



Exploring NNests Instructional Competency in Teaching Writing Skills for Middle School Students

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: 27 March 2026	Writing instruction remains a major challenge in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts because students tend to prioritize speaking over writing, while limited research has examined the instructional competency of Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers (NNESTs) in teaching writing. This study aims to identify the instructional competence of NNESTs in an English language institution, LPBA Nurul Jadid. This study was a qualitative study with a learning style inventory approach. The focus of this study was on the components of NNESTs competencies in institutional units and NNESTs experiences which was obtained through questionnaires, structured interviews, classroom observations, institutional curriculum documents, and supporting language proficiency certificates. The experiences of NNESTs are based on Kolb's learning cycle, as NNESTs were active learners who have learned English language skills and taught Writing skills. The results of this study proved that NNESTs still encountered problems in technical, managerial and conceptual competencies. Some of them were still unable to mediate the conflicting concepts found during the class and find new models, methods, and current issues around writing that they could develop for the following year. The findings also indicate that instructional competency develops through continuous experiential learning, reflection, and professional practice. Therefore, English language institutions should strengthen curriculum design and provide continuous professional development to improve NNESTs' instructional competency in writing instruction.
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1. Introduction

Middle school students represent a critical stage in foreign language learning because they begin developing higher-order thinking skills, linguistic awareness, and the ability to produce structured written texts. At this level, writing instruction involves more than vocabulary and grammar mastery; it requires students to organize ideas coherently, express opinions critically, and apply appropriate rhetorical conventions. Therefore, effective writing instruction depends greatly on teachers' instructional competency, including their ability to select appropriate strategies, provide scaffolding, and deliver constructive feedback to support students' academic literacy development.

This study was conducted at LPBA (Language Development Center) Nurul Jadid, Probolinggo, an English language development program within the Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School that provides supplementary English instruction for middle school students. The integration of formal education and pesantren-based language learning creates a unique EFL context for examining how Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers (NNESTs) demonstrate instructional competency in teaching writing. This context is important because teachers' pedagogical practices significantly influence students' writing development in environments where English is learned as a foreign language.

Writing is considered one of the most complex productive language skills because learners must organize ideas systematically, apply genre conventions, and maintain linguistic accuracy. Hyland (2022) emphasizes that writing competence is determined by learners' ability to produce texts according to specific genre requirements, while Liu and Chen (2022) argue that logical organization and systematic expression are essential to avoid ambiguity in written communication. However, writing is often perceived as more difficult than speaking because it requires greater cognitive effort and attention to linguistic details, including grammar, spelling, word choice, and punctuation (Nosratinia & Razavi, 2016). In contrast, speaking is frequently regarded as the primary goal of foreign language learning because it directly supports communication. Dewi, Kultsum, and Armadi (2017) highlight that speaking enables learners to express ideas effectively in daily interactions, while Jaya, Petrus, and Pitaloka (2022) report that learners commonly consider speaking the most desirable English skill. Similarly, Oktavia and Lestari (2022) state that language proficiency is often measured through oral performance.

Although previous studies have examined writing as a cognitively demanding skill and speaking as the dominant indicator of communicative competence, limited attention has been given to the relationship between learners' preference for speaking and their challenges in developing writing competence. Existing literature tends to discuss writing and speaking separately, leaving insufficient exploration of how the dominance of speaking influences learners' attitudes toward writing, instructional practices, and the balanced development of productive language skills.

This phenomenon is also observed among English learners at LPBA Nurul Jadid. Based on preliminary observations, students tend to prioritize speaking because daily language activities require them to communicate in English, including through institutional programs such as native day activities. Their continuous exposure to oral communication increases their interest in speaking skills, while writing and grammar are often considered difficult areas. These perceptions create challenges for teachers who must develop effective writing instruction. Therefore, investigating how NNESTs teach writing skills is essential to understand how instructional competency can overcome students' difficulties and support writing development.

