

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Deconstructing Native Speakerism in Scottish Academia: An Intercultural Relationship Approach

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Abstract

Native speakerism is a pervasive language ideology that shapes sociolinguistic hierarchies in multilingual academic settings. Although extensively examined within English language teaching (ELT) research, its broader impact on communication and sociocultural identity among multilingual international students (MIS) in higher education remains underexplored. This study expands this discussion beyond ELT contexts, framing native speakerism as a socially embedded and process-oriented phenomenon perpetuated through institutional discourses in English-dominant universities. Drawing on sociolinguistic perspectives, this study investigated how native speakerism influenced students' identities and communicative practices at a Scottish university. The study employed a qualitative document analysis of university texts alongside semi-structured interviews with seven students (six international and one domestic). These datasets were examined using critical discourse analysis and thematic analysis to explore how institutional policies and peer interactions either perpetuate or challenge native speakerist ideologies. Findings revealed that intercultural communication between domestic English-dominant students (DES) and MIS facilitates the dismantling of sociolinguistic hierarchies. We propose a framework for leveraging institutional support structures through intercultural initiatives, policy adaptations, and staff training to challenge native speakerism and enhance multilingual inclusivity and intercultural exchange. This study contributes to discussions on multilingualism and intercultural communication by providing strategies for universities to foster equitable academic spaces.

Keywords: Native Speakerism; English Language Teaching; Education; International Students; Intercultural Communication

Introduction

Linguistic and cultural ideologies are prevalent issues for multilingual users of English, existing at all levels of society and manifested through language policies, pedagogies, and individual attitudes (The Douglas Fir Group, 2016). One such ideology widely featured in current English language teaching (ELT) literature is native speakerism, a sociolinguistic ideology that promotes the linguistic and cultural hegemony of 'native speakers' (NS) of English over 'non-native speakers' (NNS) (Kiczkowiak, 2018). Previous research on this concept has led to an increased understanding of its implications for multilingual English-speaking professionals and learners within ELT settings, highlighting curricula, materials, and testing as primary mediators of native speakerist ideologies (Huda & Irham, 2023; Kiczkowiak, 2022; Tajeddin & Pakzadian, 2020). However, many of these studies limit their focus to ELT contexts, and therefore, only offer solutions for tackling native speakerism related to pedagogical improvements and changes in professional practices (Jenkins, 2007; Rose et al., 2020). Recently, scholars have begun to acknowledge the existence of native speakerism beyond ELT contexts, further developing the concept to include discrimination that transcends linguistics to include racial and cultural prejudices (Galloway & Rose, 2015; Pennycook, 2017). This acknowledgement of the implications for multilingual English users outside ELT settings is an important development that this study attempts to advance.

Furthermore, due to the global spread of English and the progressive 'internationalisation' of English-speaking higher education (HE), an increasing number of multilingual English users find themselves within English-dominant academic settings (Tran & Hoang, 2023). Accordingly, these contexts are an important area of study concerning the broader communicative and academic implications of native speakerism for multilingual international students (MIS). Indeed, research on MIS within English-dominant academic contexts has explored issues related to acculturation, linguistic proficiency, and willingness to communicate; however, this work has been argued to promote 'deficit narratives' that problematise MIS' sociolinguistic agency (Lomer et al., 2023). In doing so, these studies overlook structural factors that marginalise MIS and create barriers to intercultural communication with domestic English-dominant students (DES) (Lomer et al., 2023). Similarly, structural level discourses can reproduce native speakerist ideologies within institutional policies, further entrenching sociolinguistic hierarchies.

This study examines how native speakerist ideologies are perpetuated through structural discourses and internalised by MIS, shaping intercultural communicative relationships between students. Situating native speakerism within broader discussions of multilingualism and multicultural development in HE, the study shows how MIS navigate spaces where English serves as a communicative norm and sociocultural marker (Kramsch, 2009; Liu & Qian, 2023; Tavares, 2024). Additionally, the study explores students' multilingual identities in superdiverse environments and how universities can challenge native speakerist ideologies through strategies that promote intercultural relations and more inclusive discourse. The qualitative case study design uses critical discourse analysis and thematic analysis to examine institutional texts and semi-structured student interviews. Therefore, this study contributes to scholarship in multilingual HE by examining how MIS in Scotland negotiate their multilingual identities and agencies amid native speakerist ideologies. By focusing on the interpersonal, structural, and affective dimensions of these experiences, it

moves beyond ELT to show how linguistic hierarchies are shaped and contested within intercultural relationships in English-dominant universities.

Literature Review

Native speakerism in international ELT

Native speakerism is ‘... an ideology that upholds the idea that so-called “native speakers” are the best models and teachers of English because they represent a “Western culture” ...’ (Holliday, 2005, as cited in Holliday, 2017, p. 1). This concept has emerged as a key topic concerning prejudiced interactions associated with NS and NNS labels in the ELT industry and English-speaking academic environments (Kiczkowiak, 2018). Contemporary research has highlighted the flawed nature of these definitions, showing that these labels lack clear criteria for their application to individuals or sociocultural identities (Kiczkowiak, 2018). Scholars argue that NS and NNS labels are determined by perceptions of linguistic identities and cultural, racial, and ethnic characteristics, leading to prejudice across social contexts (Bonilla-Medina & Finardi, 2022; Von Esch et al., 2020). Despite these problematic ideological underpinnings, native speakerism has become preeminent within international ELT, establishing the NS’s hegemonic position and NNS’s inferiority, impacting students and professionals (Holliday, 2017; Pennycook, 2017). Moreover, academic structures concerned with ELT help construct these ideologies, inculcating their associated norms and beliefs in students through various mediators.

Therefore, several mediators that serve to perpetuate native speakerist ideologies have been identified within current ELT research. First, ELT textbooks are ubiquitous in international ELT contexts, often providing students with initial exposure to anglophone languages and cultures. However, the sociocultural practices and norms presented in these materials can leave lasting impressions, inculcating native speakerist ideologies. Supporting this, several studies reviewing ELT textbooks have revealed bias favouring ‘inner circle’ cultures and English varieties over NNS representations (Kachru, 1985; Kiczkowiak, 2022; Rashidi & Meihami, 2016; Tajeddin & Pakzadian, 2020). ‘Inner circle’ refers to historically English-dominant national contexts, and while it is a commonly used term within ELT research, it is recognised as oversimplifying complex linguistic realities. Accordingly, scholars have highlighted the potential negative psychological impacts of these biases on students (Jenkins, 2007; Moghaddam & Tirnaz, 2022; Soto-Molina & Méndez, 2020).

