

## INVESTIGATION IN THE USE OF ICT BY TRAINEE COUNSELLORS DURING FIELDWORK COUNSELLING PRACTICUM EXERCISE

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### **Abstract**

*This study investigated the extent of use of ICT by trainee counsellors during fieldwork counselling practicum exercise. Three research questions guided the study. The research adopted a survey research design. The target population of the study include all trainee counsellors in all eighteen (18) government owned counsellor educator institutions in South East Nigeria. In this wise, for ease of access, the researchers employed Purposive Sampling technique during selection and administration process, from which five institutions were selected and 210 trainee counsellors were drawn. The instrument for data collection is a researcher structured questionnaire titled "Use of ICT by Trainee Counsellors on Fieldwork Practicum Exercise" (UICTCFPE). The response pattern adopted for the instrument is a 4-point likert scale, which was further divided into four sections. The validation, both in face and content were established by lecturers in Counselling and Measurement & Evaluation. The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach Alpha which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.75. The instrument for data collection was administered by the researchers. The method of data analysis adopted is the Mean statistics. Results revealed that audio devices used to a very low extent by trainee counsellors during fieldwork counselling practicum exercise are CD & DVD burner, camcorder and digital camera; Visual devices used by trainee counsellors to a low extent are computer disc, CD & DVD player and projector; While mobile/smart phone and computer (laptop and desktop) are audio-visual devices used to a very high extent by trainee counsellors during fieldwork counselling practicum exercise. Drawing from the results, counsellor educators should be sufficiently trained in the use of audio, visual and audio-visual devices and make them accessible to their trainee counsellors during micro counselling exercise, to help acquaint them to the use of these ICT devices before they embark on their fieldwork counselling practicum exercise.*

**Keywords:** *Trainee Counsellor, Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Fieldwork, Counselling practicum, Institutions.*

### **Introduction**

Guidance and Counselling as a helping profession, is important within the different tiers of educational system due to the services rendered by professional counsellors, be it in the primary, secondary or tertiary educational levels, or even within the out-of-school settings. Levitt and Jacques (2005) affirm that counselling as a helping profession requires specific education and training to equip trainees with the necessary knowledge skills and eventually to provide them with a counsellor identity. Counsellor's provision of professional services within the educational, vocational and personal-social domains are pivotal in the smooth running of academics, relational issues and transitions of learners from one stage of academic learning to the next. A major factor that enhances competence of trainee counsellors is the fieldwork practicum exercise, which gives trainee counsellors the opportunity to translate all that's been taught them within the classroom environment through learned theoretical skills, techniques and organizational strategies.

This can be carried out within the school or out-of-school settings, however, under close professional supervision. Agreeably, counselling practicum is an aspect of training that enhances the competency of trainee counsellors. Nsisong and Ime (2014) defines practicum as a practical experience well supervised, that affords students the opportunity to build and develop basic counselling skills and integrate professional knowledge.

Counselling practicum is a course of study designed especially for preparation of counsellors and clinicians, that involves the supervised practical application of previously studied theories. Okafor (2021) maintains that counselling practicum provides trainee counsellors the opportunities to demonstrate their counselling skills under close supervision in a laboratory setting, preferably the environment in which the students are preparing to work. It is equally designed to provide trainee counsellors with practical skills (work experience) that emphasize the importance of learning by doing, where also, trainee counsellors transfer their knowledge to actual work. Counselling practicum is an internship exercise where trainee counsellors are given opportunity to practice what they have learnt in school. According to Mohamad (2013), it is similar to internship that obtains in other professions like medicine, law, engineering, nursing, among others.

The importance of practicum exercise cannot be overemphasised; it provides students with practical experience in a real-world setting allowing them to apply theoretical concepts to actual counselling situation; students develop essential counselling skills such as assessment, diagnosis and treatment planning. Hence, Falender and Shafrankse (2017) assert that the main source of competence acquisition is essential performance of skill. It is equally important that in the setting of practice, trainee counsellors should get support from the counsellor in their place of practice. With good support, the counsellor in training will acquire desired traits and skills. Fieldwork practicum provides students with guidance and feedback from experienced supervisors, helping them refine their skills and areas for improvement. Okobiah (2005) opined that the aim of fieldwork counselling practicum is for the trainee counsellor to be exposed to real life situation of their profession under the guidance of their supervisor. Akpochofo (2018) affirmed that clinical settings where counselling skills and techniques are practiced, are viewed as important and crucial requirement for professional competitiveness development. By engaging in fieldwork counselling practicum, trainee counsellors become better prepared for the demand of professional counselling practice.

