



## Exploring Undergraduate English Majors' Perceptions of the Essential Qualities of a Modern EFL Teacher

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- Competency
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**Abstract:** This study examined undergraduate students' perceptions of the essential qualities of a modern English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher in the English Department of Kabul University. Using a quantitative survey design, data were collected from 136 students to evaluate five dimensions of teacher competence: professional knowledge, instructional planning, classroom management, assessment practices, and professionalism. The findings revealed that classroom management and professionalism were rated as the most important qualities, followed by instructional planning and assessment, while professional knowledge received comparatively lower emphasis. Students placed greater value on teachers' ability to manage classrooms effectively, engage learners actively, provide constructive feedback, and use instructional strategies and technology than on subject knowledge alone. These results indicate a shift in students' priorities from traditional, teacher-centered models toward more learner-centered and practice-oriented approaches. However, the study also acknowledges that learner-centered methods may not be equally applicable to all courses or language components, and a balanced integration of teacher-led and student-centered instruction may be necessary in certain contexts. Overall, the study provides empirical, student-based evidence that can inform EFL teacher education programs, professional development initiatives, and institutional policies aimed at improving the quality of English language teaching in Afghan universities.

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## INTRODUCTION

As English has become the leading global language in education, communication, and technology, it has greatly influenced how language teaching and learning are approached. Developing leanings in English Language Teaching (ELT) emphasize diverse English varieties and learner contexts, highlighting the insufficiency of traditional approaches (Salih & Holi,

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2018). English has become a leading international language, used by millions across varied linguistic and cultural contexts, which affects key ELT practices, including learner identity, classroom language choice, teaching methods, syllabus design, and materials development (Salih, 2021). So, modern EFL teachers must be equipped with 21st-century skills to meet these developing demands.

Teacher competence involves several interconnected aspects, such as subject-matter expertise, pedagogical ability, communication skills, and reflective practice (Kenjaeva, 2025). Nevertheless, effective teaching is not limited to professional skills alone. Teachers are also social individuals whose empathy, appreciation of life, interdisciplinary awareness, and sensitivity to textual meanings play an important role in their overall effectiveness (Liu et al., 2022). According to the Samim, (2025) professional development for Afghan EFL educators should prioritize lesson planning and curriculum development, updated methodologies with differentiated instruction, and effective assessment and evaluation techniques. In addition, training in instructional technologies and reflective practice is essential to enhance their overall teaching quality.

Digital literacy enables EFL teachers to use technology in the classroom in practical and meaningful ways, which increases student engagement and creates a more dynamic environment for language learning (Zhang, 2023). As technology continues to develop, teachers are expected to keep updating their skills and become familiar with new tools and teaching methods (Alessa & Hussien, 2023). To prepare teachers to teach 21st-century skills effectively, strong curriculum planning, suitable assessment methods, and institutional support are essential in order to maintain teaching quality and respond to learners' needs (Martinez, 2022). Teaching in the 21st century is commonly characterized by learner-centered classrooms, individualized instruction, project-based learning, effective use of technology, global awareness, and collaborative learning (Jan, 2017).

In the Afghan context, English functions as a foreign language and a medium of instruction in many university subjects, with proficiency essential for admission and academic success (Alimyar, 2015). Afghan EFL educators face professional development needs related to lesson planning, modern teaching methodologies, and technology integration (Samim, 2025). Despite existing studies on teacher effectiveness, few explore undergraduate students' perspectives on the essential qualities of a modern English teacher (Alimyar, 2015; Samim, 2025; Bahrami et al., 2023). Most research emphasizes teachers' skills or professional development, rather than the qualities that students themselves value. Particularly at Kabul University's English Department, information on students' perceptions remains limited. This study addresses this gap by directly investigating students' views, aiming to inform teacher preparation and practice in Afghanistan. The main objective of the study was:

To investigate undergraduate students' perspectives on the essential qualities of a modern EFL teacher at the English Department of Kabul University.

