



(ISSN: 2587-0238)

Şahin Toptaş, A. & Yaren, Y. (2023). Foreign Language Education With Communicative Method in Preschool, *International Journal of Education Technology and Scientific Researches*, 8(24), 2835-2846.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.35826/ijetsar.667>

Article Type (Makale Türü): Research Article

## FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION WITH COMMUNICATIVE METHOD IN PRESCHOOL\*

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Received: 02.05.2023

Accepted: 19.09.2023

Published: 01.10.2023

### ABSTRACT

The preschool period covers a critical period when children's language learning abilities are at their highest level. During this period, the foundations of children's language development are laid, so preschool foreign language education is of great importance. This research focused on how different teaching methods affect foreign language learning at an early age. The study aimed to provide preschool 6-year-old students with German vocabulary teaching through communicative approaches. In this context, German vocabulary was taught to two different classes with different communicative activities, such as "painting and singing" and "painting and playing". In order to achieve the research objectives, a quasi-experimental design was used, involving a pre-test and post-test model with two groups that were not entirely equalized in terms of comparison. With the pre-test, the student's knowledge of German was determined, and then research groups were formed. The research was limited to 15 students in each class, and a total of 30 students were taught German vocabulary. A two-dimensional vocabulary test was used to assess different aspects of language development. 69-word cards were prepared to measure expressive aspects, and 5-word groups containing 28 cards in total were used to evaluate receptive aspects. The data shows that game and activity-based foreign language teaching has positive effects on children's language development. These methods can make language learning more effective and enjoyable due to their compatibility with children's natural learning processes. At the same time, learning a foreign language at an early age can increase children's ability to communicate fluently and make connections between different languages.

**Keywords:** Foreign language education in preschool, German language education, communicative method, receptive language, expressive language, game, song.

\* This study was carried out within the scope of the project numbered 1919B012205307 within the scope of 2209-A University Students Research Projects Support Program carried out by TÜBİTAK Scientist Support Programs Presidency (BİDEB). We want to thank TÜBİTAK Scientist Support Programs Directorate for their support.

**INTRODUCTION**

Since man is a social being, one of his greatest needs, which has been going on for generations, is to communicate. The most effective means of communication between people is language. Communication tools outside of language, such as sounds, gestures and mimic, also play an essential role in enabling communication; however, these never diminish the value of the language. Beyond denoting the ability to establish and maintain communication between people, language has social functions. It also establishes a relationship with a society and its culture (Demirel, 2003). As mentioned, speaking and communicating in a language we have is an important skill. This skill set, when used wisely and skillfully, can be of great benefit to human life. It is thought that language and communication can provide great advantages for our environment, our business life, in short, our entire life cycle. There are many different societies in the world, and each society has cultures that differ within itself. Language is blended with the cultures of societies and has become an inseparable whole. As a social being, man aspired to learn knowledge beyond his borders and the cultures of other societies. In order to accomplish this desire, man needs to learn other languages. Bal et al. (2020) have stated that it is possible to recruit the language of man and the development of humanity. Considering that we live daily communicating and using it, the effects of language are visible. The fact that language is the most important element that creates society, and the individual plays a role in foreign languages finding an important place in education programs (Çelikkaya & Balkaya, 2019). Foreign language learning has become an increasing need, and knowing a foreign language has become compulsory. Learning a foreign language contributes to cognitive development as well as cultural exchange, job opportunities, and expanding our environment. As can be seen from here, the contribution of language on child development is an undeniable fact. As soon as a person is born, they enter into an intense learning process in order to communicate, sustain life, and adapt to their environment (Kuşçu, 2017). It is thought that the fact that children learn languages other than their mother tongue at an early age will contribute to their easy adaptation to the world they live in. A mother tongue, or first language, is the language that individuals first acquire; on the other hand, languages that are learned later are called foreign languages (Demircan, 2005). A lot of research is done on whether it is easier and more beneficial to learn a language at an early age. In the study conducted by Cadierno et al. (2020), it was concluded that late language learners perform better than early language learners. Myles (2017) similarly shows that children learn foreign languages more slowly than adults. The reason for this is that children's cognitive development is not yet developed, and therefore, they need more language input to compensate for this situation. As can be seen, some research results show that it is not appropriate to start foreign language learning at an early age compared to adults and that young children learn a language more slowly because they do not yet have sufficiently developed cognitive resources. In contrast to this research, in many studies. It is stated that learning a language at an early age is more effective. Cadierno et al. (2020) state that some research results indicate that children are eager to learn languages at an early age, so this desire and enthusiasm for language learning is an important factor in language learning at an early age. It is thought that children have a passion for foreign languages and this enthusiasm should be used. Learning a new language at an early age helps increase proficiency easily (Nikolov, 2009). Od (2013) states that children's early initiation of language learning facilitates language learning. It states that the

