Discourse Function in Wordwall: An Analysis of Instructions and feedback in English Learning Activities

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Abstract

This study examines the discourse functions of instructional language and feedback in a Wordwall-based English language learning exercise. Using qualitative discourse analysis techniques based on Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Sinclair and Coulthard's classroom discourse model, this research analyzed six publicly worwall activities intended for elementary students. The study identified six primary discourse functions: directive, procedural, evaluative, motivational, corrective, and informative. Directive and procedural functions dominated the instructional phase, providing clarity and task organization, while evaluative and motivational functions defined the feedback phase, providing reinforcement and emotional support. Informational feedback occurred less frequently, suggesting that automatic responses had limited linguistic scaffolding. Overall, Wordwall is not only a gamified learning tool, but also as a structured discourse environment that influences learner engagement, participation, meaning making. These observation provide practical implication for educators, especially in the selection, modification and supplementation of wordwall activities to optimize instructional clarity, improve feedback clarity and promote reflective and language centered learning.

Keywords: Discourse Function, Wordwall, Systemic Functional Linguistics, And Digital Learning.

Introduction

Instruction and feedback are crucial in English language acquisition, as they influence students' comprehension of tasks, regulate learning processes, and assess progress. Effective instruction offers clarity, scaffolding, and explicit objectives that enhance students angagement, while feedback directs learners towards higher performance, self-regulation and ongoing development. Recent

research identicates that feedback especially when prompt, explicit, and specific substantially influences learning outcomes (Wisniewski et al., 2020; Hattie & Clarke,2022). In digital learning enviorenments, feedbacks has transformed to encompass adaptive, personalized and immediate responses that promote enhanced reflaction and autonomy (Shute & Rahimi, 2021; Maeier & Klozt, 2022).

These result hightlight the ongoing significance of comprehending the linguistic mechanism of instruction and feedback across many learning modalities. In digital and gamified context, feedback and instruction assess performance while also affecting motivation, engangement, and self-efficacy. Research indicates that emotionally supportive digital feedback can enhance persistence and diminish fear (Ding & Zhu, 2025). Research reveals that numerous digital tools offer feedback that is primarily evaluative such as "correcet" or "incorrect" with minimal explanatory depth (Rahimi & Shute, 2023). This may hinder learners' capacity to develop metacognitive techniques, especially when feedback is devoid of contextual or linguistic support (Fathi & Rahimi,2023).

While digital tools deliver prompt feedback and opportunities for repeated practice, their communicative efficacy is inconsistent, and several automated platforms lack the comprehensive scaffolding that educators generally give. The integration of technology in English language instruction has proliferated swiftly in recent years, with digital platforms providing interactive, adaptive, and data-driven learning experiences (Lin et al., 2024; Sun & Zhang, 2023). Educators are progressively utilizing gamified programs to enhance vocabulary acquisition, grammar exercises, and formative evaluation.

These instruments augment engagement via multimodality and immediate feedback, while fostering learner autonomy (Rasyid & Rahman, 2024). In this context, Wordwall has become one of the most prevalent gamification platforms globally, with over 40 million monthly users as per recent educational technology studies. Wordwall enables educators to design interactive activities, including matching, multiple-choice questions, anagrams, and sorting, accompanied by automated instructions and feedback.

Due to its popularity, accessibility, and adjustable task forms, Wordwall has become as a regular tool in numerous EFL courses. However, while numerous studies have explored Wordwall's efficacy in vocabulary acquisition, motivation, or classroom engagement (e.g., Alfares, 2025; Kahar & Baa, 2024; Purnamasari & Purwandari, 2025), scant research has focused on the linguistic characteristics of its instructional messages and feedback prompts. Automated instructions, such as "Select the correct answer," and feedback comments like "Please try again!" provide distinct discourse functions that affect task clarity, learner behavior, and emotional reaction (Zapata et al., 2025; Ding & Zhu, 2025).

However, the discourse aspect of these messages—how they influence actions, organize interactions, and facilitate meaning construction—remains insufficiently examined. This results in a deficiency in comprehending how

digital platforms influence classroom-like conversation via automated language.

