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EDITOR'S NOTE

Welcome to *HUELE Journal of Applied Linguistics, Literature, and Culture*, published by the English Education Study Program at Pattimura University. This **Volume 5, Issue 2, 2025**, presents five engaging articles that offer fresh insights into language, communication, and English education. The first article, *Politeness in Digital Interaction: A Pragmatic Analysis in Genshin Impact Discord Chats*, explores how politeness is expressed and negotiated in online gaming spaces, shedding light on the pragmatics of digital communication. The second article, *Illocutionary Speech Acts in Song Lyrics Golden by HUNTRX*, examines how language conveys intention and emotion in song lyrics, showing the intersection between linguistic form and artistic meaning. Moving to the field of language education, *Content and Language Integrated Learning as a Strategy for Enhancing Speaking Skills: A Narrative Literature Review* discusses how CLIL can strengthen students' speaking ability through integrated content learning. The following article, *Translanguaging and Formative Assessment Practices in Multilingual EFL Classrooms*, highlights how multilingual classroom practices can enrich formative assessment and support more inclusive learning. The final article, *The Effectiveness and Implementation of Gamification in Higher Education English Learning*, looks at how game-based approaches can enhance motivation and engagement in university-level English courses. Together, these studies reflect the journal's continuing commitment to exploring how language functions in diverse and evolving contexts—digital, creative, and educational—while encouraging innovative perspectives in applied linguistics and English language teaching.

Politeness in Digital Interaction: A Pragmatic Analysis in Genshin Impact Discord Chats

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ABSTRACT

Politeness is key in maintaining smooth communication, especially in digital discourse spaces where tone and intent can be easily misunderstood. This research aimed to identify politeness strategies in Genshin Impact participants' messages on the Discord server and identify factors influencing their use by adopting Brown & Levinson's (1987) theory. This research analyzed discourse transcripts from various Genshin Impact Discord server participants using a descriptive qualitative method. The findings revealed 113 utterances that occurred in the politeness strategies: 15 of bald on-record, 65 of positive politeness, 21 of negative politeness, and 12 of off-record politeness. Positive politeness strategies were primarily used in the Discord to maintain the close relationship between participants. Two main factors that influence politeness in Discord were payoffs (priori consideration) and circumstances of sociological variables. These findings highlight the importance of understanding politeness strategies in shaping respectful and effective communication in online gaming communities.

Keywords: *chat room, discord server, Genshin Impact, politeness strategies.*

INTRODUCTION

Online communication has become increasingly common, with people sharing hobbies and interests in group chats. However, the linguistic and communicative ways of uttering words can vary significantly among individuals from different backgrounds, depending on their politeness. Politeness comprises linguistic behavior through which people indicate that they take others' feelings into account when determining how they should be treated. Politeness strategies encompass individuals' linguistic and communicative choices to maintain social relationships and manage potential conflicts during interactions (Kádár, 2017). The options will be different for each culture.

Cultural differences can lead to varying perceptions of politeness, as seen in Indonesia, where kissing an older person's hand is a tradition to show respect. However, in other countries, it may be flirting or showing affection. Unwritten rules in various settings, including home, school, and work, shape language and politeness (Fridolini et al., 2021). Analyzing politeness strategies is crucial for understanding individual social interactions and cultural dynamics. This enhances

interpersonal skills and fosters effective and respectful communication in diverse environments, enhancing cultural understanding.

Discourses on online platforms like Discord allow participants to explore politeness strategies and interact with individuals from different countries and backgrounds. Participants' utterances can vary based on their personalities and cultural backgrounds. For example, Western participants avoid discussing skin color as a sensitive topic, while Indonesian participants use it as an affectionate in-group label or joke to lighten situations. Online discourse can be as intimate as talking with family or real-life friends. Discord's "channel" allows users to interact on specific topics without worrying about politeness. This makes online discourses familiar and enables people to understand others better. Learning about courtesy and observing how others communicate can be achieved through engaging in digital discourse and observing interactions. Overall, online conversations provide a platform for understanding and enhancing politeness in various contexts.

Some studies on politeness strategies have shown their significance in facilitating successful interactions between speakers. Many existing studies, particularly those focusing on movies, talk shows, and online interaction, emphasize the dominance of positive politeness strategies and the sociological factors influencing their use (Ammaida, 2020; Handayani et al., 2022; Hutahaean et al., 2021; Mojo et al., 2021; Silitonga, 2022). However, studies exploring politeness strategies in mobile games remain limited. For instance, Budiarta et al. (2024) investigated how the Traveler conveys politeness and impoliteness in interactions with Paimon in the mobile game Genshin Impact. This study uniquely investigates politeness strategies in the Genshin Impact Discord server, providing insights into digital gaming communities - a context underexplored in previous studies. Building on these insights, this study uniquely investigates politeness strategies in the Genshin Impact Discord server, providing an in-depth look into digital gaming communities—a rapidly growing and culturally diverse interactional space. Using Brown & Levinson's face theory, the research sheds light on how politeness functions in real-time, game-related online interactions. Therefore, this study aims to answer two questions: (1) What politeness strategies are used in the Genshin Impact Discord server? and (2) What factors influence the use of these strategies?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Politeness Strategies

Politeness strategies are developed to minimize threats in communication, aiming to save the hearer's face. Rather than being a fixed set of behaviors or linguistic structures, politeness is a dynamic process inherent in social interactions (Watts, 2003). Furthermore, Mills (2003) elaborates

that politeness expresses the speaker's intention to reduce impoliteness towards others. Brown & Levinson (1987) have significantly influenced the field by providing a universal model that captures the nuances of politeness across diverse languages and cultures. Based on face, this model is valid for capturing the logic of politeness in any language and culture. In conclusion, understanding politeness strategies as a dynamic and context-dependent process enriches our comprehension of social interactions and highlights the importance of cultural nuances in communication.

More recent scholarship has expanded the understanding of politeness in digital contexts. Locher & Graham (2010) argue that politeness online is shaped by the affordances of digital platforms, including anonymity, asynchronicity, and multimodality. Herring (2004) highlights the distinctive characteristics of computer-mediated communication (CMC), showing that digital discourse often blends formal and informal features, creating unique politeness challenges. These perspectives enrich the classical framework of Brown & Levinson by incorporating technological and social changes in communication.

Regarding this research, the politeness strategies proposed by Brown & Levinson (1987) were used to identify the strategies used by the participants in the Genshin Impact Discord server. They present the following four strategies to face FTA: Bald on Record strategy, Positive Politeness strategy, Negative Politeness strategy, and Off-Record strategy.

Bald on-Record

This strategy is the most direct, clear, unambiguous, and concise way to say things without minimizing the imposition on the hearer. It is mainly applied by speakers who closely know the hearer. Bald on-record can occur in four circumstances: direct imperative, metaphorical urgency, sympathetic advice, and granting permission for something requested. Direct imperative is a common usage of bald on-record, as demonstrated in the sentence "Don't burn your hand!" This direct warning effectively avoids misunderstandings and poses a risk of threatening the hearer's face. Bald on-record strategy is best for preventing misunderstandings, but has the most significant risk of threatening the hearer's face.

Positive Politeness

Positive politeness is a metaphorical extension of intimacy, used to indicate common ground or sharing of wants between strangers who perceive themselves as similar. It is a social accelerator, where speakers show equality and a desire to "come closer" to the hearer. (Brown & Levinson, 1987) list fifteen strategies of politeness addressed to the hearer's positive face: notice, attend to hearer (his interests, wants, needs, goods); exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy with hearer);

intensify interest to hearer; use in-group identity markers; seek agreement; avoid disagreement; presuppose/raise/assert common ground; joke; be optimistic; assert or presuppose S' knowledge of and concern for H's wants; offer and promise, include both speaker and hearer in the activity; give (or ask for) reasons; assume or assert reciprocity; provide gifts to hearer (goods, sympathy, understanding, cooperation). These strategies emphasize the importance of addressing the hearer's positive face and highlight the complexities of human communication in diverse contexts. Understanding these techniques enriches conversations and fosters a supportive environment.

Negative Politeness

Negative politeness is a strategy that assumes social distance or awkwardness between the speaker and hearer, emphasizing the speaker's and the hearer's independence (Brown & Levinson, 1987). It is divided into ten strategies: be conventionally indirect, question and hedge, be pessimistic, minimize the imposition, give deference, apologize, impersonalize the speaker and hearer, state the FTA as a general rule, nominalize, and go on record as incurring a debt or not indebted to the hearer. Conventional indirect politeness uses phrases and sentences with contextually unambiguous meanings, while questions and hedges soften commands and make the membership of a noun phrase more complete. Pessimistic politeness expresses doubt about the appropriateness of the speaker's speech act, while minimized imposition minimizes inconvenience or burden to another person. Deference phenomena represent instructions of social factors into language structure, such as honorifics and relative status between participants. Apologizing for an FTA indicates reluctance to impinge on the hearer's negative face and redresses that impingement. In summary, negative politeness is a strategy that assumes social distance and awkwardness between the speaker and hearer, emphasizing their independence and the speaker's role in the interaction.

Off-Record

The off-record strategy is a method of politeness that involves using indirect language to leave the meaning of an utterance up to the hearer. (Brown & Levinson, 1987) differentiate fifteen sub-strategies of off-record politeness. These include giving hints, association clues, presupposition, understatement, overstatement, tautologies, contradictions, ironic criticism, metaphors, rhetorical questions, ambiguity, vagueness, over-generalization, displacement of hearer, and incompleteness. Giving hints allows the hearer to infer the intended meaning without directly stating it, saving face for both parties. Association clues provide related implications triggered by the violation of given relevance. Similar to irony, Presuppose uses language opposite to the intended meaning, but is typically used aggressively. Understatement minimizes the speaker's

intended meaning, while overstatement amplifies the speaker's message. Metaphors and rhetorical questions allow hearers to interpret the speaker's intended message. Overall, off-record strategies highlight the complexities of communication, enhancing understanding, and maintaining respect among participants.

Factors Influencing the Choice of Politeness Strategies

Sociological factors play a significant role in the use of politeness strategies. Brown & Levinson (1987) identified two factors influencing speakers to use politeness strategies: payoff and relevant circumstances. The first factor, *payoff*, refers to the benefits a speaker can receive from each strategy. For instance, by going on record, a speaker can build trust with the hearer by making them believe they are honest and trustworthy. They can avoid misunderstandings and minimize face-threatening acts without effort.

On the other hand, by going off record, a speaker can lead the hearer to interpret their utterance, avoid responsibility for potentially damaging interpretations, and show a caring person. A positive politeness strategy minimizes face-threatening acts by indicating belonging to the same group and avoiding requests and offers. Conversely, a negative politeness strategy may satisfy the hearer's negative face, avoiding future debt, paying regard, and maintaining social distance. In summary, sociological factors play a crucial role in using politeness strategies.

The second factor is *relevant circumstances*, as the factors influencing the choice of a politeness strategy are divided into: social distance, relative power, and rank of imposition. (1) *Social distance* refers to the perceived social relationship or level of familiarity between individuals. The closer the social bond, the less politeness is required, while greater politeness is necessary in interactions with higher social standing or unfamiliar acquaintances. (Brown & Levinson, 1987) present two examples to illustrate how social distance affects the choice of politeness strategies. The first example, "Got the time, mate?", suggests that the individuals involved have a close relationship, and the speaker employs positive politeness. The second example, "Excuse me, would you by any chance have the time?", is suitable for situations where the individuals involved are unfamiliar and from different backgrounds. The speaker uses negative politeness, even more polite than the first example. (2) *Relative power* is the social rank or authority that the speaker and hearer hold in a specific context. Social status, age, occupation, or institutional roles can influence this power. Individuals with higher power may use more direct and assertive language, as their authority makes them less concerned about face-threatening acts. Conversely, individuals with lower power often employ more deferential language and additional politeness strategies to maintain face and show respect. For instance, supervisor (high power): "I need you to finish this report by the end of the

day. It is crucial for our team's success.” Employee (lower power): “Yes, I understand. I will make it my top priority.” The supervisor's superior position allows for straightforward communication without excessive politeness. At the same time, the employee acknowledges the power dynamic by using politeness markers like "yes" and emphasizing their commitment to completing the task promptly.

Next, (3) *Rank of imposition* refers to the level of inconvenience or burden associated with a specific request or action. There are two levels of ranking: those requiring services or time, and those requiring goods or non-material items. Both types can result in face-threatening acts (FTAs). High levels of imposition are present when seeking a significant favor, while low levels are evident in smaller requests. Two examples illustrate different levels of imposition: (a) “Look, I’m sorry to bother you, but would there be any chance of your lending me just enough money to get a railway to get home? I must have dropped my purse and I just don’t know what to do”. (b) “Hey, can you lend me some money? I forgot my wallet at home”. The first example involves apologizing for the inconvenience; the other is a straightforward request without minimizing potential threats. These examples demonstrate the different levels of imposition in communication. From those explanations, this research analyzed the factors influencing politeness strategies during the interaction of Genshin Impact participants in the Discord server, focused on payoff (a priori consideration) and the circumstances of sociological variables.

METHOD

Research Design

This research used a descriptive qualitative method that focused on identifying the types of politeness strategies used by Genshin Impact participants in the Discord server and the factors influencing their choice of strategy. The descriptive method was chosen since it is an approach that analyzes data directly, uses limited frameworks and interpretations, categorizes material into themes, and is appropriate to examine the everyday language of participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). This research material was the participants' discourse on the Discord server and was categorized into themes such as politeness strategies and influencing factors.

Research Site and Participants

The data for this research was purposefully selected from the interactions of various participants on the Genshin Impact Discord Server channel, specifically the *Jeaneral-chat* channel. When the server was most active, data were collected from the Discord server between February 17 and March 18, 2024 (Friday–Monday, 11 p.m.–1 a.m.). Approximately 500 utterances were initially observed; 113 relevant utterances demonstrating politeness strategies were selected for

analysis based on clarity and contextual completeness. Participants included active members of the Discord, whose usernames were anonymized. Moderators were informed of the research, and ethical guidelines for observing public online spaces were followed. The Discord application can be downloaded for free on the Google Play Store or App Store.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected by joining and recording the discourse on Discord during the specified period. Relevant utterances containing politeness strategies were identified and tabulated. The categorization process involved reading each utterance and assigning it to one of Brown & Levinson's (1987) four main strategies: Bald on Record, Positive Politeness, Negative Politeness, or Off-Record. For instance, identifying Bald on Record when direct and unambiguous utterances such as *"You better go to sleep now!"* were coded as Bald on Record because they were imposed without mitigation. After initial coding, the utterances were displayed in tables summarizing their frequency and examples for each strategy. The categorization was checked twice by the researchers to ensure reliability and to resolve ambiguities collaboratively. Analysis followed three concurrent flows of activity (Miles et al., 2014): data condensation (selecting relevant discourse), data display (organizing data in tables), and conclusion drawing (analyzing and interpreting the data).

FINDINGS

The Politeness Strategies Found in Genshin Impact's Discord Server

The findings showed four types of politeness strategies used by the Genshin Impact participants in the Discord server: bald on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record. Each utterance was identified and classified according to the types of politeness strategies, considering the factors influencing the use of the strategies. The frequency of each strategy is summarized in the table below, followed by a detailed discussion of representative examples for each category.

Table 1. Frequency of Politeness Strategy Used in the Genshin Impact Discord Server

Types of Politeness Strategy	Frequency
Bald on-Record	15
Positive Politeness	65
Negative Politeness	21
Off-Record	12
Total	113

Table 1 shows that positive politeness was the most frequent (58%), followed by negative politeness (19%), bald on-record (13%), and off-record (11%). Data showed that positive politeness was the most used strategy, suggesting participants often tried to build rapport, show friendliness, and foster group solidarity. Negative politeness was the second most common strategy used to show respect and reduce pressure in conversations, especially when making requests or dealing with people of higher status, like moderators or experienced members. Then, the next step was followed by bald on-record strategies showing that direct and unambiguous speech acts were less common but still present, often used in urgent or emotionally driven contexts. Off-record strategies were the least common, indicating that indirect or vague expressions were less preferred, but still used for humor, sarcasm, or subtle criticism. Further analysis is depicted in the following explanation.

Bald on-Record

The research identified 15 findings of the bald on record strategy, including 4 ways, direct imperatives, metaphorical urgency, granting permission, and sympathetic advice. The bald-on-record strategies used in the Genshin Impact Discord Server were identified in the following table.

Table 2. Bald on-Record Strategies Used in the Genshin Impact Discord Server

No	Politeness Strategy	Utterance	Explanation
1	Bald on-Record (Direct Imperative)	You better go to sleep or else	Direct imperative expressing concern and urgency.
2	Bald on-Record (Metaphorical Urgency)	Guys, help, why do these masked goblins keep attacking me?	Expressing desperation and urgency to prompt a response.
3	Bald on-Record (Granting permission)	Sure, you can have them all	The speaker grants permission directly, fulfilling the hearer's request.
4	Bald on-Record (Sympathetic Advice)	Get some chicken soup and get well, please	Advice intended to help the hearer recover, showing concern.

Datum 1 in the table showed a direct imperative expressing concern and urgency from the speaker after the hearer stated, "*I don't need sleep, it's fine*". The speaker warned, "*You better go to sleep, or else,*" implying a threat that not sleeping could lead to something bad happening. Following this,

datum 2 illustrates the speaker's intense desperation and urgency, aiming to inspire a response. The speaker was asking for help from other participants. The speaker implies the message was important and it needed a response. In datum 3, the speaker explicitly grants permission, satisfying the hearer's request upon hearing the phrase, "*Can I join your world?*" *I run out of hill churls to farm.*" As a result of that response, the speaker's message was classified as a bald-on-record strategy. Sympathetic advice is present in datum 4, highlighting concern for the hearer's recovery. The speaker showed concern when they learned about the hearer's unwell condition after stating, "*I'm just bella sick right now.*" The speaker offered some advice and wished the hearer well. Therefore, this data demonstrated how bald-on-record strategies employed in the Discord server to convey urgency, grant permission, offer advice, and directly address the hearer's needs without ambiguity.

Positive Politeness

This research found fourteen positive politeness strategies, except the giving gifts to the hearer strategy (goods, sympathy, understanding, cooperation), with 65 utterances. Positive politeness aims to enhance the hearer's positive self-perception and to improve friendship relations between interlocutors. A participant mostly used this strategy in the Discord servers' interaction to get positive responses from other participants, such as giving approval, exaggerating, and even using in-group identity markers to bond a relationship. The data for each strategy were summarized in the table below.

