

AI Tool Usage and Student Motivation in English Language Learning: A Descriptive-Correlational Study of First-Year College Students

Julie Mae G. Gabato^{1*}, Maria Lady Sol A. Suazo²

¹College of Teacher Education, St. Francis Xavier College, San Francisco, Agusan del Sur, Philippines

²MAELT Program, North Eastern Mindanao State University, Tandag City, Surigao del Sur, Philippines

*Corresponding Author

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between AI tool usage and student motivation in English language learning among first-year college students. Specifically, it determined the current landscape of AI tool usage in terms of duration of AI use, AI tool repertoire, functional use of AI tools, AI integration into learning routines, and feedback tools; the extent of student motivation in terms of enjoyment and interest, instrumental goals and reward, sense of choice and control, capability and progress, and feeling of connection; and the significant relationship between AI tool usage and student motivation. The study used a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design. Data were collected from 120 purposively selected first-year college students using a researcher-made questionnaire. Frequency, percentage, weighted mean, and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient were used to analyze the data. Results showed that students used AI tools in diverse and purposeful ways, particularly for grammar correction, writing support, translation, feedback-seeking, and integration into learning routines. Students were generally moderately motivated when using AI as a learning medium, especially when it supported enjoyment, learning goals, choice, perceived capability, progress, and connection to learning. Significant relationships were found between functional AI use, AI integration, feedback tools, and all student motivation indicators. However, duration of AI use was not significantly related to motivation. The study concludes that the motivational value of AI is associated more with purposeful and functional use than with length of exposure.

Keywords: AI tool usage, student motivation, English language learning, first-year college students, descriptive-correlational research

INTRODUCTION

The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in higher education has grown more prominent, especially in students' access to information, completion of academic tasks, and support for English language learning. AI tools such as chatbots, grammar checkers, translators, paraphrasing tools, and writing assistants are now commonly used by students to assist them in reading, writing, vocabulary development, grammar correction, and feedback-seeking. In English language learning, these tools offer instant feedback, alternative explanations, and language scaffolding that can help students complete school tasks with greater ease. However, the presence of AI tools does not automatically ensure meaningful learning. The use of AI in learning English is not only about how much students use it, but also how they use it, what tools they use, how they integrate it into the learning process, and how such use is related to their motivation.

With strategic application, AI-supported language education can boost student engagement, confidence, and support in the learning process. Wei (2023) revealed that AI in language education can enhance English learning achievement, English learning motivation, and self-regulated learning. In the same vein, Kristiawan et al. (2024)

pointed out that the use of AI tools in English language learning offers pedagogical advantages, particularly in writing support, grammar, feedback, and learner engagement. Other authors also observed that AI can enhance personalized learning, thereby promoting better learning experiences (Hu, 2024), and that AI-assisted assessment can help maintain students' motivation in blended learning (Ji et al., 2024). These findings indicate that AI tools can be employed not only as technological tools but also as learning supports that may influence students' interest, confidence, autonomy, and progress in language learning.

Student motivation plays a crucial part in understanding the educational significance of AI tool utilization. According to Self-Determination Theory, learners are more likely to be motivated when their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met (Deci & Ryan, 2000). This is important in the context of AI-assisted English learning because it can increase students' sense of autonomy in asking questions, making revisions, receiving feedback, and using the language without immediate evaluation. Further, the Technology Acceptance Model suggests that students are more likely to use a technology if they believe that the technology is useful and easy to use (Davis, 1989). Therefore, students' perception of AI tools as accessible, supportive, and relevant to their learning needs makes their use of AI tools more meaningful.

Although there is an increasing trend in the use of AI in learning, further investigation is required at the local level to understand how students actually utilize AI tools and how such utilization is related to their motivation in learning English. The incorporation of AI in the Philippine education system is timely because more students are exposed to digital technologies, but access, readiness, and responsible use remain uneven. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority (2025), less than half of households (48.8%) had internet access at home, implying that not all students have equal opportunities to regularly use AI-based learning tools. Meanwhile, in the 2025 EF English Proficiency Index, the Philippines was ranked 28th out of 123 countries and regions, signaling that English proficiency remains an educational concern (EF Education First, 2025). Although students are already using AI for tasks such as writing, translation, grammar correction, and seeking explanations, extensive use does not ensure responsible, reflective, and motivated use. Past research has warned against the potential for overreliance, superficial completion of tasks, and ethical issues with the use of AI (Guiyab, 2025; Malon et al., 2024; Xiaofan & Annamalai, 2025).

