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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## Communication Repair in Virtual Academic Discourse during COVID-19 Pandemic

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**ABSTRACT**

Interaction through communication remains crucial in education. However, this became more magnified when academic institutions shifted to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is the reason why this study was conducted to explore more on the communication types, mechanisms, and reasons behind the phenomenon. The study employed Corpus-Based Discourse Analysis to understand the four-recorded virtual academic discourses of AB English Language Studies as the main source of data. These discourses were transcribed and analyzed using the analytical framework of Miles and Huberman (1994) to find out the existing types and mechanisms of communication repairs. In addition, study participants were interviewed to find out the reasons why these types and mechanisms were used during the virtual academic discourses. Findings revealed that there are three types of communication repairs utilized by the participants, including repetition, code-switching (substitution), and modification. In addition, the mechanisms include self-initiated self-repair and self-initiated other-repair, and the communication breakdown that demands repair in the virtual academic discourse is associated with communication barriers, comprehension constraints, and low self-esteem as common reasons. Thus, it is concluded that communication repair opens opportunities to eliminate communication breakdown, especially for those people who know communication repair strategies.

**KEYWORDS**

Virtual Discourse, Communication Breakdown, Communication Repair, Corpus-Based Analysis

**ARTICLE INFORMATION**

**ACCEPTED:** 20 October 2022

**PUBLISHED:** 22 October 2022

**DOI:** 10.32996/jweep.2022.4.3.8

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**1. Introduction**

Communication in the process of interaction remains significant in education. In fact, according to Beshir and Yigzaw (2022), it has become a vital tool for meaning-making, negotiating, and ensuring one's involvement in constructing one's immediate social world. This means that communication skills become critically important to make sure that the learner will be able to deliver all expectations along his journey in the academe and to prepare himself with others outside the academic community. This is the reason why Walsh (2011) argues that practical interactional competence is valuable for successful teaching and learning since it is through interaction, as observed in the communication process, that educators will be able to immediately observe and assess the learnings acquired by the learners.

However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, when education shifted to online instruction, according to Ramos and Baldespiñosa (2021), communication problems or breakdowns occurred in academic discourses, as pointed out by Alawamleh et al. (2020). Simply, online instruction magnified problems in communication and interaction between learners and teachers. In fact, Lassoued, Alhendawi, and Bashitialshaaer (2020) reported that this sudden shift to distance education through online learning created shock and tension among students and faculty members across levels. Hence, Malik and Javed (2021) reported that communication breakdowns, particularly in formal settings, resulted in a negative impact.

This points to the fact that communication failure is an existing issue and has far more detrimental effects on society than one could ever imagine. This phenomenon related to unsuccessful communication is due to a disruption in the continuous flow of turn taking that constitutes a conversation, according to Brady and Halle (2002). Meaning breakdowns occur when miscommunication exists due to the interrupted stream of information caused by either the sender or receiver's end. Hence, Ramos (2010) contended that while both ends have the responsibility to avoid communication breakdown, the sender has more responsibility because of the chance to convey the information by primarily understanding the information to be conveyed and strategically transmitting the information in the most understandable language even to the point of using several languages in a single discourse if necessary.

## 2. Literature Review

Solving problems that arise from communication needs a specific and logical way in order to aid what has been broken. In accordance with Azarnoosh (2009), learners' strategies in dealing with conversational problems seem to be the focus in second language learning due to the limited knowledge of second language learners. Second-language speakers only have limited knowledge about the familiarity of their non-native language. They struggle to transmit a comprehensible message to their interlocutors, and they sometimes fail to do so.

Consonant to that, Rabab'ah (2013) suggests that one way of modifying, organizing, and maintaining a conversation is by using repair as a communication strategy. In an attempt to save the communication process and minimize the impact of miscommunication, communicators employ communication repair, which is a response by the initiator to a communication breakdown. As cited by Popescu and Cohen-Vida (2013), the use of communication strategies is the best solution that compensates for the learners' lack of knowledge.

