Learner Diversity and Academic Achievement of Primary School Pupils in Basic Science in Calabar Education Zone of Cross River State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Learner diversity has occupied the centre stage of most discussions in education. Our classrooms are heterogeneous and pupils come to the classroom with diverse identities and this diversity among pupils has some impact on their learning out comes. This study therefore sought to examine the relationship between learner diversity and academic achievement in Basic Science in Calabar education zone of Cross River State, Nigeria. The study was guided by three hypotheses. The design adopted for this study was ex-post facto research design because the independent variables cannot be manipulated. Simple random sampling technique was employed to select 500 pupils to participate in the study. Thereafter, collected data were subjected statistical analysis at 0.05 level of significance using Pearson product moment correlation analysis. Recommendations were made based on the findings obtained, that teachers should recognize the diversity among pupils and help them to benefit from their instruction.

Keywords: Learner, diversity, Basic Science, Academic achievement, Education.

1. INTRODUCTION

Basic level of education is the foundation of all other levels. It is at the basic level of education that, the foundation of building sound scientists begins. If the foundation is not well developed, then other levels will suffer. The poor science performance of learners at the higher level is an indication of a faulty foundation. Basic science, like any other subject, has its own peculiar terms then need special attention to be mastered by learners at the basic level of education. But the situation is not encouraging as there is poor performance of pupils in Basic Science. Administrators, educators, teachers and parents are worried over the low achievements of pupils at the basic level of education. Many scholars have attributed the poor achievement in Basic Science to teachers, pupils and the school environment. But little effort has been made toward learner diversity which is one of the indices of low or high performance.

Learner diversity occupies most discussions in education. According to Brent (2005) diversity in education usually refers to the effects of gender and ethnicity on students' performance. Our classrooms are heterogeneous combination of pupils who come with diverse identities. Centre for Excellence and Teaching (2008) said that "our classrooms are filled with diversity and each student is culturally unique and brings a core set of values, perspectives, concerns and agendas to the learning environment. Understanding the individuality of each student, apart from stereotypes, is important for effective teaching." The range of diversity among pupils may be in their language, ability, culture, development, learning styles, gender, socio-economic status, etc.
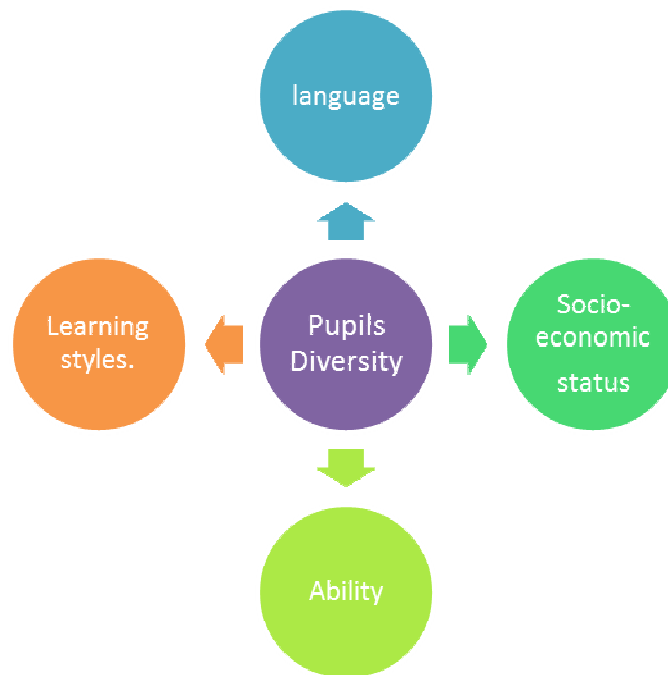
language

Learning styles.

