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Verbal Interaction in Arabic Language Teaching: Patterns and Pragmatic-Pedagogical Functions

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Abstract

Classroom talk in Arabic language teaching connects instructional guidance with students' opportunities to use the target language. This study aimed to examine patterns of verbal interaction and their pragmatic and pedagogical functions in an eighth-grade class at SMP Bilingual Terpadu Krian, Indonesia. A descriptive qualitative design was employed, with data collected through classroom observations over one semester, semi-structured interviews with three Arabic teachers and six students, and instructional documents. Written observation and interview notes were analyzed manually using Searle's speech-act categories, followed by an examination of recurring exchanges and their contextual functions; interpretations were checked through collaborative coding, triangulation, and member checking. The study offers a basis for teachers to reflect on their use of classroom language and design exchanges that provide space for student responses, feedback, and continued interaction in Arabic.

Abstrak

Tuturan dalam pembelajaran bahasa Arab menghubungkan arahan pembelajaran dengan kesempatan siswa untuk menggunakan bahasa sasaran. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengkaji pola interaksi verbal beserta fungsi pragmatis dan pedagogisnya di satu kelas VIII SMP Bilingual Terpadu Krian, Indonesia. Penelitian menggunakan desain kualitatif deskriptif dengan pengumpulan data melalui observasi kelas selama satu semester, wawancara semiterstruktur dengan tiga guru bahasa Arab dan enam siswa, serta dokumen pembelajaran. Catatan observasi dan wawancara dianalisis secara manual menggunakan kategori tindak tutur Searle, dilanjutkan dengan penelaahan pertukaran tuturan yang berulang dan fungsinya dalam konteks; interpretasi diperiksa melalui pengodean kolaboratif, triangulasi, dan pengecekan kepada partisipan. Penelitian ini dapat menjadi dasar bagi guru untuk merefleksikan penggunaan bahasa di kelas dan merancang pertukaran tuturan yang memberi ruang bagi respons siswa, umpan balik, serta interaksi berkelanjutan dalam bahasa Arab.

الملخص

يربط الخطاب الصفي في تعليم اللغة العربية بين توجيه التعلم وفرص الطلاب لاستخدام اللغة المستهدفة. هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل أنماط التفاعل الكلامي ووظائفه التداولية والتربوية في أحد فصول الصف الثامن بالمدرسة المتوسطة المتكاملة ثنائية اللغة في كريان بإندونيسيا. واعتمدت الدراسة المنهج الوصفي النوعي، وجمعت البيانات من الملاحظة الصفية خلال فصل دراسي، والمقابلات شبه المنظمة مع ثلاثة معلمين للغة العربية وستة طلاب، والوثائق التعليمية. وحللت ملاحظات الملاحظة والمقابلات يدويا وفق فئات الأفعال الكلامية عند سيرل، ثم درست التبادلات الكلامية المتكررة ووظائفها السياقية، مع مراجعة التفسيرات من خلال الترميز التعاوني والتثليث والتحقق مع المشاركين. ويمكن أن توفر الدراسة أساسا لتأمل المعلمين في استخدامهم للغة داخل الصف وتصميم تبادلات تتيح استجابات الطلاب والتغذية الراجعة واستمرار التفاعل باللغة العربية.

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Introduction

Classroom talk does most of the work in a language lesson. Teachers explain, ask, instruct and correct; students answer, ask back and join in (Murtadho, Thohir, et al., 2025). In Arabic teaching this matters twice over, because the language being taught is also the language of the room, and regular interaction gives students practice in using it (Putra et al., 2026). Practice does not always follow, and some Arabic lessons stay teacher-centered with little room for students to speak (Maghfurin & Ebeed, 2026).

What counts is how the turns fit together, not how much either side says. A teacher asks, a student answers, and the teacher confirms, corrects or pushes the answer further; an instruction may produce an action, a question back, or a request for clarification (Eldin, 2015). Repeated often enough, these exchanges settle into recognizable patterns (Thornborrow, 2014). Reading classroom talk this way moves attention from single utterances to what speakers do with them and how others take them up (Searle, 1968).

