

## **Task-Based Learning to enhance the writing skill of English as a foreign language in tenth-grade students**

Aprendizaje basado en tareas para favorecer la habilidad de escritura de inglés como lengua extranjera en los estudiantes de décimo grado

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### **Abstract**

English is used as an international language to share information, knowledge, culture and communication between people from all over the world. The teaching of any language involves four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) which students should master to become proficient users of the target language. However, writing is seemed as the most difficult and the least attractive for students. Therefore, the aim of this research was to evaluate the effectiveness of TBL method to enhance writing proficiency in EFL in tenth-grade at Abdon Calderon Fiscal Educational Unit. A longitudinal study was developed where writing knowledge of students was measure and compared in two different moments, before and after the implementation of a Task-based learning method. A mixed research methodology was applied. A sample of 30 students was randomly selected for this study. Consequently, different mathematical-statistical procedures were used to gather, organize and present information by means of tables. The data were gathered from the written materials produced by the students as a result of task cycles completion. The results showed that the Task-based learning method which was implemented contributed to enhance student writing skills in English as a Foreign Language learning.

**Keywords:** English; Task-based learning; strategy; writing.

### **Introduction**

The teaching and learning process of any language involves four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) which students should master to become proficient users of the target language. However, learning and teaching writing in a second language is seemed as the most challenging task and the least attractive for students (Wijekumar, et al., 2019). In addition, it needs to be emphasized that writing is shaped and controlled by the context in which it takes place. In this paper, writing is assumed to be “a matter of mind, hand and heart, this involves the following aspects; complex cognitive, physical, affective and social processes” (Myers, et al., 2021, p. 10).

Then teaching and learning of writing are also regarded as complex tasks because of its dynamic nature. Researchers considered that writing required extensive cognitive activity and planning.

Appropriately writhing processes require not only the active use of writing knowledge but positive attitudes to deploy the knowledge and regulate learning behavior (Teng, Sun, & Xu, 2017).

Having said that, learning of writing takes considerable time for students to become proficiently competent with the types of writing they are expected acquire when learning a foreign language (L2). That is why, the acquisition of English as a L2 writing skills has gained significance with the expansion of businesses as a result of the economic and cultural globalization (Alharbi, 2017). In L2 writing assessment, different dimensions and indicators can be assumed to measure students writing proficiency. It must be taken into account that when the student has the facility to use their own experiences in a learning method, they effectively acquire the content and can develop the skill they desire with continuous practice.

The importance of learning English based on tasks is that this strategy allows students to develop learning skills with greater ease and better understanding, especially the ability to write, which is a little more complex in another language. The main purpose of a longitudinal study is to understand not just what the current situation is (the level of students' writing proficiency), but also how things have changed or are going to change over time (what changes are expected in writing proficiency of the tenth-students). Most researchers concluded that TBL improves the student's language skills (speaking, reading, listening and writing) (Afifah & Devana, 2020).

The problem worldwide when students learn English is to fluently acquire the communicative skills, especially the skill of writing. Valli (2016) indicates that writing is an intellectual activity that leads to verbal skills. Writing in actual sense means clear and effective communication in written form. No magic formula will make writing quick and easy. One can master the art of writing with constant practice. Writing is not inborn; it is to be learnt. According to Misbah (2017) starting point of this study is the difficulty that students have in learning a new language, since it is not their native language, it makes learning difficult, especially in adolescents, and the objective of using specific task-based is to learn the skill of writing is to achieve: first the student's interest and then gradually his progress in a rich and productive vocabulary in writing skills.

According to Cevallos (2022), The problem that has been seen in Ecuadorian public schools is the lack of foundation and fluency that students have, so a question arises: can task-based learning activities promote written fluency in English? as a foreign language? Based on the researcher's preliminary observation, the students of the Abdón Calderón Fiscal Educational Unit show some limitations in the students' writing ability such as: Students do not have motivation to write letters, essays and paragraphs and students have difficulties to communicate written ideas based on real life. contexts and situations.

In this research, it was noticed that the main problem is the lack of vocabulary and the lack of study base in many students who are not motivated by their fear of knowing and learning a new language, learning goes hand in hand with the experiences and demonstration of what was learned in the classroom. Due to the lack of motivation, they also have learning deficiencies, therefore developing writing skills is a challenge for teachers and a challenge for students.