Pupils Diversity

Socio-economic status

Ability

Fig. 1 Learner Diversity

This diversity among pupils may have some impact on their learning outcomes. In this paper, we are going to take a look at only three aspects of learner diversity which are language, learning styles and socio-economic status. The language one speaks influences everything he/she does. This is because language is an aspect of one's culture, which is part of life. In Nigeria and Cross River State in particular, many mother tongue languages interfere with even how one speaks English language which is the second language used across the country, in the classroom for everyday communication. Cross River State is a multi-lingual state with many dialects, and many pupils come or arrive school with little or no knowledge of English language which is our lingua franca. This is why the language policy in Nigeria stipulates that mother tongue should be the medium of instruction for the first three years of the child in school. This was in a bid to help pupils master their mother tongue before learning English language, but this has become a mirage because many teachers are drawn from various parts of the country that speak different languages and have no knowledge of the pupils' mother tongue or the language of the immediate community.

Again, the learning style of pupils is one of the diversity that may interfere with pupils' academic achievement. There are no two pupils that have the same learning style, each comes to the classroom with his/her own learning style that needs to be taken care of by the teacher. Learning style refers to the way one prefers to learn and study. This may be visual, auditory or tactile. Cruickshank, Jenkins and Metcalf (2006) said that our learning style can be thought of as our learning personality. That, it is a consistent pattern of behaviour and performance we use to approach learning experiences. In other words, the way we react to learning experiences and study is what we called learning style. The way pupils study and learn in a classroom affect their performance. A child whose learning style is visual and has no opportunity of seeing the materials the teacher is talking about may not achieve more in the school. The same applies to pupils who are auditory and tactile learners.

Furthermore, Brown (2000) said that learning style is the manner in which individuals perceive and process information in learning situations. Again, Celcia-Murcia (2001) sees learning styles as the general approaches for example global or analytic, auditory or visual that pupil's use in acquiring a new language or in learning other subjects. It is the manner in which a learner perceives, interacts and responds to the learning environment. Learning styles therefore, are the characteristics learners employed either cognitive, affective, social and psychological to perceive, interact and respond to the learning environment. Another diversity considered in this paper is the socio-economic status of the learners. Students come to our classrooms with a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. Socioeconomic status means the level of education, income, and professionalism of an individual or group.

Although students of higher and lower socioeconomic statuses both attend classes together, the effect of lower socioeconomic status on student achievement is difficult to ignore. Students of a lower socioeconomic status often face additional challenges including a dearth of learning resources, difficult learning conditions and poor motivation that negatively affect their academic performance. It is a form of learner diversity that most importantly impact either positively or negatively on learners' achievement in school especially Basic Science which is a combination of all the sciences.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Constructivist Theory

This theory was propounded by Jerome Bruner in 1966. The theory states that learning is an active process by which learners construct their own knowledge through past and present experiences. The author further said that, the learner selects and transforms information, construct hypotheses and takes decisions based on the cognitive structure to do so. Again, Bredo (1997) asserts that constructivism is basically a theory that is based on observation and scientific study on how people learn. It says that people construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world, through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences whether past or present. Furthermore, Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2005) maintain that constructivism is a theory which regards learning as an active process in which learners construct and internalize new concepts, ideas and knowledge based on their own present and past knowledge and experiences. It is therefore important to note that leaning is constructed and not received. For instance, when we come across a new thing, we would have to reconcile it with our previous experiences, either to change what we already had or discard the new information as irrelevant.

The relevance of this theory to this study is the focus on knowledge construction by learners based on their experiences of the past and present. The approach considers learning to be centred in some socio-cultural and historical context and explains that learning is facilitated through the interactions and interrelationships learners experience through the context of their world. Since learners differ in their learning styles, socio-economic status and language, they will also construct their knowledge and ideas differently with regards to whichever experiences they may have had.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Language Diversity and Pupils' Academic Performance

The language of the learner in comparison with the language of instruction are very instrumental to the learner's ability to comprehend during lesson presentations and ultimately during assessment. In Nigeria, and indeed all Anglophone West African countries, the language of instruction is English Language. This is used despite the diversity in individual language of the pupils. There is therefore room for mother tongue interference in English language. The official language of trade and administration is English. This also extends to basic science, which it serves as the major language. The import of English usage in this context is for the purpose of easy communication among Nigerian peoples. This, therefore highlights the need for the improvement of quality of written and spoken English among elementary school pupils. This would go a long way in enhancing their communication in the basic sciences and further progressing to advance science and technology. On his part, Olaoye (2015) posits that the failure of many poor children to succeed in school is all too obvious. Most of these poor children speak more of vernacular or Pidgin English. To the author, the major explanation for that is that the language development of these children is impaired by poverty and that this impairment in turn hampers language learning. In view of the foregoing, it is instructive to examine how the different language background of the learner impacts on the learner's academic performance especially in basic science.

