Achieving Error-free posts in Asynchronous facilitation: Findings from the Discussion Forum Posts of 100 Level Students of National Open University of Nigeria

Réaliser des messages sans erreur dans la facilitation asynchrone : Résultats des messages du Forum de discussion des étudiants de niveau 100 de L'Université nationale ouverte du Nigeria

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Abstract

In order to achieve error-free posts in asynchronous discussion forum in online teaching among students of Open Distance e-learning (ODeL), this study examines patterns of errors in the use of the simple past tense on the discussion forum posts of the 2018/2019 academic session of one hundred level students of National Open University of Nigeria. Past tense errors occur when the wrong verb tense is used in writing. Using Corder's, quoted in Ellis (1994), steps in error analysis, and classification, the study found that of the three hundred and forty-eight (348) students who responded to the post, one hundred and ninety-three students (55.5%) committed errors of omission. Nineteen students (5.5%) added redundant morphemes to irregular verbs. One hundred and thirty-six students (39%) mis-selected the wrong morphemes in marking simple past tense. The findings from the study suggest that the reason for the errors are attributed to the inconsistencies in the English language especially with past tense formation in irregular verbs. The study recommends that in ODeL, leaners in a second language situation be given more online lectures

that weaves in past tense usage in English language; this will enable them to have a good grasp of the rules guiding simple past tense formation in English, and ensure correctness in the use of the right verbs by students in their posts. The study concludes that students' verb usage in online posts can be improved if online teaching platforms build in prompts that immediately pops up the correct verb whenever a student makes use of the wrong verb in posts. This will be an innovation that will encourage motivation to learn and could culminate to decline in leaners' dropout rate in ODeL in Nigeria.

Keywords: Error analysis, simple past tense, ODeL, asynchronous online post, National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN)

Résumé

Afin de réaliser des messages sans erreur dans le forum de discussion asynchrone dans l'enseignement en ligne parmi les étudiants de l'apprentissage en ligne à distance ouverte (ODeL), cette étude examine les modèles d'erreurs dans l'utilisation du passé sur les messages du forum de discussion de la session académique 2018/2019 des étudiants de niveau cent de l'Université nationale ouverte du Nigéria. Les erreurs de temps passé se produisent lorsque le mauvais temps de verbe est utilisé dans l'écriture. En utilisant les étapes de Corder, citées dans Ellis (1994), dans l'analyse et la classification des erreurs, l'étude a révélé que sur les trois cent quarante-huit (348) étudiants qui ont répondu au message, cent quatre-vingt-treize étudiants (55,5%) ont commis des erreurs d'omission. Dix-neuf élèves (5,5 %) ont ajouté des morphèmes redondants aux verbes irréguliers. Cent trente-six étudiants (39%) ont mal sélectionné les mauvais morphèmes en marquant le passé simple. Les résultats de l'étude suggèrent que la raison de ces erreurs est attribuée aux incohérences de la langue anglaise, en particulier en ce qui concerne la formation du passé dans les verbes irréguliers. L'étude recommande que, dans le cadre de l'enseignement ouvert et à distance, les apprenants en situation de langue seconde reçoivent davantage de cours en ligne qui intègrent l'utilisation du passé en anglais ; cela leur permettra de bien comprendre les règles qui régissent la formation du passé simple en

anglais et d'assurer l'utilisation correcte des bons verbes par les étudiants dans leurs cours. L'étude conclut que l'utilisation des verbes par les étudiants dans les messages en ligne peut être améliorée si les plateformes d'enseignement en ligne intègrent des invites qui font immédiatement apparaître le verbe correct chaque fois qu'un étudiant utilise un verbe erroné dans ses messages. Cette innovation encouragera la motivation à apprendre et pourrait aboutir à une baisse du taux d'abandon des apprenants dans l'ODel au Nigéria.

Mots-clés : Analyse des erreurs, passé simple, ODeL, poste en ligne asynchrone, Université nationale ouverte du Nigeria (NOUN).

