

Implementing Communicative Language Teaching in Indonesian Primary English Education: Participation, Peer Interaction, and Independent Speaking

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ABSTRACT

English learning in primary education is increasingly important for global literacy, intercultural communication, and later academic participation. However, instruction in many Indonesian primary schools still emphasises vocabulary memorisation, teacher-led explanation, translation, and restricted oral interaction. This study analysed the classroom implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) at SDN 13 Tilamuta, Boalemo Regency, Gorontalo Province, Indonesia. A descriptive qualitative design involved 15 pupils, one classroom/English teacher, and one school principal. Data were collected from February to April 2026 through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, student learning-response records, and documentation. Structured descriptive coding was integrated with thematic analysis across data sources. Twelve pupils (80.0%) responded actively to English classroom instructions and 12 (80.0%) participated in peer interaction, whereas 9 (60.0%) consistently spoke independently. Thus, the independent-speaking rate was 20.0 percentage points, or three pupils, below each supported-participation indicator. The findings indicate that CLT is pedagogically appropriate for primary English learning when activities are brief, contextual, scaffolded, and developmentally appropriate. Sustainable implementation depends on clear teacher modelling, predictable classroom routines, peer-supported rehearsal, low-cost media, and performance-based assessment. These results describe one bounded classroom and do not establish causal effects or population generalisability.

Keywords: communicative language teaching; independent speaking; Indonesian primary education; peer interaction; student participation; young learners

1. INTRODUCTION

English language education in primary school is commonly justified by the need to prepare children for later learning, wider communication, and participation in increasingly multilingual environments. An early starting age, however, does not automatically produce strong language outcomes. Reviews of early foreign-language programmes show that programme quality, exposure, teacher expertise, continuity, and the design of classroom interaction matter as much as age of onset (Butler, 2015; Thieme et al., 2022). For young learners, an effective lesson must therefore create understandable reasons to listen, respond, and use language rather than merely introduce more vocabulary at an earlier age.

This issue is especially relevant in Indonesia, where primary-school English has developed through shifting policies, uneven local provision, and substantial differences in teacher preparation and school resources. Zein (2017) identifies persistent concerns about teacher status, instructional time, classroom conditions, and pedagogy. Sulistiyo et al. (2020) similarly show that the national picture is heterogeneous and requires locally responsive policy and professional support. These conditions make implementation research important. A teaching approach cannot be evaluated only from its stated principles; researchers must examine how teachers translate those principles into routines, tasks, interaction, and assessment within a particular school.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) offers a useful framework because it positions communication as both the purpose and the means of language learning. Communicative competence includes more than grammatical accuracy. It involves using linguistic resources appropriately and strategically in social situations (Canale & Swain, 1980). In classroom terms, CLT creates opportunities for learners to understand messages, exchange meanings, respond to others, and use available language to complete purposeful activities. It does not require the exclusion of explicit guidance, repetition, or form-focused support. Instead, such support should help learners participate in meaningful language use.

CLT must nevertheless be interpreted in relation to local conditions. Studies across the Asia-Pacific region show that teachers often face limited proficiency, large or mixed-ability classes, examination pressures, restricted materials, and expectations that favour teacher explanation (Butler, 2011; Rao & Yu, 2019). Littlewood (2014) consequently argues for communication-oriented pedagogy that adapts communicative principles rather than treating CLT as a fixed package. This contextual position is important for a small public primary school. Practical CLT may consist of short instructions, modelled exchanges, pair rehearsal, visual prompts, and repeated classroom language rather than extended spontaneous discussion.

Young learners also require age-appropriate mediation. Children benefit from visible context, movement, repetition, predictable routines, and tasks with attainable linguistic demands (Cameron, 2001). International evidence indicates that teachers of young learners commonly struggle with classroom management, maintaining motivation, using the target language, and selecting appropriate activities (Copland et al., 2014; Taddese et al., 2025). Teacher competence is therefore not limited to English proficiency. It includes the capacity to model language clearly, simplify instructions, create safe participation structures, and recognise partial communicative success (Dagarin-Fojkar et al., 2022).