#### GAP

Therefore, the objective of this research was to evaluate the effectiveness of TBL method to enhance writing proficiency in EFL in tenth-grade at Abdon Calderon Fiscal Educational Unit. The current study addresses the following research questions: How can TBL method enhance the writing skill of EFL?

The analysis presented in this article is that globally the main difficulty that students have when learning a new language is the failure to fully develop skills, in this case writing, therefore the strategy that will be used is Learning based on specific tasks to successfully develop the skill of

writing. In order to achieve our objective, we made a plan that highlighted the dates and achievement goals in which we could achieve each goal successfully and thus demonstrate the effectiveness of using this learning strategy.

### **Literature Review**

#### **The writing skill of English as a foreign language**

Weir, (2005) considered four main dimensions of writing: structure an organization; content; argumentation and language use; and mechanics where each dimension has five sub-dimensions. A scale of five levels from 1 (very poor) to 5 (very good) respectively. Weir’s framework for writing assessment was updated by (Wang & Han, 2017).

Becker, (2018) defined three general dimensions of writing: organization, content and language use. Under each referred main dimension, there were a number of sub-dimensions. Each dimension and sub-dimension were assessed separately with a scale of five scoring categories or levels. The minimum possible score is 1 point, while the maximum possible score is 5 points. The different levels of writing proficiency are indicated by both a number and a qualitative description.

The skill of writing development is based on the level of each student and understanding that other skills are intertwined and to develop one with the other you must have reached a considerable level of each of the skills. Let us remember that the difficulties in learning to write are based on the lack of practice and lack of time in preparing to study a foreign language.

#### **Task-Based Learning**

There are different approaches of teaching EFL. As students have different learning styles, teachers should be creative to find new methods and strategies of teaching writing to satisfy students diversity in terms of intelligence types, learning styles and cognitive development. Those methods and strategies need to be holistic and need-based (Alharbi, 2017).

In fact, appropriate teaching methods positively impact in foreign language learning. In the 20th century, different approaches and methods were introduced such as Grammar-translation Method, Direct Method, Communicative Approach, and others. Task-based learning (TBL), also known as Task-based language teaching (TBLT) and Task-based instruction (TBI) was originated from Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). As TBL was introduced in pedagogical practices it has become a topic which caught researchers’ attention in recent decades (Liu & Ren, 2021). In addition, TBL is adopted in English language curricula of different counties worldwide (Sholeh, 2020; Liu & Ren, 2021; and Waluyo, 2019). Published research works showed that English language teachers hold positive attitudes on TBLT as a current EFL approach (Bhandari, 2020). In the same direction, the students also have positive attitude towards TBL and considered TBL activities as a good way to improve English as L2 (Afifah & Devana, 2020). Along with the above-mentioned ideas, TBL has been established as an innovative approach which was developed from the Communicative Approach (Sholeh, 2020). The literature review showed that TBL is defined an activity, a process, a teaching approach, a teaching strategy or a teaching method. For example, Sholeh, (2020); Safitri, Rafli, & Dewanti, (2020) and Bhandari, (2020) defined TBL as an approach where students execute and utilize a meaningful task as the basis unit of the learning process. TBL aimed at encouraging students to act at their own rhythm for processing and reorganizing their inter-language. As a student-centered approach, TBL enhance students’ activity rather than the activities of teachers.

The concept of TBL demand learning by doing. The students are expected to experience the language by completing the meaningful tasks (Safitri, Rafli, & Dewanti, 2020). Whereas, (Al-Tamimi, Muhsen Abudllah, & Ali Bin-Hady, 2020), define TBL as a method which involves

students in meaningful tasks using the target language. As referred, TBL involve students in meaningful tasks which can be used to develop all language skills (speaking, reading, writing and listening). Example of such tasks include creating a poster, producing newsletter, writing different types of letters, creating a presentation, producing a video or a short movie, writing an article, making a pamphlet, designing a map, among others (Willis, 2021). TBLT can be developed in three stages or phases procedure, also known as TBLT cycle (Al-Tamimi, Muhsen Abudllah, & Ali Bin-Hady, 2020):

- Phase 1: Pre-Task.
- Phase 2: During-Task: Task, Planning, Report.
- Phase 3: Post-Task.