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rules related to the mother tongue and the use of the language are acquired in the first 5 years of life that the mother tongue can be used in adult competence, but that the language acquisition process has not yet been completed. Children who step into school with a rich vocabulary progress more harmoniously with the language of learning, which makes it more effective for them to acquire reading and writing skills (Aytar & Öğretir, 2008). The individual who learns a foreign language constantly integrates his mother tongue habits into the foreign language learning process (Arak, 2006). Accordingly, it can be concluded that children's mother tongue levels and ability to learn foreign languages progress in parallel. As can be seen, in the teaching of a foreign language, the mother tongue is also included in this process. This is why the mother tongue is considered to have a significant impact on learning a new language. Since information can be acquired faster during childhood, learning a foreign language at an early age is more effortless. It is thought that children having a good language foundation can lead to more positive results so that they can comfortably develop a foreign language during their educational journey. For this reason, it is very important to give foreign language education to children in preschool education. Foreign language teaching at an early age helps children to improve their ability to understand their mother tongue by increasing their flexibility and speed of thinking, listening skills and sensitivity. This approach also provides children with the opportunity to gain the ability to communicate more comfortably with people. Foreign language teaching at an early age contributes to the mental development of children (Anşın, 2006). According to the studies, it was determined that 50% of mental development took place in the period up to the age of 4 and 30% in the period from the age of 4 to 8 years. In addition, it was observed that 33% of the school success shown until the age of 18 was due to the educational experience in the 0-6 age range (Tekiner, 1996, as cited in Koçak, 2001). As it can be understood from this sentence, the earlier the education is taken, the more it will contribute to mental development in the future. In the early period, a parallel is observed between development and learning, and the most effective developmental path of children is intertwined with learning processes (Kandır & Orçan, 2011). The preschool years, encompassing ages zero to six, constitute a critical phase of rapid development with profound and lasting effects on a child's subsequent growth and well-being (Dursun, 2009; Steel, 2015; Awake & Bloody, 2010; as cited in Karoğlu & Coban, 2019). More permanent results are obtained from what children learn at an early age and this contributes to the development of children. As in the rest of the world, foreign language learning is of great importance in our country, and it is an accepted fact how early this process should be started to obtain effective and permanent results (Köprülü, 2016). When language is supported from the preschool period, it positively affects the academic and social development of the individual (Aydoğan & Koçak, 2003; as cited in Karoğlu & Coban, 2019). Early education prepares individuals for the future and is believed to benefit them throughout their lives. However, it can be said that exposing children to language at an early age has positive effects on their language development.

German is the most preferred foreign language after English in country and worldwide and is becoming popular day by day. In these days, when the number of people who do not speak English is decreasing, people are focusing on learning another language. At this point, German, which has taken its place as one of the most used languages in the world, is encountered. German is taught as the second foreign language after English in High Schools in

our country. In addition, in some private schools, German is also taught as an elective foreign language in primary education. In the preschool period, English is usually taught as a foreign language and other languages are not given much space. Considering that the students learn English in the preschool class, it is desired to give German education as a second foreign language in the research. Until today, much research on English as a foreign language has been included in the field of preschool education. However, there is very little research on the German language, the importance of which is increasing day by day in the preschool education stage. As mentioned above, there are opposing views on the necessity of foreign language education at an early age and a common and definite opinion has not been reached on this issue. The research is very important, because it aims to determine the extent to which foreign language acquisition is possible at an early age. In addition, it is thought that the research is important because it investigates the most effective foreign language teaching method in preschool education. As can be understood from the research studies, the importance of the preschool education period in terms of foreign language education is quite significant. However, it is thought that while sufficient attention has been paid to English in the ongoing period, German has not been given the necessary importance.

