

Measures to develop 5–6-year-old preschool children’s ability to use sentences for communicative purposes: A situational survey and pedagogical experiment

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Abstract: This study aims to develop and evaluate a set of pedagogical measures to enhance 5–6-year-old preschool children’s ability to use sentences according to communicative purposes from a communicative-oriented perspective. The research employs a mixed-methods design following a sequential explanatory approach, including a situational survey and a controlled pedagogical experiment. The survey was conducted with teachers and children in several preschools to examine teachers’ awareness, the organization of language activities, and children’s use of sentence types. Based on these findings, targeted measures were designed and implemented in an intervention with experimental and control groups of equivalent initial ability. The results show that children in the experimental group demonstrated significant improvement in using sentences for communicative purposes compared to the control group. The proportion of children below expectations decreased, while those exceeding expectations increased across all sentence types, particularly in imperative and exclamatory forms. These findings confirm the effectiveness of a communicative-pragmatic approach to early language education. Practically, the study suggests that organizing purposeful communicative activities is essential for fostering young children’s verbal communicative competence.

Keywords: 5–6-year-old preschool children, Communicative approach, Communicative purposes, Language development, Language education activities, Sentence use ability.

1. Introduction

Language development is one of the major objectives of early childhood education. Supporting children’s language development not only involves expanding vocabulary and producing grammatically correct sentences but also enabling children to use Vietnamese effectively for communication across preschool ages. At the age of 5–6, children begin to participate in a variety of purposeful interactional situations, such as asking for information, making requests, negotiating, or expressing emotions, which require them to select and use sentence types appropriate to communicative contexts. However, in educational practice, language development activities often focus primarily on vocabulary expansion, pronunciation practice, or the repetition of fixed sentence patterns. In contrast, the communicative functions of sentences receive less attention. As a result, children may produce structurally correct sentences but still fail to perform communicative acts appropriate to their purposes in speaking. Therefore, research on developing sentence use for 5–6-year-old preschool children according to communicative purposes is necessary to link language teaching to children’s practical communicative competence.

In research on early language development, language is increasingly approached as a socially inferential communicative activity rather than merely a system of formal structures. Bohn et al. [1] demonstrate that preschool children already perform pragmatic inferences based on the assumption that speakers intentionally convey information, forming a relatively stable structure of communicative competence. From an assessment perspective, Blume, et al. [2] show that children’s language use in interaction reflects language development and social skills more clearly than grammatical accuracy alone. Similarly, Rasheeka, et al. [3] argue that pragmatic assessment should be grounded in natural interactional contexts. These studies consistently suggest

that pragmatic competence constitutes a foundation for language development. Nevertheless, there remains a lack of analyses concerning how communicative purposes are realized in specific units of speech, particularly at the sentence level. This unit directly expresses communicative acts such as asking, requesting, narrating, and proposing. This gap highlights the need to investigate the development of children's ability to use sentences according to communicative purposes.

Research on the development of sentence structure in young children indicates that syntax does not emerge as an abstract rule system independent of communication but rather develops through language use in interaction. In the formation of interrogative structures, Rowland and Pine [4] demonstrate that children can produce grammatically correct questions without fully mastering auxiliary inversion rules. Instead, children learn specific lexical–grammatical combinations based on frequency patterns in adult speech. This finding is reinforced by Ambridge et al. [5], who show that inversion errors depend on particular combinations of wh-words and auxiliaries rather than general syntactic rules, suggesting that early sentence development is gradually constructed from usage patterns. The influence of the language environment has also been clearly demonstrated through studies of adult speech. Hoff-Ginsberg [6] shows that maternal speech provides syntactic models while simultaneously encouraging children to participate in conversation, thereby promoting sentence structure development. This indicates that syntactic development results from structured exposure and communicative practice within educational environments rather than solely from biological maturation. From a functional perspective, Clark and Amaral [7] argue that children rely on pragmatic information and joint attention to infer meaning before generalizing syntactic rules; sentence structures thus emerge as a consequence of communicative needs. Matthews et al. [8] also show that children adjust their expressions according to communicative contexts and listeners' feedback, reflecting a close relationship between sentence structure and informational function. In terms of structural development, Hadley, et al. [9] demonstrate that grammatical progress is reflected in “sentence diversity,” defined as the ability to produce multiple subject–verb combinations to serve expressive purposes. Furthermore, Gundel et al. [10] show that children early on use referential forms appropriate to the listener's knowledge state, establishing a link between syntactic development and the ability to interpret communicative intentions.

Taken together, these studies suggest that: (1) children's sentence structures are formed through the accumulation of usage patterns based on input frequency; (2) conversational interaction and adult feedback facilitate syntactic generalization; and (3) communicative functions guide the diversification of sentence structures. However, most studies focus on natural developmental processes or family and classroom environments rather than on designing pedagogical measures aimed specifically at developing sentence use according to communicative purposes among older preschool children. This gap calls for experimental educational research that directly intervenes in communicative activities to foster both the structural and functional development of sentences among 5–6-year-old children.

Research on language development instruction in early childhood education has largely examined the relationship between educational environments, pedagogical interaction, and structured interventions in the formation of children's early language abilities. At a foundational level, Isaac [11] synthesizes research on language development from ages 0–5 and shows that adult–child interaction, language-rich environments, and dialogic reading are key factors in the development of phonology, vocabulary, and syntax. In classroom-based experimental research, Connor et al. [12] demonstrate that the amount and type of language activities in classrooms influence children's growth in letter knowledge, word recognition, and vocabulary, with teacher-directed and meaning-centered activities such as shared reading being particularly associated with vocabulary development. Grøver et al. [13] further show that the quality of teacher talk during shared reading, such as lexical diversity, word explanations, and multi-clause sentences, explains improvements in children's second-language vocabulary. Intervention studies indicate that effectiveness depends on both the structure and intensity of the intervention. Phillips, et al. [14] demonstrate that high-intensity small-group interventions improve several language indicators and help prevent reading comprehension difficulties. Chaitow et al. [15] find that professional development increases teachers' language-supportive behaviors, although the effects on children vary. Buschmann et al. [16] show that parent-based interventions reduce the risk of expressive language disorders. At a synthesis level, Ghosh and Banerjee [17] indicate that effective intervention programs are consistently associated with clearly goal-oriented communicative activities, particularly in bilingual contexts

