboration platforms, has been shown to improve engagement and learning outcomes<sup>[17]</sup>. Moreover, a recent study by Abu Guba et al. has demonstrated the effectiveness of AI-driven tools such as Grammarly in supporting EFL learners, particularly at lower proficiency levels<sup>[18]</sup>. These tools help address common writing errors, improve students' confidence in academic writing, and provide instant feedback, which is crucial for learners in ESP courses who may lack sufficient exposure to academic and workplace-specific English.

While the existing literature provided valuable insights into the role of ESP courses in enhancing workplace readiness, several gaps remain. First, there is a lack of research focusing specifically on diploma students, who may have different needs and challenges compared to undergraduate or

postgraduate students. Second, a few studies have explored the long-term impact of ESP courses on students' employability and career progression. Finally, there is limited research on the effectiveness of ESP courses in the Saudi Arabian context, particularly in light of the country's ongoing economic and educational reforms under Vision 2030.

While previous studies emphasized the effectiveness of ESP in workplace readiness, they often focus on undergraduate or postgraduate students, neglecting the unique challenges faced by diploma students<sup>[2, 4, 15]</sup>. Additionally, much of the existing research has been conducted in Western or highly industrialized contexts, raising questions about the applicability of their findings to the Saudi Arabian educational and economic landscape. This study fills these gaps by exploring ESP effectiveness in diploma-level education within the evolving labor market of Saudi Arabia.

Several studies have highlighted the role of soft skills alongside English proficiency in ensuring workplace readiness, particularly in ESP contexts. In addition to linguistic competence, employers increasingly seek candidates with strong communication, teamwork, and problem-solving abilities<sup>[19]</sup>. Studies have shown that ESP courses integrating soft skills training can better prepare students for professional environments by enhancing their ability to navigate workplace interactions and collaborate effectively<sup>[20]</sup>. This is particularly relevant for diploma students, who may enter the workforce sooner and require both technical and interpersonal competencies to succeed. Moreover, Takács et al. found that ESP programs incorporating project-based learning and industry collaboration significantly improved students' confidence in using English for professional communication<sup>[21]</sup>. These findings suggest that ESP instruction should go beyond language acquisition to include practical workplace scenarios and skills development, aligning with the evolving demands of the job market.

This study aims to contribute to the existing literature by exploring the perspectives of diploma students in Saudi Arabia and providing actionable recommendations for improving ESP instruction. Thus, its objectives are as follows:

- bTo investigate diploma students' perceptions of the relevance, effectiveness, and challenges of professional English courses in enhancing their workplace readiness.

- To provide evidence-based recommendations for improving the design and delivery of professional English

courses to better align with the needs of diploma students and enhance their employability.

## 4. Results and Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that students generally perceive these courses as relevant to their academic and professional needs, particularly in improving professional writing and workplace communication. However, challenges remain, including difficulties with technical vocabulary and a desire for more interactive and real-world learning experiences. Despite these challenges, the majority of students reported feeling more prepared for workplace English, reinforcing the value of ESP instruction in diploma programs.

In analyzing the results, the study found that the majority of students reported high levels of agreement regarding the relevance and alignment of professional English courses with their academic and professional needs, as shown in **Table 1**.

As shown in **Table 1**, 85% of students agreed or strongly agreed that the courses were relevant to their field of study. Similarly, 82% found the course content aligned with their future professional language needs, and 78% considered the vocabulary and terminology taught in the courses useful for their professional field. Additionally, 80% agreed that the courses provided realistic examples related to their field of study, and 83% reported an improved ability to write professional emails, reports, and documents. These results indicate that the courses are effectively selected to meet students' academic and career-related language needs.

These findings suggest several important implications for curriculum design and instruction. First, the high levels of agreement on the relevance and alignment of courses with students' professional needs indicate that the current curriculum is effectively addressing the linguistic demands of the workplace. This alignment is crucial for preparing students for the global job market, especially in fields such as business, accounting, and computer science, where English proficiency is vital. Educators should continue modifying course content to meet the specific needs of each discipline, ensuring students acquire specialized vocabulary and communication skills. Second, 80% of students who agreed that the courses provided realistic examples from their field highlighted the importance of incorporating authentic ma-

