



INVESTIGATING UNIVERSITY LEARNERS' BELIEFS, ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS ABOUT ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING (ELT) AND LEARNING: A THEORETICAL REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The present study includes the published literature during the first two decades of 21st century (2001-2020) for the purpose of theoretical review of studies in terms of summarizing and synthesizing the findings. A comprehensive re-search included several electronic databases and library searched references in the relevant articles that were identified in the process of screening. Initially, screening of abstracts was done for the purpose of most pertinent work on the subject to be included in the current study. The researchers also screened the full text of each article in order to assess and screen the eligibility criteria for the purpose of most recent and updated data. Research articles were reviewed in order to determine the most significant studies particular to the research questions and the domain of research. Data extraction was done based upon the studies at the university level and factors were identified that affect university learners' beliefs, attitudes and perceptions. Moreover, data was also deduced in



order to know the relationship between learners' beliefs, attitudes and perceptions with respect to proficiency and achievement. Findings provide evidences that learners have positive and favorable attitudes, beliefs and perceptions towards English language teaching and learning. The study also facilitates students learning with greater credibility of the teacher and put forth recommendations for future work.

Keywords: attitudes, beliefs, English language teaching, learning, perceptions, university students

1. INTRODUCTION

In order to understand the language learners in terms of identifying evidences about learning a language, it is an important area to study and explore the learner beliefs, attitudes and perception for future study. As in 1970s and 1980s, foundations of research work inquiry on learners' beliefs, attitudes and perceptions also recommended for further investigation, there is a need to investigate the following target research questions. "Is there any causal relationship between learner attitudes, perceptions and beliefs and outcomes like achievement and proficiency? Do more positive attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs truly contribute significantly to making language learners more successful in the classrooms, or as language learners in general?". There is a need to study these questions. Therefore, more contributions are needed in this area, so that development of effective foreign language (FL) instructional pedagogy is possible (Wesely, 2012, p. s111). Graham (2006) has suggested that changing classroom practices helps to develop and build positive image of the language learners. Importantly, understanding the foreign language learners' beliefs is beneficial for classroom instructions. As fewer research study provide insights on learner's belief about language learning and the impact on their learning behaviour.

Moreover, the outcomes of the research study of Akhtar and Kausar (2011) have particular concerns regarding the important role of beliefs in English language teaching (ELT) and learning in the Pakistani context. It is suggested that teachers would incorporate learners' views, while working on their teaching stratagems. This step may help in improving the process of English Language teaching in Pakistan. Therefore, there is a need to provide awareness about the crucial role of beliefs of students and teachers. The particular concern of Gardner's study (2001) has recommended that researchers should focus on learners' motivation because it helps in understanding learners' beliefs, attitudes and perceptions.

Previous research studies have tended to focus more on qualitative and quantitative analysis rather than providing the theoretical review. However, much of the research studies conducted to date do not provide a theoretical underpinning of this literature. Therefore, the researchers aim to present the syntheses of findings in order to provide a theoretical synthesis of studies on factors that affect learner's beliefs, attitudes and perceptions about English language



teaching and learning and how these beliefs, attitudes and perceptions relate to proficiency and achievement. Based upon the published research studies, the following research questions were formulated:

- a) What factors do affect learners' beliefs, attitudes and perceptions about English Language teaching and learning at university level?
- b) What is the relationship between learners' beliefs, attitudes, perceptions with their proficiency and achievement?

This study aims to contribute to the growing area of research by providing deeper understanding of learner beliefs, attitudes and perceptions with respect to English language teaching and learning. This will help to facilitate students' learning as well as to increase credibility of the teacher. It is our experience of teaching at the university level that has motivated us towards this type of study. This paper reports a detailed theoretical underpinning of studies in terms of synthesizing the research findings that may affect English language teachers to understand learners' behaviour which may increase the academic performance of students at the university level.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Defining Attitudes, Beliefs and Perceptions

English Language achieves a global status and its usage spreads all over the world not only in the settings of second language, but also in the contexts of foreign language. Importantly, considering learners' attitudes and beliefs are essential in ELT and learning (Burgos & Molina, 2020). With reference to language learning, the term attitudes, beliefs and perceptions has become a major area of interest by a number of ESL researchers (Ahmed, 2015; Akhtar & Kausar, 2011; Charoensuk & Jaipetch, 2017; Csizer & Dornyei, 2005; Graham, 2006; Ibrahim, Yana & Yinusa, 2018; Karatas, Alci, Bademcioglu & Ergin, 2016; Kormos, Kiddle & Csizer, 2011; Munir & Rehman, 2015; Napolitano, 2017; Oroujlou & Vahedi, 2011; Wesely, 2012).