Consequently, fieldwork counselling practicum is of diverse nature as it helps trainees to develop practical skills, professional identity, cultural competence, self awareness, critical thinking, problem solving abilities, effective communication and interpersonal skills, among others. Hank (2018) affirms that fieldwork counselling practicum is the most important experience to counselling graduation programme, and the integration of information and communication technology by trainee counsellors in fieldwork counselling exercise for effective, adequate and seamless professional services.

Technology generally is impacting on all dimensions of life. This cuts across social, economic, political and personal areas of human endeavour. The use of computers and digital information communication technology (Dig. ICT) for counselling services is not at all recent; it dates back to the first use of computer programme in counselling services in the 1960s. The emergence of the internet ICT and social network is changing the lifestyle, learning modes and career future of the young generations, the increasing use and reliance on internet and technology has created opportunities for career counsellors and practitioners to enhance and improve their services to all (Zainudin, Yusof, Hassan and Alias, 2019).

Currently, the use of ICT by counsellor educator should be a welcome advancement in tune with the digital trends. Nevertheless, as the broadening of digital technologies persists, counsellors ought to embrace their proficient communication to achieve set expectations and requirements of their client. Wangari (2019) opined that the knowledge of digital technology is vital in every profession and counselling is not excluded. Unfortunately, counselling professionals seem to yet embrace technology in accomplishing various counselling tasks which include client appointments, report writing, record keeping, making clinical assessment, testing, consultation and client referral, among others. Where the technological know-how is available, counsellor educators are able to efficiently manipulate such to translate to professional efficiency and dissemination of information for the trainee counsellors. Furthermore, to what extent are the trainee counsellors exposed or familiar with these state-of-the-art equipment or devices to make for easy application

while at their practicum site. This study, therefore, seeks to investigate the extent trainee counsellors use ICT during fieldwork counselling practicum exercise.

Despite the fact that there is Oraegbunam's (2009) work on applying information and communication technology in counselling practice, Ugwuegbulam and Ibrahim's (2013) work on moving from old school to the use of ICT in supervision of counsellor trainee in Nigeria, Hamidah and Megat's (2013) research on the application of information technology among trainee counsellors, and Akunne, Etele, Nwadinobi and Akuezuibo's (2022) report on integration of digital technology in rendering counselling services in Nigeria, there is still dearth of empirical studies on the subject. Furthermore, the scope of ICT utilization by trainee counsellors in their undertaking of fieldwork counselling practicum exercise is also unknown and not clearly understood or empirically established, hence this study.

As it stands, the world is now viewed as a global village, information and communication is now just at a click of a button. Globally, society is experiencing technological advancement in different, if not all businesses and educational strata. Mustapha, Adigun and Yakeen (2019) maintained that the world of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has permeated and unified the globe to the extent that nearly all activities and occupations people engage in are computer/ICT based. This technological advancement is also affecting and influencing counselling practices, counsellors and trainee counsellors alike. Location or place is now gradually de-emphasized for space as teaching and learning now comes in hybrid format, which involves the combination of online and face-to-face interactions in schools and other forms of business settings.

Hence, competence and proficiency in counselling now requires the ability to infuse contemporary information and communication technology (ICT) or digital knowledge in counselling by the professional or trainee counsellor. These technological approaches are more advanced than the usually known media and information technology. The use of ICT in today's counselling practice makes counselling experience more interesting, flexible and interactive, and also transcends spatial limitations. It equally makes for easy and safer record-keeping and assessment, thereby equating competence and professionalism. We are presently in the computer driven age and the use of the website/internet for job or educational search, career information, and personal-social counselling is on the fast rise. Oraegbunam (2009) asserts that the advantages of ICT are endless – speed, accuracy, storage, security of information and above all, turning one into science-oriented individual.