The study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are undergraduate students' perspectives on the essential qualities of a modern English teacher?
2. How do students perceive the extent to which current teachers demonstrate these qualities?
3. Which teacher qualities do students consider most important for professional development and effective teaching?

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopted a quantitative research design to investigate students' perceptions of the essential qualities of a modern English teacher. A survey questionnaire was employed to collect numerical data that describe patterns, attitudes, and viewpoints within the target population. Survey research is appropriate for studies aiming to obtain standardized information from a large group of respondents and allows for meaningful statistical analysis (Creswell, 2009).

### ***Participants and Sampling Procedure***

A total of 136 undergraduate students participated in the study. They were selected from a population of 210 students enrolled in the English Department, Faculty of Foreign Languages, Kabul University, ranging from first-year to fourth-year levels. The sample size was determined based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size determination table, which is widely recognized in educational research for selecting representative samples. A simple random sampling technique was employed to ensure that each student had an equal chance of being selected. The list of all enrolled students was obtained from the English Department and each student was assigned a unique number. These numbers were entered into a random number generator in SPSS, and 136 students were randomly selected based on the generated list. This procedure ensured randomness and minimized sampling bias. Including students from different academic years allowed the study to capture diverse perspectives across levels of study. Participation was voluntary, and all participants were informed about the purpose and procedures of the study before data collection.

### ***Data Collection Instrument***

The questionnaire was adapted from previously validated instruments developed by Metruk (2020) and Liakopoulou (2011), which are widely used to examine teacher qualities and competencies. Questionnaires are effective tools in quantitative research for collecting data on perceptions and attitudes in a standardized manner (Creswell, 2012).

The instrument consisted of two main sections. The first section collected demographic information, including participants' academic level (first, second, third, or fourth year). The second section consisted of 23 items measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). These items were organized into seven sub-sections:

1. Professional Knowledge

2. Instructional Planning
3. Instructional Delivery
4. Assessment
5. Learning Environment
6. Professionalism
7. Students' Perceptions of Areas for Teacher Development

This structure enabled a comprehensive assessment of students' perceptions across multiple dimensions of teaching competence.

#### ***Reliability of the Instrument***

To ensure the reliability of the questionnaire, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated using SPSS. According to Uzunboylu and Özdamli (2011), Cronbach's alpha is an effective measure of internal consistency in scale-based instruments. As shown in Table 1, the questionnaire yielded a Cronbach's alpha value of .843 for the 23 items, indicating good internal consistency. A value above .80 is generally considered strong and suggests that the items reliably measure the intended constructs. Therefore, the instrument used in this study is considered reliable and suitable for further statistical analysis.

#### ***Validity of the Instrument***

Since the instrument was adapted from previously validated studies (Metruk, 2020; Liakopoulou, 2011), its content validity was supported by established theoretical and empirical foundations. In addition, the adapted questionnaire was reviewed by two experts in TESOL and educational research to ensure clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of the items for the Afghan context.

#### ***Ethical Considerations***

Before data collection, all participants were provided with a consent form that clearly explained the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty. Only those students who gave their informed consent were allowed to complete the questionnaire. This process ensured that ethical principles were strictly observed and that the rights, privacy, and autonomy of all participants were fully respected throughout the research.

#### ***Data Collection Procedure***

After obtaining institutional and ethical approval, the researcher contacted the selected students and distributed the questionnaires in person. The purpose of the study was clearly explained, and students were given sufficient time to complete the instrument. All completed questionnaires were collected immediately to avoid data loss and ensure completeness.

## ***Data Analysis***

Data from the 136 completed questionnaires were entered into SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze students' responses. percentages, means, and standard deviations were calculated to describe students' perceptions of the essential qualities of a modern English teacher. These statistical measures provided a clear picture of which teacher qualities were most valued by students and how strongly they agreed or disagreed with each statement.

## **FINDINGS**

This quantitative study investigated the essential qualities of modern English teachers at the English Department of Kabul University. Data collected through the questionnaire were analysed using descriptive statistics in SPSS version 26, with results presented in terms of percentages and mean scores. The findings are reported through tables and descriptive summaries to provide a clear overview of participants' responses.

