Effectiveness of Oral Proficiency in English for Secondary Schools (OPS-English) Programme in Improving English Language Vocabulary among Secondary School Students

Manesha Kaur Rajendra Singh
Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan St. Patrick, Kulim, Kedah, Malaysia
E-mail: manesha_pretti@hotmail.com

Manjet Kaur Mehar Singh (Corresponding author)
School of Languages, Literacies and Translation, Universiti Sains Malaysia
E-mail: manjeet@usm.my

Lin Siew Eng
School of Educational Studies, Universiti Sains Malaysia
E-mail: selin@usm.my

Abstract

Speaking is an important skill that needs to be mastered as it is the best way to communicate with other people in order to deliver opinions and express ideas, but the fact is that secondary school students' ability in speaking English is low in Malaysia. It is caused by several factors such as lack of vocabulary, poor pronunciation, weak grammar and poor fluency that hinders the mastery of English language. In this research, Oral Proficiency in English for Secondary Schools (OPS-English) Programme was employed to improve students' speaking skill by engaging them in vocabulary based activities. The main objectives of this study are to investigate the effectiveness of OPS-English in improving the students speaking skills and increasing their vocabulary count. This is an experimental pretest-posttest control group design study which involved 70 students from a school located in one of the districts in Kedah, Malaysia. The duration of the study was 8 weeks. The data collection was done using pre-test and post-test. The data from the pre-test and post-test was analysed quantitatively using independent sample test. The findings of this study show that OPS-English can improve students' vocabulary. This is proven by experimental group's students' test score that showed improvement in the post-test. OPS-English is a suitable programme that should be used to improve students' vocabulary. The result of this study provides useful insights for English language teachers in teaching speaking.

Keywords: OPS-English, speaking ability, secondary school students, vocabulary activities

1. Introduction

Vocabulary is an essential component of language teaching. According to Nation (2001), "vocabulary is not a goal in itself, it is done to help learner listen, speak, read or write more effectively." Without having sufficient vocabulary corpus, students find it difficult to communicate in any language, irrespective of the communication skill used or productive writing. Furthermore, in the context of speaking, more often learners always find difficulties in speaking English due to lack of vocabularies. The crucial problems faced by the students make it hard for them to speak with their limited vocabulary. Limited vocabulary has been a constant setback for students and continues to be a plaguing problem worldwide and specifically in Malaysia as indicated by a number of local studies (Naginder, 2012; Norzanita Othamn, 2009; Rosemala Ismail, 2008; Tengku Intan Suzila Tengku Sharif, Mohd Yusri Mohamad Noor & Harlina Yunus, 2008; Zaira Abu Hassan Shaari, 2008). Therefore, this study would specifically like to determine if Oral Proficiency in English for Secondary Schools Programme (OPS English), a developed series of lessons dedicated and specific to teaching vocabulary can enhance speaking proficiency among Form One secondary school students in the district of Kulim, Kedah.

1.1 Statement of Problem

Based on previous research by Naginder (2012) and Rosemala (2008), the English language proficiency of the Form One students is low. The researchers' findings indicate low grades and poor performance of the students in their English language examination. One of the students' language weaknesses that attributed to the poor performance in their English language is their limited vocabulary knowledge. Thus, this weakness has led the students to face difficulties in understanding and comprehending English language teaching and learning activities conducted in the classroom.

Secondly, the students were found to be actively passive or speechless when they have to speak in classroom. This is attributed to the lack of the number of words that the students know to be successful in their oral communicative

activities.   This subsequently affects the confidence of the students and creates doubt in their ability to apply the known words for communication purposes. Furthermore, the anxiety of mispronunciation or incorrect intonation instills fear when speaking. Asgari and Mustapha (2011) also highlighted that one of the most crucial challenges that learners face during the process of second language learning is learning vocabulary as insufficient vocabulary knowledge of the learners leads to difficulties in second language learning. Therefore, this study will investigate the use of OPS-English programme integrated with vocabulary activities to improve students' English language speaking proficiency.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present study is to examine the effectiveness of vocabulary activities which are taken from OPS-English text book in an English language classroom to improve Form One students' speaking ability. The present study attempts to explore the use of vocabulary through OPS-English programme in an English language classroom. This study believes students will improve their speaking skills if students are subjected to a wide range of vocabulary.

