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Fedoriv Yaroslava Candidate of Philology, Associate Professor of English, The National University of “Kyiv-Mohyla Academy,” Kyiv, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5915-9428>

Kytaieva Susanna Candidate of Sciences (Ph.D.) in Pedagogical Sciences, Associate Professor of English, The National University of “Kyiv-Mohyla Academy,” Kyiv, <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-5801-7923>

Pirozhenko Iryna Specialist in foreign languages, Senior lecturer, The National University of “Kyiv-Mohyla Academy,” National Academy of the Security Service of Ukraine, Kyiv, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5061-1625>

Fedoriv Mariya MA in Philology, Senior lecturer, The National University of “Kyiv-Mohyla Academy,” Kyiv, <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-8460-970X>

THE ROLE OF TEAMWORK IN TEACHING ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC COMMUNICATION

Abstract. This study explores the role of teamwork in enhancing academic language proficiency among English as a Foreign Language students. With globalisation increasing the demand for advanced academic communication skills, mastering academic English has become essential for students to engage with scholarly content, present research, write academic papers, and participate in academic discussions. Concurrently, collaborative learning has gained popularity in educational institutions, with research highlighting its positive impact on students' critical thinking, problem-solving, and engagement with course material. However, there is a gap in the literature regarding the specific influence of teamwork on language acquisition and academic communication skills. This study **aims** to address this gap by examining how team-based activities in English as a Foreign Language courses impact students' academic communication skills and learning outcomes. Using a survey-based **methodology**, the study explores the dynamics of teamwork, as a **result** proving its beneficial contribution to developing language proficiency, critical thinking, and the development of essential soft skills such as collaboration and problem-solving. The paper **concludes** by emphasising the advanced understanding of the impact of teamwork on academic communication and language learning and highlighting the importance of structured teamwork, clear role definitions, and feedback mechanisms in promoting student engagement and motivation, which cumulatively hold the **scientific and practical value of the findings**. Overall, this research contributes to the

development of more effective collaborative English as a Foreign Language learning strategies. and suggests **future research** on online and blended learning models, particularly in crisis conditions, where remote collaboration can support resilience and motivation to foster long-term academic and professional success.

Keywords: EFL, academic communication, collaborative learning, teamwork, education strategies, student engagement.

Федорів Ярослава Романівна кандидат філологічних наук, доцент кафедри англійської мови Національного університету «Києво-Могилянська академія», Київ, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5915-9428>

Китаєва Сусанна Олегівна кандидат педагогічних наук, доцент кафедри англійської мови Національного університету «Києво-Могилянська академія», Київ, <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-5801-7923>

Піроженко Ірина Дмитрівна спеціаліст з іноземних мов, старший викладач кафедри англійської мови Національного університету «Києво-Могилянська академія»; Національна академія Служби безпеки України, Київ, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5061-1625>

Федорів Марія Любомирівна магістр філології, старший викладач кафедри англійської мови Національного університету «Києво-Могилянська академія», Київ, <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-8460-970X>

РОЛЬ КОМАНДНОЇ РОБОТИ У НАВЧАННІ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ ДЛЯ АКАДЕМІЧНОЇ КОМУНІКАЦІЇ

Анотація. У пропонованому дослідженні розглядається роль командної роботи у вдосконаленні академічної мовної компетентності студентів, які вивчають англійську мову як іноземну. Оскільки в сучасних умовах глобалізації зростає попит на розвинені навички академічної комунікації, опанування академічної англійської мови набуває особливої важливості для студентів у контексті опрацювання наукових матеріалів, презентації досліджень, написання наукових текстів та участі в академічних дискусіях. При цьому в освітніх закладах дедалі більшої популярності набувають принципи командної роботи, а наукові дослідження підтверджують її позитивний вплив на розвиток критичного мислення студентів, навичок спільного вирішення проблем, кращого занурення в навчальний процес. Разом з тим у науковій літературі спостерігається брак висвітлення конкретного впливу командної роботи на оволодіння іноземною мовою та розвиток навичок академічного спілкування. Відтак, це дослідження має на меті усунення цієї прогалини шляхом вивчення впливу командної діяльності в курсах англійської мови як іноземної на розвиток