***Table 1. Reliability Statistics***

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.843	23

Table 1 presents the reliability statistics of the research instrument. The Cronbach's Alpha value for the questionnaire is .843, based on 23 items. This coefficient indicates a high level of internal consistency among the items, suggesting that the instrument is reliable for measuring the intended constructs. According to widely accepted standards, a Cronbach's Alpha value above .80 is considered good, demonstrating that the items are well-correlated and consistently capture the underlying variables of the study. Therefore, the questionnaire used in this research is deemed reliable and suitable.

## ***Demographic information***

The study participants comprised 136 English-majored students from the Department of English at Kabul University. Participant ages were categorized as follows:

***Table 2. Ages of the respondents***

Age	Frequency	Percentage
18-20	34	24.8 %
20-22	47	34.3 %
22-25	42	30.7 %
1bove 25	13	9.5 %

Table 2 presents the age distribution of the respondents. Out of 136 participants, the majority (34.3%) were between 20 and 22 years old, followed by 30.7% aged 22 to 25. About 24.8% of the respondents were in the 18–20 age group, while a smaller proportion, 9.5%, were above 25 years of age. Overall, most participants were young adults, reflecting the typical age range of undergraduate students at the English Department of Kabul University.

**Table 3.** Professional Knowledge of teacher

Statements	Percent	SD	M
A modern EFL teacher should have deep subject knowledge in TESOL.	79.6%	1.00	3.98
Teachers should stay updated with current research and developments in language teaching.	82.1%	0.98	4.10
A modern EFL teacher should be familiar with multiple teaching methodologies.	85.4%	0.79	4.27

The results presented in Table 3 reveal students' strong agreement on the professional knowledge required of a modern EFL teacher. Students' responses indicate a high value placed on teachers' academic and methodological competence. Most respondents (85.4%) agreed that a modern EFL teacher should be familiar with multiple teaching methodologies, which received the highest mean score ( $M = 4.27$ ,  $SD = 0.79$ ). Similarly, 82.1% of the students emphasized the importance of staying updated with current research and developments in language teaching ( $M = 4.10$ ,  $SD = 0.98$ ). Moreover, 79.6% agreed that teachers should possess deep subject knowledge in TESOL ( $M = 3.98$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ). It shows strong and consistent agreement among respondents about the academic and professional knowledge of a modern EFL teacher.

**Table 4.** Instructional Planning Competences

Statement	Percent	SD	M
A modern EFL teacher should design lesson plans aligned with learning objectives.	80.4	1.05	4.02
Teachers should select and prepare appropriate instructional materials for diverse learners.	80.1	0.93	4.01
A modern EFL teacher should design activities that encourage students' engagement.	83.1	1.00	4.15

Table 4 show students' perceptions of the instructional planning competences required of a modern EFL teacher. Most students (83.1%) agreed that a modern EFL teacher should design activities that encourage students' engagement, which received the highest mean score ( $M = 4.15$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ). Similarly, 80.4% of the respondents believed that teachers should design lesson plans aligned with learning objectives ( $M = 4.02$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ). In addition, 80.1% agreed that teachers should select and prepare appropriate instructional materials for diverse learners ( $M = 4.01$ ,  $SD = 0.93$ ). The findings indicate a strong agreement among respondents on the importance of effective lesson planning and preparation.

**Table 5.** Instructional Delivery

Statement	Percent	SD	M
A modern EFL teacher should use clear and effective teaching strategies.	84.9	0.99	4.24
Teachers should adapt instruction based on students' needs and progress.	81.9	0.93	4.10
A modern EFL teacher should integrate technology effectively during teaching.	80.6	1.05	4.03

Table 5 reveal students' perceptions of the instructional delivery competences required of a modern EFL teacher. A majority of respondents (84.9%) agreed that a modern EFL teacher should use clear and effective teaching strategies, which received the highest mean score ( $M = 4.24$ ,  $SD = 0.99$ ). Similarly, 81.9% emphasized the need for teachers to adapt instruction

based on students' needs and progress ( $M = 4.10$ ,  $SD = 0.93$ ). Additionally, 80.6% agreed that teachers should integrate technology effectively during teaching ( $M = 4.03$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ). The findings indicate strong agreement on the importance of clear, adaptive, and technology-integrated teaching practices.