Furthermore, standardised testing is another key mediator of native speakerist ideologies. Standardised English assessments reinforce the subordinate status of multilingual English-users by endorsing NS-focused norms that disadvantage these learners (Rose et al., 2020). ELT test criteria are grounded in the ‘standard English’ (StE) model, with divergence seen as a mistake rather than legitimate language diversity (Jenkins, 2006). Traditional teaching methods that prioritise test scores over communicative skills remain prevalent, reinforcing prescriptive monolithic conceptualisations of English (Rose et al., 2020). Research on localised ELT evaluations in ‘outer’ and ‘expanding’ circles shows that test guidelines heavily prioritise ‘inner circle’ cultural norms, discriminating against multilingual English users (Ahn, 2015; Huda & Irham, 2023). This concerns multilingual English users aspiring to ‘inner circle’ HE, as English test results are crucial for university admission (Piller & Bodis, 2024).

Therefore, international test providers act as gatekeepers for 'inner circle' academia (Cogo et al., 2021).

Standardised language testing remains a controversial issue, with many scholars suggesting that monolithic representations of English oppose learners' multicultural realities, and that change is needed (Jenkins, 2006; Rose et al., 2020). However, minimal research has examined the impact of native speakerism beyond ELT settings, limiting stakeholders' ability to develop strategies for addressing these issues outside the classroom.

Native speakerism and the 'international student'

For many MIS, 'inner circle' tertiary education represents the culmination of their studies, offering access to greater socioeconomic agency and aspirational communities within globalised economies (The Douglas Fir Group, 2016). As HE has become increasingly internationalised, scholars have begun to pay greater attention to the experiences of MIS within English-dominant contexts, highlighting various sociocultural and linguistic challenges during their studies.

Notable issues within this literature pertain to student acculturation (Arias-Valenzuela et al., 2016; Chen, 2016; Moussa, 2021), linguistic deficiencies (Yeh & Inose, 2003), and accent intelligibility (Dovchin, 2020; Wang et al., 2017), which are all posited as determinants of intercultural communicative success between DES and MIS. While this work elucidates issues in multicultural educational spaces, some scholars label it as 'deficit framed' (Xu, 2022). This argument stems from problematising MIS' sociolinguistic abilities and cultural adaptability while failing to acknowledge the host institution's role in shaping students' social and communicative agencies, particularly regarding intercultural relationships between students (Mittelmeier, 2025; Tavares, 2024). Recent research has begun to consider the institution's role in either facilitating or restricting intercultural contact between DES and MIS, but these discussions remain limited within international student research (Mittelmeier, 2025; Pham & Tran, 2015; Tavares, 2024; Yu & Moskal, 2018).

A central theme within this discussion is how MIS are categorised within 'inner circle' academic discourse. The 'international student' label has been problematised as marginalising and socially 'othering' MIS (Ramjattan, 2023). Ramjattan (2023) argues that MIS in English-speaking universities must prove linguistic competence through standardised testing based on 'colonial stereotypes' which manufacture deficiencies, as MIS are deemed linguistically inferior to DES, creating a hierarchical system (p. 176). Therefore, the 'international student' label is conflated with native speakerist definitions of the NNS, showing how these ideologies are reconstructed within 'inner circle' academic discourses. These institutional labels place MIS in a homogenised, disadvantaged group, drawing on native speakerist rhetoric that has the potential to increase intergroup biases between DES and MIS cohorts (Liu & Qian, 2023; Williams-Gualandi, 2020). Moreover, the demarcation of 'home' and 'international' students creates dichotomous experiences beyond linguistic discrimination, with universities often implicitly reinforcing systemic inequalities linked to racial, cultural, and linguistic identities through policy and practice (Ennsner-Kananen et al., 2021; Kubota et al., 2023; Sterzuk, 2015; Williams-Gualandi, 2020).

Accordingly, scholars have noted a divide between DES and MIS groups, even within institutions that emphasise multiculturalism in their official discourse (Robinson et al., 2020). Research has identified structural barriers to intercultural communication, including lack of multicultural inclusivity in curricula, insufficient staff training, and absence of proactive

strategies to facilitate social interactions (Collins & Callaghan, 2022). Consequently, some scholars suggest that institutional interventions, such as emphasising intercultural communication within curricula and policy, are effective tools for addressing these concerns (Fielding et al., 2023; Freeman & Li 2019; Zhang-Wu, 2023). Furthermore, researchers have theorised that individual identities and social agencies can act as barriers to intercultural engagement among students (Robinson et al., 2020). Perceived cultural and linguistic boundaries, differences in social activities, and lack of reciprocity are posited as inhibitors of intercultural contact between DES and MIS, suggesting that individual dynamics contribute significantly to student division alongside institutional policy (D’Orazi & Marangell, 2025; Kudo et al., 2019; Robinson et al., 2020).

However, scholars acknowledge the need to consider the potential negative effects of intercultural contact for MIS, including feelings of discomfort, loneliness, and loss (Williams-Gualandi, 2020). Additionally, it has been argued that ‘superficial’ intercultural communication is insufficient to reduce student division, with ‘meaningful’ intercultural relationship development posited as a more effective solution (Robinson et al., 2020). Although there is no clear consensus on the benefits of intercultural communication, evidence suggests it can encourage ‘global mindedness’ and greater acceptance of other cultures and languages (Trenchs-Parera & Pastena, 2024). Notably, while intercultural communication typically refers to interactional processes between individuals from differing linguistic and cultural backgrounds, intercultural relationships refer to the longer-term social bonds that may develop through repeated communicative encounters. In this study, intercultural communication is conceptualised as the interactional mechanism through which intercultural relationships between MIS and DES may emerge and develop (Kudo et al., 2019). Therefore, this research attempts to understand how facilitating these relationships can help deconstruct harmful ideologies embedded at structural and individual levels, thereby reducing social divisions among students.