Consequently, looking at the different issues and scenarios, trainee counsellors' use of ICT during fieldwork counselling practicum exercise according to Nsiong and Ime (2014) may include; enhanced accessibility to ICT facilities, increased efficiency to use of ICT, improved communication with client and supervisors, new skills required in ICT-based counselling; ethical consideration in maintaining ethical standards in ICT-based practice.

The result of this research work if published, will be of great significance to the practice of fieldwork counselling practicum exercises to trainee counsellors in all counsellor education institutions in the following instances; improve counselling practice by identifying strengths and weaknesses in ICT usage during practicum exercises, thereby creating a more refined and seamless fieldwork experience for trainee counsellors and their supervisors. It is also hoped that the findings of the study would contribute to educational research that fosters informed policy development, bridge digital divide and pave way for the electronic age.

Towards this end, this study investigated the use of ICT by trainee counsellors during fieldwork counselling practicum exercise.

#### **The study specifically;**

- i) Ascertained to the extent audio devices are used by trainee counsellor in conducting counselling exercises during field-work counselling practicum.
- ii) Ascertained to the extent visual devices are used by trainee counsellor in conducting counselling exercises during field-work counselling practicum.
- iii) Ascertained to the extent audio-visual devices are used by trainee counsellor in conducting counselling exercises during field-work counselling practicum.

### **Research Questions**

1. To what extent are audio devices used by trainee counsellors in conducting counselling exercise during field-work counselling practicum?
2. To what extent are visual devices used by trainee counsellors in conducting counselling exercise during field-work counselling practicum?
3. To what extent are audio-visual devices used by trainee counsellors in conducting counselling exercise during field-work counselling practicum?

### **Methods**

This study adopted the quantitative approach. It uses numbers to represent what is being investigated (Sanders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). The use of numbers lends a quantitative approach to statistical analysis (Onyeka and Onuekwusi, 2019). This approach collects quantitative data and provides summary information on many characteristics (Hair, Celsi, Money, Samuel and Page, 2011). This present study leans on quantitative approach to research as it seeks to use a sample that is representative of the sample frame and used researchers structured questionnaire titled ‘Use of ICT by Trainee Counsellors on Fieldwork Practicum Exercise’ (UICTCFPE) to collect data that was subjected to statistical analysis.

In terms of research strategy, the survey research strategy was used to collect data from primary samples with a view of analyzing such data statistically and then enable generalization of results to a population (Collins and Hussey, 2021). It is a research strategy that studies both large and small population by drawing and studying a representative sample. This study seeks to find out the extent trainee counsellors use visual, audio and audio-visual materials in counselling during their fieldwork counselling practicum exercise.

The population of the study consists of all trainee counsellors in the counsellor educator institutions in the South East of Nigeria (Government owned), who had taken part in first and second legs of fieldwork counselling practicum. There are 18 government owned Counsellor educator institutions in the South East region of Nigeria.

The sample consists of 210 final year trainee counsellors. This is because the final year student counsellors have done their first and second leg fieldwork counselling practicum exercises. Purposive sample techniques was adopted in terms of institutions and respondents. Purposive sampling technique involves selecting participants of cases based on specific criteria or characters that align with the research purpose. There are several types of Purposive sampling technique but for this work, the researchers used Convenience Purposive Sampling which involves selecting participants based on ease of access or convenience. According to Osuala and Ihekwa (2014), Purposive sampling is when the members of the sample are selected based on their special position or because of their ease of data collection. Hence, the use of the counsellor educator institutions owned by the government in South East of Nigeria listed below:

<b>Institutions</b>	<b>No of Respondents</b>
1. Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education Owerri, Imo State	42
2. Abia State University Uturu	42
3. Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-Alike, Ebonyi State	42
4. Nnamdi Azikiwe University Akwa, Anambra State	42
5. Enugu State University of Technology	42
<b>Total</b>	<b>210</b>

Forty-two respondents were taken from each institution. The researchers administered the questionnaires by themselves, hence, all 210 (two hundred and ten) copies were retrieved from the respondents.

The instrument for data collection is a questionnaire designed by the researchers captioned Use of ICT by Trainee Counsellors on Fieldwork Practicum Exercise (UICTCFPE). It has four sections; A, B, C and D. Section-A is the introductory part/guide to the respondents on the topic of the study and how to respond to the instrument. Section-B sought to determine the extent audio devices are used by trainee counsellors in the course of counselling clients during fieldwork counselling practicum exercise; section-C of the questionnaire sought to quantify the extent trainee counsellors use visual devices when counselling clients, while section-D sought to determine the extent trainee counsellors use audio-visual devices when counselling clients.