1.3 Research Objectives

The present study addresses the following three research objectives.

1. To identify the English language speaking ability of control group students.
2. To identify the English language speaking ability of experimental group students.
3. To investigate the effectiveness of OPS-English programme in improving the English language speaking ability of experimental group students.

1.4 Research Questions

The present study addresses the following research questions.

1. What is the pre-test and post-test score of the control group students?
2. What is the pre-test and post-test score of the experimental group students?
3. Does the use of OPS-English programme improve the English language speaking ability of experimental group students?

1.5 Hypothesis of the Study

Null hypothesis (Ho): There is no significant difference between students who are taught by using OPS-English programme to improve the English language speaking ability with students who are not taught by using OPS-English programme to improve the English language speaking ability.

Alternative hypothesis (Ha): There is a significant difference between students who are taught by using OPS-English programme to improve the English language speaking ability with students who are not taught by using OPS-English programme to improve the English language speaking ability.
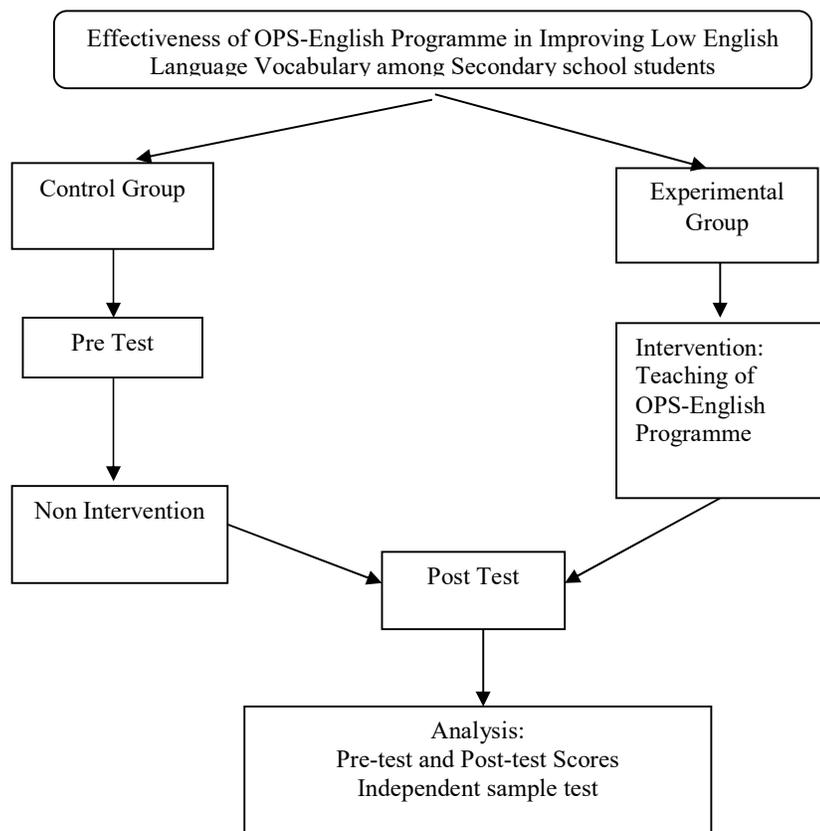
1.6 Conceptual Framwork

Figure 1.1 Conceptual Framework

Conceptual framework indicates there are two groups in this study which is control group and experimental group. Pre-test will be given to both groups before OPS-English Programme intervention is introduced to experimental group. Control group will be following the normal teaching without any additional vocabulary activities to improve their speaking ability in the classroom. The experimental group will be taught using OPS-English Programme to improve speaking ability. At the end of the intervention, the researcher gave a post-test to both groups. The results collected were analysed using an independent sample test and comparison of pre-test and post-test scores of both groups.

1.7 Significance of the Study

This study will contribute significantly to the English language development of the Form One students. Furthermore, the findings of the study will be able to assist English language teachers to improve or upgrade their vocabulary teaching activities in improving the student's English language speaking ability.