академічних комунікативних навичок та на навчальні результати студентів. Використовуючи анкетний метод дослідження, автори аналізують динаміку командної роботи, в результаті чого підтверджуючи її сприятливий внесок у розвиток мовної компетентності, критичного мислення та основних навичок спілкування, зокрема співпраці та розв'язання проблем. У висновках підкреслюється важливість розуміння впливу командної роботи на вивчення іноземної мови і розвиток академічної мовної компетентності, структурованої командної роботи, чіткого розподілу ролей та механізмів зворотного зв'язку для сприяння залученню та підвищенню мотивації студентів. Отримані результати мають наукову і практичну цінність, оскільки сприяють розробці ефективніших стратегій колаборативного навчання в курсах англійської мови як іноземної. Крім того, автори пропонують перспективні напрями майбутніх досліджень, зокрема щодо онлайн- та змішаних моделей навчання, особливо в кризових умовах, коли дистанційна співпраця може розвивати стійкість і мотивацію студентів, забезпечуючи їхній довгостроковий академічний і професійний успіх.

Ключові слова: англійська мова, академічна комунікація, колаборативне навчання, командна робота, освітні стратегії, залучення.

1. Introduction. The need for advanced academic communication skills in English is becoming increasingly important with the rise of globalisation. In higher education, mastering academic English not only enables students to effectively engage with scholarly content but also prepares them for presenting research, writing academic papers, and contributing to academic discussions. Consequently, proficiency in academic communication has become a key factor in students' academic and professional accomplishments.

Statement of the Problem. Despite the widespread adoption of collaborative learning across disciplines, a significant gap remains in research on its specific role in acquiring English as a foreign language and developing academic communication skills. While studies highlight the benefits of team-based activities in enhancing critical thinking, problem-solving, and student engagement, their direct impact on language acquisition and communication proficiency remains underexplored. This gap limits educators' ability to design effective EFL curricula that make use of teamwork so as to enhance both language skills and academic communication. Thus, **the relevance of this research** lies in addressing this gap by expanding the understanding of how collaborative learning can be strategically utilised by educators and curriculum designers and effectively implemented in EFL courses to achieve key learning objectives and optimise student outcomes.

Thus, **the purpose of this study** is to explore the role of teamwork in enhancing language proficiency and academic communication skills among EFL students. By examining collaborative tasks and their outcomes, the study seeks to identify the impact of teamwork on student engagement, performance, and overall learning experience. Additionally, the study aims to uncover both the benefits and challenges

associated with team-based activities in EFL contexts. Inferences from this research will inform teaching practices so as to integrate collaborative methods into EFL curricula, ultimately contributing to more effective language education strategies.

The research questions address the ways in which teamwork influences students' academic communication skills in English, the perceived benefits and challenges of team-based activities in the EFL courses, and how teamwork can be integrated into university curricula. By addressing these questions, the study will contribute to a deeper understanding of the interplay between collaborative learning and language education, offering practical recommendations for educators and enhancing the overall effectiveness of EFL courses.

2. Literature review. In order to provide a framework for studying the role of collaborative activities in teaching academic English and outline the research methodology and analysis, it is necessary to define the theoretical foundations, review existing research, and address challenges associated with teamwork in language learning.

The significance of collaborative learning in modern education is examined in prior studies that emphasize equipping students with the skills needed for academic and professional purposes. Lau et al. [1, p. 80–99] and Marasi [2, p. 324–337] highlight that group work is increasingly integrated into university curricula as a fundamental twenty-first-century skill, fostering adaptability, decision-making, and problem-solving abilities. Marasi suggests that collaborative learning supports higher-order thinking and promotes long-term retention of information, making it a key pedagogical approach in higher education. Pöysä-Tarhonen et al. underscore the importance of teamwork in developing students' capacity to work with peers from varied backgrounds: collaboration skills are necessary for students “*to provide themselves with the ability to work effectively and respectfully with diverse teams in the future*” [3, p. 787-799]. Chen and Lin [4, p. 102441] highlight the benefits of collaboration in language learning, noting that “*pair collaboration led to more negotiation and scaffolding, which facilitated learners' pragmatic development in implicatures.*” De Prada et al. [5] assert that the ability to collaborate effectively is seen as fundamental to personal, academic, and professional success, particularly in fostering adaptability and decision-making.