The study's primary purpose is to draw attention to the importance of foreign language education in preschool. In this context, it is aimed to teach foreign languages to preschool children with different activities and to determine the effectiveness of these activities at an early age. In addition, in the research it is aims to increase the teaching of the German language, which is not limited to English but is widely used as an alternative to the foreign language of children studying in preschool education. The purpose of this study is to identify an effective communicative method for preschool foreign language education that can yield better results and facilitate the teaching process for German teachers.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design**

For the purpose of the study, pretest and post-test models were applied in two groups that were not equalized, following semi-experimental designs (Büyüköztürk, 2007). Various methods are employed for effectively teaching foreign languages to preschool children. In the research, the Communicative Method, which is thought to be the most efficient way for preschool students, was used. In the Communicative Approach Method, it is aimed to improve the foreign languages of children by addressing their communication situations. The communicative approach, which adopts a communicative language and language use model, refers to a teaching approach in which the teaching methodology, learning materials, teacher and student roles, classroom activities, and practices are organized in accordance with this understanding (Demircan, 2005). In the communicative approach, the interests and needs of the learners are given importance, and the target language is taught not only in the classroom environment but also in relation to real life (Roche, 2005). As mentioned above, in the communicative approach, it is desired to create not only knowledge but also experience in children along with

activities. When applying the Communicative Approach, it is desired to provide information transfer to children through games, to provide attention, and to create memorability.

### Research Group

The research was carried out in the 2022-2023 academic year in 2 classes in the 6-year-old age group who received preschool education at Gazi Üniversitesi Çocuk Gelişimi Araştırma Uygulama ve Eğitim Merkezi (ÇOGAUM). A total of 30 students participated in the study. In order to avoid any difference between the participants in the learning process due to developmental differences, attention was paid to the fact that the groups participating in the study were the same age. The research group was selected by purposive sampling method. The reason for choosing this group in the study is that it is easily accessible, and it is a sample group suitable for the research purpose. Purposive sampling is the selection of appropriate groups for the purpose of the research, which is not non-random (Büyüköztürk, et l., 2017).

### Data Collecting Tools

In the study, a German vocabulary test was developed to measure German language development. The first foreign language of the students participating in the research is English. German is taught as a second foreign language. The measuring tool is formed in two dimensions: as a receiver and an expressor. Considering that the expressive aspects of some children develop later, attention was paid to the fact that the vocabulary test was two-dimensional. A total of 69-word cards with an image of each word were prepared for the expressive test. For the recipient test, a total of 28 cards were prepared, four different from each word group consisting of 5-word groups containing the target word.

### Collecting the Data

In practice, the receptive and expressive German Vocabulary Test, which was developed to measure German language development, was applied. In the study, pre-tests were carried out against the possibility that the children had previous knowledge of German. In the expressive test, students were shown cards and asked to say the words verbally. In the receptive test, the target word was asked verbally by the teacher and the student was asked to show that word from the illustrated word group on the word card. At the end of the research, the difference between the foreign language development of the two groups was evaluated.

**Tablo 1:** Weekly Lesson Plan

Week	Group	Method	Topic	Word Count
Week 1	Class A	Singing-Coloring	Numbers	11
	Class B	Game- Coloring		
Week 2	Class A	Singing-Coloring	Animals	8
	Class B	Game- Coloring		
Week 3	Class A	Singing-Coloring	Colors	10
	Class B	Game- Coloring		
Week 4		Review		
Week 5	Class A	Singing-Coloring	Fruits	13

	Class B	Game- Coloring		
<b>Week 6</b>	Class A	Singing-Coloring	Vegetables	7
	Class B	Game- Coloring		
<b>Week 7</b>	Class A	Singing-Coloring	Family	11
	Class B	Game- Coloring		
<b>Week 8</b>	Class A	Singing-Coloring	Organs	9
	Class B	Game- Coloring		
<b>Week 9</b>	General Review – German Vocabulary Test			