Section-B contains twenty-one (21) items, section-C fifteen (15) items and section-D contains seventeen (17) items. A 4-point Likert response pattern of Always, Sometimes, Rarely and Never was adopted and were assigned numerical values of 4,3,2 and 1 respectively. Three (3) research questions guided the study from which 21, 15 and 17 questions were drawn respectively to elicit the required response from the respondents (trainee counsellors who had gone on fieldwork practicum exercise).

Attempts were made to ensure the psychometric properties of validity. The face and content validities were established by giving the initial draft of the instrument for data collection to two PhD lecturers in Measurement and Evaluation, one PhD lecturer in Counselling who read the draft and made corrections that were incorporated into the final format of the instrument for data collection. The overall reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach Alpha statistics with coefficient value of 0.75.

In terms of face and validity of the instrument for data collection, Sanders and Lewis (2018) recommendations to ensuring face validity were considered and they include the following;

1. Title of questionnaire should be clear.
2. Questionnaire should be printed on a large font size.
3. The introductory part of the questionnaire should be brief.
4. The introductory part of the questionnaire should explain the topic as well as what the respondents are expected to do with the questionnaire.
5. The questionnaire items should be displayed clearly on each page of the questionnaire.
6. Questionnaire should include how it should be returned when completed.
7. Questionnaire should be printed on good quality paper.

The above were followed as a guide in order to ensure face validity of the instrument for data collection.

In addition, the instrument was administered to 30 (thirty) trainee counsellors that were not used in the main study. The data collected there from, were subjected to Cronbach Alpha and it yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.75. The researchers deemed it appropriate and consequently used it in the main study.

**Research Question 1:** To what extent are audio devices used by trainee counsellors in conducting counselling exercise during fieldwork counselling practicum?

Table 1: Showing extent of usage of audio devices by trainee counsellors during fieldwork counselling practicum exercise.

**Key: VLE (Very Low Extent), LE (Low Extent), HE (High Extent), VHE (Very High Extent)**

S/N	Items	4	3	2	1	Total	Mean (x̄)	Remark
1	Video cassette/tape	42	42	-	126	210		
		168	126	0	126	420	2.0	LE
2	Video cassette recorder (VCR)	-	42	42	126	210		
		0	126	84	126	336	1.6	LE
3	Audio cassette tape	42	42	84	84	252		
		168	126	168	84	546	2.16	HE
4	Audio cassette recorder	42	42	84	84	252		
		168	126	168	84	546	2.16	HE
5	Computer disc (CD)	42	126	-	42	210		
		186	378	0	42	488	2.32	LE
6	Digital Versatile Disc (DVD)	84	42	42	42	210		
		336	126	84	42	598	2.84	HE
7	CD & DVD Player	-	127	84	42	210		
		0	378	168	42	588	2.83	HE
8	CD & DVD Burner	-	42	-	168	210		
		0	126	0	168	294	1.4	VLE
9	Mobile/Smart phone	168	42	-	-	210		
		672	126	0	0	798	3.6	VHE

10	projector	-	126	42	42	210		
		0	378	84	42	504	2.4	LE
11	camcorder	-	-	84	126	210		
		0	0	168	126	294	1.4	VLE
12	Digital Camera	-	-	168	42	210		
		0	0	236	42	278	1.32	VLE
13	Memory card	42	168	-	-	210		
		168	524	0	0	524	2.49	LE
14	USB Flash drive	42	126	42	-	210		
		168	378	84	0	720	2.49	LE
15	Digital voice recorder	-	42	84	84	210		
		0	126	168	84	378	1.8	LE
16	Digital audio player	-	82	126	-	210		
		0	246	252	0	498	2.3	LE
17	Microphone	-	42	84	84	210		
		0	126	168	84	378	1.8	LE
18	Loud Speakers	42	-	126	42	210		
		168	0	378	42	688	3.2	HE
19	Smart Watch	42	-	42	126	210		
		168	0	84	126	378	1.8	LE
20	Television	-	42	84	84	210		
		0	126	168	84	378	1.8	LE
21	Computer: -Laptop, -Tablet, -Notebook, -Palmtop, -Desktop.	168	42	-	-	210		
		672	126	0	0	798	3.8	VHE

