

Investigating Google Translation App Reliance on Enhancing EFL Learners' Language Proficiency

Ali Ahmed Suleiman

College of Languages and Translation, Islamic University of Minnesota
alyahmed5@gmail.com

Intisar Zakariya Ahmed Ibrahim

Department of English Language & Literature, College of Languages & Humanities, Qassim University, Saudi Arabia
In.Ibrahim@qu.edu.sa

Imadeldin Omer Ahmed Yahya

Assistant Professor, Al-Khaleej for Training and Education at King Saud University
iyahya.c@ksu.edu.sa

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Abstract

This study focuses on the impact of Google Translate (GTA) on EFL learners' language proficiency, specifically its advantages and disadvantages. The survey data and literature review revealed that while many learners are frequent users of GTA, particularly for vocabulary (median=4.0) and pronunciation (median=4.0), the correlations to improvement were substantial for vocabulary ($p=0.72$) and pronunciation ($p=0.68$). However, the correlations for writing ($p=0.28$) and comprehension ($p=0.45$) were weaker, suggesting limited contributions to the more complex skills of writing and comprehension. These findings also suggest that GTA may contribute to immediate improvement in vocabulary and pronunciation, but in terms of complex skills, the direct relationship between GTAs and improvement will be influenced by other contextual factors in EFL learning situations. This study emphasizes the immediate contributions to vocabulary and pronunciation while also highlighting the complexities and subtleties of incorporating GTA into language teaching and learning.

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized world, the ability to communicate in English is crucial for achieving social, academic, and professional success (Crystal, 2003; Graddol, 2006). As the common language of international communication, English proficiency is not only important for educational mobility and workplace competitiveness, but it is also essential for an individual's communicative competence—the ability to use language effectively in authentic contexts (Canale & Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1972).

However, achieving proficiency in English as a foreign language (EFL) remains challenging.

Learners frequently struggle with core language learning components such as vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and fluency, which are difficult to master without authentic interaction and consistent exposure (Nation, 2013; Richards & Schmidt, 2010). These difficulties are exacerbated in situations where English is not the primary language of communication, and students may lack access to immersive linguistic environments or highly qualified instructors (Kirkpatrick, 2011; Ruan et al., 2021). Such limitations limit learners' opportunities to practice meaning-focused communication, which is required for proficiency development (Ellis, 2015).

With the proliferation of digital tools, students are increasingly supplementing traditional instruction with technology to close exposure gaps. Machine translation (MT) applications, particularly Google Translate (GT), have grown in popularity among EFL learners for quick comprehension, vocabulary expansion, and drafting support (Jolley & Maimone, 2022; Klimova, 2025). Recent research suggests that learners use GT not only as a dictionary replacement but also as a scaffolding mechanism to overcome communicative barriers in real time (Cancino & Panes, 2021; Nguyen, 2023). While earlier debates framed GT reliance as a form of "cheating" or linguistic shortcutting (Groves & Mundt, 2015), contemporary scholarship increasingly recognizes its potential role in improving lexical variety, accuracy, and learner autonomy when used critically and with guidance (Comelles, 2025; Jolley & Maimone, 2022). Thus, GT reliance fits into broader shifts in computer-assisted language learning (CALL) and MT literacy, where the emphasis has shifted from banning MT to teaching students how to evaluate, post-edit, and critically engage with MT outputs (Deng et al., 2022; Jiang et al., 2024). This reflects a pragmatic consensus: GT cannot replace authentic communicative practice, but when used strategically, it can help EFL learners overcome contextual constraints and strengthen aspects of communicative competence that would otherwise go undeveloped.

When confronted with the issues listed above, technology has emerged as a driving force for development, not only changing but also influencing language educational practices. There are numerous tools for learners who use technology, ranging from machine translation websites to interactive learning sites, which are constantly evolving and are now widely available. Google Translation Application (GTA) has become one of the most popular forms of technology due to its ease of use and ability to provide real-time translations (Clifford et al., 2013). GTA has

enabled learners to instantly translate printed text, phrases, and sometimes spoken vernacular, and it has become an essential resource that learners use when attempting to access new languages when confronted with an unexpected barrier. While some have acknowledged GTA's benefits for users in terms of accessibility and convenience, questions remain about its implications for language-learning outcomes, such as vocabulary comprehension, pronunciation considerations, and the importance of self-directed language development (Sweeney & Moore, 2012; Tsai 2019). These issues warrant further investigation into GTA's effects on language-learning practices.