According to a definition of attitudes provided by Oroujlou and Vahedi (2011), it is considered as set of beliefs and it can be learned or taught, for instance: second or foreign language learning. However, students are not born to like or dislike a language. If a learner enters in a class with neutral attitudes about a particular language or has personality traits in terms of perceiving and responding, his/her attitude towards language or learning a language is influenced strongly by the surroundings or the context itself. As the development of attitudes takes place within context, it is important to develop good or positive attitudes, feelings and beliefs in order to raise the learner's efficiency in the language classroom. Fakeye (2010), Hashwani (2008) and Lai and Aksornjarung (2018) have found that positive attitude is fundamental to learn the English Language. For Ibrahim, Yana and Yinusa (2018), the concepts



attitudes, perceptions and beliefs are based upon the situation or any object related to it. Since attitude comprises of three factors i.e. behavior, cognition and affective, these three attitudinal factors help the students to identify their self with the native speakers' community. Additionally, it also helps in adopting or acquiring numerous characteristics of behaviour that leads to characterize one's self to the members of target language (TL) community.

In fact, the changing demand or scenario of teaching language theories or different methodology where learners play a central role, learners' attitudes, beliefs and perception maximize the learning process and teaching output. Consequently, learners' attitudes and beliefs are defined as feelings that are collected in terms of language usage and also the status of that language in the society. If the learners speak a second language in a wide range of different situations or fulfilling the professional demands, they will be able to distinguish the communicative value of L2 learning and therefore develop motivation in terms of acquiring proficiency in that language (Ahmed, 2015). Charoensuk and Jaipetch (2017) show those learners' attitudes; beliefs and perceptions display the feelings of people towards the communicators of the target language. Moreover, the findings would seem to show that learners' attitudes, perceptions also encourage them to work hard and bring changes in the education career (Munir & Rehman, 2015).

Notably, learners' attitudes, beliefs and perceptions towards learning the second language can be positive or negative (Nduwimana, 2019). Gardner and MacIntyre (1993) conclude that with positive beliefs in terms of language learning, learners develop positive beliefs about learning a language and achieve good grades. On the other hand, negative attitudes and beliefs develop anxiety and poor academic performance and achieve low grades (Baker, 1992). Therefore, learners' perception includes their own understanding level of learning. Given that, beliefs focus on what they think about themselves as well as the learning situation. The possible explanation thus expounds that attitudes refer to two different domains: i) attitude with regard to the learning situation (instructor and instructional techniques usage), ii) and the target community (Wesely, 2012). The above literature provides evidence that understanding learners' attitudes beliefs and perceptions are considered as essential aspects in terms of maximizing the language learning process and teaching output.

2.2 Research Syntheses of Beliefs, Attitudes and Perceptions of University Students Towards English Language Teaching (ELT) and Learning

Different factors affect learners' expectations regarding English Language Teaching and learning at the university level or higher education institutions (HEIs). Despite the fact that identifying the learners' expectations helps in understanding the desires and needs. It also assists the understanding of students' expectations at different roles beyond the organization's boundaries that may involve different connected facets of life. These considerations favorably support universities or HEIs to fill the gap by offering friendly atmosphere for learning and



development (De Moraes, Montebello, Zaccaria, & Cremonesi, 2019). As identified and highlighted in the previously published literature and the prevalent need of time that universities or (HEIs) need to realize the market value and also investigates the perceptions of learners regarding their values including trust, identity building, and emotional relations. This is important because these are interconnected to their lives. It benefits in increasing the development of knowledge, experiencing innovation in learning new skills, besides helping in teaching and learning effectively. It also has an impact on organization's or universities performance. From the research evidences, it appears that this is the less explored area and therefore needs more research in the context of university in terms of incorporating and integrating students' beliefs, attitudes and perceptions. Additionally, this may facilitate learners and teachers in improving university performance (Takahashi, Bulgacov, Sempregon & Giacomini, 2017).