Total mean score = 47.51

Mean of means = 2.26

In table 1 above, the following audio devices: CD & DVD burner, camcorder and digital camera are used by trainee counsellors to a very low extent. Video cassette/tape, video cassette recorder (VCR), computer disc (CD), projector, memory card, USB flash drive, digital voice recorder, digital audio player, microphone, smart watch, television and computer (laptop and desktop) are used to a low extent. In addition, audio cassette tape, audio cassette recorder, Digital Versatile Disc (DVD), CD & DVD player and loud speakers are used by trainee counsellors to a high extent, while mobile/smart phone is used to a very high extent. The total mean score is 47.51, while the mean of means is 2.26. This means that trainee counsellors use audio devices to a low extent during their fieldwork practicum exercise.

**Research Question 2:** To what extent are visual devices used by trainee counsellors in conducting counselling exercise during fieldwork counselling practicum?

Table 2: Showing extent of usage of visual devices by trainee counsellors during fieldwork counselling practicum exercise.

**Key: VLE (Very Low Extent), LE (Low Extent), HE (High Extent), VHE (Very High Extent)**

S/N	Items	4	3	2	1	Total	Mean (x̄)	Remark
1	Video cassette/tape	-	-	42	168	210		
		0	0	84	168	252	1.2	VLE
2	Video cassette recorder (VCR)	-	-	42	168	210		
		0	0	84	168	252	1.2	VLE
3	Computer disc (CD)	42	42	-	126	210		
		168	126	0	126	420	2.0	LE
4	Digital Versatile Disc (DVD)	42	126	-	42	210		
		168	378	0	42	588	2.8	HE
5	CD & DVD Player	-	84	42	84	210		
		0	252	84	84	420	2.0	LE
6	CD & DVD Burner	-	-	-	210	210		
		0	0	0	210	210	1.0	VLE
7	Mobile/Smart phone	168	-	-	42	210		
		672	0	0	42	714	3.4	HE
8	Projector	-	84	42	84	210		
		0	252	84	84	420	2.0	LE
9	Camcorder	-	-	42	168	210		
		0	0	84	168	252	1.2	VLE
10	Digital camera	-	42	-	168	210		
		0	126	0	168	294	1.4	VLE
11	Memory card	42	178	-	-	210		
		168	504	0	0	670	3.19	HE
12	USB Flash drive	42	126	-	42	210		
		168	378	0	42	578	2.75	HE
13	Smart Watch	-	-	-	210	210		
		0	0	0	210	210	1.0	VLE
14	Television	-	126	42	42	210		
		0	378	84	42	504	2.4	LE
15	Computer: -Laptop, -Tablet, -Notebook, -Palmtop, -Desktop.	210	-	-	-	210		
		840	0	0	0	840	4.0	VHE

Total mean score = 31.54

Mean of means = 2.10

In table 2 above, trainee counsellors use the following visual devices to a very low extent: video cassette/tape, video cassette recorder (VCR), CD & DVD burner, camcorder, digital camera and smart watch, while computer disc, CD & DVD player, projector and television are used to a low extent. In addition, Digital Versatile Disc (DVD), mobile/smart phone, memory card and USB flash drive are visual devices trainee counsellors use to a high extent during their fieldwork practicum exercise, while the computer (Laptop) is used to a very high extent. The total mean score is 31.54, while the mean of means is 2.10. This means that trainee counsellors use visual devices to a low extent during their fieldwork practicum exercise.

**Research Question 3:** To what extent are audio-visual devices used by trainee counsellors in conducting counselling exercise during fieldwork counselling practicum?

Table 3: Showing extent of usage of audio-visual devices by trainee counsellors during fieldwork counselling practicum exercise.

