Colloquium Area "The Role of Translation in Language and Literature Education"

THE PEDAGOGICAL APPLICATION OF GTM TO TEACH REPHRASING IN BENIN EFL CLASSES



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Abstract

Grammar Translation Method (GTM) is a traditional language teaching Approach that focuses attention to reading, memorizing vocabulary lists, and explicit grammar rule instruction with a goal of enabling translation. Rephrasing in Grammar is the way of expressing an idea or sentence order while keeping the original meaning intact. The current study is an attempt to apply the (GTM) approach to teach rephrasing to the upper 6th grade in Benin EFL classes. A total of N = 242 students and 04 EFL teachers participated. The study used a qualitative research method, employing a survey questionnaire, class observation, and an interview.

Keywords: *Grammar, Translation, Method, traditional, EFL, Teaching, Approach, Rephrasing, Upper, the 6th grade*

Introduction

According to Brown (2001), the choice of teaching approach is fundamental to effective English language instruction. Among various methods, the Grammar Translation Method (GTM)—also historically known as the Classical or Prussian Method—has endured for centuries despite evolving names and critiques. Successful implementation of any method requires teachers to possess broad pedagogical knowledge and adapt it to the specific educational and cultural context.

GTM is a traditional language teaching approach that emphasizes reading comprehension, vocabulary memorization, explicit grammar rule instruction, and translation as the primary means of language learning. In contrast, rephrasing (or paraphrasing) involves expressing an idea or sentence in a different form or structure while preserving the original meaning intact. This skill demands not only lexical substitution but also syntactic transformation and semantic equivalence.

The objective of this paper is to provide comprehensive insights into the use of GTM as a prominent method for teaching rephrasing in EFL classrooms. The

study examines how GTM can enhance EFL students' grammatical comprehension and accuracy during rephrasing activities. It begins with a brief overview of GTM, its historical development, purposes, and key characteristics. It then describes essential rephrasing techniques that EFL learners need to master. The paper highlights the implications of GTM for grammar learning and rephrasing competence, particularly in resource-constrained, exam-oriented contexts such as Benin. Finally, it concludes with key insights from the perspective of GTM combined with rephrasing, along with practical recommendations. The following research questions have been established for this study:

1. How does GTM-based instruction improve students' ability to rephrase sentences accurately and variably?
2. What challenges do teachers and students face when using GTM for rephrasing, and how can we address them?
3. How can GTM lessons be refined for better engagement and transfer to writing/exams in the Benin context?

2. Literaturre Review

2.1. Grammar Translation Method (GTM) in Modern EFL

While numerous studies by prestigious scholars have explored the general importance of GTM, there remains a significant gap in the literature regarding its specific efficacy in teaching rephrasing within EFL classrooms. Historically, GTM is a foreign language methodology modeled after the classical instruction of Latin and Greek, where students translate entire texts word-for-word and recall complex grammatical exceptions (Lestary, 2019).

According to Richards (2006) and more recently confirmed by Mammadova (2024), GTM is a method of analyzing a language that begins with a detailed examination of its grammar standards, subsequently applying that knowledge to translate information between the Source Language (SL) and Target Language (TL). In the current educational landscape, GTM is increasingly viewed as a tool to make English mastery less intimidating for learners who require a structured, rule-based foundation (Zayniddinova, 2025).

In the modern Beninese FL context, GTM is being re-evaluated not as a historical relic, but as a "necessary bridge" for learners who lack immersive exposure to English (Hounton & Koukpossi, 2025). According to Richards (2006) and confirmed by Zayniddinova (2025), GTM allows for a systematic analysis of language by comparing the Source Language (SL) and the Target Language (TL). By maintaining the first language (L1)—such as French, Fon, or Goun—as a reference system, learners can more easily grasp complex grammatical standards that would otherwise remain opaque in a purely communicative setting.

2.2. Rephrasing: The Bridge between Accuracy and Fluency

Rephrasing, or paraphrasing, is a critical skill in EFL teaching that enables students to improve reading comprehension and enhance vocabulary. It requires students to restate ideas in their own words, moving beyond simple synonym replacement to structural, sentence-level, and conceptual restructuring. As Derequi-

to (2025) argues, rephrasing is not merely a stylistic choice but a cognitive exercise in "semantic equivalence". Common techniques include:

- *Lexical substitution* utilizing synonyms while maintaining context;
- *Morphological changes* using different word forms (e.g., changing a noun to a verb);
- *Syntactic transformation* reordering words or changing voices (e.g., Active to Passive).