where dialogic reading and culturally responsive practices play central roles. This observation highlights the importance of studies focusing on specific linguistic units within pedagogical activities, particularly at the sentence level, where communicative purposes are directly realized. Approaches centered on educational activities also emphasize the role of teaching methods. Pasaribu et al. [18] demonstrate that play, singing, and storytelling enhance children's sentence production abilities. Tran [19] establishes an experiential activity process for developing coherent speech, while Isaac [11] confirms that storytelling and reading aloud support syntactic development. At the level of educational organization, Nguyen [20] and Nguyen [21] emphasize the roles of educational management, communicative environments, and teacher professional development in language development. Studies published in the *Journal of Educational Equipment* (2023, 2024) also identify language-rich environments and family, school collaboration as key implementation conditions. Overall, these studies agree that preschool language development results from multi-layered interactions among teacher talk quality, the design of communicative activities, structured interventions, and educational environments; however, research specifically addressing the development of sentence structures according to communicative purposes remains limited.

From these perspectives, three relatively consistent conclusions emerge in early childhood language research: (1) language competence develops through pragmatic communicative interaction; (2) sentence structures evolve through usage frequency and conversational feedback; and (3) effective educational interventions are associated with purposeful communicative activities. Nevertheless, most studies either examine natural syntactic development or evaluate environmental and programmatic effects at the level of general activities. Consequently, the relationship between specific linguistic units, particularly the sentence, and the communicative functions children must perform in educational contexts has not been systematically examined. In particular, there is a lack of educationally oriented research aimed at developing preschool children's ability to select and use sentence types according to communicative purposes. This gap highlights the need for an approach that integrates linguistic theory with pedagogical activity design to develop children's sentence use in relation to communicative acts.

The present study, therefore, aims to develop and examine a pedagogical approach to fostering the ability of 5–6-year-old preschool children to use sentences according to communicative purposes, based on the integration of functional linguistic perspectives and developmental characteristics of early childhood language. Specifically, the study seeks to identify patterns in children's use of sentence types associated with communicative acts, design an appropriate system of educational activities, and evaluate changes in children's ability to select and use sentence types according to communicative purposes after participating in these activities.

Accordingly, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do 5–6-year-old preschool children currently use sentence types for different communicative purposes (narrating, asking, requesting, and expressing emotions) in educational interactional contexts?
2. What components should a system of educational activities designed from a communicative-functional perspective include to support children's selection and use of sentence types appropriate to communicative purposes?
3. How does the implementation of these activities influence the development of children's ability to use sentences according to communicative purposes?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Linguistic Foundations

The linguistic basis for developing sentence use according to communicative purposes in 5–6-year-old children is grounded in the view that language functions primarily as a tool for communication, in which the sentence serves as the fundamental unit for performing this function. According to Halliday [22], every utterance simultaneously fulfills three metafunctions: the ideational function, the interpersonal function, and the textual function. Among these, the interpersonal function is particularly reflected in the selection of sentence types appropriate to communicative purposes, including declarative, interrogative, imperative, and exclamatory sentences.

In Vietnamese linguistics, Nguyen [23] classifies Vietnamese sentences according to communicative purposes and emphasizes the close relationship between sentence form and communicative effectiveness.

Nguyen [24] further argues that sentence use is also influenced by intonation and context, two factors that help distinguish and orient the intended purpose of an utterance. Diep [25] maintains that a sentence not only possesses syntactic structure but is also associated with pragmatic function, thereby highlighting the importance of developing learners' ability to select sentence types appropriate to communicative purposes. Hoang and Le [26] similarly suggest that the development of children's speech should not be limited to teaching simple sentence structures but should also guide children to use sentences appropriately in relation to communicative purposes and contexts.

These perspectives indicate that sentence use according to communicative purposes is not merely a matter of grammar but is closely related to pragmatic factors and social communication skills. Therefore, applying these theoretical foundations in designing appropriate educational activities can contribute to developing 5–6-year-old children's ability to use sentences according to communicative purposes, while also providing a solid foundation for effective communication and language learning in primary education.

2.2. Grammatical Characteristics of Children Aged 5–6

At the age of 5–6, children have formed a relatively stable foundation in using sentences for communicative purposes, as reflected in their ability to employ a variety of sentence types in everyday communication. One notable strength is that children can use declarative sentences clearly to recount events or express opinions. They are able to formulate questions to seek information or express curiosity, and they begin to use imperative sentences to make requests or suggestions, as well as exclamatory sentences to express emotions. Children also demonstrate the ability to adjust intonation according to the purpose of different sentence types, showing basic distinctions between interrogative, declarative, and exclamatory sentences. In addition, they begin to experiment with simple compound sentence structures, thereby increasing the coherence and richness of their speech.

However, alongside these strengths, several limitations remain. The use of different sentence types is not yet balanced, with declarative sentences clearly dominating, while exclamatory and imperative sentences appear less frequently in spontaneous speech. Children's vocabulary and sentence organization still rely heavily on adult language models, which may result in expressions that are sometimes repetitive or insufficient to convey the intended nuances of meaning. Although children's use of intonation has improved, confusion may still occur in situations requiring subtle emotional expression or levels of politeness.

These strengths and limitations suggest that 5–6-year-old children are already prepared to use sentences as tools for thinking and social interaction; however, they still need opportunities and guidance through diverse communicative activities to further develop their ability to use sentences according to communicative purposes. Developing criteria for assessing the ability of 5–6-year-old children to use Vietnamese sentences according to communicative purposes.

2.3. Objectives of Developing Assessment Criteria

The development of criteria for assessing children's ability to use Vietnamese sentences according to communicative purposes aims to identify specific manifestations of language competence from a pragmatic perspective. Such criteria provide an important basis for monitoring, evaluating, and supporting the development of children's ability to use sentences appropriately for communicative purposes. They also help orient language education activities in preschool settings toward a more scientific and effective approach.

2.3.1. Foundations for Developing the Assessment Criteria

First, linguistic foundations: Pragmatics emphasizes the role of sentences in communicative acts. Sentences express communicative purposes such as asking, narrating, requesting, and expressing emotions. Developing criteria based on speech acts enables a more accurate assessment of children's sentence use.

Second, developmental psychological foundations: At the age of 5–6, children begin to develop logical thinking and communicative competence. They are capable of understanding, producing, and adjusting sentences according to communicative purposes. Therefore, the assessment criteria should accurately reflect children's cognitive level and their ability to apply language in communication.