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In the study, only vocabulary was taught to the groups. In one of the groups where the communicative method will be used, singing and coloring, and in the other class, words were taught with games and coloring activities. Each week, songs and games were found appropriate for the vocabulary group to be taught. In both classes, German was spoken during the lesson. Both groups were taught 7 different vocabulary groups consisting of 7-13 words for 2 lessons per week for 8 weeks. Before the words taught in the lesson were created, observations were made in the classes where the students studied, class teachers were interviewed, and word groups were formed by taking into account the materials available in the class. Each week a repetition of the previous week was made, after which a new set of words was taught. After the first three weeks, the repetition course was conducted. In the last week, at the beginning of the week, there was a repetition lesson one day, and at the end of the week, a German vocabulary test was taken in a lesson.

In order to ensure internal validity in the study, two groups from the same age group were determined, and the same researcher taught in both groups. In addition, to ensure internal validity, sample groups were determined randomly from children without a German background by pre-test. If the relationship between at least two observed variables is clear and unambiguous, it is called internal validity (Fraenkel et al., 2012). Although there was a loss or increase in participants during the research, the sample groups were limited to 15 people each. While all students in the same class were included in the applications, the sample groups were limited to 15 people. To ensure external validity, the final test was applied only to pre-tested subjects. External validity refers to the ability to relate research results to similar groups or to different situations. This is a concept used when evaluating the generalizability of research results (Karataş, 2015).

### Data Analysis

The Mann-Whitney U Test was performed to examine the difference in German vocabulary knowledge between the groups. First of all, it was examined whether the data were distributed normally. SPSS 21.0 Package program was used in the analysis of the data.

### FINDINGS

Before evaluating the difference between student groups, the assumptions of normality and variance homogeneity of the sample group were taken into consideration; accordingly, it was determined that some data sets were not normally distributed, and some variables did not provide homogeneity of variance. Mann-Whitney U Test was performed to evaluate the difference between the groups. Whether two unrelated groups differ

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significantly from each other can be measured by the Mann-Whitney U Test. The equivalent of the t-test for unrelated samples is the Mann-Whitney U Test (Büyüköztürk, 2020; Büyüköztürk, et al., 2020). Before the Mann-Whitney U Test was performed, the average scores of the groups were obtained because the number of words in each word group was different. The analyses were based on average scores. While the groups of students in different classes in the research were the independent variable, vocabulary knowledge was the dependent variable. With the Mann-Whitney U Test it was aimed to measure whether there was a significant difference between the independent variables, that is, the averages of the student groups, in terms of vocabulary.

**Table 2.** Mann-Whitney U Test Results of the German Vocabulary Test by Groups

Classes	n	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	p
Class A	15	13,70	205,50	85,5	,26
Class B	15	17,30	259,50		

**Note.** Mean Rank: Average Rank, Sum of Ranks: Sequence Sum, U: Mann-Whitney U value, p: Significance Level

The Mann-Whitney U Test results of the German vocabulary test scores of the groups of students who learn words with song and learn words with games in the vocabulary classes are given in Table 2. Accordingly, at the end of the 9-week experimental study, there was no significant difference between the group of students in the class who learned German words with song and the group who learned words with the game (U: 85.5,  $p > 0.05$ ).

There was no statistically significant difference between the groups. For this reason, in order to evaluate the student groups, the total value and the average value given by the students were evaluated. As a result of 9 weeks of vocabulary teaching, the findings of the classes are given in the table below.

**Table 3.** Class A German Vocabulary Test Results

Students	Numbers	Animals	Colors	Fruits	Vegetables	Family	Organs
<b>Class A</b>							
<b>A1</b>	0	Fish	Orange, Pink, Black	Banana, Pineapple, Orange	-	Father, Grandfather, Baby	-
<b>A2</b>	1, 5	-	Orange, Blue, Purple	Banana, Pineapple	-	Father, Cousin (Female), Cousin (Male), Grandfather, Baby	Head, Eye, Shoulder
<b>A3</b>	-	-	-	-	-	Kuzen	-
<b>A4</b>	1, 5	Fish	-	-	-	Mother, Father, Grandmother, Grandfather	-
<b>A5</b>	-	Fish	Pink	-	-	-	-
<b>A6</b>	2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9	-	Orange, Blue	Banana, Pineapple, Orange	-	Grandmother	Head, Nose, Shoulder
<b>A7</b>	5, 7	Fish	Pink, Blue, Black	Banana, Pineapple	-	Cousin (Female), Cousin (Male), Baby	Head, Mouth, Nose
<b>A8</b>	-	-	Pink	Pineapple	-	-	-
<b>A9</b>	-	-	Blue	-	-	-	-
<b>A10</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-	Mouth
<b>A11</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-	Head
<b>A12</b>	-	-	Blue	-	-	Baby	-