TBL can turn EFL teaching and learning a social and cultural activity (Arboleda & Castro, 2019) where language is learned solving tasks from cultural and social issues. The distinctive feature of TBL is meaningful task which is proposed as the main unit of language micro design (Waluyo, 2019). The main role of students in TBL is to complete the meaningful task appropriately and this role include other roles such as group participation, monitoring, and risk-taker and innovator.

As a student-centered approach, the main role of the language teacher in TBL is to facilitate the students learning throughout a meaningful task. Such tasks are directly related with real-life problems and situations. In the meantime, teachers monitor students' performance and intervenes when necessary (Bhandari, 2020).

This paper assumed two variables of interest. The dependent variable or outcome is the writing proficiency of students. Whereas the TBL method was defined as the independent variable. This definition of variable was assumed from Hofman & Sutherland, (2018) mixed research approach approach.

According to Hofman & Sutherland, (2018), the distinctive feature of a longitudinal study is that it gathers information or dataset from more than one point in time. Often before and after implementation of a new teaching method or strategy, when two points in time are assumed. In case that three instants were adopted, the information is gathered at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the study.

## **Materials and methods**

A mixed research approach was applied in which qualitative and quantitative methods were used at the same time (Hofman & Sutherland, 2018). The methodology assumed was in accordance with the longitudinal study theory. This study not only explored what the current situation of students' writing proficiency is but also what changes are expected in writing proficiency of the tenth-students. If there is any change, the study included a statistical analysis to evaluate if those changes are significant under a reasonable significant level.

### **Population or type of sampling**

The participants of this study were 30 EFL students of tenth-grade of basic education from Fiscal Abdon Calderon Educational Unit which is the total population. Abdon Calderon National College was founded in 1970. This educational institution is located in a rural area at Abdon Calderon Village, Portoviejo city. It became a government school on May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1980 and it has a great total of 866 students and 30 teachers distributed in two academic sessions, in the mornings and in the afternoons.

### **TBLT method**

In this paper, TBL is assumed as a method (Al-Tamimi, et al., 2020). The longitudinal study consisted of a comparison of students writing performance in two specific scenarios, before (pre-

TBLT method) and after (pre-TBLT method) to track writing performance. To implement TBLT method, a procedure (TBLT cycle) was applied which consists of three phases or stages (Gan & Leung, 2020; and Safitri, Rafli, & Dewanti, 2020).

According to the referred researcher, the TBLT method can be applied in a form of cycle where the phases of this cycle can be named as Pre-Task or Phase 1, During-Task or Phase 2 and Post-Task or Phase 3). TBL comprises a real-world situation and the task.

- The purpose of **Pre-Task phase** is to prepare learners to acquire the language by meaningful tasks focus on the real-world contexts. After the new topic is introduced, language expressions and vocabulary words which are needed to complete the task are carefully reviewed.
- **During-Task phase**, the learning process should be performed in the real-world context situations which require written communication. In this phase, students are grouped and include planning of individual and group work.
- **Post-Task phase** enable students to practice the writing language activities. Learners are encouraged to report their activities and feedback are given. The evaluation takes place in the three stages.

In the TBL activity proposed, each dimension and sub-dimension is assessed separately with a scale of five scoring categories or levels after the completion of the task cycle. The minimum possible score is 1 point, while the maximum possible score is 5 points. The different levels of writing performance could be indicated by both a number and a qualitative description. Table 1 shows the dimensions and sub-dimension used.

**Table 1:** *Dimensions and sub-dimension of students writing performance. Source: (Becker, 2018).*

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Sub-dimension</b>
<b>Organization</b>	1. Main idea 2. Supporting details 3. Concluding sentence 4. Transition words
<b>Content</b>	5. Relevance to prompt 6. Key ideas from text 7. Idea development
<b>Language Use</b>	8. Grammatical features 9. Vocabulary items 10. Presence of language errors

### **Data analysis**

Mathematics and statistics methods were used to describe, summarize and present dataset in form of tables as well as look for patterns in order to make predictions or inferences regarding Task-Based Learning and writing proficiency. Descriptive statistics included the methods for measuring central tendencies such as mean. It also included methods for measuring variability as range and standard deviation.