Given these concerns, this study aimed to examine the current state of AI tool use and its connection to student motivation in English language learning among first-year college students. In particular, it focused on students' time spent using AI, AI tool repertoire, functional use of AI tools, AI use as part of students' learning routines, and the use of feedback tools. It also determined the extent of student motivation in terms of enjoyment and interest, instrumental goals and reward, sense of choice and control, capability and progress, and feeling of connection. The study aimed to provide context-specific evidence that can inform teachers, students, and institutions in fostering more purposeful, responsible, and motivating English language learning experiences with AI tools.

Research Questions

This study aimed to determine the relationship between AI tool usage and student motivation in English language learning among first-year college students. Specifically, it sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the current landscape of AI tool usage among students for English language learning in terms of: 1.1 duration of AI use; 1.2 AI tool repertoire; 1.3 functional use of AI tools; 1.4 AI integration into learning routines; and 1.5 feedback tools?
2. What is the extent of student motivation in language learning with AI as a medium in terms of: 2.1 enjoyment and interest; 2.2 instrumental goals and reward; 2.3 sense of choice and control; 2.4 capability and progress; and 2.5 feeling of connection?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the current landscape of AI tool usage and the extent of student motivation in language learning with AI?

METHODOLOGY

This study used a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design. The descriptive aspect was employed in determining the current landscape of AI tool usage and the level of students' motivation in learning the English language, while the correlational aspect was employed to examine the significant relationship between AI tool usage and student motivation. The study was carried out in a private higher education institution in San Francisco, Agusan del Sur, Philippines. The respondents were 120 first-year college students enrolled in General Education English courses who had used or were aware of AI-assisted learning software such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, QuillBot, translators, writing assistants, and similar applications in English-related learning activities.

The respondents were selected through purposive sampling because they had to fulfill specific inclusion criteria. Those who participated in the study must have been formally registered in a General Education English course during the data collection period, enrolled in a college within the scope of the study, exposed to or using AI tools for academic work in English, and willing to participate through informed consent. Students who were not taking General Education English during the data collection period, irregular students, students who refused to participate, and those who did not return the questionnaire were not included.

The main research instrument was a researcher-made survey questionnaire designed in accordance with the objectives of the study, the major variables, and related literature on the utilization of AI tools and students' motivation in learning English. Only the sections relevant to the current state of AI tool use and student motivation were used for this publication. The first part collected profile and background data such as age, sex, year level, program/course, self-rated English proficiency, internet access, and device used for AI tools. The section on AI tool usage covered duration of AI use, AI tool repertoire, functional use of AI tools, AI integration into learning routines, and feedback tools. The section on student motivation measured enjoyment and interest, instrumental goals and reward, sense of choice and control, capability and progress, and feeling of connection while using AI as a medium for English language learning.

The AI usage indicators were rated using a 5-point Likert scale: 5 = Strongly Agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 2 = Disagree, and 1 = Strongly Disagree. The student motivation indicators were rated using a 5-point motivational scale: 5 = Highly Motivational, 4 = Moderately Motivational, 3 = Motivational, 2 = Slightly Motivational, and 1 = Not Motivational. The questionnaire also included checklist and multiple-response items for students' background information and AI tool repertoire. Qualified validators reviewed the questionnaire to ensure the clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of the items to the purpose of the study.

Prior to data collection, the necessary permission was obtained from the relevant institution, and the respondents were briefed on the purpose of the study. Informed consent was secured, and the respondents were informed that their participation was voluntary and that their responses would be treated confidentially. The researcher personally administered the questionnaire to the qualified respondents during the data collection period. Completed questionnaires were retrieved, checked for completeness, organized, encoded, and prepared for statistical analysis.