Third, early childhood educational foundations: The criteria are also based on the requirements of the Standards for the Development of Five-Year-Old Children (Decision No. 4222/QĐ-BGDĐT, December 27, 2024). Within these standards, language and communication competence include listening comprehension, responding to information, expressing ideas so that others can understand, and using polite verbal and behavioral forms in communication. These requirements provide a foundation for determining specific criteria consistent with the goals of early childhood education and the developmental characteristics of preschool children's language.

Fourth, practical educational foundations: Educational practice shows that children use a variety of sentence types but often confuse their communicative functions. Therefore, the criteria should be based on classroom observations and designed to be clear, recognizable, and measurable in specific communicative situations.

Fifth, assessment methodological foundations: The criteria should ensure several essential qualities: specificity (linked to observable linguistic behaviors), contextuality (appropriate to communicative situations), differentiation (with clear performance levels), and feasibility (easy to apply in practice). These qualities help ensure accurate assessment and support effective language development.

Table 1.

Criteria table for assessing the ability of 5–6-year-old children to use Vietnamese sentences according to communicative purposes.

Criterion	Sentence type	Assessment indicator	Not yet achieved	Achieved	Above expected
Listening comprehension of sentence types	Declarative	The child listens to a peer/teacher introducing themselves and correctly identifies the person's name and at least two additional pieces of information (e.g., interests, abilities, address).	Unable to identify the name and at least two additional pieces of information from the introduction.	Correctly identifies the name and at least two pieces of information from the introduction.	Quickly and accurately identify and fluently repeat the name and at least two pieces of information from the introduction.
	Interrogative	The child listens to questions from a peer/teacher and provides answers appropriate to the content and communicative situation (e.g., "What is your name?", "How old are you?", "What do you like?").	Does not understand the question or answers incorrectly or irrelevantly.	Understands the question and provides an appropriate answer.	Responds quickly and accurately, providing complete answers and sometimes expanding the information.
	Imperative	The child listens to a request (e.g., "Please bring me the pen.") and performs the required action.	Does not perform or performs the requested action incorrectly.	Correctly performs the requested action.	Performs the action correctly and responds verbally in an appropriate manner.
	Exclamatory	The child listens to an exclamatory sentence (e.g., "Oh! This flower is so beautiful!") and recognizes the emotion expressed.	Unable to recognize or incorrectly identifies the emotion expressed.	Correctly recognizes the emotion expressed.	Correctly recognizes the emotion and can explain the situation in which such an exclamation might be used.
Speaking using expressive sentence types	Declarative	During a self-introduction activity, the child	Unable to clearly state their name and at least two	Clearly states their name and at least two pieces of	Provides detailed and coherent information about themselves with

		clearly states their name and at least two additional pieces of information (e.g., interests, abilities, home address) with appropriate facial expressions.	pieces of information; facial expressions do not match the content.	information with appropriate facial expressions.	natural and appropriate facial expressions.
	Interrogative	During a peer interview activity, the child asks questions with clear communicative purposes (e.g., about feelings, thoughts, or objects) using appropriate intonation and expressions.	Unable to ask questions or ask irrelevant questions with inappropriate intonation.	Asks clear and purposeful questions with appropriate intonation and expressions.	Asks a variety of questions demonstrating deeper interest in peers, with natural and expressive intonation.
	Imperative	In communicative situations, the child expresses personal needs through appropriate requests (e.g., asking for help or permission) clearly and politely.	Unable to express needs through appropriate or polite requests.	Expresses needs through clear and polite requests with an appropriate attitude.	Expresses requests politely and naturally with appropriate facial expressions, intonation, and gestures.
	Exclamatory	In communicative situations, the child expresses emotions (e.g., happiness, sadness, fear, worry, anger) through exclamatory sentences with appropriate intonation.	Unable to express emotions through appropriate exclamatory sentences or uses inappropriate intonation.	Expresses emotions through appropriate exclamatory sentences with suitable intonation.	Expresses emotions vividly and naturally with expressive and engaging intonation.

2.4. Methods for Developing Sentence Use According to Communicative Purposes For 5–6-Year-Old Children

2.4.1. Principles for Proposing Methods to Develop Sentence Use According to Communicative Purposes

First, ensuring appropriateness to the developmental characteristics of older preschool children. The methods should be based on children's visual–imaginal cognitive characteristics and their still-limited language resources. Learning activities, therefore, need to be designed in ways that are familiar, vivid, and experiential so that children can easily engage with communicative situations.

Second, ensuring a pragmatic orientation in language development. The methods should not only train children to construct sentences but also guide them in using sentences appropriately for communicative purposes. Children should be given opportunities to practice language use in meaningful communicative contexts.

Third, flexible integration of methods and forms of organization. Developing sentence use according to communicative purposes requires the combination of visual methods, verbal instruction, practice activities, and games. Such integration enables children to learn language engagingly and naturally.

Fourth, promoting a language-rich communicative environment. Both classroom and family environments should provide abundant opportunities for children to listen, respond, and interact verbally. Such environments

constitute essential conditions for the formation and development of children's ability to use sentences according to communicative purposes.

Fifth, ensuring individualization and holistic development. The methods should consider differences in children's language proficiency so that appropriate adjustments can be made. At the same time, they should contribute to the development of related competencies such as thinking, emotional expression, and social communication.

2.4.2. Groups Of Methods for Developing Sentence Use According to Communicative Purposes

2.4.2.1. Visual-Based Methods

Visual-based methods are grounded in children's visual thinking characteristics during their cognitive development. According to La et al. [27], the use of visual materials such as pictures, real objects, and models not only helps children better understand linguistic content but also creates concrete communicative situations that are familiar and close to children's real-life experiences. As a result, these methods stimulate children's motivation to speak and their ability to use sentences according to communicative purposes.

The primary objective of visual-based methods is to help children recognize and flexibly use different sentence types, declarative, interrogative, exclamatory, and imperative, in specific contexts. Visual stimuli function as prompts that stimulate thinking, guide reasoning, and foster verbal responses, thereby enabling children to use language more purposefully and effectively in communication.