**Table 1.** Summary of Students' Responses.

Statement	Percentage of Agreement: (Agree/Strongly Agree)
Courses are relevant to their field of study	85 %
Course content aligns with future professional language needs	82 %
Vocabulary and terminology are useful for the professional field	78 %
Courses provide realistic examples related to the field of study	80 %
Improved ability to write professional emails, reports, and documents	83 %

materials and real-world scenarios. This approach enhances students' understanding of course content and connects classroom learning to professional practice. Collaborating with industry professionals to create case studies, simulations, and projects that reflect current workplace challenges could further strengthen this aspect. Third, the significant improvement in students' professional writing skills, particularly in emails, reports, and documents, shows the effectiveness of the courses in developing essential workplace communication abilities. To further support this progress, instructors could introduce more intensive writing assignments and provide detailed feedback. Fourth, while most students found the vocabulary taught in the courses useful, a quarter of them reported difficulty with technical terms, suggesting the need for more focused instruction in this area. Educators could address this by integrating glossaries, visual aids, and context-based exercises, as well as incorporating multimedia resources such as videos and podcasts to expose students to technical language in authentic contexts. Finally, despite positive feedback overall, nearly half of the students expressed a desire for more interactive activities and real-world case studies. This feedback suggests that while current teaching methods are effective, there is potential for more engagement through collaborative activities such as group projects, role-playing, and peer reviews.

Regarding the teaching methods and learning experience, the results showed that students expressed positive perceptions of the teaching methods and overall learning experience, as shown in **Table 2**.

As illustrated in **Table 2**, 77% of students agreed or strongly agreed that the course materials (books, presentations, electronic resources) helped them understand the topics. Furthermore, 72% found the teaching methods enjoyable and effective, and 81% agreed that instructors explained the content clearly and provided useful guidance. A significant majority (76%) felt comfortable asking questions and participating in class discussions, and 73% reported that the

courses provided sufficient practical activities, such as case studies, role-playing, and group projects, to improve their English skills. Additionally, 78% found the feedback on their assignments and language performance helpful for improvement, and 82% agreed that the course difficulty level matched their English proficiency. These findings highlight the effectiveness of the teaching methods and the supportive learning environment provided by the courses.

The findings reveal several key implications for teaching practices. First, 77% of students who found course materials helpful suggest that the selection and presentation of resources, including books, presentations, and electronic resources, are well-aligned with students' learning needs. To maintain this positive trend, instructors should continue updating and diversifying materials to reflect current industry standards, incorporating multimedia resources such as videos, podcasts, and interactive online platforms to cater to various learning styles. Second, 72% who found teaching methods enjoyable and effective highlighted the importance of creating an engaging and interactive classroom environment. To further enhance engagement, instructors could explore innovative teaching strategies such as gamification, flipped classrooms, and technology-enhanced learning tools to make lessons more dynamic. Third, 81% agree that instructors explain content clearly and provide useful guidance, indicating the effectiveness of the teaching approach in fostering understanding and confidence. To build on this strength, instructors could offer additional one-on-one support sessions or create online forums for students to seek clarification and discuss course-related topics. Fourth, 76% of students who felt comfortable asking questions and participating in class discussions reflect a supportive learning environment essential for active participation and collaboration. To encourage further participation, instructors could incorporate group-based activities such as debates, peer reviews, and collaborative projects to create opportunities for students to practice language skills in a low-pressure setting. Fifth, 73%

**Table 2.** Students' responses regarding teaching methods and learning experience.

Statement	Percentage of Agreement: (Agree/Strongly Agree)
Course materials helped in understanding topics	77%
Teaching methods were enjoyable and effective	72%
Instructors explained content clearly and provided useful guidance	81%
Felt comfortable asking questions and participating in class discussions	76%
Courses provided sufficient practical activities	73%
Feedback on assignments and language performance was helpful for improvement	78%
Course difficulty level matched English proficiency	82%

positive feedback on practical activities, such as case studies, role-playing, and group projects, highlights the value of hands-on learning experiences in improving English skills. To maximize their impact, instructors could collaborate with industry professionals to design case studies and projects that reflect current workplace challenges. Sixth, 78% who found feedback on assignments helpful underscore the importance of timely and constructive feedback. Instructors could enhance this aspect by using rubrics and detailed comments to provide specific guidance on improvement. Finally, 82% agreement that course difficulty matched students' English proficiency suggests that the courses are well-calibrated to meet students' needs. To sustain this balance, instructors could conduct periodic assessments to gauge students' proficiency levels and adjust course content as needed.

