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USE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING APPLICATIONS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING (ELT): ADULT LEARNERS' PERCEPTIONS IN PAKISTANI ESL CONTEXT

Author 1:	DR MUHAMMAD SABBOOR HUSSAIN , Professor, Department of English, University of Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan, dr.muhammadsabboorhussain@uskt.edu.pk
Corresponding & author 2:	DR IRAM RUBAB , Assistant Professor, Department of English, GC Women University Sialkot, Pakistan, Email: iram.rubab@gcwus.edu.pk
Author 3:	MS SHEEZA TUFAIL , MS Scholar, GC Women University Sialkot Pakistan, Email: sheetatufail22@gmail.com

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Abstract

Due to increasing advancements in innovations, social media influences the social texture of our society. It has transformed the processes of communication, interaction, and socialization. The current study was executed to explore the learners' perceptions regarding its usage to improve the English language. The study's objectives were to highlight preferences of social networking applications for language skills development by ESL learners and explore the views of ESL instructors regarding possible benefits and threats of using innovative tools in ELT. Due to the importance of social media applications and their role in communication, information sharing, skill enhancement, English vocabulary development, motivation, and proficiency in the English language, the researchers focused their research on the aforementioned aspects and their effects on the perceptions of ESL learners. The researcher utilized a survey-based technique, so a questionnaire was adopted to explore ESL learners' views regarding the effectiveness of innovative tools in the English language learning process. Also, it was a mixed-method approach. At the same time, semi-structured interviews were conducted to demonstrate ESL teachers' views about the advantages and disadvantages of utilizing social networking platforms to learn the English language. The results of this study indicated that YouTube is the most widely used source among university learners of district Sialkot. Similarly, the teachers' views also suggest that social media is paramount in learning English. Therefore, the result of this study, it is suggested that this research will be valuable to instructors and syllabus designers to enhance the efficacy of teaching the English language. **Keywords:** Skills, perception, innovation, communication, enhancement

Introduction

Technological advancements in education have been enormous, particularly in learning English as a foreign language. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) in English language learning can assist students in improving their language skills (Khaloufi & Laabidi, 2017). In addition, the use of ICT in English language learning may empower and motivate students. Improving their critical thinking skills encourages teachers to change their teaching styles to be more active, flexible, effective, and student-centered (Asmara et al., 2019). While ICT use can facilitate cooperation and engagement during the English language learning process, the learning process must also be scaffolded to ensure that learners take advantage of these opportunities (Murray, 2005). In the context of ESL, ICT platforms such as e-mail, social media such as Facebook and Instagram, and video-based communication such as Skype can provide English language learners with chances to engage with native speakers (Annamalai, 2017). Nunan (1999) states that many ESL students want to improve their English communication abilities due to language complexity. However, they do not have enough opportunity to use the target language fluently in front of others due to the distinction between the native language and the English language (Shumin, 2002; Ellis, 2008). On the other hand, Thomas (2012) believes that verbal instructor coaching is not the best way to educate students since digital innovation has changed the brain's structure. The brain is more responsive to visual imagery than aural codes. However, apart from passive learning in the classroom, social media sites provide students with a practical

setting to learn a language (Ziegler, 2007). According to Seo (2013), online networking platforms provide several chances for students to develop their language learning mechanisms outside of the traditional classroom environment. Incorporating new approaches and different types of social media makes it easier for students to participate, foster teamwork, and assess each other while giving them a simple way to share information with their classmates and friends (Williams, 1992). Similarly, Cutter (2015) stated that various tools in ESL classes boosted learners' autonomy and aptitude levels. Incorporating innovations into ESL courses stimulates English language students to achieve success in the language. The usage of media is essential for students. However, it is also crucial for English language instructors because social media may help them diversify their teaching tactics and styles and provide a source for learning new terminology. In addition, the instructors participate in several online workshops and seminars connected to innovative English language education for university-level students. Instructors can acquire help from Internet portals, and then they can use these educational approaches to instruct their pupils effectively (Aydin, 2012).

Research Objective

- To highlight the preference of social media applications by ESL learners for language learning.
- To highlight the views of ESL learners on social media's role in language skills development and learning.