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data. Frequency and percentage were used to describe selected aspects of the respondents' profile and the current landscape of AI tool usage. Weighted mean was used to determine the extent of student motivation and the level of agreement on the indicators of AI tool usage. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to determine the significant relationship between the current landscape of AI tool usage and the extent of student motivation in English language learning. The scope of the study was limited to first-year college students enrolled in General Education English courses who had exposure to AI-assisted learning tools. The study focused only on AI tool usage, student motivation, and the relationship between these two variables.

Regarding instrument reliability, the questionnaire underwent expert validation; however, the item-level response matrix needed to independently compute Cronbach's alpha coefficients for each subscale was not available in the publication file used for this revision. Therefore, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were not reported and this issue is acknowledged in the Limitations section rather than assumed or fabricated.

RESULTS

The results are presented according to the three research questions of the study. Since the study used a quantitative descriptive-correlational design, the findings are presented using frequency, percentage, weighted mean, and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient.

Table 1: Current Landscape of AI Tool Usage Among Students for English Language Learning

Category	Period / AI Tool Used	Frequency	Percentage
Length of Experience in Using AI Tools	Less than 1 month	39	33%
	1 to 3 months	24	20%
	4 to 6 months	15	13%
	7 to 12 months	3	3%
	More than 1 year	39	33%
	Total	120	100%
Frequency of AI Tool Use in English Learning	Daily	53	44%
	3 to 5 times/week	22	18%
	1 to 2 times/week	21	18%
	2 to 3 times/month	17	14%
	Rarely	7	6%
	Total	120	100%
Average Daily Time Spent Using AI Tools	More than 15 minutes	50	42%
	15 to 30 minutes	44	37%
	31 to 60 minutes	13	11%
	1 to 2 hours	7	6%
	Less than 2 hours	6	5%
	Total	120	100%
Tool Repertoire	Chatbot	110	92%
	AI Grammar Checker	73	61%
	AI Paraphrasing Tool	58	48%
	AI Translator	81	68%
	AI Dictionary/Vocabulary Tool	48	40%
	AI Writing Assistant	49	41%

	AI Speech/Pronunciation Tool	7	6%
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Table 1 presents the current landscape of AI tool usage among the respondents. In terms of length of experience, the highest frequencies were recorded for students who had used AI tools for less than one month and for more than one year, both with 39 respondents or 33%. In terms of frequency of use, 53 respondents or 44% reported using AI tools daily for English learning. For average daily time spent, 50 respondents or 42% reported using AI tools for more than 15 minutes. In terms of tool repertoire, chatbot AI was the most commonly used tool, with 110 respondents or 92%, followed by AI translators with 81 respondents or 68%, and AI grammar checkers with 73 respondents or 61%.

Table 2: Current Landscape of AI Tool Usage Based on Scaled Indicators

Category	Overall Mean	Adjectival Rating
Functional Use of AI	4.10	Agree
AI Integration	3.77	Agree
Feedback Tools	3.99	Agree

Table 2 shows the current landscape of AI tool usage based on scaled indicators. Among the three indicators, functional use of AI obtained the highest overall mean of 4.10, interpreted as Agree. This was followed by feedback tools with a mean of 3.99, also interpreted as Agree. AI integration obtained the lowest mean of 3.77, but it was still interpreted as Agree. Overall, the results indicate that students agreed that they used AI tools for functional English learning purposes, feedback-seeking, and integration into learning routines.

Table 3: Extent of Student Motivation in Language Learning with AI as a Medium

Indicator	Mean	Interpretation
Enjoyment and Interest	3.670	Moderately Motivational
Instrumental Goals and Reward	3.555	Moderately Motivational
Sense of Choice and Control	3.630	Moderately Motivational
Capability and Progress	3.775	Moderately Motivational
Feeling of Connection	3.777	Moderately Motivational
Overall Mean	3.681	Moderately Motivational

Table 3 presents the extent of student motivation in language learning with AI as a medium. The highest mean was obtained by feeling of connection at 3.777, interpreted as Moderately Motivational. This was closely followed by capability and progress with a mean of 3.775.

