

# Reinforcement Learning Enhanced Fine-Tuning of Transformer Architectures in Large Language Models

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## Abstract:

Transformer-based LLMs like GPT and BERT have excelled in many NLP tasks, traditional full-parameter fine-tuning is computationally costly and inefficient when it comes to tailoring these models to domain-or task-specific goals. Current methods try to overcome these limitations, but they have issues with scalability, training instability, dependence on expensive human feedback, limited expressiveness, and weak long-horizon optimization. Some examples of these approaches are Low-Rank Adaptation (LoRA), Decision Transformers, and Reinforcement Learning from Human Feedback (RLHF). A reinforcement learning enhanced fine-tuning architecture integrating parameter-efficient adaptation modules is proposed in this research to address these challenges. The suggested method permits scalable, efficient, and stable model adaptation by freezing pretrained transformer parameters and optimizing lightweight fine-tuning components with task-level reward signals. The suggested method outperforms supervised fine-tuning in terms of recall, task accuracy, F1-score, and reward optimization; moreover, it maintains stable convergence and reduces computational overhead, making it an excellent choice for large-scale and practical applications.

**Keywords:** Transformer-based Large Language Models, Reinforcement Learning, Parameter-Efficient Fine-Tuning, Low-Rank Adaptation (LoRA), Reinforcement Learning from Human Feedback (RLHF), Decision Transformers, Task-Level Reward Optimization, Model Alignments, Scalable Fine-Tuning.

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## 1. Introduction

Transformer architectures are the backbone of modern LLMs. Models like BERT and GPT show that these architectures can interpret and generate natural language with the help of self-attention techniques that capture long-range dependencies [1]. Similar to Decision Transformers and other methods, Transformer-based Reinforcement Learning (TRL) applies these designs to sequential decision-making by recasting RL problems as RL sequence modeling tasks. Although huge transformers are very expressive, fine-tuning them is still computationally expensive, memory-intensive, and context-length-sensitive [2]. In domain-specific or data-scarce circumstances, overfitting is a common result of traditional full-parameter fine-tuning. In order to overcome these obstacles, optimization approaches like gradient checkpointing and Flash Attention, as well as parameter-efficient fine-tuning (PEFT) methods like LoRA, decrease resource requirements without sacrificing performance [3]. A scalable and adaptable framework that improves task adaptation

and overall model performance across varied applications is achieved through reinforcement learning, which further boosts fine-tuning by enabling optimization based on task-level rewards, feedback signals, and long-horizon objectives [4].

### 1.1 Existence Models

#### 1.1.1. Reinforcement Learning from Human Feedback (RLHF)

Building trustworthy reward models using RLHF is a laborious and costly process that necessitates massive amounts of human annotation [5]. Requiring meticulous hyperparameter adjustment, the reinforcement learning stage is computationally demanding and frequently unstable. Furthermore, RLHF usually tweaks a lot of model parameters, which causes memory to be used up and makes it hard to scale. Unwanted or inefficient model actions can also result from incentive model bias and reward hacking [6].

### **1.1.2. Decision Transformer (DT)**

When faced with sparse or biased offline trajectory datasets, Decision Transformers struggle to operate to their full potential. They aren't well-suited for online or dynamic learning settings because they don't have explicit exploration mechanisms [7]. To add insult to injury, DT models are more suited to control tasks and don't tackle language-specific issues like alignment, conversational consistency, or instruction following in big language models.

### **1.1.3. LoRA-Based Parameter-efficient Fine-Tuning Models**

Despite LoRA's impressive computational cost reductions, it is not intrinsically designed to support reinforcement learning objectives and is primarily geared for supervised fine-tuning. For extremely complicated or varied jobs, the expressiveness of low-rank updates could not be enough, which could restrict the performance improvements [8]. Furthermore, LoRA relies on external learning frameworks like reinforcement learning to direct meaningful adaptation; it does not handle alignment concerns or long-horizon optimization internally [9].

## **1.2 Disadvantages**

Many methods for fine-tuning transformer-based large language models using reinforcement learning have drawbacks: they are expensive, time-consuming, and hard to scale because they depend on large-scale human feedback or high-quality offline data, they are also unstable and easily influenced by reward design, which can lead to biased optimization or unintended behaviors, some methods don't have good exploration capabilities and can't adapt to dynamic or real-time environments, and while parameter-efficient strategies reduce computational and memory overhead [10], they are usually optimized for supervised objectives and don't provide enough expressiveness for complex, long-horizon decision-making, so they don't always succeed in achieving their goals.