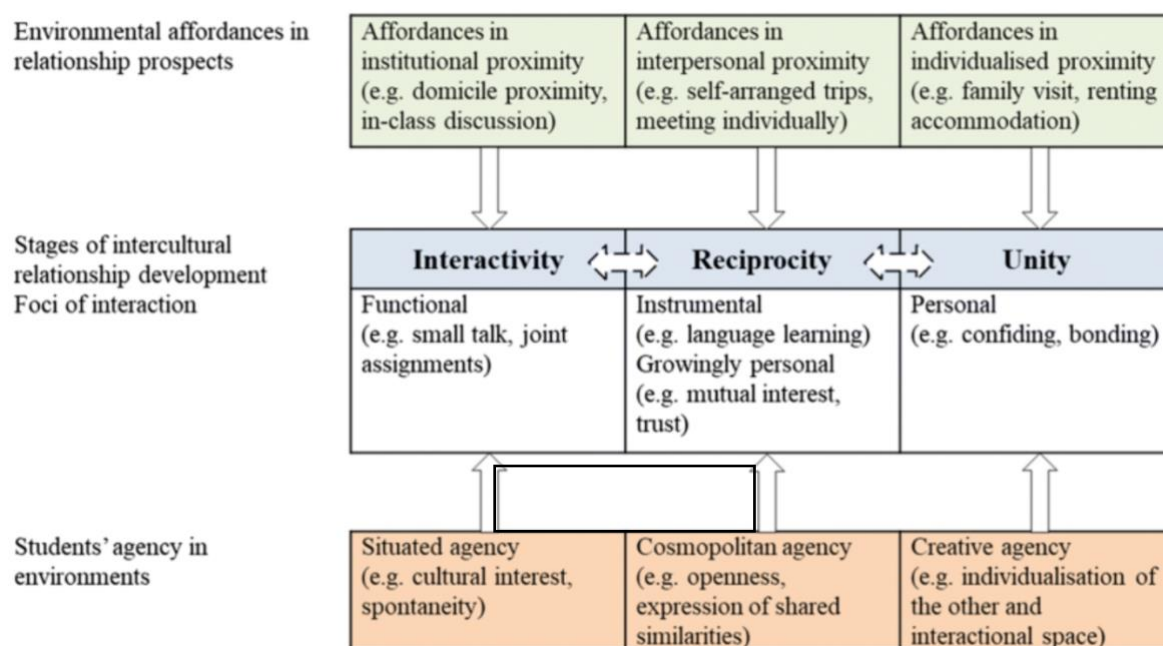
Theoretical Approach

This study utilises two theories to examine native speakerism’s effects on the social positioning, self-identities, and communicative practices of MIS in Scottish HE institutions. It investigates how these ideologies might be challenged through intercultural relationships between MIS and DES. First, Kudo et al.’s (2019) ‘3 stage ecological and person-in-context conceptual framework’ conceptualises relationships between DES and MIS, illustrating how individual agencies and environmental factors jointly influence relationship development through various stages (see Figure 1). The framework demonstrates how environmental ‘affordances’ and students’ self-agencies intersect at each relationship stage by restricting or enabling intercultural contact between students (pp. 479-481). This ecological framework helps elucidate how native speakerist ideologies, internalised by students and embedded within institutional texts, shape students’ communicative practices in superdiverse academic settings.

Furthermore, to understand students’ negotiation of linguistic identity and communicative agencies, this study draws on García and Wei’s (2014) notion of ‘translanguaging’, which views language use as a fluid, contextually dependent, agentic practice transcending linguistic boundaries. Importantly, this study rejects recent iterations of

translanguaging theory that adopt a deconstructivist stance, denying the existence of named languages due to concerns regarding their empirical grounding (MacSwan, 2022). The study utilises translanguaging theory primarily as an interpretive lens to understand how MIS challenge native speakerist communicative norms, internalised NNS labels, and sociolinguistic hierarchies through multilingual practices when interacting with their peers. Translanguaging theory complements the ecological model by focusing on students' communicative self-agencies and linguistic self-identities, which are core components of the intercultural relationship-building process, showing how multilingual agentic practices help deconstruct barriers created by native speakerist ideologies in English-dominant academic settings. This study demonstrates how meaningful intercultural communication between DES and MIS, with effective institutional support, can help challenge and deconstruct native speakerist ideologies across structural and individual ecologies.

Figure 1: Kudo et al.'s (2019) three-stage ecological and person-in-context conceptual framework



Research Questions

The proposed study attempts to achieve the research aims by exploring two primary questions related to the topic described. The questions are as follows:

1. How are native speakerist ideologies constructed through academic structures across MIS' educational trajectories?
2. To what extent do internalised native speakerist ideologies shape the intercultural communicative agency and identity of MIS?

Methodology

Research design and context

This article is based on an empirical qualitative case study conducted by the corresponding author under the supervision of the co-author at a Glasgow university in 2024, examining the impact of native speakerism on intercultural relationships between MIS and DES. Accordingly, the first-person singular ('I') is used for research activities undertaken by the corresponding author (data collection and analysis), while the plural ('we') refers to co-interpretation of the findings and co-preparation of the manuscript. I adopted a critical interpretivist epistemology and social constructivist ontology to conceptualise the ideological processes behind native speakerism in relation to intercultural student relations. Furthermore, I employed 'abductive inference' during data collection and analysis, moving iteratively between empirical observations and analysis to develop plausible explanations for patterns identified in the textual and experiential data (Lipscomb, 2012, p. 245). This approach allowed me to address unexpected findings that emerged during the research process and consider them through a theoretical framework, informing new lines of empirical enquiry (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). The design provided a novel perspective that contrasted institutional discourse with student experiences, rarely seen in previous literature.

In the global education market, English-speaking institutions hold significant influence, with the UK being a leading destination for international studies. International students comprise 26% of UK HE enrolments, making intercultural communication in academic settings a timely issue (HESA, 2024). Therefore, Scotland offered a unique setting largely absent from recent research on MIS in English-dominant contexts. Scotland's sociolinguistic landscape, characterised by multiple English varieties, complicates intercultural contact and exposes the fallacy of 'native' and 'non-native' definitions (Kiczkowiak, 2018). Glasgow, Scotland's largest and most cosmopolitan city, provided an ideal setting for exploring these sociolinguistic dynamics.