Education system accommodates diverse group of learners. In this pursuit of student consideration in terms of instructional methods that foster proficiency in learning and improves the academic performance, English is considered essential (Napolitano, 2017). However, in the Pakistani context, motivation to learn English language with relevance to their attitudes and beliefs of learning experience found as sturdiest aspect based upon their learning effort (Islam, Lamb & Chambers, 2013). Similarly, students report that considering competency in English is an influential vehicle for developing literacy, skills, knowledge and helps in understanding the western culture that is important for national development (Al-Haq & Al-Masaeid, 2009; Norton & Kamal, 2003).

Additionally, the increasing use of English in the global context has added a new tenet of universalistic teaching and learning of English language in Pakistani context. It contributes to achieve the quality in education (Shamim, 2011). In the similar vein, other studies also show the learners positive attitudes of learning English in the global context (Csizer & Kormos, 2009; Kormos, Kiddle, & Csizer, 2011; Lamb, 2012).

Data from several studies (See, Al-Haq & Al-Masaeid, 2009; Csizer & Kormos, 2009; Kormos, Kiddle & Csizer, 2011; Lamb, 2012; Norton & Kamal, 2003) suggest that the learners have positive attitudes, beliefs and perceptions in English language teaching and learning. However, recent literature has emerged that offers contradictory findings about learners' negative attitudes or slight favorable attitudes towards learning English language. Although the researchers have highlighted the reasons or the factors behind the negative attitude, beliefs and perceptions were the effect of the instructional methods, teaching materials or rare usage of English. It was also reported (See, Abidin, Pour-Mohammadi & Alzwari, 2012; Asghar, Jamil, Iqbal, & Yasmin, 2018; Kong & Wei, 2019; Youssef, 2012) that some learners agreed that they are not paying attention when the English instructor is delivering the lecture. Thus, this negative belief may not know the importance of learning English. Nevertheless, positive attitude is considered as an umbrella term for learning a language. Therefore, it is recommended that



instructors should incorporate and respect learners' attitudes, beliefs and behaviour in teaching English language. Importantly, students' attitudes help in providing information for policy making in terms of introducing or implementing the instructions in the light of learners' views. Apart from this, it is also important to motivate the learners and develop positive attitudes. Previous results have also reported in the literature that it is also important to consider students' needs and their learning styles in order to build the positive image or attitudes towards English Language.

Additionally, other previous studies have found a high positive attitudes, beliefs and perceptions of university students toward ELT and learning. For example, Berowa, Devanadera, David and Devanadera (2018) have reported the highly positive attitudes towards ELT and learning of Vietnamese learners at Philippines. Similarly, students at Hadhramout University have also showed motivation and positive orientation toward English language teaching and learning. Particularly, learners have also shown a positive attitude towards the English status at educational domain and its social value (Al-Tamimi & Shuib, 2009).

Recently, a considerable literature on learners' attitude towards English language teaching and learning has also reported a positive attitudes, beliefs and perceptions (Burgos & Molina, 2020; Fakeye , 2010; Hashwani, 2008; Kormos, Kiddle & Csizer , 2011;Noreen,Ahmed & Esmail, 2015; Soleimani & Hanafi, 2013; Tahaineh & Daana, 2013). Table 1 answer the research questions and provides the major findings of the university student's beliefs, attitudes and perceptions and also highlight the factors that show the relationship between proficiency and achievement towards ELT and learning.

Table 1

Factors affecting University learners and relationship between proficiency and achievement about ELT and learning

Researchers' name (year)	Factors affecting university learners' beliefs, attitudes and perceptions	Relationship between proficiency and achievement
De Moraes, Montebello, Zaccaria, and Cremonezi (2019)	Fulfilling learners' expectations including technological, cultural, social, economic and psychological factors.	Improvement in marketing strategies, management skills and in the field of education.
Takahashi, Bulgacov, Semprebon and Giacomini (2017)	Value other life connected aspects including identity, relationship, trust and emotional balance	Knowing the values helps in bringing innovations. Developing, acquiring and exploitation of new skills and knowledge.
Napolitano (2017)	Learner's engagement including attention of teacher's interest, develop passion and level of motivation. Provision of opportunities for learners to become	Develop the culture of learning and accommodate the diverse learners' needs that propel success in teaching and learning.



active participant in learning fulfills the needs.
Offer the dynamic learning platform that foster collaboration, innovation and works on creativity.