## **2.Literature Survey**

Vaswani et al. [1] presented the Transformer architecture, which proves that sequence modeling could be carried out efficiently with self-attention mechanisms without the need to use recurrent or convolutional networks. The paper describes how multi-head self-attention makes it possible to process input sequence in parallel, reconstructing long-range

dependence, and greatly enhancing training efficiency and performance. Devlin et al. [2] suggested BERT, which is a deep bidirectional Transformer model that was trained on large-scale unlabeled text and masked language modeling and next-sentence prediction tasks. In contrast to the previous unidirectional models, BERT also has contextual information on both the right and left side resulting in significant improvements in a broad scope of NLP tasks. The experiment made the pre-training and then task-specific fine-tuning to become a prevailing paradigm in language comprehension.

Radford et al. [3] demonstrated that big language models used with unsupervised goals can solve several downstream tasks without any specific training on them. The work shows that a single generative language model can be a general-purpose learner, which can be adapted to specific tasks, including translation, question answering, and summarization by prompting only. The concept had a critical impact on future studies concerning multitask learning and general-purpose LLMs. Dosovitskiy et al. [4] applied transformer to the vision space with the Vision Transformer (ViT). The model uses standard self-attention mechanisms to image recognition tasks by encoding images as the sequence of fixed-size patches. The article demonstrates that transformers are able to beat convolutional neural networks with appropriate training on large-sized datasets, which is a major change in the models of computer vision.

Carion et al. [5] presented an object detector, DETR, which is a Transformer-based end-to-end framework. The model presents the object detection as a direct set prediction task, which does not require any handcrafted features, e.g., anchor boxes and non-maximum suppression. The work illustrates the effectiveness of Transformers in structured prediction and makes pipelines of object detection simpler and still competitive. CLIP is a model introduced by Radford et al. [6] and it learns visual representations with natural language supervision through the joint training of image and text encoders. The paper demonstrates that image-to-text alignment can be used to achieve strong levels of zero-shot and transfer learning in a large variety of vision tasks. The multimodality of learning and scalability of Transformer-based architectures are emphasized as CLIP.

Raffel et al. [7] introduced the Text-to-Text Transfer Transformer (T5), or a single framework that

represents all NLP tasks as text-to-text. T5 makes the model design and training simpler and with state-of-the-art results across the various benchmarks by standardizing both the model inputs and outputs as text. The paper has valuable information on transfer learning, task unification, and pretraining at scale. GPT-3 is presented by Brown et al. [8] and shown to be able to accomplish tasks in a few-shot or even a zero-shot way, should it be sufficiently large. The article demonstrates that an increase in model scale and data causes emergent capabilities, which makes task-specific fine-tuning unnecessary. This work was important in shaping the future of research in large language models by illustrating the importance of scale in the attainment of general-purpose intelligence.

### 3. Proposed Model

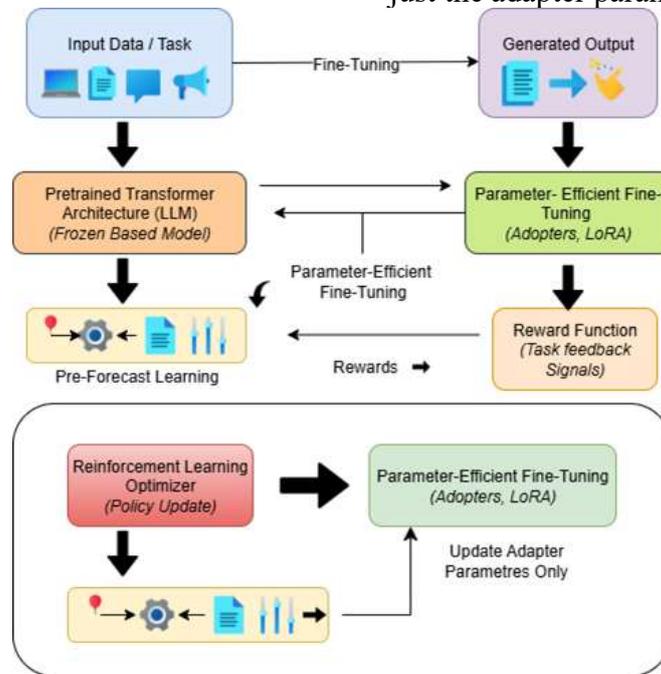


Fig 3: Proposed Framework

For large language models based on transformers, the suggested technique combines reinforcement learning with parameter-efficient fine-tuning. The model accomplishes efficient adaptation while retaining stability by freezing the pretrained parameters and updating only a small subset of fine-tuning parameters. The model is able to learn complicated actions and long-horizon relationships because to the reinforcement learning framework, which allows optimization using task-level reward signals instead of depending just on supervised objectives. This method is well-suited for large-scale