NNESTs represent the majority of English teachers worldwide and play an essential role in EFL education. Unlike the traditional assumption that Native English-Speaking Teachers (NESTs) possess greater teaching advantages, recent studies recognize that NNESTs have unique professional strengths derived from their experiences as language learners. Their understanding of students' linguistic difficulties, cultural backgrounds, and learning contexts enables them to design more relevant pedagogical practices (Hsieh et al., 2022). Instructional competency, including lesson planning, classroom management, assessment practices, feedback strategies, and scaffolding, represents a crucial factor determining teachers' effectiveness in facilitating language learning, particularly writing development.

Recent scholarship has also challenged native-speaker ideology in English language teaching. Hsieh, Gao, and Bell (2022) explain that becoming an NNEST involves continuous professional development, identity negotiation, and contextual adaptation. Wright (2022) further argues that symbolic boundaries between native and non-native teachers continue to influence TESOL practices, while Garton, Copland, and Mann (2025) demonstrate that native-speaker employment policies may reinforce inequalities based on linguistic background rather than teaching effectiveness. These studies highlight the importance of examining NNESTs based on professional competence rather than solely on language background.

Previous studies have contributed valuable insights into English language teaching but leave several gaps regarding NNEST instructional competency in writing instruction. Irsyadi and Muta'allim (2023) examined hybrid learning implementation in English teaching within an Islamic boarding school context but did not investigate teachers' instructional competency or writing pedagogy. Karuru et al. (2023) explored the effectiveness of the Question and Answer Method in improving Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS), while Merizawati et al. (2023) investigated storytelling methods for speaking proficiency and Suryanti et al. (2024) examined the Jigsaw Method for reading comprehension. These studies primarily focused on instructional strategies and student outcomes rather than the competencies that enable teachers to design, implement, and evaluate effective instruction.

Furthermore, research in applied linguistics has explored various linguistic phenomena, including minority language maintenance (Sariono et al., 2025), linguistic landscapes in Islamic boarding schools (Sofyan et al., 2022), sociolinguistic research trends (Yudistira et al., 2024), expressive language disorders (Sofyan et al., 2024), and early language acquisition (Suryanti et al., 2023; Suryanti et al., 2024). However, these studies have not examined how NNESTs' instructional competencies influence writing instruction, particularly at the middle school level. International research on NNESTs has also predominantly focused on teacher identity, professional legitimacy, linguistic proficiency, and native-speakerism, while empirical investigations of writing-specific instructional competency remain limited.

Therefore, this study addresses this gap by exploring NNESTs' instructional competency in teaching writing skills to middle school students at LPBA Nurul Jadid, Probolinggo. Drawing on Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory and Spencer and Spencer's competency framework, this study investigates how teachers' literacy background, professional experience, experiential learning processes, and competency components shape their instructional competency in writing instruction. The findings are expected to contribute to the understanding of NNESTs' instructional competency development and provide practical implications for EFL teacher education and writing instruction, particularly in Islamic boarding school contexts.

2. Methods

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the instructional competency of NNESTs in teaching writing at LPBA Nurul Jadid, Probolinggo. Rather than measuring participants' learning styles through Kolb's Learning Style Inventory (LSI), this study adopted Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory as an analytical framework to interpret teachers' instructional experiences throughout the teaching-learning process (Kuntjojo, 2015). The primary data consisted of two sources. First, institutional documents describing the writing competency standards implemented at the elementary, intermediate, and advanced levels were analyzed to identify the expected writing outcomes at each instructional stage. Second, data were collected from NNESTs' teaching experiences through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. These data captured how teachers planned, implemented, reflected on, and refined their writing instruction across different proficiency levels.

Data analysis was guided by Kolb's four experiential learning cycles: Concrete Experience (CE), Reflective Observation (RO), Abstract Conceptualization (AC), and Active Experimentation (AE). Teachers' narratives and classroom practices were coded according to these four dimensions to understand how instructional competency developed through professional experience. Concrete Experience represented teachers' direct classroom practices; Reflective Observation referred to their reflections on instructional successes and challenges; Abstract Conceptualization described how teachers formulated pedagogical principles from those experiences; and Active Experimentation illustrated how these principles were implemented to improve subsequent writing instruction. Accordingly, Kolb's framework functioned as an interpretive lens rather than a psychometric measurement instrument. The study did not administer LSI questionnaire, classify teachers into learning style categories, or interpret learning style profiles. Instead, Kolb's experiential learning cycle was employed to explain how NNESTs constructed pedagogical knowledge and continuously developed their instructional competency through experience in teaching writing. The four stages of Kolb's experiential learning cycle adopted in this study are illustrated in Figure 1.