A T-Test was applied to compare means of each dimension and sub-dimension in order to track writing performance. The purpose of T-Test is to explore if there is a significant different

between Pre-TBLT and Post-TBLT. An alternative hypothesis was assumed as  $H_a: \mu \neq H_o$ , with  $H_o$  as the null hypothesis. Taking into consideration that only three dimensions and nine sub-dimensions were compared (a total of twelve, less than 30), a T-test was chosen as hypothesis test.

The statistical analysis would help to analyze if there is a significant change in students writing performance in terms of means and standard deviations. As it is well known, in EFL different dimension can be assumed to measure writing performance of students. This study assumes the dimension of writing performance proposed by Becker, (2018).

## Results

Because the main purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of TBLT method to enhance writing performance in EFL lessons of tenth-grade students, ten TBLT classes were planned and implemented in a period of five weeks (two TBLT classes per week). TBL structure comprises a title, a real-world situation and the task. Table 2 shows one example of TBLT which was designed and implemented based on (Willis, 2021).

**Table 2:** *Example of TBLT activity*

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**Title: Job application**

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Real world situation: You were searching for a job which, in your opinion, would be in accordance with your profession and educational level. Certain day, you were reading a newspaper when you found a job advertisement you think is more appropriately for you taking into consideration your competencies.

**Objectives:** To evaluate learner knowledge about writing skill of the task and topic acquired during the class

**Pre Task**

In the pre-task, the teacher guides the students to begin with the organization of the work.

**Organization**

- Main idea
- Presentation of the topic
- New Vocabulary

**During Task**

During the task the students introduce meaning that are required during task performance. They will be use:

**Content**

- Preparation of the work
- Organization of ideas and use of learned vocabulary.

**Post Task**

In the post task the student will send the activity using the email or using social media in which they will evidence the task carried out.

**Language Use**

- Presentation of the activity.
  - Vocabulary items
  - Feedback on work done
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**Task:** Write an application letter to the manager (your EFL teacher) and say what you think. You may send the referred letter with your CV as an attachment. It could be sent by email or using social media.

The students are expected to improve writing proficiency completing the task. As a result, an email or an application letter as well as a CV must be written and graded. TBL activities might be supported by showing pictures of advertisements taken from newspapers and magazines.

From teachers' perspective, for grading such a TBL activity as well as students' writing proficiency, a general method was assumed (Klimova, 2011). This referred method consists of several steps which EFL teacher executed as follow:

1. Read the paper broadly without marking and getting the general idea of paper organization and structure.
2. Reread the paper in details, mark errors and write comments.
3. Read paragraph by paragraph, thinking less about organization.
4. Reread the paper once again to get the overall purpose of the paper.
5. Write good and bad features as well as number of errors.
6. Write final comments, assign a grade, record information in the students file and compare results with previous writing of the student.

### **Analysis, Interpretation**

The statistical procedure made possible to organize the information of students writing performance through a table, before and after the application of TBLT. The information was processed with the aid of Microsoft Office Excel 2019. Students writing performance dimensions, sub-dimensions, means, standard deviations (SD) and mean difference are displayed in Table 3. Two particular moments, before and after TBLT implementation were selected. Those point in time were identified as pre-TBLT method and post-TBLT method.

*Table 1: Students writing performance dimensions, sub-dimensions, means, standard deviations (SD) and mean difference*

No	Sub-dimension/Dimensions	Pre-TBLT method		Post-TBLT method		Mean Difference
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Sub-d1	Main idea	1,88	0,33	4,10	0,23	2,22
Sub-d 2	Supporting details	1,97	0,39	4,13	0,29	2,16
Sub-d 3	Concluding sentence	1,99	0,36	4,09	0,26	2,11
Sub-d 4	Transition words	1,84	0,30	4,10	0,26	2,26
D1	Organization	1,90	0,34	4,12	0,26	2,22
Sub-d 5	Relevance to prompt	1,99	0,29	4,24	0,27	2,25
Sub-d 6	Key ideas from text	2,00	0,41	4,20	0,29	2,21
Sub-d 7	Idea development	1,96	0,24	4,19	0,28	2,24
D2	Content	1,98	0,32	4,21	0,28	2,23
Sub-d8	Grammatical features	2,00	0,28	4,19	0,24	2,19
Sub-d9	Vocabulary items	2,03	0,41	4,12	0,44	2,09