With regard to the challenges and areas for improvement, while the overall feedback was positive, the results found that some students identified areas for improvement as explained in **Table 3**.

As shown in **Table 3**, 25% of students reported difficulty understanding technical terms, suggesting a need for more focused instruction on specialized vocabulary. Additionally, 45% expressed a desire for more interactive activities and real-world case studies, indicating an opportunity to enhance engagement and practical application. Despite these challenges, the majority of students (84%) felt more prepared to use English in their future jobs after completing the courses, and 81% recommended the courses to their peers.

The findings highlighted several challenges and offered solutions to address them. First, 25% of students who reported difficulty understanding technical terms emphasize the need for more focused instruction on specialized vocabulary. This is especially important in fields such as business, accounting, and computer science, where technical terms are crucial for professional communication. To ad-

dress this challenge, instructors could introduce glossaries, or vocabulary lists specific to each field, accompanied by definitions, examples, and contextual usage. Visual aids, such as diagrams, charts, and infographics, could help students grasp complex terms, while context-based exercises such as reading technical documents or listening to industry-specific podcasts would reinforce understanding. Additionally, scaffolded learning opportunities, where technical terms are introduced gradually and reinforced through repeated exposure, could enhance retention and mastery. Second, 45% of students expressed a desire for more interactive activities and real-world case studies signal an opportunity to increase engagement and practical application. Interactive and experiential learning activities are key to helping students apply theoretical knowledge to real-world scenarios. To address this feedback, educators could incorporate case studies based on actual workplace situations, allowing students to analyze problems, propose solutions, and practice language skills in a professional context. Role-playing activities, such as mock meetings, presentations, or client interactions, could simulate real-world communication scenarios, while group projects and collaborative tasks would encourage teamwork and peer learning. Furthermore, leveraging technology-enhanced learning tools, such as virtual simulations or online collaboration platforms, could create immersive and interactive learning experiences.

Despite the challenges, the fact that 84% of students felt more prepared to use English in their future jobs and 81% recommended the courses to their peers underscores the overall effectiveness of the courses in enhancing workplace readiness. These results suggest that the courses are successfully equipping students with the language skills and confidence needed to navigate professional environments. However, addressing the identified challenges can further strengthen students' preparedness and ensure that they are fully equipped to meet the demands of their future careers.

**Table 3.** Challenges and areas for improvement.

Statement	Percentage of Agreement
Experienced difficulty understanding technical terms	25%
Desired more interactive activities and real-world case studies	45%
Felt more prepared to use English in future jobs after completing the courses	84%
Recommended the courses to their peers	81%

The earlier findings suggest that ESP curriculum developers should integrate more industry-specific case studies and interactive learning methods to bridge the gap between classroom instruction and workplace demands. Given that 45% of students expressed a desire for more real-world case studies, instructors could collaborate with industry professionals to design practical scenarios that reflect workplace communication challenges. Additionally, since 25% of students struggled with technical vocabulary, courses should incorporate targeted vocabulary-building exercises, including digital glossaries, contextual learning through multimedia, and scaffolded practice activities to reinforce understanding over time.

The study's findings align with resource dependence theory, which suggests that students recognize ESP courses as essential resources for workplace communication. The high agreement (85%) on course relevance and (84%) on workplace preparedness indicates that students perceive these courses as key assets for employability, reinforcing the theory's premise that language proficiency is a vital resource in professional settings. Furthermore, agency theory is reflected in students' desire for more interactive learning (45%), demonstrating that students seek greater control over their learning experiences through engagement with real-world case studies and practical activities. These theoretical perspectives provide a deeper understanding of the data, suggesting that ESP course design should not only provide linguistic input but also empower students as active agents in their professional language development.

In addition, these findings align with previous research emphasizing the effectiveness of ESP courses in enhancing job readiness<sup>[4, 15]</sup>. The high agreement on course relevance and content alignment supports the assertion of Dashtestani that ESP courses bridge the gap between academic learning and professional communication<sup>[18]</sup>. However, the study also confirms challenges identified by Basturkmen and Sandwall, such as the need for better vocabulary instruction and

more interactive learning<sup>[3, 14]</sup>. In the Saudi Arabian context, these findings provide evidence supporting Vision 2030's emphasis on workforce preparation, suggesting that ESP courses should be continuously refined to meet evolving industry demands.