The aim of teaching English language for secondary schools in Malaysia is to enable students to use English language to further their studies, for work purposes and to enable learners to access knowledge on the internet. Therefore, the benefits for the students are that they will be able to communicate more effectively in the English classroom if they acquire new and extended vocabulary as well as new and extended collocations. As a result, it will help students to enhance their English language oral communication. Furthermore, this will also help to establish a network among students both locally and overseas through social media that is dominated by English language as the medium of communication as the students will have sufficient number of vocabulary for communicative purposes.

Secondly, the findings of this study could provide useful information for teachers teaching English in secondary schools in Malaysia. The success of the application of vocabulary activities through OPS-English will provide insights to the teachers to improve their teaching style.   Indirectly, it will also contribute towards the professional and career development of English language teachers.

2. Review of Related Literature

Speaking is the natural state of language, as all human beings are born to speak their native languages. Speaking refers to "a process of oral language production" (Tarone, 2005, p.485), and speaking performance is defined as actual instances of producing oral language in real time (adapted from McNamara, 1996, p. 54). Speaking is thus regarded as a critical skill in learning a second or foreign language by most language learners, and their success in learning a language is measured in terms of their accomplishment in oral communication (Nunan, 1998; Nunan, 2001).

Oxford Advanced Dictionary states that the definition of speaking is to express or communicate opinions, feelings, and ideas by or as talking and it involves the activities in the part of the speaker as psychological (articulator) and physical (acoustic) stage. According to Nazara (2011):"Speaking is a multifaceted construct" (p.30). Speaking is a basic skill that language learners should master with the other language skills. It is defined as a complex process of sending and receiving messages through the use of verbal expressions, but it also involves non-verbal symbols such as gestures and facial expressions. However, today's world states that the goal of teaching speaking should improve students' communication skills, because, only in that way, students can express themselves and learn how to follow the social and cultural rules appropriate in each communicative circumstance (Susanti, 2007) , According to Susanti (2007), the teaching of speaking has been developed by using repetition of drills and memorization as well use other techniques such   as video techniques that lead students' to express their selves freely and use the language they are learning without any shyness or fear to make mistakes.

In learning a second language and especially speaking, vocabulary plays an important role. Vocabulary is broadly defined as knowledge of words and word meanings. Vocabulary is classified into four large types, which are meaning/oral vocabulary, receptive vocabulary, expressive vocabulary and literate/written vocabulary. Meaning or oral vocabulary refers to the combination of both listening and speaking vocabularies (Pikulski & Templeton 2004). It is one element that links the four skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing all together. In order to communicate well in second language, students should learn an adequate number of words and should know how to use them correctly in context. Children who possess limited vocabulary knowledge show more discrepancies in their vocabulary acquisition over time as compared to their peers who have rich vocabulary knowledge (Biemiller & Slonim 2001).

Graves (2000, as cited in Taylor, 1990) defines vocabulary as the entire stock of words belonging to a branch of knowledge or known by an individual. He also states that the lexicon of a language is its vocabulary, which includes words and expressions. According to Diamond and Gutlohn (2006), vocabulary is the knowledge of words and word meanings. This is further supported by Stahl (2005) that vocabulary knowledge is knowledge. This knowledge of a word not only implies a definition, but also implies how that word fits into the world. Vocabulary knowledge is not something that can be fully mastered; it is something that expands and deepens over the course of a lifetime.

Hussin, Maarof and D'Cruz (2000) found that students, who became good test-takers, were not able to speak and write competently when they graduated from high schools. Therefore, the application of drill-and-practice approach in their study had some advantage in language teaching, as it helped the student to master English language gradually. In another research by Nguyen and Khuat (2003) reported in their article, "The Effectiveness of Learning Vocabulary through Games" found that even though students realize the importance of vocabulary when learning language, most students learn vocabulary passively due to several factors. First, they consider the teacher's explanation for meaning or definition, pronunciation, spelling and grammatical functions boring as learners have nothing to do but to listen to their teacher. Second, students only think of vocabulary learning as knowing the primary meaning of new words. Therefore, they ignore all other functions of the words. Third, students usually only acquire new vocabulary through new words in

their textbooks or when given by teachers during classroom lessons. For example, learners find many new words in a text and then ask the teacher to explain the meanings and usage. Many students do not want to take risks in applying what they have learnt. Students may recognize a word in a written or spoken form and think that they already "know the word", but they may not be able to use that word properly in different contexts or pronounce it correctly.