**Table 6.** Assessments

Statement	Percent	SD	M
A modern teacher should use a variety of assessment methods to evaluate learning.	80.3%	1.07	4.01
Teachers should provide timely and constructive feedback to students.	81.6%	0.87	4.08
A modern teacher should align assessments with learning objectives.	81.4%	0.94	4.07

The results in Table 6 shows that constructive feedback received the highest agreement, with 81.6% of students endorsing it ( $M = 4.08$ ,  $SD = 0.87$ ). This recommend that students worth feedback as a critical tool for guiding learning and improving performance. Closely following, 81.4% of respondents agreed that assessments should be aligned with learning objectives ( $M = 4.07$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ ), reflecting the importance of coherence between teaching goals and evaluation methods. Using a variety of assessment methods received slightly lower agreement at 80.3% ( $M = 4.01$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ), indicating that while diversity in assessment is valued, students place slightly greater emphasis on feedback and alignment.

**Table 7.** Classroom Environment and Management Competences

Statement	Percent	SD	M
A modern EFL teacher should create a positive and supportive classroom environment.	83.7 %	1.06	4.18
Teachers should encourage students participation and collaboration.	83.1 %	1.01	4.15
A modern EFL teacher should manage classroom behavior effectively.	82.5 %	1.00	4.13

Table 7 highlights students' views on classroom environment and management competences. The results show that 83.7% of respondents agreed that modern EFL teachers should create a positive and supportive classroom environment ( $M = 4.18$ ). Encouraging student participation and collaboration was also highly valued, with 83.1% agreement ( $M = 4.15$ ). Effective classroom behaviour management received similar support (82.5%,  $M = 4.13$ ), indicating that students consider classroom climate and management as crucial factors in successful teaching and learning.

**Table 8.** Professionalism

Statement	Percent	SD	M
A modern EFL teacher should demonstrate ethical behavior and integrity.	81.6 %	0.94	4.08
Teachers should engage in continuous professional development.	80.3 %	0.99	4.01
A modern EFL teacher should collaborate with colleagues and share knowledge.	80.9 %	0.95	4.04

As outlined in Table 8, participants' perceptions of essential professionalism traits for modern EFL teachers revealed a strong agreement. Highest among these was the belief that a teacher should demonstrate ethical behavior and integrity, which received agreement from 81.6% of respondents ( $M = 4.08$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ ). Similarly, there was robust agreement on the necessity of continuous professional development, endorsed by 80.3% of participants ( $M = 4.01$ ,  $SD = 0.99$ ). Moreover, collaboration with colleagues and knowledge sharing was also viewed as a critical component of professionalism, with 80.9% in agreement ( $M = 4.04$ ,  $SD = 0.95$ ).

**Table 9. Students' Perceptions of Areas for Teacher Development**

Statement	Percent	SD	M
Current teachers in the English department of Kabul University adequately demonstrate professional knowledge.	79.0 %	0.95	3.95
Teachers sufficiently plan and deliver lessons that meet modern teaching standards.	79.1 %	1.04	3.96
Teachers effectively assess students' learning and provide feedback.	81.9 %	1.03	4.10
Teachers create a learning environment that supports modern teaching practice.	81.6 %	0.94	4.08
Teachers demonstrate professionalism in their profession.	83.4 %	0.97	4.17