<b>A13</b>	5	-	Orange	Orange	-	-	-
<b>A14</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>A15</b>	-	-	-	-	-	Baby	-
<b>Class B</b>							
<b>B1</b>	8,3	Cat, Fish	Orange, Pink	-	-	Baby	-
<b>B2</b>	-	Fish	Purple	Banana, Pineapple	Carrot	Baby	Knee
<b>B3</b>	5, 6	Cat, Fish	Orange	Banana, Pineapple, Orange	-	Father, Cousin (Female), Cousin (Male), Grandfather, Grandmother, Baby	-
<b>B4</b>	5, 8, 2	Cat, Fish	Pink, White, Black, Brown, Orange	Banana, Pineapple, Orange	-	Mother, Brother Father, Grandmother, Grandfather, Baby	Head, Feet, Eye, Shoulder, Knee
<b>B5</b>	5, 8	Cat, Fish	-	-	-	-	-
<b>B6</b>	-	-	Blue, Pink	-	-	-	Head, Shoulder, Nose
<b>B7</b>	8	-	-	Banana	-	-	-
<b>B8</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>B9</b>	-	Cat, Fish	-	Pineapple	-	Baby	-
<b>B10</b>	-	Fish	Purple	Banana, Pineapple,	-	-	-
<b>B11</b>	0	Fish	-	Banana	-	Cousin (Male)	-
<b>B12</b>	0, 8	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>B13</b>	5	-	Pink	Banana, Pineapple, Orange	-	Sister, Brother	-
<b>B14</b>	5	Fish	Pink	Banana	-	Baby	-
<b>B15</b>	-	-	Blue	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	28	18	32	29	1	35	17

Since there was little difference between the receptive and expressive word tests, the test results were written as a total. When the average scores of the student groups (average score was calculated as total score/number of students) were examined, it was observed that the students in class B, that is, the students who were taught with games and painting activities, knew more words in the vocabulary test than the students who were taught with the song and painting activity. As a result of the vocabulary test, it is observed that out of the 7-word groups, family, colors, fruits, and numbers are known more than others. Remarkably, with the exception of one student from vegetables, none of the students from either group knows a word. One student from each group did not answer any words on the vocabulary test. In addition, the number of students who know a word in class A is higher than the other group. When all word categories were examined, it was observed that students generally learned words that were similar or identical to English (fish: der Fisch, Cat: die Katze, pink: pink, blue: blau, orange: orange, banana: die Banane, orange: die Orange, pineapple: die Pineapple, baby: das Baby, cousin: der Cousin, grandmother, die Großmutter: grandfather: der Großvater).



## CONCLUSION and DISCUSSION

Preschool foreign language education refers to the education provided to children when their language learning abilities are at their highest level. Typically, children between the ages of 0-6 experience this period, which includes a critical time frame for laying the foundations of language development. Therefore, preschool foreign language education plays a significant role in enabling children to make the most efficient use of their language learning abilities. During this period, children's learning ability is so flexible that it allows them to be exposed to new languages, almost like playing a game. Since their minds are still flexible, their abilities to distinguish different sounds and understand grammatical structures are highly developed. Therefore, it is believed that children tend to develop fluent pronunciation and natural language usage when learning a new language. In this context, the main purpose of the research is to emphasize the importance of preschool foreign language education and to examine the impact of different teaching activities on early foreign language learning. Within this framework, the aim is to determine the effectiveness of early learning by teaching preschool children's foreign languages through various activities. Additionally, the goal is to provide more opportunities for teaching alternative foreign languages, such as German, to preschool children, not limited to English. The research results aim to facilitate the education process by presenting which activities are more effective among communicative methods for teaching foreign languages in the preschool period by German teachers who teach foreign languages in preschool.