Another study by Ratnawati and Ismail (2003) based on their knowledge, gained through their experience as teacher educators, and based on study that they had conducted on the teaching and learning of English found that Malaysian rural school students lacked basic vocabulary in English to be able to respond to reading tests or tests of vocabulary. The lack of exposure to English led many students to not being able to use the language beyond the word level. Furthermore, Teresa's (2005) study investigated the effectiveness of using authentic materials to teach vocabulary. Teresa determined if students actually learned any vocabulary from the use of authentic materials for students would be reduced to mere discourse of iconic gestures and symbols. Her case study among low English language proficiency secondary student's in Kedah identified limited vocabulary knowledge as the cause. This problem led the students to face difficulty in understanding texts for reading. Therefore, the authentic material for teaching vocabulary used in the study attributed to higher motivation and enhancement of students' vocabulary. The students in her study were able to comprehend written texts and use the language both inside and outside of the classroom. In addition, one of the many predicaments faced by language learners at all levels is lack of lexical competence, resulting in lagging proficiency levels and inability to relate to the four language skills (Naginder, 2013). Her research offers a tangible suggestion as to how low language achievement can be overcome, that is, by becoming autonomous vocabulary learners and provides further benefits that can be derived from autonomous vocabulary learning behaviour.

4. Methodology

The research design used in this study is quantitative research. This study uses experimental design which is the Pre-test - Post-test Control Group Design. This research design uses experimental design because the researcher wants to compare the speaking ability of the students in the control group and experimental group. Control group will not receive any treatment using OPS-English. The researcher wants to investigate the effectiveness of OPS-English programme in improving the English language speaking ability and increasing their vocabulary count of experimental group students. This study utilised a purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling, also known as judgmental, selective or subjective sampling, is a type of non-probability sampling technique. Purposive sampling was used as the school has only two Form One class comprising 70 students. Therefore, both classes' students took part in the study. Random assignment was employed to designate one class as the treatment group and another class as the control group. Data was collected using pre-test and post-test. Data collected were in the form of scores based on the speaking assessment scale Independent Sample Test is used to see if there is a significant difference between the means of two groups which is experimental and control group.

4.1 Research Design

The research design used in this study is quantitative research. Arikunto (2006: 12) states "Quantitative research is a kind of research which requires the use of numbers, ranging from data collection, data interpretation and the appearance of the results". This study uses experimental design which is The Pretest-Post test Control Group Design. This design involves at least two groups both which are formed by random assignment; both groups are administered a pre-test of the dependent variable. One group receives a new or unusual, treatment, and both groups are post tested. Post test scores are compared to determine the effectiveness of the treatment.(Gay, 2011) The control group will not receive any treatment where else the experimental group will be receiving treatment in the form of OPS-English Programme intervention involving the use of vocabulary activities to improve students' speaking ability. This research design uses experimental design because the researcher wants to compare the speaking ability of the students in the control group and experimental group. Control group will not receive any treatment using OPS-English. The researcher wants to investigate the effectiveness of OPS-English programme in improving the English language speaking ability of experimental group students.

The two group pre-test and post-test design can be represented as:

Experimental

| O1 X O2 |

Control

| O1   O2 |
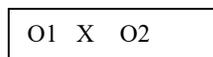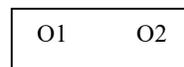
Note: O1   : pre-test
      X   : treatment
    O2 : post test

O1   : Pre test
O2   : Post test

4.2 Sampling

This study utilised a purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling, also known as judgmental, selective or subjective sampling, is a type of non-probability sampling technique. Non-probability sampling focuses on sampling techniques where the units that are investigated are based on the judgement of the researcher. The main goal of purposive sampling is to focus on particular characteristics of a population that are of interest, which will best enable to answer research questions (Creswell, 1998). The researcher uses purposive sampling because OPS-English programme is an intervention programme that is specifically designed for Form One students.