Speech act theory provides a useful framework for examining these actions, since Austin (1975) explained that speaking is itself a form of action and distinguished locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts, while Searle (1969) developed the concept of illocutionary acts and later classified them into assertives, directives, commissives, expressives and declarations (Searle, 1979). These categories help explain what speakers do through language, whether providing information, directing others, expressing feelings, making commitments or establishing a particular status, although the meaning of an utterance cannot be separated from the speaker, the situation and the response of other participants (Searle, 1979).

Such functions are clearly visible in classroom communication, where a teacher's directive may ask students to answer a question, complete an exercise or speak Arabic, an assertive may provide information or show understanding, and expressive acts can communicate praise or appreciation while commissive acts indicate willingness or commitment. These utterances do more than exemplify linguistic categories, since they shape how teachers organize learning, how students participate and how interaction develops (Kebede & Endalamaw, 2025).

Research on speech acts in language teaching has identified several important patterns: Sumarti et al. (2019) found that teachers' directive speech acts were used to organize language learning activities and were accompanied by students' positive affective responses, Luthfiyyahsyah et al. (2024) examined teachers' expressive acts and students' responses, including praise, agreement, disagreement and gratitude followed by attention, repetition, silence and other positive reactions, and Syammary et al. (2024) approached the issue from the student side and found directives in the form of requests, questions and invitations addressed to teachers and peers. These studies show that speech acts are used by both teachers and students, yet because they tend to examine particular types separately, less attention has been given to how different speech acts connect within recurring teacher–student exchanges.

Pragmatics adds a second layer. Hussain and Khan (2024) tie speech acts to communicative purpose and to whether learners join in; Musa and Mohammed (2022) point out that form alone rarely gives the meaning, since context carries much of it; Farafishah et al. (2025) show speech functions sitting close to the social and situational setting. Eslami-Rasekh (2005) argues that pragmatic awareness is what lets learners judge how language works in a given situation. Naming the act is therefore only half of the analysis: what the speaker intends, how the utterance lands and how others respond all carry weight.

Less clear is how the different acts work together over a stretch of lessons, and what that combination does for learning. Classroom talk is rarely a set of isolated utterances: teachers open, steer, question and feed back, while students answer, show understanding, join in and sometimes promise to do something. Read as connected patterns, those exchanges show what the speakers accomplish and what the exchange achieves pedagogically.

The relationship between pragmatic action and pedagogical function offers a way to examine classroom discourse beyond the classification of individual utterances, bringing the connections between teacher and student turns into view while retaining attention to the classroom conditions in which those exchanges take place. Its value lies in treating interaction as a situated process rather than assuming that a speech-act category has a fixed instructional role.

Method

This study used a qualitative descriptive case study design (Duff, 2008) because it examined a single bounded case, one eighth-grade Arabic class at SMP Bilingual Terpadu Krian, Indonesia, in its natural setting, drew on multiple sources of evidence and documented the case during the second semester of the 2025–2026 academic year. Participants were selected through purposive sampling and consisted of three Arabic language teachers and six students directly involved in classroom interaction: teachers were included on the basis of their teaching role, experience and willingness to participate, while students were selected according to regular attendance, active classroom participation, ability to describe their learning experiences and willingness to take part, and those who did not meet these criteria were excluded.

The students had Indonesian language backgrounds, while Arabic was used as the main language of instruction, and their proficiency was considered intermediate on the basis of their ability to understand classroom instructions, respond to teachers and participate in interaction using Arabic.

Data came from about 60 classroom observations across one semester, semi-structured interviews and instructional documents. Lessons ran about 90 minutes; teacher interviews took roughly 30 minutes and student interviews 15–20 minutes. Questions were open-ended and covered the use of Arabic, instructions, student responses, correction, feedback and participation: teachers were asked how they used Arabic in class, students how they answered teachers' questions and instructions. Collection stopped when the same patterns kept recurring and nothing new was turning up.

Everything was written down by hand, in field notes and interview notes; no audio or video was recorded. Teacher and student utterances bearing on the research question were copied out in writing and sorted for analysis.