Table 3. Positive Politeness Strategies Used in the Genshin Impact Discord Server

No	Politeness Strategy	Utterance	Explanation
5	Notice/Attend to Hearer	Keep practicing in your free time... I'm sure you'll ace it next time	Shows encouragement and attention to the hearer's issue.
6	Notice/Attend to Hearer	I'm noticing you have changed your PFP...	Remarks on the hearer's appearance to show attentiveness.
7	Exaggerate (Approval)	Oh, that's cool!	Enthusiastic approval with exaggeration using exclamation.
8	Exaggerate (Approval)	Your cuteness hits me like an arrow in my lower ribs	Dramatic hyperbole is used to express exaggerated affection.

No	Politeness Strategy	Utterance	Explanation
9	Intensify Interest to Hearer	Did you know Raiden's sword comes from her heart?	The speaker shares trivia to pique the hearer's interest.
10	Use In-Group Identity Marker	What do you expect, silly?	A term of endearment used to strengthen group identity.
11	Seek Agreement	Iron what?	Repetition suggests seeking alignment in a playful tone.
12	Avoid Disagreement	Not really, but if you like her, then play her	Soft disagreement using a hedge and allowance.
13	Presuppose/Raise Common Ground	Did you know Raiden's sword comes from her heart?	Shared game trivia is assumed to connect with the hearer.
14	Joke	Enough to understand what love and heartbreak man /j	Self-deprecating humor tagged with '/j' to imply jest.
15	Assert S' Knowledge of H's Wants	I know you didn't want it, but at least you got the best standard lightcone.	The speaker recognizes the hearer's disappointment and reassures.
16	Offer and Promise	I will try to remember to do it later	Promises cooperation in future action.
17	Be Optimistic	You'll help me, right?	Optimistically assumes the hearer will participate.
18	Include S and H in Activity	Let's just have a normal conversation actually	Inclusive language to invite mutual participation.
19	Give Reason	Why don't you go out and take a deep breath?	The suggestion was softened with a reason to show concern.
20	Assert Reciprocity	I can let you farm if you'll help me find two Tsurumi time challenges	Mutual cooperation is expressed with conditional exchange.

Table 3 shows the *Notice/Attend to Hearer* strategy (Datums 5–6), which shows how speakers paid close attention to the hearer’s feelings and circumstances. In Datum 5, the speaker acknowledged the hearer’s frustration about failing a motorcycle test and offered encouragement: “*Keep practicing in your free time... I’m sure you’ll ace it next time.*” Similarly, in Datum 6, the speaker noticed and commented on the hearer’s unusual profile picture, showing attentiveness to their habits and preferences. The *Exaggerate* strategy (Datums 7–8) was used to express enthusiastic approval or affection through hyperbolic language. For example, in Datum 7, the hearer responded to a comment about language channels with “*Oh, that’s cool!*”, using an exclamation mark to convey enthusiasm. Datum 8 goes further, where the speaker dramatically expressed admiration by saying, “*Your cuteness hits me like an arrow in my lower ribs,*” which uses hyperbole to create a playful and warm interaction.

Then, some strategies aimed to engage the hearer by sparking interest or affirming group identity. In Datum 9, the speaker shared a surprising game-related fact to *Intensify Interest to Hearer*, which successfully piqued the hearer’s curiosity. Likewise, Datum 10 uses an *In-Group Identity Marker*, where the speaker affectionately calls the hearer “*silly*” to convey camaraderie. Agreement and harmony were maintained through strategies like *Seek Agreement* (Datum 11) and *Avoid Disagreement* (Datum 12). In Datum 11, the speaker echoed the hearer’s words playfully: “*Iron what?*” This repetition fosters alignment in the conversation.

Meanwhile, in Datum 12, the speaker softened disagreement by hedging and allowing the hearer to keep their preference: “*Not really, but if you like her, then play her if you want.*” Other strategies relied on shared knowledge and humor. In Datum 13, the speaker assumed a *Common Ground* by sharing trivia about the game, prompting interest and connection. Similarly, in Datum 14, humor was used to diffuse tension: “*Enough to understand what love and heartbreak man /j*”, where */j* signals a joke.

Furthermore, several strategies reflect care for the hearer’s desires and promote cooperation. For instance, in Datum 15, the speaker reassured the hearer after an undesirable outcome: “*I know you didn’t want it, but at least you got the best standard lightcone.*” The *Offer and Promise* strategy appears in Datum 16, where the speaker committed to helping later. Optimism about the hearer’s cooperation was evident in Datum 17: “*You’ll help me, right?*” and inclusivity was promoted in Datum 18: “*Let’s just have a normal conversation actually.*” Lastly, the speaker encouraged cooperation in Datums 19 and 20 by giving reasons and suggesting reciprocity. In Datum 19, the speaker proposed taking a break: “*Why don’t you go out and take a deep breath?*” In Datum 20, the speaker explicitly suggested a mutually beneficial exchange: “*I can let you farm if you’ll help me find two Tsurumi time challenges first.*”. Thus, positive politeness strategies were used in the Genshin Impact Discord Server to foster

camaraderie, maintain harmony, and encourage engagement. Whether through noticing the hearer's needs, exaggerating approval, making optimistic assumptions, or offering reciprocal help, these strategies reflect the participants' efforts to build and sustain positive interpersonal relationships in their online interactions.

Negative Politeness

The negative politeness strategy aims to demonstrate respect and establish a sense of distance between speakers and Hearers. The participants' messages on the Genshin Impact Discord server utilized negative politeness strategies, as observed in their interactions. Five out of ten strategies were found, except the imposition, state the FTA as a general rule, nominalize, go on record as incurring a debt or not incurring the hearer, and the impersonalize speaker and hearer strategy, with 21 utterances. In this case, a participant used negative politeness to soften requests or commands by making them less imposing, to acknowledge the imposition by saying sorry, and even to maintain respect in the conversation using an honorific. The data can be seen in the following table.

Table 4. Negative Politeness Strategies Used in the Genshin Impact Discord Server

No	Politeness Strategy	Utterance	Explanation
21	Conventionally Indirect	Could you help me make some teams then?	Request softened using a modal verb to minimize imposition.
22	Question and Hedge	It seems that there's some issue with your network	Use of a hedging phrase to reduce assertiveness.
23	Be Pessimistic	If it's not death-related, I'm afraid I can't help you	Politeness is expressed through conditionals and apologies.
24	Give Deference	That's very kind of you, milady...	Respectful honorific acknowledges social differences.
25	Apologize	I apologize, greetings to you and the rest who I oversaw	An apology was issued to mend oversight.
26	Apologize	Oh, I didn't mean to drag down the vibe here... sorry	Apologetic tone to show remorse for unintended disruption.

In datum 21, the speaker softened a request with a conventionally indirect phrase, using the modal “*could you*” to reduce pressure and avoid imposing. Datum 22 demonstrates using a hedge, “*it seems that,*” to make the assertion less forceful and more tentative, leaving room for alternative interpretations. In datum 23, the speaker expressed pessimism and regret by using a conditional and an apologetic phrase, minimizing the imposition by acknowledging their limitations. Datum 24 highlights deference, where the speaker addressed the hearer respectfully as “*milady,*” acknowledging a social hierarchy and showing esteem. In datum 25, an explicit apology was given to repair an oversight and recognize the hearer’s feelings. In contrast, datum 26 shows another apology, where the speaker expressed remorse for negatively affecting the group’s mood. These data collectively illustrate how negative politeness strategies helped maintain respect, minimize threats, and foster harmonious interaction in the online discourse at Genshin Impact.

Off-Record

This strategy involves indirect uses of language. Alternatively, to construct an off-record utterance, one says something that is either more general (contains less information) or different from what one means (intends to be understood). In either case, the hearer must make some inference to recover what was intended. Six out of fifteen off-record strategies were found in this, with 12 utterances: understate, overstate, tautologies, be incomplete and use ellipsis, contradictions, and rhetorical questions. The detailed explanation can be seen below.

Table 5. Off-Record Strategies Used in the Genshin Impact Discord Server

No	Politeness Strategy	Utterance	Explanation
27	Understate	Itto’s passive is quite interesting	Understatement reduces the force of expression.
28	Overstate	Geo is a sh*t element... I hate geo	Overstatement expresses exaggerated dislike humorously.
29	Tautology	Game is game	Redundant truth used to imply acceptance or complaint.
30	Tautology	Why is gaming named gaming even he’s not gaming?	Playful complaint using tautological phrasing.
31	Ellipsis	Not sure about that... nice PFP tho	An elliptical statement leaves the thought unfinished.

No	Politeness Strategy	Utterance	Explanation
32	Contradiction	Kinda yes and kinda no	A contradictory statement encourages interpretation.
33	Rhetorical Question	How could I know? I quit	A rhetorical question used to express detachment.

The off-record strategies in the Genshin Impact Discord server reflect the speakers' preference for indirectness and creativity in expressing opinions. The understatement in Datum 27 ("*Itto's passive is quite interesting*") minimizes enthusiasm, hinting at mild disapproval. Conversely, the overstatement in Datum 28 ("*Geo is a sh*t element...*") exaggerates criticism humorously to engage others. Tautologies appear in Data 29 and 30 ("*game is game,*" "*Why is gaming named gaming...*") as redundant truths to express resignation or playful complaint. Ellipsis in Datum 31 ("*Not sure about that... nice PFP tho*") leaves the thought incomplete, inviting the hearer to interpret the speaker's true sentiment. Contradiction in Datum 32 ("*Kinda yes and kinda no*") conveys ambiguity and prompts the listener to infer meaning. Finally, the rhetorical question in Datum 33 ("*How could I know? I quit*") expresses detachment without expecting an answer. These strategies show how participants employ subtle, indirect communication to maintain politeness and engage creatively in conversation.

The Factor Influencing the Use of the Strategy

In Genshin Impact's Discord channel, participants' politeness strategies are influenced by two main factors: the payoffs (a priori consideration) and the circumstances (sociological variables). The participants determined the politeness strategy for dealing with FTAs by considering certain payoffs or advantages and the relevant circumstances that would provide more benefits for them. Choosing the appropriate strategy helps the participants build mutual relationships, maintain social distance, and avoid or minimize the debt implication of FTAs, such as requests or offers.

The Payoff: A Priori Consideration

The payoff factor is commonly used in the discourse to appeal to the listener's negative face by minimizing imposition or respecting others' autonomy. Some utterances were chosen to give an example of the payoff factor in the following table.

Table 6. The Payoff factor influencing the politeness strategies used in the Genshin

Impact Discord Server			
No	Strategy	Utterance	Explanation
34	Positive Politeness (Avoid Disagreement)	Collie seems like better fit in my opinion, but it could work	A hedge is used to reduce confrontation over differing opinions.
35	Positive Politeness (Offer/Promise)	Sleep well then. Gn mods. I promise not to cause any ruckus while you are gone.	Demonstrates reassurance and respect through a joking offer.
36	Off-Record (Ellipsis)	I love Yelan...look what people see her as...	Indirect opinion through ellipsis to allow interpretation.

In datum 34, the hearer used positive politeness with the *avoid disagreement* strategy to soften a different opinion. The hedge “seems” and the phrase “but it could work” reduced potential conflict while still expressing their perspective, maintaining solidarity. Datum 35 illustrates positive politeness through an *offer/promise*. The hearer playfully reassured the speaker by promising not to cause trouble while they were away, fostering a warm and cooperative atmosphere. Lastly, datum 36 shows an *off-record* strategy using ellipsis. The speaker expressed their opinion about Yelan vaguely (“*I love Yelan... look what people see her as...*”), leaving room for the hearer to interpret and respond indirectly, which they did by shifting to other characters and avoiding direct disagreement.

In summary, the payoff factor significantly influences the choice of politeness strategies in the Genshin Impact Discord Server, as it allows speakers to minimize conflict, express solidarity, and maintain harmony in conversations. Participants strategically use hedges, offers, promises, and indirect language to appeal to the hearer’s face needs while avoiding confrontation. This finding highlights how speakers weigh the benefits of maintaining good relationships and ensuring mutual understanding when choosing how to phrase their utterances.

The Circumstances: Sociological Variables

As the second factor, sociological variables include the rank of imposition, social distance, and power. In this research, Genshin Impact’s Discord server participants mostly contain regular members and some new members. The pace of the interaction is rapidly changing with every passing second. The language employed is semiformal, suited for peer interaction and casual exchanges. Some participants discussed unrelated topics about the game, such as food, origin, daily

life, etc. The participant's personal information remains confidential, which makes other participants ask about the age in the discourse or adopt a more casual tone. The three classifications of sociological variables can be seen below.

Table 7. The Sociological variables factor influencing the politeness strategies used in the Genshin Impact Discord Server

No	Strategy	Utterance	Explanation
37	Social Distance	"Man I'm sorry man. I said it wrong"	Informal addresses ("man") show familiarity and close social distance between participants.
38	Relative Power	"Bro is being haunted by Xiangling"	Casual peer-to-peer language, indicating no power difference and fostering sympathy or humor.
39	Rank of Imposition	"Please stick to English in the Teyvat channels."	A polite request from an admin, demonstrating a high-ranking imposition mitigated with "please" and a respectful tone.

The sociological variables observed in the Genshin Impact Discord interactions illustrate how social distance, relative power, and rank of imposition influence politeness strategies. Datum 37 shows how low social distance is reflected in informal language, as the hearer repeatedly uses the word “*man*” to convey familiarity and camaraderie between participants. Datum 38 highlights relative power, where casual, humorous language such as “*Bro is being haunted*” signals equal standing between the speaker and hearer, fostering peer-to-peer rapport. Lastly, datum 39 demonstrates the rank of imposition: the speaker, an admin, mitigates a high-ranking request (“*Please stick to English*”) with polite language and a respectful address (“*young lady*”), showing sensitivity to the hearer’s feelings despite enforcing a rule. In conclusion, the participants adapted their language based on social distance, power relations, and the burden of the request, ensuring interactions remained respectful and cooperative even in a dynamic online setting.

DISCUSSION

This study set out to explore two primary research questions: 1) What types of politeness strategies are used in the Genshin Impact Discord server? and (2) What factors influence the use of these strategies in this online gaming community? Through a pragmatic lens grounded in Brown

and Levinson's (1987) theory, this study identified the strategy employed and the contextual variables influencing its application. In response to the first research question, the analysis revealed four types of politeness strategies, from the most frequent to the least: positive politeness, negative politeness, bald on-record, and off-record. Among these, positive politeness was most frequently observed, aligning with prior studies emphasizing its role in fostering solidarity in online communities. Negative politeness and off-record strategies were used in contexts requiring deference or ambiguity. Bald on-record strategies, though direct, occurred in urgent or emotionally charged contexts. These findings demonstrate how participants strategically navigate digital discourse to maintain relationships and mitigate face threats. These findings align with prior research (Assyari & Djauhari, 2025; Handayani et al., 2022; Lukman et al., 2024; Syah, 2021) that highlights positive politeness's dominance in traditional, and digital interaction platforms. This frequent use reflects how participants seek to maintain friendly and cooperative relationships in the discourse, suggesting the creation of a pseudo-familial space despite anonymity and geographic distance.

Regarding the second research question, two influencing factors were found: payoff (a priori consideration) and sociological variables - specifically, social distance, relative power, and rank of imposition. The choice of politeness strategy often stemmed from participants' desire to reduce imposition or foster inclusion. For example, positive politeness was commonly employed when participants offered help or comfort, while negative politeness was used to maintain respect in hierarchical or formal contexts. These results support Brown and Levinson's original framework and demonstrate its applicability to modern digital discourse. Interestingly, although less frequent, the use of off-record and bald on-record strategies served specific functions. Off-record strategies allowed participants to express opinions indirectly, preserving social harmony. Meanwhile, bald-on-record strategies—typically more direct—were used in urgent or emotionally charged situations. These contextual applications reflect similar dynamics identified in Swari et al. (2024) and Budiarta et al. (2024), though the informal nature of Discord allowed for more relaxed interaction compared to formal or scripted media like films and interviews.

This study contributes new insights into how online game communities negotiate politeness, especially in real-time discourse environments where cultural, emotional, and strategic considerations intersect. For practitioners such as moderators or platform designers, these insights can inform community management strategies that promote respectful dialogue. For instance, training bots or designing prompts that mirror positive politeness strategies may help maintain a healthy discourse environment.

However, some drawbacks occurred in this research, as the theory was based on outdated politeness strategies proposed by Brown & Levinson (1987). Brown & Levinson's model is useful but criticized for its ethnocentrism and dependence on stable social hierarchies (Mills, 2003; Watts, 2003). Scholars argue that it inadequately accounts for cultural variation, gender differences, and the dynamic nature of digital communication. For example, Locher & Graham (2010) emphasize that politeness is negotiated in interaction rather than fixed, and that online environments reshape how politeness is enacted. Similarly, Herring (2004) highlights how computer-mediated communication (CMC) differs from face-to-face interaction, with affordances like anonymity, asynchronicity, and multimodality influencing politeness strategies. Sifianou (2019) notes that the lack of visual cues online can lead to heightened politeness and increased impoliteness, depending on context.

In addition, another limitation was the data collection, which was restricted to one specific channel (Jeaneral-chat) within a limited time frame, which may not fully represent broader or longitudinal patterns across the entire Discord community. Furthermore, the lack of user demographic data (e.g., cultural background, gender) limits the ability to draw culturally nuanced interpretations. The nature of Discord, which is text-based, semi-anonymous, and fast-paced, also means that some intended meanings may have been missed or misinterpreted. Future research could expand on these findings by exploring cross-cultural comparisons of politeness in Discord channels from different games or regions. Additionally, examining voice-based interactions or integrating longitudinal studies may offer deeper insights into evolving patterns of digital politeness. Investigating how users adapt politeness strategies in response to moderation policies or AI-generated messages may also be fruitful areas of inquiry.

CONCLUSION

The findings revealed four types of politeness strategies on Genshin Impact's Discord server-specific channel. There were 113 utterances in total that employed the politeness strategies. The first strategy was bald on record, with 15 utterances occurring bald on record. There were 14 strategies of positive politeness found on the channel, with 65 utterances of positive politeness. The strategies of negative politeness include only 5 strategies, with 21 utterances occurring in negative politeness, and the last strategy was off-record politeness, which in this case included 6 strategies and a total of 12 utterances occurred off-record.

Furthermore, several factors that influenced the choice of strategies were found. There were payoffs: a priori consideration, and the circumstances (sociological variables). The analysis indicates that politeness strategies and their influencing factors are related among the participants.