4.3 Participants

The respondents are a group of Form One students aged 13 from a school which is located in Kedah. The number of students who took part in this study is 70 (N = 70). The school is located in the district of Kulim, Kedah. Based on data obtained from the school authority, it was found that majority of the students in this school come from a poor background. In addition, they have very little interest to learn the English language. In the control group and treatment group there are 2 students each who are not able to read a single word in English.

The teachers, Madam Y and Madam M, who conducted the treatment are from the same school as the researcher. Madam Y taught the experimental group while Madam M taught the control group. Madam M who is a *Guru Cemerlang* and also the head of the English Panel in the school has been teaching for more than 30 years. Madam Y has also been teaching for more than 30 years. This indicates, both of the teachers are very experienced English teachers.

4.4 Instruments

This section discusses the instruments used to collect data for this study. The instruments used in this study comprise of a pre-test and post-test and a text book given by the Ministry of Education on OPS-English. To collect data for this study the instruments used are a series of 10 lesson plans (5 lesson plans for the experimental group and 5 lesson plans for the control group) and also a speaking scale. The activities are taken from the OPS-English text book which is provided by the Ministry Of Education. The activities are designed to ensure that opportunities are given to all students to use the English language for oral communication in a fun way. These activities are written based in the integrated listening and speaking skills. There are ten units in the text book. The strategies deployed are all task based activities which can be used by the teachers to involve students in communicating in the English language classroom.

4.4 Speaking Assessment Scale

Speaking assessment is an important part in this study. The speaking assessment scale was created by the Ministry Of Education based on the contexts and functions listed in the Course of Study (Ministry of Education). Furthermore, the speaking assessment scale is used in Malaysian Education System for Form One students in Malaysia (Appendix 11). The Speaking scale assesses students' ability to take part in social interaction to express ideas, opinions and thoughts. Assessment criteria for spoken interaction are like personal response, fluency, language accuracy and pronunciation. The term assessment refers to more than tests and grades. Actually, Haley and Austin (2004: 117) state that "[it] involves development of materials, processes, activities and criteria to be used as tool for determining how well and how much learning is taking place." Similarly, Lindsay and knight (2006) state that: Assessment is the process of analyzing and measuring knowledge and ability, in this case, the learner's knowledge of the language and ability to communicate (p.121).

4.4 Pre-Test and Post-test

The pre-test and post-test are the primary instruments. The rational of pre-test and post-test instrument is to compare respondents, treatment group speaking ability before and after the treatment. The study aims to prove that OPS English is capable to enhance students speaking ability. Pre-test and post-test will consists of 5 questions. (Appendix 12) Time allocated for pre-test and post-test for each student is 10 minutes.

Pre-test and post-test have been validated by three experienced English Language teacher. The pre-test and post-test are considered suitable to be used in this research study. The validity and reliability of the questions is maintained as the pre-test and post-test is formed. In terms of reliability, the consistency of measurement is maintained in the pre-test and post-test. The two sets of test are identical in every way except for the content of the questions. The five questions measure the same variable, the same of difficulty level and scoring. A test is considered reliable if you give the same test or match students on two different occasions, the test should yield the same result (Brown, 2004: 20).

The content of the pre-test and post-test are taken from the OPS- -English text book. All the questions for pre-test and post-test are based from the OPS English guidelines. Students are familiar with the questions given. The content of the questions will be related to students. This will be much easier for students to answer.

The pre-test was given to 70 respondents. There are 35 respondents in the treatment group and 35 respondents in control group. In the first week that is before the OPS English is introduced to the students, pre-test was given for respondents in control group and treatment group. The post test was given to 70 respondents in control group and treatment group in week 7.

5. Results

An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare the pre-test scores between the control group and experimental group. There is no significant difference in the scores of pre-test for control group (Mean=3.23, Standard deviation=1.610) and for experimental group (Mean=3.26, Standard deviation=1.482) conditions; t (68) = -.077, p= .939. This shows that there is no different in pre-test scores between control group and experimental group.

An independent-samples t-test was also conducted to compare the post test scores between control group and experimental group. There is a significant difference in the scores of post-test for control group (Mean= 3.83, Standard deviation =1.992) and for experimental group (Mean=9.60, Standard deviation = 2.746) conditions; t (68) = -10.064, p= .000. It can be concluded that there is a significant difference between students who were taught by using OPS-English with students who were not taught by using OPS-English. The experimental group has higher mean (9.6) which shows the OPS-English programme is an effective intervention to improve students' speaking ability.