Existing literature explains the policy context of primary English in Indonesia and the general challenges of communicative pedagogy. Less is known about how a modest, classroom-level configuration of CLT operates in a public primary school in Boalemo Regency, Gorontalo Province. The present study addresses this contextual gap by examining observable participation rather than claiming language proficiency gains. It focuses on three indicators that can be documented in ordinary lessons: responses to English classroom instructions, interaction with peers during communicative tasks, and willingness to speak independently.

The study aimed to analyse how CLT was implemented at SDN 13 Tilamuta and how pupils participated in the resulting classroom activities. It addressed three questions: (1) How were communicative principles translated into classroom routines and tasks? (2) What patterns appeared in pupils' responses to English instructions, peer interaction, and independent speaking? and (3) What pedagogical conditions supported or constrained classroom implementation? The study provides a bounded, practice-oriented account. It does not test whether CLT caused gains in general English proficiency.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Communicative Competence and Context-Sensitive CLT

The theoretical basis of CLT lies in the distinction between knowing language forms and being able to use language appropriately. Canale and Swain (1980) describe communicative competence through interrelated knowledge and strategic capacities. This framework shifted attention from isolated structures towards what learners can accomplish with language in context. Classroom implementation therefore requires opportunities to interpret meaning, select language for a purpose, react to an interlocutor, and repair limited communication.

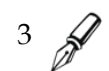
Contemporary CLT is best understood as an orientation rather than a single technique. Littlewood (2014) presents communication-oriented teaching as a continuum that can include pre-communicative practice, structured communication, and more autonomous language use. Butler (2011) shows why this flexibility is necessary in Asia-Pacific classrooms, where reforms are often reshaped by teachers' beliefs, curricular demands, resources, and learners' proficiency. A context-sensitive version of CLT can thus combine modelling and repetition with interaction, provided that learners use the practised language to understand or convey meaning.

2.2 Communicative Pedagogy for Young Learners

Young learners differ from adult language learners in attention span, metalinguistic awareness, social dependence, and need for concrete context. Cameron (2001) recommends tasks that connect language to actions, objects, images, stories, and familiar classroom events. The linguistic load should be limited enough for children to participate successfully, while repetition should occur across purposeful encounters. Such design makes routines pedagogically valuable. Recurrent phrases can become comprehensible input and, with teacher prompting, a resource for response.

The quality of teachers' pedagogical decisions is central. Dagarin-Fojkar et al. (2022) identify linguistic, didactic, and intercultural competences as important for primary EFL teaching. Wilden and Porsch (2020) further show that target-language use in primary classrooms varies by function and is related to teachers' self-assessed proficiency. These findings support a balanced principle: teachers should increase accessible English for routines and interaction, while using strategic first-language support when it prevents confusion or protects task participation.

Recent classroom research also warns against equating attractive activities with communication. Songs, games, movement, and visual media may be useful, but their value depends on whether pupils interpret or produce language for a recognisable purpose.



Taddese et al. (2025) report gaps between recommended young-learner principles and observed practices in primary schools, including limited language use and resource constraints. Imran et al. (2024) likewise identify professional preparation and resource availability as persistent concerns. Low-cost media can therefore be appropriate when the teacher uses it to prompt meaningful responses rather than passive display.

2.3 Participation, Peer Interaction, and Independent Speaking

Participation is a multidimensional sign of engagement. Philp and Duchesne (2016) distinguish behavioural, cognitive, social, and emotional dimensions in language tasks. For young beginners, observable actions such as following an English instruction, responding with a word or phrase, turn-taking with a peer, or volunteering an answer provide useful but partial evidence. They show that pupils entered the communicative event; they do not independently demonstrate stable proficiency.

Peer interaction can lower the immediate performance demand by distributing attention and allowing rehearsal. A systematic review by Washington-Nortey et al. (2022) indicates that peer interaction can support language development among young English learners, although interaction quality and partner characteristics matter. Homayouni (2022) also reports that scaffolded group work can support speaking and vocabulary learning. In a primary EFL classroom, paired or small-group work may thus serve as a bridge between teacher-led repetition and independent oral production.

Independent speaking places a higher demand on retrieval, confidence, and public performance. A learner may respond accurately within a chorus or pair but hesitate when speaking alone. This difference should not be interpreted simply as unwillingness or failure. It identifies the point at which support must be gradually reduced. A developmentally appropriate CLT sequence therefore moves from modelling, joint response, and peer rehearsal towards short individual production, while maintaining a low-risk classroom climate.