This research concluded that politeness strategies in online game discourse rooms were not used arbitrarily but were influenced by pragmatic considerations and social variables embedded in the interaction.

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Illocutionary Speech Acts in Song Lyrics Golden by HUNTR/X

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ABSTRACT

The 2025 Netflix film K-Pop: Demon Hunters and its chart-topping single “Golden” mark a new milestone in the globalization of the Korean Wave, exemplifying Western media’s creation of authentic, hybrid K-pop content for a global audience. This study seeks to elucidate the linguistic strategies underlying the song’s success by identifying, classifying, and analyzing the illocutionary speech acts in its lyrics. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach and Searle’s five categories of illocutionary acts, the research conducts a close reading to determine the pragmatic function of each utterance. The findings show that, of the 39 utterances analyzed, expressive acts are the most prevalent type (44%), followed by commissive acts (36%). Representative (13%), directive (5%), and declarative (3%) acts appear more sparingly to establish the narrative and mark pivotal shifts. The dominance of expressive and commissive acts suggests that the song’s communicative force derives primarily from articulating psychological states and committing to future actions, rather than merely recounting events. This linguistic emphasis on emotional transformation and empowerment is central to how “Golden” convincingly performs an authentic K-pop identity despite its English lyrics and Western production.

Keywords: *illocutionary, speech acts, lyrics, feeling, expression.*

INTRODUCTION

The 21st century has been characterized by the global ascent of South Korean popular music (K-pop), a cultural movement that has profoundly reshaped the international entertainment industry. This “Hallyu” (Korean Wave) has now entered a more intricate phase of cultural exchange, in which Western media has evolved from mere observation to active creation, producing content that authentically participates in the K-pop ecosystem (Mikel et al., 2025). This dynamic of cultural translation and hybridization has culminated in the unprecedented success of the 2025 animated Netflix film, K-Pop: Demon Hunters.

Upon its June 2025 release, K-Pop: Demon Hunters became a global cultural and economic phenomenon. The film, which follows the fictional K-pop girl group Huntr/x as they lead a double life as music idols and covert demon hunters, topped Netflix's global charts in 93 countries. Its impact extended far beyond streaming, with significant real-world effects. The film’s soundtrack dominated mainstream music charts like Billboard and Spotify, with its songs outperforming even established K-pop supergroups. This success generated a massive economic ripple effect, including

a 23.1% surge in tourism to Seoul and a projected economic impact in the trillions of Korean won (Kim, 2025). The phenomenon was so significant that it prompted the South Korean government to establish a task force to capitalize on the trend and propose legislation to support similar "tradition-convergence content".

The film's extraordinary success can be attributed to a meticulous formula balancing authenticity with global accessibility. To ensure legitimacy, the production was helmed by Korean-Canadian director Maggie Kang and featured veteran K-pop producers, including Teddy Park and the Grammy-winning Lindgren. This collaboration was intended to create music that could "legitimately fit into the K-pop space" (Rutherford, 2025). The film also respectfully integrates deep elements of Korean culture, from traditional shamanism and folklore to modern fan culture, creating a rich and authentic world (Mikel et al., 2025). This commitment to authenticity is carefully blended with a strategy of cultural hybridization. The film and its soundtrack are presented entirely in English, a deliberate choice to remove language barriers for a mainstream Western audience. In a remarkable display of this hybrid approach, the animators designed the characters' mouth movements to match Korean pronunciation, embedding a layer of cultural specificity even within an English-language product.

This study focuses specifically on the film's lead single, "Golden," performed by the fictional group Huntr/x. The song spearheaded the film's musical dominance, topping the Billboard Hot 100 for six consecutive weeks and accumulating over 163.4 million streams in a single month (Rutherford, 2025). "Golden" stands as the ultimate artifact of the film's successful formula: an English-language track that has been accepted globally as a powerful and authentic K-pop anthem. The song's lyrics are central to this success, as they are crafted to convey the themes of empowerment, identity, and perfectionism that are central to both the film's narrative and the K-pop genre's appeal (Mikel et al., 2025; Mirza, 2025).

While the commercial and cultural impact of "Golden" is well-documented, a deeper linguistic analysis is necessary to understand how its lyrics function to achieve such a powerful communicative effect. The words are not merely descriptive; they perform specific actions to construct a persona and convey a message that resonates globally. To systematically investigate these communicative functions, this research will employ Speech Act Theory.

Therefore, the primary objective of this study is to identify, classify, and analyze the illocutionary acts present within the lyrics of the song "Golden." This investigation seeks to decode the specific linguistic strategies and communicative actions that enabled a fictional, English-language song to perform an authentic K-pop identity so successfully, contributing to a deeper

understanding of linguistic performance, cultural translation, and the globalization of popular music.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Speech act theory is defined as a study in the pragmatic area to guide the expression of how the sentence and utterance are expressed (Searle et al., 1980). In speech act study, the scope of knowledge is in the field of particular actions, producing statements, asking questions, giving orders, describing, explaining, apologizing, thanking, congratulating, and other relevant studies. In linguistics, communication is more than just making an utterance; it is saying something in a particular context, with a specific meaning and purpose, to make the listener recognize the intention (Sitanggang & Sinaga, 2020). Because song lyrics often embed multiple languages, prior research shows that code-switching can function cohesively within a single communicative act in media texts. In Indonesian TV advertisements, for example, intra- and inter-sentential switching is integrated to deliver one message (Mainake, 2021), supporting our treatment of English lines with embedded Korean as a unified corpus for illocutionary analysis.

The Illocutionary Act then narrows the focus of the present research. The present research focuses on illocutionary speech acts in the lyrics of the song "Golden" by HUNTR/X. In an illocutionary act, the study is committed by producing an utterance that acts for someone (Gawa, 2023). An illocutionary act is the act of releasing a locution or utterance with a certain force of a question or promise (Alston, 2000). This study categorizes speech acts into five divisions, including representative, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative.

Representative, Directive, Commissive, Expressive, and Declarative each elaborate these divisions. Representative act addresses evidence of the speaker's utterance and the action (Gawa, 2023). The range of representatives includes simple assertions, statements, demands, admissions, showings, reports, giving testimony, mentions, and speculations (Asroriyah & Nurhana, 2022). In directives, the speaker's utterance tries to get someone to do something. These illocutionary acts are typically intended to direct or to influence the behaviour of the addressee (Alston, 2000). The familiar directive types include ordering, commanding, requesting, suggesting, asking, advising, encouraging, warning, begging, suggesting, ordering, and inviting. A commissive speech act commits the speaker to future action. The whole point of commissive is to commit the speaker to a particular course of action (Alston, 2000). In commissive, the important effect of production consists in the speaker's taking on a specific obligation. An expressive speech act is related to the psychological feelings of the speaker towards the utterance of what the speaker wrote. Expressive, as defined by Alston (2000), includes the notion of reactions to other people's behaviour and

fortune, and of attitudes and expressions of attitudes towards someone else's actions. The speaker intends expressive speech acts to evaluate things by thanking, complaining, congratulating, flattering, praising, blaming, and criticizing (Asroriyah & Nurhana, 2022). A declarative affects professional affairs that expresses the speaker's utterance (Gawa, 2023). In this speech act, the speaker creates new things, including status, circumstances, etc (Asroriyah & Nurhana, 2022). The speech acts are spoken of as impressing, deciding, cancelling, prohibiting, granting, permitting, classifying, lifting, and forgiving.

METHOD

Research Design

In this study, the researchers utilized qualitative research. Qualitative methodology involves describing and exploring phenomena through data collection. A descriptive approach is utilized in this study, as the data are presented descriptively, focusing on the analysis of the virtual girl group Huntrix's song "Golden" using Searle's (1969) speech act theory. The lyrics were examined to identify and categorize speech acts into Searle's five types: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives. The analysis involved a close reading of the lyrics, with each utterance contextualized to determine its pragmatic function.

The classification process was supported by drawing on existing research on speech acts in song lyrics, thereby ensuring a comprehensive interpretation of the data. Comparative insights from prior studies, such as Samsudin et al. (2023), enriched the analysis, highlighting common trends in the use of speech acts in music. The findings were then quantified and organized into a table that illustrated the frequency and function of each speech act type in the song. This method demonstrates the applicability of speech act theory in uncovering the multifaceted communicative strategies in song lyrics.

Research Site and Participants

The research object is the officially released lyrics of the song "Golden," performed by the fictional K-pop group HUNTR/X in the 2025 animated film K-Pop: Demon Hunters. The unit of analysis comprises all lyric lines in the studio version, totaling 39 utterances as transcribed in this study's dataset and reported in Table 1. The analysis is limited to the canonical studio audio release and its published lyrics; remixes, live performances, music video captions, annotated or fan-transcribed variants, and paratextual materials are excluded. Code switching and Korean segments in the lyrics are treated as part of the same data and analyzed within the same speech-act framework, without translation-based rephrasing. This delimitation ensures that the data is stable,

replicable, and aligned with the study's aim to classify illocutionary acts at the level of lyric utterances.

Data Collection and Analysis

Two sources of data were utilized: primary data and secondary data. Primary data consisted of song lyrics containing speech acts, while secondary data included information from journals, articles, books, and the internet related to speech acts to strengthen the research further. The researchers employed the documentation method (Putri & Mariana, 2019) to gather relevant research data, including books and journals on speech acts.

Data were analysed using the interactive analysis model by Miles and Huberman (1994), involving data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The data consisted of transcriptions of the lyrics to "Golden" by Huntrix, collected through listening and note-taking. Data reduction focused solely on the lyrics, excluding any other songs. Data classification was based on Searle's theory of speech acts. Conclusions were drawn from the research process, which was grounded in the classification and analysis of the data.

FINDINGS

As mentioned in the literature review above, the findings of this research concern the types of illocutionary speech acts. The illocutionary acts include representative, directive, declarative, commissive, and expressive. The results are explained by classifying each sentence in every line of the lyrics in Table 1.

Table 1. Identification of Illocutionary Acts in Song Lyrics Golden by HUNTRX

NO	LYRICS	Function of Illocutionary Acts	TOTAL	Percentage %
1	I was a ghost, I was alone 어두워진 앞길 속에 (hah)	Representatives	5	13%
2	Given the throne, I didn't know how to believe			
3	I was the queen that I'm meant to be			
4	But I couldn't find my own place.			
5	Called a problem child 'cause I got too wild			
6	I'm done hidin', now I'm shinin' like I'm born to be	Directives	2	5%

NO	LYRICS	Function of Illocutionary Acts	TOTAL	Percentage %
7	We dreamin' hard, we came so far, now I believe			
8	But now that's how I'm getting paid, 끝없이 on stage	Declaratives	1	3%
9	We're goin' up, up, up, it's our moment	Commissives	14	36%
10	You know, together we're glowing			
11	Oh, up, up, up with our voices			
12	영원히 깨질 수 없는			
13	Oh, I'm done hidin', now I'm shinin' like I'm born to be			
14	That's who we're born to be			
15	No more hiding, I'll be shining like I'm born to be			
16	'Cause we are hunters, voices strong, and I know I believe			
17	We're goin' up, up, up, it's our moment.			
18	You know, together we're glowing.			
19	Oh, up, up, up, with our voices			
20	영원히 깨질 수 없는			
21	Oh, I'm done hidin', now I'm shining like I'm born to be			
22	That's who we're born to be			
23	I lived two lives, tried to play both sides	Expressives	17	44%
24	Gonna be, gonna be golden			
25	Gonna be, gonna be golden.			
26	Oh, our time, no fears, no lies			
27	Waited so long to break these walls down			
28	To wake up and feel like me			
29	Put these patterns all in the past now.			
30	And finally live like the girl they all see			

NO	LYRICS	Function of Illocutionary Acts	TOTAL	Percentage %
31	Gonna be, gonna be golden.			
32	Gonna be, gonna be golden.			
33	Oh, our time, no fears, no lies			
34	You know we're gonna be, gonna be golden.			
35	We're gonna be, gonna be			
36	Born to be, born to be glowin'			
37	밝게 빛나는 우린			
38	You know that it's our time, no fears, no lies.			
39	That's who we're born to be			
TOTAL ALL SENTENCES			39	100%

Table 1 provides the complete list of 39 utterances and their assigned illocutionary categories. In total, expressive acts occurred 17 times (44%), commissive acts 14 times (36%), representative acts 5 times (13%), directive acts 2 times (5%), and declarative acts 1 time (3%). These figures are calculated as proportions of the 39 utterances analyzed and are consistent with the totals reported in Table 1.

DISCUSSION

Of the 39 utterances analyzed, expressive acts were the most frequent (44%), followed by commissive acts (36%). Representative acts accounted for 13%, directives for 5%, and declaratives for 3%. The interpretation below explains how this distribution functions within the song and situates the pattern in prior research.

Representative

A representative act, as defined in the literature review, commits the speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition, functioning to state, report, admit, or describe a state of affairs. In the lyrics of “*Golden*,” representative acts comprise 5 of the 39 total utterances, accounting for 13% of the song’s illocutionary content. While not the most frequent act, their function is critical: they establish the narrative’s foundation by describing the singer’s past state of conflict, isolation, and self-doubt. These statements provide the backstory of suffering from which the rest of the song’s triumphant transformation emerges.

The analysis of the specific lyrics reveals a consistent theme of a troubled past. Utterances such as *"I was a ghost, I was alone"* and *"But I couldn't find my own place"* are direct statements of fact about the singer's internal experience. They represent a world of alienation and loneliness, directly reflecting the film's plot, in which the lead singer, Rumi, feels isolated by the secret of her demonic heritage. Furthermore, the line *"Called a problem child 'cause I got too wild"* functions as a report on how others perceived her, reinforcing the external judgment that contributed to her shame. Another set of representatives highlights the core conflict between the singer's external status and internal reality. The lines *"Given the throne, I didn't know how to believe"* and *"I was the queen that I'm meant to be"* present a contradiction. The speaker asserts her high status as a "queen" on a "throne," yet simultaneously conveys her inability to internalize this reality. This dissonance is central to the film's theme of imposter syndrome born from shame.

Interestingly, the frequency of representative acts in *"Golden"* (13%) is notably lower than what has been found in other linguistic analyses of song lyrics. For instance, in their study of Sia Furler's album *"This Is Acting"*, Nasim and Mariana (2024) found that the representative type was the most dominant, constituting approximately 60.37% of all illocutionary acts. They concluded that these acts primarily served to narrate stories and convey information to the listener. Similarly, Sari and Emelia (2022) found that representative acts were the most prevalent on Bruno Mars's *"Doo-Woops & Hooligans"* album, accounting for 62% of the total. The lower proportion in *"Golden"* suggests a different rhetorical strategy. Rather than focusing on detailed storytelling through description, *"Golden"* uses a small number of impactful representative statements to establish a baseline of past pain quickly. This allows the song to dedicate the majority of its lyrical space to the more dominant commissive and expressive acts, which drive the song's forward-looking message of commitment and emotional catharsis.

Directives

A directive illocutionary act is one in which the speaker's utterance aims to prompt the addressee to act. Such acts encompass a range of functions, including ordering, requesting, advising, and encouraging. In the song *"Golden,"* directives are the second least frequent category, appearing in only two utterances and comprising 5% of the lyrics. Despite their rarity, these directives serve as a crucial pivot in the narrative, marking the protagonist's shift from a passive state of suffering, as established by the representatives, to an active resolve for change.


The primary directive utterance, *"I'm done hidin', now I'm shinin' like I'm born to be,"* is not addressed to an external listener but functions as a command directed toward the self. It constitutes an act of self-encouragement—a forceful internal declaration to cease one behavior (hiding in

shame) and initiate another (shining with confidence). This moment is central to the film's narrative, symbolizing the protagonist Rumi's decision to embrace a complete identity and reject the shame long carried. Here, the directive operates as a personal affirmation that catalyzes the song's emotional climax, signaling a decisive movement from despair to empowerment. Wailissa (2023) analyzes teacher–student interaction in the educational film *Freedom Writers* using a speech-act lens to characterize how instruction is managed. In that pedagogical context, outward, listener-oriented directives predominate, accounting for 40.5% of utterances (Wailissa, 2023). This contrasts with our inward, self-addressed directive use in “Golden,” highlighting how genre and communicative purpose shape directive frequency and function.

The low frequency of directives in “Golden” (5%) stands in notable contrast to findings from other studies of popular music. Research on Sia's album “This Is Acting” found directives as the second-most prominent type, accounting for 22.70% of all acts. Similarly, directives were the second most frequent category in analyses of Bruno Mars albums (Sari & Emelia, 2022) and Taylor Swift songs (Gawa, 2023), each at around 17%. The minimal use of directives in “Golden” suggests a different rhetorical purpose. Whereas many songs deploy directives to engage or command the listener (for example, “*dance with me*,” “*listen*”), “Golden” foregrounds an internal journey. Its primary communicative goal is not to influence the listener's actions but to articulate the singer's emotions (expressives) and future commitments (commissives). Consequently, the few directives present are aimed inward, functioning as potent declarations of personal change rather than external commands.

Declaratives

A declarative act is a distinctive utterance that alters the state of affairs by the very act of being spoken, creating a new reality, status, or circumstance. In “Golden,” the declarative is the least frequent illocutionary act, occurring only once and comprising 3% of the total utterances. Despite its rarity, this single act plays a pivotal role: it formalizes the singer's transformation by announcing a new professional and personal reality, thereby consolidating the changes traced throughout the song.

The specific lyric, “*But now that's how I'm getting paid  on stage*,” functions as a declarative by officially reclassifying the singer's past behavior. Actions previously framed as negative in representative acts (for example, “*Called a problem child 'cause I got too wild*”) are now declared to be the very source of professional success and livelihood. The utterance does more than report a fact; it establishes a new reality in which what once provoked shame now confers value. It thus

proclaims a new state of being, signaling the final and irreversible step in a trajectory of self-acceptance and empowerment.

The scarcity of declaratives in “Golden” aligns with findings across multiple analyses of song lyrics. Declaratives also ranked least frequent in studies of Sia’s album *This Is Acting* (1.90%) and Bruno Mars’s *Doo-Wops & Hooligans* (0.6%). Moreover, (2023) found no declaratives in Taylor Swift’s songs. This consistent rarity reflects the nature of declarative acts, which typically require specific institutional authority to succeed pragmatically, as in a judge’s sentence or an official christening. Song lyrics, as a medium of artistic and personal expression, generally lack such formal contexts. Consequently, the deliberate inclusion of even a single declarative in “Golden” is significant: it lends a decisive, quasi-official finality to the protagonist’s transformation, effectively declaring the new identity into existence.