Sample and sampling techniques

The sample consisted of six MIS and one monolingual DES aged 22-45 years, studying at a Scottish university in Glasgow. Within the specific context of this study, MIS were defined as those studying on an international student visa who self-identified English as an additional language. DES were defined as Scottish citizens who identified English as their first language. Convenience and purposive sampling methods ensured sample diversity in terms of participants' sociocultural identities and linguistic backgrounds, including ethnicity, nationality, and first language (Taherdoost, 2016). This enabled broader representation across linguistic, cultural, and academic backgrounds than previous research focusing on homogenised student groups from a single culture. Formal ethical approval was granted by the university's research ethics committee prior to the study, with relevant ethical guidelines followed throughout. Recruitment was handled ethically, with participants made aware of the study aims and required to sign ethics forms before interviews to confirm informed consent. As the study examined intercultural communication between DES and MIS, the inclusion of one DES provided a contrasting perspective on these interactions, offering contextual insight that enhanced the analytical depth of the experiential data.

Furthermore, the sample was divided into two subgroups: students enrolled on a Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)-related postgraduate course and those studying other disciplines. Participant recruitment was separated for three reasons. First, as a fellow TESOL student, my prior relationship with the participants would affect interview data impartiality. While some researchers argue that prior relationships can be advantageous in interviews (Adriansen & Spangler, 2023, p. 213), including unknown participants helped reduce bias. Second, the six-month study duration of the TESOL students limited their exposure to DES and Scottish sociocultures, a relevant point as exposure time would influence perceptions. Including postgraduate students who had resided in Scotland longer helped investigate how native speakerist ideologies persisted over time. Finally, many TESOL participants had professional experience as ELT teachers, which could influence their views on native speakerism. Including non-TESOL participants provided a less-informed perspective, rarely found in native speakerism research, which is presently dominated by ELT professionals' experiences.

Table 1: Participant information

Pseudonym	Sex	Length of time in Scotland	Course of Study	Nationality	DES/ MIS Self-identification
Rojin	Female	One year	MSc TESOL	Iranian (Iran)	MIS
Adanna	Female	One year	MSc TESOL	Nigerian (Nigeria)	MIS
Cyrus	Male	Two years	Postgraduate Research	Iranian (Iran)	MIS
Laila	Female	Six months	MSc TESOL	Omani (Oman)	MIS
Jordan	Male	Two years	Postgraduate Research	Chinese (China)	MIS
Ling	Female	Two years	Postgraduate Research	Chinese (China)	MIS
Heather	Female	Scottish resident	MSc TESOL	Scottish (Scotland)	DES

Note. DES = domestic English-dominant student; MIS = multilingual international student.

Data collection

In line with the qualitative case study design, a two-stage multi-method data collection process was used. First, textual data were obtained through deductive qualitative document analysis of the university's official website, with all publicly accessible sections iteratively reviewed against predefined criteria to identify text relevant to the study's aims (Creswell, 2009). The selection criteria were driven by the study's theoretical focus on native speakerist ideologies. Selected texts included promotional materials, policy documents, ELT support pages, 'international student' pages, and university doctrine outlining future economic and recruitment targets which referred to native speakerist rhetoric, student

positionality, or linguistic norms and standards. In this study, native speakerist rhetoric refers to institutional language that implicitly or explicitly reproduces hierarchical distinctions between 'native' and 'non-native' English users, including references to linguistic deficiency, proficiency verification, or assumptions regarding communicative norms. Texts were excluded if they did not contain information relevant to the research aims. The purpose was to identify native speakerist rhetoric within official university texts to reveal how these discourses shape institutional policy and practice, thereby affecting opportunities for intercultural communication between DES and MIS. Furthermore, supplementary information concerning university policy not accessible through the website was requested via email from relevant department help desks. Selected texts were archived as a document corpus, organised by document type and source, and imported into the analytical framework for subsequent critical discourse analysis.

Semi-structured interviews lasting 45-90 minutes followed the textual data collection. Interview schedules were informed by textual analysis data, guiding topics to enable students to confirm or refute researcher inferences. Interviews were conducted using Microsoft Teams online chat software, enabling accurate verbatim transcription and reducing power asymmetries between interviewer and interviewee due to the neutral setting (Kvale, 2007; Lomer et al., 2023, p. 78). Moreover, the flexibility of the semi-structured format allowed me to pursue specific questions based on participant comments for further elaboration (Cohen et al., 2007). Additionally, researcher positionality was considered throughout the research process, particularly during interviews (Adriansen & Spangler, 2023): 'Positionality refers to the social and political positions of those involved in the research—both the researcher and the participants' (p. 207). As a monolingual English user, my linguistic positionality in relation to the MIS participants was that of an 'outsider' as their first language differed, limiting my ability to relate to participants' sociolinguistic backgrounds (p. 209).

Furthermore, I did not share the same cultural background with the MIS participants alongside other 'visible' characteristics such as religion, race and gender in most cases (Reyes, 2020). However, my position could be best categorised as neither an 'insider' or 'outsider', instead occupying the 'space between' due to my position as a fellow student (p. 209). While maintaining impartiality was considered within the methodology, strategic co-construction and leveraging of prior relationships helped reduce the hierarchical interview structure and facilitated a more collaborative data collection process, thereby reducing power asymmetries (Dollinger et al., 2023).

Moreover, as interviews were conducted in English due to my own monolingual status, consideration was given to how this might impede MIS participants' self-expression and autonomy, potentially disempowering the interviewees (Schembri & Jahić Jašić, 2022). To address this concern, member checking allowed participants to amend transcripts post-interview, improving clarity and transparency (McKim, 2023). Member checking also helped address power asymmetries with participants I did not know, giving them greater ownership of their data and reducing the risk of misinterpretation. The participants were also afforded the opportunity to select their pseudonyms which were used to anonymise the findings. Overall, combining interviews with textual analysis enabled triangulation through systematic comparison of both datasets.

Data analysis

I utilised a two-stage analytical approach to identify relevant data from institutional texts and interview transcripts. First, I analysed data from university texts using Fairclough's (1995) 'three-dimensional critical discourse analysis framework' (CDA), which examined how native speakerist ideologies are embedded within institutional discourses and conveyed through university policies. The use of CDA enabled me to reveal the university's underlying ideological position, essential for examining its role in perpetuating native speakerist ideologies and influencing students' sociocultural relations between DES and MIS (Fairclough, 1995, p. 97). Through this analysis, I generated specific data using deductive reasoning, supporting an abductive research approach when combined with inductive interviews.