2.4 Indonesian Primary-School Implementation

Indonesia's primary English provision is shaped by policy variation and local capacity. Zein (2016) argues that teacher education must respond specifically to the demands of primary English rather than assuming that general language preparation is sufficient. Zein (2017) and Sulistiyo et al. (2020) further demonstrate that curriculum status, teacher availability, time allocation, and resources vary across schools. These conditions favour an implementation lens that asks what is feasible, observable, and sustainable in one setting.

The present study uses this lens. It treats CLT implementation as an alignment among five classroom elements: comprehensible teacher modelling, predictable English routines, contextual vocabulary, peer-supported tasks, and performance-based observation. The framework recognises that a small school may not possess extensive technology or specialist materials. Communicative quality depends more directly on what pupils are invited and supported to do with language.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

3.1 Research Design and Setting

The study employed a descriptive qualitative design in a bounded school setting. This design was selected because the objective was to describe the implementation process, participant responses, and contextual conditions rather than to estimate a treatment effect. The research was conducted at SDN 13 Tilamuta, Boalemo Regency, Gorontalo Province, Indonesia, from February to April 2026. The school setting provided an opportunity to examine CLT under ordinary primary-classroom conditions.

3.2 Participants and Data Sources

Participants comprised 15 primary-school pupils who joined the observed English learning activities, one classroom/English teacher, and one school principal. The teacher and principal were included because they were directly connected to classroom implementation and school-level support. The study reports pupil data in aggregate form and does not identify individual children.

Table 1

Participants and Primary Sources of Evidence

Participant group	Number	Primary evidence
Pupils	15	Classroom observation and learning-response records
Classroom/English teacher	1	Observation, semi-structured interview, and documentation
School principal	1	Semi-structured interview and school documentation

Note. The grade level, age range, and gender distribution were not included in the dataset supplied for manuscript preparation.

3.3 Instruments and Data Collection

Four sources of evidence were used. First, classroom observations documented the teacher's use of English instructions, modelling, communicative routines, peer-work structures, simple vocabulary, media, and performance monitoring. Second, semi-structured interviews with the teacher and principal provided contextual information about implementation and school support. Third, student learning-response records captured participation patterns. Fourth, instructional and school documentation supported contextual interpretation.

A structured observation-coding rubric organised the pupil-level evidence. The supplied record contained three reportable participation indicators: active response to English classroom instructions, engagement in peer interaction during communicative tasks, and consistent willingness to speak independently. The rubric was used as an organising device within the qualitative design. Counts were calculated to describe the distribution of observed participation, not to conduct inferential testing or measure learning gains.

3.4 Data Analysis

The analysis proceeded through two linked strands. In the descriptive strand, the available observation summary was tabulated for each of the three pupil-participation indicators. For each indicator, the analysis reported the number meeting the criterion, the number not meeting it, the percentage of the 15 pupils, and the absolute percentage-point contrast with independent speaking. Counts remained primary because one pupil represented 6.7 percentage points. No inferential test was applied because the purpose was to characterise a bounded case, the participants were not probability-sampled, and the three indicators were not validated as statistically independent outcome measures.

In the interpretive strand, interview, observation, learning-response, and documentary records were examined through thematic analysis. The researchers familiarised themselves with the records, generated provisional codes, grouped related codes, reviewed candidate themes against the available evidence, defined theme boundaries, and produced an evidence-linked narrative (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The coding frame retained theoretically relevant CLT categories, including modelling, classroom routines, peer-supported tasks, and independent production, while allowing context-specific enabling and constraining conditions to remain visible.

The final synthesis compared the descriptive participation pattern with the thematic account of how activities were organised. Claims were classified as directly observed, numerically summarised, or interpretive. A theme was treated as better supported when it converged across more than one source. Single-source patterns were retained cautiously and were not presented as established causal mechanisms. This reporting strategy follows the transparency principles of the Standards for Reporting Qualitative Research (O'Brien et al., 2014).