These mechanisms are a collection of methods and linguistic devices for resolving communication issues and negotiating meaning. Relatively, Healey et al. (2018) mention that in conversation; speakers rely on repairs to fix a variety of misunderstandings and glitches that occur in the everyday course of conversation. The occurrence of communication breakdown is unpredictable and unavoidable, especially in oral communication, where communicators might be consciously or unconsciously aware of the arising of problems while communicating and utilizing communication repair.

On the other hand, Yasui (2010) concludes that repairs are not limited to the correction of linguistic errors but also include understanding checks, confirmation checks, requests for clarification or repetition, the offer of a candidate hearing, etc. When it comes to repairing the conversation, people can use many strategies, but it will always depend on the settings where the interaction is done and the channels that communicators use.

Additionally, Julien, Finestack, and Reichle (2019) theorized that when a breakdown in communication takes place, they might request a repair to increase their understanding of the message. To illustrate, when individuals speak or communicate, they produce utterances that contain linguistic characteristics and indicate the repair that is taking place in the conversation to prevent and overcome breakdowns and convey coherent messages to their interlocutors. Hence, it is a fact that the communication setting is an important factor in making sure that a successful transfer of information takes place.

Nevertheless, as academic communities shifted to online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the communication setting also became a potential avenue for breakdowns. In the Philippines alone, there are 55 ethnic groups who speak 171 languages and dialects over the archipelago's 7,100 islands. The considered official languages are Filipino and English, with English as the medium of instruction (ESCAP, 2000). Notably, Filipinos have the ability to communicate effectively. Despite their lack of formal schooling, individuals can put together words or phrases to express themselves or respond to questions. Regardless of whether they are speaking their native language or a language with which they are familiar, speakers face the unavoidable problem of communicating effectively. Filipinos are skilled at negotiating meaning in order to comprehend or be understood. The Philippines possesses a great wealth of indigenous languages, and while these languages are related, extensive differences exist among them.

In some senses, this linguistic diversity is a problem for the Philippines, as it hinders effective communication among the various ethnic groups (McFarland, 2008). Language limitations in terms of dialects are one of the issues in the Philippines. Even if people are speaking the same language, dialectical differences can lead to misunderstandings and communication gaps. When the initiator fails to do so, one common sort of error is the failure of both Filipinos to communicate effectively. This issue necessitates communication restoration in order to comprehend and correct the discussion. The sender is responsible for correcting some utterances to ensure that both parties receive and understand the message. Relevant to that, this study focused on determining the types of communication repairs used by the students and exploring how they do communication repair along with examining their reasons corresponding to their actions of doing communication repair.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Design**

The research utilized discourse analysis. According to McCarthy (1991), discourse analysis is concerned with the study of the relationship between language and the contexts in which it is used. Specifically, the lens of corpus-based discourse analysis is applied in this research. Wa-Mbaleka and Rosario (2022) pointed out that corpus-based discourse analysis is an approach that combines the empirical nature of corpus linguistics and the analytical goals of discourse analysis. Hence, in the study, corpus linguistics was used to examine the large collection of naturally occurring data along with the descriptive statistical tools used to identify patterns in the corpus. Then the discourse analysis was used to interpret the patterns within the contexts in which they occur (Cameron and Panovic, 2014).

#### **3.2 Environment**

The study was conducted at Cebu Technological University Argao, Cebu, Philippines. This is an institution of higher learning in a rural community. From Cebu City, it is situated strategically at 69 kilometers at the south eastern corridor of Cebu Province. The campus caters to learners from across the surrounding municipalities, which can be considered to be part of the same speech community from a wide variety of the Cebuano-Visayan language. In addition, it is notable that in the context of the study, English is used as a second language. This means that the English language is part of the day-to-day communication along with the Cebuano-Visayan language of the community members. Moreover, with the presence of technology, communicating with one another is faster and easier through mobile phones and other mobile applications, along with the use of internet connectivity. The situation allows a more free flow of information and exchange of ideas through the utilization of available languages, both Cebuano-Visayan and English.