Furthermore, previous study on feedback frequently emphasizes its effectiveness or encouraging influence, rather than examining its linguistic role in developing understanding and engagement (Lee, 2023; Lin et al., 2024). The communicative function of automated messaging on digital networks such as Wordwall has garnered minimal academic scrutiny. This study examines the discourse functions included in Wordwall's instructional and feedback language.

This study aims to investigate the forms, linguistic manifestations, and pedagogical implications of discourse functions present in Wordwall-based English learning activities, in light of the reported gap. Specifically, the research is guided by the following questions:

1. What types of discourse functions are present in Wordwall's instructional and feedback messages?
2. In what manner are these discourse functions linguistically manifested in Wordwall-based English learning activities?
3. What are the educational consequences of these discourse functions for the instruction and acquisition of the English language?

Method
Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design with discourse analysis as the primary approach. The qualitative approach was used because the purpose of this study was to investigate and analyze the communicative functions of language used in the English learning activity Wordwall. Discourse analysis was used to investigate how the instructional and feedback language in the Wordwall activity served various purposes that fostered learning engagement. The researcher's goal with this design was to discover and interpret the discourse functions reflected in the instructional instructions and feedback messages of the Wordwall as they relate to the learning process. The analysis employed Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (Halliday, 1994) and the classroom discourse model by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), which collectively provide a comprehensive framework for recognizing and understanding discourse functions in educational texts.

Data Source

The data for this study were obtained from textual sources contained in Wordwall-based English learning activities, primarily vocabulary and grammar exercises. The data consisted of:

1. Instructions are commands or directions that tell students what to do during the activity (e.g., "Match the word to its meaning" or "Choose the correct answer").

2. Feedback is the system's automated response or message generated in response to student actions (e.g., "Good job!", "Try again!", or "Correct answer!").

The items were selected from publicly available Wordwall activities used in English language schools at the elementary. The researchers focused solely on textual and linguistic characteristics, not visual or aural elements.

Data Collection Procedure

The researchers selected six Wordwall activities related to English vocabulary and grammar learning. Each activity was carefully observed, and written materials (instructions and feedback) were recorded, transcribed, and categorized for further research. Screenshots and text transcripts were used to verify the accuracy of the data. The collected text was then divided into two categories: instructional discourse and feedback discourse.

Data Analysis

The data were evaluated qualitatively using discourse analysis methodology. This analysis followed the steps proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014):

1. *Data Condensation*

All instructional and feedback statements were removed and distilled to their fundamental linguistic components. Utterances that fulfilled the same communication functions were categorized together.

2. *Coding Process*

A coding framework was established based on: Halliday's metafunctions (interpersonal, ideational, textual) and Categories of discourse moves by Sinclair and Coulthard. The six recognized discourse functions were:

1. Directive
2. Procedural
3. Evaluative
4. Motivational
5. Corrective
6. Informational

Every statement was analyzed for its lexical indicators, imperative constructions, evaluative phrases, and interactional strategies.

Example of Coding: ***"Try again"***
- linguistic feature: Imperative clause, motivated lexical prompt
- Initial code: Affective prompt
- Final category: Motivational Function

This technique enhanced the transparency and replicability of classification.

3. *Data Display*
Coded data were organized in tables, classifying each speech according to discourse function and linguistic structure.

4. *Conclusion Formulation and Validation*
Themes and patterns were honed through iterative comparisons across activities. The findings were corroborated with theoretical frameworks and prior research to augment interpretive validity.