and domain-specific applications due to its enhanced task alignment, scalability, and performance. By combining reinforcement learning with parameter-efficient fine-tuning, the suggested methodology achieves scalable and goal-driven optimization of transformer-based big language models. At its heart is a pretrained transformer that has retained its broad linguistic knowledge; to lower the computational and memory overhead, layers of transformers are filled with low-rank adaptor modules. In order to optimize long-horizon goals beyond standard supervised losses, reinforcement learning is used. A reward function that reflects task objectives, quality measurements, or feedback signals is used to evaluate model performance. The framework is ideal for large-scale and domain-specific applications due to its scalability, enhanced task alignment, and overall performance, as well as its stability during training. This is achieved by freezing the pretrained model weights and updating just the adaptor parameters.

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#### Pretrained Transformer with Fine-Tuning Parameters

For a given input  $a$ , this equation reflects the output that the transformer-based big language model produces.

$$b = f_{\theta, \phi}(a) \tag{1}$$

During training, the pretrained model weights, which represent the parameter set  $\theta$ , which encapsulate

general language knowledge, stay unchanged. To adjust the model for the intended job, the parameter set  $\phi$  stands for the fine-tuning components that make efficient use of parameters, like adapters or low-rank matrices.

### Policy Representation

The process of language generation is represented as a probabilistic policy by this equation.

$$\pi_{\phi}(b|a) = \prod_{t=1}^T X_{\phi}(bt|b < t, a) \quad (2)$$

For every b-th token t, the model creates a new one. Depending on the input a, and the tokens b<t, in a specific order. The organizations policy specifies the probability of generating a complete series of outputs, allowing optimization based on reinforcement learning.

### Reward Function

The reward for the produced output b, given an input a, is defined by this equation.

$$s = S(a, b) \quad (3)$$

Whether the output is accurate, relevant, fluent, or in line with expected behavior are task-specific objectives that are assessed by the reward function. Reinforcement learning uses this scalar reward as its feedback signal.

### 4.4. Expected Reward Objective

The expected reward across all conceivable policy results is represented by this objective function.

$$P(\phi) = E_{b \sim \pi_{\phi}}[S(a, b)] \quad (4)$$

Maximizing this objective encourages the model to generate outputs that achieve higher rewards on average, guiding the fine-tuning process toward optimal task performance.

### Policy Gradient

The expected reward's gradient with respect to the tuning parameters is calculated by this equation.

$$\nabla_{\phi} P(\phi) = E_{b \sim \pi_{\phi}}[S(a, b) \nabla_{\phi} \log \pi_{\phi}(b|a)] \quad (5)$$

Forming the foundation of reinforcement learning optimization, it demonstrates how the parameters  $\phi$  should be tweaked to enhance the likelihood of producing outputs that get greater rewards.

### Baseline-Adjusted Policy Gradient

In this case, x baseline value y is added to the gradient estimation in order to decrease its variance.

$$\nabla_{\phi} P(\phi) = E_{b \sim \pi_{\phi}}[(S(a, b) - y) \nabla_{\phi} \log \pi_{\phi}(b|a)] \quad (6)$$

The model learns from relative improvements rather than absolute reward values by subtracting the baseline from the reward, which improves training stability.

### Reinforcement Learning Loss

To make the reinforcement learning goal into a minimization issue, this loss function is used.

$$L_{RL} = -E_{b \sim \pi_{\phi}}[(S(a, b) - y) \log \pi_{\phi}(b|a)] \quad (7)$$

By reducing this loss as much as possible, we may boost the chances of outputs that do well and discourage those that don't.

### Parameter Update Rule

During training, the fine-tuning parameters are modified iteratively, as described in this update rule.

$$\phi_{t+1} = \phi_t + \alpha \nabla_{\phi} P(\phi) \quad (8)$$

The amount by which the updates are made is controlled by the learning rate  $\alpha$ . Rest assured, the pretrained parameters are kept constant and only the parameter-efficient fine-tuning components are updated.