Research Questions

- How far do social networking applications assist ESL students in improving their

reading, listening, writing, and speaking skills?

- What are the ESL teachers' views regarding the potential benefits and challenges of using social media as a tool in learning English as a second language?

Significance of research

This study is beneficial to language learning processes because social media plays an essential part in communication abilities. This research will also be useful in examining how online networks help ESL students become proficient in English. Additionally, it will look at how online platforms can help teachers stay productive, innovative, and efficient in their teaching methods, making English instruction never boring.

Problem Statement

A communicative context is necessary for the language learning process, but ESL students are not given enough opportunity to communicate in English and are not given enough exposure to instructive English. They are frequently unable to participate in class discussions effectively as a result (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011). These days, there are more platforms for learners to learn on because of the growth of innovations and the accessibility of social media technologies (Gikas & Grant, 2013). Therefore, by highlighting the preferences of university students, the current study is carried out in the Pakistani setting to explore the usefulness of social media in learning the English language.

Research Methodology

For this investigation, the researcher used a mixed-technique approach. The current study chose a mixed-method approach based on the research questions.

Literature Review

Social media is a collection of tools that enable people to form and maintain relationships. Social media is one of the most widely used technologies by individuals worldwide, from young learners to the elderly. University students use social media in their regular activities in various situations (Al Arif, 2019). According to Kaplan & Haenlein (2010), social media is a collection of internet applications that enable the creation of a wide range of content around the globe. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and other social media platforms are just a few examples. These types of social media are simple to join for free. It is also one of the primary reasons why so many people use social media. Social media allows individuals to stay connected. Individuals can use social media to communicate with other students and teachers at any time (Charlesworth, 2015). By combining formal and informal learning via technology, online networking sites give learners a collaborative learning platform free of time and location constraints (Li, 2017). Mahmud & Ching (2012) searched using Facebook as a pedagogical tool in ESL classrooms. The findings revealed that using Facebook significantly improved learners' second language skills, particularly their reading and writing abilities. Hammad (2017) surveyed ESL students at King Khalid University on the value of WhatsApp for language learning. Many pupils appreciated this application. Moreover, learners believed that exchanging messages in audio, video, and text messaging would improve receptive and productive skills. Li (2017) used quantitative methods and a survey to highlight the role of innovative networks in ESL. The data showed

that students thought WhatsApp apps might help them improve their English. Contrary to the traditional environment, it also stimulates interaction between learners and teachers. YouTube is also one of the pivotal forms of social media and plays a vital part in English language learning due to its unique qualities. It allows ESL students to download videos to practice the English language (Irfan et al., 2016). Similarly, Taskiran (2018) and his colleagues used a mixed methodology approach to investigate learners' perceptions of Twitter's use in the context of language acquisition. According to the findings, students viewed Twitter as a valuable tool for improving the efficacy of language learning. On the other hand, Gay & Sofyan (2017) stated that Edmodo is an interactive online learning platform that helps language learners get improved knowledge and abilities with the support of instructors and companions. Hence, language is the foundation of communication, and communication is essential in every aspect of life because it allows us to share our ideas and thoughts. Enhancing speaking abilities is vital for constructive and productive communication since it serves the objective of communication (Irfan et al., 2016). Castaneda (2011) employed mixed learning methodologies with the application of YouTube to aid language learners in increasing their speaking skills. Most of the members considered the benefits of YouTube for communicating and comprehending concepts. So, in comparison to traditional classroom practice, ESL students have multiple opportunities to listen to diverse audio-video programs via various social media sources, which improves their listening proficiency (Brady et al., 2010).