Conceptual Framework
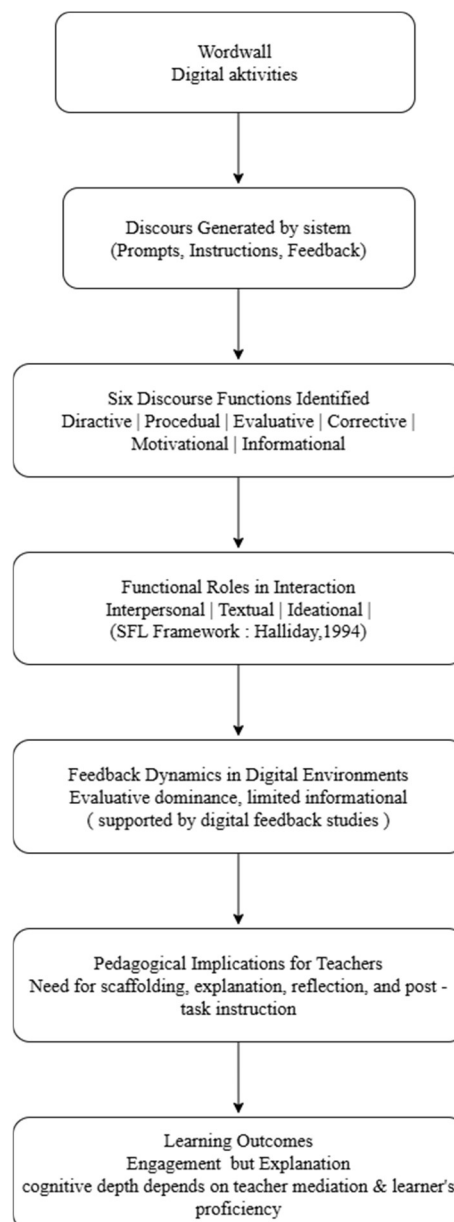
Results

An analysis of instructional language and feedback in 10 Wordwall-based English learning activities revealed six primary discourse functions: directive, procedural, evaluative, motivational, corrective, and informational. These functions were classified based on their communicative purpose and linguistic structure, using Halliday's (1994) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework and Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) discourse analysis model. Each function serves a distinct instructional purpose, such as guiding students, managing engagement, or evaluating responses. Wordwall's automated instructions and feedback messages, such as "Choose the correct answer," "Try again," or "Correct!", demonstrate how the platform simulates instructor discourse through a digital interface. These findings suggest that language use in Wordwall serves not only technical but also communicative functions, influencing motivation, focus, and comprehension.

Table 1 "Discourse Function Categories Used in Wordwall Instructions and Feedback"

NO	Discourse Function	Typical Linguistic Form (Example)	Expected Context	Pedagogical Purpose
1	Directive	"Choose the correct answer." "Match the words."	Instructional part of Wordwall activities	To guide students' actions and task completion.
2	Procedural	"Click start to begin." "After finishing, press submit."	Instructional messages at the beginning or end of tasks	To provide step-by-step directions and maintain activity flow.
3	Evaluative	"Correct answer!" "Good job!"	Automated feedback after correct responses	To provide positive evaluation and reinforcement. To keep students confident and engaged.
4	Motivational	"Try again!" "You can do it!"	Feedback for incorrect responses	To keep students confident and engaged.
5	Corrective	"Incorrect—check again."	Feedback for incorrect	To signal errors and

			input	motivate students to think or correct.
6	Informational	"The correct answer is…"	Occasionally in extended feedback.	To provide specific information

Directive Function

*Figure 1*

"Match the words with their pictures."
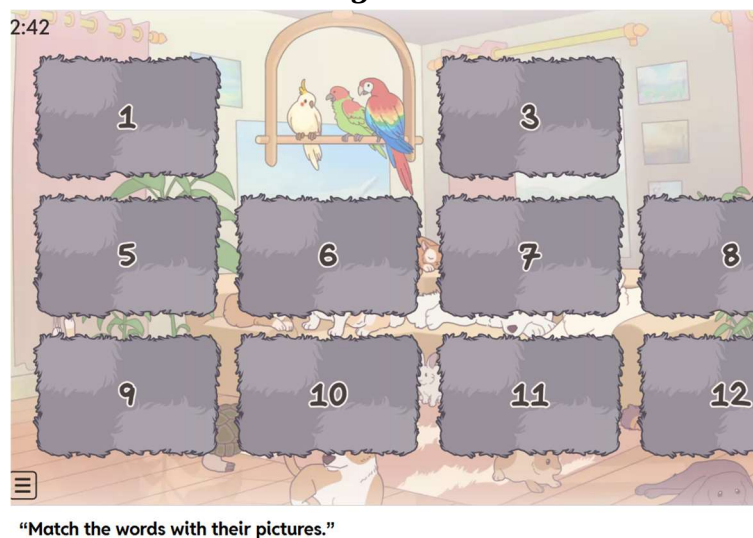
The directive function is most often used in instructional commands that aim to direct learners' direct activities. Examples include "Match the Words," "Click the Correct Picture," and "Choose the Best Answer." These sentences are distinguished by their imperative verb forms that direct learners to specific tasks, acting as explicit verbal cues for procedural control. These statements generally employ the imperative mood, utilizing material procedures such as match, chose, or drag, which indicate action-oriented involvement. Despite comprising an insignificant percentage of the overall discourse, directive instructions consistently manifest across all activities, indicating their crucial function in facilitating task engagement.