Second, I analysed the interview dataset using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis technique. Thematic analysis (TA) is '...a method for identifying and interpreting patterns of meaning ("themes") within qualitative data' (Clarke & Braun, 2017, p. 297). The six-stage process enables iterative theme creation, making it suitable for qualitative research. I identified initial codes as participant comments relating to the research questions, later synthesising these into broader themes. This dataset reflected participants' experiences regarding native speakerism's impact on their communicative agencies and sociocultural identities. By inductively interpreting interview data, I produced a complementary dataset which facilitated data triangulation. This triangulation was achieved by comparing textual and interview datasets to identify convergent and divergent discourses concerning student experiences and institutional policies. This process reduced overreliance on a single dataset and ensured the findings reflected both macro and micro discourse levels (Polit & Beck, 2012). I concluded the analysis by merging the primary themes from both the textual and TA datasets into four overarching meta themes, offering insights into native speakerism within the university context and practical strategies for its deconstruction. While the findings are presented thematically, the analysis draws on Kudo et al.'s (2019) ecological framework throughout to interpret how native speakerist ideologies shape both individual student agencies and 'environmental affordances' across different stages of intercultural relationship development.

Results and Discussion

Theme 1: Construction and inculcation of native speakerism

Cultural ideations

The findings suggest that MIS' exposure to NS ideologies during their prior education contributed to the internalisation of these beliefs, which subsequently shaped their communicative anxieties and expectations of linguistic hierarchies upon entering Scottish HE. Accordingly, MIS interview participants described their prior ELT as strongly centred around NS standards and communicative norms, mediated by textbook-centric pedagogies and limited exposure to 'non-standard' English varieties. The participants viewed these practices negatively and saw native speakerist standards as detrimental to their English language development and communicative confidence. This supports literature that admonishes such practices and problematises forced adherence to monolithic standards and sociocultural norms (Jenkins, 2007; Moghaddam & Tirnaz, 2022; Soto-Molina & Méndez, 2020). However, participants described a minimal level of 'inner circle' sociocultural representation within the

textbooks used during their prior ELT, contrasting with the aforementioned literature. Some participants reported that this limited exposure to 'inner circle' cultural representations, combined with societal and institutional discourses, contributed to the construction of idealised perceptions of 'inner circle' cultures and an unfamiliarity with 'non-standard' DES varieties.

Rojin, a postgraduate student from Iran, explained her idealised view of 'inner circle' sociocultures.

Rojin: Every time that we speak about UK and America in my country. We said we imagined them like a very big and ideal place. Everybody is smart, intelligent. ... That is something that maybe culturally it's in our nature that we think we are lower than for example Europe, we are lower than America...

The lack of exposure to authentic examples of anglophone sociocultures and linguistic norms may further perpetuate unrealistic cultural ideations and the hegemonic position of English-dominant cultures compared to students' domestic cultures (Newsome & Cooper, 2016).

English testing and linguistic hierarchies

Furthermore, many participants noted that testing was the focal point of their ELT education, positioning English as the preeminent language while simultaneously discouraging translanguaging among students. Despite the presence of students' home cultures in ELT materials, the emphasis on standardised English examinations for measuring academic abilities meant students' first languages were subverted throughout their early education. Adanna, a postgraduate TESOL student from Nigeria, described how her school implemented punitive measures to restrict students' first language across subjects.

Adanna: And if by accident you, like, speak something that is not English with your classmate then and it happens to reports. Just know that you're doomed for the day. You understand? So there will be a punishment for you.

While Adanna noted local English varieties were included in teaching materials, these punitive measures exemplify institutional policies that construct sociolinguistic hierarchies in multilingual settings. Consequently, the hegemonic status of English, tied to native speakerist ideologies and colonial histories, continues to be reinforced throughout students' academic journeys. This can lead students to develop inferior self-identities from the enforced limitation of first language use, undermining their sociocultural identities and linguistic heritage. This situation indicates how institutional privileging of English for academic advancement results in harmful English as a medium of instruction (EMI) policies that limit students' linguistic agencies and establish sociolinguistic hierarchies promoted by native speakerist ideologies. This finding supports research that problematises EMI policies due to their harmful impact on MIS' linguistic and cultural identities (Adamson, 2024; Fang & Hu, 2025; Rose et al., 2022).

Testing and communicative competence

Additionally, participants explained how test-oriented ELT impacted their communicative abilities in the present day. Ling, a Chinese doctoral student, believed her insecurities regarding her English speaking ability stemmed from earlier ELT, which prioritised academic language over communication due to the emphasis on testing.

Ling: Just follow the textbook and just explain the grammar and do a lot of test papers. That's it. ... So that's why I'm not confident in speaking. ... I'm too shy to speak English in public and in front of people.

Ling's description of her early ELT reflects her fellow participants' experiences and shows the lasting impacts of test-oriented ELT practices common across international institutions. These findings align with research advocating for testing reform in ELT to address concerns about the detrimental impacts of standardised testing on students' communicative competence (Parviz & Azizi, 2025; Zhao, 2022). However, while participants uniformly criticised testing as a means of developing communicative competence, some still advocated for its use as a gatekeeper for acceptance into 'inner circle' academia. Jordan, a doctoral student from China, viewed mandatory testing as a way for MIS to prove their linguistic capabilities.

Jordan: 'I believe that language tests like the IELTS are necessary. Such proficiency exams indicate that my language skills have reached a certain level, which makes my life in Scotland more convenient.'

While many MIS share this pragmatic stance, it highlights the normalisation of English language testing: accepted by participants yet cited as a central cause of their lack of communicative competence. This perspective aligns with prior research which highlights some MIS' positive attitudes towards standardised testing as an academic measure (Sinclair et al., 2019; Wang & Cheng, 2025). This reveals a paradoxical perspective where students accept NS standards despite acknowledging their negative effects on their communicative development. Consequently, MIS arguably perpetuate native speakerist ideologies while accepting a disadvantaged position within English-dominant academia due to assumed linguistic deficiencies. These findings illustrate the consistent institutional inculcation of native speakerist ideologies throughout MIS' early education in their home contexts, leading to their internalisation.