According to Zorko (2009), learners have difficulties speaking due to comprehension, vocabulary, and structural challenges. YouTube's improvements in the teaching process improved student performance and allowed them to benefit from peer and teacher feedback. This study confirmed that YouTube videos enable students to learn activities that enhance speech, vocabulary, and grammar. Yunus et al. (2012) took a quantitative approach, utilizing open-ended questions to analyze learners' and instructors' perspectives on the importance of online networking applications in writing. The findings revealed that new technologies encourage ESL students to interact and improve their writing abilities. Consequently, various research studies completed over the last few decades clearly illustrate that using social media and other social networking tools improves English language learners' language skills. It provides ESL students with unique opportunities to improve their writing skills (Murray & Hourigan, 2008). However, there has been little research on ESL students' perceptions of the role of various networking applications in the English language learning process. This study aims to determine what ESL students think about the utility of innovative platforms in English language learning at GCWUS, UMT, USKT, and GMC Sialkot in Pakistan. The purpose of this study is to determine which platforms learners prefer for improving their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills among YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and Edmodo. The study also shed light on the similarities and differences between learners' preferences and teachers' practices of using social networking applications in the English

teaching-learning process. In Pakistan, English is taught as a compulsory subject from grade one to grade fourteen, and even after 14 years of study, most students cannot communicate in English. As a result, there is a need to improve this learning environment. Social networking applications can play a pivotal role, as various research studies discussed above demonstrate the importance of social networking applications in learning English.

Research Gap

Due to the importance of social media applications and their role in communication, information sharing, skill enhancement, English vocabulary development, motivation, and proficiency in the English language, the researchers focused their research on the aforementioned aspects and their effects on the perceptions of ESL learners. Currently, the usage of numerous online networking tools in English language teaching-learning processes is critical. Taking into account the above-mentioned contributions, the problem under consideration is the analysis of ESL students' opinions on the preferences of social networking apps for learning English at the university level in Pakistan.

Methodology

The researcher employed a mixed-method approach for this study. Based on the research topics, a mixed-method strategy was selected for this study. According to [Cresswell \(2008\)](#), the mixed-method approach has become the preferred technique due to the advantages of both qualitative and quantitative methods.

Population and Sampling

This research included ESL students and instructors from two public and two private institutions of district Sialkot. The study's sample was chosen using convenience

sampling. According to [Dornyei \(2007\)](#), convenience sampling is the least appealing yet the most prevalent since it focuses on practicalities. The quantitative data were obtained from 400 male and female BS students from the English department, while the qualitative data was gathered from eight ESL teachers from four universities.

Research Tools

A 5-point Likert scale questionnaire adapted from [Alghasab & Alfadley's \(2018\)](#) research is utilized for quantitative data. Changes were made to the questionnaire based on a study of the literature and the current research objectives. It was divided into two portions: demographic information and 25 items dealing with productive and receptive abilities. The qualitative data was gathered via semi-structured interviews with eight ESL instructors from four different institutions. The interview guide included two parts: one regarding background information and the other concerning their perspectives on the importance of online networking sites in the context of English language learning.

Theoretical Framework

This research is grounded on the framework of Vygotsky's social constructivism. Based on his notion this extensive study was conducted to demonstrate the usefulness of social networking applications in the English language learning process. This theory holds, and I would accordingly assume that the usage of innovative techniques positively affects the language learning mechanism for ESL learners since it enhances learners' intrinsic interactivity and information pivotal for language learning [Zhang \(2009\)](#).

Results and Discussions

Internal consistency of Scales of language skills

In survey-based research, the adoption of items and categories is of vital significance to achieve appropriate outcomes. The chosen item in a category ought to be pertinent and tend to the one fundamental theme of that classification. The appropriateness of the items in a category is generally evaluated by utilizing the internal consistency of the scales. In the psychometric study, validity and reliability are two significant components. The researcher determined the reliability of the learners' preference for social networking applications to learn English language questionnaires by utilizing Cronbach's Alpha constants via SPSS software.

Table 1: Internal Consistency of Scales

Scales	Alpha
Listening Skills (5)	.767
Speaking Skills (5)	.911
Reading Skills (5)	.660
Writing Skills (5)	.827

Descriptive analysis of ranking of social media applications in English learning skills

The mean and standard deviation are given in the following table to illustrate ESL learners' most preferred social networking applications to learn the English language. The following statistics showed an intriguing rise in social media usage for English language learning on Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Edmodo, and WhatsApp. YouTube is preferred by the majority of students above all applications.