Commissive

Commissives are a type of speech act in which the speaker commits themselves to carrying out a future action (Yule, 1996). In other words, when a speaker uses a commissive, it indicates their intention to perform a particular action later on. Within the lyrics of the song “*Golden*,” these acts convey the singer’s intentions or commitments, adding depth to the song’s emotional and thematic layers. Commissive illocutionary acts, which commit the speaker to some future action expressing hopes, rejections, threats, or offers, represent the second largest portion, accounting for approximately 36% of the lyrics.

The point of a commissive is to commit the speaker to some future action, and the commonest commissive is the promise. In the song “*Golden*,” this category may be carried out individually by the singer or collectively as part of a group. In line “*We’re goin’ up, up, up, it’s our moment. You know together we’re glowing. Oh, up, up, up with our voices*,” such actions include making promises, threats, and pledges. From the utterance “*영원히 깨질 수 없는 (Can never be broken)*,” it is kind of a promise that the singer with the group will not be disintegrated or destroyed. The line “*Cause we are hunters, voices strong, and I know I believe*” where the singer firmly expresses optimism or commitment not to make her group feel down, can be interpreted as a promise to sustain the confidence of the loved one. Those sentences are a kind of promise and fall into the category of commissive illocutionary acts. This commissive pattern highlights resolve and projected collective action. By contrast, in political address genres, directives occupy the core, and their appropriateness is evaluated through felicity conditions—propositional content, preparatory, sincerity, and essential conditions—as shown in Jokowi’s G20 Session I speech (Toisuta & Aritonang, 2024).

Commissive speech acts, although infrequent, demonstrate the speaker's determination to cope with her emotional challenges. For example, the line *"Oh, I'm done hidin', now I'm shinin' like I'm born to be. That's who we're born to be"* shows the singer's resolve to protect herself by cutting off connections that could lead to emotional setbacks and emphasizes her awareness of her vulnerability and her commitment to provide emotional support building trust through words. Similarly, the line *"No more hiding, I'll be shining like I'm born to be"* serves as a commissive act, in which the speaker promises a breakthrough in expressing herself. The examples illustrate the speaker's active effort to transform her sorrow into a source of empowerment and reclaim power in the face of adversity, providing a sense of hope and strength that redefines her identity.

Among the various types of speech acts in the lyrics of the song "Golden," commissive acts account for approximately a third of the lyrics. The portion can be considered quite large compared to commissives in Sia's album "This Is Acting," which accounts for 6.70% according to the study by Nasim and Mariana (2024). Interestingly, Mukminin (2024) found a similar result in this research. In the song *"Kupu-Kupu"* by Tiara Andini, it accounted for 22% and ranked third among other speech acts. Therefore, in these studies, the singer states their involvement in a specific action or deed not only to communicate a commitment but also to show the speaker's effort to express their feelings, despite differences across the songs analyzed.

Expressive

An expressive act is an act that addresses certain psychological feelings of the speaker to the addressee. In this case, the motions are the speaker's mood, including happiness, sadness, kindness, politeness, madness, etc. In this research, expressive feelings refer to the singer's psychological utterances in the form of lyrics. The sentence *"I lived two lives, tried to play both sides"* conveys the idea of living on both sides, shining and hiding. The word "shining" plays a role as a singer on the stage, while the word "hiding" means the singer's inner child. The supportive sentences accompany the following utterance, *"Gonna be golden,"* which represents the singer's expectation and feeling of having a better life after achieving the speaker's goal on stage. In addition, when the singer said *"our time, no fears, no lies,"* the expressive acts are enforced by the words *"no fears,"* which enhance the singer's shining moment as an entertainer. The phrase "no lies" expresses the singer's bravery. Furthermore, the following sentence *"Waited so long to break these walls"* indeed supports the opening lyric in the directive act of *"I'm done hidin', now I'm shinin' like I'm born to be"*.

The expressive acts, as in Mukminin (2024), explored admiration, as the singer was impressed by someone's beauty. The research was based on the song *"Kupu-Kupu"* by Tiara Andini, an Indonesian singer. The lyrics of this song are about the exciting feeling of a relationship. Indeed,

the feelings in the lyrics of “*Kupu-Kupu*” are dissimilar to those of “*Golden*” due to a distinct purpose of the singer. Meanwhile, in Nasim & Mariana's (2024) research, they found the singer's expression of gratitude to the person who aided the singer. Nasim and Mariana (2024) used song lyrics by Sia Furler in the album “*This Is Acting*”. In addition, the second lyric of “*This Is Acting*” was “*The pain was swallowing me,*” in line with this research about the pain of a singer's experiences of suffering. In this research, when the singer said in line 29, “Put these patterns all in the past now,” it suggests suffering.

The frequency of expressive acts in the lyrics of “*Golden*” is in line with those found in other lyrics researched by other researchers. As in Sari and Emelia (2022), the frequency of expressive acts was 62% in Sari and Emelia (2022), and 44% in this research. This means that the frequency of expressive acts is more highlighted in the lyrics of songs. On the other hand, expressive utterance in the lyrics of “*Love Story*”, a song by Taylor Swift, has the lowest frequency, about 4,34%, among representative, directive, and commissive acts (Sitanggang & Sinaga, 2020).

Implications and limitations

The distribution indicates a communicative strategy in which identity is performed through the sequencing of affective declaration and pledged action. This sequence helps account for how the song advances empowerment and authenticity within its narrative frame. Given that the data is limited to a single song's studio lyrics, claims are correspondingly bounded; however, the pattern contributes to broader discussions of speech-act usage in pop music and to analyses of how lyrical discourse performs identity through emotion and commitment. The dataset is restricted to the studio version's published lyrics. Live renditions, remixes, and fan-annotated texts may exhibit different distributions or intensify particular acts—for example, additional directives in audience call-and-response contexts. Future research might extend the corpus to multiple tracks within the same soundtrack, compare English-language K-pop releases with Korean-language originals, or model transitions between expressive and commissive sequences over time.

CONCLUSION

In this study, five illocutionary speech acts were identified in the lyrics of the song: representatives, directives, declaratives, commissives, and expressives. Expressive acts elicited more utterances (44%) about the singer's expression of her feelings of bravery. The singer's bravery appeared in the phrases “no fears” and “gonna be golden”. In commissive acts, the singer made commitments after achieving the debut. Commissive speech acts increased by 36% after expressive

acts, with the singer's promises rising, reflecting the singer's inner child's "no more hiding," which conveyed the meaning of not being able to show their talents.

On the other hand, representative speech acts accounted for 13% of the lyrics, as the singer mentioned self-doubt, isolation, and conflict. The first sentence on the lyric "*I was a ghost, I was alone*" meant the singer's sentimental inner child. The following five sentences support the sentences. Furthermore, the sixth sentence indicated a directive speech act with 5%. The directive explained the singer's performance and actions with the sentence "Now, I'm done hiding," which represented the action that followed the representative's act. "From those five illocutionary acts, the least act was declarative, with 3% accumulation. It stated that the singer's profession is singing and that they should be paid. As a result, this research revealed the expression of the singer through music, specifically the singer's sentimental emotions during childhood.

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Content and Language Integrated Learning as a Strategy for Enhancing Speaking Skills: A Narrative Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Speaking remains one of the most challenging skills for foreign language learners, who often understand written and spoken texts but struggle to communicate fluently and accurately. Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has been introduced as an instructional approach that combines subject learning with the use of the target language, creating authentic opportunities for oral production and interaction. This narrative review examines how CLIL contributes to speaking development, drawing on empirical studies conducted across different educational levels and contexts. Findings from the reviewed research show that CLIL consistently enhances fluency and vocabulary. Learners in CLIL programs tend to produce longer stretches of speech with fewer pauses and demonstrate broader lexical repertoires, particularly in academic vocabulary. Evidence on grammatical accuracy and pronunciation is more mixed: while learners often achieve intelligibility and communicative effectiveness, errors persist without explicit language support. Communicative competence emerges as a strong area of growth, as CLIL classrooms provide space for negotiation of meaning, turn-taking, and pragmatic use of language. The review also underscores the importance of implementation factors. Scaffolding, feedback, teacher training, and assessment practices significantly influence outcomes, while program intensity, duration, and learner motivation further shape the development of speaking skills. Although results vary across contexts, the overall evidence indicates that CLIL provides a productive environment for developing oral proficiency, offering learners both the need and the opportunity to use language meaningfully in the pursuit of content learning.

Keywords: *CLIL, oral proficiency, speaking skills, fluency, communicative competence*

INTRODUCTION

Developing oral communicative competence has long been a challenge in foreign language education. Learners often acquire receptive knowledge through reading and listening but continue to struggle with speaking fluently and accurately in real communicative contexts (Lee et al., 2023). Traditional EFL instruction tends to emphasize form and comprehension over production, leaving students with limited opportunities to engage in extended spoken interaction. As a result, many learners can understand English but remain hesitant or inaccurate when required to speak.

CLIL has been introduced as a response to this challenge by combining subject content learning with the use of a foreign language. Instead of treating language as an isolated subject,

CLIL engages learners in using the target language to access knowledge, solve problems, and communicate ideas. This integrated approach creates natural opportunities for oral production and interactive communication (Lai, 2024a). The expansion of CLIL across diverse contexts in Europe, Asia, and Latin America has shown its potential to enhance language skills alongside content learning, and research has documented this expansion, supported by studies of implementation and teacher development (Nguyen et al., 2024; Querol-Julián, 2025).

Empirical research indicates that CLIL benefits speaking development in multiple ways. Meta-analytic and review studies indicate that productive oral skills improve more under CLIL than in conventional language classes (Lee et al., 2025; Pittas & Tompkins, 2024). Learners in CLIL settings often demonstrate greater fluency, with smoother, more sustained oral production than their non-CLIL peers (del Puerto & Lacabex, 2017; Martínez Agudo, 2019). Lexical development is also a consistent outcome, as exposure to academic content in English provides access to subject-specific vocabulary and promotes richer lexical choices (Olsson, 2025). While gains in grammatical accuracy and pronunciation are less consistent and often depend on the intensity of exposure or the presence of explicit language instruction (Azpilicueta-Martínez, 2024; Rallo Fabra & Jacob, 2015), improvements in communicative competence are widely reported (Martínez Agudo, 2020; Villabona & Cenoz, 2022). These findings suggest that CLIL fosters not only linguistic development but also the ability to use language effectively in academic and interactive contexts.

The purpose of this narrative literature review is to synthesize empirical findings on how CLIL supports the development of speaking skills. By drawing on recent studies employing a range of research designs—including meta-analyses, longitudinal studies, and classroom-based investigations—this review highlights the potential of CLIL to promote fluency, lexical growth, interactional competence, and overall communicative effectiveness in diverse educational settings.

METHOD

This narrative review is based on published research examining the relationship between CLIL and speaking skills. The focus is on empirical studies reporting oral outcomes, such as fluency, accuracy, vocabulary use, and communicative competence. Sources were identified through searches in major academic databases, including ERIC, Web of Science, Scopus, Google Scholar, and ScienceDirect, using combinations of terms such as “CLIL,” “English Medium Instruction,” “oral proficiency,” “speaking skills,” and “communicative competence.”

Studies were included if they investigated CLIL or EMI programs and reported results on learners’ spoken performance. A variety of designs were considered, including experimental and

quasi-experimental studies, longitudinal research, comparative analyses of CLIL and non-CLIL groups, and classroom-based investigations of implementation practices. Reviews and meta-analyses that synthesized findings across contexts were also consulted.

The analysis was conducted narratively rather than statistically. Findings from individual studies were grouped thematically, with attention to the types of oral skills measured, the assessment tools employed, and the reported outcomes. This approach enables comparisons of evidence across diverse contexts and highlights patterns in fluency, accuracy, lexical development, pronunciation, and communicative competence.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This review draws on studies conducted in primary, secondary, and higher education settings. Although the educational stages differ, the evidence is synthesized around common themes in speaking development—fluency, accuracy, vocabulary, pronunciation, communicative competence, and implementation factors—allowing patterns to be observed across contexts.

Fluency and Vocabulary

Research consistently shows that CLIL offers learners more opportunities for extended oral practice, which often leads to gains in fluency. In studies comparing CLIL and non-CLIL groups, students in CLIL classrooms tended to produce longer stretches of speech with fewer pauses or hesitations (del Puerto & Lacabex, 2017; Martínez Agudo, 2019). These findings are echoed in large-scale reviews, which report that fluency is one of the skills most likely to benefit from CLIL settings (Lee et al., 2025; Pittas & Tompkins, 2024). The emphasis on meaning-focused communication and the need to discuss subject matter seem to provide conditions that encourage more natural and sustained oral production.

Vocabulary development has also been highlighted as a recurring outcome of CLIL instruction. Learners are exposed not only to everyday language but also to subject-specific terminology, which enriches their lexical repertoire. Studies in upper secondary education demonstrate that CLIL learners acquire a broader range of academic vocabulary than peers in traditional EFL programs (Olsson, 2025). Similar evidence has been found in primary contexts, where exposure to content-driven tasks contributed to more diverse word use and greater lexical sophistication in learners' oral output (Lai, 2024a, 2024b). These results underline that CLIL provides access to language that might not typically be encountered in regular language classrooms.

However, improvements in vocabulary are not limited to size alone; they also involve the flexibility with which learners use words in oral communication. Comparative research shows that

CLIL students tend to employ vocabulary more effectively in discourse, making their speech more precise and contextually appropriate (Martínez Agudo, 2020). This suggests that lexical growth in CLIL is not only quantitative but also qualitative, reflecting deeper engagement with language through content learning. In addition, sustained exposure over time appears to consolidate lexical gains, pointing to the importance of program duration and intensity (Lázaro- Ibarrola, 2025; Merino & Lasagabaster, 2018).

Taken together, the evidence indicates that fluency and vocabulary are two areas of speaking ability that benefit most reliably from CLIL instruction. The combination of meaningful practice, authentic communicative needs, and exposure to academic discourse creates conditions where learners can both speak more fluidly and expand their lexical range. While the extent of these benefits varies with factors such as program intensity and instructional design, the trend across diverse contexts is clear: CLIL provides consistent advantages, helping learners speak with greater ease and richer vocabulary.

Accuracy and Pronunciation

Findings on grammatical accuracy in CLIL contexts are less uniform than those on fluency or vocabulary. Some longitudinal studies suggest that while CLIL provides more opportunities to use the language, this does not automatically translate into more accurate speech (Azpilicueta-Martínez, 2024; Martínez Agudo, 2019). Learners often communicate successfully but still display recurring grammatical errors, particularly in verb forms and morphosyntactic structures. This indicates that CLIL's focus on meaning and content, while valuable for communication, may not adequately address form to ensure accuracy.

Comparative studies support this observation. For example, research on Spanish CLIL learners shows that although they gain in fluency, their grammatical accuracy does not always surpass that of non-CLIL peers (Lázaro- Ibarrola, 2025; Merino & Lasagabaster, 2018). One explanation is that CLIL classrooms tend to prioritize content understanding and communicative effectiveness, with limited explicit correction of grammatical errors. This creates conditions where learners can be understood but continue to produce non-target-like structures over extended periods.

Pronunciation outcomes in CLIL are also mixed. Studies examining Spanish-Catalan learners, for instance, report that while CLIL improves intelligibility, it does not necessarily reduce foreign accent or lead to more native-like pronunciation (Rallo Fabra & Jacob, 2015). Azpilicueta-Martínez (2024) similarly finds that additional CLIL exposure helps learners perform oral tasks more confidently, but it does not eliminate pronunciation difficulties. These results suggest that

without targeted instruction or phonetic training, gains in pronunciation remain limited, even in CLIL environments.

Evidence indicates that CLIL supports communicative effectiveness rather than error-free speech. Learners often convey meaning successfully, but improvements in accuracy and pronunciation depend on complementary pedagogical strategies, such as explicit focus on form, corrective feedback, or phonological training (Ballinger, 2021; Milla & García Mayo, 2021). In this sense, CLIL alone is not a guarantee of grammatical precision or native-like pronunciation. However, it provides a platform for developing such skills when supported by appropriate instructional practices.

Communicative Competence

One of the most consistent findings in CLIL research is its contribution to the broader notion of communicative competence. Because learners are expected to use the target language to understand and discuss subject content, they are placed in situations that require negotiation of meaning, turn-taking, and pragmatic skills. Several studies confirm that students in CLIL settings develop stronger interactive abilities than peers in traditional EFL classrooms (Martínez Agudo, 2020; Villabona & Cenoz, 2022). These gains are not limited to linguistic accuracy but extend to how effectively learners use language to manage interaction.

Evidence from classroom-based research shows that CLIL promotes discourse functions that are often underrepresented in regular language classes. Learners participate in group discussions, ask for clarification, and justify opinions, which mirrors authentic communication practices (Mahan, 2022; Sato & Hemmi, 2022). These interactional features give learners the chance to apply language in purposeful contexts, moving beyond rehearsed dialogues or isolated grammar tasks. In this sense, CLIL creates conditions that more closely resemble real-world communication.

At the same time, the development of communicative competence depends on the type of support teachers provide. Studies point to the importance of scaffolding strategies, corrective feedback, and opportunities for peer collaboration (Ballinger, 2021; Milla & García Mayo, 2021). When teachers provide structured support, learners not only communicate more but also refine their language use during interaction. Conversely, when support is limited, learners may resort to basic language, which limits their communicative growth.

The literature suggests that CLIL strengthens learners' ability to engage in meaningful communication. The emphasis on content provides a natural reason to use the language, while classroom interaction gives learners practice in managing real exchanges. Although accuracy and

pronunciation remain variable, learners consistently show improved competence in using language for communication, which is arguably one of the main goals of foreign language learning.

Implementation Factors and Contextual Variation

The effectiveness of CLIL in supporting speaking development depends on how programs are implemented. Teacher practices such as scaffolding, feedback, and task design play a central role in shaping outcomes. Studies show that when teachers provide structured opportunities for oral interaction and guide learners through corrective feedback, students are more likely to refine their spoken performance (Ballinger, 2021; Milla & García Mayo, 2021). In contrast, when lessons emphasize content delivery without space for negotiation of meaning, oral gains are less pronounced. Mahan (2022) emphasizes that scaffolding is especially critical in CLIL classrooms, where teachers must balance content delivery with language support. Effective scaffolding enables learners to access subject knowledge while gradually improving their spoken English.