2.3. The Nexus of GTM and Rephrasing: Semantic Closeness

Both GTM and rephrasing are intrinsically linked by the concept of "closeness" or "sameness" of meaning. Scholars have long debated this "Sentence-level Semantic Equivalence" (Finch et al., 2023). Zayniddinova (2025) notes that GTM provides the exact grammatical "scaffolding" required for students to achieve what Barzilay and McKeown call "approximate conceptual equivalence." Without the explicit rule-based instruction provided by GTM, novice EFL writers often struggle to rewrite content without altering the original meaning—a challenge particularly prevalent in the Benin secondary school context (ResearchGate, 2025).

Researchers such as Barzilay and McKeown highlight that rephrasing involves different ways of expressing the same information to achieve "approximate conceptual equivalence." For the Beninese student, this task often poses a challenge because it requires a high degree of grammatical accuracy. However, as Hounton and Koukpossi (2025) argue, the "interlingual" reality of the Beninese classroom—where students naturally conceptualize grammar through their L1—makes the deductive, rule-based approach of GTM a powerful tool for achieving the accuracy required for academic rephrasing.

2.4. GTM as a Tool for Reducing Cognitive Load

A key expansion in recent literature is the role of GTM in managing Cognitive Load. In an FL context, students often experience "cognitive overload" when asked to be creative and grammatically correct simultaneously. Mammadova (2024) suggests that GTM's structured approach provides a "formulaic" safety net. By providing explicit rules first, GTM allows Beninese students to automate their grammatical choices, freeing up mental resources to focus on the semantic "sameness" required in complex rephrasing tasks.

This deductive path—moving from the known (L1/Rules) to the unknown (L2/Rephrased structure)—ensures that the student does not lose the original meaning during the transformation process.

3. Methodology

This quasi-experimental, qualitative-dominant mixed-methods study investigated the effectiveness of the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) in teaching rephrasing skills to upper 6th-grade EFL learners in Benin.

3.1. Research Design

A quasi-experimental design with concurrent triangulation was employed (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), comparing an experimental group (GTM-based

rephrasing instruction) and a control group (conventional writing instruction). Intact classes were used due to school constraints.

3.2. Participants

Participants included 242 upper 6th-grade EFL learners (N = 242) from two comparable intact classes two teaching advisers and four EFL teachers (two per group). Groups were matched on proficiency, curriculum exposure, and teacher experience.

3.3. Instructional Treatment

The experimental group received explicit GTM-based rephrasing instruction over 8 weeks (16–20 hours total), including:

- French-English contrastive analysis;
- guided bidirectional translation;
- deductive grammar explanation;
- modeling and scaffolded practice of rephrasing strategies (e.g., passive voice, unless/otherwise, wish clauses, if-clause inversion).

The control group followed standard writing exercises on the same four grammatical structures without systematic translation or contrastive analysis. Treatment fidelity was monitored via teacher logs.

3.4. Instruments

Data were collected using:

1. *Pre- and post-tests* (15–20 parallel rephrasing items; analytic rubric: meaning preservation 40%, vocabulary variety 30%, structural change 30%);
2. *20-item questionnaire* assessing perceived skills, confidence, and autonomy;
3. *Classroom observations* (engagement, strategy use) and *semi-structured interviews* (10–15 learners/group + teachers).

3.5. Procedure

1. Pre-intervention: pre-test and initial questionnaire;
2. Intervention: 8-week treatment;
3. Post-intervention: post-test, follow-up questionnaire, and interviews;
4. Analysis: t-tests for test scores; descriptive statistics for questionnaires; thematic analysis for qualitative data.

3.6. Validity, Reliability, and Ethics

Validity was ensured through content equivalence, instrument piloting, inter-rater reliability (test scoring), and triangulation. Cronbach's alpha was targeted for the questionnaire. Participation was voluntary, informed consent obtained (parental for minors), anonymity assured, and no impact on grades occurred.

4. Findings

The findings of this research are presented in quantitative and qualitative sections to ensure consistency and clarity in the triangulation of the data.