The analysis followed directed content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) and was conducted manually, beginning with a coding frame derived from Searle's five speech-act categories: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives and declarations. Utterances were then grouped into the recurring patterns of teacher–student interaction that emerged from the data and examined in terms of their pragmatic and pedagogical functions; coding was carried out collaboratively with selected data checked by a second researcher, and differences in interpretation were discussed until agreement was reached. Observational, interview and documentary evidence was then compared across sources while selected interpretations were confirmed through member checking, and the recurrence of interaction patterns together with the consistency of the three data sources provided sufficient evidence to support the analysis.

Results

Patterns of Verbal Interaction across Speech Act Types

The observations recorded in this class revealed five recurring patterns of verbal interaction: teacher initiation, student response and participation, feedback and affective interaction, student commitment, and teacher regulation of classroom activities. These were realized through five speech-act types, namely directives, assertives, expressives, commissives and declarations, and Table 1 presents three representative utterances for each type.

Table 1 Speech Act Types and Patterns of Classroom Interaction

Speech Act Type	Code	Sample Utterance	Translation	Main Speaker	Interaction Role
Directive	D1	أَجِيبُوا عَنِ السُّؤَالِ الثَّالِثِ	Answer the third question	Teacher	Initiating student response
	D2	اُكْتُبُوا الْجَوَابَ فِي دَفَاتِرِكُمْ	Write the answer in your notebooks	Teacher	Directing learning activity
	D3	حَاوِلُوا أَنْ تَتَكَلَّمُوا بِاللُّغَةِ الْعَرَبِيَّةِ	Try to speak in Arabic	Teacher	Encouraging language use
Assertive	A1	هٰذِهِ الْكَلِمَةُ تَعْنِي الْمَدْرَسَةَ	This word means “school”	Teacher/Student	Providing information
	A2	أَظُنُّ أَنَّ هٰذَا الْجَوَابَ صَحِيحٌ	I think this answer is correct	Student	Expressing an opinion
	A3	فَهِمْتُ الْفَرْقَ بَيْنَ الْمُفْرَدِ وَالْجَمْعِ	I understand the difference between singular and plural	Student	Showing understanding
Expressive	E1	أَحْسَنْتَ، إِجَابَتُكَ جَيِّدَةٌ	Well done, your answer is good	Teacher	Giving positive feedback
	E2	شُكْرًا عَلَى التَّوْضِيحِ يَا أُسْتَاذ	Thank you for the explanation, teacher	Student	Expressing appreciation
	E3	أَنَا سَعِيدٌ لِأَنَّنِي أَسْتَطِيعُ أَنْ أَتَكَلَّمَ بِالْعَرَبِيَّةِ	I’m happy that I can speak Arabic	Student	Expressing a positive feeling
Commissive	C1	سَأُجِيبُ بِاللُّغَةِ الْعَرَبِيَّةِ	I’ll answer in Arabic	Student	Expressing willingness
	C2	سَأُرَاجِعُ هٰذَا الدَّرْسَ فِي الْحجرة	I’ll review this lesson in the room	Student	Expressing learning commitment
	C3	سَأُصَحِّحُ إِجَابَتِي	I’ll correct my answer	Student	Taking responsibility
Declaration	DEC1	أُعْلِنُ بَدْءَ الِاخْتِبَارِ الآنَ	I declare that the test begins now	Teacher	Formally starting an activity
	DEC2	أُعْلِنُ انْتِهَاءَ وَقْتِ الْإِجَابَةِ	I declare that the answering time is over	Teacher	Formally ending an activity
	DEC3	أَعْتَبِرُ هٰذِهِ الْمَهَمَّةَ مُكْتَمِلَةً	I consider this task completed	Teacher	Establishing task completion

Directives (D1–D3) were associated mainly with teacher initiation and guidance, where teachers used them to elicit responses, direct students to complete tasks and encourage the use of Arabic: D1 initiated a student response, D2 guided a learning activity and D3 encouraged students to communicate in the target language.

Assertives (A1–A3) appeared more often in student participation, although teachers also used them, enabling speakers to provide information, express opinions and indicate understanding, so that A1 conveyed information while A2 and A3 reflected students’ opinions and comprehension of the lesson.

Expressives (E1–E3) occurred in both teacher and student talk, with teacher expressions appearing mainly as praise or positive feedback, as in E1, and students using expressive acts to show appreciation and

positive feelings, as in E2 and E3. Because these acts occurred on both sides of the interaction, they linked instructional feedback with affective responses.