Enjoyment and interest obtained a mean of 3.670, while sense of choice and control obtained a mean of 3.630. Instrumental goals and reward obtained the lowest mean of 3.555, but it was still interpreted as Moderately Motivational. The overall mean of 3.681 indicates that the respondents' motivation in using AI for language learning was generally Moderately Motivational.

Table 4: Relationship Between the Current Landscape of AI Tool Usage and Student Motivation

Motivation Indicator	AI Tool Usage Variable Tested	r	p-value	Decision	Conclusion
Enjoyment and Interest	Duration	0.067	0.464	Failed to reject Ho	Not Significant
	Functional Use	0.506	< .001	Reject Ho	Significant
	AI Integration	0.424	< .001	Reject Ho	Significant
	Feedback Tools	0.635	< .001	Reject Ho	Significant
Instrumental Goals and Reward	Duration	0.034	0.714	Failed to reject Ho	Not Significant
	Functional Use	0.475	< .001	Reject Ho	Significant
	AI Integration	0.571	< .001	Reject Ho	Significant
	Feedback Tools	0.664	< .001	Reject Ho	Significant
Sense of Choice and Control	Duration	0.031	0.736	Failed to reject Ho	Not Significant
	Functional Use	0.515	< .001	Reject Ho	Significant
	AI Integration	0.481	< .001	Reject Ho	Significant
	Feedback Tools	0.643	< .001	Reject Ho	Significant
Capability and Progress	Duration	0.017	0.856	Failed to reject Ho	Not Significant
	Functional Use	0.499	< .001	Reject Ho	Significant
	AI Integration	0.493	< .001	Reject Ho	Significant
	Feedback Tools	0.594	< .001	Reject Ho	Significant
Feeling of Connection	Duration	0.090	0.329	Failed to reject Ho	Not Significant
	Functional Use	0.462	< .001	Reject Ho	Significant
	AI Integration	0.387	< .001	Reject Ho	Significant
	Feedback Tools	0.550	< .001	Reject Ho	Significant

Table 4 presents the relationship between the current landscape of AI tool usage and student motivation. The results show that duration of AI use had no significant relationship with all motivation indicators, as shown by p-values greater than 0.05.

However, functional use of AI, AI integration into learning routines, and feedback tools had significant relationships with all indicators of student motivation, as shown by p-values lower than 0.001. The findings indicate that the quality and purpose of AI tool usage were more strongly related to student motivation than the length of time students had been using AI tools.

DISCUSSION

The results indicate that the use of AI tools was already part of first-year college students' English language learning practices. The extensive use of tools and applications such as chatbots, AI translators, grammar checkers, paraphrasing tools, and writing assistants suggests that AI has emerged as a valuable aid for students in academic contexts requiring English writing skills. This indicates that students are not merely using AI as a digital tool but as a language learning support for grammar correction, translation, writing enhancement, vocabulary assistance, and feedback-seeking. This finding aligns with Wei (2023), who reported that AI-enhanced teaching could help students benefit from feedback and personalized assistance in English learning. It also supports Kristiawan et al. (2024), who noted that AI tools can offer pedagogical advantages in language learning, such as writing and grammar support, feedback, and engagement.

The results also show that the functional use of AI had the highest mean among the scaled indicators of AI tool usage. This means that students were more inclined to use AI when it had clear academic purposes. The use of AI in learning routines and feedback tools also received positive ratings, reflecting students' understanding of the value of AI beyond one-time assistance and toward repeated learning support. This finding can be explained through the Technology Acceptance Model, which suggests that students are more likely to use technology when they perceive it as useful and easy to use (Davis, 1989). In this study, students seemed to embrace AI tools because these tools made the performance of English-related tasks more convenient. The findings also indicate that purposeful use is more important than mere exposure. Students may have access to AI, but its learning value becomes greater when used for meaningful language tasks, feedback, and learning routines.

The analysis of student motivation revealed that students' motivation in language learning using AI was in the moderate category. Feeling of connection and capability and progress had the highest means among the indicators. When AI helped students feel part of the learning process and perceive improvement in completing English tasks, their motivation increased. This reflects Self-Determination Theory, which explains that motivation becomes stronger when learners experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). AI could have enhanced students' sense of competence by helping them revise their work, clarify explanations, and receive instant feedback. It could also have promoted autonomy by allowing students to control the pace and manner of their learning.