In the field of language acquisition, the *Interaction Hypothesis*, a foundational concept in *Communicative Language Teaching*, provides a theoretical basis for understanding how interaction with peers influences language development. Hidalgo et al. [6, p. 3] and Yang [7, p. 6471] assert that second-language acquisition is most effective when learners engage in meaningful, negotiated interactions. Yang demonstrates that peer collaboration enhances language proficiency by reinforcing active engagement with course materials. Premo et al. [8] examine how group-based tasks create authentic communication opportunities, allowing students with diverse perspectives to engage and improve their speaking, listening, reading, and writing

skills. From this standpoint, Healey [9] explains that conversational adjustments, such as clarification requests and feedback, facilitate linguistic growth by encouraging learners to refine their language use in real time. Zakaria et al. [10] explore the role of group work in ESL classrooms through the lens of Tuckman's model, finding that it positively influences students' learning experiences and highlighting the need for educators to provide guidance to maximise the effectiveness of collaborative learning. Additionally, Noh and Yusuf [11, p. 2367–2375] indicate that peer feedback, a core element of team-based learning, plays a significant role in helping students to reflect on their progress and refine their communication skills. As Phillips [12] notes, teamwork not only strengthens linguistic abilities but also fosters critical thinking, among other soft skills, enabling students to articulate complex ideas more effectively in academic settings.

Despite its advantages, collaborative learning in language education presents several challenges. Unequal participation remains a persistent issue, as differing contributions can lead to frustration and conflicts within teams [13]. As van Popta et al. [14, p. 24–34] observe, assessing individual performance within group settings remains a complex task, with educators facing difficulties in ensuring fair and accurate evaluations. The researchers observe that peer assessment, widely recognised as a valuable tool for promoting reflective learning, is often used to evaluate both academic products and collaborative processes [15, p. 961–978]. Van der Zwaan [16] also highlights the challenge of distinguishing individual contributions from collective achievements, which can impact grading fairness and accountability. To address these concerns, Lin [17, p. 11–28] and Chen [18] propose integrating individual reflections and structured peer assessments into team-based activities to balance group success with personal accountability.

Survey-based methodologies effectively capture behavioural and cognitive processes, making them suitable for examining collaborative learning in EFL. For instance, Fedoriv and Zhukorska [19, p. 46–49] highlight the adaptability of surveys in defining notions, combining quantitative and qualitative analysis of the survey data. The researchers outline the methodology of participant selection, data collection, and the combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis to achieve a comprehensive understanding of linguistic constructs. Adopting this methodology, Fedoriv, Pirozhenko, and Shuhai [20, p. 4] demonstrate how survey responses can be used to examine learner motivation and emphasise the role of motivation-related language in shaping students' learning experiences. Their findings reveal that students who excel in teamwork settings benefit from external support systems. These studies validate the effectiveness of surveys in examining the role of teamwork in language learning while offering insights that align with broader research on communication and engagement in collaborative learning settings.

Despite the extensive research on collaborative learning, significant **gaps** remain regarding its role in language acquisition, particularly in addressing challenges related to participation, assessment, and individual accountability. While previous studies

emphasize the benefits of teamwork in fostering adaptability, critical thinking, and higher-order cognitive skills, the mechanisms through which peer collaboration enhances language learning outcomes require further empirical validation. Additionally, issues such as unequal participation and the difficulty of assessing individual contributions within group settings have yet to be fully resolved. This study **aims** to bridge these gaps by employing a survey-based methodology to analyse student engagement, motivation, and linguistic development in collaborative learning environments. By integrating structured peer assessments and reflective practices, the research seeks to provide new insights into optimizing teamwork in EFL instruction and offer strategies for supporting language acquisition in the context of the outlined challenges. The findings will contribute to a better understanding of how collaborative activities can be designed to maximise learning outcomes while addressing common challenges, thus offering practical recommendations for supporting language education in university curricula.

3. Research methodology. Given the importance of teamwork in language learning and the existing challenges, further empirical investigation is aimed at assessing its effectiveness in teaching academic communication in English. This study employs a survey-based research methodology to examine students' perceptions of teamwork, evaluate its impact on language acquisition, and identify strategies for optimising collaborative learning experiences.