Native speakerist rhetoric

Moreover, the findings suggest that internalised native speakerist ideologies mediated during prior education are later reconstituted and reinforced through institutional discourses within Scottish HE. Subsequently, the CDA discovered native speakerist language ideologies within university ELT-related texts. The ELT support page explicitly uses native speakerist definitions through terms like 'Non-native English-speaking students' alongside language implying MIS inferiority such as 'Do you need to improve'. Similarly, the 'language requirements' page uses phrases like 'proof of proficiency', emphasising the need to prove English ability through standardised testing. This shows how official texts can implicitly position DES as academically superior due to their NS status, an observation supported by

prior research (Ramjattan, 2023; Tavares, 2024). Thus, institutional discourses further entrench the NNS status of MIS as a core component of their sociocultural identity, positioning them as linguistically deficient (Ramjattan, 2023). Essentially, the reconstruction of student identities reconstitutes the NNS identity already internalised by MIS, illustrating how ELT and Scottish academic structures perpetuate native speakerist ideologies across contexts. As demonstrated in later themes, these internalised beliefs and identities contribute to patterns of student separation and communicative anxiety during intercultural interactions between MIS and DES.

Theme 2: Sociolinguistic hierarchies and the 'international student' identity

Textual representations of the 'international student'

The CDA findings revealed how representations of MIS' sociocultural identities were framed through native speakerist ideologies embedded within official university texts. Throughout the university website and associated documents, 'international' and 'domestic' student identifiers were used as collective terms to describe student groups. While these terms are not divisive in isolation, their use to reconstruct student identities within homogenised groups can negatively impact inclusion, thereby restricting MIS' 'situational agency' (Kudo et al., 2019). Relatedly, the term 'international student' frequently appeared in discussions of economic and recruitment goals in the university's 'strategic plans' documents. The university cites its '30,000 international students from over 140 countries' as evidence of its dedication to inclusion, belying a stronger focus on these students as economic assets. Interestingly, this market-driven language was absent in texts concerning DES, highlighting distinct institutional views of these groups. These findings concur with recent research on the positioning of international students as dehumanised commodities within English-dominant HE (Lomer, 2018; Tran & Hoang, 2023, p. 36).

Furthermore, visual representations of MIS were linked to specific markers of sociocultural identity, such as race, religion, and language. The 'country-specific' information sections paired testimonials and images with nationality. For example, the 'Middle East' page featured Muslim students wearing hijabs, while the 'China' page showed only Mandarin speakers in testimonials. This approach overlooks the rich dialectal and linguistic variety within these countries, potentially marginalising students from areas with multiple languages and religions. Previous research has noted similar essentialised conceptualisations of MIS identities, supporting the CDA findings (Lomer, 2017; Tavares, 2024). These categorisations homogenise complex intersectional identities, demonstrating how the 'international student' is linked to specific collectivist sociocultural identities distinct from 'domestic student' identities (Liu & Qian, 2023).

Negative self-identities and communicative anxieties

Interview data confirmed how MIS assumed an inferior social position within the academic environment due to internalised native speakerist ideologies stemming from structural discourses. Participants described how their prior views of first language English users created extreme communicative anxieties when commencing studies in Scotland. Rojin explained how she feared interacting with DES due to internalised cultural ideations and negative self-assessment of her NNS status.

Rojin: 'I was afraid to communicate with native and British student because I think as I said I had some imaginary think about this country and its people, so I don't at the beginning. I don't dare even to.'

Laila, a postgraduate student from Oman, shared this perspective by describing how she anticipated communicative difficulties with DES despite her experience as a TESOL teacher in her home country.

Laila: 'I feel like it was easier for me to speak, for example, to (name redacted) ...And to the other people (MIS) because I feel like their language proficiency is just like mine. And I will not be embarrassed in front of them.'

This pre-emptive self-separation was echoed by other participants, indicating that native speakerist ideologies first inculcated during prior ELT persist into future HE settings and continue to impact communicative agencies. Interestingly, participants' English proficiency or prior ELT teaching experience did not reduce these anxieties, elucidating how native speakerism dictates MIS' linguistic legitimacy within English-dominant contexts. This finding contributes to current understandings regarding the detrimental impacts of native speakerism on students and teachers within international ELT and wider academic contexts (Holliday, 2017; Pennycook, 2017). In short, the homogenisation of students' sociocultural and linguistic identities indirectly influences their communicative and social practices. This creates an environment where MIS gravitate towards students who share the 'international student' label, thereby forming the same culturally homogenised groups represented in official discourses (Kudo et al., 2019; Rodriguez et al., 2024).

Multilingual communicative repertoires in intercultural interaction

Although switching between named languages was not explicitly evidenced in the interview data, participants described using their multilingual capabilities to form successful intercultural relationships with students from different first-language backgrounds, overcoming initial communicative anxieties. This demonstrates effective use of multilingual resources to resist NS communicative norms established during students' prior ELT and establish initial relationships through 'situated' and 'cosmopolitan' agencies (Kudo et al., 2019). Therefore, these multilingual communicative practices align with broader understandings of translanguaging that emphasise the mobilisation of speakers' full linguistic repertoires (García & Wei, 2014). Adanna explained how her interactions with both MIS and DES enhanced her social agency, Scottish cultural knowledge, and English communicative competence, thus improving her academic experience overall.

Adanna: '... what really helped was my art of communicating frequently with them (Scottish students), so that was really what helped me.' "I've seen a lot of culture differences and I've seen a lot so I couldn't have done that if I don't communicate with the Scottish...'

By choosing to forge social connections with other Scottish students through multilingual communicative practices, MIS were able to bridge social divisions created in part

by inculcated sociolinguistic hierarchies and institutional categorisations. Interpreting these practices through a translanguaging perspective highlights how MIS draw on their multilingual repertoires to challenge native speakerist ideologies embedded in institutional discourses that position them as social outsiders and restrict their communicative agencies. The findings showcase how multilingual practices can facilitate greater communicative agencies, enhance students' 'transcultural knowledge', and improve intercultural relationships beyond the 'interactivity stage' (Kudo et al., 2019) within academic settings, contributing to existing research (Trenchs-Parera & Pastena, 2024).

Theme 3: Student separation and environmental affordances

Institutional barriers to intercultural communication

The CDA revealed how university policies reinforce separation between MIS and DES, shaping 'environmental affordances' (Kudo et al., 2019). Rather than simply denoting visa status, these labels carry ideological weight, influencing the university's approach to student support and determining levels of social inclusion and academic equity. Support resources for 'international students' emphasised ELT, cultural adjustment, and logistical matters, using terms like 'adjusting' and 'adapting' that imply deficit capabilities. This reinforces the construction of the 'international student' identity as a distinct, dependent group, reinforcing social separation between DES and MIS (Lomer et al., 2023, p. 74). This finding aligns with research that problematises the 'international student' identity within English-dominant HE as causing marginalisation and social 'othering' (Brooks & Waters, 2022; Liu & Qian, 2023; Ramjattan, 2023).