Table 2

Scales	Mean	SD
Facebook	2.12	.912
WhatsApp	2.63	1.009
YouTube	3.06	.987
Edmodo	1.71	.925
Twitter	2.26	1.16

Quantitative analysis of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills

The frequency, mean and standard deviations of all the four categories of language skills are given below. The statement-wise analysis of each skill has been analyzed below:

Table 3: Listening skills

No.	Statements	Frequencies					Mean	Std. Deviation
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree		
1	Use of online networks assists me to practice listening skills.	35	56	54	183	72	3.50	1.19
2	Social media is an easy way to download videos which is quite helpful for English listening skills development.	35	45	36	175	109	3.69	1.229
3	Our accent improves when we listen to a conversation of the English language native speakers on online networks.	38	44	47	156	115	3.66	1.261
4	My listening skills were enhanced by listening to English music on innovative platforms.	70	79	60	136	55	3.06	1.33
5	Social media has no role in improving listening skills.	146	127	62	49	16	2.15	1.161

The averages and standard deviations of each statement on the theme of listening abilities are shown in the tables above. In the statement-by-statement analysis, Item 2, social media is an easy source to download videos that are helpful for English language learning, received the highest mean score of 3.695 with a standard deviation of 1.229. Item 3: Social networking apps improve learners'

accents while listening to videos of the native speaker', received the second-highest score of 3.665 with an SD of 1.261. Item 4 'By listening to English music on innovative platforms my listening skills enhance' received the third-highest mean of 3.502 with a standard deviation of 1.191. Item 1: Usage of online networks assists me to practice listening skills, came in fourth with a score of 3.06 and an SD of 1.340, whereas item 5: 'Innovative platforms have no effect in increasing listening abilities,' came in fifth with a score of 2.155 and an SD of 1.161.

Table 4: Speaking Skills

No	Statements	Frequencies					Mean	Std. Deviation
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree		
6	Chatting in English with my friends through social media improved my English language speaking proficiency.	33	36	64	187	80	3.61	1.14
7	Social media permit me to convey views easily and freely in English.	35	35	70	177	83	3.59	1.16
8	I use social media sources to discuss homework assignments with my class fellows to enhance my communication skills.	42	42	56	164	96	3.57	1.25
9	English learners should use social media sources to improve their speaking skills	39	40	47	178	96	3.63	1.22
10	I communicate more confidently with my peers and teachers via online networking sites than through direct discussion.	46	50	56	159	89	3.48	1.28

The category of speaking skills encompassed five items which showed the great values of mean score extending among 3.48 and 3.63. Item 9 English learners should utilize innovative tools to improve speaking skills' achieving the top score of 3.630 with an SD of 1.225. Item 6: 'Chatting in English with my friends through social media improved my English language speaking proficiency' achieved the second-highest mean on the scale of speaking skill with a score of 3.612 and an SD of 1.147. Item 7, 'Online networking sites permit me to convey views easily and

freely in the English language', achieved the third highest mean 3.595 with a standard deviation of 1.165, which was also increased in terms of influence. Item 8 'I use social media sources to discuss homework assignments with my class fellows to enhance my communication skills, obtained the fourth top score of 3.575 with an SD of 1.252. Item 10 'I communicate with my peers and teachers more confidently via online networking sites than direct discussion' scored 5th number score of 3.487 with an SD of 1.280.

Table 5: Reading Skills

No.	Statements	Frequencies					Mean	Std. Deviation
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree		
11	Content posted on social media is more interesting and easier than classroom notes for English language reading skills development.	38	74	82	152	54	3.27	1.18
12	Reading news on social networking sites helps me comprehend the English language effectively.	38	53	65	188	56	3.42	1.16
13	I prefer online networking sites to find about learning approaches for my reading skills enhancement.	37	69	83	47	64	3.33	1.20
14	Social media sources play an important role in English language reading skills development.	34	56	56	183	71	3.50	1.18
15	Social media decrease the habit of in-depth reading.	43	63	74	160	60	3.32	1.21

Item 14, 'Social media sources play an important role in English language reading skills development', achieved the top score of 3.502 and an SD of 1.182. Item 12, 'Reading news on social networking sites help me comprehend the English language effectively', scored the second uppermost mean score of 3.42 with an SD of 1.16. Item 13, 'I prefer online networking sites to find new learning approaches for my reading skills enhancement', scored the third top score of

3.330 with an SD of 1.201. Item 15 scored the fourth position with a mean value of 3.327 with an SD of 1.21. Whereas Item 11, 'Content posted on social media is more interesting and easier than classroom notes for English language reading skills development', achieved the mean value of 3.275 with an SD of 1.188.