#### **3.3 Participants and Instrument**

There were twenty-five (25) participants involved in the study. They were selected using purposive sampling. They were those who met the inclusion criteria, which are: (a) officially enrolled in the university, (b) under the AB English language program, (c) part of a literature subject, and (d) a native of Cebu province. The criteria are necessary to establish a common ground in conducting the study. In order to get the data from the virtual academic discourse, the observation guide was made to aid in looking for the types of communication repairs and their mechanisms. The observation guide was created based on the definitions revolving around communication repairs and mechanisms. Furthermore, the observation guide was validated by language experts to make sure that its contents were in consonance with the need of the study.

#### **3.4 Data Gathering Procedures**

The study started after appropriate permissions were obtained. Then, the recording of the virtual academic discourses in four sessions commenced at weekly intervals. When these recorded virtual academic discourses were deduced, the participants were interviewed to uncover their reasons. After that, the process of careful transcription followed while maintaining the anonymity of the participants using pseudonyms. The transcription was cross-checked by research members to make sure that its contents were in consonance with the actual recording. Data trustworthiness was ensured by following the criteria set by Lincoln and Guba (1989), including the concept of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. On the other hand, ethical considerations were guided through the criteria of Creswell (2014), which include: before conducting the study, beginning the study, collecting the data, analyzing the data, reporting and storing the data, and publishing the data.

After gathering and transcribing the data, these were accordingly arranged into files for analysis. The analytical framework of Miles and Huberman (1994) became the guide to deduce further the data. The analytical framework consists of three activities, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification.

The principle of selectivity became the anchor for the data reduction phase. Hence, in this stage of analysis, the raw data were reviewed thoroughly and singled out for description. The deductive analysis occurred using the research questions as a guide. Meaning, communication repair occurrences were identified, counted, and analyzed according to the types and mechanisms employed in the virtual academic discourse. In addition, inductive analysis occurred to look for the reasons of the study participants in using communication repair. Hence, in this part, according to Ramos and Baldespiñosa (2021), the selection of other data to be highlighted was based on the idea that there could be emerging and related concepts that support the study. Simply, in this stage of data analysis, the research questions help in shaping the initial categorizations.

The data display stage of analysis is the phase where additional higher-order categories are searched as they emerge from the data. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), this stage employs constant comparison to establish significant patterns and is followed by questioning and refinement as part of an ongoing analytic process.

In the third and final stage, called the drawing of conclusion and verification, the researchers moved back to review the analyzed and deduced data and discover further in terms of its meaning and examine for possible associated implications that are very critical and relevant to the research questions raised. Hence, in this stage, there were several instances of revisiting the data to check and re-check the emerging types, mechanisms, and reasons for using communication repair in the virtual academic discourse.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

**Table 1**  
**Types of Communication Repair**

Types	Frequency	Percentage %	Rank
• Repetition	232	48.84%	1st
• Code-switching (substitution)	174	36.63 %	2nd
• Modification	69	14.53 %	3rd
Total	475	100 %	

The study shows that there are three common types of communication repair that are used by learners in the virtual academic discourse. As shown in Table 1, the frequency and percentage of occurrence display that repetition, code-switching, and replacement are the common types used, of which collectively, a total of 475 occurrences were identified. Out of the total occurrences, 232, or 48.84%, were identified as repetition, 174, or 36.63%, were code-switching as substitution, and 69, or 14.53%, were replacement types.

In the context of repetition as a communication repair type, Beshir and Yigzaw (2022) claimed that a speaker might avoid making mistakes; hence this is considered a communicative strategy. This type of communication repair is best exemplified in the excerpt from the transcript.

Teacher: How did the author present the **flow of the story**?

Makoy: **Flow of the story?** You mean the **flow of the story**? The one that was given to us to read as a team?

Teacher: Yes, that's it.

Clearly, the sample shows how "Makoy," the student clarified his question by doing repetition. Clarification for him, in this case, is considered essential to avoid errors in the task of responding to the question raised by the teacher. Hence, he repeated the line "flow of the story" coming from the teacher and stated it twice as part of his response. Therefore, in this case, repetition reminds the listener/s of the importance of the coming utterance. It was evident that the participant's repetition strategies enabled him to gain more time while still maintaining a language environment conducive to meaningful English language discussion. As pointed out by Brady et al. (1995), repetition as a repair strategy occurs when the communicator produces the same message as produced in the original message. This is done with the goal of making sure that the communicator is understood, and because the focus of making oneself understood in every communication process is very natural, repetition, in this case, got the highest percentage because, according to Brady & Halle (2002), repetition as a repair strategy is considered to be the most basic type.