Directive discourse embodies Halliday's interpersonal metafunction by demonstrating authority and purpose throughout the instructional contact (Halliday, 1994). This is consistent with Rahman and Arifin (2024), who found that directive clarity is crucial in EFL environments to reduce ambiguity and maintain engagement. Wordwall commands function similarly to classroom teacher conversations, but lack the tonal diversity and contextual adaptations provided by human instruction.

Procedural Function

Figure 2

Please drag the text onto the image,After finishing press submit
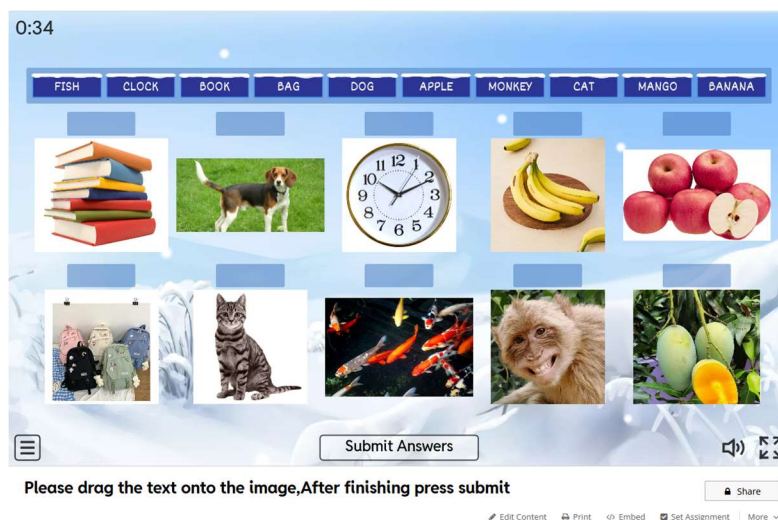
Procedural functions first emerged in messages that organized task flow and defined activity boundaries, including "Click start to begin," "Press submit when finished," and "Restart the game." These utterances played a textual role by ensuring coherence and sequence in digital learning interactions. They depend on succinct imperatives and linguistic organizational indicators (e.g., upon completion, after finishing).   Although less common than evaluative or corrective feedback, procedural signals are essential for indicating system operations rather than instructional content, underscoring Wordwall's interface-driven characteristics.

Pangestu and Surjono (2023) argued that instructional language in online learning should include procedural cues to effectively control learner navigation. In the Wordwall activity analyzed, procedural discourse served as the digital equivalent of instructor gestures or transitions in traditional classrooms. Procedural discourse helped maintain user focus and facilitated cognitive processing by establishing clear transitions from one task phase to the next. This study supports Buckingham Shum et al. (2023), who found that well-structured procedural cues enhance learner autonomy and usability in automated learning systems.

Evaluative Function

Figure 3

The evaluative function was represented by feedback words such as "Correct answer!" and "Good job!" that convey positive reinforcement. These messages serve as an evaluative tool, recognising learner success and providing affective encouragement. Evaluative discourse satisfies the interpersonal and ideational metafunctions by recognising performance and increasing self-efficacy. According to Hattie and Clarke (2022), affirming feedback improves learner motivation and task perseverance, especially when given shortly following a response.

However, the data show that Wordwall's evaluative input lacks elaboration, delivering praise without providing thorough linguistic reason. This shortcoming is consistent with Maier and Klotz's (2022) assessment, which states that while digital feedback can motivate, it frequently fails to encourage deeper knowledge in the absence of descriptive or process-level clues. As a result, evaluative feedback in Wordwall largely maintains engagement rather than encouraging metalinguistic reflection.