A similar study was conducted by Oluwole (2008). It examined how mother tongue influences the academic performance of students in English language in Junior School Certificate Examination (JSCE). The thrust of the research was to examine if mother tongue is the only factor responsible for the untold performance of students in English Language at the junior school level. The study was also concerned with finding out what other factors were responsible for the woeful failure. The sample for the study comprised a hundred students (male and female) drawn from SSI class of different public schools in the western part of Nigeria. The age range of the respondents, who constituted students that sat for the JSCE, was between 10.52 and 15.17. The research questions raised were analysed using simple percentages, descriptive statistic. The result of the analysis indicated that mother tongue significantly influences the performance of students in English language in JSCE. The study further revealed that apart from mother tongue, there exist other factors that contribute to the poor performance of students in the subject.

The researcher further mentioned the other factors to include lack of textbooks, poor teaching method, absence of professional growth and development of teachers and the student's language background. Based on these findings, the researcher outlined measures capable of enhancing improved students' academic achievement in the subject. This study revealed that it is not only mother tongue that influences students' academic performance. However, mother tongue is one of the factors. The influence of mother tongue lies on its interference in spelling, pronunciation, etc. Students who come from a home that mostly speak English or whose parents are fluent speakers of English language may not find it difficult to cope with the instructional dynamics in an English-speaking school.

Conversely, Kosonen (2005) opined that students are more likely to enrol and succeed in school when they are given an opportunity to learn in their mother tongue, while Benson (2002) noted that parents of such students usually communicate their teachers and are fully involved in the learning of their wards. According to Hovens (2002), education based mother tongue have a significant benefit on disadvantaged group of children especially those from rural areas as well as girls that don't seem to have enough exposure to an official language, who also have the tendency to longer stay in school. This category of learners does better as they don't repeat grade as much if they receive instructions in their mother tongue.

In a study by Chisunum and Ejie (2014) on the importance of English language in Nigeria, students' poor performance in English Language examinations, attitudes of students toward instruction, communicative competence and the importance of mother tongue as a medium of instruction; suggestions were made to the effect that the use of mother tongue should be made compulsory so as to enable the children to have a mental translation of all concepts presented in English and also to gain sufficient meaning of the concepts. They also noted that a citizen that is literate even only in the mother tongue will be sufficiently equipped to live a useful and meaningful life in the fast changing world.

3.2 Learning Styles and Pupils' Academic Performance

There are many ways through which pupils internalise information. Each child has a different way of learning. In other words, there is diversity in the way pupils learn in school. The concept of learning style refers to a person's preferred way of learning. It is the preference students have for thinking, relating to others, and particular types of classroom environments and experiences (Warn, 2009). Cornett in Warn (2009) sees the concept as "a consistent pattern of behaviour but with a certain range of individual variability" (p.9). In individual, especially students do not learn in the same way. There are different learning styles. Warn also held that a learning style does change with experience. Different people employ various styles of learning, which effectiveness also depends on the individual involved.

Obiefuna and Oruwari (2015:5) conceptualise learning style as "a range of competing and contested theories that aim at accounting for differences in individuals' learning. These theories propose that all people can be classified according to their 'style' of learning, although the various theories present differing views on how the styles should be defined and categorised. A common concept is that individuals differ in how they learn." To address this, Ibe (2012) and Afurobi (2011) in Oruwari (2014) maintained that students learn in many ways e.g. seeing and hearing, reasoning logically, reflecting and acting, memorizing and visualizing, drawing analogies and building models.

Honey and Mumford (1992) in Warn (2009) state that learning exists when someone can do something that he could not do previously. The authors further classify learners into four groups to include activists, theorists, pragmatists and reflectors. An effective learner relies on four different learning modes: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation. Each learner possesses different learning modes to achieve his/her learning objectives.