Sub-d10	Presence of language errors	1,98	0,27	4,14	0,30	2,16
D3	Language Use	2,00	0,32	4,15	0,33	2,15

To complete the study, it was necessary to apply a hypothesis test. A T-Test was assumed considering that the pairs of dependent means were less than 30 (ten sub-dimensions and three dimensions). The referred test would help to explore if there is any significative difference in terms of students writing performance. The information was processed with the aid of an online T-Test calculator. The statistical results of this hypothesis test are shown in Table 4.

**Table 2: Results of T-Test**

Sub-dimension and Dimensions	Pre-TBLT method (T1)	Post-TBLT method (T2)	Dev (T2-T1)	Dev (Diff-M)	Sq. Dev
Sub-d1	1,88	4,10	3	26,69	712,48
Sub-d2	1,97	4,13	-78	-54,31	2999,33
Sub-d3	1,99	4,09	3	26,69	712,48
Sub-d4	1,84	4,10	-84	-60,31	3637,02
D1	1,90	4,12	3	26,69	712,48
Sub-d5	1,99	4,24	-90	-66,31	4396,71
Sub-d6	2,00	4,20	3	26,69	712,48
Sub-d7	1,96	4,19	-74	-50,31	2530,86
D2	1,98	4,21	3	26,69	712,48
Sub-d8	2,00	4,19	-78	-54,31	2949,33
Sub-d9	2,03	4,12	3	26,69	712,48
Sub-d10	1,98	4,14	-75	-51,31	2632,48
D3	2,00	4,15	2	26,69	660,09
			20	43,69	1909,02
			3	26,69	712,48
			-77	-53,31	2841,71
			2	25,69	712,48
			19	42,69	2841,71
			3	26,69	712,48
			-86	-62,31	660,09
			2	25,69	1822,63
			14	37,69	712,48
			2	25,69	3882,25
			15	37,69	660,09
			M: -23,69	25,69	1420,71
					660,09
					1497,09
				38,69	S: 44363,54

Significance Level: 0.05

Difference Scores Calculations:

Mean: -23,69

$\mu = 0$

$$S^2 = \frac{SS}{df} = \frac{4463,54}{26 - 1} = 1774,54$$



$$S_M^2 = \frac{S^2}{N} = 1774,54/26 = 68,25$$

$$S_M = \sqrt{S_M^2} = \sqrt{68,25} = 8,26$$

T-value Calculation:

$$t = \frac{(M - \mu)}{S_M} = (-23,69 - 0)/8,26 = -2,87$$

$$p = 0,00828$$

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A difference in all sub-dimensions and dimensions of students writing performance was observed after implementation of TBLT method. As shown in Table 4, Sub-d1 (Main idea) experienced a mean increment from 1,88 to 4,10 (a difference of +2,22). The same happened with D2 (Content) which experience an increment from 1,98 to 4,21 (a difference of +2,23).

The highest improvement was observed in Sub-d4 (Transition words) which experienced a change in mean from 1,84 to 4,10 (a difference of +2,26). The least improvement was observed in Sub-d9 (Vocabulary items) which experienced a change in mean from 2,03 to 4,12 (an increment in mean of +2,09). Comparing dimensions of students writing proficiency, the highest improvement was observed in D2 (Content) which experienced a change in mean from 1,98 to 4,21 (a difference of +2,23). The least improvement was observed in D3 (Language Use). It experienced a change in mean from 2,00 to 4,15 (an increment in mean of +2,15).

The statistical procedure implemented reveled a p value of 0.00828 which is less than the significance level of 0,05. As a result of the p value found, the null hypothesis is rejected. This result showed that there is a significant difference in in terms of students writing performance between Pre-TBLT and Post-TBLT means. In fact, the implementation of TBLT method significantly enhance students writing performance in EFL.