Given that 45% of students expressed a need for more interactive activities, it is recommended that ESP courses integrate role-playing, case studies, and workplace simulations to provide students with real-world communication practice. Moreover, to assist the 25% of students who reported difficulty with technical terms, instructors should incorporate glossaries, multimedia explanations, and industry-specific documents to reinforce understanding. Finally, following Abu Qub'a et al. who highlighted the benefits of gamification in ESP courses, incorporating AI-driven tools such as Grammarly and virtual simulations could enhance language learning outcomes<sup>[22]</sup>.

Unlike previous ESP studies that focused on undergraduate or postgraduate students, this research examines diploma students, offering insights into their specific challenges and needs<sup>[6, 7]</sup>. As Saudi Arabia emphasizes workforce readiness, this study provides recommendations to align ESP courses with evolving labor market demands. By identifying students' desire for more real-world case studies, improved technical vocabulary instruction, and interactive learning, this study provides actionable recommendations for ESP curriculum developers.

## 5. Conclusions

This study has explored the role of professional English courses in enhancing workplace readiness among diploma students at King Faisal University's Applied College in Saudi Arabia. By examining students' perceptions of the relevance, teaching methods, challenges, and overall impact of these courses, the research provides valuable insights into their effectiveness and areas for improvement. The findings under-

score the critical importance of professional English courses in equipping students with the language skills and confidence needed to succeed in the globalized job market, particularly in the context of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, which emphasizes the development of a skilled and competitive workforce. While studies such as those by Al-Mahrooqi et al. and Faruk examined ESP effectiveness in the Gulf region, they primarily focused on undergraduate education<sup>[8, 16]</sup>. This study fills a gap by addressing the perspectives of diploma students, who often have different needs and career pathways.

The findings of this study align with those of Hutchinson, who emphasized the role of ESP courses in bridging the gap between academic learning and professional practice<sup>[2]</sup>. Similarly, Belcher and Flowerdew found that ESP courses improve job readiness by focusing on industry-specific communication skills<sup>[4, 5]</sup>. However, unlike Basturkmen, who noted that ESP courses often lack sufficient interactive learning opportunities, this study found that 73% of students agreed that their courses included practical activities<sup>[3]</sup>. This suggests that recent curriculum modifications may have improved student engagement.

The study highlights the significance of aligning English language instruction with the specific demands of students' academic and professional fields. Using course content to meet the linguistic and communicative needs of industries such as business, accounting, and computer science ensures that students acquire the specialized vocabulary and practical skills required for workplace success. Furthermore, positive feedback on teaching methods and learning experiences demonstrates the value of creating a supportive and engaging classroom environment that fosters active participation, collaboration, and skill development.

A key strength of this study is its focus on diploma students, an often-overlooked group in ESP research, providing unique insights into their educational experiences and workplace readiness. Additionally, the large sample size (300 students) enhances the reliability of the findings. However, the study has some limitations. The use of self-reported data may introduce response bias, as students' perceptions may not fully reflect their actual preparedness. Furthermore, the study is limited to one institution, which may affect the generalizability of the findings to other educational settings. Future research should incorporate longitudinal studies to track students' actual workplace performance after complet-

ing ESP courses.

However, the research also identifies specific challenges that need to be addressed to further enhance the effectiveness of professional English courses. These include difficulties in understanding technical terms and a desire for more interactive, real-world learning activities. Addressing these challenges through targeted interventions, such as incorporating more hands-on activities, leveraging technology-enhanced learning tools, and collaborating with industry professionals, can help bridge the gap between classroom learning and professional practice. Ultimately, the findings of this study contribute to the ongoing discourse on ESP education and provide actionable recommendations for curriculum developers and instructors to better meet the needs of students and employers in Saudi Arabia and beyond.

## Author Contributions

The author was solely responsible for the conception, design, data collection, analysis, and interpretation of the study. Additionally, the author drafted and revised the manuscript, approved the final version, and is accountable for all aspects of the work.

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## Institutional Review Board Statement

All procedures followed were in accordance with the ethical standards of the responsible committee on human experimentation. This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of King Faisal University, with ethics approval reference<sup>[3–6, 6, 9, 19, 20]</sup>. The standards are also in line with the Helsinki Declaration of 1975, as revised in 2000. Informed written consent was obtained from all participants for being included in the study.

## Informed Consent Statement

Informed written consent was obtained from all participants for being included in the study.



## Data Availability Statement

Data is available upon reasonable request.

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## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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