Participants. The study surveyed 187 students aged 18–25 from five departments of the National University of “Kyiv-Mohyla Academy” (NaUKMA), providing a diverse representation of academic disciplines. The distribution of participants included 34.3% from Humanities, 23.1% from Social Sciences, 26.1% from Computer Sciences (IT), 6% from Law, and 10.4% from Economics. This sample selection ensures a broad perspective on collaborative learning experiences across fields with varying educational methodologies and professional expectations. By including students from both STEM and non-STEM disciplines, the study captures potential differences in how teamwork and peer collaboration influence language acquisition and academic engagement. The accompanying chart (Fig. 1) visually represents the proportion of respondents from each department, highlighting the interdisciplinary nature of the study and reinforcing the relevance of its findings to a wide academic audience.

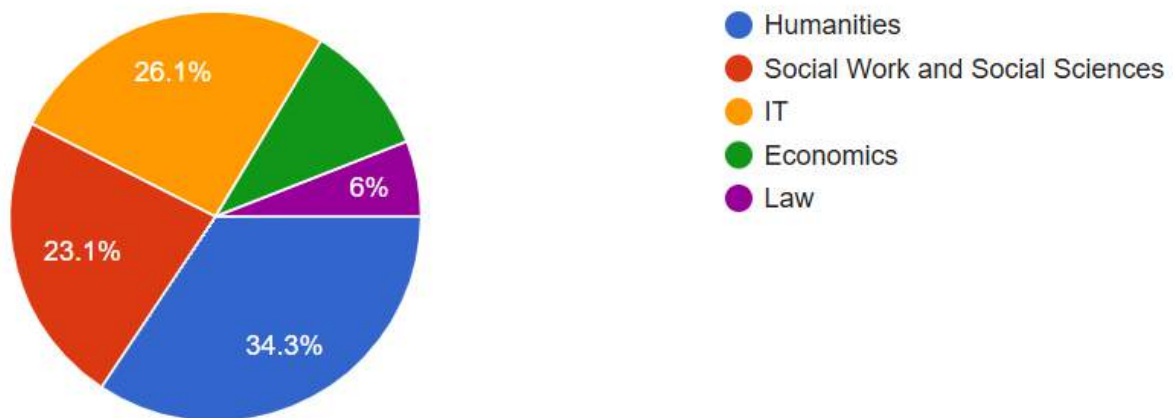


Fig. 1. Distribution of survey participants by departments of the NaUKMA, based on the study sample of 187 respondents.

Source: Authors' own work.

Data Collection. A structured survey was conducted online via Google Forms for the period of 2023–2024 and gathered quantitative data on students' experiences with teamwork in academic settings.

The survey included structured and open questions related to their overall experience, the effectiveness of team assignments, skill development, team dynamics, challenges faced, and satisfaction with communication within teams.

4. Survey results. Among the survey participants, 86.8 % of the students reported prior experience working in teams in other courses, while 13.2 % of the respondents had no such experience.

The majority of respondents had a positive experience with teamwork in educational environments, with 64.2% reporting a positive perception and 9.4% describing their experience as very positive. A neutral stance was taken by 17% of participants, while 7.5% had a negative experience, and 1.9% reported a very negative experience.

Regarding the effectiveness of team assignments in achieving course learning objectives, 52.8% found them effective, while 17% considered them very effective. A neutral stance was held by 26.4% of respondents, whereas 1.9% considered teamwork ineffective, and another 1.9% found it very ineffective.

The most commonly improved skill through teamwork was communication, reported by 71.7% of respondents. Time management was enhanced for 56.6%, followed by presentation skills (45.3%), critical thinking (39.6%), and conflict resolution (39.6%).

When assessing team members' contributions, 56.6% of participants indicated that most members contribute, but some do less. Equal contributions among all members were reported by 24.5%, whereas 17% observed that a few individuals dominated the work. Only 1.9% of respondents perceived contributions as very uneven.

When asked about comfort levels in sharing ideas and opinions during group discussions, 30.2% of respondents stated they always felt comfortable, and 45.3% usually felt comfortable. A neutral response was given by 15.1%, while 5.7% rarely felt comfortable, and 3.8% never felt comfortable sharing their ideas.