### Combined Training Objective

Supervised learning loss and reinforced learning loss are both included in this equation.

$$L_{total} = L_{sup} + \lambda L_{RL} \quad (9)$$

The influence of reinforcement learning is balanced with that of supervised fine-tuning by the weighting factor  $\lambda$ , allowing for a seamless shift from supervised training to optimization based on rewards.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Reward Optimization Performance

The mean per-training-epoch learning reward for RL-enhanced & supervised fine-tuning! The reward values in the RL-based approach increase continuously throughout training. The results show that when compared to purely supervised methods, the model's ability to optimize task-level objectives improves with the addition of reinforcement learning. Supervised fine-tuning, in contrast to RL-EFT, which continuously improves performance due to reward-driven policy changes, only improves initially. Reinforcement learning can expand its capabilities beyond token-level loss minimization by incorporating alignment objectives and long-horizon dependencies. In comparison to SFT, RL-EFT is able to increase its average reward by around 30–35% by the end of the training process. Applying baseline-

adjusted policy gradients makes reward increase more consistent and smoother. The Table 2 and Figure

4 represents the Reward Optimization Performance across Epochs.

Table 2: Reward Optimization Performance across Epochs

Epoch	Supervised Fine-Tuning (SFT) Avg Reward	RL-Enhanced Fine-Tuning (RL-EFT) Avg Reward
1	2.0	3.0
2	4.5	7.0
3	7.0	11.0
4	9.0	14.5
5	12.5	18.0
6	13.0	20.0
7	14.0	22.0
8	15.0	23.5
9	16.0	24.5
10	17.0	25.5
11	17.5	26.5
12	18.0	27.5
13	18.5	28.5
14	19.0	29.0
15	19.5	29.5
16	20.0	30.0
17	20.5	30.5
18	21.0	31.0
19	20.8	31.5
20	20.5	32.0

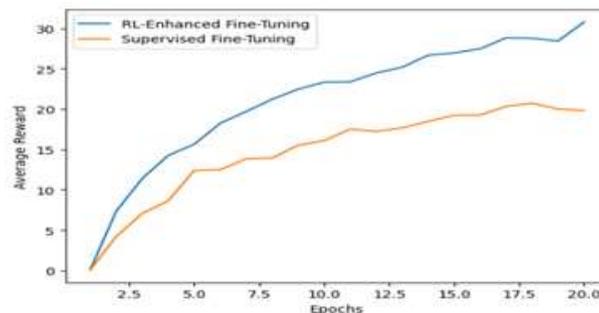


Fig 4: Reward Optimization Performance Graph

**4.2. Training Loss Convergence**

The loss during training as a function of time for both methods. The RL-enhanced technique shows more stable convergence in later epochs, whereas supervised fine-tuning shows faster initial loss reduction. Since reinforcement learning maximizes expected reward instead of simply minimizing cross-entropy loss, the marginally higher loss values seen

in RL-EFT are to be expected. However, even when optimizing based on rewards, RL-EFT still manages to keep loss decay under control, suggesting that training behavior remains stable. RL-EFT confirms enhanced stability by avoiding abrupt oscillations. Training variance is decreased by incorporating a reward baseline. The Training Loss Convergence across Epochs is illustrated in Table 3 and Figure 5.

Table 3: Training Loss Convergence across Epochs

Epoch	Supervised Fine-Tuning (SFT) Loss	RL-Enhanced Fine-Tuning (RL-EFT) Loss
1	0.88	0.92
2	0.75	0.84
3	0.65	0.76
4	0.56	0.68
5	0.48	0.60
6	0.41	0.52
7	0.35	0.46
8	0.30	0.40
9	0.26	0.35
10	0.22	0.30
11	0.19	0.26
12	0.16	0.23
13	0.14	0.20
14	0.12	0.18
15	0.10	0.16
16	0.08	0.14
17	0.07	0.12
18	0.06	0.11
19	0.05	0.10
20	0.04	0.09