3.5 Trustworthiness and Analytic Boundaries

Credibility was supported through source triangulation across classroom observations, teacher and principal interviews, learning-response records, and documentation. Dependability was strengthened by stating the indicator definitions, calculation rules, thematic sequence, and analytic boundaries. Confirmability was addressed by keeping the descriptive counts separate from thematic interpretation and by examining non-confirming evidence, particularly the pupils who did not consistently meet each indicator. Transferability was supported through a bounded description of the school, participants, period, and instructional configuration (Nowell et al., 2017).

The available manuscript dataset did not contain full interview transcripts, verbatim participant quotations, the number and duration of observed lessons, independent double-coding, inter-coder agreement, or participant validation. These procedures are therefore not claimed. Their absence limits the reader's ability to audit theme construction and reduces confidence in fine-grained interpretation. Accordingly, numerical summaries are treated as descriptive, themes as context-bound, and all causal or population-level claims are excluded.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Classroom Configuration of CLT

The classroom evidence was organised as a three-level participation architecture: entry through comprehension of classroom instructions, supported production through peer interaction, and less-supported production through independent speaking. The implementation therefore represented scaffolded CLT rather than unrestricted spontaneous conversation. Teacher modelling and short English instructions established the language needed to enter an activity; peer tasks then provided a rehearsal space before pupils were invited to speak independently.

Activities connected language to immediate classroom purposes and familiar content. Low-cost media and visible prompts helped make intended meanings accessible, while performance monitoring focused on whether pupils responded, interacted, and attempted language. Evidence strength differed across the results: the three participation indicators were directly quantified, whereas the five implementation conditions were thematic interpretations across the available records. The latter should therefore be read as explanatory patterns, not as independently measured effects.

4.2 Student Participation Patterns

Table 2 reports counts and percentages for the three available pupil-level indicators. Responses to English instructions and peer interaction each involved 12 pupils, whereas independent speaking involved 9. In a group of 15, the 20.0-percentage-point difference represents three pupils and should not be interpreted as a precise population estimate.

Table 2

Observed Participation in CLT-Oriented Classroom Activities

Observation indicator	Meeting, n (%)	Not meeting, n (%)	Gap vs independent speaking
Active response to English classroom instructions	12 (80.0)	3 (20.0)	+3 pupils; +20.0 pp
Peer interaction during communicative tasks	12 (80.0)	3 (20.0)	+3 pupils; +20.0 pp
Consistent willingness to speak independently	9 (60.0)	6 (40.0)	Reference

Note. Percentages describe this group of 15 pupils only; one pupil equals 6.7 percentage points. The percentage-point gap uses independent speaking as the reference. The indicators are classroom participation criteria, not a standardised proficiency scale.



4.3 English Routines as an Entry Point to Participation

Twelve pupils met the active-response criterion and three did not meet it consistently. The 80.0% figure indicates that brief, recurrent instructions were accessible to most members of this classroom. The criterion captured an observable link between an English prompt and an appropriate action or oral response. It did not measure the depth of comprehension, response accuracy across novel instructions, or durable learning.

The three non-confirming cases are analytically important. They show that routine exposure did not produce uniform participation. Plausible explanations include variation in attention, comprehension, confidence, task familiarity, or readiness to respond, but the available records cannot distinguish among these mechanisms. The defensible implication is continued modelling, visual support, checking for understanding, and multiple response opportunities rather than attribution of the pattern to a single learner characteristic.

4.4 Peer Interaction Was Stronger Than Independent Speaking

Twelve pupils met the peer-interaction criterion and three did not. This marginal rate was identical to the rate for responding to classroom instructions. However, the supplied aggregate record did not include a pupil-by-indicator cross-tabulation. It therefore cannot establish that the same 12 pupils met both criteria or that instruction response predicted peer participation. The justified conclusion is narrower: both supported forms of participation were common in this classroom.

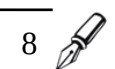
Independent speaking was the least frequently met indicator. Nine pupils (60.0%) met it consistently and six (40.0%) did not. Relative to either 80.0% supported-participation rate, this was an absolute shortfall of three pupils and 20.0 percentage points. On a relative scale, the independent-speaking rate was 25.0% lower than the peer-interaction rate. This contrast is consistent with an autonomy challenge, but it does not prove that peer support caused the difference because the indicators were not experimentally manipulated and individual transitions were not recorded.