> Learning style is classified into four types. They are converger, diverger, assimilator and accommodator. Converger learning style combines abstract conceptualization and active experimentation in order to test the theory in practice. Diverger learning style combines concrete experience and reflective observation and considers specific experience from different perspectives. He is imaginative, interested in people and good at generating ideas. Assimilator combines reflective observation and abstract conceptualization and excels in the development of theoretical frameworks. Finally, the accommodator combines concrete experience and active experimentation, using the results of his/her testing as a basis for new learning (Kolb, 1976 in Warn, 2009:4).

In his exposition, Warn (2009) concluded that the preference of learning style by a student is influenced by certain factors, which have a significant relationship with pupils' academic achievement. In the said study by Warn (2009), the objective was to examine the differences that exist in the learning styles of students using two final year subjects that have different method of assessment – theoretical and computational subjects. The study equally sought to determine the relationship between the learning styles of students and their academic achievement. The methodology of the study involved controlling and not controlling for the students' previous academic achievement. The study employed the Kolb's (1976) Learning Style Inventory (LSI) to examine the type of learning style used by the students of accounting in a tertiary institution in Malaysia. The sampled students had to fill out two sets of LSI questionnaires on the course Malaysian Taxation (computationally oriented) and Financial Strategy (theoretically oriented). The final year results of the students in the both subjects were analysed in the study to determine its relationship with the students' learning style. On the type of learning style, it was converger learning style for the subject Malaysian Taxation while for Financial Strategy, the learning style used by the students was Accomodator learning style. This result indicates that there is a significant difference in learning styles and subject area. However, the result indicated that no significant relationship exists between the students' learning style and their academic performance. This implies that the impact of learning style is basically felt in subject area and not necessarily in academic performance of the learner.

Obiefuna and Oruwari (2015) undertook a study on learning style and academic performance of students in English language in senior secondary schools in Imo state of Nigeria. The study adopted a quasi experimental approach, and was guided by two research questions and hypotheses respectively. With a purposive sampling technique, a sample of 300 students was selected and used for the study. The study used both descriptive and inferential statistics in data collection and analysis. The major instrument for data collection was an English Achievement Test (EAT) used in the pre-test and post-test. While the research questions were answered using simple percentage and mean count, the hypotheses were analysed using ANCOVA at 0.05 level of significance. It was discovered as a result that the learning style preference for English language students is the converger learning style. I was further observed that academic performance of students with respect to their learning style is dependent on the teaching method; students perform better when teaching methods match their learning styles. This result implies that influence of learning styles on students' performance is based on learning style and teaching method agreement. It was thus the recommendation of the authors that English language teachers identify the learning style of students before selecting and using teaching methods for complementary purpose.

Abidin, Rezaee, Abdullah and Singh (2011) carried out a study on learning styles and overall academic achievements in a specific educational system using a survey design. 317 students participated in the study and learning style survey (LSS) was employed to gather data. One way analysis of variance and multiple regression analysis were used to test the hypotheses. It was discovered that a significant relationship exist between overall academic achievement and learning styles. Also, earlier Warn (2009) found from literatures that learning style is one of the predictors of academic achievement for a study performed in Spain.... But on the contrary, Warn's study revealed a no significant association between the students' learning styles and their academic performance.

3.3 Socio-Economic Status And Pupils' Academic Performance
The concept of socio-economic status, according to **Keltner (2008:12)** refers to "an economic and sociological combined total measure of a person's work experience and of an individual's or family economic and social position in relation to others based on income, education and occupation." According to the author still:

> When analyzing a family's socioeconomic status, the household income, earner's education and occupation are examined, as well as combined income verses with an individual, when their own attributes are assessed. Socio-economic status is usually divided into three groups: high, middle and low. When placing a family or individual into one of these categories, any or all of the three variables (income, education and occupation can be assessed (Keltner, 2008:12).

Ghazi, Nawaz, Shahzad, Shahzada and Rukhsar (2013) studied the relationship between parents' socio-economic status and the academic performance of children. The study's purposed to investigate socio-economic factors that influence academic performance of students in secondary schools in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The co-relational and descriptive research designs were used for the study. The population of the study comprised intermediate level – first year – students of six districts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The study used a total of 720 students as samples. Data was analysed using Pearson Product Movement correlation analysis. The findings show that there is a positive significant relationship between total family income and father's job grade and students' academic performance.