Commissives (C1–C3) were predominantly produced by students and, unlike assertives, which mainly reflected immediate responses, referred to actions students intended to carry out: C1 expressed willingness to answer in Arabic, C2 indicated a commitment to review the lesson and C3 showed responsibility for correcting an answer.

Declarations (DEC1–DEC3) belonged to the teacher. They changed the status of what was going on: DEC1 opened the test, DEC2 closed the answering period, DEC3 settled that a task was finished.

The split of acts matched a split of roles. Teachers did most of the initiating and regulating; students did most of the answering, showing understanding and committing themselves. Praise and appreciation moved both ways. What held the lesson together was not any single act but the way one act handed over to the next.

Pragmatic Functions of Verbal Interaction

Each of the five types did different work in the lesson, and the work depended on what the speaker was after and where the utterance fell as much as on its form. Table 2 sets out these functions.

Table 2 Pragmatic Functions of Verbal Interaction

Speech Act Type	Data Code	Pragmatic Function	Description
Directive	D1	Requesting a response	Asking students to respond to a question
	D2	Directing an action	Asking students to perform a particular task
	D3	Encouraging an action	Encouraging students to use Arabic
Assertive	A1	Providing information	Presenting information or meaning
	A2	Expressing an opinion	Stating the speaker's judgment
	A3	Showing understanding	Indicating comprehension of the lesson
Expressive	E1	Praising	Showing approval of a student's response
	E2	Expressing appreciation	Showing gratitude to the interlocutor
	E3	Expressing positive feelings	Showing satisfaction or enthusiasm
Commissive	C1	Expressing willingness	Showing readiness to perform an action
	C2	Expressing commitment	Indicating an intention to continue an activity
	C3	Taking responsibility	Expressing intention to improve or correct an action
Declaration	DEC1	Establishing activity status	Formally marking the beginning of an activity
	DEC2	Establishing activity status	Formally marking the end of an activity
	DEC3	Establishing task status	Formally marking a task as completed

Directives covered several functions beyond giving commands, since D1 requested a response, D2 directed students to carry out a task and D3 encouraged the use of Arabic, so directives were used both to guide action and to sustain classroom interaction.

Assertives carried information, judgement and comprehension: A1 gave information, A2 gave an opinion, A3 showed the lesson had been understood. Expressives worked on the relationship instead, with E1 as praise, E2 as appreciation and E3 as a positive feeling about the learning itself.

Commissives pointed forward in time: C1 offered to answer in Arabic, C2 promised to keep working at the lesson, C3 took responsibility for putting an answer right. Declarations did something else, fixing where an activity stood: DEC1 began it, DEC2 ended it, DEC3 marked it complete.

Form alone will not tell you what an utterance is doing. The same category can serve quite different ends, depending on what the speaker wants and where the utterance sits in the lesson.

Pedagogical Functions of Verbal Interaction

Pedagogically, the acts did several connected jobs at once: they organized activity, drew students in, supported understanding, gave feedback, built responsibility and pushed students toward Arabic. Table 3 sets these out.

Table 3 Pedagogical Functions of Verbal Interaction

Speech Act Type	Data Code	Pedagogical Function	Contribution to Learning
Directive	D1	Encouraging participation	Involving students in classroom activities
	D2	Organizing learning activities	Guiding students to complete specific tasks
	D3	Encouraging Arabic use	Increasing students' use of the target language
Assertive	A1	Supporting understanding	Providing information needed for learning
	A2	Encouraging student expression	Giving students space to express opinions
	A3	Checking understanding	Showing whether students understand the lesson
Expressive	E1	Providing positive feedback	Supporting confidence and motivation
	E2	Building positive interaction	Maintaining good teacher–student relations
	E3	Supporting emotional engagement	Encouraging a positive attitude toward learning
Commissive	C1	Encouraging active participation	Supporting willingness to use Arabic
	C2	Developing learning commitment	Supporting continued review beyond classroom activities
	C3	Developing responsibility	Encouraging students to improve their own work
Declaration	DEC1	Organizing classroom stages	Marking the formal beginning of an activity
	DEC2	Managing learning time	Marking the formal end of an activity
	DEC3	Confirming task completion	Establishing the completion of classroom work

Directives contributed mainly to participation and classroom organization, since D1 invited students to respond, D2 guided them through learning tasks and D3 encouraged the use of Arabic, so teacher direction served to manage activities and also to create opportunities for students to take part in them.