In teaching practice, teachers often employ pictures, video clips, real objects, or expressive models and organize a sequence of activities including observation, conversation, sentence construction, and retelling. At each stage, teachers encourage children to use sentence types appropriate to communicative purposes such as describing, questioning, expressing emotions, or making requests.

For example, when teaching the theme Traffic Safety, the teacher may show an image of a child helping an elderly person cross the street. The teacher can ask: "What is happening here?" (encouraging declarative sentences), "What is the child doing?" (prompting questions), and then model an exclamatory sentence such as "Oh, the child is so kind!" to encourage children to express emotions naturally through speech.

2.4.2.2. Verbal Methods

Verbal methods refer to the teacher's use of spoken language as a means of guiding, regulating, and stimulating children's active and purposeful language use. The teacher's model speech serves both as a medium for transmitting knowledge and as a linguistic model that helps children develop correct and appropriate language representations. This method is particularly effective in developing children's ability to use different sentence types according to communicative purposes.

The main objective of this method is to enable children to acquire expressive strategies through exposure to model speech, thereby developing their ability to use sentence types flexibly and appropriately. Additionally, it contributes to the development of children's linguistic thinking and their ability to respond appropriately in different communicative situations.

In practice, teachers may apply several forms of verbal instruction, such as storytelling with expressive intonation and diverse sentence structures; organizing open dialogues to encourage children to respond using various sentence types; or modeling sample utterances that children can repeat and adapt in specific contexts.

For instance, when telling the story "The Fox, the Rabbit, and the Rooster," the teacher may use an exclamatory sentence such as "Oh, the fox is so cunning!" and then ask a guiding question: "If you were the rabbit, what would you say?" Children may respond with imperative sentences such as "Rooster, please help me!" or exclamatory sentences such as "I'm so scared!"

2.4.2.3. Practice-Based Methods

Practice-based methods are built upon experiential learning theories that emphasize the role of experience and practice in authentic contexts. For 5–6-year-old preschool children, language becomes a genuine communication tool only when it is used in meaningful interaction with others. These methods create opportunities for children to use sentences naturally, flexibly, and appropriately in communicative situations, thereby fostering pragmatic thinking.

The core objective of this method is to enable children to apply different sentence types, declarative, interrogative, exclamatory, and imperative, in learning activities, play, and everyday interactions. Through these experiences, children not only practice sentence functions but also develop critical thinking, collaborative skills, and appropriate verbal responses in various communicative contexts.

Practice-based methods can be implemented through activities such as retelling stories using pictures, models, or prompts; organizing group activities that create interactive environments where children practice asking and answering questions; and repeating sentence structures in similar situations and expanding them in new contexts. In this process, teachers act as facilitators who guide, support, and adjust children's language use.

For example, after listening to the story "The Three Little Pigs," the teacher may divide the class into three groups. The first group retells the story using declarative sentences; the second group formulates questions such as "Why did the youngest pig build a brick house?"; and the third group produces exclamatory sentences such as "Wow, the house is so strong!" Using the same content for different communicative purposes helps children practice selecting appropriate sentence types and thus enhances their communicative competence.

2.4.2.4. Game-Based Methods

Game-based methods derive from the psychological and physiological characteristics of preschool children. At this developmental stage, play is not only a recreational activity but also a natural and engaging form of learning that supports children's holistic development. From the perspective of language development, games provide opportunities for children to use language in interactive, engaging, and meaningful communicative situations.

The primary objective of this method is to create an open and low-pressure communicative environment in which children are encouraged to use language actively and purposefully. Games serve as catalysts that stimulate communication, helping children develop the habit of selecting and using sentences appropriate to communicative purposes, thereby effectively enhancing their pragmatic competence.

These methods can be implemented through various forms such as language games, situational games, and creative storytelling competitions. In language games, teachers may organize activities such as "Guess Who I Am," "Match the Sentence to the Purpose," or "Find the Appropriate Sentence," helping children distinguish and apply sentence types in corresponding communicative contexts. Situational games provide opportunities for children to practice language responses in simulated communicative settings.

For example, in the game "Creative Storytelling Competition," each group of children draws a random object, such as a hat, a ball, or a cat, and collaboratively creates a short story that includes different sentence types corresponding to communicative purposes. This process not only allows children to develop sentence use naturally but also provides teachers with opportunities to observe and assess each child's ability to apply sentence types appropriately in real communicative contexts.

3. Research Methods

3.1. Research Design

The study employed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design combined with a controlled pedagogical experiment. The initial quantitative survey aimed to identify teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices regarding the development of sentence use according to communicative purposes for children aged 5–6. The findings from this phase served as the basis for designing intervention measures.

Based on these results, a pretest–posttest control group experimental design was implemented to examine the effectiveness of the proposed pedagogical measures in improving children's ability to use sentences according to communicative purposes. Quantitative data were used to determine the degree of change before and after the intervention, while qualitative data were collected after the experiment to explain the mechanisms of the intervention and the contextual conditions affecting its implementation in classroom practice.

This design enabled the study to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention through measurable outcomes and identify how the proposed measures function in developing communicative sentence use among 5–6-year-old children in the current preschool educational context.

3.2. Research Sample

The study was conducted at several preschools in Duong Noi Ward, Ha Dong District, Hanoi, including Duong Noi A Preschool, Duong Noi B Preschool, and Hoa Anh Dao Preschool.

Phase 1: Situation Survey

The survey involved 45 preschool teachers who were directly teaching classes for children aged 5–6. Data were collected to identify teachers' perceptions and current pedagogical practices in organizing activities aimed at developing sentence use according to communicative purposes.

In addition, 150 children aged 5–6 from participating schools were observed to determine their current ability to use sentences according to communicative purposes. Observations were conducted in natural classroom contexts such as lessons, learning corners, and mealtime interactions to ensure ecological validity of the language data. The results served as baseline data for intervention design and pretest data for the experimental phase.

Phase 2: Pedagogical Experiment

The pedagogical experiment involved 500 preschool children aged 5–6, including 250 children in the experimental group and 250 children in the control group. The groups were selected to ensure equivalence in age, curriculum, and classroom learning conditions prior to the intervention.

Children in the experimental group participated in activities designed to develop sentence use according to communicative purposes through the proposed system of methods, including visual, verbal, practice-based, and game-based methods. Meanwhile, the control group continued participating in language development activities following the teachers' conventional instructional approaches.