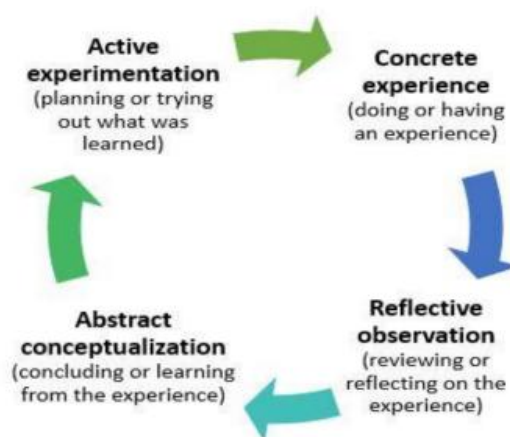


Figure 1. Kolb's cycles of learning
Source: Kuntjojo (2015)

In this study, the teachers are also learners who have experience in learning English (including writing skills) based on Kolb's four cycles. The experience they gained was

transformed into knowledge that they imparted to the language learners. Thus, the knowledge and experience gained by them will trigger the use of the LSI approach, where the way they teach is based on the knowledge and experience they have gained. Data related to teachers' knowledge and experience are obtained through questionnaires and structured interviews with writing teachers at elementary, intermediate and advanced levels. The first main data are descriptions from the institution's curriculum department of the NNESTS competency components that teach Writing skills. The second main data are the experiences of learning and teaching NNESTS writing skills obtained from questionnaires and structured interviews. Supporting data are the language proficiency certificates of the teachers. Data analysis are conducted in a grounded manner through three stages. First, transcribing the data from the questionnaires and structured interviews, and making open codification. In the open codification stage, the researcher names each phenomenon generated from the questionnaires and interviews. Second, categorizing the data based on two main aspects, namely literacy and experience. In the experience aspect, the data was based on Kolb's cycle which consists of abstract conceptualization, active experimentation, concrete experience, and reflective observation. Third, data related to experience are analyzed based on the concept of competency theory by Spencer & Spencer (1993) which includes technical competence, managerial competence, conceptual competence, and leadership competence.

3. Result and Discussion

The analysis identifies three interrelated aspects that explain the development of NNESTS' instructional competency in teaching writing. The first examines teachers' literacy background, particularly their age and teaching experience, as the contextual foundation of instructional competency. The second explores how instructional competency develops through teachers' experiential learning processes, interpreted through Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory. The third interprets these experiential processes using Spencer and Spencer's competency framework to demonstrate how technical, managerial, and conceptual competencies are manifested in NNESTS' writing instruction. Together, these findings provide an integrated understanding of how instructional competency is developed and enacted in EFL writing classrooms.

3.1 Age and Experience as Literacy Component

Foreign language teaching planning needs to be done carefully and strategically. The maturity of planning for this can be seen from the extent to which learning targets, learning outcomes, teaching materials, and teaching methods can be prepared properly and carefully. This preparation indicates that there is an adjustment of teaching materials to the learning outcomes that need to be done, so that not all things and aspects in a language need to be taught in formal learning. All of these things need to be contained and outlined in the institution's curriculum. From the observation, it was found that there are no specific criteria linked to NNESTS tutors in writing skills in the institution's curriculum documentation. The teaching of writing skills is done by tutors with different levels of age and experience. Tutors who are old enough are placed at the Advance level of learners and those who are young or just graduated from college (freshgraduate) are placed at the Elementary level of learners. This parameter also has an impact on the determination of learning targets and source books used at each learner level. In this study, the Curriculum Section justified that each learner level has different learning targets and outcomes. At the elementary level, learners are

expected to understand the use of punctuation and the formation of words into sentences. At the intermediate level, learners are expected to understand sentence structure and the formation of a paragraph. At the advanced level, learners are expected to be able to apply the rules of writing at the basic to advanced levels into writing in the form of scientific papers. The relationship between NNESTs' teaching experience and the distribution of instructional responsibilities across learner proficiency levels is illustrated in Figure 2.