## Discussion

The findings provided evidence of the appropriateness and adequacy of TBLT in EFL writing assessments. Results demonstrated that this method is very significant in the process of learning a foreign language and for improving the writing skill. Pérez (2021) by Rai Zahoor Ahmed (2015) indicated that there was an improvement in L2 performance indicators with Task-Based Learning in terms of complexity, fluency and accuracy.

The improvement that was observed was in the Supporting details and Transition words, this indicates that the vocabulary that students acquire through task-based learning is very significant, as indicated by Milarisa (2019), of course, who makes it clear in her research since there were a significant effect on the students who were taught by TBLT using Supporting details and Transition words.

Researchers considered writing as a complex process (Weir, 2005; Wijekumar, et al., 2019 and Myers, et al., 2021). That is why, considerable research papers have been published during the past few decades to assess writing in EFL. In that regards, different dimensions and indicators have been defined to measure students writing proficiency. Becker, (2018), writing assessment framework and rating scale can be used for assessing students writing proficiency in EFL classrooms.

The literature review showed that TBL is defined, indistinctively as an activity (Safitri, Rafli, & Dewanti, 2020), a teaching approach (Sholeh, 2020 & Bhandari, 2020) and a teaching method (Al-Tamimi, et al., 2020 and Gan & Leung, 2020) but in this study it was assumed as a method. Currently, TBL method had won popularity and had been adopted in English language curricula

of different countries worldwide (Sholeh, 2020; Liu & Ren, 2021; & Waluyo, 2019). The findings of this paper revealed TBL method enhance writing proficiency in EFL lessons.

As a student-centered method, TBL gives students a chance to execute and utilize a contextualized meaningful task as the basis unit of the learning process as a result students improve and develop their writing skill, indicating its usefulness in the EFL context. Such a finding is consistent with (Bhandari, 2020; Gan & Leung, 2020; and Safitri, Rafli, & Dewanti, 2020) research works.

Valli (2016) says in his research, which indicates that Writing is a productive skill which needs more participation and interest. As a result of his research he indicates that The task-based approach has proven to be successful approach to developing students' writing skills in Any level. The most noteworthy limitation stems from the fact that, this paper only explored the impact of TBL on writing skill, limiting the scope of this study. Future studies will explore TBLT impact on other skills such as reading, speaking and listening.

Comparing the means values and standard differences of students' writing performance corroborate that there was an increment in all dimensions and sub-dimension of writing proficiency of tenth-grade student at the Abdon Calderon Fiscal Educational Unit. Similar results were found by Gonzalez & Pinzon (2019). They found improvement in Lexical Complexity between the pretest and posttest in learners' L2 performance, presents difference of written L2 Fluency between Pretest and Posttest of the experimental group, describes that the treatment of TBLT to the experimental group has increased L2 accuracy measure in writing skill. Their results indicate that there are no significant differences in the pretest scores and posttest scores of L2 performance triad within the control group but in case of the experimental group there are statistical significances in the scores of L2 performance indicators, complexity, fluency and accuracy.

Comparing this research with other research, we notice that the result is similar and that students significantly improve their learning of the English language and improve their writing skills using basic tasks.

### **Conclusions**

The study evaluated the effectiveness of TBL method to enhance students writing performance in EFL lessons. As the students were exposed to different meaningful task components to improve writing performance, students felt more comfortable practicing writing in each TBLT cycle. After the use of TBLT, the students got better score when perform EFL. Students used various kinds of vocabulary based on real-world context and enjoyed learning writing.

The results of the hypothesis test supported the alternative hypothesis ( $H_a: \mu \neq H$ ). It was concluded that there is a significant difference between pre-TBLT means and post-TBLT means in terms of writing proficiency of tenth-grade students at Abdon Calderon High School which took part in the study. In other words, TBLT method contributed to enhance writing proficiency of students in EFL lessons.

Based on the findings it is concluded that the introduction of the task-based learning method produced transformations in students' knowledge, particularly with regard to writing or relationships in English as a Foreign Language. However, there are some aspects in this study that could be strengthened in future research works. Such aspects could include the size of the sample as well as the impact of TBLT on reading, speaking and listening skills.

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