Introduction

The challenges in physical learning were significantly brought to the fore with the advent of Covid-19. All sectors including academic institutions were shut down as a result of the pandemic. Despite the pandemic, the online mode of learning which entails learning at the confines of the home went on through synchronous and asynchronous modes of delivery. The asynchronous mode was harnessed more during the pandemic, as it availed leaners with the opportunity of responding to posts at their convenient time. In any of these modes of learning, the users were expected to communicate effectively and abide by the rules of the language use in the interaction. Nigeria, where this study was carried out is a multiethnic country with more than 400 indigenous languages; thus, learners have to grapple with the rigors of learning a second language (English). This probably is the reason why Ezema (1996), says that "The learner acquires a second language in an artificial fashion quite different from the natural way in which a mother tongue is acquired. He or she faces many obstacles as he or she tries to achieve some level of competence in the language" (p. 231). The mother tongue (L1 hereafter) of some Nigerians impinges on the use of English, and sometimes often leads to errors. Communicating flawlessly in the target language most times pose problems for the Nigerian user; as a result of L1 interference. This observation makes it

possible for Nigerians to misuse the English language both in speaking and in writing. According to Corder (1974) every language consists of a set of rules for generating phonologically, syntactically and semantically well-formed sentences. When these rules are flouted, errors arise. Errors are flawed side of the learner, either in speech or writing, as a result of learning a new language. Uba (2015) carried out an error analysis on an adult Nigerian postgraduate student in the United Kingdom, and found that there are a lot of errors associated with both Interlingua and intralingua. The student's second language development moves at lower rate. The study concludes that in terms of teaching implication, some errors can be corrected immediately while others can be delayed because too much negative feedback may hinder the progress of the learner. Madu (2019) examines grammatical errors in thirty copies of three randomly selected widely read Nigerian newspapers. The data were analysed using the Error Analysis procedure of Pit Corder. The findings showed among other factors that grammatical errors in the newspapers were as a result of personal native language habits. The study recommends that print media organizations should adopt good feedback mechanism for improved and error free expressions. Ndubuisi and Aja (2021), using the theoretical framework of Corder (1974), Richard & Schemidt (2002) and Brown (1980), examine some of the errors in the expressions by first year students of Coal City University, Enugu. The errors were classified and labeled as ''Indomie English''. The study concludes that the errors by the students are mostly interlingual errors. This points to the fact that students are still at the beginning point of learning English. Oruwari et al (2021) examine errors in sixty essays written by sixty students whose first language is not the English language. The classification of the errors show that they are six most common errors committed by the students. Among other factors, the study concludes that some of the teachers are not adequately trained or qualified, and this may lead to poor performance of students in the subject. None of these studies focus on errors in discussion forum posts of one hundred level students, and proffer solution on how these errors can be avoided. This separates the current from previous studies.

The aim of this study is to identify wrong usage of simple past tense (SPT) hereafter, obtained from asynchronous online posts (AOP) hereafter, of one hundred level NOUN students; and also proffer

solution on how to ameliorate such challenges using opportunities offered by technology in order to enable them to optimise the benefits of ODeL. It was observed that during the synchronous mode, students use wrong past tense when they wanted to report past experiences. This motivated the researcher to find out if the same error in speech will be observed in their AOP. The specific objectives are: to find out the categories and percentages of errors committed by the students in AOP; and to explain the likely sources(s)/cause (s) of the errors in the use of the SPT by the students, and recommend how it can be overcome.

Literature Review

Previous studies have attributed a huge number of second language (L2) learners' errors to the influence of their first language (Newmeyer, 1996; Lim, 2003; Mahmoud, 2005; Al-Nofaie, 2010; Al-khresheh, 2010, 2011). Newmeyer (1996) argued that using L1 is unavoidable whilst learning L2, because structures from L1 can easily be transferred to L2. Al-Nofaie (2010) stated that when L2 learners use their L1 as a tool to learn their L2, the outcome can be positive or negative.