Motivational Function

Figure 4
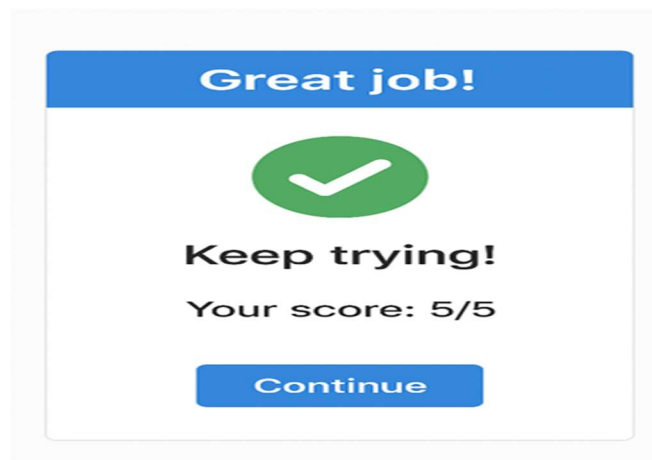
The motivational function is manifested in statements such as "Try again!" and "You can do it!"phrases triggered by incorrect responses. These brief, supportive comments aim to boost learners' confidence and reduce anxiety. Motivational language is crucial for maintaining persistence, especially in gamified contexts where learners experience repeated cycles of success and failure. Ding and Zhu (2025) found that emotionally supportive, positive feedback in mobile-based learning increased behavioral engagement and motivation.

In Wordwall, motivational feedback served as dialogic prompts, replicating the instructor's empathy in digital form. Although brief, these signals contributed to affective engagement, supporting Lee's (2023) argument that the emotive dimension of feedback has a substantial impact on learners' perspectives and

willingness to continue learning. Thus, motivational utterances represent the humanizing aspect of automated systems.

Corrective Function

Figure 5

The corrective function is reflected in signals such as "Wrong check again" and "That's wrong." These feedback comments alert learners to errors and encourage reevaluation. Corrective remarks serve both an evaluative and pedagogical role by exposing learners to discrepancies between their responses and the intended answer. While Wordwall edits are quick and explicit, they often lack explanatory annotations or linguistic logic. This nature favors behaviorist principles correction through trial and error over cognitive elaboration.

According to Rahimi and Shute (2023), corrective feedback in digital systems improves accuracy but must be combined with metacognitive suggestions to encourage deeper learning. Similarly, Fathi and Rahimi (2023) observe that solely evaluative feedback can hinder learner reflection.

Informational Function

Figure 6
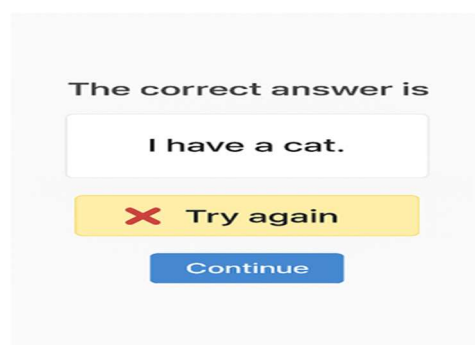
Informational feedback is less common, with examples such as "The correct answer is…" followed by an appropriate response. This type of feedback provides explicit linguistic information, helping learners understand the form or meaning of the target. Shute and Rahimi (2021) argue that task-specific, informative feedback has a greater long-term impact on retention than general praise. In this study,

informational feedback was occasionally found in teacher-created expanded Wordwall templates, suggesting that the presence of this function depends on how the activity is tailored. Informational feedback is the most pedagogically rich function because it links feedback to learning outcomes, rather than simply performance evaluation. However, its rarity in automated Wordwall tasks highlights potential design limitations.

A relative-frequency summary was produced to illustrate the overall significance of each discourse function across all six activities, in addition to detailing each function. The summary omits numerical counts but indicates the relative prominence of each function within the dataset.

Table 2. Relative Presence of Discourse Functions Across Wordwall Activities

Discourse Function	Relative Presence	Description
Directive	High	Appears consistenly ata the beginning of each activity to intiate task
Procedural	Moderate	Occurs during navigation steps such as start, submit, or finish
Evaluative	Very High	The most dominant type of feedback, including ✓ , " Good" and "perfect".
Corrective	High	Frequently appears after incorrect responses, marked by ✗ or "Wrong".
Motivational	Low-Moderate	Appears occasionally to encourage retrying (e.g., "Try again!).
Informational	Low	Appears only when learners activate the " Show Answer"feature

Table 2 illustrates that evaluative and corrective functions were the most prevalent, but motivating and informative functions were far less common. These patterns influenced the feedback dynamics of Wordwall and guided the further analysis of overlapping functions and variations in activity types.