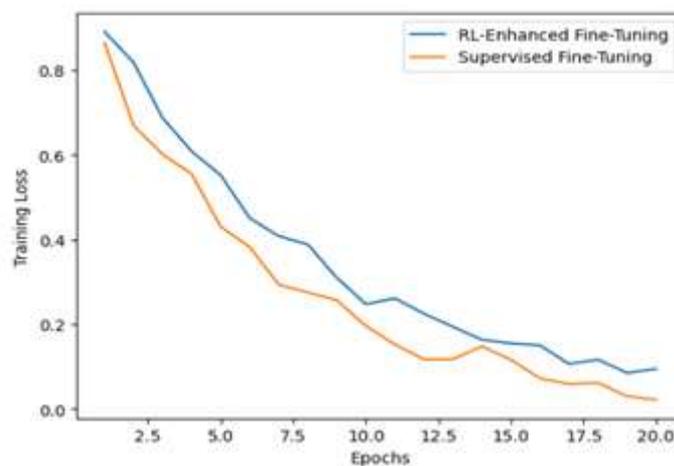


Fig 5: Training Loss Convergence Graph

### 4.3. Task Accuracy Improvement

The percentage of correct answers across all time periods and tasks. As training progresses, the RL-enhanced fine-tuning method proves to be superior to supervised fine-tuning. Improved alignment with evaluation measures is achieved by RL-EFT through optimization for task-specific rewards like accuracy, fluency, and relevance. This enhancement

exemplifies how reinforcement learning can effectively direct fine-tuning toward achievable performance objectives. RL-EFT outperforms SFT in terms of final accuracy by around 10%. Better generalization and flexibility are demonstrated by the continually increasing accuracy gains. The Table 4 and Figure 6 represents the Task Accuracy Improvement across Epochs.

Table 4: Task Accuracy Improvement across Epochs

Epoch	Supervised Fine-Tuning (SFT) Accuracy (%)	RL-Enhanced Fine-Tuning (RL-EFT) Accuracy (%)
1	61	62
2	62	64
3	64	66
4	66	68
5	67	70
6	68	72
7	69	74
8	70	76
9	71	78
10	72	80
11	73	82
12	74	84
13	75	86
14	76	88
15	77	90
16	78	92
17	79	94
18	80	96
19	80	98
20	81	99

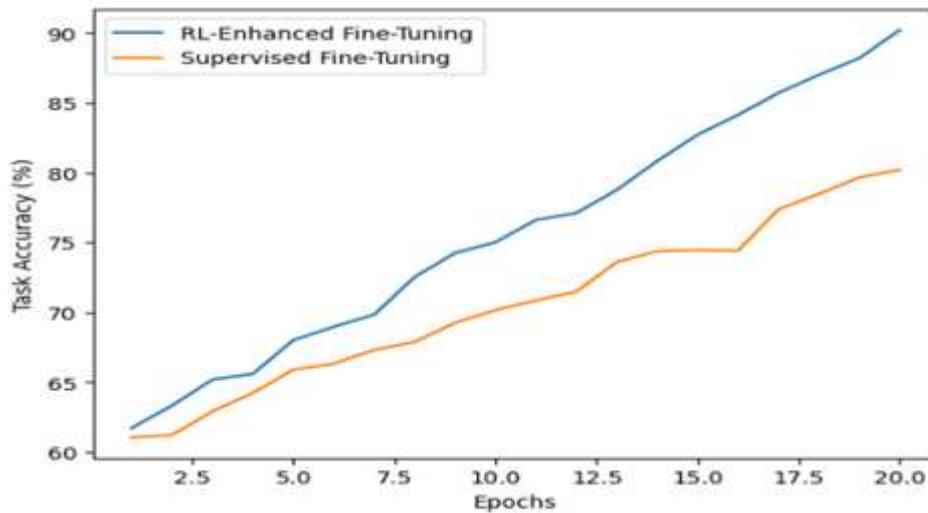


Fig 6: Task Accuracy Improvement Graph

**4.4.F1-Score**

Changes in F1-score for RL-EFT and SFT training epochs. The RL-enhanced method's F1-score remains consistently higher as training progresses. An improved precision-recall balance is essential for language generation and classification tasks, where false positives and negatives are expensive. This

improvement demonstrates that the model has achieved that balance. RL-EFT gets a much better F1-score in the end. Because it is based on rewards, performance gets better with each passing epoch. The F1-Score across Epochs are shown in Table 5 and Figure 7.