Classification of Errors and their Causes

Researchers have pointed out that in a second language situation, errors arise in speech and writing; and have classified sources of errors in writing using different labels (Corder, 1971, 974; Richard, 1974; Burt and Kiparsky (1974); Ellis, 1994, 1997; Richard et al. 2002; Selinker, 2008). For example, Corder (1971) classified "errors" into ''errors of competence'' and ''errors of performance''; "errors of competence'" are divided into two kinds—interlingual error and intralingual error. Burt and Kiparsky (1974) pointed out two types of errors as: local error and global error. Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982) categorised errors into four categories: omission, additional, missed formation, and improper ordering. Error, especially in writing mostly occurs when the wrong tense is used. Tense is normally indicated by the use of a particular verb form – either an inflected form of the main verb, or using the base form, or both in combination. Inflection may involve the use of affixes, such as the ''ed'' ending that marks the past tense of English regular verbs, but can also entail stem modifications, such as

ablaut (the substitution of one root vowel for another e.g. ''Get – got''). Collinge (1990) noted that "tense is the relationship between the form of the verb and the time of the action or state it describes". The SPT in regular verbs is formed by adding ''ed'' to the infinitive, adding –d to verbs ending in ''e'' verbs ending in consonant ''y'', change; ''y'' to ''i'' and add ''ed''. The general view about tense is that, the past tense formation for regular verbs is fairly more straightforward than the irregular verbs.

Asynchronous mode of delivery in ODeL

The mode of interactions in Open and Distance eLearning (ODeL hereafter) elsewhere and in Nigeria is mainly through the synchronous and asynchronous mode. Instructors can facilitate interactions through a variety of technologies, such as chats on the virtual learning environment, discussion boards, and email (Sher, 2009; Commonwealth of Learning, 2015; Lowenthal & Moore, 2020; Lowenthal et al., 2021). In asynchronous discussion platforms, interaction occur without being limited by time or space (Brown & Green, 2009; Hew et al., 2010; Bernstein & Isaac 2018).

Asynchronous online discussion forums are seen as an extension of traditional learning that promotes interaction, knowledge construction, and self-assessment (Seethamraju 2014). Brown et al. (1989) pointed out that the asynchronous discussion forum provides the opportunities for learners to actively participate or interact in knowledge co-construction. In a similar vein, Anderson (2009) found that the AOP is able to generate the critical dimensions of learning found in the traditional classroom. Asynchronous online posts are effective writing tool for students (Dennen et al. (2007; Andersen 2009). Asynchronous online posts are among the ways to prepare leaners acquire cognitive and increase their critical thinking (Anderson, 2009; Szabo & Schwartz, 2011; Pena & Almaguer, 2012; Schaefer et al. 2018; Corfman and Beck, 2019). The flexibility of AOP allows leaners participate and respond to posts at their convenience, facilitates lifelong learning, which is learner-centred, personalised, and collaborative (Parajuli, 2016; Jinot, 2020); allow students time to reflect and refer to related information that they have read and

researched (Morrison, et al., 2012; Xie et al. 2014; Wegmann & McCauley, 2014), thereby providing students an opportunity to develop a "more thorough understanding of course content" (Knowlton, 2003, p. 31). Foushee (2018) in a similar line of argument like Knowlton (2003) submitted that the posting of an essay in AOP can help learners to improve their creativity and language writing skills; through engaging in AOP students are able to employ self-assessment strategies to independently revise or rewrite their work.

The studies above have foregrounded the importance of AOP as a tool that enhance learning. A concern is that these previous studies did not proffer solution that will enable students to produce an error-free posts. While researchers have described and highlighted the importance of the AOP as a veritable platform for learner-instructor interaction, they have not been any attempt to show how leaners improve their cognitive abilities through knowing the right form of the simple past tense verbs to use in AOP, this further have negative effect on learners' education on the whole. Given this problem, the current study seeks to address this area of study by examining through empirical data, the type of SPT verb forms in the AOP of 100 level students of National Open University of Nigeria, then recommend ways through which the problem can be mitigated.

Method

The case study method was used in this study. Corder's, quoted in Ellis (1994, p. 48) stages in error analysis are adopted. These stages are: ''collection of samples of learner language (collection of data from the students' responses on the AOP), identification of errors (this was done at the data cleaning stage), description of errors, and explanation of errors''. At the analysis stage, the errors were classified under the subheads: omission of some required element; addition of some unnecessary or incorrect element; and selection of incorrect elements. The dataset was exported to an Excel file and imported into IBM SPSS Statistics for the statistical analysis. The population was all one hundred level students who registered for the 2018/2019 academic session. The sample size was one thousand, and twenty-three (1023), that is, all the one hundred level students who offered GST102 (Use of

English and communication skills) in the 2018/2019 academic session of NOUN, this was when the researcher taught the course. The instrument used in the collection of data was a descriptive written test given to the students to narrate on the AOP, a sad experience they have had using the discussion platform of their virtual leaning environment. Three hundred and sixty-one students responded; of these, thirteen had no errors in their responses, so the analysis was based on the responses of three hundred and forty-eight students. In the analysis section, the excerpts are put in italics to foreground them; also, the wrong verbs are asterisked. The analysis and discussion are presented in the next section.