Discussion

These findings are consistent with *Systemic Functional Linguistics* because they demonstrate how instructional language and feedback simultaneously perform interpersonal, textual, and ideational tasks (Halliday, 1994).

Interpersonally, Wordwall establishes authority through commands and motivational words. Textually, procedural and corrective signals promote coherence and flow of activity. Ideally, informative feedback conveys knowledge and significance.

These combined functionalities demonstrate that Wordwall's automated discourse system transcends mechanics, constructing learning as a verbal interaction between learner and technology. However, unlike teacher-generated conversation, Wordwall's vocabulary is constrained by programmed templates, resulting in a lack of adaptive nuance and contextual sensitivity (Lin, Tsai, and Liang, 2024). The majority of evaluative and motivational feedback indicates that the system prioritizes emotional reinforcement over intellectual understanding.

This conclusion is consistent with Buckingham Shum et al. (2023), who showed that automated platforms often prioritize interaction size over explanatory depth. However, this design is not entirely detrimental: for inexperienced or young learners, a quick affirmation such as "Good job!" may be sufficient to maintain engagement and reduce cognitive load (Sun and Zhang, 2023). From a pedagogical perspective, the effectiveness of such feedback is determined by the learner's proficiency and task complexity.

Thus, teachers can maximize Wordwall's potential by incorporating further discussion or debriefing to transform brief comments into meaningful learning. Furthermore, the difference between Wordwall's automatic input and the nuanced commentary generally offered by classroom teachers underscores a significant pedagogical gap.   In in-person interactions, educators typically provide detailed feedback, subsequent inquiries, or rephrasing that assist students in negotiating meaning and comprehending the reasoning behind accurate answers.

This corresponds with the findings of Wang and Han (2022), who indicated that teacher-generated feedback facilitates more profound cognitive processing than automated systems, which frequently restrict replies to accuracy indicators. Kao and Reynolds (2024) similarly discovered that students regard teacher input as more credible and elucidative than automated evaluation, indicating that the superficial informational depth of Wordwall may be inadequate for promoting long-term comprehension.

The significant dependence on evaluative and corrective tokens noted in this study thus signifies a wider trend recognized in digital learning research, wherein the rapidity of feedback is favored over linguistic depth. The instructional value of Wordwall resides not in supplanting teacher explanations but in augmenting them. Systematic assessments of automated feedback systems indicate that digital platforms can enhance accuracy and immediate job performance; nonetheless, they necessitate instructor mediation to transform succinct evaluative signals into conceptual understanding (Fan & Ma, 2022).

This supports Jensen's (2021) assertion that online learning environments require explicit scaffolding to offset the absence of conversational bargaining

usually found in classroom discourse. Furthermore, evaluative-centric systems like Wordwall prioritize performance over explanation, a phenomenon also identified by Lu (2023), who remarked that digital tools frequently lack the metalinguistic depth essential for ESL learners to thoroughly internalize language principles.

Consequently, educators can enhance learning results by incorporating post-task reflection, directing students to examine errors identified by Wordwall without explanation, and situating feedback within overarching language objectives. These approaches guarantee that Wordwall's motivational advantages are harmonized with the profundity and flexibility that solely teacher-led engagement can offer.

Conclusion

This study examines the functions of instructional and feedback discourse in Wordwall-based English language learning exercises, identifying six main functions: directive, procedural, evaluative, motivational, corrective, and informational. Findings indicate that Wordwall's instructional discourse predominantly fulfills directive and procedural roles, guiding learners and organizing the flow of tasks, while its feedback discourse focuses on evaluative and motivational goals, maintaining engagement and providing affective support.

However, informative feedback is less common, suggesting that the platform prioritizes behavioral correction over deeper language contemplation. Overall, Wordwall has considerable pedagogical potential as an interactive digital tool that fosters engagement and autonomy; however, its communicative success depends on teacher adaptation. Teachers are encouraged to enrich automated feedback with explanatory messages and incorporate Wordwalls into reflective classroom activities to increase linguistic depth and meaningful learning interactions.

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