Most respondents were satisfied with communication within their teams, with 57.4% expressing satisfaction and 24.5% being very satisfied. A neutral stance was taken by 15.1%, while 3.8% were dissatisfied, and 1.9% reported being very dissatisfied.

The majority of respondents (56.6%) reported never experiencing conflicts or disagreements in their teams. Rare conflicts were reported by 26.4%, while 15.1% occasionally faced conflicts. Only 1.9% stated that they frequently encountered conflicts during teamwork.

The most frequently cited challenge was a lack of engagement, reported by 45.3% of respondents. Role clarity was an issue for 41.5%, while 39.6% identified uneven workload distribution as a challenge. Communication issues were highlighted by 26%, and linguistic issues affected 28.3% of respondents. A total of 15.1% cited "other" challenges that varied, making them less statistically significant compared to the more prevalent categories; however, their presence highlights individual or context-specific difficulties that may warrant further qualitative analysis.

A significant proportion of positive responses to the question "*I feel nervous when working in a group with people I do not know*" came from Humanities students (43.8% within the Faculty of Humanities and Arts), followed by IT students (24.5% within the Information Technologies Faculty), Social Work and Social Sciences (20.9% within the SWSS Faculty), with Law and Economics contributing smaller shares (10% within Economics and 9.1% within Law), suggesting disciplinary differences in group work anxiety.

Preferences for independent English learning as opposed to teamwork were most prevalent among Humanities students (31.3% within Humanities), followed by IT students (24.5% within IT), Social Work and Social Sciences (20.9% within Social Sciences), and Law (9.1%) and Economics (10% students, each contributing the smallest amount of the positive responses.

To summarise, prior experience with teamwork in academic settings proved to be a fundamental factor for the majority of students, who expressed a generally positive perception of collaborative learning of English. Team assignments were found to be effective in achieving course objectives and enhancing key skills such as interpersonal and group communication, time management, and critical thinking. Most students felt comfortable sharing their ideas during group discussions.

While some challenges were noted, including a lack of engagement and workload distribution, conflicts were rare, and most participants acknowledged the benefits of teamwork in developing essential academic and professional skills. The most commonly reported teamwork challenges were lack of engagement, role clarity issues, uneven workload distribution, communication difficulties, and linguistic barriers.

Group work anxiety and preference for independent English learning varied across disciplines, with Humanities students reporting the highest discomfort, while Law and Economics students exhibited the lowest levels of anxiety and the least preference for independent study.

Qualitative Data Analysis. Qualitative data from the surveys were analysed using content analysis of the responses to the open question “*How can your participation in teamwork be made more productive and efficient?*” so as to identify trends and patterns in students' experiences with teamwork. Descriptive statistics were then applied to summarise the responses, emphasising the perceived benefits and challenges of team-based activities in EFL courses.

The analysis highlights a significant impact of teamwork on students' language proficiency and communication skills, providing a deeper understanding of this methodology for educators and curriculum designers. Namely, the students reported that collaborative activities contributed to improvements in speaking, writing, listening, and reading skills by fostering authentic language use and interactive learning. Engaging in group discussions and joint problem-solving enhanced the use of formal academic language, helping students to develop fluency in professional and scholarly communication. Beyond linguistic gains, teamwork fostered vital soft skills such as critical thinking, negotiation, leadership, and conflict resolution, all of which are important for academic and professional success. Additionally, the collaborative environment was reported to boost students' confidence and motivation, making them more engaged and effective communicators in academic settings.

Based on the survey data, it is observed that challenges in teamwork often arise from group dynamics, including dominance by certain members, lack of participation, and language proficiency issues, all of which can impact collaboration and learning outcomes. Additionally, students exhibit varied attitudes toward teamwork, ranging from enthusiasm to reluctance, which further influences group cohesion and effectiveness. Despite these challenges, students' feedback generally reflects a positive perception of team-based tasks, with many finding them both enjoyable and productive. However, students also suggested solutions such as clearer role definitions, better workload distribution, and more structured peer feedback instructions to enhance the overall teamwork experience.