It was therefore concluded that socio-economic status of parents is vitally influential in the academic achievement of children. By this conclusion, the recommendation, among others was that a serious commitment should be made on the part of government to uplift people's socio-economic status, by ensuring an increase in income of families and to ensure quality education for children from such homes to increase their socioeconomic status.

Marmot (2004) noted that lower socio-economic status parents have the tendency to dictate commands or orders while communicating with their children unlike their counterparts from higher socio-economic status, who do relate with their children cordially or in a friendly manner during interaction. The impact of this is that while children from the former background are likely to be timid, confused and focused, children from the latter background would freely think, express themselves and articulate ideas clearly. By this, it could be inferred that children who ask and answer questions in class, who perform well in assignments and tests and examinations are likely to come from high socioeconomic household.

Eshetu (2015) conducted a study in Wollo, Ethiopia on the effect of parental socioeconomic status on students' academic performance. The study used an explanatory research design. A sample of 538 students was randomly chosen from thirteen junior secondary schools in the region. Data collected were subjected to statistical analysis using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics including percentage, Spearman's rho correlation, independent samples t-tests and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). Results show that parents' socioeconomic status – education and occupation – has a significant relationship with students' academic performance. The study revealed that children of educated parents with good economic strength had higher scores in regional examinations than those from poor background. Children with high socioeconomic status have parents that have the well withal to provide them with all the necessary facilities needed in schools. They have access to wide range of resources to enhance students' academic performance through intellectual stimulation and good educational inspiration. These factors are visibly lacking in families of low socioeconomic status.

In a contrary study, Singh and Singh (2014) discovered that the parents' socioeconomic status does not significantly affect students' educational achievement. It rather posited that it is the health status and social adjustment of the child that majorly determine children's educational achievement. Their investigation revealed that students who come from the same socioeconomic background may still perform differently due to the above factors in play.

4. METHODOLOGY

The research design adopted for this study is the ex-post facto research design. The reason for adopting this design is that the independent variables were not to be manipulated, because their manifestation had already occurred. The target population of the study comprised all primary six pupils in the basic level of education in Calabar Municipal Council of Cross River State, Nigeria. According to the Cross River State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB, 2016), there are 76,326 pupils in primary six in the area of study. A simple random sampling technique was adopted where all the pupils were given equal chance of being selected. A hat and draw method was employed to select 500 pupils to participate in the study. A sample of 500 pupils was selected for the study.

4.1 Purpose of the study
The main purpose of the study was to investigate the relationship between learner diversity and pupils' academic performance in Basic Science at the primary school level in Calabar Municipality, Cross River State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to examine whether:
1. Learning styles of pupils relate to their academic performance in Basic Science.
2. Pupils' language relate to their academic performance in Basic Science
3. Pupils' socioeconomic status relate to their academic performance in Basic Science.

4.2 Research Questions
Three research questions were posed to guide the study. These questions will further be translated into hypotheses so as to be tested. The questions included:
1. How do pupils' learning styles relate to their academic performance in Basic Science?
2. How does pupils' language relate to their academic performance in Basic Science?
3. To what extent does pupils' socio-economic status relate to their academic performance in Basic Science?

4.3 Research Hypotheses

To guide the study, three research questions were translated into null hypotheses.

1.   There is no significant relationship between learning styles of pupils and their academic performance in Basic Science.
2.   Pupils' language does not significantly relate to their academic performance in Basic Science.
3.   A significant relationship does not exist between in pupils' socio-economic status and their academic performance in Basic Science.

5. RESULTS

We present results based on the analysis of research data

Table 1: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of the relationship between language and pupils' academic performance in basic science (N=500).

Variables	∑X ∑Y	∑X² ∑Y²	∑XY	r-cal
Language	10429	257477		
			133752	.097
Academic performance	6436	86432		

Significant at .05, Critical r-value = .088 df = 498

The result presented in table 2 shows that the calculated r-value of .097 is greater than the critical r-value of .088 at .05 level of significance with 498 degree of freedom. The result further implied that the null hypothesis was rejected indicating that pupils language has a significant relationship with their academic performance in basic science.