Analysis and discussion

The findings revealed three categories of errors: omission, addition, and mis-selection. These are mostly intralingual. We take them in turns:

Errors of Omission
Error of omission relates to the absence of an item that must appear in a well-formed sentence. Under error of omission, there are three categories of omission both in regular and irregular verbs:

Omission in regular verbs:
Omission of ''d'', ''ed'', ''ied''
Extract 1: *My uncle that *promise to support …* (promised)
Extract 2: *l *discover that the phone *is not in my bag...* (discovered, was)
Extract 3: *I almost *cry my eyes out ...* (cried)

These extracts are examples of the omission of some morphemes by some students in regular verbs. In extract 1, ''-d'' was omitted; in extract 2 ''-ed'' was omitted, and extract 3 ''-ied'' was omitted.

Omission in irregular verbs
Most irregular verbs mark their past tense through stem modification, omission of internal vowel, and change at the end of the verb. In stem

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modification, the morphemes omitted are consonant and vowel in a word. Omission of internal vowel is when the student omits just a vowel in the word. Below are the extracts from the data to explain each category:

Stem modification
Extract 4: *I have *break* up with her … (broken)
Extract 5: *They *bring the bag* ... (brought)
Extract 6: *I *find it difficult to login to my GST102* … (found)
These extracts are examples of omission of the correct past tense marker by some students. The extracts are irregular verbs; the formation of their past tense forms differ in all the instances. In extract 4, the student omitted the internal vowel and end past tense marker, instead of ''broken'', the student used the base form of the verb ''break''. The past tense form of the verb in extract 5 is ''brought'', but the student used the base form ''bring''. In 6, the student used the base form ''find'' instead of ''found''.

Omission of internal vowel in the verb
Extract 10**:** *That was how I *become* ... **(**became**)**
Extract 11**:** *To address the situation before it *get out of hand* ... *(*got*)*
Extract 12**:** *Before I *know the situation* ... (knew)
In extract 10, the student used the base form of the verb as the past tense form, instead of ''became'', the student used ''become'' omitting the internal vowel ''a''. Extract 11 is a similar omission of the vowel ''o'', and in extract 12, the vowel ''e'' is omitted.

Omission of end past tense marker (''t'' and ''id'')
The omission of end past tense marker in irregular verbs is another sub-type of errors by some students; extracts 8 and 9 exemplify this:
Extract 8: *It was a night trip which *mean we* ... (meant)
Extract 9: *People have *lay ambushed* ... (laid)
In extract 8, the student omitted the end past tense marker ''t''; instead of ''meant'', the student used ''mean''. Likewise, in extract 9, the student used ''lay'' instead of ''laid''.

Table 1: Items omitted, number of students involved and percentages

Area of omission/item omitted	Number of students	Percentage (%)
Regular verb		
-d	31	16
-ed	46	24
-ied	16	8
Irregular verbs		
Stem modification	49	25
Omission of end past tense marker (-t, -id)	19	10
Omission of internal vowel	32	17
Total	**193**	**100**

Therefore, the percentage of those that committed errors of omission is:

$$\frac{193}{348} \times \frac{100}{1} = 55.5\%$$

Error of addition
This relates to the presence of an item that must not appear in well-formed utterances. Some students erroneously added redundant morphemes to form the SPT. Addition errors noticed in the data occurred only in irregular verbs under the subheads—addition of redundant morpheme and double marking:

Addition of redundant morpheme in irregular verbs with zero past tense marker
Extract 13: *The tyre of the vehicle *bursted* (burst)
Extract 14: *I *costed the things ...* (cost)
Extracts 13 and 14 are some of the instances of addition of redundant morpheme in irregular verbs with zero past tense markers. The verbs ''burst'' and ''cost'' are irregular verbs which have the same form both in the present and past tense forms.