In the research, using communicative methods, German vocabulary was taught to two different classes of the preschool age group of 6 years, with one class using coloring songs and the other class using coloring game activities. To collect data for the purpose of the research, a pre-test and post-test model was applied in two non-equivalent comparative experimental designs. First, a pre-test was conducted to determine whether the students had any knowledge of German. The application was made to all students in the class, and the research group was limited to 15 students in each class. To measure the German language development of students, a German vocabulary test was developed. Considering that expressive aspects of language development may vary individually, the vocabulary test was designed with a two-dimensional approach. A total of 69-word cards were prepared for the expressive test. For the receptive test, there are 5-word groups, each consisting of 4 different cards related to the target word. In total, 28 cards were prepared for measuring receptive skills. To test the significance of the difference between the groups participating in the research, the Mann-Whitney U test was applied. As a result of the analysis, no significant difference was found. Student groups were evaluated based on total and average values according to the results of the German vocabulary test. According to the research results, the class where German was taught through games and coloring knew more words compared to the group where songs and coloring were used for vocabulary teaching. In addition, in the class where vocabulary was taught through songs, there were more students who did not know any words or knew only 1 word. Based on the obtained result, it can be stated that teaching vocabulary through games in preschool is a more effective language teaching method than teaching vocabulary through songs. Kara (2004) supports this view by stating that children can develop their language skills to the highest level in game-based environments starting from the

preschool period. Furthermore, Çilek (2021) has asserted the significance of classroom activities and dramatic play within the context of such gaming activities for the development of both children's perceptions and language skills in terms of their ability to assess the events transpiring in their surroundings. While some students do not know any words, it is observed that some students know a quite high number of words. It is thought that this difference may be due to individual and developmental differences such as attention and interest among students. Tulu (2009) stated that factors such as gender, age, and the mother's education level affect children's language development. When looking at the differences between word groups, it is observed that students know more words from family, colors, fruits, and numbers of groups. Except for one student, no student knew any words from the vegetable group. It can be said that vegetables are less used by preschool students in their native language compared to other word groups, and therefore, learning words from this group is more complicated. Moreover, it is noteworthy that students learned words similar to English more. It can be expressed that a student who learns one language can establish connections between languages, making it easier to learn a second language.

Pre-school foreign language education not only enhances language skills but also increases cultural awareness. Understanding different languages and cultures can give children a broader worldview and strengthen their empathy abilities. Additionally, early foreign language learning can facilitate the learning of more complex grammar rules and vocabulary in the future. A study by Şeker (2010) found that pre-school foreign language education contributes to children's native language development. Preschool foreign language education is an opportunity to make the most of this vital period when children's language learning abilities are at their peak. The education provided during this period can help children improve not only their language skills but also gain a global perspective.

## **SUGGESTIONS**

Game and activity-based foreign language teaching should be supported as it has positive effects on children's language development. These methods can make language learning more effective and enjoyable for children due to their compatibility with natural learning processes. Especially at in early age, teaching foreign languages through games and interactive activities is essential for increasing children's language awareness and developing their communication skills fluently. This approach can enhance children's cultural awareness and provide them with a multilingual worldview.

In preschool foreign language education, communicative and fun methods such as games, songs, stories, and interactive activities should be used more. Additionally, providing specialized training programs for teachers can provide more effective support to students with different levels of language learning. In conclusion, preschool foreign language education can enable children to make the most efficient use of their language learning abilities and make the language learning process enjoyable and meaningful for them. During this period, the education provided can help children develop their language skills, empathy abilities, cultural awareness, and broad

worldviews. Future research can expand knowledge in this field by examining topics such as different age groups and the effectiveness of teaching materials in more detail.

#### ETHICAL TEXT

“This article complies with journal writing rules, publication principles, research and publication ethics, and journal ethics. Responsibility for any violations that may arise regarding the article belongs to the author(s). The ethics committee approval of this research was obtained with the decision numbered E-77082166-604.01.02-520213 at the 25.11.2022 decision of Gazi University Ethics Commission.”

**Author(s) Contribution Rate:** In this study, the contribution rate of the first author is 50% and the contribution rate of the second author is 50%.

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