4.5 Functional Use of Simple Vocabulary

The records documented simple vocabulary being used within instructions, routines, and peer activities. This finding concerns functional classroom use, not vocabulary growth. No standardised vocabulary measure, baseline, comparison condition, or delayed assessment was available. The analysis therefore excludes claims that CLT increased vocabulary size or produced durable lexical learning.

4.6 Conditions Supporting Implementation

Across the available sources, five recurring conditions formed the thematic support system for implementation: clear teacher modelling, predictable classroom routines, peer rehearsal, accessible low-cost media, and observation of actual performance. Their proposed relationship is sequential and interpretive: modelling clarified expected



language, routines reduced processing demands, peers provided a lower-risk rehearsal space, media supplied context, and performance observation made participation visible. Because frequency counts and verbatim quotations were not available for these themes, the study does not rank their strength or estimate their separate effects.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 A Contextually Adapted Form of CLT

The findings support a context-sensitive interpretation of CLT. Communication at SDN 13 Tilamuta did not depend on long, spontaneous conversations. It emerged through short instructions, familiar routines, simple vocabulary, and supported exchanges. This pattern is consistent with Littlewood's (2014) continuum between controlled preparation and communicative use. It also answers Butler's (2011) call for locally feasible versions of communicative pedagogy in the Asia-Pacific region.

The result is important because CLT is sometimes presented as the opposite of modelling, repetition, or teacher guidance. In this primary setting, those supports were necessary for communication. The critical distinction was the purpose of the support. Repetition prepared pupils to recognise or produce language during an interaction; it was not the final objective. This interpretation retains the communicative-competence orientation described by Canale and Swain (1980) while responding to the developmental needs identified by Cameron (2001).

5.2 Peer Interaction as a Participation Bridge

The identical aggregate rates for instruction response and peer interaction show that both supported forms of participation were common. They do not show that the same pupils succeeded in both forms. This distinction prevents an ecological inference from equal marginal totals to individual behaviour. Even with that constraint, the result accords with the view that task engagement has social and behavioural dimensions (Philp & Duchesne, 2016) and with evidence that peer interaction can create language-development opportunities for young English learners (Washington-Nortey et al., 2022).

Peer work should not be treated as automatically communicative. Its contribution depends on task clarity, partner roles, linguistic support, and teacher monitoring. Homayouni (2022) demonstrates the value of scaffolded group work for speaking and vocabulary, but the present study adds a practical qualification for beginner primary contexts: peer interaction was most useful when pupils had first received a clear model and a manageable language frame. The peer stage acted as rehearsal and supported participation rather than replacing teacher mediation.

5.3 The Independent-Speaking Gap

The 60.0% independent-speaking rate is the most instructionally consequential result. It was three pupils and 20.0 percentage points below each supported-participation indicator. Because one pupil changes the observed rate by 6.7 percentage points, the count difference is more informative than the percentage alone. The pattern is compatible with higher demands for retrieval, turn initiation, and public performance, but those mechanisms remain interpretations rather than tested mediators.



A suitable response is gradual release rather than abrupt removal of support. Teachers can move from choral response to fixed pairs, rotating pairs, brief individual turns, and later short unscripted responses. Wait time, visual prompts, acceptance of concise answers, and opportunities to rehearse can reduce unnecessary performance pressure. The objective is not to force public speech from every child at once, but to expand the proportion of pupils who can use familiar language with decreasing support.

5.4 Teacher Capacity, Routines, and Low-Cost Resources

The implementation conditions reinforce the central role of teacher capacity in primary English. Dagarin-Fojkar et al. (2022) show that effective teaching requires specialised didactic competence, while Wilden and Porsch (2020) demonstrate that target-language use is linked to classroom function and teacher proficiency. At SDN 13 Tilamuta, useful English input was made manageable through modelling and routines. This suggests that professional development should focus on teachable classroom-language repertoires and task sequencing, not only on abstract descriptions of CLT.

Resource limitations need not eliminate communicative activity, but they shape its design. Imran et al. (2024) and Taddese et al. (2025) identify materials and professional support as recurring challenges in primary English teaching. The present findings indicate that low-cost media can be sufficient when it provides shared visual context and prompts a response. The pedagogical value lies in the interaction organised around the material, not in the price or technological complexity of the material itself.