**Key: VLE (Very Low Extent), LE (Low Extent), HE (High Extent), VHE (Very High Extent)**

S/N	Items	4	3	2	1	Total	Mean (x̄)	Remark
1	Video cassette/tape	42	-	-	168	210	1.6	LE
		168	0	0	168	336		
2	Video cassette recorder (VCR)	-	-	-	210	210	1.0	VLE
		0	0	0	210	210		
3	Computer disc (CD)	42	84	-	84	210	1.9	LE
		168	252	0	84	404		
4	Digital Versatile Disc (DVD)	42	126	-	42	210	2.8	HE
		168	378	0	42	588		
5	CD & DVD Player	-	210	-	-	210	3.0	HE
		0	630	0	0	630		
6	CD & DVD Burner	-	-	-	210	210	1.0	VLE
		0	0	0	210	210		
7	Mobile/Smart phone	168	42	-	-	210	3.8	VHE
		672	126	0	0	798		
8	Projector	-	84	42	84	210	2.0	LE
		0	252	84	84	420		
9	Camcorder	-	42	-	164	210	1.38	VLE
		0	126	0	164	290		
10	Digital Camera	-	-	210	-	210	2.0	LE
		0	0	420	0	420		
11	Memory card	-	210	-	-	210	3.0	HE
		0	630	0	0	630		
12	USB Flash drive	-	84	84	42	210	1.9	LE
		0	192	168	42	402		
13	Microphone	-	42	168	-	210	1.7	LE
		0	126	236	0	362		
14	Loud Speakers	-	-	-	210	210	1.0	VLE
		0	0	0	210	210		
15	Smart Watch	-	-	-	210	210	1.0	VLE
		0	0	0	210	210		
16	Television	-	42	168	-	210	2.1	HE
		0	126	328	0	454		
17	Computer: -Laptop, -Tablet, -Notebook, -Palmtop, -Desktop.	168	42	-	-	210	3.8	VHE
		672	126	0	0	798		

Total mean score = 34.98

Mean of means = 2.06



From table 3 above, video cassette recorder (VCR), CD & DVD burner, camcorder, loud speakers and smart watched are audio-visual devices trainee counsellors use to a very low extent during their fieldwork counselling practicum, while video cassette/tape, computer disc (CD), projector, digital camera, USB flash drive and microphone are used to a low extent. Similarly, Digital Versatile Disc (DVD), CD & DVD player, memory card and television are audio-visual devices trainee counsellors use to a high extent during fieldwork counselling practicum, while they use mobile/smart phone and computer (laptop and desktop) to a very high extent. The total mean score is 34.98, while the mean of means is 2.06. This means that trainee counsellors use audio-visual devices to a low extent during their fieldwork practicum exercise.

### **Discussion of Result**

Audio-visual devices can facilitate teaching and counselling, and used during fieldwork counselling exercise by trainee counsellors. The results above reveal that majority of the audio, visual and audio-visual devices are not sufficiently used during their fieldwork counselling practicum exercise. This may be a reflection of the extent to which trainee counsellors were exposed to their uses during the taught counselling practicum course. This result may equally be informed by the fact that the counsellor educators themselves do not expose trainee counsellors sufficiently to audio, visual and audio-visual devices. This may be because they are not ICT compliant and dwell in the domain of analogue compliant. The use of these audio, visual and audio-visual materials in reality, can facilitate counselling, make clients interested in counselling and consequently the resolution of their challenges.

The results have some obvious implications in counsellor education. Counsellor educators themselves should be sufficiently trained to acquire the knowledge of the use of audio, visual, and audio-visual devices, so that they can apply them when teaching their student counsellors. The counsellor educators can collaborate with department of Educational Technology to acquire the knowledge. In addition, the counselling education department should acquire audio, visual and audio-visual materials, use them in teaching their students and making them accessible to the trainee counsellors during micro counselling exercise. This will help acquaint them to the use of audio, visual and audio-visual devices.

Furthermore, it is important to investigate the types and extent of use of audio, visual and audio-visual devices in teaching their students practicum in class. In addition, carry out a study on counsellor educators' use of audio, visual and audio-visual devices in evaluating their students' fieldwork counselling practicum.

### **Conclusion**

This study has revealed the types of ICT devices trainee counsellors use during counselling fieldwork practice, and the extent to which they use the different audio, visual and audio-visual devices. Drawing from the results, counsellor educators can now spice up their teaching of counselling practicum with the ICT devices, thereby adding variety to their teaching and making the student's interest captured and consequently learning more.

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