Teacher training also emerges as a key factor. Professional development programs that address the dual demands of teaching content and language help teachers integrate language support into subject teaching. Research from diverse contexts demonstrates that teachers who receive CLIL-focused training are more confident in managing linguistic scaffolding and in creating space for oral practice (Banegas, 2020; Nguyen et al., 2024; Querol-Julián, 2025). This suggests that CLIL's success is not only about exposure but also about equipping teachers with strategies to foster speaking skills.

Another dimension concerns learner motivation. Motivation can be both a driver and a product of CLIL participation. Studies in Europe and Asia report that learners in CLIL settings often express a greater willingness to communicate and greater engagement with tasks than peers in traditional classrooms (Bakken & Brevik, 2023; Mearns et al., 2020; Somers & Llinares, 2021). However, motivational benefits are not automatic; they tend to emerge when programs are well-structured and learners feel supported in managing linguistic challenges (Lo, 2025). In addition to motivation, assessment practices shape how learners approach speaking tasks. Research in STEM-based CLIL contexts shows that when teachers use assessment methods aligned with language development goals, students are more willing to participate in oral activities and demonstrate clearer gains in spoken competence (Kruawong & Imsa-ard, 2024).

Finally, contextual variation affects the extent of oral benefits. Factors such as program intensity, duration, socioeconomic background, and access to resources shape outcomes significantly. Research shows that high-intensity programs yield stronger speaking gains than low-intensity ones (Merino & Lasagabaster, 2017; Lázaro-Ibarrola, 2025), while inequalities in

resources can limit access to these advantages (Lorenzo et al., 2022; Denman et al., 2023). These findings underscore that CLIL's potential is not uniform across contexts; the degree of benefit for speaking skills depends on how programs are designed, supported, and sustained.

CONCLUSION

The studies reviewed demonstrate that CLIL is a valuable approach for developing speaking skills in foreign language education. Across diverse contexts, learners in CLIL programs show more fluent oral production and a richer lexical repertoire than peers in traditional EFL classrooms. While gains in accuracy and pronunciation are less consistent, CLIL consistently fosters communicative competence by creating meaningful interaction situations. These benefits are strengthened when programs are sufficiently intensive and long-lasting, and when learners are encouraged to use language to engage with content in authentic ways.

At the same time, the review highlights that outcomes depend heavily on how CLIL is implemented. Effective scaffolding, feedback, assessment practices, and teacher training are essential for ensuring that speaking development is more than incidental. Motivation also plays a central role, both influencing and being influenced by participation in CLIL. Variation across contexts, including differences in program design and socioeconomic background, means that CLIL does not yield identical results everywhere. Nevertheless, the overall picture is clear: when carefully planned and supported, CLIL provides a powerful means of integrating language learning with content instruction to strengthen learners' spoken performance.

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Translanguaging and Formative Assessment Practices in Multilingual EFL Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

This narrative literature review examines translanguaging as a pedagogical strategy and analyzes its implications for formative assessment practices in multilingual EFL contexts. The review synthesized empirical research from peer-reviewed journals accessed via ERIC, Scopus, Google Scholar, and JSTOR. Selection criteria focused on empirical studies reporting original data collection in multilingual classroom settings where translanguaging intersected with assessment practices. Analysis organized findings into three thematic categories: translanguaging pedagogical practices, formative assessment techniques, and implementation challenges. Results show that translanguaging supports comprehension, metalinguistic awareness, and learner confidence, while affirming multilingual identities. When integrated into formative assessment, translanguaging enables students to demonstrate knowledge through their complete linguistic repertoires, producing more valid evidence of learning than English-only assessment. Teachers gain accurate insights into student understanding, facilitating responsive instruction based on actual knowledge rather than language proficiency limitations. Students engage more actively in peer and self-assessment processes and develop stronger academic confidence. Implementation faces substantial barriers: contradictory language policies mandating English-only assessment despite multilingual classroom realities; high-stakes testing pressures that restrict formative translanguaging practices; insufficient teacher preparation in both translanguaging pedagogy and assessment literacy; and practical challenges in managing linguistically diverse classrooms. The review identifies critical research gaps that require longitudinal investigation of learning outcomes, comparative studies examining context-specific effectiveness, and participatory research centered on student perspectives. The findings indicate that realizing the equity potential of translanguaging assessment requires coordinated systemic change across policy frameworks, professional development models, teacher education curricula, and institutional support structures rather than isolated teacher-level innovations.

Keywords: *translanguaging pedagogy, formative assessment, multilingual EFL classrooms, classroom-based assessment, language policy*

INTRODUCTION

English language teaching increasingly recognizes that students bring multiple languages into the classroom. These linguistic resources extend beyond English and include home languages, community languages, and other languages students know (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017; Duarte, 2019). This understanding challenges the English-only approaches that dominated language pedagogy for many years. Multilingual students navigate classrooms where English coexists with their other

languages. Teachers face an important practical question: how can they use students' multilingualism to support English language learning? The monolingual framework that treated home languages as problems rather than resources no longer fits classroom realities (Makalela, 2015).

Translanguaging offers a pedagogical framework that views students' full linguistic repertoires as an integrated resource for learning. Unlike code-switching, which assumes languages to be separate systems, translanguaging emphasizes the fluid and unified use of multilingual competence (Probyn, 2015; Y. Wang & Li, 2022). Teachers who use translanguaging allow students to draw on all their languages to construct meaning, develop metalinguistic awareness, and engage with content (Alasmari et al., 2022; Sun, 2024). Research highlights that translanguaging enhances comprehension and learner confidence, while supporting multilingual identity. (Almashour, 2024; Tran, 2025). Teachers increasingly view home languages not as interference but as cognitive and social resources that support English learning.

Formative assessment is essential in language instruction. Unlike summative evaluation, formative assessment focuses on learning by providing ongoing feedback that helps students understand their current performance and identify ways to improve (Pan et al., 2024; Zeng & Huang, 2021). Effective formative assessment includes strategic questioning, peer and self-assessment, dialogic feedback, and instructional adjustments based on evidence of student learning (Latif & Wasim, 2024; Yan et al., 2022). However, in multilingual EFL classrooms, teachers encounter challenges when aligning formative assessment with translanguaging practices. They must balance standardized expectations with culturally responsive approaches, and they often face institutional pressures that privilege English-only assessment despite students' multilingual repertoires (Ismail et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2024).

When formative assessment incorporates translanguaging, teachers gain more accurate insights into student knowledge. Students can demonstrate what they know rather than being limited by what they can express in English alone (Ascenzi-Moreno, 2018; D. Wang & East, 2024). They show deeper thinking, take intellectual risks, and engage more actively when assessment allows them to draw on their full linguistic repertoires (Fine & Braaten, 2025; Greenier et al., 2024). Translanguaging shifts formative assessment from a monolingual practice that often disadvantages multilingual learners toward a more equitable process. This approach addresses fundamental questions about assessment validity, cultural responsiveness, and educational equity in multilingual EFL classrooms.

This narrative literature review examines empirical research on translanguaging as a pedagogical strategy and its implications for formative assessment in multilingual EFL contexts.

The review analyzes how translanguaging functions in classroom practice and explores its impact on various formative assessment techniques. It examines the challenges and opportunities that emerge when these approaches intersect. By analyzing empirical studies from diverse geographic and educational contexts, this review shows how translanguaging-informed formative assessment can create more equitable and effective learning environments for multilingual EFL students. The findings offer theoretical insights into multilingual assessment paradigms and practical guidance for educators implementing translanguaging in their formative assessment practices.

METHOD

This narrative literature review examined empirical research on translanguaging pedagogy and formative assessment practices in multilingual EFL classrooms. The search targeted multiple academic databases, including ERIC, Scopus, Google Scholar, JSTOR, and Web of Science. Search terms combined keywords related to translanguaging ("translanguaging," "multilingual pedagogy," "translingual practice") with terms related to assessment ("formative assessment," "classroom assessment," "assessment for learning," "feedback") and context ("EFL," "ESL," "multilingual classroom," "English language learners"). Boolean operators connected these search strings to identify relevant literature. Citation tracking and reference list scanning identified additional studies that were not captured in database searches.

Inclusion criteria required that articles report empirical research with actual data collection, focus on translanguaging practices or formative assessment in EFL or multilingual contexts, and be published as peer-reviewed publications in English. The review excluded purely theoretical papers, conceptual articles without empirical data, and studies focusing exclusively on summative or high-stakes testing without formative assessment components. Thematic analysis identified patterns across the selected articles. Articles were analyzed to extract key information about research contexts, participant characteristics, methodologies, and main findings. The analysis organized findings into three thematic categories: translanguaging pedagogical practices, formative assessment in multilingual contexts, and studies examining both translanguaging and assessment together. Within each category, the analysis identified recurring themes, pedagogical functions, challenges, and opportunities reported across different geographic and educational settings. This approach enabled the review to synthesize findings from diverse contexts while recognizing that translanguaging and formative assessment practices vary across cultural, institutional, and linguistic environments. The narrative synthesis examined not only what researchers found but also how different methodological approaches contributed to understanding these practices. Studies using qualitative methods provided detailed insights into classroom interactions and teacher decision-

making, while mixed-methods research offered both breadth through surveys and depth through interviews and observations.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Translanguaging Pedagogical Practices in Multilingual EFL Classrooms

Examining how translanguaging operates in multilingual EFL classrooms provides essential groundwork for understanding its role in formative assessment. Teachers and students use translanguaging in varied ways that serve distinct yet interconnected purposes. These practices range from spontaneous student interactions to deliberate pedagogical strategies teachers employ to facilitate learning. The forms of translanguaging take and the functions it serves reveal fundamental assumptions about language, learning, and multilingual competence in educational contexts. Teacher perspectives on translanguaging shape implementation in ways that either enable or constrain its pedagogical potential. Analyzing both the practices themselves and the beliefs that support or hinder them clarifies what makes translanguaging effective and what barriers prevent its full realization.

Forms and Functions of Translanguaging Practices

Translanguaging in multilingual EFL classrooms operates through distinct yet interconnected forms. Teacher-initiated translanguaging differs from student-initiated practices, yet both contribute to learning in ways that challenge monolingual assumptions. When teachers use translanguaging deliberately, they move beyond reactive code-switching toward what Probyn (2015) identifies as "pedagogical translanguaging." This intentionality matters because it positions translanguaging as planned pedagogy rather than linguistic accommodation for student deficiency. As Tian & Li (2024) emphasize, translanguaging should be seen as a reconceptualization of pedagogy that transcends the limitations of monolingual language teaching.

Teacher-initiated translanguaging typically addresses instructional needs, such as clarifying complex concepts, providing scaffolding for challenging tasks, or ensuring comprehension of critical information. Teachers control when, how much, and which translanguaging forms appear in instruction. Research in Saudi Arabian universities shows teachers employed translanguaging during classroom management, giving instructions, providing feedback, and explaining complex concepts (Alasmari et al., 2022). These practices occurred more often during virtual office hours than formal class sessions, suggesting teachers view translanguaging as particularly useful for one-on-one support.

Student-initiated translanguaging emerges during peer interactions and reflects learners' meaning-making processes. Students draw on their complete linguistic repertoires to explore ideas, negotiate understanding with peers, and construct knowledge collaboratively. Duarte's (2019) observations of multilingual students in German mainstream classrooms revealed how students used translanguaging spontaneously for elaboration, translation, interpretation, giving examples, and asking questions. These high-order speech acts activated complex cognitive processes naturally during content-based tasks. Bouguerra (2024) likewise found that EFL learners valued translanguaging as a legitimate resource for meaning-making and identity expression, contrasting it with English-only instruction that felt restrictive.

The pedagogical functions of translanguaging serve to extend well beyond simple comprehension support. Research across Chinese, Turkish, and South African contexts demonstrates how translanguaging scaffolds understanding, builds metalinguistic awareness, facilitates meaning-making, supports learner identity, and reduces anxiety (Probyn, 2015; Sun, 2024; Ulum, 2024). When students consciously draw on cross-linguistic knowledge, they develop a deeper understanding of both their home languages and English. This metalinguistic awareness represents a cognitive advantage that multilingual learners possess that monolingual frameworks fail to leverage (Sun, 2024). A systematic review by Huang & Chalmers (2023) further confirms that translanguaging interventions in EFL classrooms enhance comprehension, higher-order thinking, and learner participation. However, methodological limitations across reviewed studies preclude strong causal claims, necessitating more robust intervention research. The underlying rationales differ: in South Africa, translanguaging is framed as essential for equity and access in multilingual classrooms, whereas in Turkey and China, it is often presented as a supplementary strategy to ease anxiety and enhance engagement. This comparison suggests that translanguaging functions both as a structural necessity in highly multilingual African contexts and as a pedagogical innovation in Asian EFL settings.

Translanguaging's role in supporting learner identity and reducing anxiety connects pedagogical practice to socio-emotional dimensions of learning. Multilingual students often experience language classrooms as sites where their home languages carry deficit associations while English represents aspiration and success. This linguistic hierarchy creates anxiety and undermines confidence. When teachers welcome translanguaging, they communicate that students' home languages have value and legitimacy in educational spaces. The anxiety reduction reported across Turkish (Ulum, 2024) and Chinese (Sun, 2024) contexts reflects more than linguistic comfort—it signals identity validation and a sense of belonging. Song et al. (2022) also show that

translanguaging supports students' social-emotional learning by reducing negative emotions and fostering classroom belonging.

The relationship between translanguaging and cognitive engagement challenges assumptions about language learning that require maximum target-language exposure. Research demonstrates that translanguaging facilitates deeper cognitive processing rather than impeding English development. When students can think through complex problems using their complete linguistic resources, they engage at higher cognitive levels than when they struggle to operate exclusively in English. The cognitive energy saved by not constantly translating into English allows focus on critical thinking, analysis, and creativity. Thus, if cognitive engagement is prioritized over maximal English-only exposure, translanguaging becomes not merely acceptable but pedagogically advantageous for multilingual learners (Duarte, 2019; Galante, 2020; Huang & Chalmers, 2023; Plata & Macawile, 2022).

Teacher Beliefs and Attitudes

Teacher beliefs about translanguaging exist in tension between pedagogical convictions and institutional constraints. Many teachers recognize translanguaging's value for learning (Galante, 2020) while simultaneously worrying about violating English-only norms or fostering L1 dependency (Yuvayapan, 2019). Others express concern that translanguaging may inadequately prepare students for English-dominated assessment systems, a dilemma also noted in South African and European contexts (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017; Probyn, 2015). This ambivalence reflects larger contradictions in multilingual education where policies espouse multilingual competence as a goal while actual practices privilege monolingual performance. Teachers navigate these contradictions daily, making moment-by-moment decisions about language use without clear institutional guidance or professional consensus about best practices (Huang & Chalmers, 2023).

The shift from monolingual ideology toward multilingual acceptance appears neither linear nor complete. Even teachers who intellectually embrace translanguaging often retain monolingual habits and assumptions shaped by their own educational experiences (Duarte, 2019). The process requires more than exposure to translanguaging theory; teachers need opportunities to examine their beliefs about language learning and analyze how these beliefs influence practice. Without such critical reflection, professional development focused solely on strategies produces superficial change that may not persist when institutional pressures mount (Plata & Macawile, 2022).

Teacher attitudes toward translanguaging vary considerably across contexts and are influenced by personal language learning experiences, professional training, and institutional cultures. Research in Turkish contexts shows pre-service teachers hold positive views toward

translanguaging as a natural and beneficial practice, yet they identify challenges in maintaining balance between L1 and L2 and express concerns about potential L1 dependency (Ulum, 2024). These concerns reveal how teachers internalize competing discourses about language learning—valuing multilingualism intellectually while worrying about practical implementation. The worries reflect not ignorance but rather teachers grappling with genuine pedagogical dilemmas about optimal language use across different contexts and purposes. For example, pre-service teachers in Turkey view translanguaging positively as a natural part of meaning-making (Ulum, 2024), while teachers in South Africa adopt a more ambivalent stance, balancing its necessity for comprehension with policy-driven English dominance (Probyn, 2015). In Middle Eastern contexts like Saudi Arabia, teachers accept translanguaging informally but hesitate to legitimize it formally (Alasmari et al., 2022). This pattern shows that teacher beliefs cannot be separated from institutional power structures and language ideologies across regions.

How teachers conceptualize their role also shapes the implementation of translanguaging. Those who see themselves primarily as English language instructors may view translanguaging as compromising their teaching mission (Yuvayapan, 2019), while others who frame their role as supporting overall student development more readily embrace translanguaging as legitimate pedagogy (Galante, 2020). This identity dimension matters because it influences not only whether teachers use translanguaging but also how they frame it for students, administrators, and themselves. When teachers believe their professional responsibility includes leveraging all students' resources for learning, translanguaging becomes a principled practice rather than a reluctant accommodation.

The relationship between teacher beliefs and actual practice proves complex. Teachers may hold positive translanguaging beliefs yet implement them inconsistently due to contextual constraints, lack of confidence, or insufficient pedagogical knowledge (Huang & Chalmers, 2023). Conversely, some teachers translanguage regularly despite harboring reservations about its appropriateness, responding to immediate classroom needs even when uncertain about theoretical justifications (Probyn, 2015). This belief–practice gap suggests that supporting the implementation of translanguaging requires addressing both ideological and practical dimensions simultaneously.

Translanguaging in Formative Assessment Practices

Moving from general translanguaging pedagogy to its specific applications in formative assessment requires examining how multilingual perspectives reshape assessment theory and practice. Formative assessment in multilingual contexts raises fundamental questions about which assessment measures to use, how validity is conceptualized, and whose knowledge counts as

legitimate. Traditional assessment frameworks designed for monolingual contexts prove inadequate for multilingual learners whose competencies exceed what they can demonstrate in English alone. The techniques teachers use for formative assessment—feedback, questioning, peer and self-assessment, documentation—all take on different dimensions when translanguaging becomes possible. Student experiences with translanguaging assessment reveal how these practices affect learning, engagement, and identity in ways that teacher-focused research often overlooks. Understanding translanguaging in formative assessment thus requires attention to theoretical reconceptualization, practical implementation strategies, and learner perspectives simultaneously.

Reconceptualizing Assessment in Multilingual Contexts

Traditional assessment in language education rests on monolingual assumptions that distort what multilingual learners know and can do. When assessment requires English-only performance, it conflates language proficiency with content knowledge and positions multilingual students' linguistic resources as deficits to overcome (Ascenzi-Moreno, 2018; Probyn, 2015). Such practices generate systematically invalid data about multilingual learners' actual capabilities. The invalidity matters because assessment data shape educational decisions about placement, instruction, and advancement, and when assessments underestimate students' knowledge, they receive inappropriate instruction and unequal opportunities. Broader critiques of monolingual ideologies in education reinforce this problem (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017; Galante, 2020).