The content in Table 9 demonstrating professionalism received the highest agreement, with 83.4% of students endorsing it ( $M = 4.17$ ,  $SD = 0.97$ ), suggesting that ethical conduct and professional behavior are highly valued by students. Effective assessment and feedback were also rated highly at 81.9% agreement ( $M = 4.10$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ), followed closely by creating a supportive learning environment (81.6%,  $M = 4.08$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ ), highlighting the importance of evaluation practices and classroom atmosphere. Planning and delivering lessons that meet modern teaching standards (79.1%,  $M = 3.96$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ) and demonstrating professional knowledge (79.0%,  $M = 3.95$ ,  $SD = 0.95$ ) received slightly lower agreement, indicating these as potential areas for further development. The results suggest that while teachers are generally competent, students emphasize the need for continued growth in instructional planning, delivery, and knowledge demonstration.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that students perceive a modern EFL teacher as requiring a comprehensive set of competences, spanning professional knowledge, instructional planning and delivery, assessment practices, classroom management, and professionalism. Across all areas, students consistently emphasized the importance of subject-matter expertise, methodological versatility, and engagement with current research, with mean scores ranging from 3.95 to 4.27 and high levels of agreement (79.0–85.4%). Instructional delivery competences, particularly the use of clear and effective teaching strategies ( $M = 4.24$ ) and activities that promote student engagement ( $M = 4.15$ ), were highlighted as critical for effective learning. Assessment practices, including providing constructive feedback and

aligning evaluation with learning objectives, also received strong endorsement ( $M = 4.01$ – $4.10$ ), underscoring students' recognition of assessment as a central component of the teaching-learning process.

Furthermore, classroom environment and management competences, especially fostering a positive and supportive atmosphere ( $M = 4.18$ ) and encouraging participation ( $M = 4.15$ ), were viewed as essential for creating an engaging and effective learning space. Professionalism, including ethical behavior, collaboration, and continuous development, was similarly valued ( $M = 4.01$ – $4.08$ ), reflecting students' expectation that teachers maintain integrity and professional growth. Overall, these results indicate that students expect modern EFL teachers to integrate content expertise, pedagogical skill, assessment competence, classroom management, and professional ethics into a cohesive and learner-centered teaching practice. A key finding of the study is the strong emphasis students placed on pedagogical competence, particularly familiarity with multiple teaching methodologies, the use of clear teaching strategies, and the ability to create a positive and supportive classroom environment. These qualities received the highest levels of agreement, suggesting that students prioritize *how* teaching is delivered over mere content transmission. This finding supports the view that modern EFL teachers are expected to act not only as knowledge providers but also as facilitators of engaging and interactive learning experiences. Similar conclusions have been reported in international studies, which emphasize learner-centered instruction, methodological flexibility, and adaptive teaching as core features of effective modern teaching (Jan, 2017; Saptono & Ayllina, 2022).

At the same time, professional knowledge including deep TESOL knowledge, staying updated with current research, and understanding diverse methodologies was also rated highly, though slightly lower than pedagogical and facilitative skills. This pattern suggests that students may view strong subject knowledge as a basic prerequisite rather than a distinguishing feature of effective teaching. In a study by Zambak (2024) found out that participants' placed greater importance on teachers' competencies related to effective instructional delivery and the management of teaching and learning processes. Moreover, strong emphasis was given to professional development practices, effective communication with students, and thorough mastery of subject matter knowledge. This finding is consistent with Metruk (2020), who argues that subject-matter expertise forms the foundation upon which effective pedagogy is built.

Findings related to instructional planning and delivery further highlight students' preference for structured, purposeful, and engaging lessons. Students strongly agreed that modern EFL teachers should align lesson plans with learning objectives, select appropriate materials for diverse learners, and design activities that promote engagement. These results align with constructivist learning theories, which emphasize active learner involvement and intentional instructional design (Creswell, 2014). Similar results have been reported in Afghan university contexts, where students have expressed dissatisfaction with traditional lecture-

based instruction and have called for more interactive and well-planned lessons (Rahimi & Safi, 2019; Samim, 2025).

In relation to assessment practices, students expressed strong support for clear, fair, and adaptive assessment methods, including the effective use of technology. This suggests that students value transparency, feedback, and assessments that reflect their learning progress rather than relying solely on final examinations. This finding echoes international research highlighting the importance of formative and learner-centered assessment in enhancing motivation and learning outcomes (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2019). Afghan studies have similarly shown that students prefer assessment practices that provide meaningful feedback and support learning rather than merely ranking performance (Noori, 2020).