Use of double marker in irregular verbs
Extract 15: *Someone *stoled the phone ...* (stole)
Extract 16: *She *tooked my bag ...* (took)

Extracts 15 and 16 are examples of the use of double past tense marker by some students. The verbs ''steal'' and ''take'' are irregular verbs. Their SPT forms entail internal vowel modification to give ''stole'' and ''took''; but the students applied the rule for regular verb SPT formation to the irregular verb form.

Table 2: Items erroneously added, number of students and percentages

Item added	Number of students	Percentage (%)
Irregular verbs		
Redundant past tense marker	14	74
Double marker	5	26
Total	**19**	**100**

Therefore, the percentage of those that added wrong items is:
$$\frac{19}{348} \times \frac{100}{1} = 5.5\%$$

Error of mis-selection of morpheme
Error of mis-selection relates to the use of the wrong form of morpheme or structure in forming the SPT. Under error of mis-selection, there are: wrong inflection of regular verb, wrong inflection of irregular verb, wrong selection of the ''be'' verb, and outright mis-selection of word. They are presented in turns below:

Wrong inflection of regular verbs
Extract 17: *It *seems as if ...* (seemed)
Extract 18: *My friend *invites us to ...* (invited)
Extracts 17 and 18 are instances of the selection of the wrong morpheme by some students to mark the SPT in regular verbs. In these instances, instead of ''ed'' the students used the present tense marker ''s''.

Wrong inflection of irregular verb
Extract 19: *As I *leaved Kaduna ...* (left)
Extract 19 is an instance of the mis-selection of the past tense marker for the irregular verb. This is a case of the misapplication of the rule of the SPT formation for regular verbs on irregular verb.

Wrong selection of the past tense form of the 'be' verb
Extract 20: *The journey *is not very far ...* (was)
Extract 21: *I saw 2:00 pm I *am going to write ...* (was)
The ''be'' verbs are part of the irregular verbs in English which mark their past tense form through outright change of the base form. The correct form of the past tense wrongly selected in extracts 20 and 21 is ''was''.

Outright mis-selection of word
Extract 22: *In 2017 when I *fell to gain admission ...* (failed)
Extract 23: *The Federal Road Safety Corps that *safe our life ...* (saved)

Extracts 22 and 23 are examples of the outright mis-selection of words. The two words out rightly mis-selected are not the base words which the students ought to have used. The right words are ''failed'' and ''saved'' respectively.

Table 3: Items mis-selected, number of students and percentages

Area of mis-selection	Number of students	Percentage (%)
Wrong inflection of regular verbs	54	40
Wrong inflection of irregular verb	10	7
Wrong selection of the past tense form of the 'be' verb	61	45
Outright mis-selection of word	11	8
Total	**136**	**100**

Therefore, the percentage of those mis-selected wrong items is:

$$\frac{136}{348} \times \frac{100}{1} = 39\%$$

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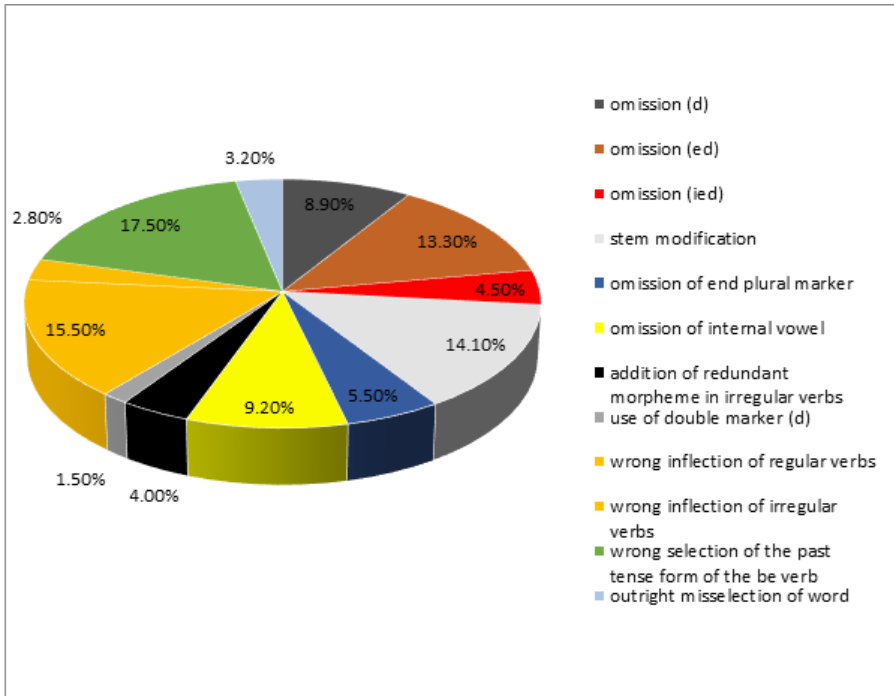
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Figure 1: A summary of the errors and corresponding percentages (total percentage is 100)