5. Discussion.

Interpretation of Findings. The research findings align with existing literature on the benefits of collaborative learning in enhancing both language skills and soft skills. Studies have consistently highlighted how teamwork not only promotes language development but also strengthens essential soft skills such as collaboration, critical thinking, and problem-solving. The significance of teamwork in fostering academic communication skills is evident in students' reporting improved abilities to express their ideas and engage in academic discussions through collaborative activities. However, the challenges faced, particularly unequal participation, coincide with those noted in previous research (e.g., (Lau et. al, 2014, 80–99; Marasi, 2019, 324–337),

where disparities in team member contributions can hinder group cohesion and the overall learning experience.

Implications for Teaching Practices. To address the observed challenges, incorporating structured team roles and clear guidelines for collaboration are seen as highly effective. Clearly defined roles help to ensure that each student actively participates, minimising the risk of unequal contribution and fostering a more balanced learning environment. Additionally, providing regular feedback and supporting peer assessments can encourage self-reflection and peer accountability, which is essential for maintaining a productive team dynamic. Balancing individual and group assessments can ensure acknowledgement of both collective and personal responsibility. By implementing these strategies and addressing potential drawbacks, educators can enhance the collaborative learning experience so that all students can benefit from the academic and interpersonal advantages of teamwork.

Limitations and Prospects for Further Research. While teamwork has been shown to enhance language proficiency and academic communication skills, there are limitations that should be taken into account. Primarily, it is the variability in group dynamics, where differences in motivation, language proficiency, and individual engagement levels can significantly impact learning outcomes. Additionally, the effectiveness of teamwork may depend on instructional design, with poorly structured tasks leading to unequal participation and reduced benefits for some students. The influence of external factors, such as cultural attitudes toward collaboration and prior experiences with group work, also brings out an issue requiring further exploration.

Future research could benefit from thorough studies over a prolonged period of time aimed at examining the long-term effects of teamwork on developing language proficiency, particularly in tracking improvements in speaking, writing, listening, and reading skills. Comparative studies across disciplines and varying language proficiency levels would provide a broader understanding of the impact of teamwork, revealing whether collaborative learning is equally effective for students with different linguistic backgrounds and academic specialisations.

Another potential area for further research is the connection between teamwork and student motivation in crisis conditions. While collaborative learning has been shown to enhance engagement and confidence, it would be valuable to explore how factors like group cohesion, clarity of roles, and task complexity impact motivation, particularly in challenging environments. Additionally, investigating online and blended teamwork models, especially within the context of distance education during crises, could offer insights into optimising collaboration and supporting the motivation and resilience of remote learners.

6. Conclusion. This study investigated how teamwork enhances linguistic skills and academic communication in EFL students. The results confirm that collaborative learning significantly boosts both language proficiency and essential soft skills. These findings directly answer the original research questions concerning the influence of teamwork on academic communication, its associated challenges and benefits, and its potential integration into university curricula.

In particular, through a survey-based methodology, the study has demonstrated that teamwork fosters student engagement, enhances communication skills, and supports the development of critical thinking. The results emphasise that students who are engaged in team-based learning environments experience higher motivation and confidence in using English for academic purposes. At the same time, challenges such as uneven participation and role ambiguity highlight the need for structured collaboration strategies.

By integrating insights from educational psychology, sociolinguistics, and pedagogy, this research underscores the interdisciplinary **scientific value** of teamwork in EFL education. It strengthens linguistic competence and develops leadership, negotiation, and conflict-resolution skills, which are critical for academic and professional success.

The **practical implications** of this study lie in its evidence-based strategies and recommendations for optimising collaborative learning activities. The findings emphasise the importance of structured teamwork, well-defined roles, and feedback mechanisms in maximising student engagement and learning outcomes. Additionally, the study highlights the potential of online and blended learning models in fostering collaboration, particularly in crisis conditions where remote teamwork can enhance resilience and motivation.

Overall, the study showcased the effectiveness of teamwork in EFL courses, highlighting its benefits and challenges, and outlining practical recommendations for curriculum development.

Future research should focus on exploring digital collaboration tools and adaptive learning models to enhance teamwork-based approaches in language education, ensuring their relevance across diverse learning contexts, improving students' academic outcomes and their better academic and professional preparedness for the future.

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Note on AI Use: The text was proofread with the aid of the OpenAI language model to assist non-native English authors and enhance clarity and language quality. The final content is the full responsibility of the authors.

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