5.5 Contribution to Indonesian Primary English Education

The study contributes a classroom-level account to an Indonesian literature often concerned with policy, teacher supply, and programme status. Zein (2016, 2017) and Sulistiyo et al. (2020) show why primary English implementation varies across settings. The present case specifies a feasible configuration of repeated English routines, bounded communicative tasks, peer support, and performance observation. Its principal analytic contribution is not an effectiveness estimate. It is the identification of a 20.0-percentage-point marginal gap between supported participation and independent speaking, together with a transparent account of the evidence needed before that gap can be explained causally.

5.6 Practical Implications

For teachers, lesson planning should specify what pupils will understand or communicate, not only which words they will encounter. Each lesson can include a short model, a familiar routine, guided peer practice, and one manageable opportunity for individual speaking. Teachers should record who responds only with group support, who interacts with a peer, and who can speak independently. This simple performance record can guide the next level of scaffolding.

For school leaders, support should prioritise stable instructional time, access to reusable visual media, and teacher development focused on primary classroom language

and activity design. Expectations should remain realistic. A small public school does not need elaborate technology to implement communicative principles, but the teacher needs preparation time, a clear progression of language routines, and institutional recognition that oral participation is a legitimate learning outcome.

For assessment, vocabulary recall should be complemented by evidence of use. Short performance checks can document whether pupils follow an English instruction, respond appropriately, exchange information with a peer, and produce a brief independent utterance. Such checks are developmentally appropriate when criteria are transparent and the classroom climate remains supportive.

5.7 Limitations and Future Research

The study involved one school, 15 pupils, one teacher, and one principal. The findings describe this bounded setting and cannot represent all Indonesian primary schools. The supplied record contained only three pupil-level marginal counts. It did not include a pupil-by-indicator matrix, a comparison group, pretest-posttest measure, standardised speaking or vocabulary score, detailed demographics, number and duration of observed lessons, full transcripts, verbatim quotations, or longitudinal follow-up. These omissions prevent analysis of individual transitions, subgroup differences, effect magnitude, mechanism, and durability.

Future studies should preserve a de-identified pupil-by-occasion data matrix, document lesson number and duration, define each indicator prospectively, and retain consented excerpts that connect themes to primary evidence. Repeated observations could distinguish occasional participation from stable patterns. Multi-site designs could examine contextual variation, while mixed-method studies could combine implementation evidence with validated measures of vocabulary, listening, speaking performance, and willingness to communicate. Where sample size and design permit, researchers should report uncertainty intervals and model within-pupil change rather than relying on cross-sectional percentages.

6. CONCLUSION

CLT at SDN 13 Tilamuta was implemented through teacher modelling, English classroom routines, contextual vocabulary, peer interaction, low-cost media, and performance-based observation. Twelve of 15 pupils responded actively to English instructions, 12 engaged in peer interaction, and 9 consistently spoke independently. The difference between either supported-participation indicator and independent speaking was three pupils, equivalent to 20.0 percentage points in this classroom.

The findings support CLT as a feasible classroom orientation when activities are brief, contextual, scaffolded, and developmentally appropriate. They do not show that CLT caused language gains. The practical priority is gradual release from modelled and peer-supported performance towards short independent turns, coupled with individual-level monitoring. Stronger causal, developmental, and transferable conclusions require fuller observational records, direct qualitative evidence, validated language measures, and ethically documented follow-up research.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

PROPOSED CRediT STATEMENT FOR AUTHOR CONFIRMATION. Idrus Dama: conceptualisation, methodology, investigation, data curation, formal analysis, and writing the original draft. Gusfin M. Moonti: methodology, validation, supervision, and review and editing. Both authors must confirm that these roles accurately represent their contributions and approve the submitted manuscript.

DATA AVAILABILITY

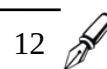
De-identified data that support the findings may be available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to school permission, participant confidentiality, and applicable ethical restrictions.

GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE DISCLOSURE

The authors used OpenAI's ChatGPT to support English-language editing, manuscript structuring, and reference-format checking. The tool was not used to generate research participants, observations, interview quotations, or statistical results. The authors remain responsible for verifying the manuscript, references, analysis, ethical statements, and final submitted content.

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