3.3. Research Instruments

The study employed multiple data collection instruments to gather information about teachers' pedagogical practices and children's communicative sentence use before and after the intervention.

3.3.1. Teacher Questionnaire

A questionnaire was designed to investigate teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices related to developing communicative sentence use among children aged 5–6. The instrument consisted of four main components:

Professional awareness: Evaluating teachers' perceptions of the importance of developing sentence use according to communicative purposes and children's ability to acquire such competence at the age of 5–6.

Level of implementation: Measuring how frequently teachers focus on practicing communicative sentence use in educational activities.

Forms of activity organization: Identifying instructional contexts used by teachers, such as storytelling, role-play corners, language games, communicative situations, and picture-based conversations.

Pedagogical methods: Identifying teaching strategies used to support children's sentence use, including guided questioning, practice-based activities, and situational teaching, as well as teachers' perceived effectiveness of these approaches.

The questionnaire employed a combination of item formats, including a five-point Likert scale to measure agreement levels and implementation frequency, as well as multiple-choice questions to identify teaching forms and methods used in practice.

The questionnaire content was reviewed by experts in early childhood education to ensure content validity before being administered.

3.3.2. Observation Checklist for Children's Communicative Sentence Use

An observation checklist was developed to assess children's ability to use sentences according to communicative purposes in natural interaction contexts. The instrument adopts a communicative competence perspective, focusing on children's functional mastery of sentence use rather than micro-level grammatical errors.

The instrument consisted of two groups of criteria:

1. Receptive competence (listening–understanding)

Children’s ability to recognize and correctly interpret the communicative purpose of different sentence types in interaction, including declarative, interrogative, imperative, and exclamatory sentences, is essential for effective communication.

2. Productive competence (speaking)

Children’s ability to use corresponding sentence types to perform communicative acts such as informing, questioning, requesting, or expressing emotions in specific contexts.

Rating Scale

Each indicator was evaluated using a three-level developmental scale: (1) Not achieved: the child does not understand or use the communicative purpose of the sentence correctly; responses are fragmented or dependent on prompts. (2) Achieved: the child understands and correctly uses the sentence type in familiar situations. (3) Above achieved: the child uses sentence types flexibly, appropriately to the context, and actively maintains interaction.

3.3.3. Observation Contexts

Observations were conducted repeatedly across natural daily activities, including classroom lessons, learning corner activities, and mealtime interactions, to ensure ecological validity. The instrument was applied in both pretest and posttest assessments to determine changes in children’s communicative sentence use after the intervention.

3.3.4. Research Procedure

The study was implemented through several sequential phases to ensure alignment between identifying practical needs and evaluating the effectiveness of the pedagogical intervention.

Phase 1: Survey of current teaching practices

A questionnaire was administered to 45 teachers, combined with classroom observations, to identify teachers’ perceptions, instructional contexts, and teaching methods used to develop communicative sentence use for children aged 5–6. The findings served as the basis for developing intervention measures.

Phase 2: Assessment of children’s initial competence

A total of 150 children were observed in natural communicative situations (lessons, learning corners, and mealtime interactions) using the standardized observation checklist to determine their initial level of communicative sentence use. These data provided both a description of the current situation and a basis for selecting intervention content.

Phase 3: Development of the intervention measures

Based on the findings from the teacher survey and the assessment of children’s competence, a system of pedagogical measures was designed to enhance communicative interaction, diversify contexts of sentence use, and support children in flexibly applying different sentence types in activities.

Phase 4: Pedagogical experiment

The experiment was conducted with 500 children (250 experimental and 250 control). The experimental group participated in activities organized according to the proposed intervention system, while the control group continued with conventional teaching practices.

Phase 5: Post-intervention evaluation

After the experimental period, children in both groups were reassessed using the same observation checklist to determine changes in their ability to use sentences according to communicative purposes.

3.3.5. Data Analysis

Observation data were coded using a three-level developmental scale (Not achieved = 1; Achieved = 2; Above achieved = 3) for each sentence type and competence domain (listening–understanding; speaking). Descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage) identified the distribution of competence levels. Changes before and after the intervention within each group, as well as differences between experimental and control groups,

were tested using the Chi-square test for contingency tables at $p < 0.05$. The intervention's effectiveness was determined by shifts in children from "Not achieved" to "Achieved" and "Above achieved" levels.

Qualitative data obtained from classroom observations and interviews were analyzed using content analysis to support the interpretation of quantitative findings.

3.3.6. Research Ethics

The study was conducted on the basis of voluntary participation by teachers and with the consent of participating schools. Parents were informed about the purpose and procedures of the study before observations involving children were conducted.

All collected data were anonymized and used solely for scientific research purposes, with no disclosure of personally identifiable information. Observations were conducted within children's natural daily activities and did not interfere with their learning or routine classroom experiences.

4. Research Results and Discussion

4.1. Results of the Situation Survey

Teachers' perceptions, instructional forms, and pedagogical methods in developing communicative sentence use for children aged 5–6

The survey results indicate that preschool teachers demonstrate a positive awareness and strong consensus regarding the importance of developing sentence use according to communicative purposes for children aged 5–6. All participating teachers (45/45, accounting for 100%) agreed that developing communicative sentence use is an essential component of the language education curriculum and plays a significant role in fostering children's communicative competence. Similarly, all teachers stated that children's communication abilities would be considerably limited if they were not trained to use sentences appropriately according to communicative purposes.

100% of teachers emphasized the importance of teaching children to use different sentence types accurately, such as declarative, interrogative, imperative, and exclamatory sentences, in communication. Notably, 91.1% of teachers (41 out of 45) believed that children aged 5–6 are fully capable of understanding and using different sentence types according to communicative purposes when provided with appropriate guidance. These findings suggest that teachers possess a solid conceptual understanding of communicative sentence development, which provides a favorable foundation for implementing pragmatics-oriented language education in preschool settings.

The survey also reveals that role-play corner activities were selected by all teachers (100%) as a form of activity for practicing communicative sentence use. This reflects the effectiveness of play-based learning in creating vivid communicative contexts. Storytelling activities were also widely used, with 93.3% of teachers reporting their use, highlighting the continued importance of storytelling in supporting both cognitive and language development in young children. Other instructional forms, such as communicative situations, language games, and picture-based conversations, were used but with lower frequency. This suggests that while teachers have begun to diversify their instructional forms, greater flexibility and integration of context-rich and interactive activities are still needed.