Additionally, university staff confirmed that 'international student' email chains were separate from 'domestic student' chains, creating disparate environmental affordances and limiting opportunities for spontaneous intercultural contact. This implicitly encouraged students to mix within familiar sociocultural groups, increasing intergroup biases and maintaining the 'domestic' and 'international' identity split. These findings contradict research that problematises MIS' communicative agencies and acculturation successes as predictors of intercultural socialisation between DES and MIS (Wang et al., 2017; Yan & Berliner, 2011; Yeh & Inose, 2003).

Student social divide

When asked whether they perceived a distinct separation between MIS and DES, all participants acknowledged this separation. One participant, Cyrus, exemplified this division.

Cyrus: '... go to Union around 10:00pm, 2nd floor and just count international people there and local people.'

Researcher: 'And what would I find if I was to do that?'

Cyrus: 'So few international students there...'

This encapsulates the clear lack of 'institutional proximity' between these student groups within the social hub of the university, highlighting the result of environmental affordances being restricted by institutional policy (Kudo et al., 2019). Moreover, all

participants expressed a lack of awareness of social events that encouraged intercultural contact between DES and MIS, perhaps confirming the impact of the aforementioned email chains. Earlier research has noted similar results concerning the lack of social awareness exhibited by MIS and the conflict between students' individual sociocultural beliefs and values and the social activities promoted by the university (Rodriguez et al., 2024; Thurnell-Read et al., 2018).

Internalised NS norms

Another significant discovery related to student separation was the unfavourable view of MIS towards local Scottish English varieties. All participants expressed being 'shocked' upon hearing the Scottish dialect, acknowledging their limited cultural understanding of Scotland, which intensified their initial social interaction challenges (Newsome & Cooper, 2016). Many participants described anticipating communication issues with DES and made plans before travelling to Scotland to restrict social interactions with DES in favour of MIS. Despite acknowledging Scottish students' friendliness, difficulties in comprehending the Glaswegian accent were cited by all participants as a primary factor in their avoidance of intercultural communication with DES. Adanna explained how she initially avoided interactions with Scottish English speakers in social situations due to her inability to comprehend the Glaswegian accent.

Adanna: ... I always avoided this conversation, having conversation with Scottish you understand? Because I hardly understand what they are saying and I need to like tell them to repeat over and over again before I could hear.

Other students shared similar perspectives regarding the Glaswegian accent that prevented their intercultural relationships with DES moving beyond the 'interactivity stage' (Kudo et al., 2019). Notably, participants showed varying degrees of progress in comprehending the Glaswegian accent over time, yet difficulties persisted, even among those living in Scotland for years. Participants exhibited positive attitudes towards DES who 'softened' their accents to align with StE varieties from prior ELT. Non-standard 'inner circle' varieties like Glaswegian are nearly absent from international ELT materials, leaving MIS unprepared for communication with Scottish speakers. Jordan described his positive attitude towards a Scottish staff member teaching a university ELT class he attended regularly.

Jordan: He Scottish but his English have doesn't have accent. It's very, very clear and it's easier for foreigners, foreign students to understand.

This highlights the unconscious distinctions made by MIS between StE and Scottish English varieties, suggesting an internalisation of monolithic linguistic norms related to native speakerist standards. The positive reception of DES who reduced their accents during intercultural dialogues suggests that MIS perpetuate NS norms through their reluctance to engage with DES who do not conform to these norms. This finding provides evidence of the consequences of excluding non-standard varieties from ELT curricula on multilingual English learners, broadening current research that typically focuses on contexts outside the 'inner circle' (Galloway & Rose, 2015; Jeong et al., 2021). Additionally, these observations add to the literature on native speakerism by offering evidence of its effects on monolingual English

speakers, a viewpoint seldom addressed outside professional ELT contexts (Alqahtani, 2022). This reveals the subtleties of native speakerism at the micro-level within the Scottish context, as both groups' communicative behaviours show an unconscious adherence to NS standards, demonstrating the depth of its inculcation.

Theme 4: Deconstructing native speakerism in Scottish academia

Intercultural friendships and the reconfiguration of self-identities

Interview data showed the impact of intercultural interactions in classroom settings which were facilitated through effective multilingual practices. Heather and Rojin, who progressed beyond the 'interactivity stage' to form meaningful intercultural relationships, explained how their friendship developed through individual agency and institutional proximity within the classroom. Both participants reached the 'unity stage', where they regularly socialised outside the university. The findings suggest that this stage was primarily achieved through 'creative agency', as they discovered shared interests beyond cultural curiosity and practical interactions (Kudo et al., 2019). Rojin explained how her internalised native speakerist ideologies regarding NS status and communicative norms were deconstructed through an interaction with her classmate Heather.

Rojin: ... that communication with my classmate make a positive thing in my mind that these native speakers are not that thing you made in your mind. ... most of those expectation disappeared positively.

This process exemplifies how students may leverage their multilingual repertoires to build intercultural relationships that can begin to dismantle internalised sociolinguistic hierarchies between DES and MIS, thereby enabling MIS to develop more equitable view of their own sociolinguistic status (García & Wei, 2014). However, some studies have found that intercultural communication between DES and MIS can reinforce linguistic hierarchies, as Adanna experienced in one interaction with Heather while working on a group assignment.

Adanna: So then it was kind of difficult for me because I couldn't understand her and she as well couldn't understand me.

Researcher: You would feel then in that situation that your variety of English maybe limited your ability to participate in that group project?

Adanna: Yeah, I would say that because my contribution wasn't included in the work that was presented in the classroom.

This experience highlights the need for institutions and educational stakeholders to consider the potential negative impacts of intercultural contact between students, particularly when aiming to encourage it through specific policies (Robinson et al., 2020). Moreover, this illustrates that communication at the 'interactivity' stage of the student relationship can produce varied outcomes which are influenced by both individual and contextual factors. However, Rojin explained that her friendship with Heather facilitated a platform for further social interactions and support beyond the university including assistance

with housing and childcare support, which greatly improved her social life and perception of wider Scottish society.

Rojin: As I said, there are this relationship with Heather make me consider Scottish people so friendly and then little by little I made some friend in some communities...

Rojin: ... she helped me to find house... I didn't have any friend here in Glasgow. So personally I don't know about, for example, childcare... she's really supportive and she she's a really a real friend.