Table:6 Writing Skills

No.	Statements	Frequencies					Mean	Std. Deviation
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree		
16	I may improve my writing skills while chatting with my friends on social media.	51	56	69	165	59	3.31	1.24
17	Online networking sites incline me to learn English by providing a vast array of writing activities.	44	79	77	152	48	3.20	1.20
18	Social media is an interesting way of text messages which improve our English language writing skills.	48	51	55	171	75	3.43	1.26
19	Using internet abbreviations sometimes negatively affects my academic writing.	48	61	89	153	49	3.23	1.20
20	After using social networks, I tend to make spellings mistakes.	52	77	71	148	52	3.17	1.25

This category also had five statements. Item 18, 'Social media is an interesting way of text messages which improve our English language writing skill', scored the first position with a value of 3.435 and an SD of 1.26. Item 16, 'I may improve my writing skills while chatting with my friends on online networking sites' achieved the 2nd top value of 3.312 with an SD of 1.248. Item 19, 'Using internet abbreviations sometimes negatively affect my academic writing', attained a mean of 3.235 with an SD of 1.20. Item 17 'online networking tools incline me to learn English by providing a vast array of writing activities', scored 3.202 with an SD of 1.205. Lastly, Item 20, 'After using social networks, I tend to make spelling mistakes', obtained 3.17 with Std. deviation of 1.254.

Mean and Standard Deviation of scales used in Social media role in learning the English language

The overall mean and standard deviations of all four categories of language skills have been compared below in the following table. The table illustrated that the speaking category showed a higher mean and standard deviation value, which were 3.58 and 1.04 respectively.

Scales	Mean	SD
Listening Skills	3.217	.890
Speaking Skills	3.58	1.04
Reading Skills	3.39	1.05
Writing Skills	3.27	.952

Qualitative Result

The data was analyzed by thematic analysis concerning the advantages and disadvantages of innovative platforms in the English teaching-learning process. The following themes are evolved out of it:

- Theme 1:** Providing a stress-free platform or decreasing face-to-face communication.
- Theme 2:** Increasing grammatical mistakes or enhancing writing skills.
- Theme 3:** Providing collaborative learning vs lack of emotional connections.
- Theme 4:** Providing quick assistance or causing distraction.
- Theme 5:** Causing wastage of time or source of giving direct feedback to ESL learners.

The thematic analysis of ESL teachers also portrays the importance of online networks in the English language teaching-learning phenomenon. The findings highlighted many aspects of ESL teachers' perceptions of the use of social media in the English language learning process. In response to the question of whether social media is a stress-free

platform for language learners or if it reduces communication skills, out of the 50 teachers, forty-two teachers believe that it gives a stress-free environment to language learners. It allows ESL students to talk confidently in a face-to-face setting, while only eight teachers believe it limits ESL students' ability to communicate face-to-face. When teachers were asked about the impact of social media on writing skills, almost all of them agreed that it has a detrimental effect. They said that due to the widespread usage of these programs, students are more likely to make grammar and spelling errors when writing professionally, such as in exams. On the other hand, only six teachers considered the value of social media applications in improving writing skills. Out of fifty teachers, forty-two thought that social media fosters collaboration and the idea of sharing information with other peers. In contrast, the other two thought it was a barrier to encouraging collaborative learning since it lacked emotional connections. Almost all ESL teachers said that social media is essential for gaining immediate guidance in the language learning process, whether it is a source of quick support or diversions. The interviews also revealed that all professors saw social media as a quick way to guide students about their shortcomings rather than a waste of time. On the other hand, only eight teachers saw social media as a waste of time and little use in providing immediate feedback to language learners.