Assertives sat closer to understanding. A1 supplied information the lesson needed, A2 opened space for an opinion, A3 showed whether the lesson had landed. Through them, what students knew became visible to the teacher and to the class.

Expressives carried the interpersonal side: E1 was positive feedback, E2 appreciation, E3 a good feeling about speaking Arabic. They kept the exchange warm enough for students to keep trying.

Commissives went past the immediate answer. C1 showed a willingness to use Arabic, C2 a commitment to keep revising, C3 a readiness to correct an answer. Their value lay in participation, commitment and responsibility for learning.

Declarations organized the lesson. DEC1 opened an activity, DEC2 closed it, DEC3 confirmed the task was done. They gave the class clear edges between one stage and the next.

The pedagogical functions tracked the interactional roles described earlier. Teacher speech organized, invited and fed back; student speech showed understanding, willingness, commitment and responsibility. Talk in this classroom was doing two jobs at once, communicating and teaching.

Discussion

Interaction Patterns and Classroom Roles

Teachers and students took different parts, and the parts fitted together. Directives came mostly from teachers, who used them to start activities and steer learning, which is what Sumarti et al. (2019) also found in language classrooms. But an instruction was rarely only an instruction: it drew an answer, moved a task along, or nudged students into Arabic. Control of the lesson and room for students to speak came from the same move (Kot & e Silva, 2026).

Students usually answered into those openings. They responded, gave opinions and showed understanding, and most of this came after a teacher's prompt, so the participation was real without being self-started. Guidance and participation therefore need not pull against each other: a well-placed prompt can make speaking possible. Murtadho, Thohir, et al. (2025) report something similar, that steady exposure and genuine interaction build both participation and confidence in Arabic.

Expressives ran alongside all this. Luthfiyyahsyah et al. (2024) found the same acts in teacher–student talk, mostly as praise, agreement, disagreement and gratitude. Here, praise usually came after a student performed, and student appreciation came after an explanation or some help. These were not simply emotional asides; they carried feedback and they held the exchange together.

Directives were distributed differently here than in Syammary et al. (2024), where students used them to request, question and invite, addressing teachers and peers alike. In this class directives belonged mainly to teachers. The contrast points to conditions rather than to a fixed pattern: teaching style, proficiency, routine and how much room students are given to start an exchange all bear on who uses which act, and why.

Put together, the acts form a sequence. A directive opens the exchange, an assertive carries it, an expressive holds it together. What matters is not the label attached to a turn, but the way the turns hand over to one another and keep the lesson moving.

Pragmatic and Pedagogical Functions

In the exchanges examined, the pragmatic and pedagogical functions of classroom speech were closely connected, since an utterance could perform an immediate communicative action while also contributing to the learning process. A directive, for example, could request a response or guide an action and at the same time organize a task, invite participation or encourage the use of Arabic, whereas assertives conveyed information and made students' understanding visible while expressives and commissives connected interpersonal meaning with feedback, participation and commitment to learning (House & Kádár, 2025).

Take the utterance "I will answer in Arabic": as a commissive it commits the speaker to a future act, and in the classroom it also announces a willingness to take part and to use the target language. Its force comes from what it does in that exchange, not from the category alone. Reading utterances this way is what pragmatic competence involves, recognizing how language works in a particular situation (Aytaç, 2026).

Declarations show the same on the teacher's side. Marking where an activity begins, ends or is finished does more than register a fact about the lesson: it structures the hour, makes transitions audible and lets students follow where they are. Pragmatic force and pedagogical work arrive in the same words.

This is why classroom talk is a poor description of a delivery channel. Work on teacher talk has already tied meaningful teacher–learner interaction to engagement and motivation (Sakka et al., 2022). Here the acts were the means by which the lesson was organized, students were drawn in, understanding was shown and commitment was voiced. Pragmatic meaning and pedagogical work are not two layers of classroom talk; they are the same act seen from two sides.