Aside from its numerous useful features that can improve learners' language competence and fluency, the Google Translate App has emerged as a reliable tool for EFL learners. Despite its limitations and issues, it remains an exciting tool because it translates and provides instant pronunciation to beginners, intermediate, and advanced foreign language learners (Van Rensburg et al., 2012). However, its limitations and challenges have sparked heated debate about whether it is truly beneficial as a learning tool. The study looked into GTA's linguistic, cognitive, and practical challenges, as well as knowledge of its positive role when used in meaningful and strategic ways. The study sought to investigate the role of GTA on learners in an EFL environment, demonstrating how technology can be used to improve their language learning abilities while also emphasizing the importance of understanding how to mitigate the limitations and risks associated with GTA.

1.1.Linguistic Challenges

GTA continues to circulate primarily as a translation tool; however, it frequently lacks fidelity, particularly with complex, idiomatic, and cultural construals, which rarely map directly to one language. Idiomatic descriptions, such as "break a leg" to mean "good luck," may be translated literally, resulting in confusion and misreadings (Clifford et al., 2013). Errors occur because GTA is based on a neural machine translation (NMT) system, which, despite its advances, cannot always provide meaning for the nuances of construal types of figurative language and cultural context (Garcia & Pena, 2011; Koehn & Knowles, 2017). This lack of fidelity can lead to misguided learners and potentially faulty language use when there is an over-reliance on GTA for comprehension and production.

Another significant issue is GTA's inability to account for context when translating polysemous words, such as "bank" (a financial institution or the side of a river) or "light" (illumination or something not heavy). Without contextual understanding, GTA frequently produces technically correct but contextually inappropriate translations, resulting in awkward or meaningless language use (Castilho et al., 2018). For example, the sentence "She sat by the bank" could be mistranslated if GTA interprets "bank" as a financial institution rather than a riverside (Bowker, 2019). This lack of contextual awareness is a well-known limitation of machine translation systems, which are based on statistical patterns rather than deep semantic understanding.

Furthermore, GTA can introduce grammatical errors such as incorrect verb forms, improper use of articles, or word order issues, particularly in languages with complex grammatical structures such as Spanish or French (Alhaisoni & Alhaysony, 2017). Such errors can confuse learners, causing them to misinterpret the correct application of grammar and, over time, perpetuating incorrect language use (Lee, 2020; Liu & Tsai, 2013; Tsai, 2019). GTA can be useful, but when used incorrectly, it can undermine learners' language abilities and fluency.

1.2.Cognitive Challenges

A primary concern with the use of GTA (Google Translate App) is that learners become overly reliant on the app, which can impair critical thinking and problem-solving skills. When using a tool like GTA for instant translation, learners may avoid cognitive processing that is required for relevant language learning, such as analyzing sentence structures, inferring contextual meanings, and manipulating vocabulary (Clifford et al., 2013; Sweeney & Moore, 2012). These may facilitate surface learning, in which learners seek "quick fixes" to engage with the language rather than meaning (Liu and Tsai, 2013). To combat word-for-word translation from GTA, learners may simply copy and paste text into it with little memory of the process, rather than struggling to understand the grammatical rules or semantic aspects of the sentence (assuming they were even interested).

The ease of use provided by GTA may also reduce learners' motivation to use active learning strategies such as using dictionaries, composing sentences, or seeking feedback from teachers or peers. According to Jolley and Maimone (2015), students who rely on GTA frequently abandon traditional learning techniques such as vocabulary memorization or grammar exercises, which can help learners develop a solid linguistic foundation. Furthermore, over-reliance on GTA can impair learners' ability to operate independently because learners may be challenged to complete tasks without using machine translation (Lee, 2020).

Additionally, reliance on Google Translate applications (GTA) can create a **false sense of linguistic competence** and lead to inaccurate self-assessment. Early studies already cautioned that instant translations may cause learners to believe they are proficient readers or writers when, in reality, the output is often contextually inappropriate or linguistically flawed (Garcia & Pena, 2011; Niño, 2009). Recent research reinforces this concern, showing that **machine translation (MT) can foster inflated confidence levels** among learners who mistake automatically generated texts for authentic language production (Groves & Mundt, 2015; Lee, 2022).