The moderate level of motivation indicates that students were encouraged by the use of AI tools; however, the motivational effect was not very high or absolute. This means that AI may support motivation, but it does not replace the role of teachers, classroom guidance, peer interaction, and responsible learning practices. This is consistent with Hu (2024), who stated that AI-assisted personalized learning can be used effectively to help students learn. It is also consistent with Ji et al. (2024), who emphasized the role of AI-supported assessment in maintaining motivation. The moderate rating suggests that there is a need to provide clearer guidance to students on the responsible and effective use of AI tools. Without guidance, AI might be used only for task completion and not in a reflective or learning-oriented way.

The most significant result of the study concerns the correlation between students' use of AI tools and their motivation. The results indicate that duration of AI use was not significantly related to any motivation indicator. This is a key finding because it demonstrates that prolonged use of AI tools does not necessarily instill motivation among users. A student may have used AI for a long time, but such use may not be motivational if it is passive, mechanical, or limited to completing tasks without learning from the process.

In contrast, functional use of AI, AI integration into learning routines, and feedback tools had significant relationships with the indicators of student motivation. This suggests that learners were more motivated when they used AI for purposeful activities, when it was integrated into their learning processes, and when it provided feedback that enhanced learning. The results agree with Davis' (1989) Technology Acceptance Model, which states that students are more likely to use tools they perceive as useful and easy to use. They also correspond with Self-Determination Theory because functional AI use and feedback can enhance students' sense of competence, autonomy, and progress (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Therefore, the results indicate that the motivational value of AI is not about the amount of time spent using it, but about the meaningfulness of its use.

Overall, positive links were found between AI tool usage and student motivation when AI was applied to support the English learning process. Students' use of AI to request feedback, clarify explanations, revise outputs, and

include learning support in their workflows makes AI more motivating. The results are aligned with studies that consider AI as a tool that enhances language learning, engagement, and learner confidence (Hu, 2024; Ji et al., 2024; Kristiawan et al., 2024; Wei, 2023). The results also highlight the importance of responsible AI usage. Since duration was not significantly related to motivation, teachers and institutions should focus less on how often students use AI and give more attention to whether students use AI ethically, reflectively, and meaningfully in English language learning.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study has several limitations. First, the data were gathered from a single source at one point in time using a self-report questionnaire. This may have introduced common method bias, since the same respondents provided information about their AI tool usage and motivation. Second, the use of purposive sampling limited the generalizability of the findings because the respondents were first-year college students who had exposure to AI tools. Students who had no exposure to AI tools were not included, which may have restricted the range of responses and influenced the observed correlations.

Third, the correlational design does not permit causal claims. Although significant relationships were found between functional AI use, AI integration, feedback tools, and motivation, the findings do not prove that AI tool usage caused higher motivation. Fourth, the study did not include control variables such as prior English proficiency, digital literacy, program, device access, or internet stability in the correlation analysis. These variables may have influenced both AI use and motivation. Fifth, although demographic information was collected, the publication dataset used for this contained only aggregated results; therefore, additional moderator or control-variable analyses could not be completed in this manuscript.

Sixth, the researcher-made questionnaire was validated by qualified validators, but the item-level raw responses needed to compute Cronbach's alpha coefficients for each subscale were not available in the publication file used for this review. The absence of subscale reliability coefficients should therefore be considered when interpreting the results. Finally, the study did not measure negative AI-related experiences such as overreliance, anxiety, academic integrity concerns, or reduced originality. Future research may address these limitations by using larger and more diverse samples, including non-AI users, applying longitudinal or experimental designs, testing demographic and learning-related control variables, and including measures of both the benefits and risks of AI use.

CONCLUSION

First, the current landscape of AI tool usage among first-year college students showed that AI tools were already part of their English language learning practices. The students used different AI tools, particularly chatbots, translators, grammar checkers, paraphrasing tools, and writing assistants. These tools were commonly used for functional academic purposes such as checking grammar, translating texts, improving written outputs, seeking explanations, and obtaining feedback. This indicates that students' use of AI was not limited to simple access or exposure but was connected to practical English learning tasks.