Another important theme emerging from the findings is the significance of classroom environment and management. Students strongly emphasized the need for a positive, supportive, and collaborative classroom atmosphere, as well as effective behavior management. This indicates that students associate effective teaching with emotional support, respect, and active participation. Previous Afghan research has also demonstrated that a supportive classroom climate plays a vital role in increasing students' confidence and willingness to communicate in English (Abid, 2025). International literature further confirms that positive classroom environments contribute to both academic achievement and social development (Harmer, 2015).

Regarding professionalism, students placed high value on ethical behavior, continuous professional development, and collaboration among teachers. This finding suggests that students expect teachers to act as role models and lifelong learners who are committed to improving their practice. These expectations are consistent with both Afghan and international studies that identify professionalism as a key dimension of effective teaching (Richards, 2017; Metruk, 2020). In the Afghan higher education context, where teachers hold a respected social position, ethical conduct and professional responsibility are particularly important.

When students evaluated the current performance of their teachers, the results showed generally positive perceptions, especially in terms of professionalism and assessment practices. However, comparatively lower ratings for professional knowledge and lesson planning indicate areas where students believe further improvement is needed. This gap between students' expectations and their perceptions of current practice highlights the need for targeted professional development. Similar concerns have been raised in Afghan studies, which point to that Afghan university teachers need ongoing professional development to improve pedagogy, update materials, and integrate technology in EFL instruction. Practical training and classroom observation are also vital for strengthening their teaching effectiveness (Hafizi, 2023).

Taken together, the findings of this study align closely with previous research conducted both in Afghanistan and in international contexts, which emphasizes the multifaceted nature

of effective EFL teaching. Similar to earlier studies, students in this research highlighted the importance of pedagogical flexibility, classroom interaction, and the use of modern instructional tools. At the same time, their responses reflect specific features of the Afghan educational context, particularly the continued reliance on teachers as primary sources of knowledge and guidance, as well as the increasing recognition of technology as an integral component of higher education. This combination of global perspectives and local realities demonstrates that students' expectations of EFL teachers are shaped by both international teaching standards and contextual constraints.

Moreover, the findings underscore the growing importance of a student-centered perspective in defining teacher competence. Rather than viewing effective EFL teaching solely in terms of subject-matter expertise, students emphasized the value of pedagogical agility, active classroom engagement, and the ability to adopt modern teaching practices. This shift suggests that learners increasingly expect their teachers to act as facilitators of learning who can adapt instruction to diverse needs and promote interactive and meaningful learning experiences. Such results support contemporary views in the literature that effective EFL teachers must balance strong content knowledge with methodological skills, technological awareness, and responsiveness to learners' expectations.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion this paper brings together students' views on what makes a modern EFL teacher effective at Kabul University. In general, students see good teaching as a balance between strong teaching skills, solid subject knowledge, professional behavior, and the ability to adjust to different learning needs. They especially value interactive lessons, fair assessment, helpful feedback, good classroom management, and the use of technology in teaching. At the same time, rather than focusing only on how much an EFL teacher knows, students care more about how that knowledge is shared in the classroom. In other words, they prefer teaching that is engaging, supportive, and student-centered. Meanwhile, although teachers were mostly seen as doing well in terms of professionalism and creating a positive classroom atmosphere, students still felt there is room for improvement, particularly in updating professional knowledge and planning lessons more effectively. In short, this study offers a clear and simple picture of modern EFL teacher competence from students' perspectives in the Afghan university context. It shows that their expectations match international ideas of effective teaching, while also pointing out specific areas that need more attention locally.

## AUTHORS CONTRIBUTIONS

Both authors work collaboratively in writing the manuscript.

- Muhammad Mujtaba Sarwary conceptualized and supervised the study, and investigated and analyzed data.
- Abdul Salam Abid wrote the manuscript and revised the reviewers' comments.

All authors reviewed and approved the final version.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

If there are no competing interests in their submitted manuscripts, authors should state so explicitly: "The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest"

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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