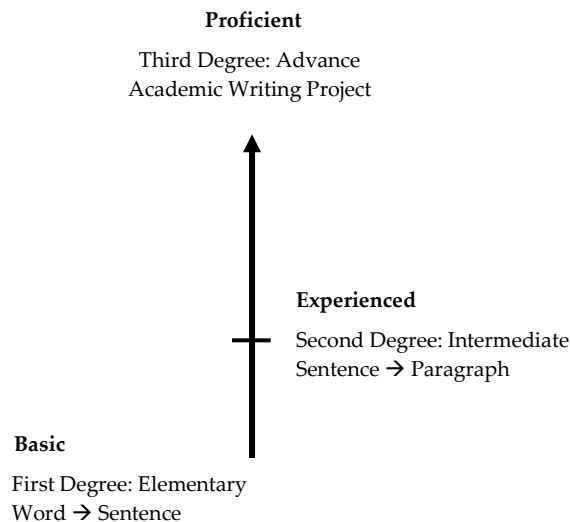


Figure 2. NNESTs level of experience and students level

As illustrated in Figure 2, the institution assigns NNESTs to different instructional levels according to their teaching experience. Less experienced teachers, particularly recent graduates, are responsible for elementary-level classes, where writing instruction focuses on foundational competencies, including punctuation, word formation, and sentence construction. More experienced teachers are assigned to higher instructional levels, where learners are expected to develop paragraph writing and academic writing skills. This distribution demonstrates that teaching experience serves as an important literacy component in determining instructional responsibilities and reflects the institution's expectations regarding the instructional competency required at different learner proficiency levels.

3.2 Experience as NNESTs Cycle of Learning

In the aspect of active experimentation, there is a Writing tutor at the elementary level who did not determine the learning models and methods to be used in the Writing class. However, they have understood the contents of the book and selected the materials that they will teach. This is different from the intermediate and advanced levels who determine the learning models and methods that will be used to teach writing skills. The comparison of NNESTs' instructional preparation across the elementary, intermediate, and advanced levels in the Active Experimentation stage is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Active Experimentation

No.	Variables	Elementary	Intermediate	Advance
1.	Understand the content of the	√	√	√

	subject's book			
2.	Select significant topics for the subject	√	√	√
3.	Determine the model of learning	-	√	√
4.	Determine the method of learning	-	√	√

On the concrete experience aspect, the tutor at the elementary level has less than three years of experience teaching Writing. He also has experience teaching Speaking skills but not Grammatical skills. This is different from tutors at the intermediate level who have experience in teaching Speaking and Grammatical skills. The tutor at the advanced level has experience in teaching Writing for a relatively long time, which is more than three years, but he does not have experience in teaching Speaking and Grammatical skills. Experience as a teacher of English skills is supported by the English proficiency test that each tutor has participated in. This indicates that there is an awareness that as NNESTS, they need to measure their English proficiency with some of the existing skill components as evidence that their proficiency is tested and they can evaluate the test results before they teach certain skills to NNEL (non-native English learner) learners. The indicators representing the Concrete Experience stage across the three instructional levels are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Concrete Experience

No.	Variables	Elementary	Intermediate	Advance
1.	Experience of teaching Writing subject previously	√	√	√
2.	Experience of teaching Writing subject less than three years	√	√	-
3.	Experience of teaching Writing subject more than three years	-	-	√
4.	Experience of teaching Speaking subject	√	√	-
5.	Experience of teaching Grammar subject	-	√	-
6.	Experience of taking an English proficiency test	√	√	√

In the reflective observation aspect, NNESTS at the elementary level had problems in teaching Writing skills. He also found difficult topics in the textbooks used and found students' difficulties in understanding the material. This is not the case with tutors at intermediate and advanced levels, where they only have problems in teaching Writing, such as mediating conflicting concepts in writing and the lack of understanding of learners due to the lack of reading habits. The results related to the Reflective Observation stage are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Reflective observation

No.	Variables	Elementary	Intermediate	Advance
1.	Have a problem during the class	√	√	√

2.	Find a difficult topic within the book	√	-	-
3.	Find students' difficulty on the topics	√	-	-
4.	The difficulty of the book contents to be presented for certain level	-	-	-