Interpretive Cautions and the Limits of the Account

Read these patterns against how the class was run. Heavy use of directives may say as much about the teacher's responsibility for keeping activities moving as about personal style. Exercises, instructions and guided practice generate occasions for direction; a lesson built from them will produce directives whatever the teacher prefers (Subandiyah et al., 2025).

Student assertives and commissives need the same care. They show participation, understanding and commitment, but most of them followed a question or an instruction, so the activity was real without being self-started. Involvement can grow inside teacher-guided talk, not only in student-led exchange: the teacher kept opening and shaping, and students filled the openings by answering, showing understanding and committing to the next step (Yasmin et al., 2026).

Comparison across studies needs a caution too. Studies differ in how the classroom is organized and in what they will count as one instance of an act, so a difference in distribution is not automatically a difference in teaching. Teacher activity shapes how students take part in ways a frequency count will not show (Abbas et al., 2025).

These patterns belong to one classroom rather than to Arabic teaching in general. Their interest is in showing how structure, roles and chances to speak shape which acts each side uses. Frequency on its own is poor evidence of dominance or of passivity; what the acts do in the exchange is what counts (Alshammari et al., 2026).

The same caution extends to the pedagogical functions reported above, which are best understood as interpretations of what the utterances appeared to accomplish within the documented exchanges rather than as evidence that the acts concerned produced measurable learning effects, and the patterns described here may likewise reflect the conditions under which the interaction was observed as much as any settled feature of student participation. Distinguishing between these possibilities would require closer attention to how an exchange develops after an initial student response and to the conditions under which students themselves open one, neither of which the present analysis was designed to establish.

All of this points to a broader way of reading speech acts in Arabic teaching. Their value is in what they do to participation, feedback, responsibility and the running of the room, as much as in their form. Set beside interaction patterns and learning functions, the acts show how the talk of a lesson becomes part of the teaching.

Practical Implications for Arabic Language Teachers

Classroom talk can be used more deliberately to support communication and learning, since teacher directives do not need to function only as commands but can invite responses, encourage students to speak and create opportunities to use Arabic, and when used in this way classroom management becomes part of communicative practice. This is consistent with communicative approaches that emphasize interaction, language functions and authentic language use in developing learners' communicative competence (Murtadho, Taufiq, et al., 2025).

Interaction can also be extended after students give an answer, because rather than ending the exchange once the answer is correct teachers can ask students to explain, clarify or respond to another student, so that a short exchange develops into a longer interaction in which students have more opportunities to use Arabic and respond to one another (Cho et al., 2026).

Expressives and commissives open another route. Praise, acknowledgment and appreciation soften feedback; a commitment spoken aloud asks students to say what they will practise, correct or improve. Talk then reaches past the immediate answer toward involvement and responsibility (Asaoka et al., 2026).

The routine language of the room is a resource as well. Opening an activity, setting a time limit, moving on, closing the lesson: students hear Arabic used for something real each time. Management need not sit apart from learning. It supplies the context in which Arabic is met and used (Sulistyani & Riwayatiningsih, 2025).

Conclusion

Guidance and participation do not have to trade off: in this classroom, control of the lesson produced openings for students to speak rather than closing them, and the same utterance could organize an activity while making room for a learner, so its instructional value cannot be read off its category. The claim is specific to this classroom and does not show that any act, on its own, improves learning.

One eighth-grade class and one semester set the limits here, and the reading offered does not travel automatically to other settings. Written notes, with no recording, also leave out wording, timing and the exact shape of a turn, so what follows is an interpretation of documented interaction rather than a complete record of it.

Further work should compare classrooms across schools, grade levels and proficiency levels and record interaction under proper consent, so what follows a teacher's prompt can be traced turn by turn; that would separate an intended pedagogical function from an observed learning effect. For teaching, the practical test is narrower: whether a directive is followed by a student turn or by another directive.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest, financial or otherwise, in relation to the research, authorship, and publication of this article.

Declaration of AI Use

In preparing this manuscript, the authors used generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools for language editing and copy-editing only, namely to check grammar and punctuation, to improve clarity and concision, and to keep terminology and style consistent. The tools were not used to design the study, to collect or analyse the data, to interpret the findings, or to generate research content. All suggestions were reviewed, revised, and approved by the authors, who take full responsibility for the content of the published article.

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