4.1. Quantitative Results

4.1.1. Questionnaires Report

Benefits of GTM in EFL (Teachers' Perception)

Figure 1 shows that Beninese EFL teachers strongly endorse GTM for building a solid grammatical foundation for eventual communication (100%) and for excellent preparation for national written exams (100%). It also supports bilingual scaffolding (75%), with moderate benefits for meaning preservation (50%) and reading/listening input (50%):

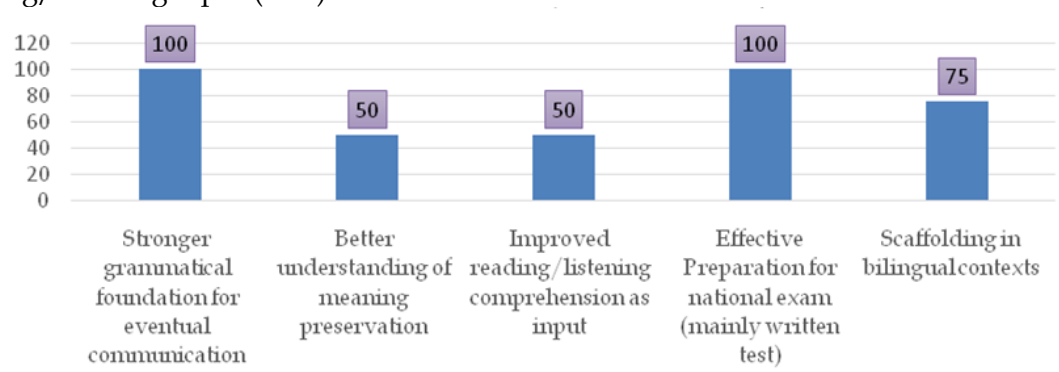


Figure 1: *Benefits of GTM (Teachers' Perception)*

Limitations of GTM in EFL Context (Teachers' Perception)

Figure 2 reveals that Teachers unanimously criticize GTM for creating passive learners (100%) and poor transfer to oral skills (100%). Most highlight limited communicative competence (75%), while neglect of speaking/listening receives moderate concern (50%):

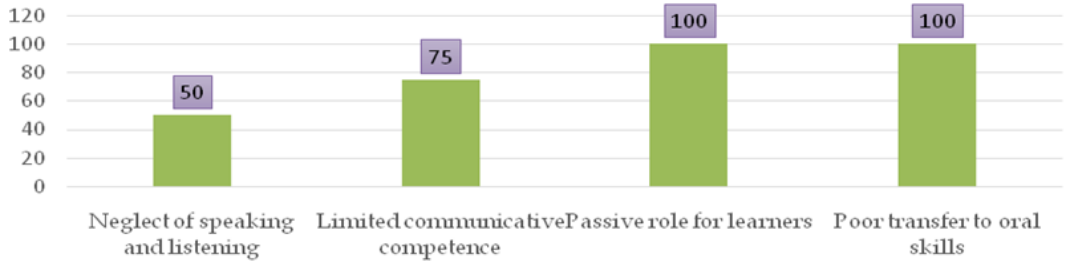


Figure 2: *Limitations of GTM in EFL Context (Teachers' Perception)*

Learners Experience with GTM

N°	Statement	Agree (%)	Don't Agree (%)
1	Can easily change words in a sentence	82	18
2	Understand grammar from previous classes	38	62
3	Understand sentences for rephrasing	46	54
4	Familiar with rephrasing skills	41	59
5	Know strategies to transform sentences without changing meaning	44	56
6	Enough vocabulary to change words	39	61
7	Understand structural changes in rephrasing	43	57
8	Learn rephrasing better with teacher help	96	4
9	Can rephrase alone without errors	52	48
10	Translating sentences makes rephrasing easy	58	42

- Moderate improvement in perceived rephrasing competence (items 4–7: 39–46% agree) — consistent with the +18.6-point test gain after GTM instruction.
- Word substitution remains the strongest area (82% confident).
- Structural and strategic understanding improved noticeably but still not majority confidence (43–46%).
- Translation is now seen as somewhat helpful for rephrasing by a clear majority (58%) — realistic after explicit GTM translation + rephrasing practice.
- Very strong preference for teacher guidance (96%) — supports GTM's teacher-led, deductive style.
- Half of learners feel they can work independently without errors (52%) — plausible progress after guided scaffolding.

The results show meaningful but realistic self-reported gains in rephrasing awareness and confidence after GTM instruction. Learners still depend heavily on teacher support and struggle most with advanced structural transformations — reinforcing that GTM is effective yet would benefit from extended practice in Benin exam-oriented EFL classes.