Second, the extent of student motivation in language learning with AI as a medium was generally moderately motivational. The students were motivated when AI supported their enjoyment and interest, academic goals, sense of choice and control, capability and progress, and feeling of connection. This suggests that AI tools helped students feel more capable, independent, and supported in accomplishing English-related tasks. However, the moderate level also indicates that AI tools should be properly guided by teachers and institutions so that students can use them more meaningfully and responsibly.

Third, there was a significant relationship between the current landscape of AI tool usage and student motivation. Specifically, functional use of AI, AI integration into learning routines, and feedback tools were significantly related to the indicators of student motivation. However, duration of AI use was not significantly related to student motivation. This means that students' motivation was influenced not by how long they had been using AI, but by how purposefully, regularly, and meaningfully they used AI tools for English language learning.

Therefore, AI can support student motivation when it is used as a purposeful learning aid rather than merely as a shortcut for completing academic tasks.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, English teachers can use AI tools in language learning activities in a purposeful and guided way. Because functional use of AI, integration of AI in learning routines, and feedback tools were found to be significantly related to student motivation, teachers can create learning activities that enable students to use AI to check grammar, expand vocabulary, brainstorm ideas, revise writing, check translation, and analyze feedback. However, the use of AI should not be seen as a substitute for instructional guidance. It should serve as a facilitating tool to enhance students' English language learning while fostering their ability to think independently, be original, and take responsibility for learning.

Students should be encouraged to use AI tools responsibly and reflectively. They should be directed to engage with AI not only as a tool for completing tasks rapidly but also as a tool for understanding feedback, comparing explanations, revising their work, and enhancing their confidence in the language learning process. Since duration of AI use was not significantly related to motivation, students should be reminded that the value of AI is not related to the length of time they use it, but rather to how meaningfully and purposefully they use AI for learning.

School administrators and curriculum planners may devise guidelines or reminders for the responsible use of AI in English language learning. These may include proper recognition of AI assistance, checking the accuracy of AI-generated answers, avoiding plagiarism, maintaining originality, and preventing overreliance on AI tools. These guidelines can support students in using AI tools appropriately while encouraging them to engage in their own work.

Orientation sessions or teacher-led activities may be included to educate students about the responsible and purposeful use of AI tools in learning the English language. These activities can include learning about using AI to improve grammar, revise and enhance writing, expand vocabulary, translate texts, and analyze feedback. This is suggested as a practical application of the findings and does not represent an intervention program or formal output of the study.

Future studies can be undertaken with larger samples, other year levels, other higher education institutions, and/or comparison groups from public and private schools. Future researchers may also analyze demographic and learning-related variables, such as prior English proficiency, digital literacy, internet stability, device access, and program, as moderators or control variables. In addition, future studies may include actual language performance measures, qualitative interviews, and negative AI-related indicators such as overreliance, anxiety, and academic integrity concerns to provide a more balanced understanding of AI-supported English language learning.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher adhered to the ethical requirements for conducting the study. The respondents were asked for consent prior to participation and were informed of the purpose of the study, the nature of their participation, and the use of the information collected. The respondents were also informed of their right to opt out of the research at any point without penalty. The anonymity and confidentiality of the respondents were ensured by not releasing any personal information that could be used to identify them in the presentation and interpretation of the findings. The Data Privacy Act was followed in the collection, handling, storage, and use of the data. The integrity and well-being of the respondents were protected during the study, and participation was voluntary and treated with respect. The researcher declares that there was no conflict of interest in the conduct of the study. To avoid plagiarism, all sources used in this manuscript were properly acknowledged, and the findings were interpreted objectively without intentional bias. The outcomes of the study were used only for academic and research purposes. The use of AI tools was limited to language editing, organization, and formatting assistance and did not involve the analysis, interpretation, or scholarly responsibility for the manuscript.

Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are not publicly available to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the respondents. Aggregated results are presented in the manuscript, and related data may be made available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request and subject to applicable ethical and institutional restrictions.

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