Researchers conclude that there is a significant statistical difference in the pre-test and post-test scores. So, the OPS-English programme's intervention is effective in improving students' speaking ability.

Table 1. Independent sample test for pre test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Pre-test	Equal variances assumed	.569	.453	-.077	68	.939	-.029	.370	-.767	.710
	Equal variances not assumed			-.077	67.537	.939	-.029	.370	-.767	.710

Table 2. independent sample test for post test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Post_test	Equal variances assumed	4.488	.038	-10.064	68	.000	-5.771	.573	-6.916	-4.627
	Equal variances not assumed			-10.064	62.029	.000	-5.771	.573	-6.918	-4.625

6. Discussion

Based on the findings of this research it can be asserted that OPS-English learning is essential because it creates situation based activities that provide students opportunities to discuss and prepare their oral presentations with the assistance of a wide range of vocabulary. Besides that, OPS-English activities allow continuous drilling to be conducted on the students' pronunciation as they are listening and pronouncing.

OPS-English has been advocated to enhance the aural and oral skills of Malaysian students. Typically, OPS-English is a very interesting programme that can be implemented to improve speaking ability. Students have a lot of opportunity to practice speaking and have active involvement in the English classroom. OPS-English programme intervention also allowed students to practise collaborative team work value in completing their oral group work assignment.

Teaching speaking skill through OPS-English can be enjoyable experience for both, teacher and student. In fact, students can improve their speaking ability after being taught by using the activities in the OPS-English programme. It can be seen by students' achievement in post test scores. Students' speaking ability improved as well as their motivation in speaking and they were interested to speak through OPS-English in the classroom. Results of the research show that the students improve their speaking ability.

OPS-English learning helps regenerate students by providing a structured environment for sharing some of the responsibilities to learn. Through working together to learn, students learn more, have more fun and develop many other skills such as learning how to work with one another. Through the findings of this study, it is clear that students can improve speaking skills ability through the intervention of OPS-English.

7. Recommendations

In order to improve students speaking ability, there are some suggestions that need to be considered. Teaching speaking using OPS-English in the classroom can motivate students to practice speaking more, and it improves student's speaking ability. Students are encouraged to speak in English when they are exposed to the intervention through OPS-English. Students will try to speak English in the classroom. At this point of time teachers should encourage students and motivate students by correcting their mistakes and giving students the support to speak in English. Ops-English has a positive impact for students to develop confidence to communicate in English language classroom. The researcher suggests teachers use this technique because it encourages students to speak in speaking class.

During this research, the researcher discovered new insights, challenges and possible solutions to the problems experienced by the teacher in the English classroom. Firstly, students have a deficit in second language vocabulary and teachers have a limited time for direct instruction. In this regard, it is important for teachers to develop creative methods to expose students to vocabulary in many ways that develop and reinforce word meaning throughout the school day. This can be done by using OPS-English vocabulary based activities in the classroom to build students vocabulary knowledge.

Teaching of OPS-English activities can be carried out throughout the year. The researcher believes the duration of six months given is too short to finish all the 10 units in the text book. Completing OPS-English activities within six months puts tremendous pressure on the teachers as well. Teachers should be given longer time to teach OPS-English. Thus, teachers will not tend to rush to finish the syllabus. Teachers and students will have more flexible time if OPS-English is spread out throughout the schooling year. Teachers would not feel pressured to finish all the units in the text book. Therefore, the researcher believes teaching OPS-English can be done throughout the year in secondary schools which are in lower band.

8. Conclusion

The findings of this study indicated that teaching OPS-English learning has positive impact on students' speaking ability. On the whole, teaching speaking using OPS English in the English language classroom is good and a very useful method which help students to improve speaking ability. Teaching OPS-English to enhance students' speaking ability creates a friendly and active atmosphere through group discussions. It can also be observed that group work lend support to the weaker learns by the good ones. Students get motivated to talk and present in the friendly classroom environment. The researcher believes application of OPS-English programme in the English language classroom is an effective intervention to improve students' speaking ability.

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