In terms of teaching methods, guided questioning and dialogue emerged as the most commonly used strategies, applied by all 45 teachers (100%), which aligns with the interactive nature of language development in early childhood. Practice-based methods were also widely used (86.7%), supporting skill formation through repeated practice. Meanwhile, 60% of teachers reported using situational teaching methods, which help children apply sentence types flexibly in specific communicative contexts. No teachers selected the modeling-by-example method, and only 8.9% reported using other methods. These findings indicate that teachers tend to prioritize interactive and experiential teaching approaches, though further professional support may be needed to enhance flexibility in organizing language-learning activities.

Despite teachers' positive awareness, the survey results show that the level of attention devoted to practicing communicative sentence use remains uneven. Only 8 out of 45 teachers (17.8%) reported that they regularly focus on this aspect in their teaching, whereas the majority indicated that they address it only

occasionally or have not implemented it systematically. This discrepancy suggests a need for practical pedagogical support to help teachers translate their existing awareness into effective classroom practices.

Finally, teachers identified storytelling and role-play corner activities as the two most effective instructional forms for developing communicative sentence use among children aged 5–6. These activities enable children to apply language in meaningful contexts and thus develop purposeful communication skills. Additionally, some teachers highlighted language games, picture-based conversations, and communicative situations as supportive instructional forms. These findings underscore the importance of flexibly integrating multiple activity types when organizing language education in preschool settings.

Results of the survey on children’s ability to use sentences according to communicative purposes to examine the current status of 5–6-year-old children’s ability to use sentences according to communicative purposes, a survey was conducted with 150 preschool children from Duong Noi A Preschool, Duong Noi B Preschool, and Hoa Anh Dao Preschool. Data were collected through observations of children’s language use in natural contexts, including classroom lessons, learning corner activities, and mealtime interactions. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 2.

Results of the survey on children’s ability to use sentences according to communicative purposes.

Criteria	Sentence type	Not achieved (n)	%	Achieved (n)	%	Above achieved (n)	%
Listening–understanding	Declarative	20	13.3	83	55.3	47	31.3
	Interrogative	18	12.0	86	57.3	46	30.7
	Imperative	17	11.3	84	56.0	49	32.7
	Exclamatory	17	11.3	82	54.7	51	34.4
Speaking	Declarative	19	12.7	88	58.7	43	28.7
	Interrogative	15	10.0	87	58.0	48	32.0
	Imperative	22	14.7	84	56.0	44	29.3
	Exclamatory	12	8.0	89	59.3	49	32.7

The results indicate that the majority of children aged 5–6 reached the “Achieved” level across both criteria—listening–understanding and speaking, with percentages ranging from 54.7% to 59.3%. The proportion of children at the “Above achieved” level was also relatively high, ranging from 28.7% to 34.4%, with the highest performance observed in the ability to understand and produce exclamatory sentences.

However, a small proportion of children remained at the “Not achieved” level (8.0%–14.7%). The highest percentage of this group was found in speaking imperative sentences, indicating certain difficulties in expressing requests or needs clearly and appropriately in communication.

Overall, the findings suggest that most children have already developed a relatively good ability to recognize and use different sentence types according to communicative purposes. Nevertheless, further pedagogical support is needed to strengthen children’s use of sentence types that require greater control of intonation, communicative attitude, and confidence in interaction. These findings provide important implications for designing pedagogical interventions aimed at enhancing children’s flexibility and effectiveness in communication across diverse interactional contexts.

4.2. Results of the Pedagogical Experiment on Children’s Ability to Use Sentences According to Communicative Purposes

4.2.1. Pre-Test Results

To examine the initial level of children’s ability to use sentences according to communicative purposes, a pre-test assessment was conducted with both the control group and the experimental group. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3.

Pre-test results of children's ability to use sentences according to communicative purposes.

Criteria	Sentence type	Not achieved		Achieved		Above achieved	
		Control (n/%)	Experimental (n/%)	Control (n/%)	Experimental (n/%)	Control (n/%)	Experimental (n/%)
Listening– understanding	Declarative	34 (13.6)	33 (13.2)	138 (55.2)	140 (56.0)	78 (31.2)	77 (30.8)
	Interrogative	31 (12.4)	30 (12.0)	142 (56.8)	143 (57.2)	77 (30.8)	77 (30.8)
	Imperative	29 (11.6)	28 (11.2)	140 (56.0)	139 (55.6)	81 (32.4)	83 (33.2)
	Exclamatory	28 (11.2)	27 (10.8)	137 (54.8)	136 (54.4)	85 (34.0)	87 (34.8)
Speaking	Declarative	33 (13.2)	32 (12.8)	146 (58.4)	147 (58.8)	71 (28.4)	71 (28.4)
	Interrogative	26 (10.4)	25 (10.0)	144 (57.6)	145 (58.0)	81 (32.2)	80 (32.0)
	Imperative	38 (15.2)	37 (14.8)	139 (55.6)	140 (56.0)	73 (29.2)	74 (29.6)
	Exclamatory	21 (8.4)	20 (8.0)	148 (59.2)	149 (59.6)	81 (32.4)	81 (32.4)

The pre-test results indicate that the distribution of children's ability to use sentences according to communicative purposes in the control group and the experimental group was relatively similar across all sentence types and both criteria—listening, understanding, and speaking.

For each sentence type, the proportion of children at the “Achieved” level accounted for the largest percentage, ranging from approximately 54.4% to 59.6%. This was followed by the “Above achieved” level, which ranged from 28.4% to 34.8%, while the proportion of children at the “Not achieved” level remained relatively low, ranging from 8.0% to 15.2%.

The differences between the control and experimental groups across these levels were minimal and did not indicate any systematic advantage for either group. These findings suggest that the initial communicative sentence-use ability of the two groups was comparable, thereby ensuring the necessary conditions for an objective comparison of the effectiveness of the proposed pedagogical intervention during the experimental phase.

4.2.2. Post-Test Results

Table 4.

Post-test results of children's ability to use sentences according to communicative purposes after the pedagogical experiment.