Islam, Lamb and Chambers (2013)

Within nations, English Language plays an important role and serves for different purposes including education, marketing, selling goods, professional use, mediating official relations with other nation state, and other mode of channels for instance: reporting with media.

Developing the sense of national fidelity and self-positioning within local context. This affects the level of motivation to learn the English language.

Al-Haq and Al-Masaeid (2009)

Jordan students consider learning English as an essential tool for acquiring knowledge. They feel proud in mastering an English Language. It is needed in various domains of life. Thus, development of knowledge and skills are acquired through English language. It is an essential tool to develop individuals and nations.

Develop the understanding of the western culture and become a part of well-educated class. Moreover, English language is considered as a globalization vehicle. It helps in cross-border communication and integration. Thus, by mastering English language, a learner develops competence, self-confidence and self-assurance to meet the demands of the technological era. In fact, it is fundamental to learn and communicate with different cultures.

Kormos, Kiddle and Csizer (2011)

Santiago university students enjoy L2 learning and knows the pragmatic values of learning English.

Learner's belief to maintain a positive self-guide in terms of enjoyment driven from the process of learning. Moreover, beliefs of one's self foster the motivation level of L2 learning.

External influences from the learner's social background, environment, and family had a huge impact in the process of L2 learning, attitudes and future- guides to one's self.

Self-guides, attitudes, self-efficacy beliefs, future-self guides are directly linked in L2 learning process. These beliefs and attitudes positively influence the internal and external motivation to learn L2.

L2 learning helps in formulating the positive images of learners themselves as a proficient user of L2. This will contribute in the process of L2 learning. It raises positive attitudes and increases the persistence level of the learners.



Nduwimana (2019)	Burundi Sciences learners believe that Listening, speaking, reading and writing plays an important role in learning English.	English language knowledge helps in the communication process in the global world. This knowledge also needs in studies and professional life.
Al-Tamimi and Shuib (2009)	Learner's motivation supports to learn English Language for the purpose of academic and its instrumental value. Moreover, learners also support to learn by means of the culture value of English speaking world as shown in English movies. Furthermore, learners also reported to learn English for the job purpose and other persuasive reasons of usage in international dealings and desire to speak English fluently.	English Language learning enables to work on tasks proficiently and build one's personality. It also helps to enhance the status among friends. Particularly, it will help in integrating with western world. It fulfils jobs and society's requirement.
Burgos and Molina (2020)	English Language and learning give learners more opportunities to learn and become competent in competitive world. It also enhances general knowledge, helps to study other subjects, capable of analysis of information and communication.	English language and learning promote opportunities in different domains. It develops professional knowledge and skills and prepare learners to face the new challenges or requirements of the global world.

The salient factors of the studies presented in Table 1 provide evidences that university learners show positive attitudes, beliefs and perceptions towards English language teaching and learning for various reasons including education value, technological usage, social and cultural factors, knowledge building, develop motivation level, self-confidence, competency and fluency, personality building, knowing the western culture and improves the marketing strategies, develop identity and build good and reputable relations with other nation state and meet job requirements, open the door of employment opportunities and capable of communication with the masses worldwide. Therefore, considering learners' attitudes, beliefs and perceptions are essential variables while teaching and learning ELT.

2.3 Reviews of Research on Beliefs, Attitudes and Perceptions of National Universities Students Towards English Language Acquisition Process

In Pakistan, English is not only considered as the official Language, but its usage is widespread in all domains or sectors including education, economics, social sciences and business management. In viewing the status of English in Pakistani context, more energy and time have given to make teaching and learning of English more effective. However, very little attention has been paid on learners' learning strategies, their attitudes beliefs and perceptions about English language learning and teaching so far. The current situation directs towards the



importance of affective aspects. The research on education of foreign and second language teaching and learning is steadily turning to the direction of investigating the beliefs, attitudes and concepts of language of students and language instructors (Aziz & Quraishi, 2017). Nausheen and Richardson (2013) have reported that Higher education is facing major challenge with respect to meeting adequately the varying needs of diverse population of learners.