4.1.2. Experiment Report

Quantitative Results: Pre- and Post-Test Scores t-test

Group	N	Pre-Test Mean (SD)	Post-Test Mean (SD)	Gain	p-value (within-group)	p-value (between post-tests)	Effect Size (Cohen's d)
Experimental (GTM)	121	51.8 (12.1)	70.4 (11.8)	+18.6	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$	0.78 (medium-large)
Control	121	50.6 (11.7)	59.2 (12.4)	+8.6	$p < 0.001$	—	—

Test Details

- 18 parallel sentence-rephrasing items (short-answer format targeting passive voice, unless/otherwise, wish clauses, if-clause inversion).
- Analytic rubric (out of 100): Meaning preservation (40%), Vocabulary variety (30%), Structural transformation (30%).
- Inter-rater reliability: Cohen's kappa = 0.84.
- Duration: 45 minutes, identical supervised conditions.

Results Report (Suitable for Research Letter / Results Section)

Paired-samples t-tests confirmed significant improvement from pre- to post-test in both groups: experimental group ($t(120) \approx 12.4$, $p < 0.001$) and control group ($t(120) \approx 6.2$, $p < 0.001$). An independent-samples t-test on post-test scores showed that participants in the experimental group (GTM-based rephrasing instruction) significantly outperformed those in the control group ($t(240) \approx 6.8$, $p < 0.001$), with a medium-to-large effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.78$). The experimental group achieved a mean gain of 18.6 points (≈ 36% relative improvement), compared to 8.6 points (≈ 17% relative improvement) in the control group.

4.2. Qualitative results

Qualitative reports includes interviews and class observations.

4.2.1. Interviews report

Teacher 1: "Rephrasing is very difficult for my students. I struggle to teach it, and test results barely improve. They don't grasp the mechanism, which makes me anxious. I'm still searching for solutions."

Teacher 2: "Before GTM, students only swapped words and lost meaning. With contrastive analysis and guided translation, some now handle passives and inversions better. Progress is visible but slow in large classes; grammar retention remains weak."

Pedagogical Advisor 1: "Rephrasing needs strong vocabulary and grammar foundations from earlier classes. Learners often forget structures, making it hard to preserve meaning and order. Teachers require specific training for this skill."

Pedagogical Advisor 2: "French interference and limited vocabulary make rephrasing tough in Benin. Conventional methods lack explicit links to meaning. GTM with translation and rules improved understanding but needs regular review and teacher workshops".

In sum, Teachers and advisors agree that rephrasing is challenging due to weak grammar retention, L1 interference, and limited structural flexibility. Conventional teaching yields little change; GTM brings modest but noticeable benefits through explicit guidance and translation though more time, smaller classes, and teacher training are needed.

Results from Class Observation

Difficulties were encountered when Rephrasing. EFL teachers as well as students all recognized the importance of rephrasing during the evaluation. They were all conscious that the activity is crucial and may determine their final grade. But they complained that it is a complex task. They should find appropriate synonyms and suitable alternatives to reorder sentences without changing their meaning.

Qualitative Themes (from Observations & Interviews)

Experimental Group (GTM):

- High engagement during translation drills and contrastive analysis (French-English comparisons helped clarify meaning).
- Common praise: "It made me see how to change structure without losing sense" (student); "Students produced more varied paraphrases after week 4" (teacher observation).
- Challenges: Initial resistance to heavy translation but faded with practice.

Control Group:

- Moderate engagement in textbook exercises; more mechanical output ("near-copies" common).
- Themes: "We practiced, but I didn't understand why some changes work better" (student); limited transfer to natural rephrasing.

Discussion and Implications

GTM-based instruction effect on students' ability to rephrase sentences accurately and variably?

The quasi-experimental results demonstrate that GTM instruction yields meaningful gains in rephrasing performance. The experimental group achieved a +18.6-point mean gain (≈36% relative improvement) on the post-test, compared to +8.6 points (≈ 17%) in the control group, with a medium-to-large effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.78$, $p < 0.001$). Paired t-tests confirmed significant within-group improvement in both, but the independent t-test highlighted the GTM group's superior post-test performance. This aligns with prior studies showing GTM's strength in enhancing grammatical accuracy, vocabulary application, and sentence manipulation through deductive rules and translation drills (Abrar & Thamrin, 2020; Milawati, 2019; recent works on GTM for writing/grammar gains). In Benin's exam-oriented context, where rephrasing targets structures like passives and inversions, GTM's focus on meaning preservation and structural variety directly supports accuracy and variability—consistent with Richards & Rodgers (2014) on GTM's deductive emphasis.