In the aspect of abstract conceptualization, tutors at each level of learners evaluate Writing teaching at the end of each semester, understand what needs to be developed from the learning process, and find new aspects that need to be developed from learners' abilities related to Writing. In contrast, they did not find the latest models and strategies from their teaching experience. The indicators representing the Abstract Conceptualization stage are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Abstract conceptualization

No.	Variables	Elementary	Intermediate	Advance
1.	Conduct an evaluation on Writing class every end semester	√	√	√
2.	Understand what to develop from students' learning	√	√	√
3.	Take a note on difficult topics	-	√	√
4.	Find the latest model and strategy from teaching the subject	-	-	-
5.	Find the new aspect that needs to develop from students' ability in Writing subject	√	√	√

The findings across the four stages of Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory demonstrate that NNESTs continuously transform their teaching experiences into pedagogical knowledge and instructional improvement. Differences in instructional planning, teaching experience, reflective practice, and pedagogical evaluation indicate that instructional competency develops through an ongoing process of experience, reflection, conceptualization, and experimentation. These experiential learning processes provide the foundation for understanding how NNESTs' instructional competency is manifested through different competency dimensions, as discussed in the following section using Spencer and Spencer's competency framework.

3.3 NNESTS Components of Competency

The findings indicate that the competency components assigned to NNESTs teaching writing at each learner level have not yet been formally standardized by the Curriculum Department at LPBA Nurul Jadid. Instead, teaching assignments are determined through institutional considerations that primarily emphasize the tutors' age, which is assumed to reflect their teaching experience, pedagogical maturity, and professional competence. Consequently, older NNESTs are generally entrusted with teaching higher-level writing classes, while younger tutors are assigned to elementary-level learners. This institutional

practice suggests that age functions as an indirect indicator of accumulated instructional experience rather than as an isolated determinant of teaching quality.

This finding is consistent with (Rusydiana, 2021) who reported that age has a positive and significant relationship with teacher professionalism because increasing age is often accompanied by greater teaching experience, pedagogical knowledge, and professional maturity. It is also supported by (Scheirlinckx et al, 2025), who found that age is associated with several instructional characteristics; however, its influence is neither universal nor equally strong across all dimensions of teaching effectiveness. Their study emphasizes that although older teachers may demonstrate advantages in certain instructional and social-emotional competencies, effective teaching is shaped by multiple interacting factors, including years of teaching experience, continuous professional development, and contextual demands.

In the context of this study, the assignment of NNESTs to different learner levels reflects an institutional belief that age represents accumulated pedagogical experience and instructional readiness. Nevertheless, the findings also reveal that age alone cannot comprehensively define instructional competency. The effectiveness of NNESTs in teaching writing is more accurately reflected in their ability to design writing activities, provide constructive feedback, facilitate students' writing development, and adapt instructional strategies to learners' proficiency levels. Therefore, while age serves as one practical consideration in determining teaching responsibilities at LPBA Nurul Jadid, instructional competency should be understood as a multidimensional construct that extends beyond chronological age and encompasses pedagogical expertise, reflective practice, and professional experience.

In general, this study can conclude that technical competence, managerial competence and conceptual competence are issues for NNESTs in teaching writing skills at each level. In general, NNESTs need to have technical competence in teaching language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing (Alghofaili & Elyas, 2017; Harsanti & Manara, 2021; Silalahi & Widianingtyas, 2022). They should be able to design and deliver effective learning activities to develop students' language skills. In this study, NNESTs who taught Writing skills at the elementary level did not determine learning methods and models. In Spencer's concept of competence, technical competence refers to technical knowledge and skills that are specific to performing a particular task (Dharmanegara, 2019). This competency relates to an individual's ability to master the tools, technology or methods used in the work. This competency is necessary for NNESTs in teaching Writing skills, especially when they conduct visual demonstrations using the latest technology and methods.

In a study conducted by (Ismiyani, 2021), NNESTs are often claimed to be less competent and qualified in teaching English. This argument is still relative because there are NNESTs who also have knowledge of English related to one language skill. They develop and deepen this knowledge by focusing on the problems that exist in that skill, which they can then actualize into existing skill outcomes. The study that conducted by (Selvi, et al., 2024) shows that the perception of NNESTs as being less competent is largely rooted in native-speakerism rather than in empirical evidence of teaching quality.