Code-switching, as a substitution, provides students with opportunities to communicate and enhance their understanding Ahmad (2009). This is because, as Ayeni (2021) has mentioned that while communication is key in every human relationship or encounter, the use of language in communication is also tied to an individual's mastery of such language. Hence, to continue the delivery of the message, a possible substitution is used through the available language in the context of code-switching. This type of communication repair is exemplified in the following excerpt from the transcript.

Teacher: What do you think is meant by the author in this case? Anyone? Common, I know you have something to share in there. Yes! Sheila? You want to say something?

Sheila: Yes, yes. I think the writer emphasizes the value of resiliency here. Kana bang (**My point is**), whatever comes

along the way, mag-pandemic paman, or bagyo, or unsa pa nga kalamidad, (**whatever comes along the way, may it be a pandemic, or typhoon or any calamity**), padayun mu-adjust lang (**just go on and adjust**). Unya padayun gihapun sa life (**and then, life will just continue**).

Teacher: Well done! It's a good point and a clear explanation about the concept of resiliency.

Therefore, in a naturally multilingual community where both Cebuano-Visayan and English languages co-exist, the learners are expected to manipulate both languages during contact with other speakers of the same speech community resulting in the switching of one language to another. Simply, they use their native language as a linguistic choice along with other co-existing languages that connect with it to thoroughly express ideas, as seen in the natural shifting from English to the Cebuano-Visayan language in the response made by the student. Rabab'ah (2013) stated that non-native speakers are challenged with the inevitable task of communicating successfully with each other, i.e., sending and receiving comprehensible messages. They struggle to transmit a comprehensible message to their interlocutors. Hence, in this case, the learner is a non-native speaker of the English language. Initially, the response was made using the English language because the question from the teacher was framed in English. However, the student naturally shifted back to her own native language to put emphasis and clarity in her response. Therefore, Leonard (1983) suggests that competent communicators learn to regulate and modify messages within a conversation. Thus, this became the case for the participants in the study.

Lastly, the modification includes changes in the original message done either through addition or reduction, as pointed out by Meadan and Halle (2004). This is done when the speaker realizes that (s)he is saying something unclear that does not hold the listener's attention, which is fundamental in conversation that participants construct or design their talk so as to be understood in the way they wish to be understood according to Drew (2005). This type of communication repair is best exemplified in the excerpt from the transcript.

Teacher: So, what do you think is the general message of this story? Who would like to try sharing ideas this time?  
Yes, yes, James. Go ahead, please.

James: I believe that the author wants the reader to know that **marriage is something that people should think about**.

Teacher: Uhm, what do you mean by that?

James: **This means that people have to consider other aspects of life before engaging with someone in a marital relationship. This involves thinking critically about the responsibilities that come after getting married, such as the rearing of children and provision of the family needs.**

Teacher: Good point, James!

The excerpt shows how James, the student, made modifications to his initial response by adding more information about the concept related to marriage. This was done in consonance with the concept of Golinkoff (1986) that by producing the same concept, gestures, vocalization, or speech as in the original message and adding other communicative behavior with the inclusion of more lexicons, the message delivered became clearer and understandable.

Furthermore, in the succeeding table, the mechanisms used by the learners during virtual academic discourse are presented. In totality, there were 27 occurrences of mechanisms found in the recorded academic discourses.

Table 2  
Communication Repair Mechanisms

Mechanisms	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
• Self-initiated self-repair	26	93.30%	1 <sup>st</sup>
• Self-initiated other-repair	1	3.70%	2 <sup>nd</sup>
Total	27	100%	

Consonant to the findings, it is shown in Table 2 that there are two types of communication repair mechanisms being utilized by the students, which include self-initiated self-repair comprising twenty-six (26) occurrences or 93.30% and self-initiated other-

repair in one (1) occurrence which is 3.70% of the total occurrences. This further explains that one way of modifying, organizing, and maintaining a conversation is by using repair as a communication strategy. It is suggested that using communication strategies prevent communication breakdowns and get a message across to the listener leads to second language learning (Swain,1985; Rababah, 2007).