Discussion

English is an international language, and it is widely used in practically all aspects of life due to its globalization. English is not only employed in business and medicine, but it is

also commonly used in our educational framework as a medium of instruction in higher education and a compulsory subject at a low level. Social media sources have grown in popularity in this era because social media plays an increasingly important role in shaping public perceptions and strengthening society. However, in the academic setting, different social media sources are being used to improve the instruction process of students. As a result, the current study was conducted to assess Pakistani ESL learners' perceived usefulness of online networks in English learning. This study aims to show how Internet networks can help students learn English at the university level in Pakistan. The data revealed that ESL students had a generally good attitude toward using Internet networks to improve their language skills. Online networks such as WhatsApp, Twitter, and Edmodo, among others, have grown in popularity among university students as a means of exchanging ideas and participating in other online activities. Due to its unique ability to be accessed quickly, social media is regarded as a cutting-edge medium for English learners to express themselves authentically. The study found that using social networking sites to communicate with professors increases the motivation and confidence level of the learners. Instructors may encourage students to use this method to improve their English language skills. It's worth noting that this study's findings, in addition to confirming that social networking programs aid in the English language learning process, are essential. The finding of this study revealed that ESL learners vigorously observed the productivity of social networks in the language enhancement process. This

study aimed to ascertain students' perceptions of the benefits of utilizing social media for English language learning and to ascertain ESL instructors' perspectives on the potential benefits and risks associated with the use of social media in the English language learning process. As aforementioned, this research employs two instruments: data regarding the usefulness of social media in the context of English language learning was collected by questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. According to the questionnaire, most students considered YouTube the most viable tool for other applications to aid in their English language acquisition. The findings of the semi-structured interview with ESL teachers show the significance of online networks in the English language teaching and learning phenomenon. Furthermore, participants in the current study expressed positive opinions about the efficiency of social media in developing language abilities, which was consistent with the findings of [Kalasi \(2014\)](#), [Obar \(2015\)](#), [Almarwaey, and Alsaied \(2017\)](#). According to the members' perspectives, online networks play a significant role in their English language learning approach, supporting previous research ([Warschauer and Grimes; Melkote and Liu, 2000; Wang and Vasquez; Li 2017](#)) on the importance of online networks in language learning. Therefore, the results of this study indicated that social media provides several opportunities for ESL learners to enhance their language skills. Students found that using social media helped them improve their critical thinking skills. Hence, the majority of participants stated that using social media improved their English skills by engaging in discussions and

communicating in both oral and written English. Hence, the results of this study indicated that the utilization of social media can increase the productivity of ESL students in communication, discussion, and interaction in contrast to traditional strategies in ESL classrooms. [Habibi et al., \(2018\)](#).

Conclusion

This study examines the distinction between innovative platforms in the ESL learning process. According to the study's findings, the majority of university students have access to social media sources. Respondents expressed a favorable attitude toward social media applications in the context of ESL and believed that innovative platforms could play a significant role in the English language learning phenomenon. As a result, social media may be a viable tool for improving ESL learners' language learning processes. According to the students, social media is a valuable and effective platform for learning English. Social networking applications offer numerous opportunities for communication integration, teamwork promotion, and information exchange. According to this study, the use of innovative platforms positively influenced learners' acquaintance, approach, and learning achievement.

Recommendations

By exploring the preferences of ESL learners towards social media for the English language, the following recommendations are described below:

- There is a need to transform the ESL classroom environment for students friendly so they can freely practice enhancing their communicative abilities.

- There should be workshops and seminars for ESL instructors to get more awareness to accumulate the usage of social networking applications in the English language classroom.
- This work indicates that online applications play a significant part in enhancing language skills and vocabulary enhancements.

Therefore it is recommended that university-level ESL learners may use them to build language proficiency at the university level. So due to its significance, as indicated in the findings, it is recommended that instructors inform those learners about its usage who do not have acquaintance with its functionality for the improvement of the English language.

Future Directions

There are some suggestions for future study.

- This research was executed in the district of Sialkot universities, only keeping in view the researchers' convenience. In the future, the research can be conducted in different cities of Pakistan to explore the function of online networks for English language enhancement.
- The data were obtained only from four universities of district Sialkot due to the limited time frame. However, the future researcher can expand it to more than four universities to make it more authentic.
- The present research was limited to a single department of different universities, but the future researcher may use this across many other disciplines to achieve better and more profound results.

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