In addition to problems in technical competence, the NNESTs in this study also had problems in classroom management. When viewed from the components of reflective observation, the majority of NNESTs experienced problems in providing classroom teaching. Problems encountered during teaching are how to mediate new things that contradict the textbooks used and the lack of learners' ability to absorb material due to lack

of reading. If managerial competence is achieved, NNESTS will acquire strategies in dealing with problems encountered when teaching Writing skills. This will have an impact on how NNESTS can provide solutions related to the teaching of Writing skills in terms of managerial aspects, especially when NNESTS find contradictions in the concept of writing.

Based on its conceptual competence, NNESTS was also unable to find and identify aspects that could be used as findings in models and strategies for teaching Writing skills that they could implement in the following year. NNESTS' sensitivity to learning problems and activities should generate stimulus for NNESTS to identify novelty in models, methods, and substantive knowledge that will impact on improving the learning experience of NNESTS and learners, and the institution's curriculum development. Success in learning and teaching can have a positive impact on scientific development. Through this process, scientific novelty can occur. In this study, novelty in the field of Writing skills can be useful for learners in this research locus as an evaluation and development of writing skills for expected concrete outcomes, such as paper writing. Through the conceptual competence of NNESTS, learners are expected to apply the latest writing rules that are trending in various types of written works.

There are at least three things that this study can formulate as reasons why conceptual competence is important for NNESTS. First, it enables them to understand the principles and concepts underlying the English language, its structure and usage. This knowledge is crucial for teaching English as a foreign language, as it enables NNESTS to explain grammar rules, vocabulary, and pronunciation accurately and effectively. Secondly, conceptual competence helps NNESTS to develop appropriate teaching methods and materials. By understanding the learning process and cognitive development of learners, NNESTS can design lessons that suit different learning styles and ensure that the materials are interesting and relevant. Third, conceptual competence assists NNESTS in adapting their teaching to different cultural contexts. As English is often taught in multicultural settings, it is crucial for NNESTS to understand the cultural background of learners and adapt their teaching methods accordingly, as research by Nigar, Kostogriz, & Hossain (2024) and Vaishnav (2025). This can be done by incorporating culturally relevant materials or adapting activities to suit learners' needs and preferences.

4. Conclusion

The Kolb cycle proves that NNESTS is an active learner who is also teaching a skill in English. She learned from her experiences as a learner in the past and as a teacher in the present. However, if their experience is viewed from Spencer's Competence theory, then their experience still reaps the problems they found while teaching Writing skills. The problems include problems in technical competence, managerial competence, and conceptual competence, so that instructionally they still mediate and judge the conflict of concepts in Writing skills and find novelty in models, methods, and knowledge. Thus, the knowledge they teach is still not maximally developed into more varied discourses or issues, especially in Writing skills. This study provides recommendations to English language institutions that teach Writing skills to prepare learning designs that can include more varied and interesting expectations, outcomes, materials, and methods, so that it will have a positive and significant impact on the development of English language learners' Writing skills. Apart from the institution as the highest policy, NNESTS also needs to have the passion and motivation to develop its knowledge and teaching models by considering the novelty and current issues surrounding Writing skills.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Authors' contribution

Suryanti contributed to the conceptualization, methodology, data collection, data curation, formal analysis, interpretation of the findings, and writing of the original draft. Hafni Hafsah contributed to the conceptualization, methodology, supervision, interpretation of the findings, and review and editing of the manuscript. Ahmad Munawir contributed to the conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, interpretation of the findings, and review and editing of the manuscript. Petrus Jacob Pattiasina contributed to the methodology, formal analysis, and review and editing of the manuscript. Damon Wicaksi contributed to the formal analysis, interpretation of the findings, and review and editing of the manuscript. Muta'allim contributed to the data collection, data curation, and review and editing of the manuscript. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Statement on the Use of Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence (AI)-assisted tools were used for English translation, grammar correction, and proofreading. All research design, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of the findings, and the final content of the manuscript were conducted, verified, and approved by the authors, who take full responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of the work.

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