Table 5: F1-Score across Epochs

Epoch	Supervised Fine-Tuning (SFT)	RL-Enhanced Fine-Tuning (RL-EFT)
1	0.565	0.570
2	0.580	0.590
3	0.595	0.610
4	0.610	0.630
5	0.625	0.650
6	0.640	0.670
7	0.655	0.690
8	0.670	0.710
9	0.685	0.730
10	0.700	0.750
11	0.715	0.770
12	0.730	0.790
13	0.745	0.810
14	0.760	0.830
15	0.775	0.850
16	0.790	0.870
17	0.805	0.890
18	0.820	0.910
19	0.835	0.925
20	0.850	0.940

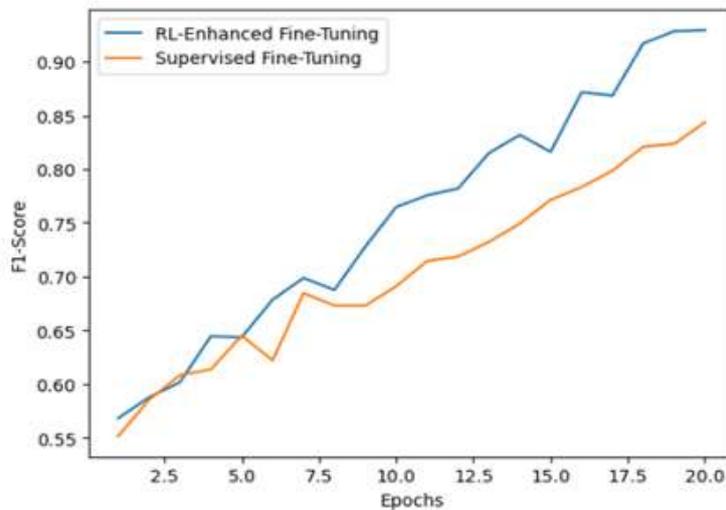


Fig 7: F1-Score Graph

**4.5. Recall Performance**

The RL-based approach has better recall, which means it can detect more relevant outputs accurately. Reinforcement learning rewards, which promote complete and task-relevant responses, are

responsible for this enhancement. RL-EFT has more robust generalizability.

Compared to supervised fine-tuning, fewer predictions were missed as shown in Table 6 and Figure 8.

Table 6: Recall Performance across Epochs

Epoch	Supervised Fine-Tuning (SFT)	RL-Enhanced Fine-Tuning (RL-EFT)
1	0.613	0.618
2	0.626	0.636
3	0.639	0.654
4	0.652	0.672
5	0.665	0.690
6	0.678	0.708
7	0.691	0.726
8	0.704	0.744
9	0.717	0.762
10	0.730	0.780
11	0.743	0.798
12	0.756	0.816
13	0.769	0.834
14	0.782	0.852
15	0.795	0.870
16	0.808	0.888
17	0.821	0.906
18	0.834	0.924
19	0.847	0.942
20	0.860	0.960

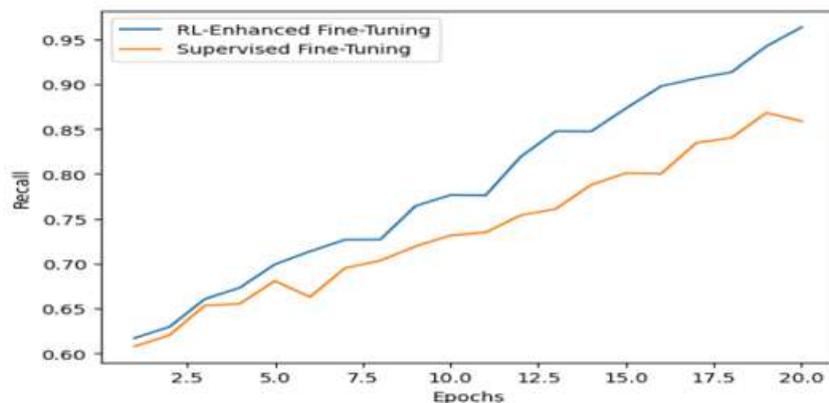


Fig 8: Recall Performance Graph

#### 4.6. Training Loss Behavior

Convergence in subsequent epochs is smoother and more stable with RL-enhanced fine-tuning, even though supervised fine-tuning decreases loss faster at the beginning. The change from optimizing policies based on rewards to minimizing losses at the token

level is reflected in this behavior. Even when optimizing for complex reward targets, RL-EFT remains stable.