Self-initiated self-repair mechanism has been viewed as self-interruption, according to Sparks (1994). This means that the speaker of the current turn cuts off his/her speech, lengthens the sounds, and uses quasi-lexical fillers such as uh and um. This is used in order to repair their errors in problematic talk. Schegloff et al. (1977) state that self-initiated repair occurs when the interlocutor who is responsible for the source of trouble both initiates and completes the repair. The reason that this repair is vastly used is that the speaker is fully aware of his message and Rabab'ab (2013) believes that these are prominent features of daily communication. And this repair existed because, as stated by (Faerch and Kasper, 1983), during the planning and execution phases, second language speakers encounter problems due to their lack of linguistic resources; therefore, they modify their plan and use their existing knowledge, usually consciously, with the intention of sending a comprehensible message and achieving their communicative goal.

In addition, self-initiated other repair mechanism occurs when the speaker of the repairable item indicates a problem in the talk, but the recipient resolves the problem. Notably, the data show that the self-initiated self-repair mechanism is commonly used compared to the self-initiated other repair mechanisms. This is greatly connected to the nature of the discourse which occurred between the teacher and the learners along with other variables such as proficiency level, progress in language acquisition, and monitoring focus and ability, as pointed out in several studies (Fincher 2006; Kormos 1999a; Lennon 1994; O'Connor 1988; Smith 2008).

Table 3  
Common Reasons for Using communication Repair

Themes	Categories
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication Barriers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Poor internet connectivity</li> <li>· Outdated gadget</li> <li>· Language used</li> <li>· Noisy environment</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comprehension Constraints</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Low thinking skills</li> <li>· Poor vocabulary</li> <li>· Language unfamiliarity</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low Self-Esteem</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Communication anxiety</li> <li>· Stressful modality</li> <li>· Poor family support</li> </ul>

Table 3 shows the three themes with corresponding categories corresponding to the common reasons for using communication repair. Notably, this includes communication barriers, comprehension constraints, and low self-esteem.

The first theme, known as the communication barrier, comprises the categories concerning poor internet connectivity, outdated gadgets, the language used, and noisy environment. Simply, in this case, a communication barrier is anything that prevents one from receiving and understanding the messages; of which according to Rani (2016), these exist in any communication process. Hence, these barriers trigger communication breakdowns that require repair, as mentioned by the participant in the interview.

*During a discussion of our lesson online, there were really cases where my responses did not reach directly to the other end because of my internet connectivity problem since I am located in the mountain barangay. - Mark*

*I really wanted to participate in the class discussion, but sometimes I just decided to stay quiet because of the noise in my environment. When I give my response, most often, I need to say it out loud or do it again because someone is singing next to me because my location is just closer to where the PISO wifi is. – Stella*

These two directly quoted statements from the participants signify that when barriers in communication are present in their location where they are situated to participate in their virtual academic discourses, the demand to do communication repair is also

evident in order to make sure that their messages will be clear and understandable. This situation is supported by Dabaj et al. (2004) when they claim that there are greater problems in distance education or virtual learning, such as the case during the COVID-19 pandemic due to physical distance between members, insufficient technology, difficulties using media, need for more human interaction, time, place constraints and restrictions, and lack of experience with distance education. Thus, communication barriers are considered one of the main reasons why students tend to perform communication repairs.

Furthermore, the second theme, known as comprehension constraints, comprises the categories concerning low thinking skills, poor vocabulary, and language unfamiliarity. The findings indicate that comprehension of the topic can lead to a breakdown in responding to questions in the academic discourse. This is best exemplified by the directly quoted statements from the participants.