Criteria	Sentence type	Not achieved		Achieved		Above achieved	
		Control (n/%)	Experimental (n/%)	Control (n/%)	Experimental (n/%)	Control (n/%)	Experimental (n/%)
Listening– understanding	Declarative	24 (9.6)	18 (7.2)	138 (55.2)	138 (55.2)	88 (35.2)	94 (37.6)
	Interrogative	23 (9.2)	16 (6.4)	137 (54.8)	136 (54.4)	90 (36.0)	98 (39.2)
	Imperative	22 (8.8)	15 (6.0)	135 (54.0)	134 (53.6)	93 (37.2)	101 (40.4)
	Exclamatory	20 (8.0)	14 (5.6)	133 (53.2)	132 (52.8)	97 (38.8)	104 (41.6)
Speaking	Declarative	23 (9.2)	17 (6.8)	141 (56.4)	136 (54.4)	86 (34.4)	97 (38.8)
	Interrogative	19 (7.6)	14 (5.6)	139 (55.6)	132 (52.8)	92 (36.8)	104 (41.6)
	Imperative	26 (10.4)	18 (7.2)	134 (53.6)	129 (51.6)	90 (36.0)	103 (41.2)
	Exclamatory	15 (6.0)	11 (4.4)	137 (54.8)	128 (51.2)	98 (39.2)	111 (44.4)

The post-test results indicate that children in both groups showed improvement in their ability to use sentences according to communicative purposes; however, the degree of improvement differed markedly between the two groups. In the experimental group, the proportion of children in the “Not Achieved” category decreased to approximately 4.4%–7.2%, while the proportion in the “Above Expected Level” category increased to 37.6%–44.4%. In contrast, the control group showed only modest improvement, with the “Not Achieved” rate remaining at about 12%–18% and the “Above Expected Level” rate reaching only 22%–27%.

The increase in the “Above Expected Level” category in the experimental group was approximately 12%–20% higher than that of the control group. This suggests that the improvement observed in the control group mainly reflects children's natural developmental progress, whereas the more substantial change in the

experimental group can be attributed to the impact of the pedagogical intervention measures that were implemented.

The level of development in 5–6-year-old children’s ability to use sentences according to communicative purposes before and after the experiment is presented in detail in the following data.

Table 5.

Development in the ability to use sentences according to communicative purposes in 5–6-year-old children before and after the experiment.

Criterion	Sentence type	Group	Not Achieved	Achieved	Above Expected
Comprehension of sentence types	Declarative	Control	13.6 → 9.6 (-4.0)	55.2 → 55.2 (0)	31.2 → 35.2 (+4.0)
		Experimental	13.2 → 7.2 (-6.0)	56.0 → 55.2 (-0.8)	30.8 → 37.6 (+6.8)
	Interrogative	Control	12.4 → 9.2 (-3.2)	56.8 → 54.8 (-2.0)	30.8 → 36.0 (+5.2)
		Experimental	12.0 → 6.4 (-5.6)	57.2 → 54.4 (-2.8)	30.8 → 39.2 (+8.4)
	Imperative	Control	11.6 → 8.8 (-2.8)	56.0 → 54.0 (-2.0)	32.4 → 37.2 (+4.8)
		Experimental	11.2 → 6.0 (-5.2)	55.6 → 53.6 (-2.0)	33.2 → 40.4 (+7.2)
	Exclamatory	Control	11.2 → 8.0 (-3.2)	54.8 → 53.2 (-1.6)	34.0 → 38.8 (+4.8)
		Experimental	10.8 → 5.6 (-5.2)	54.4 → 52.8 (-1.6)	34.8 → 41.6 (+6.8)
Production of expressive sentence types	Declarative	Control	13.2 → 9.2 (-4.0)	58.4 → 56.4 (-2.0)	28.4 → 34.4 (+6.0)
		Experimental	12.8 → 6.8 (-6.0)	58.8 → 54.4 (-4.4)	28.4 → 38.8 (+10.4)
	Interrogative	Control	10.4 → 7.6 (-2.8)	57.6 → 55.6 (-2.0)	32.2 → 36.8 (+4.6)
		Experimental	10.0 → 5.6 (-4.4)	58.0 → 52.8 (-5.2)	32.0 → 41.6 (+9.6)
	Imperative	Control	15.2 → 10.4 (-4.8)	55.6 → 53.6 (-2.0)	29.2 → 36.0 (+6.8)
		Experimental	14.8 → 7.2 (-7.6)	56.0 → 51.6 (-4.4)	29.6 → 41.2 (+11.6)
	Exclamatory	Control	8.4 → 6.0 (-2.4)	59.2 → 54.8 (-4.4)	32.4 → 39.2 (+6.8)
		Experimental	8.0 → 4.4 (-3.6)	59.6 → 51.2 (-8.4)	32.4 → 44.4 (+12.0)

The data on the development level of children’s ability to use sentences according to communicative purposes before and after the experiment are illustrated in the following chart.

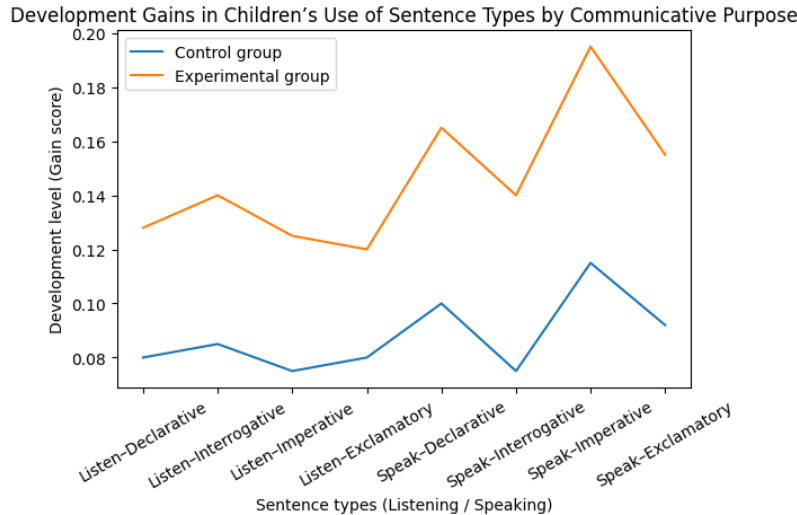


Figure 1.

Development level of the ability to use sentences according to communicative purposes in 5–6-year-old children before and after the experiment.