For instance, the study of Hosseini and Pourmandnia (2013) have concluded that the following factors influence the language learning process: i) need ii) interest iii) knowledge iv) previous experience and principally v) attitudes, vi) beliefs and vii) perceptions are significant in terms of language learning. Similarly, this is also evident by the illustration of the study of Harvey (2003) that the examination of learners' beliefs, motivation and perceptions in higher education helps in improving the quality of learners' learning and education. This is exemplified in the work undertaken by Watson, McSorley, Foxcroft, and Watson (2004) that having knowledge of learners' beliefs, learning experiences and perceptions can help in improving the academic performance and achievement.

Malallah (2000) research study has also found similar findings like previous studies (Al-Haq & Al-Masaeid, 2009; Csizer & Kormos, 2009; Islam et al., 2013; Kormos, Kiddle, & Csizer, 2011; Lamb, 2012; Norton & Kamal, 2003) that mostly learners have favored the English language teaching and learning. It was also found that learners believed that English language is perceived as prestigious, easy and interesting. These learners have positive attitudes towards English native speakers. They see English native speakers as hard workers, efficient, educated, friendly, polite and intelligent. Moreover, another important finding that has received considerable attention among ELTs that if a level of learners' English is higher, they face lesser anxiety level in English language classroom. Thus, it is correlated with the mechanisms of the motivation factors. Even though, these findings are consistent with Nausheen and Richardson (2013), literature also shows significant correlations of learners' motivational beliefs with respect to the influences of course experience. It is a widely held view that knowledge about learners' beliefs, their motivational factors, and perceptions about learning experiences helps improving the learner's academic achievement (Pintrich, 2003; Pintrich & DeGroot, 1990; Pintrich & Zusho, 2002; Watson et al., 2004).

Similarly, Akram (2017) holds the view that English language is considered prestigious in the Pakistani context. It is recommended that language teachers have to be equipped with practical skills for better performance in the language classroom. Importantly, to motivate students to learn English language and make tasks and activities are relevant and interesting. In this way, it seems possible to raise learners' expectations, develop their positive attitudes and beliefs toward English Language teaching and learning (Pathan, 2012). Recent research of Rasool and Winke (2019) have suggested that more studies are required in order to investigate learners' attitudes, perceptions, beliefs and motivation of English language teaching and learning in the context of Pakistan. Moreover, educational policies and language practices should consider



the learners' need so that practitioners are aware of the different attitudes, beliefs and perceptions of students about ELT and learning (Haidar & Fang, 2019). Knowing the learners' beliefs about English language teaching and learning may benefit the academic performance of the learners and their future academic performance (Hussein, Demirok, Uzunboylu, 2009; Tsui & Ngo, 2017). Apart from this, learning English also provides bright career and more employment opportunities (Pathan, Shahriar & Mari, 2010). Table 2 highlights the factors of the national universities' students' attitudes, beliefs and perception towards English language teaching and learning. Moreover, Table 2 also pinpoints the relation that how English language teaching and learning affects proficiency and achievement in practical life of learners.

Table 2

Students' beliefs, attitudes and perceptions towards ELT and learning at National level

Researcher's name (year of publication)	Factors affecting national universities learners' beliefs, attitudes and perception	Relationship between proficiency and achievement
Rukh (2014)	Business students opines that English Language enhances the learner's knowledge and provide more job opportunities. It also helps to understand other discipline subject's knowledge.	By knowing English Language considered as educated man in the society. It also develops the confidence level in terms of expressing oneself in society.
Malallah (2000)	Kuwait University students have highlighted the following factors: Improving the ability to communicate in English. Passing courses. English language learning is useful, enjoying and likeable. It is important for education purpose. Some learners are not sure in terms of their future careers to continue or to give up with respect to the study of English. Able to communicate easily at abroad. It also helps in reading the details and instructions written on goods, medicines and imported items. Kuwaitis learners also perceive	Helps in tourism, business, and travel and for the purpose of job. Enables to participate freely in different activities of different cultural groups of English speaking countries.