These data illustrate the potential positive impacts of challenging native speakerist ideologies through interactions to create opportunities for social engagement beyond the classroom, easing transcultural stress. This finding expands research on the potential benefits of intercultural contact among DES and MIS in academic contexts (D'Orazzi & Marangell, 2025). Additionally, this supports research on transcultural stress for MIS (Arias-Valenzuela et al., 2016; Chen, 2016; Moussa, 2021), showing that DES can help reduce these stresses alongside institutional support. It is important to mention that Rojin was an asylum seeker who moved to the UK after suffering persecution in her home country due to her Kurdish identity. Accordingly, while research problematises the emphasis on 'integration' for MIS within English-dominant contexts, Rojin's experience shows that for students who wish to integrate, intercultural relationships provide support beyond academic settings. This illustrates how MIS' intersectional identities influence their communicative agencies.

Although some MIS participants received similar support from DES, participants found adapting to the Scottish context relatively easy, attributing this to prior experiences living abroad. However, they noted university support was insufficient for students without such experience, and the CDA confirmed these views. This finding adds nuance to prior research discussing MIS' pre-existing transcultural knowledge and identities, highlighting that some students require additional institutional support besides logistical and financial guidance (Trenchs-Parera & Pastena, 2024).

Furthermore, Heather, the only DES participant, recognised her own deconstructive process through interaction with a Middle Eastern classmate.

Heather: At first, I was a little bit nervous. Because I've never actually spoke to anyone socially from places such as Saudi Arabia. So it's changed my perceptions. Now I see the human being not the clothing...

Evidently, the benefits of intercultural interactions transcend linguistic identities to deconstruct biases across students' sociocultural identities, creating a more inclusive environment. Interactions limited to the 'interactivity stage' remain effective in producing positive social outcomes and can help deconstruct structural inequalities and cultural stereotypes. Heather's experience indicates how this deconstructive process may equally benefit DES, although the restricted inclusion of these students limits the generalisability of this finding. Therefore, multicultural contexts should not be assumed normative for DES and fostering intercultural relations is not solely important for MIS. Overall, the findings demonstrate the effectiveness of intercultural interactions between DES and MIS in

dismantling sociocultural and sociolinguistic hierarchies, especially when students move their relationship beyond the 'interactivity stage'.

Recommendations

The strategies below are derived from findings related to RQ1 and RQ2 and are presented as practice-oriented implications for addressing native speakerism and intercultural engagement.

In line with the findings, universities should expand intercultural support by drawing on students' prior transcultural experiences beyond stereotypical cultural representations. Similarly, DES could be supported through initiatives encouraging early engagement with MIS, such as an intercultural buddy system. More social events promoting cultural exchange, alongside greater emphasis on cultural learning for all students, would also enhance both cohorts' academic experiences and promote equity in multicultural spaces. Additionally, Scottish universities could integrate intercultural communication into curricula with staff support. For example, digital learning environments have been proven to improve intercultural competence and willingness to communicate among university students (Aladini & Gheisari, 2025; Zuo, 2025). Combining institutional support with intercultural communication between DES and MIS can reduce student separation and create opportunities for social interaction beyond the university.

Finally, universities should alter policies that proliferate divisive student identities and native speakerist rhetoric. The 'international student' label, normalised within international academia, has been shown to inhibit academic and social participation (Liu & Qian, 2023). Replacing these terms with a more inclusive one would remove the distinction between 'domestic' and 'international' students from official texts. This would ensure all students receive the same communications and improve awareness of events encouraging intercultural exchange. If all students are considered within the same academic community, this will help deconstruct deficit labels carried over from prior ELT contexts.

Limitations and Implications

This study had several limitations. First, the small case study sample reduces generalisability, as the findings were undoubtedly influenced by individual factors pertaining to the participants' personalities and life experiences. Second, the short duration of postgraduate programs also restricted longitudinal insights into how native speakerism evolves over time. As the duration of MIS participants' studies in Scotland was not systematically analysed, future research could explore how extended intercultural interactions with DES over several years might affect intercultural agency and resistance to native speaker norms. Additionally, the particularities of English variations found within the Scottish context may limit the applicability of some of the findings elsewhere, especially regarding accent intelligibility and communicative barriers. Moreover, DES' experiences were underexplored due to sample constraints, and further research could illuminate their role in sustaining or challenging linguistic hierarchies.

Conclusion

This study posits native speakerism as a socially constructed ideology perpetuated through structural discourse, instilling entrenched negative self-identities and sociocultural hierarchies in MIS throughout their academic lives. The findings show how institutional discourses reinforce structural inequalities through native speakerist ideologies, resulting in a division between DES and MIS. The study contributes to research that moves away from 'deficit narratives' by highlighting moments where MIS used their multilingualism as a tool to resist divisive discourses and establish positive sociolinguistic self-identities (García & Wei, 2014; Lomer et al., 2023, p. 74). Moreover, this research shows the lasting internalisation of native speakerist ideologies by MIS and how meaningful intercultural communication can begin to deconstruct them. This investigation also offers a novel perspective on Glasgow's sociolinguistic landscape, where non-standard English varieties challenge MIS and expose the lack of such accent representation in ELT curricula (Galloway & Rose, 2015; Tagliatela, 2021). Furthermore, the study highlights the need for research on the impact of native speakerism on first language English-users to recognise the other side of this complex issue across various multilingual contexts.

Through this case study, we present strategies for addressing native speakerism through intercultural interaction and institutional support to dismantle structural inequalities in Scottish academia. English-dominant universities must better recognise the factors driving student division within these institutions. By ignoring these issues, institutions normalise this separation, contradicting the inclusive multicultural rhetoric they espouse. Likewise, we argue that universities must move beyond assimilationist models of integration (Mittelmeier, 2025) and recognise the agentive, negotiated nature of intercultural communication (García & Wei, 2014). To achieve a more equitable HE system, institutions must recognise their role in reproducing structural inequalities and implement change for all students. In short, institutional support and structural discourse must align with internationalisation strategies to ensure equitable outcomes for all students, regardless of visa status or sociolinguistic identity.

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Ethics

This study was reviewed and approved by a University Research Ethics Committee. All participants confirmed that their participation was voluntary and provided informed consent.

Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

AI Statement

ChatGPT was used to identify grammatical errors, and the authors made final revisions based on their own judgment. The authors retain full responsibility for all editorial decisions and the final manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflict of interest regarding this publication.

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