Table 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of the relationship between learning styles and pupils' academic performance in basic science (N=500).

Variables	∑X ∑Y	∑X² ∑Y²	∑XY	r-cal
Learning Styles	12127	285049		
			143450	.089
Academic performance	6436	86432		

Significant at .05, Critical r-value = .088 df = 498

The result of the analysis presented in the table 2 shows that the calculated r- value of .089 is greater than the critical r-value of .088 at .05 level of significance with 498 degree of freedom. This result implies that the null hypothesis was rejected, indicating a significant relationship between learning styles and pupils academic performance in basic science.

Table 3: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of the relationship between socioeconomic status and pupils' academic performance in basic science (N=500)

Variables	∑X ∑Y	∑X² ∑Y²	∑XY	r-cal
Socio-economic status	11783	2653293		
			148739	.096
Academic performance	6436	86432		

Significant at .05, Critical r-value = .088 df = 498

The result presented in table 3 shows that the calculated r-value of .096 is greater than the critical r-value of .088 at .05 level of significance with 498 degree of freedom. This implies that the null hypothesis was rejected while the alternate hypothesis was retained, implying that socio-economic status of parents do relate significantly with pupils academic performance in basic science.

6. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The first hypothesis stated that there is no significant relationship between pupils' language and their academic performance in Basic Science. From the analysis, the finding of this hypothesis showed that a significant relationship exists between pupils' language and academic performance in Basic Science. This implies that, the language a child brings to the classroom has impact on the child's performance. It may be positive or negative depending on the medium of instruction used in the classroom.

This finding is supportive of Oluwole (2008), who found out from a research work that the influence of mother tongue lies on its the interference in spellings, pronunciation, and that students who come from a home that speak English mostly or whose parents are fluent speakers of English language may not find it difficult to cope with the instructional dynamics in an English speaking school. The finding of this study on language diversity is further in line with Olaoye (2015), who posited that the failure of many poor children is obvious and that most of these poor children speak more of vernacular or pidgin English.

The second hypothesis was that there is no significant relationship between learning styles of pupils and their academic performance in Basic Science. Based on the analysis, the hypothesis was rejected; the result showed that there is a significant relationship between learning styles of pupils and their academic performance in basic science. The implication of this finding is that, the different learning styles employed by learners due to their personality diversity influences their academic performance positively or otherwise.

This finding lends credence to the finding of Oruwari (2015), who found out from a study on learning styles and academic performance that learning styles have a significant relationship with academic performance. The finding of this study also supports the finding of Abidin, Rezaee, Abdullah and Singh (2011) who discovered from a research work that a significant relationship exists between overall academic achievement and learning styles.

The third hypothesis stated that, a significant relationship does not exist between pupils' socio-economic status and academic performance in Basic Science. From the analysis, the result showed that there is a significant relationship between pupils' socio-economic status and their academic performance in Basic Science.

The implication is that students from high socio-economic families have most of the things they need and the encouragement from parents to do well in their academic work. This finding is in consonance with Eshetu (2015) who found from a study on parental socio-economic status and students' academic performance that socio-economic status of parents has strong association with academic performance of students. But the finding of this study is in contrast with Singh and Singh (2014) whose result showed that there is no significant relationship between the two variables.

7. CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, it is obvious that learner diversity in terms of language, learning styles as well as socio-economic status of pupils are determining factors of pupils' academic performance in basic science in Cross River State, Nigeria. It has been deduced that, for pupils to perform creditably, both the teachers, parents and pupils need to cooperate with each other hence diversity among pupils cannot be ruled out in teaching learning context.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations and made based on the findings of the study thus:
1. Teachers should take into consideration the language pupils bring to the classroom and try to help them cope with whichever medium of instruction they are using to
    teach. This will enable the pupils to be proficient in the use of that language.
2. Pupils should be encouraged to continue to use the learning styles that are convenient to them in order to enhanced their academic performance
3. Parents should try to provide the basic learning materials and needs of their wards irrespective of their socio-economic status and also, government should intensify the free education to help bridge the gap between the socio-economic status.

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