English as academic and prestigious.		
Nausheen and Richardson (2013)	Learners value extrinsic motivation and wanted to develop the feelings of positive self-efficacy for academic achievement towards English language teaching and learning. Teachers should be good in terms of explaining the subject and make subjects more interesting and also try to motivate learners to learn.	Good teaching affects English Language teaching and academic performance. Stronger extrinsic motivation, positive self-efficacy, and task value play a facilitative role towards English language learning. It also leads towards optimistic course experiences.
Pathan (2012)	Learners value integrative motivation, so that they become the part of the members of the English Speaking Pakistani and Engineering community. Learners learn English for passing exams and to raise status in one's society.	Integrative and instrumental motivation helps to learn English language. Knowing a language raises students' confidence and becomes associated with Professional and skilled community of Engineers, both nationally and internationally.
Rasool and Winke (2019)	Learners have reported they learn English for the instrumental purpose and international communication. Importantly, learners displayed high level of motivation to learn English language.	English language knowledge helps in future lives. We will move forward in practical life and job market.
Pathan, Shahriar and Mari (2010)	Learners' attitudes and motivational factors to learn English Language are: i) intrinsic interest ii) going abroad iii) prompt achievement and iv) instructors' influence.	Learning English helps in bright future, raising social status and providing better job opportunities.

The aforementioned analysis of literature mentioned in Table 2, the major findings based on the discussion keeping the focus on research questions, show that the universities learners have favorable and positive attitudes, beliefs and perceptions toward English language teaching and learning. Moreover, the results of the above studies also show that the demand of the job market, career building, educational and business purpose, passing the exams, improving communication skills and participation in the foreign activities are the major factors towards learning English. In view of the studies carried out, these studies reflected that overall learners



had highly motivated attitudes and beliefs towards English Language teaching and learning. It was also revealed that inadequacy towards acquisition of English Language hampers the possible achievement of goals in different domains.

3. CONCLUSION

To encapsulate the present study, it vouchsafes a theoretical review of studies in order to manifest the synthesis of major findings. Moreover, this study has identified that university learners have favorable and positive attitudes, beliefs and perceptions towards English Language teaching and learning. The major findings of the study regarding the learners' attitudes, beliefs and perceptions were the learners work hard to learn English in order to bring changes in the future career, achieve good grades and gain social recognition. Moreover, learners knew the importance of English in the educational domain. One of the most significant findings emerged from this study was the learners awareness of the relationship between ELT and learning in terms of proficiency and achievement. Furthermore, learners were aware that ELT and learning helps to improve the marketing strategies, manage skills, acquire new skills and knowledge, develop the understanding of western culture, enhance competence, self-confidence, and become proficient L2 user. Besides, they were found expressing that English helps in the global communication, builds one's personality, fulfills the job's criteria, and develops the professional knowledge. The proficiency in English encourages them to face new challenges, participate freely in different activities and provides better job opportunities. The findings also highlighted the factors that affect university learners' attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions towards ELT and learning. These factors includes fulfilling the learners expectations in terms of technological, cultural, economic, psychological and social factors, offering a dynamic platform that may foster collaboration and innovation; develop passion and motivation level of learners; provide opportunities to become active participant in the learning process; fulfill learners needs; maintain a positive self-guide in the learning process and help to analyze other subjects content.

Taken together these results suggest that language teachers should be equipped with practical skills in order to teach in the language classroom. Moreover, teachers should also motivate learners to learn a language by making tasks and activities more interesting. It is also important to consider learners need while teaching and learning. It benefits learners' academic performance and their future lives. Furthermore, it also provides the learners bright career opportunities. The findings of the theoretical review should help practitioners of ELT, language policy makers to design educational policies by incorporating learners' beliefs, attitudes and perception towards ELT and learning. The study is limited in providing the theoretical findings based upon the previous published literature. Notwithstanding these limitations, the study suggests making ELT and learning more effective in the Pakistani context. As less attention needs to be paid to learners' attitudes, beliefs and perception towards ELT and learning (Aziz & Qureshi, 2017). Research findings provide evidence to further examine learners' beliefs, attitudes, motivational factors and perceptions in the context of higher education. It may help in improving the quality of learning and education (Harvey, 2003). Furthermore, research could



also be conducted empirically with the same research questions in order to validate the findings of other studies by investigating the effectiveness of university learners' attitudes, beliefs and perception towards ELT and learning and provide more comprehensive and detailed research findings.



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