Reconceptualizing assessment requires distinguishing what assessment measures from what it should measure. In content areas, assessment ideally evaluates conceptual understanding rather than English fluency (Probyn, 2015; D. Wang & East, 2024). Students may grasp scientific principles or historical analysis without fully articulating their understanding in English. Monolingual assessments cannot distinguish between a lack of knowledge and a lack of English proficiency. Translanguaging assessment offers a solution by allowing students to demonstrate knowledge through their full linguistic repertoires, producing more valid data because it captures the intended construct—content knowledge—rather than the confounded construct of knowledge expressed only in English (Huang & Chalmers, 2023). Broader pedagogical perspectives also highlight the role of translanguaging in rethinking classroom practice (Duarte, 2019).

The shift from assessment of learning to assessment for learning takes on particular urgency in multilingual contexts where formative assessment serves equity purposes. Formative assessment provides ongoing feedback to support learning improvement rather than judging final performance (Demekash et al., 2024; Latif & Wasim, 2024). For multilingual learners, translanguaging within formative assessment creates low-stakes opportunities to demonstrate

emerging understanding, receive comprehensible feedback, and develop both content knowledge and English proficiency (Pan et al., 2024). The formative context makes translanguaging pedagogically appropriate in ways that summative assessment may not, since the goal is learning rather than gatekeeping. Broader teacher-perspective research also suggests that embracing translanguaging fosters equity and inclusion (Ulum, 2024). In African schools, translanguaging-based formative assessment primarily addresses equity concerns by validating students' multilingual repertoires (Probyn, 2015), whereas in Asian contexts it is often linked to efficiency and creativity in language learning (Greenier et al., 2024; Pan et al., 2024). This distinction illustrates how translanguaging in assessment can serve either justice-oriented goals or pragmatic pedagogical ones, depending on the socio-political context.

Assessment practices also reflect cultural assumptions about appropriate interaction, acceptable ways to demonstrate knowledge, and norms for feedback. Western assessment traditions privilege individual performance, explicit verbal expression, and direct questioning, which may feel unfamiliar to students from other cultural backgrounds (Song et al., 2022). Culturally responsive formative assessment must therefore accommodate not only linguistic diversity but also diverse norms for participation and knowledge display (Huang & Chalmers, 2023; Pan et al., 2024). If these cultural assumptions remain unexamined, translanguaging alone cannot address inequity in multilingual assessment (Galante, 2020).

The validity question central to any assessment innovation takes on specific characteristics in translanguaging assessment. Some worry that allowing multiple languages compromises the measurement of English proficiency, but this reflects confusion about the purposes of assessment (Probyn, 2015; D. Wang & East, 2024). In formative contexts, English proficiency may not be the construct being measured; students can legitimately demonstrate disciplinary understanding using translanguaging without invalidating assessment of those competencies. When the construct is language development itself, translanguaging assessment requires carefully designed tasks and rubrics to distinguish purposeful multilingual communication from the inability to use English. Research shows that teachers and students use translanguaging strategically rather than excessively, suggesting that validity concerns are often overstated (Yuvayapan, 2019). Supportive research on identity and attitudes confirms that worries about translanguaging stem from broader ideological tensions rather than empirical evidence (Almashour, 2024; Cenoz & Gorter, 2017). A further contrast emerges when comparing policy environments: in contexts with strict English-only mandates, such as Saudi Arabia, translanguaging remains marginalized despite its pedagogical benefits (Alasmari et al., 2022). By contrast, in South Africa and some European systems, translanguaging is legitimized within equity-oriented policy frameworks (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017;

Probyn, 2015). This divergence underscores that institutional policy either constrains or enables teachers' agency, shaping whether translanguaging is framed as resistance or as officially sanctioned pedagogy.

Translanguaging-Informed Formative Assessment Techniques

Feedback represents perhaps the most critical formative assessment practice that translanguaging can enhance. The effectiveness of feedback depends on student comprehension; when feedback is only in English, learners may not fully grasp its meaning and thus cannot use it productively (Y. Wang & Li, 2022). Teachers strategically use L1 to clarify the meaning of feedback before guiding students back into English, which supports both comprehension and target language development (Duarte, 2019; D. Wang & East, 2024). This scaffolded approach emphasizes that content understanding and English proficiency can develop together rather than compete with each other.

The form feedback takes matters as much as its linguistic composition. Translanguaging feedback can be oral or written, teacher-provided or peer-generated, immediate or delayed, each serving different pedagogical purposes (Makalela, 2015). Oral feedback during teacher-student conferences enables responsive translanguaging, in which teachers adjust their language use based on students' comprehension cues (Y. Wang & Li, 2022). Written feedback permits more deliberate bilingual composition, modeling English structures while ensuring clarity through L1 explanations (Ascenzi-Moreno, 2018). Peer feedback in shared languages also provides opportunities for collaborative meaning-making, thereby extending students' assessment capacity (Plata & Macawile, 2022; D. Wang & East, 2024).

Interactive assessment through questioning and classroom dialogue creates formative opportunities particularly well-suited to translanguaging. Strategic questioning, as demonstrated in TEFL contexts, allows teachers to probe understanding and stimulate deeper thinking (Pan et al., 2024). When students can draw on their full linguistic repertoire, more learners participate actively, providing richer evidence of their thinking (Probyn, 2015; Sun, 2024). This participation also strengthens students' confidence and helps bridge the gap between cognitive challenge and linguistic accessibility (Yan et al., 2022). Well-designed translanguaging questions thus function as both assessment and language development tools.

Collaborative assessment practices, including peer and self-assessment, benefit from translanguaging because they require metacognitive awareness and articulation of learning processes (Ulum, 2024). Students need appropriate language to describe their strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement, and translanguaging provides that expressive capacity

(Song et al., 2022; Yuvayapan, 2019). Limiting students to English alone risks superficial evaluation and weakens the formative value of assessment. Allowing translanguaging reduces cognitive load and encourages deeper engagement with assessment criteria (Almashour, 2024; D. Wang & East, 2024).

Documentation and assessment tools also require reconceptualization to integrate translanguaging effectively. Traditional rubrics often presuppose English-only performance and overlook the communicative value of multilingual artifacts (Huang & Chalmers, 2023). Teachers face complex questions: whether to assess languages separately or holistically, how to weigh content against linguistic form, and how to recognize communication effectiveness regardless of language choice (Zeng & Huang, 2021). Adapted rubrics in Chinese and Turkish contexts, for example, have credited students for strategic language use and clarity of expression across languages (Ulum, 2024; D. Wang & East, 2024). This reflects a paradigm shift from treating language as a barrier to recognizing it as a resource in assessment (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017).

Portfolio assessment offers particular affordances for translanguaging because portfolios collect diverse artifacts over time, enabling students to demonstrate learning through multiple modes and languages (Ascenzi-Moreno, 2018). A portfolio might include English-only work, L1 compositions, and translanguaged texts, revealing the full range of student abilities (Galante, 2020; Tian & Li, 2024). Reviewing portfolios together allows teachers and learners to discuss language choices, reflect on translanguaging as a learning strategy, and articulate developmental trajectories (Bouguerra, 2024; Tran, 2025). This makes translanguaging visible as a developmental resource rather than a hidden or remedial practice.

Student Experiences and Outcomes

Student perspectives on translanguaging in formative assessment reveal insights that teacher-focused research often misses. Students show sophisticated awareness of when and why translanguaging supports learning and when it may pose challenges (Fine & Braaten, 2025). They note that using multiple languages reduces anxiety, removing the constant fear of English errors, while enabling deeper engagement with ideas (Song et al., 2022; Ulum, 2024). Students also recognize that translanguaging communicates respect for their linguistic identities, rather than only valuing them as future English speakers (Galante, 2020).

Research with sixth-grade students reveals particularly nuanced understandings of translanguaging's role in collaborative assessment contexts. In formative science assessments, students reported that using multiple languages with peers enabled them to focus on scientific concepts without constant translation (Fine & Braaten, 2025). They perceived translanguaging as

supporting both English development and deeper content understanding, challenging assumptions that L1 hinders L2 acquisition (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017). Students articulated that translanguage enabled them to demonstrate knowledge they possessed but could not yet fully express in English (Probyn, 2015). This metacognitive awareness reflects sophisticated thinking about language and learning that English-only frameworks often fail to capture (Duarte, 2019).

The relationship between translanguage assessment and student confidence operates through multiple mechanisms. Allowing students to use all linguistic resources removes barriers and encourages them to attempt challenging tasks (Fine & Braaten, 2025). Translanguage also enables students to produce work that more accurately reflects their competence, providing a realistic sense of achievement (D. Wang & East, 2024). Moreover, by validating students' multilingual identities, translanguage assessment strengthens academic self-concepts beyond language-specific outcomes (Almashour, 2024; Galante, 2020).

Engagement with formative assessment processes increases when translanguage makes assessment accessible and meaningful. Students participate more actively in peer assessment when they can use shared languages, and they offer richer self-assessment when articulating thoughts with their full repertoires (Plata & Macawile, 2022; Song et al., 2022). They also ask more questions and seek feedback more readily when not confined to English (Fine & Braaten, 2025; Pan et al., 2024). This active involvement matters because formative assessment depends on student engagement; passive reception of feedback diminishes its learning potential.

The learning outcomes associated with translanguage assessment extend beyond task performance to long-term skill development. Students build stronger bilingual academic competence when assessment recognizes both languages (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017; Tian & Li, 2024). They also strengthen content knowledge by expressing a full understanding without linguistic restriction. Through self-assessment, they develop metacognitive awareness and begin to see languages as integrated resources rather than separate systems (Ascenzi-Moreno, 2018; Duarte, 2019)—this metalinguistic awareness benefits communication across academic domains.

Student experiences with translanguage assessment vary by linguistic background and educational context. Those who share home languages with peers experience translanguage differently than isolated speakers in diverse classrooms (Bouguerra, 2024). Social prestige of languages also shapes whether translanguage feels empowering or risky (Alasmari et al., 2022). Moreover, students in contexts where translanguage is institutionally supported engage with greater confidence than those in contexts where it is unofficial or contested (Fine & Braaten, 2025; Makalela, 2015). These variations show that the impact of translanguage depends not only on pedagogy but also on the broader social and policy environment. In primary classrooms, such as

in Chinese contexts, translanguaging often functions as a scaffold for comprehension and collaborative meaning-making (Greenier et al., 2024), while in middle school science classes in the U.S., students emphasize its role in fairness and identity (Fine & Braaten, 2025). At the university level, however, translanguaging is frequently framed in relation to academic English demands and identity negotiation (Almashour, 2024). This cross-level comparison suggests that younger learners view translanguaging pragmatically as a tool for understanding, whereas older learners attach broader socio-academic meanings linked to equity, legitimacy, and academic identity.

Challenges, Opportunities, and Implications

Implementing translanguaging in formative assessment involves navigating a complex landscape of constraints and possibilities that shape what teachers can accomplish in actual classroom contexts. The challenges are not merely technical difficulties to overcome through better training but reflect deeper tensions between competing educational values, institutional structures, and ideological commitments. At the same time, the opportunities translanguaging assessment offers extend beyond individual student benefits to potentially transforming how multilingual education conceptualizes competence, equity, and learning. The implications reach across multiple domains—research agendas requiring attention, policies needing reform, practices demanding development, and professional preparation requiring redesign. Understanding these challenges and opportunities in relation to one another reveals that translanguaging assessment implementation cannot succeed through isolated interventions but requires systemic change that addresses multiple dimensions simultaneously.

Challenges in Implementation

Policy contradictions create fundamental implementation challenges that individual teachers cannot resolve on their own. Educational systems often espouse multilingualism as valuable while simultaneously mandating English-only instruction and assessment. These contradictory policies place teachers in untenable positions where following official mandates means ignoring professional knowledge about multilingual pedagogy (Alasmari et al., 2022). When teachers translanguage despite restrictive policies, they risk administrative censure even as they serve student learning needs (Makalela, 2015). This tension underscores the need for policy reform rather than relying only on teacher training.

The high-stakes testing culture exerts a powerful influence on formative assessment practices, even when formative and summative assessments serve different purposes. The dominance of English-only standardized tests sends implicit messages that translanguaging lacks

legitimacy and that formative practices not aligned with summative expectations are less valuable (Zeng & Huang, 2021). Teachers internalize these messages and restrict translanguaging in formative contexts, despite evidence that translanguaging supports learning (D. Wang & East, 2024). The persistence of a hierarchy—where translanguaging is tolerated in formative but excluded from summative assessment—reveals lingering monolingual bias (Plata & Macawile, 2022). This dynamic communicates to students that translanguaging is acceptable only in low-stakes contexts, undermining claims that multilingual competence has genuine value.

Professional development for translanguaging assessment faces challenges beyond insufficient time or resources. The transformative potential of translanguaging assessment requires shifts in beliefs about language, learning, and assessment that workshops alone cannot accomplish (Huang & Chalmers, 2023). Teachers need opportunities to examine their own linguistic ideologies, practice translanguaging assessment with peer support, and reflect on its impact on learning (D. Wang & East, 2024). Without institutional commitment, professional development risks producing superficial changes that fade under pressure from monolingual policies (Almashour, 2024).

The balance between supporting students through L1 use and developing English proficiency is a genuine pedagogical dilemma with no formulaic solutions. Teachers worry that excessive translanguaging reduces exposure to English needed for acquisition (Probyn, 2015). Research highlights that the "optimal" use of translanguaging depends on proficiency levels, task purposes, and content difficulty (Duarte, 2019; Tian & Li, 2024). Because contextual factors vary so widely, teachers require frameworks for situated judgment rather than universal rules (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017). This uncertainty creates anxiety among teachers who wish to support learners effectively without undermining English development.

Managing classroom linguistic diversity intensifies challenges in implementing translanguaging. In bilingual classrooms where teachers and students share two languages, barriers are primarily ideological (Makalela, 2015). In multilingual classrooms with many home languages, practical challenges multiply: teachers cannot scaffold instruction in every language, and peers may not share the identical linguistic repertoires (Galante, 2020). Assessment of multilingual work also becomes complex when teachers lack proficiency in the languages students use (Bouguerra, 2024). Thus, the question shifts from whether to translanguage to how to translanguage equitably when linguistic resources vary dramatically.

Assessment literacy deficits further compound translanguaging implementation challenges. Teachers who lack a clear understanding of formative assessment cannot integrate translanguaging effectively, even with strong beliefs in its value (Latif & Wasim, 2024). Studies in Ethiopia and

Saudi Arabia reveal that many teachers still conflate formative with summative assessment and rely on traditional testing (Alasmari et al., 2022; Demekash et al., 2024). Adding translanguaging complexity to this shaky foundation proves counterproductive. This highlights the importance of sequencing professional development to first establish strong formative assessment literacy before integrating translanguaging-specific applications.

Opportunities and Affordances

Equity gains through translanguaging assessment address fundamental injustices in how schools evaluate multilingual students. When assessment allows translanguaging, learners can demonstrate knowledge they previously could not show in English-only contexts (Ascenzi-Moreno, 2018). This more accurate assessment prevents inappropriate remedial placement and opens advanced opportunities, thereby producing more equitable educational trajectories (Makalela, 2015; Probyn, 2015). The equity dimension extends beyond individual benefits to challenging systemic practices that have historically disadvantaged multilingual learners (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017). Teachers report discovering capabilities that English-only assessment had hidden, prompting instructional adjustments better aligned with student needs (Duarte, 2019).

Beyond improving equity, translanguaging assessment also transforms how multilingualism itself is conceptualized. The shift from deficit to asset-based perspectives on multilingualism represents a profound opportunity that translanguaging assessment offers. Traditional assessment frames multilingual students as deficient in English, whereas translanguaging reframes multilingualism as competence and resource (Almashour, 2024; Galante, 2020). This asset orientation reshapes how teachers, students, and institutions interpret linguistic repertoires, positioning multilingual students as resourceful rather than remedial (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017). Consequently, such reframing influences curriculum design and institutional culture by validating multilingualism and fostering stronger academic identities and a sense of belonging (Bouguerra, 2024; Tian & Li, 2024).

Equally important, teacher knowledge about student capabilities also improves dramatically when assessment reveals what translanguaging makes visible. Teachers often express surprise at the depth of understanding students show when allowed to use multiple languages (Makalela, 2015). These insights not only reshape perceptions of individual learners but can also shift teachers' broader views of multilingualism as an asset (Duarte, 2019; Galante, 2020). When teachers encounter evidence contradicting deficit narratives, they begin questioning underlying assumptions, a process that supports more equitable multilingual education (Probyn, 2015).

At the pedagogical level, translanguaging enhances the effectiveness of formative feedback. When students fully comprehend suggestions and can apply them productively, feedback becomes genuinely formative.. Bilingual feedback ensures comprehension in ways English-only feedback cannot (Y. Wang & Li, 2022). Students who better understand feedback can act on it, leading to more meaningful improvements in their work (D. Wang & East, 2024). This finding highlights that feedback comprehension is central to formative value; without it, even detailed feedback yields little learning benefit (Ascenzi-Moreno, 2018). Translanguaging, therefore, functions less as an accommodation than as a necessity for effective formative assessment with multilingual learners.

Technology-mediated translanguaging assessment creates new possibilities unavailable in traditional contexts. Digital platforms can facilitate bilingual feedback, peer assessment across languages, multimodal submissions, and multilingual portfolios (Sun, 2024). These tools may reduce practical barriers in highly multilingual classrooms where teachers cannot provide scaffolding in all languages (Huang & Chalmers, 2023). While translation tools remain imperfect, they can enable communication that might otherwise be impossible, making translanguaging assessment more scalable and sustainable (Zhang et al., 2024).

Creative assessment design flourishes when monolingual constraints lift. Studies suggest that translanguaging enables students to create multimodal and innovative compositions, capturing creativity and competence beyond traditional essays (Galante, 2020; D. Wang & East, 2024). Such assessments can reinvigorate practices that have become routine, encouraging students to exceed minimum requirements and engage more deeply with content (Ulum, 2024; Yan et al., 2022). The quality improvements indicate that monolingual constraints artificially limit what students can demonstrate, giving teachers only partial views of student capabilities (Tran, 2025).