This overconfidence may discourage **deep cognitive engagement**, as students rely on surface-level translation rather than developing problem-solving strategies or metalinguistic awareness (O'Neill, 2019; Jolley & Maimone, 2022). For example, Lee (2022) found that learners who depended heavily on MT made fewer independent revisions and demonstrated weaker long-term gains in grammatical accuracy. Similarly, Comelles (2025) noted that while MT-assisted texts can appear fluent on the surface, learners often fail to detect cohesion errors or pragmatic inappropriateness, which undermines communicative competence in authentic contexts.

The consequences are especially problematic in high-stakes environments where **accuracy, precision, and comprehensibility are critical**—such as academic writing, professional communication, or intercultural interaction. Without explicit training in **post-editing and critical evaluation of MT outputs**, learners risk developing a **misleading sense of mastery**, which may hinder their ability to function effectively in real-world communicative situations (Deng et al., 2022; Jiang et al., 2024).

The cognitive challenges associated with GTA are particularly relevant in educational settings, where the goal is to foster autonomous learning and critical engagement with the language. Studies have shown that learners who rely heavily on GTA often struggle with tasks that require creativity, spontaneity, or higher-order thinking, such as writing essays or engaging in conversations (Alhaisoni & Alhaysony, 2017). This suggests that while GTA can be a useful tool for quick reference, it should not replace the cognitive effort required for deep language learning.

In order to combat these challenges, instructors can help students use GTA thoughtfully instead of thoughtlessly, for instance, by having students compare their own attempts to the translations

produced by GTA, check the mistakes, and think critically about the mistakes made (Tsai, 2019). Additionally, instructors could plan and design activities and tasks that require students' 'meaning making' with the language (like peer reviews, discussing readings in groups, solving a problem) in order to develop their critical thinking and autonomous learning abilities (Lee, 2020). By teaching students to use GTA for error-checking or editing, and combining the technology with more traditional ways of learning, instructors can allow students to use the advantages of technology but limit the cognitive drawbacks.

1.3. Practical Challenges

GTA's pronunciation function is a useful tool; however, it uses one standardized accent and does not provide feedback for learners, so its usefulness is limited for learners wishing to acquire specific local accents (Jolley & Maimone, 2015; Lee, 2020). For example, learners wishing to acquire a British accent from GTA's American pronunciation indication, the tool could be unhelpful or misleading. Moreover, GTA does not give feedback on learners' pronunciation—learners do not know whether they are accurately reproducing, e.g., phonemes. The lack of interactive feedback restricts the potential of GTA as a pronunciation teacher.

A further practical limitation of GTA is the limited offline use it affords. Although the app provides an offline mode, it is limited in capabilities compared to the online version. For example, offline translations may be less accurate than online translations because they are not updated in real-time and do not utilize more advanced neural machine translation (NMT) features (Castilho et al., 2018). This limitation is a considerable barrier to learners in places with limited or unreliable access to the internet, particularly in rural areas or places with poor access to language learning resources (Alhaisoni & Alhaysony, 2017).

In addition, the convenience inherent in the use of GTA can distract learners from their original learning objectives. For example, learners can rely on GTA to complete assignments or inappropriately use the app to translate entire texts without understanding the content and miss activities that encourage reading comprehension or writing. If learners become too reliant on the app, they risk superficial learning where they can gain quick results, but are neglecting deeper language engagement. Over time, this can affect their long-term progress as they do not develop the critical thinking skills or problem-solving skills needed for independent use of the language (Niño, 2009).

Nevertheless, educators and students should take a purposeful approach to using GTA. For example, students might actively use the pronunciation feature as an additional tool while also

having native speakers or language teachers practice with them in order to provide feedback (Garcia & Cabot, 2012; Garcia & Pena, 2011). In addition to students using GTA as a reference, educators can design activities that require students to use GTA to compare their work with the translations GTA provided, as well as identify errors and reasons for the deficiencies of machine translation (Lee, 2020). Consequently, a proactive integration of GTA within a larger language learning (and teaching) framework might provide students with the tools to have the benefits of GTA while minimizing the cost.