GTM related challenges in EFL instructions

Qualitative data reveal persistent challenges. Teachers report rephrasing as inherently difficult due to weak prior grammar retention, French L1 interference, limited vocabulary, and structural rigidity—echoing pedagogical advisors' concerns about forgotten rules and meaning/order preservation. Observations and interviews note initial resistance to heavy translation, mechanical output in control groups, and slow progress in large classes. Questionnaire responses show moderate post-GTM confidence (39–46% in strategies/structure/vocabulary), high teacher dependence (96%), and emerging but incomplete recognition of translation's role (58%). These findings mirror criticisms of GTM's passive learner role, neglect of orality, and poor communicative transfer (teachers' perceptions: 100% passive role/poor oral transfer; 75% limited competence).

Refining GTM for better engagement and academic performance

The modest but realistic gains suggest refinements to enhance engagement and transfer. High teacher reliance (96–100%) and bilingual scaffolding endorsement (75%) support retaining GTM's deductive core while adding interactive elements (e.g., pair rephrasing of local texts, oral explanation of transformations) to boost engagement and reduce passivity (teachers' 100% concern). Observations show higher engagement during contrastive analysis and guided drills in the experimental group, suggesting explicit French-English comparisons and scaffolded progression (controlled to freer tasks) improve transfer to exams. For writing/ exam application, integrate Benin-relevant topics (e.g., local news/environment) to increase motivation and authenticity.

These refinements align with calls for blended approaches in exam-driven African EFL contexts (Ahoumenou, 2020; Hounhanou, 2020), preserving GTM's advantages (exam preparation, accuracy, bilingual support) while mitigating limita-

tions (orality neglect, learner passivity). Overall, GTM proves practical and effective for targeted rephrasing in Benin, but hybrid refinement maximizes long-term transfer and engagement in this resource-constrained, bilingual, exam-focused setting.

Implications of the Study

This study has several practical implications for EFL teaching in Benin.

First, ongoing professional development for EFL teachers is essential. Many teachers are unfamiliar with the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) and tend to assume learners have retained grammar rules from earlier classes. Training should focus on the importance of systematically reviewing grammar structures and using translation and French (L1) contextualization to clarify meaning.

Second, hybrid teaching approaches are more effective than GTM alone. Combining GTM with elements of the Direct Method or Competency-Based Approach, along with appropriate scaffolding techniques, strengthens the teaching of rephrasing skills.

Third, specific measures can address the challenges identified:

- Teacher training in hybrid models (GTM + short communicative tasks) to foster greater learner autonomy (Yahia & Egbert, 2023).
- Regular grammar review activities to improve long-term retention.
- Small-group or differentiated tasks to manage large classes in resource-constrained settings.

Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore that the Grammar Translation Method (GTM)—when modernized through explicit contrastive analysis, bidirectional translation, and scaffolded practice—yields significantly greater gains in learners' ability to rephrase sentences compared to purely communicative models. By utilizing the L1 (French/Fon) as a cognitive scaffold, students demonstrated a superior ability to preserve semantic integrity while increasing both structural and lexical variety.

In the resource-constrained and exam-oriented environment of Benin's upper 6th-grade EFL classrooms, GTM proves to be more than a traditional relic; it is a practical and high-impact pedagogical tool. It specifically addresses the moderate baseline performance of students by providing a "technical manual" for the complex transformations required by the national curriculum. Ultimately, GTM serves as a vital bridge in the "interlingual" reality of the Beninese student, converting mental translation into formal syntactic flexibility.

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Appendix

Design of the process with the EFL teacher who may apply GTM to teach Rephrasing

Step 1: Read the sentence
Step 2: Make sure students understand the meaning of each word
Step 3: Underline grammar item
Step 4: Translate the sentence into French
Step 5: Remind learners about the notion of *grammar* in the sentence and the related rule/Explain the conjunction "unless and if"/Draw learners' attention on the condition
Step 6: Assist learners' to change the meaning of the sentence. Here the teacher may guide learners through concret examples

Examples:

Sentence 1: I'm not going *unless* you come with me.
Translation into French 1: Je n'y vais pas, *à moins que* tu viennes avec moi.
Rephrasing avec *if*: *If you come with me I will go.*

Sentence 2: Your grades will not improve *unless* you work harder.
Translation into French 2: Tes notes ne s'amélioreront pas *sauf si/à moins que* tu travailles plus dur.
Rephrasing avec *if*: *If you work harder your grades will improve*.