Implications for Research, Policy, and Practice

Research examining translanguaging in formative assessment needs to move beyond showing that it works toward exploring how, when, and for whom it works best. Current studies suggest that translanguaging assessment benefits multilingual learners across diverse contexts, but the variation in effectiveness remains underexplored (Huang & Chalmers, 2023; Zhang et al., 2024). Questions about differences by age, proficiency level, or linguistic background, as well as transfer to summative performance and long-term outcomes, require longitudinal and comparative designs that are still rare. Without such evidence, teachers lack clear guidance for adapting translanguaging assessment to particular classrooms and student populations.

Student voice also requires greater attention. Fine & Braaten (2025) show that students can offer sophisticated insights into how translanguaging affects their learning and assessment

experiences, yet most studies focus on teacher practices with limited student perspectives. More participatory approaches could generate knowledge grounded in learners' realities rather than adult assumptions, highlighting dimensions of motivation, identity, and equity that teacher-centered research may overlook.

The development of frameworks and tools represents another urgent area. Teachers often adapt existing assessment approaches on their own without systematic guidance. Research-based frameworks could provide principles for task design, rubrics that evaluate multilingual work, and protocols for bilingual feedback (Ascenzi-Moreno, 2018; D. Wang & East, 2024). These resources must remain adaptable to context while offering enough structure to support teachers unfamiliar with translanguaging assessment.

Policy implications extend beyond permission to active support. Studies show that official policies often mandate English-only assessment even while classrooms rely daily on translanguaging practices (Alasmari et al., 2022; Probyn, 2015). Effective policy support would require funding for professional development, time for teacher collaboration, curriculum materials that incorporate translanguaging approaches, and accountability systems that value multilingual demonstrations of knowledge. Without such alignment, the gap between policy and practice will persist, leaving teachers to negotiate contradictions individually.

For practice, the challenge is to help teachers develop judgment about when translanguaging enhances assessment and when it might complicate measurement. Professional development should address not only strategies but also the underlying beliefs about language and learning that shape assessment decisions (Demekash et al., 2024; Latif & Wasim, 2024). Short workshops are unlikely to achieve this; teachers need sustained opportunities for reflection, peer support, and experimentation.

Teacher education also bears responsibility for preparing future educators to see translanguaging as a standard aspect of assessment literacy rather than a specialized topic. Programs that normalize multilingual assessment across methods courses and practicum experiences can foster this shift (Galante, 2020; Ulum, 2024). Critical reflection on monolingual ideologies should be integral, encouraging pre-service teachers to examine how deficit views have shaped their own experiences and to envision more equitable approaches for their students.

Realizing the full potential of translanguaging assessment will require coordination across researchers, policymakers, teacher educators, practitioners, and students themselves. Each group contributes knowledge and resources that cannot be developed in isolation. Without such collaboration, translanguaging assessment risks remaining a marginal practice taken up sporadically by individual teachers rather than a mainstream component of equitable multilingual education.

In sum, the reviewed studies suggest that translanguaging in formative assessment serves multiple purposes depending on context: in African schools, it functions as an equity mechanism for access, in Asian classrooms, it is often leveraged for efficiency and engagement, and in Western middle schools, it connects to identity and fairness. Across levels of education, younger learners emphasize comprehension and participation, while older students highlight issues of legitimacy and academic identity. Policy environments further shape how translanguaging is framed—either as resistance in English-only systems or as legitimate pedagogy in multilingual-friendly frameworks. These patterns indicate that translanguaging should be understood not as a uniform method, but as a context-sensitive strategy whose value emerges at the intersection of pedagogy, policy, and learner identity.

CONCLUSION

Evidence from translanguaging research in multilingual EFL classrooms exposes a significant disparity between multilingual learners' competencies and the restricted expression permitted by monolingual assessment frameworks. When formative assessment welcomes translanguaging, students show deeper conceptual understanding, engage more actively in learning processes, and develop stronger academic identities. Teachers obtain clearer insights into students' understanding, allowing them to tailor instruction to genuine learning needs rather than perceived shortcomings tied solely to English proficiency. The pedagogical functions of translanguaging—scaffolding comprehension, building metalinguistic awareness, reducing anxiety, and validating identity—work synergistically with formative assessment's learning-oriented purposes. However, implementation faces substantial challenges rooted not in translanguaging's pedagogical soundness but in systemic contradictions between multilingual realities and monolingual ideologies. Policy frameworks mandate English-only assessment while classrooms become increasingly multilingual. High-stakes testing pressures restrict formative translanguaging even as research documents its effectiveness. Teachers lack both the foundations of assessment literacy and professional development specific to translanguaging to implement these approaches confidently. These challenges require systemic solutions addressing policy alignment, institutional support, professional preparation, and resource allocation simultaneously.

The path forward requires reconceptualizing multilingual competence as the norm rather than the exception in language education. Translanguaging in formative assessment offers more than accommodation for linguistic deficiency—it represents fundamentally different assumptions about what counts as knowledge, how learning happens, and whose linguistic resources have legitimacy in educational contexts. Current research establishes that translanguaging assessment

benefits multilingual learners, but questions remain about optimal implementation across diverse contexts, long-term developmental trajectories, and scaling beyond individual teacher innovation. Future investigation needs longitudinal designs examining how translanguaging assessment affects sustained learning outcomes, comparative studies identifying which approaches work best for whom under what conditions, and participatory research centering student voices in assessment design. The transformative potential of translanguaging assessment for promoting equity in multilingual education can be achieved through collective action involving researchers, policymakers, teacher educators, and classroom practitioners. Without such coordination, translanguaging risks remaining a marginal practice rather than standard professional knowledge in contexts where most language learning actually occurs—multilingual classrooms where students bring rich linguistic resources that current assessment paradigms fail to recognize, value, or leverage for learning.

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The Effectiveness and Implementation of Gamification in Higher Education English Learning

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effectiveness of gamification in higher education English learning, drawing on empirical studies and systematic reviews. The analysis focuses on three dimensions: the impact of gamification across language skills, the role of design elements and platforms, and the theoretical and methodological issues that shape current findings. Results show that gamification is most consistently effective in vocabulary and pronunciation, where discrete, repetitive tasks align well with immediate feedback and spaced practice. Grammar, reading, and writing benefit motivation and engagement, but improvements in accuracy, comprehension, or rhetorical sophistication remain inconsistent. Immediate feedback, progress tracking, and adaptive challenges emerge as the strongest design features, while points, badges, and leaderboards produce mixed outcomes. Platform comparisons reveal that Kahoot! is effective for synchronous participation, Quizizz supports asynchronous review, and Duolingo promotes independent learning, though none alone guarantees durable outcomes. Theoretical perspectives such as Self-Determination Theory, Flow Theory, and the ARCS model help explain motivational gains, but they are rarely tested comparatively, limiting their explanatory power. Methodological weaknesses—including short intervention durations, variable instruments, weak control-group designs, and geographic concentration in Asia—further constrain generalizability. The review concludes that gamification holds substantial, but context-dependent, promise for English language education and must be integrated strategically with pedagogical objectives to ensure sustainable learning outcomes.

Keywords: *gamification, higher education, English language learning, digital platforms, educational technology*

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, digital platforms such as Kahoot!, Quizizz, and Duolingo have become widely used in university English courses. Their design centres on points, badges, leaderboards, and instant feedback, and these features are often promoted as ways to address persistent problems such as low participation, passive learning, and uneven skill development. The spread of these tools mirrors broader technological changes in higher education, though adoption has often outpaced systematic evaluation. Zhang & Hasim (2023) documented their extensive use across institutions but also noted significant differences in the depth of pedagogical integration.

Whether gamification provides lasting benefits rather than short-term novelty remains open to debate, with findings differing across skills and learner groups.

Studies focusing on specific language areas present a varied picture. Research on vocabulary learning shows consistent benefits, notably when game features support repetition and retrieval (Panmei & Waluyo, 2022). Evidence from writing instruction is more mixed, with outcomes shaped by task complexity and the design of game mechanics (Zhihao & Zhonggen, 2022). In the area of reading, quasi-experimental studies have found increases in learner enjoyment and engagement, though the impact on deeper comprehension strategies is less clear (Cheng et al., 2025). Sailer & Homner's (2020) meta-analysis, synthesising experimental studies, confirmed that gamification generally produces small to moderate positive effects on motivation, behaviour, and cognition.

Theoretical perspectives help account for these results. Self-Determination Theory remains influential, with studies showing how game features can support competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Shen et al., 2024). Competence is encouraged by visible progress tracking, autonomy by opportunities to select challenges, and relatedness by collaborative or peer-oriented activities, particularly in writing and reflective learning contexts (Nilubol & Sitthitikul, 2025). Flow Theory adds another dimension by highlighting the role of difficulty calibration in sustaining engagement (Khaldi et al., 2023). The ARCS model has also been applied to gamified learning, linking design principles such as attention, relevance, confidence, and satisfaction to motivational outcomes (Baah et al., 2023). Across these frameworks, feedback emerges as a central element, though studies differ on how it should be designed and delivered (Zolfaghari et al., 2025).

Research design further influences how findings are interpreted. Quasi-experimental approaches make causal inference possible but often simplify classroom realities (Laura-De La Cruz et al., 2023). Systematic reviews offer broader perspectives but must contend with considerable heterogeneity in interventions, outcome measures, and participant profiles (Chan & Lo, 2024; Zhang & Hasim, 2023). Mixed-methods studies enrich the picture by combining test results with students' reflections, often highlighting challenges that quantitative data alone cannot capture (Nilubol & Sitthitikul, 2025). Most interventions remain short-term, typically lasting a single course or semester, and there is still little longitudinal research to assess their long-term impact. The concentration of studies in specific regions also raises questions about the broader applicability of the findings in different educational contexts.

Accordingly, this review is guided by four interconnected objectives that together frame its scope and contribution. First, it aims to analyze the effectiveness of gamification across major English language skills —vocabulary, grammar, reading, writing, and speaking/pronunciation —

to identify patterns of consistent and variable outcomes. Second, it seeks to evaluate which design elements—such as immediate feedback, points, badges, leaderboards, and adaptive challenges—and which platforms, including Kahoot!, Quizizz, and Duolingo, demonstrate reliable associations with either learning gains or motivational effects. Third, the review examines how theoretical perspectives, particularly Self-Determination Theory, Flow Theory, and the ARCS model, are used to interpret gamification’s pedagogical impact, while also considering their explanatory strengths and limitations. Finally, it examines methodological weaknesses across the reviewed studies, including short intervention duration, instrument variability, weak control-group design, and geographic concentration, to highlight gaps and propose directions for future research.

METHOD

This study employed a narrative literature review approach to synthesize recent empirical and review-based research on gamification in higher education English learning collected from databases including Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. The literature search was conducted using Boolean operators to refine and combine keywords for precision, applying combinations such as “gamification” AND “English language learning” AND “higher education”, “gamification” OR “game-based learning”, and “EFL” OR “ESL”. This ensured that both experimental and review studies were retrieved while excluding unrelated work. Inclusion criteria focused on articles investigating gamification in English as a Foreign or Second Language (EFL/ESL) contexts at the tertiary level. In contrast, exclusion criteria ruled out studies from primary or secondary education and non-peer-reviewed sources. The search strategy also filtered for studies explicitly reporting either learning outcomes or motivational effects. This systematic but flexible approach enabled the selection of a dataset that was both rigorous and relevant.

Data analysis proceeded in three phases aligned with the objectives of the review. First, selected studies were categorized by the language skills addressed: vocabulary, grammar, reading, writing, and speaking/pronunciation. Second, design elements and platforms were examined to identify patterns of effectiveness, with a focus on immediate feedback, points, badges, leaderboards, challenges, and tools such as Kahoot!, Quizizz, and Duolingo. Third, theoretical frameworks, including Self-Determination Theory, Flow Theory, and the ARCS model, were evaluated for their explanatory power, alongside methodological issues such as intervention duration, instrument variability, and cultural context. This three-phase approach allowed for both within-domain and cross-domain synthesis to highlight consistencies, contradictions, and research gaps. The narrative review format was chosen for its flexibility in integrating findings across diverse

methodologies and for enabling critical analysis of the theoretical and pedagogical implications of gamified English learning.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Gamification Effectiveness Across Language Skills

Research on gamification in higher education English learning has produced a diverse set of findings across different language skills. While some domains, such as vocabulary and pronunciation, show consistent positive outcomes, others, such as grammar, reading, and writing, show more variable results. These differences reflect both the nature of the skills themselves and the way game mechanics interact with learners' cognitive and affective processes. Vocabulary and pronunciation tend to be more easily gamified because they involve discrete, measurable elements that lend themselves to repetition and feedback. In contrast, complex skills such as writing or reading comprehension require deeper cognitive engagement, making the outcomes less straightforward. The following discussion presents how gamification has been implemented across different language domains, what patterns emerge, and how these findings should be critically interpreted.

Studies on vocabulary learning consistently show that gamification produces substantial, measurable benefits. Panmei & Waluyo (2022) reported that students who used Quizizz to practice vocabulary showed repeated exposure and achieved significantly higher retention rates than those in traditional instruction. Yu (2023) similarly found that the use of points, competition, and immediate feedback significantly increased both acquisition and satisfaction. At the same time, Min et al. (2025) noted that even when motivation improved, test scores did not always reflect lasting learning gains, suggesting that enthusiasm may not automatically translate into performance. Large-scale reviews confirm that vocabulary is the most frequently targeted skill in gamification studies, reflecting its alignment with repetition-based mechanics (Laura-De La Cruz et al., 2023; Zhang & Hasim, 2023). These findings suggest that vocabulary is particularly well suited to gamification, though long-term learning outcomes depend on thoughtful design.

Grammar-focused research, by contrast, shows more uneven results. Noori (2025) observed that gamification through social media reduced anxiety in grammar learning and encouraged practice, but accuracy gains were inconsistent. Jannah et al. (2023) reported similar findings in Indonesian higher education, noting higher student engagement but modest improvements in actual mastery of grammar rules. Khaldi et al. (2023) and Sadeghi et al. (2022) emphasized that motivational gains often outweighed cognitive ones, raising questions about the depth of learning achieved. Some evidence suggests that competitive mechanics, such as leaderboards, may increase

stress for specific learners (Sailer & Homner, 2020). Others, however, point out that when gamification emphasizes feedback rather than competition, it is more effective in lowering affective barriers to grammar practice (Baah et al., 2023). Taken together, grammar remains a domain where gamification can encourage participation but struggles to improve accuracy consistently.

In reading, gamification appears moderately effective, with results varying across contexts and study designs. Cheng et al. (2025) reported that Chinese undergraduates improved in both enjoyment and reading proficiency through gamified tasks, although novelty effects were evident over time. Matyakhan et al. (2024) found that Thai students engaged more readily with gamified reading exercises, but comprehension gains were mostly literal and had limited effects on deeper critical reading. In addition, gamification tends to increase persistence more than comprehension depth, suggesting that learners may read more but not necessarily better (Chan & Lo, 2024; Zolfaghari et al., 2025). Studies of platform use indicate that synchronous tools such as Kahoot! effectively energize participation, while asynchronous platforms like Quizizz provide opportunities for extended review (Orhan Göksün & Gürsoy, 2019; Wang & Tahir, 2020). Despite these benefits, inconsistent outcome measures limit comparability across studies. Reading, therefore, stands as a domain where gamification promotes motivation but provides limited evidence of substantial cognitive development.

Writing presents both encouraging and challenging evidence regarding gamification. Nilubol & Sitthitikul (2025) demonstrated that gamified blended learning improved both writing proficiency and metacognitive awareness when feedback and revision cycles were integrated. Zhihao & Zhonggen (2022) found that gamified time-limited writing tasks enhanced fluency and syntactic accuracy, though gains diminished after the initial intervention period. Saiyad & Mevada (2024) reported measurable improvements in the writing of engineering students, though these were closely tied to peer collaboration and instructor facilitation. Broader reviews highlight that gamification often boosts willingness to engage in writing but does not reliably develop rhetorical or argumentative sophistication (Sailer & Homner, 2020; Zolfaghari et al., 2025). In some contexts, social-media-based grammar gamification indirectly supported writing by lowering anxiety (Noori, 2025). Overall, gamification seems more effective for writing processes such as revision and reflection than for complex composition skills.

Speaking remains the least studied area of gamification, with most evidence limited to pronunciation research. Barcomb & Cardoso (2020) demonstrated that gamified pronunciation training targeting English /r/ and /l/ improved learners' accuracy and reduced anxiety in Japanese classrooms. Tejedor-Garcia et al. (2020) showed that persistence in challenge-based pronunciation

games was more predictive of improvement than initial proficiency, suggesting that motivation plays a critical role. Kahoot! has been used to encourage participation in speaking practice, though the results often remain at the level of engagement rather than communicative competence (Wang & Tahir, 2020). Shen et al. (2024) also noted that online gamification enhanced motivation and relatedness, which may, in turn, indirectly support oral interaction. Despite these promising findings, the lack of large-scale or longitudinal studies leaves speaking underexplored compared to other skills. This gap indicates that while gamification holds promise for oral communication, stronger evidence is still needed.

A cross-domain analysis highlights distinct patterns in how gamification impacts language skills. Vocabulary and pronunciation consistently emerge as the domains with the most apparent benefits, owing to their reliance on discrete and repetitive practice tasks. Grammar, reading, and writing show more variable effects, with motivational improvements often exceeding measurable learning gains. Reviews emphasize that these differences reflect not only skill complexity but also how game mechanics interact with cognitive and affective dimensions (Chan & Lo, 2024; Zhang & Hasim, 2023). Inconsistent results across studies also underline the role of instructional design, as feedback-driven approaches tend to outperform reward-driven ones. Speaking remains the most underrepresented area, underscoring a misalignment between gamification research and communicative teaching priorities. These findings suggest that gamification should not be treated as a universal tool, but rather as a targeted approach for skills that align with repetitive and feedback-oriented practice.

To illustrate these findings, Table 1 summarizes gamification’s effectiveness across language domains, the key mechanisms associated with success, and representative studies.