A comprehensive analysis of the data table and line chart shows that after the experiment, children’s ability to use sentences according to communicative purposes improved in both groups; however, the level of development in the experimental group was clearly higher. Across all sentence types, the proportion of children in the “Not Achieved” category in the experimental group decreased more substantially (approximately 5–7.6%)

compared with the control group (2.4–4.8%). At the same time, the proportion of children in the “Above Expected Level” category increased considerably, particularly in expressive sentence types such as imperative and exclamatory sentences (an increase of 9.6–12.0%).

The average percentage of achievement levels after the experiment is presented in the following table and chart.

Table 6.
Average percentage of achievement levels after the experiment

Level	Control Group	Experimental Group
Not Achieved	8.6%	6.2%
Achieved	54.7%	53.3%
Above Expected Level	36.7%	40.6%

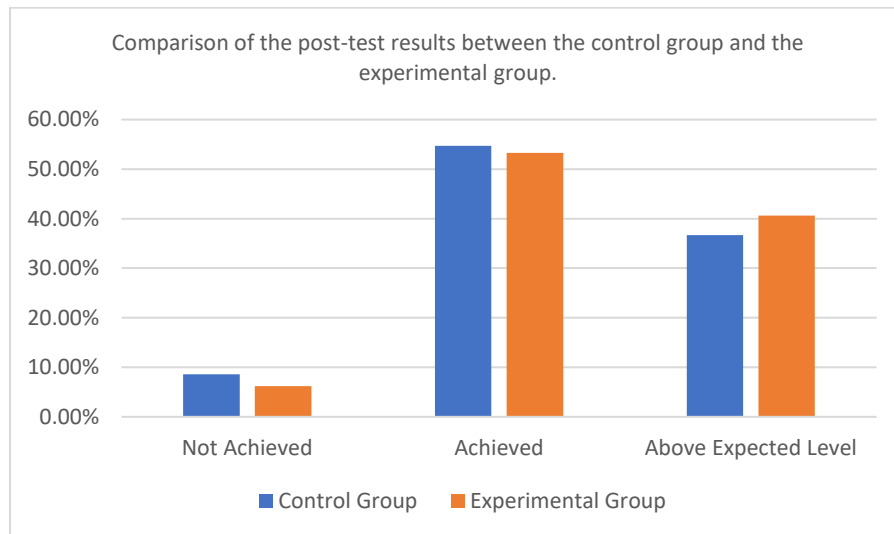


Figure 2.
Average percentages of achievement levels after the experiment.

The results presented in Table 3 and Figure 1 indicate that after the experiment, the proportion of children at the “Not Achieved” level in the experimental group (6.2%) was lower than in the control group (8.6%), while the proportion at the “Above Expected Level” was noticeably higher (40.6% compared to 36.7%). At the “Achieved” level, the two groups showed relatively similar proportions (53.3% and 54.7%, respectively); however, the shift from the “Achieved” level to the “Above Expected Level” was more pronounced in the experimental group. This suggests that the intervention measures not only helped reduce the number of children who did not meet the expected level but also improved the quality of language task performance at higher levels. Therefore, the effectiveness of the intervention is reflected in a greater improvement in children’s ability to use sentences according to communicative purposes, rather than merely increasing the proportion of children meeting the minimum requirement.

4.3. Discussion in Relation to Previous Research

The research findings reveal a clear shift from the “Achieved” level to the “Above Expected Level” in the experimental group, while the proportion of “Not Achieved” decreased across all sentence types. This suggests that the improvement is not only quantitative but also reflects qualitative changes in the ability of 5–6-year-old children to use sentences according to communicative purposes. This trend is consistent with pragmatic approaches in early childhood language education, which suggest that children acquire sentence structures more effectively when they participate in purposeful communicative situations where linguistic forms are closely linked to expressive functions.

Compared with studies that focus primarily on expanding vocabulary or reinforcing grammatical structures, the present findings indicate that when learning activities are organized according to a communicative orientation, children do not merely reproduce sentence patterns but are also able to select appropriate sentence types based on communicative intentions and interactional contexts. This demonstrates that development occurs at the level of language use competence, rather than merely at the level of linguistic knowledge. Thus, the study contributes additional empirical evidence supporting the communicative-functional approach to language teaching in early childhood education, while also suggesting that the design of context-rich activities may be an important condition for helping children move from formulaic sentence use to purposeful communicative expression.

5. Conclusion

The study demonstrates that organizing activities aimed at developing sentence use according to communicative purposes has a positive impact on the sentence-use competence of 5–6-year-old children. After the intervention, the proportion of children reaching the “Above Expected Level” increased consistently across all sentence types, while the proportion at the “Not Achieved” level decreased markedly, particularly in the experimental group. These changes were reflected not only in children’s ability to recognize sentence types but also in their ability to select and adjust their speech appropriately according to communicative intentions and interactional contexts.

The findings indicate that placing children in purposeful communicative situations, combined with activities such as storytelling, role-playing, and guided conversation, helps shift the learning process from reproducing linguistic forms to using language functionally. In this way, the study provides empirical evidence supporting the effectiveness of the communicative-functional approach to language teaching in early childhood education.

However, the study was conducted within a limited number of preschool institutions located in the same area; therefore, the generalizability of the findings remains limited. In addition, the experimental period was relatively short and may not fully reflect the long-term sustainability of language competence development. The evaluation was mainly based on observations of children’s language behavior in controlled pedagogical situations, which may not fully capture their communicative performance in natural contexts outside the classroom. Furthermore, the study focused on sentence types according to communicative purposes and did not examine other factors such as individual characteristics, family environment, or differences in teachers’ interactional styles.

Future educational practice should consider integrating the development of sentence use according to communicative purposes as a central orientation in organizing language education activities in early childhood settings, particularly through context-rich activities such as storytelling, role-playing, and communicative situations. Teachers should be provided with professional development on pragmatic approaches to language teaching in order to move beyond sentence pattern practice toward the creation of purposeful communicative environments. Teacher education programs should also incorporate this perspective into their curricula to enhance future teachers’ capacity to organize communication-focused learning activities for young children. Further research should expand the sample size, extend the duration of intervention, and employ more in-depth assessment tools to gain a clearer understanding of how children’s language use competence develops across diverse communicative contexts.

Institutional Review Board Statement:

This study was conducted in accordance with ethical standards for research involving human participants. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents. The data were collected anonymously and used solely for research purposes. According to the institutional guidelines, this study is exempt from formal ethical approval.

Transparency:

The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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