2. THE ROLE OF GTA IN EFL LEARNING

Research on the use of Google translation apps (GTA) in EFL contexts also addresses the advantages and disadvantages. For example, Mahardika (2017) and Mohammed (2023) found that GTA has a positive influence on learning when managed appropriately, while Krisdayanti (2022) reported that GTA is beneficial for students. However, Klimova and Zamborova (2020) acknowledge that GTA requires some improvement and caution in revising. Cancino and Panes (2021) showed that GTA can improve writing more accurately. Thus, they noted students must double-check that their translations are the most accurate. Sujarwo (2020) stated that GTA, though it may improve comprehension, means students have to revise and make better translations usable for good results.

Chen (2023) found GTA helpful for students' motivation, showing that students used game-based translation apps positively. For example, Benda (2013) noted the speed of GTA and its ability to assist students in reading and composing texts, even though it has the potential of some errant translation. Urlaub and Dessein (2022) also acknowledged the positive role of GTA in foreign language classrooms, especially for novice and intermediate learners.

2.1. Research Gap and Objectives

Although research at this time is addressing GTA's current functionality and user-friendliness, there is limited research on its effectiveness for language retention over the long term, especially vocabulary retention and pronunciation improvements. This study is going to help fill this gap in the research community by investigating the influence of GTA on the language proficiency of EFL learners. The research is going to focus on vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation comprehension, and writing, with the hope of understanding and supporting whether or not GTA's use has facilitated or perhaps impeded language development and how reliance on this technology has affected the learners' ability to independently internalize all language skills.

The study was guided by the following hypotheses:

1. GTA use will positively correlate with immediate vocabulary retention but negatively impact long-term acquisition.
2. Frequent use of GTA's pronunciation feature will improve pronunciation accuracy.
3. Over-reliance on GTA will correlate with lower independent language proficiency.

By addressing these hypotheses, this research aims to clarify GTA's role in EFL learning and provide insights into its effective integration into language education.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1.Participants

The targeted research community comprises PYP students at Najran University who study 32 hours of intensive English language in two semesters, distributed among the four language skills and a grammar course. In addition, they study 2 mathematics courses and likewise computer courses in which English is the medium of instruction

The population consists of 93 male and 70 female students studying in the preparatory year at Najran University, KSA. The participants were selected randomly from the total number of students using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sampling table based on a formula published by the NEA Research Bulletin (1960). Accordingly, 73 males representing 55.3%, and 59 females representing 44.7% females aged 18-20 years old were randomly selected to represent the sample for this study.

3.2.Research Instruments

A questionnaire was used to collect the data for this study. The researchers designed the questionnaire based on the ample literature review. The survey examines EFL learners' use of Google Translate, collecting demographic details (age, gender) and responses on GTA usage frequency, feature satisfaction, and perceived improvements in English skills. Mean scores and standard deviations were used to understand students' perceptions and how they utilize the GTA for language learning, providing insights into the importance and variability of each purpose.

3.3. Procedures

The questionnaire was delivered randomly via WhatsApp to the targeted sample. The participants were asked to respond to the questionnaire. Only 64 out of 132 students responded to the data collection tool with valid responses of 51 %. For the participants' characteristics, 60.9% of the respondents were male (n=39), while 39.1%.% were female (n=25).

4. RESULTS

This study's survey examines EFL learners' use of Google Translate, collecting demographic details (age, gender) and responses on GTA usage frequency, feature satisfaction, and perceived improvements in English skills. Mean scores and standard deviations were used to understand students' perceptions and how they utilize the GTA for language learning, providing insights into the importance and variability of each purpose.