From the chart, the SPT mostly used erroneously is in the omission category. Under the omission category, 31 students omitted ''–d'' (16%), 46 students omitted ''–ed'' (24%), 16 students omitted ''–ied'' (8%), 49 students modified the stem (25%), 19 students omitted the end past tense marker ''–t'', and ''–id'' (10%), 32 students omitted the internal vowel (17%). The percentage of students that omitted items is 193 students divided by the total number of students which is 348, times 100 = **(55.5%).**

Addition errors have the least number of students, with a total number of 19 students, those that added redundant past tense marker 14 students (74%), those that used double marker 5 students (26%) giving 100%. The percentage of students that added erroneous is 19 students divided by the total number of students which is 348, times 100 = **(5.5%).**

Under the error of mis-selection, the ''be'' verb has the highest number of students— 61 giving 45%; this is followed by wrong inflection of regular verb with 54 students (40%). Wrong inflection of regular verbs and outright mis-selection of words have 10 students (7%) and 11 students (8%) respectively. The percentage of students that mis-selected items is 136 students divided by the total number of students which is 348, times 100 = **(39%).**

Findings

Findings show that the irregular verbs pose more problems for the students than the regular verbs. This is probably because there are no specific rules guiding the formation of SPT marker for irregular verbs in English. The reason for the errors could be attributed to fact that Nigerian languages which is the super-strate of the students is more stable in tense marking. The errors do not reflect the students' LI; in other words, there is no visible interference from the LI on the students' erroneous use of the SPT in their posts. This supports Al Tamimi (2006) and Brown's (2007) assertion that interference from the learners' L1 is not the only cause for committing errors. The unstable nature of the past tense formation in English especially for irregular verbs can be fingered as the likely cause of the errors. In the area of addition of wrong morphemes, overgeneralization is a likely factor contributing to the students' errors where the students create deviant structures on the basis of his/her experience of other structures in the L2. The Nigerian user who may have internalized the past tense marker in English as the addition of ''–ed'' to words, overgeneralizes by adding ''–ed''to verbs that take zero past tense marker. According to James (1998), in L2 acquisition, the less the learner knows about the target language, the more s/he is forced to draw upon any other prior knowledge s/he possesses.

The implication of the findings is that students are still unable to distinguish the base form of irregular verbs from the inflected SPT forms as revealed in their AOPs; their inability also to distinguish verbs with zero past tense marker as revealed by the data validate Richards (1971) claim that some errors emanate as a result of faulty

generalization where L2 speakers extend the rule of SPT marker for regular verbs to irregular verbs. This also tallies with Selinker's (2008) view that intra-lingual errors are those that are due to the target language independent of the user's L1.

Conclusions

Errors arise in a second language situation when the leaners are still at the learning stage of the language. The English language which is the target language has its own tense marking morphemes different from what is obtainable in Nigerian languages. Many users of English language have their first languages which have ways of marking past tense quite different from the English language. The young leaners of English language still have a long way to go in trying to grapple with the inconsistencies in tense usage which is common in the English language.

Recommendation

To mitigate the findings of this study, it is recommended that prompts be built in in asynchronous online discussion platforms which ensures leaners use the right past tense form of verbs in their posts. This will help leaners communicate emerging ideas and knowledge to the community of learners, and also sustain leaners' interest in their post on the asynchronous online platform. The prompts will act as aid for learners, thus providing them with the technological and pedagogical support to meet their educational needs for professional development.

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