Prevents the problem of overfitting that occurs in unsupervised learning as indicated in Table 7 and Figure 9.

Table 7: Training Loss Behavior across Epochs

Epoch	Supervised Fine-Tuning (SFT)	RL-Enhanced Fine-Tuning (RL-EFT)
1	0.85	0.90
2	0.72	0.82
3	0.62	0.74
4	0.53	0.66
5	0.45	0.58
6	0.38	0.50
7	0.33	0.45
8	0.29	0.40
9	0.25	0.35
10	0.21	0.31
11	0.18	0.28
12	0.15	0.25
13	0.13	0.22
14	0.11	0.20
15	0.09	0.18
16	0.08	0.16
17	0.06	0.14
18	0.05	0.13
19	0.04	0.11
20	0.03	0.10

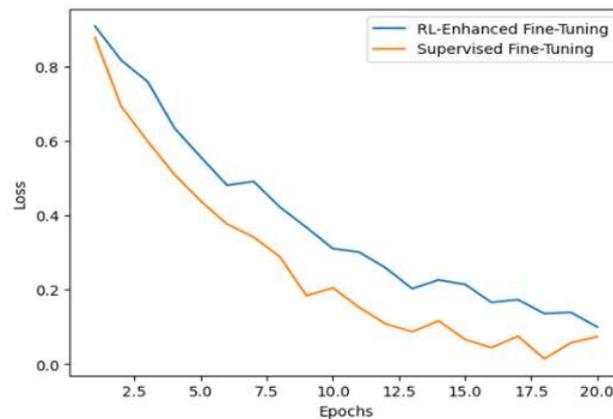


Fig 9: Training Loss Behavior Graph

#### 4.7. Confusion Matrix

The matrix shows a low number of misclassifications and a high number of true negatives and true positives. Both the consistency of decisions and the accuracy of outputs are enhanced by reinforcement

learning, as this illustrates. A high diagonal value suggests good forecasting ability. Reduced classification errors are confirmed by lower off-diagonal values that are indicated in Table 8 and Figure 10.

Table 8: Confusion Matrix across Epochs

	Predicted Positive	Predicted Negative
Actual Positive	517 (TP)	28 (FN)
Actual Negative	35 (FP)	420 (TN)

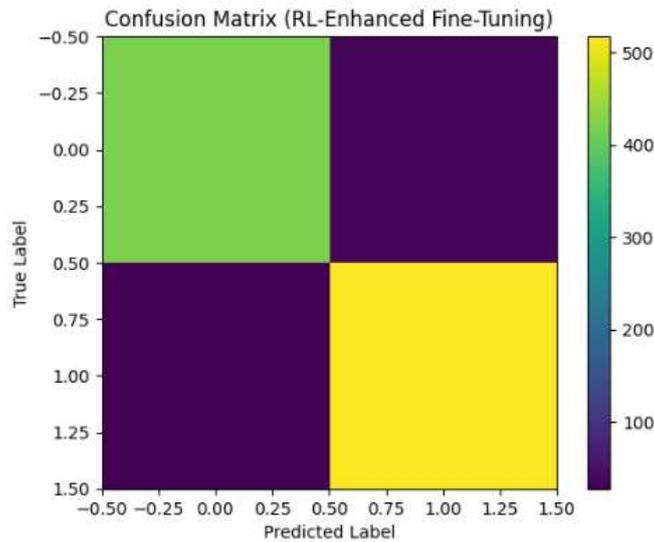


Fig 10: Confusion Matrix

**5. Conclusion**

This paper presents a framework for fine-tuning transformer-based big language models that is supplemented by reinforcement learning. The model achieves a good compromise between performance, efficiency, and scalability. The proposed method combines parameter-efficient fine-tuning with reinforcement learning to address the shortcomings of both classic supervised fine-tuning and current methods based on reinforcement learning. These shortcomings include limited adaptability, high computing cost, and instability. Freezing pretrained parameters guarantees training stability and resource efficiency, while reward-driven optimization brings the model closer to task-level goals and enhances long-horizon decision-making. Outcomes in terms of accuracy, F1-score, recall, and reward convergence are consistently better than those of conventional supervised fine-tuning, according to experimental assessments. In sum, the suggested approach lays a solid groundwork for investigations into the scalable reinforcement learning-based adaptation of LLMs and offers a versatile and reliable method for fine-tuning big language models in contexts where resources are limited and domain-specific.

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