4.1. How often do students use GTP for learning?

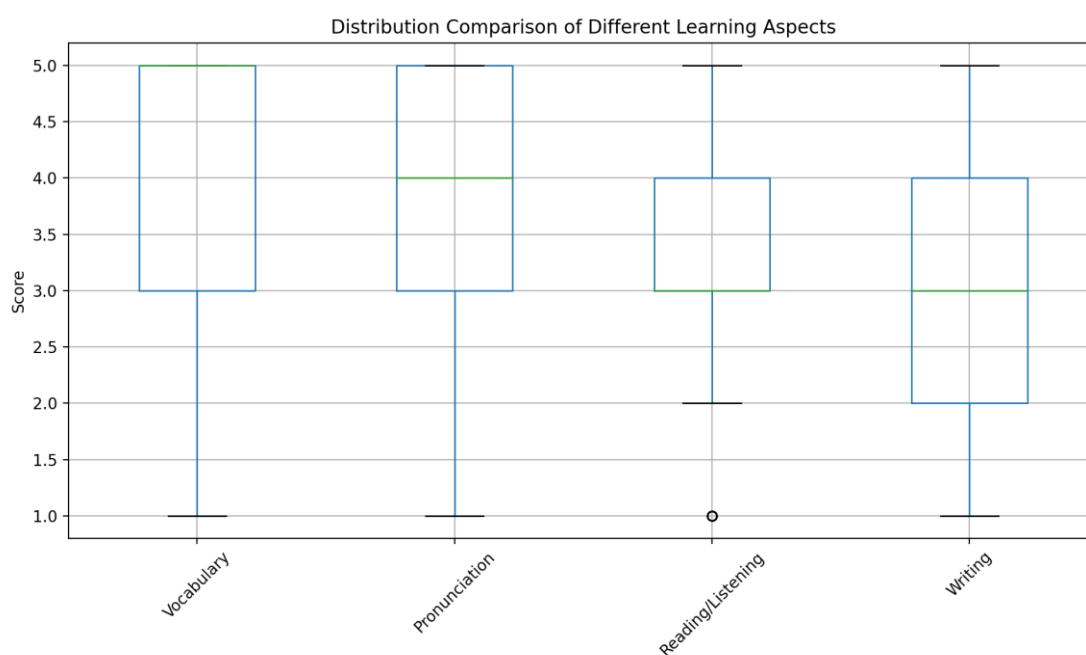
The results of the preliminary analysis of the first question, as shown in Table 1, show that most respondents (51.6%) use GTA occasionally, 12.5% almost always, and 29.7% frequently. Only 6.23% indicated low to very low use. The statistical mean of 3.64 and a mode of 3 indicate a generally high and consistent level of usage, which means that students regularly use this tool to learn English. This result suggests that a significant number of students use GTA either occasionally or frequently, which emphasizes its important role in their language learning journey. Furthermore, the moderate to high frequency of use underscores its value as an additional learning tool. This finding confirms the ideas of Smith and Jones (2008), who suggest that students use the Google Translate application (GTA) extensively and emphasize its practical and easy use in learning English.

	Frequency	Percent
Never use	1	1.6%
Almost never	3	4.7%
Occasionally/Sometimes	33	51.6%
Almost every time	8	12.5%
Frequently use	19	29.7%
Total	64	100%
Mean	3.64	
Mode	3	

4.2. Learners' Purpose of Using GTA

The results in Table 3 compare how often EFL learners use GTA for language learning aspects: vocabulary, pronunciation, comprehension (reading/listening), and writing. It reveals the distribution of points across the four aspects of learning on a scale of 1 (always) to 5 (never). Vocabulary and pronunciation have gained the highest median values (4.0), with the values for vocabulary between 3.5 and 4.5 and pronunciation between 3.0 and 4.5. For both aspects, there are no outliers and wide whisker ranges (1.0 to 5.0), indicating a consistent perception of their effectiveness by users. In contrast, reading/listening and writing gained lower median scores

(3.0), ranging from 2.5 to 3.5 for reading/listening and 2.0 to 4.0 for writing. Reading/listening shows greater variability, with an outlier at 1.0, suggesting inconsistent user experiences, while writing shows no outliers but similar variability. These results reveal that translation and pronunciation are the most valued features of GTA, while grammar and sentence construction have less value and appreciation by EFL learners.



4.3.GTA and Learning Improvement

Table 2 presents the relationship between the reasons for using the Google Translate App (GTA) and learning improvement across different language elements. Two statistics, Spearman's Rank Correlation coefficient (r) and Kendall's Tau (τ), are used to assess the association. The results indicate that GTA relates most strongly (i.e., the relatively strongest positive relationship) to "word meaning" learning improvement (Spearman's $r = .72$, Kendall's $\tau = .58$), suggesting that users believe GTA is particularly useful when learning new vocabulary expansively. Following that, the next relative impact is for "pronunciation" learning improvement (Spearman's $r = .68$, $\tau = .53$), indicating that GTA is also helpful when developing pronunciation skills. A lesser correlation is reflected in "reading/or listening comprehension" learning improvement (Spearman's $r = .45$, Kendall's $\tau = .35$), indicating the GTA is still believed to be useful in improvement but to a lesser degree. Furthermore, the least amount of relative association is reflected in "writing" (Spearman's $r = .28$, Kendall's $\tau = .21$), indicating that GTA is the least helpful when compared to all other reasons for language-related purposes.