Table 1. Summary of Gamification Effectiveness by Language Domain

Domain	Effectiveness	Key Mechanisms	Representative Studies
Vocabulary	Strong positive	Spaced repetition + immediate feedback	(Baah et al., 2023; Panmei & Waluyo, 2022; Yu, 2023)
Grammar	Variable	Anxiety reduction > accuracy gains	(Jannah et al., 2023; Noori, 2025; Sadeghi et al., 2022)
Reading	Moderate	Engagement > comprehension depth	(Cheng et al., 2025; Matyakhan et al., 2024; Orhan Göksün & Gürsoy, 2019)
Writing	Moderate	Feedback loops + revision support	(Nilubol & Sitthitikul, 2025; Saiyad & Mevada, 2024; Zhihao & Zhonggen, 2022)
Speaking/ Pronunciation	Limited but promising	Phonological training + persistence	(Barcomb & Cardoso, 2020; Shen et al., 2024; Tejedor-Garcia et al., 2020)

The table shows that gamification produces the most consistent benefits in vocabulary and pronunciation, where learning tasks are repetitive, measurable, and feedback-intensive. Grammar, reading, and writing are less consistent, with many interventions improving motivation more than actual learning outcomes. Speaking remains understudied, representing a significant opportunity for future research. These patterns indicate that gamification is most effective when aligned with discrete and practice-intensive skills rather than as a generic motivational tool across all domains.

Design Elements and Platforms Effectiveness

The effectiveness of gamification is not determined solely by the skill domain being taught, but also by the specific design elements and platforms used to implement it. Across the reviewed studies, several mechanisms consistently appear as critical drivers of learning and engagement, while others demonstrate more limited or even contradictory effects. Immediate feedback and structured progress tracking are the most reliable contributors to learning, whereas elements such as points, badges, and leaderboards primarily serve motivational functions. Similarly, the platforms most commonly used in higher education, such as Kahoot!, Quizizz, and Duolingo, display distinctive strengths and weaknesses depending on the learning context. This section examines these elements and platforms in greater detail, highlighting not only their potential but also their limitations when applied in English language instruction.

Immediate feedback is consistently reported as the most potent feature of gamification, enabling learners to identify errors and correct them during practice. In vocabulary learning, the role of feedback in spaced repetition activities has been shown to strengthen long-term retention and satisfaction (Panmei & Waluyo, 2022; Yu, 2023). Writing studies similarly emphasize that feedback loops integrated into revision cycles improve both accuracy and metacognitive awareness (Nilubol & Sitthitikul, 2025). By contrast, interventions that rely heavily on points or rankings without providing formative feedback often show limited transfer to learning outcomes (Sailer & Homner, 2020). Baah et al. (2023) further argue that feedback aligns directly with the ARCS model by enhancing confidence and satisfaction, which sustain motivation. These findings suggest that immediate feedback is not simply a technical feature but a pedagogical necessity in gamified instruction.

Points and badges remain the most visible gamification mechanics, but their effectiveness tends to be short-lived. Several studies report that while these elements encourage learners to engage more actively in the initial stages of a course, their motivational power diminishes over time (Chan & Lo, 2024). Khaldi et al. (2023) also found that points and badges mainly promote extrinsic motivation, which does not always translate into deep learning or long-term retention. In

grammar instruction, points sometimes increase engagement but fail to improve accuracy significantly (Jannah et al., 2023). At the same time, students often report satisfaction in collecting badges, which may contribute to persistence even when learning outcomes are less visible. This duality highlights the need to integrate points and badges alongside stronger pedagogical strategies carefully. While useful as entry points for engagement, they cannot substitute for meaningful cognitive tasks and feedback-driven learning.

Leaderboards are among the most controversial elements in gamification research, producing both positive and negative outcomes. On one hand, competitive ranking can increase excitement and stimulate participation, particularly in vocabulary games and classroom quizzes (Yu, 2023). On the other hand, studies report that leaderboards may create stress and demotivation for lower-performing students (Sailer & Homner, 2020). Noori (2025) observed that while some learners enjoyed competing, others felt anxious when constantly compared to peers, which reduced their willingness to participate in grammar tasks. Reviews further indicate that leaderboards often benefit high-achieving or competitive students but alienate those with weaker proficiency (Laura-De La Cruz et al., 2023). As a result, leaderboards are best employed in collaborative rather than individual competitive modes, which balance motivation with inclusivity. The evidence suggests that without thoughtful adaptation, leaderboards may amplify inequalities in learner experience.

Progress tracking is another frequently cited design feature that enhances the sustainability of gamification. By visualizing learners' advancement through levels or stages, progress tracking provides a clear sense of competence and direction (Shen et al., 2024). Vocabulary platforms that display accumulated points and completed stages motivate students to persist with practice (Panmei & Waluyo, 2022). Writing studies also confirm that progress dashboards encourage students to revisit tasks and track revisions (Nilubol & Sitthitikul, 2025). Reviews suggest that progress tracking appeals to learners' psychological need for competence in line with Self-Determination Theory (Min et al., 2025). However, without quality feedback, tracking alone risks reducing learning to mechanical score accumulation. This highlights the need to combine progress tracking with formative assessment features that give meaning to the numbers displayed. In this way, tracking becomes not only motivational but also pedagogically valuable.

Challenges represent a core element of gamification that promotes persistence and sustained engagement. Tejedor-Garcia et al. (2020) showed that students who consistently accepted pronunciation challenges achieved greater improvement than those who participated sporadically. In reading tasks, gamified challenges encouraged students to continue practicing even when comprehension gains were modest (Matyakhan et al., 2024). Challenges appear to tap into learners'

intrinsic motivation by presenting tasks that are challenging but attainable, consistent with Flow Theory principles (Khalidi et al., 2023). However, if challenges are too easy, they fail to stimulate engagement, while overly complex tasks risk producing frustration. Studies emphasize that adaptive challenges tailored to learners' proficiency are most effective in sustaining motivation (Chan & Lo, 2024). Thus, challenges remain a double-edged sword: highly effective when calibrated, but counterproductive when misaligned.

Among platforms, Kahoot! Remains the most widely studied tool for gamification in English language classrooms. It is frequently used in synchronous settings to energize participation and assess comprehension (Kohnke & Moorhouse, 2022). Wang & Tahir (2020) found that Kahoot! consistently increases classroom excitement, though its primary benefits are motivational rather than cognitive. In grammar and vocabulary contexts, Kahoot! quizzes provide immediate reinforcement but may not significantly enhance accuracy or deep comprehension. Students generally report enjoying Kahoot! Sessions, which makes it effective for formative assessment and classroom management. However, reviews caution that Kahoot!'s novelty effects wear off over time if used repetitively without integration into broader pedagogical frameworks (Zolfaghari et al., 2025). These findings indicate that Kahoot! is most effective as a complementary tool rather than a comprehensive instructional strategy.

Quizizz has emerged as another dominant platform, offering asynchronous flexibility that distinguishes it from Kahoot!. Orhan Göksün & Gürsoy (2019) reported that Quizizz allowed students to practice reading comprehension independently, enhancing engagement while providing teachers with detailed analytics. Panmei & Waluyo (2022) similarly found that Quizizz supported vocabulary retention through spaced repetition and individual progress tracking. Unlike Kahoot!, which is most effective for short bursts of synchronous engagement, Quizizz appears better suited for sustained practice and review outside class. Students often appreciate the self-paced nature of Quizizz, which reduces pressure while maintaining competitiveness through point accumulation. However, reviews note that Quizizz may lack the social energy of synchronous tools, suggesting that its benefits are context-dependent (Chan & Lo, 2024). Overall, Quizizz offers more substantial support for independent learning, particularly for skills that require repetition.

Duolingo and custom-built applications illustrate a different side of gamification, emphasizing accessibility and learner autonomy. Min et al. (2025) highlighted that Duolingo's gamification aligned well with Self-Determination Theory by supporting competence, autonomy, and relatedness. While learners often enjoy streaks, levels, and rewards, studies show that Duolingo is most effective for vocabulary and basic grammar practice rather than complex writing or speaking tasks. Reviews also caution that reliance on automated mechanics may limit opportunities

for authentic communication (Zhang & Hasim, 2023). Nonetheless, such platforms provide valuable opportunities for learners to engage with English outside formal classroom contexts. Duolingo in particular demonstrates how gamification can democratize access, though its pedagogical limitations underscore the importance of teacher integration. As with other tools, its most significant potential lies in complementing rather than replacing structured instruction.

To summarize these insights, Table 2 synthesizes the primary design elements and platforms, outlining their main functions, effectiveness patterns, and representative studies.

Table 2. Gamification Design Elements and Platforms

Element / Platform	Primary Function	Effectiveness Pattern	Key References
Immediate Feedback	Correct errors, sustain learning	Consistently positive across domains	(Baah et al., 2023; Nilubol & Sitthitikul, 2025)
Points & Badges	Extrinsic motivation	Short-term engagement, limited durability	(Chan & Lo, 2024; Khaldi et al., 2023)
Leaderboards	Competition, peer comparison	Mixed: motivate some, cause anxiety for others	(Noori, 2025; Sailer & Homner, 2020)
Progress Tracking	Visualization of progress	Supports persistence if paired with feedback	(Panmei & Waluyo, 2022; Shen et al., 2024)
Challenges	Adaptive engagement	Effective when calibrated to the learner level	(Chan & Lo, 2024; Tejedor-Garcia et al., 2020)
Kahoot!	Synchronous classroom quizzes	Strong motivational impact, modest learning	(Kohnke & Moorhouse, 2022; Wang & Tahir, 2020)
Quizizz	Asynchronous practice	Enhances retention, supports self-paced study	(Orhan Göksün & Gürsoy, 2019; Wang & Tahir, 2020)
Duolingo/Custom Apps	Independent learning	Useful for basics, limited for complex skills	(Min et al., 2025; Zhang & Hasim, 2023)

The table demonstrates that while gamification elements vary widely in function, only certain features consistently improve learning outcomes. Feedback, progress tracking, and well-calibrated challenges are the strongest pedagogical drivers, while points, badges, and leaderboards primarily influence short-term motivation. Similarly, platform comparisons reveal that Kahoot! excels in synchronous engagement, Quizizz supports asynchronous review, and Duolingo fosters independent learning but with limited depth. These patterns underscore that gamification should not be adopted solely for its novelty but rather integrated thoughtfully to align with pedagogical goals.

Theoretical Insights and Pedagogical Implications

Among the theoretical perspectives applied to gamification in English language learning, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) has been the most influential framework. Studies consistently show that gamified tasks can satisfy the three basic psychological needs identified by SDT: competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Min et al., 2025). Vocabulary platforms like Duolingo, for instance, allow learners to set personal goals and monitor progress, thereby enhancing autonomy and competence. Shen et al. (2024) further demonstrated that online gamification environments foster relatedness by creating a sense of community, even in digital contexts. At the same time, limitations arise when gamified elements overemphasize extrinsic motivators such as points and badges, which may undermine intrinsic motivation over time. This paradox indicates that while gamification can align with SDT, it does so effectively only when mechanics are designed to reinforce rather than replace internal drives. Consequently, SDT provides a valuable lens for explaining both the strengths and pitfalls of gamification in sustaining learner engagement.

Another important theoretical perspective comes from Flow Theory, which emphasizes the balance between challenge and skill as the foundation of optimal learning experiences. Gamification leverages this principle by structuring tasks into progressive levels that calibrate difficulty to learner proficiency (Khaldi et al., 2023). When learners experience this balance, they are more likely to enter a state of flow, marked by immersion, concentration, and intrinsic enjoyment. However, mismatched calibration can quickly lead to boredom when tasks are too easy or to frustration when tasks are too complicated (Chan & Lo, 2024). Pronunciation games, for example, have shown that students persist longer when challenges are slightly beyond their comfort zone but still achievable (Tejedor-Garcia et al., 2020). This suggests that flow-inducing elements are particularly effective for repetitive skills like vocabulary and pronunciation. Nevertheless, for complex tasks such as writing, achieving flow is harder because challenges are less easily standardized. Thus, Flow Theory provides valuable insights into why gamification succeeds in some skills but struggles in others.

The ARCS model (Attention, Relevance, Confidence, and Satisfaction) has also been applied to explain gamification's motivational dynamics. Studies suggest that gamified activities capture learners' attention through novelty and competition, while relevance is enhanced when tasks are contextualized to learners' goals (Baah et al., 2023). Confidence is fostered by immediate feedback and visible progress tracking, which assures learners that their efforts lead to improvement. Satisfaction emerges when achievements are rewarded through badges or recognition, reinforcing continued participation. At the same time, reviews caution that attention driven by novelty is temporary and declines without sustained relevance or meaningful challenge (Chan & Lo, 2024).

This limitation explains why many gamification interventions show strong initial engagement but weaker long-term outcomes. Nonetheless, the ARCS framework highlights that gamification's motivational appeal is multidimensional, requiring alignment of all four components to achieve lasting impact. It also emphasizes that gamification is not merely about engagement but about fostering confidence and satisfaction that support learning persistence.

Despite their explanatory value, SDT, Flow Theory, and ARCS are often applied descriptively rather than rigorously tested. Zhang & Hasim (2023) note that studies frequently invoke these theories to justify design choices but rarely conduct empirical comparisons to determine which framework best predicts outcomes. For example, while SDT explains motivation through psychological needs, it cannot fully account for why learners sometimes disengage despite high perceived autonomy. Flow Theory highlights the importance of challenge calibration, yet it does not adequately explain why motivational gains often fail to transfer into measurable learning. Similarly, ARCS captures the multidimensionality of motivation but provides limited predictive power for learning outcomes. Reviews emphasize that future research should not simply adopt these theories as rhetorical frames but test them directly against one another in controlled designs (Chan & Lo, 2024). Doing so would advance both theoretical precision and pedagogical guidance. In the absence of such comparative testing, the role of theory in gamification research remains more justificatory than explanatory.

Methodological Limitations and Future Directions

A recurrent limitation in gamification research is the short duration of interventions, which often undermines claims about long-term effectiveness. Many studies were conducted over a single semester or less, raising questions about whether improvements reflected authentic learning or temporary novelty effects (Matyakhan et al., 2024; Zhihao & Zhonggen, 2022). Vocabulary studies, in particular, have shown sharp gains early in the intervention, followed by plateaus as novelty wore off. This suggests that gamification's motivational boost may not automatically translate into sustained performance. Longitudinal research with delayed post-tests is rare but necessary to distinguish between immediate excitement and durable learning outcomes. Without extended timelines, conclusions about gamification's educational value remain provisional. Future studies must therefore prioritize longitudinal designs to assess retention and transfer beyond the initial intervention period.

Another methodological weakness lies in the variability of instruments used to measure both motivation and learning outcomes. Some studies rely on self-reported questionnaires with limited validation, while others use teacher-designed tests with varying reliability (Sadeghi et al., 2022).

This inconsistency makes cross-study comparison challenging and weakens the robustness of systematic reviews. For example, in reading studies, gains were often measured by surface-level comprehension questions, while writing outcomes were assessed through highly subjective rubrics. Such variability obscures whether observed improvements reflect genuine skill development or differences in measurement tools. Researchers have called for more standardized instruments to ensure comparability across contexts and skills (Chan & Lo, 2024). Until then, conclusions about the relative effectiveness of gamification must be interpreted cautiously. Future work should adopt validated scales for motivation and standardized proficiency assessments to improve methodological rigor.

The lack of rigorous control group design further limits the reliability of current gamification findings. Many quasi-experimental studies compare gamified instruction with traditional methods but fail to control for variables such as teacher enthusiasm, novelty effects, or additional time-on-task (Khaldi et al., 2023). In some cases, both groups receive different amounts of practice, making it unclear whether improvements are due to gamification or increased exposure. Moreover, random assignment of participants is rare, which introduces bias in interpreting treatment effects. Reviews emphasize that without strong experimental controls, it is difficult to isolate the actual impact of gamification (Zolfaghari et al., 2025). For example, studies of grammar instruction showing motivational gains may reflect teacher encouragement rather than the mechanics of the instruction. To strengthen causal claims, future research must incorporate randomized controlled trials, balanced practice time, and transparent reporting of design procedures. Only then can gamification's effects be distinguished from confounding variables.

Finally, the geographic concentration of gamification research raises concerns about the generalizability of its findings. A large proportion of empirical studies have been conducted in Asian contexts, particularly China, Thailand, and Indonesia (Laura-De La Cruz et al., 2023; Zhang & Hasim, 2023). These contexts often emphasize collective learning and high-stakes testing, which may influence how learners respond to competitive or collaborative mechanics. Evidence from collectivist cultures shows stronger acceptance of team-based competition, while individualist contexts may produce different motivational outcomes. The lack of cross-cultural studies limits our understanding of whether findings apply broadly across higher education systems.

Furthermore, the relative absence of research from regions such as Africa, Latin America, and Europe creates gaps in the literature. Comparative studies across cultural contexts are therefore crucial to identify how sociocultural variables moderate gamification effectiveness. Until such work is conducted, conclusions about gamification's universality should remain tentative.

CONCLUSION

The synthesis of empirical studies and reviews demonstrates that gamification has notable but uneven effects across different English language skills in higher education. Vocabulary and pronunciation emerge as the domains most consistently enhanced, owing to their reliance on discrete, repetitive tasks that align effectively with feedback-driven mechanics such as Quizizz, Duolingo, and pronunciation challenges. Grammar, reading, and writing, while benefiting from higher levels of motivation, show more variable learning outcomes, with improvements often concentrated in surface accuracy, persistence, or engagement rather than long-term cognitive or rhetorical gains. Immediate feedback, progress tracking, and adaptive challenges consistently stand out as the most powerful design elements across domains, whereas points, badges, and leaderboards demonstrate limited or even contradictory effects. Platform comparisons further confirm that Kahoot! excels in synchronous engagement, Quizizz supports asynchronous practice, and Duolingo fosters independent study, but none of these tools alone guarantees lasting achievement. These findings reinforce that gamification is most effective when aligned strategically with pedagogical goals, rather than adopted as a superficial motivational device.

At the theoretical level, Self-Determination Theory, Flow Theory, and the ARCS model provide complementary insights into why gamification motivates learners, yet comparative evaluations reveal that these frameworks are rarely tested against each other in empirical research. SDT explains the satisfaction of competence, autonomy, and relatedness in gamified environments, Flow Theory clarifies the role of challenge calibration, and ARCS emphasizes the multidimensionality of motivational appeal. However, all three are often invoked descriptively rather than analytically. Methodological limitations further constrain the evidence base: most interventions remain short-term, rely on inconsistent instruments, employ weak control group designs, and are geographically concentrated in Asian contexts. These limitations mean that, while current data highlight the motivational power of gamification, its capacity to produce durable language-learning outcomes is less specific. Future research must therefore prioritize longitudinal designs, standardized measures, stronger experimental controls, and cross-cultural comparisons to advance both theoretical precision and pedagogical practice. In conclusion, gamification offers promising but context-dependent benefits in English language education, and its success depends on the thoughtful integration of design elements with learners' needs and instructional objectives.

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