*When I give my answer to a question raised by my professor, there are cases that I need to undo or redo my responses, especially when my name is called and I am not yet ready to provide the answer...hehehe, meaning I am already talking while I am still trying to analyze the point of my response to the question.* - Anabelle

*In my case, wala jud koy ingun-ana kadaghang vocabulary nga magamit dayun. (In my case, I just don't have the wide range of vocabulary to use immediately.)* - Alex

This shows that in the context of virtual academic discourses, the need to agree or disagree on the issue or even the demand to elaborate requires the competence to communicate. According to Markham (2015) that it is through communication that people will be able to influence the understanding, attitude, and actions of others. Yet, in contrast, some of the students failed to perform this stand because comprehension constraints hindered them from doing so. Lack of comprehension is one of the common reasons that occur in situations of communication that leads to communication breakdown. The participants emphasized that due to a lack of understanding of the topic, the speaker has the inability to communicate smoothly and fails to pass the message. Additionally, the wide range of vocabulary is significantly valuable as these are options for forming sound statements. To sum up, this shows consonance with Schegloff et al. (2007) pointing out the evidence that language learners are able to employ many repair strategies.

Lastly, the third theme, known as low self-esteem, comprises the categories concerning communication anxiety, stressful modality, and poor family support. Each of these includes the corresponding categories that support the particular theme. This is best shown in the directly quoted responses.

*Honestly, I feel scared to be embarrassed when responding to my professor. This is the reason why I often make some changes in my responses because the focus is more on not getting embarrassed instead of clearly answering the question.* - Archie

*Actually, during online classes, I really feel stressed, especially if many of my classes will do a synchronous session, because I am afraid to lose my internet data, and I know I don't have the luxury to buy for the load to get connected immediately since my family does not really provide me all the support I need in this online class.* - Tom

These responses reflect the fact that possible communication breakdown occurs because these issues may involve personal, technical, financial, or even the entire family. This fact is in consonance with the findings of Cucek (2001) that these are consistently emerging barriers and issues in the context of distance education, such as the case of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. These barriers and issues include lack of interaction, wherein students cannot overcome their communication anxiety for they lack communication practice; poorly structured courses; and difficulty in accessing resources. Moreover, personal issues are considered one of the factors in having low self-esteem because it involves family motivation and self-discipline. In addition, low self-esteem can lessen a student's desire to learn, her ability to focus, and her willingness to take risks; Shore (2010) and Eastwood (1979) added that if a person has low self-esteem, they will always belittle themselves despite outward success. Davidson et al. (2012) further explain that the sense of self-esteem is very much related to the way they communicate with others around them.

## **5. Conclusion**

The study was conducted during the academic year 2020-2021. Data were gathered from the four-recorded virtual academic discourses that were transcribed and subjected to corpus-based discourse analysis to find the types and mechanisms of repair mechanisms. The common reasons were identified through an interview with the participants, and data from the interview were analyzed following the analytical framework of Miles and Huberman (1994).

The findings show that the types of communication repair in the virtual academic discourse include repetition, code-switching (substitution), and modification. Among these types, repetition emerged to be commonly occurring. Moreover, repair mechanisms in these discourses include self-initiated self-repair and self-initiated other-repair. In addition, it is notable that there were more

self-initiated self-repair mechanism occurrences. Lastly, the common reasons for using communication repair in the virtual academic discourse are associated with communication barriers, comprehension constraints, and low self-esteem.

Based on the findings, the study demonstrated that communication breakdown is an inevitable part of the interaction, especially in the virtual academic discourse, if not properly mediated. Therefore, communication repair opens opportunities to eliminate communication breakdown, especially for those people who possess repair strategies. It is very beneficial if one has knowledge in knowing communication repair and is able to use it to repair errors that can lead to successful communication, as it is very vital in day-to-day living. Moreover, the study shows that there are types of communication repair that can be utilized to continue and help facilitate the flow of communication between individuals involved, such as repetition, code-switching (substitution), and modification. More so, there are also mechanisms that signal those involved in the communication process to do communication repairs, such as, in this case, self-initiated self-repair, and self-initiated other-repair.

This research is within the virtual academic discourses, which are highly dependent on the availability of technology. Hence, it is suggested that a replicated study may be done in the context of discourses in the blended learning modality to see if there will be different types and mechanisms to occur as well as to identify the reasons behind such phenomenon.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest in working on this research.

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**Publisher's Note:** All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations or those of the publisher, the editors, and the reviewers.

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