Table 2. Spearman's ρ and Kendall's Tau (τ) Correlation Between Overall Frequency of GTA Use and Students' Improvement in Different Language Aspects.

Purpose of Using GTA	Spearman's ρ	Kendall's τ
Word Meaning	0.72	0.58
(Pronunciation)	0.68	0.53
(reading / listening Comprehension)	0.45	0.35
(Writing)	0.28	0.21

5. DISCUSSION

This study examines the role of Google Translate (GTA) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning and summarizes findings about how often EFL students use GTA in learning foreign languages, perceived purposes, and correlates the purposes of using the App with the improvement of learners' language. The results show that GTA is frequently used among EFL learners. More than 80% of respondents reported using GTA occasionally (mean = 3.64), which is consistent with Smith and Jones (2008), who emphasize the practicality and accessibility of the App. This high usage rate emphasizes the integration of GTA into students' language learning strategies and suggests that it serves as a supplemental resource rather than a substitute for formal instruction. Alhaisoni and Alhaysony (2017) also observed a positive attitude toward GTA among Saudi students, highlighting its perceived value in multilingual contexts. However, Benda (2013) warns that over-reliance on machine translation can hinder in-depth engagement with linguistic structures. This is a concern that warrants further research into balanced use.

Regarding learners' goals, the study shows considerable differences in the purpose GTA used to improve linguistic aspects and language skills. Vocabulary (semantics) and pronunciation (phonology) were the most valued GTA features, with a median score of 4.0 and consistent user feedback, reflecting the usefulness of GTA in expanding learners' vocabulary repertoire and supporting phonetic accuracy. This aligns with Nation's (2001) emphasis on vocabulary acquisition as a cornerstone of language proficiency and Chen's (2023) findings on the Google Translate app to increase EFL learners' motivation. In contrast, the writing (syntactic structure)

and comprehending reading/listening areas had lower median scores (3.0) and greater variability, particularly in comprehending reading/listening (outliers at 1.0). This suggests that while GTA supports task comprehension, its effectiveness in developing productive skills such as writing is limited. Lee (2020) and Cancino and Panes (2021) support this, pointing to the challenges of using machine translation for complex grammar and syntax, which may explain learners' inconsistent experiences in improving writing.

Further, the correlation analysis demonstrates the impact of GTA on learning outcomes. The strongest positive correlation with vocabulary improvement (Spearman's $\rho = 0.72$) confirms the role of GTA in lexical development; the result is also confirmed by Garcia and Cabot (2012), who argue that machine translation can promote vocabulary knowledge in beginner learners. Pronunciation also showed a robust correlation ($\rho = 0.68$), which is likely due to the audio features of GTA, which align with Bowker's (2019) call for improved machine translation capabilities. However, the weakest correlation ($\rho = 0.28$) was shown for writing improvement, which is consistent with Tsai's (2019) observation that GTA has problems with contextual coherence in drafting sentences. Klimova and Zamborova (2020) similarly point out the limitations of using apps for differentiated reading comprehension, which may explain the moderate correlation ($\rho = 0.45$). These results suggest that the effectiveness of GTA varies across different skills, with vocabulary and pronunciation benefiting the most from the features.

To summarize, this study highlights the dual role of GTA as a vocabulary and pronunciation enhancer and as a less effective tool for writing and reading/listening. Educators could use GTA strategically for vocabulary teaching or pronunciation practice, but they should be wary of overusing it for writing tasks. Future research should explore pedagogical frameworks that combine GTA with teacher guidance, taking into account the concerns expressed by Niño (2009) about potential drawbacks. By balancing the strengths of GTA with the needs of learners, educators can utilize the potential of GTA to improve EFL instruction without compromising critical language skills.

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