

## Impact of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Intervention on Emotion Expression and Management

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### ABSTRACT

The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) underscores the importance of SEL to ensure holistic development of children and states that the education system must aim to “develop good human beings capable of rational thought and action, possessing compassion and empathy”. Several studies have shown the impact of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) intervention on the ability to express and ability to manage emotions do contribute to holistic development of children, their academic as well as behavioural skills. This research has been done to understand the impact of SEL intervention on emotion management and expression. The target population is children aged 10-15 years. Understanding the impact of SEL intervention on emotion expression and management will aid to improve SEL intervention design and implementation in schools.

**Keywords:** *SEL, Social Emotional Learning Emotional Expression and Management, Holistic Development, Self-awareness, Self-Management*

“Educating mind without educating the heart is no education at all” - Aristotle beautifully summarizes the need and impact of Social Emotional Learning (SEL).

As education systems changed with time across the world, the essence of student-teacher relationship: a safe and trustful environment got lost. The modern education system encourages students to compete with each other with little to no focus on their holistic development. The impact of highly competitive and less nurturing environment at school is manifesting in learning generation and observed as issues like anxiety disorder, depression, suicide, identity crisis etc.

Education system has a very important role to play in holistic development of students not only by fostering their cognitive development but also their social and emotional development. Most of the schools have very limited resources to address these areas along with the continuously rising pressure of academic achievement.

SEL was formed when scholars from multiple fields – such as emotional intelligence, child development, preventive science, bullying prevention and public health – came together in 1944 to identify key skills and competencies students need to successfully navigate through

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school and life. These scholars developed SEL as an overarching framework in an attempt to end the piecemeal approach to social and emotional issues that students face and create a common understanding and goals for student development.

Since the conception of SEL, thousands of schools have implemented SEL programs and research has been done using various types of SEL programs. SEL is being introduced at various levels like, classroom, school and community. SEL is being integrated in the teacher's training program to make SEL as a way of teaching.

In the late 1960s James Comer introduced SEL program at the Yale School of Medicine in the Child Study Centre by focusing on the social and emotional needs of the students. The program showed a great impact on academic performance in schools by early 1980s which gave momentum to SEL movement. Comer's research marked an important milestone for SEL in schools, and in many ways opened the door for other organizations, researchers, and policy makers to contribute and shape what SEL is today. Author W.B. Yeats once said, "Education is not the filling of a pail but the lighting of a fire." The goal of any school system is not to merely fill students' minds with figures and facts but also to help students to become thinkers and doers. We can do this by developing skills that will help them navigate through all sorts of challenges. Schools continue to grapple with how best to "ignite the fire" in students. Over recent decades, many educators have come to realize that SEL is a key component of that process.

To support the connection between research, policy, and practice for student social and emotional development, CASEL was formed (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2005). As defined by CASEL, SEL is the process through which young and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships and make responsible and caring decisions (CASEL). SEL helps children to recognize and manage their own emotions, accept and understand others' emotions. For example, SEL focuses on the skills which will enable children to calm themselves when angry, make friends, work through the conflicts respectfully, and make ethical and safe decisions. The five core competencies promoted by CASEL are, 1) Self-Awareness 2) Self-Management 3) Social Awareness 4) Relationship Skills 5) Responsible Decision Making. These five skills can be taught and applied at various developmental stages from childhood to adulthood and across diverse cultural contexts.

The proximal goals of SEL programs are to foster the development of five interrelated sets of cognitive, affective, and behavioural competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2005). These competencies, in turn, should provide a foundation for better adjustment and academic performance as reflected in more positive social behaviours, fewer conduct problems, less emotional distress, and improved test scores and grades (Greenberg et al., 2003).

The CASEL has completed (2007) studies that clearly show that students who receive SEL programming academically perform better than their peers, who do not have SEL exposure. Effective SEL implementation in the school drives academic learning, and it also drives social outcomes such as positive peer relationships, caring, empathy and social engagement by expressing and managing their own emotions.

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Regular SEL interventions create an environment where children feel safe to express their emotions and learn how to manage it. SEL interventions emphasize on the fact that “All feelings are OK” and focus on expression and management rather than suppressing them. Our ability to express emotions gives us the ability to understand ourselves better and hence improves our relationship with others. It helps us to make better decisions, improve confidence, reduces stress and anxiety and makes us feel more at peace.

Evidence suggests that explicit SEL interventions are effective in helping students develop social and emotional competencies and improve other aspects of students’ lives above and beyond the effects of academic achievement. SEL interventions can improve students’ attitudes toward themselves and others, social behaviours, and behavioural problems (Durlak et al., 2011; Jones, Brush, et al., 2017; Yeager, 2017). In addition, a substantial and growing body of research demonstrates the powerful relationships between social and emotional competencies and success in various contexts, including outcomes later in life, such as earnings and criminal activity.

For overviews of this research, see NRC (2012) and National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2016). Taken together, these recent developments in policy and research suggest that students are likely to benefit when schools offer high quality SEL interventions. Additional in-depth sources of information on evidence-based SEL interventions include the CASEL guides (CASEL, 2013; CASEL, 2015), *Navigating SEL from the Inside Out*, a report by Stephanie Jones and colleagues (Jones, Brush, et al., 2017), and the 2015 *Handbook of Social and Emotional Learning* (Durlak et al., 2015).

Results from a landmark meta-analysis that looked across 213 studies involving more than 27,000 students found that, SEL intervention helps the classroom behaviour by expressing themselves and increasing ability to manage emotions and stress. SEL intervention helps students to know, name and understand their emotions by increasing their self-awareness. These interventions help students to understand themselves which address the skills gap highlighted by World Economic Forum (2015) which focused on the pressing issue of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills gap and ways to address it. According to Dr Anantha Duraiappah, Director, UNESCO MGIEP, SEL should be regarded not only as a remedial or preventive measure for those who are particularly vulnerable to stress, but also as a long-term solution to quality education.

Pratham’s Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2019: Early Years, released in January 2020 reinforced the need to include SEL in school curriculum. This is the first large-scale exercise that collected data on a number of developmental indicators relating to learning, including social and emotional abilities of young children in age group of four to eight years in rural India. ASER 2019 data provides quantitative evidence to assess SEL of young children in India, an important preliminary step in deconstructing the complexities of measuring social and emotional skills. The study accommodated wide cultural, linguistic, and social diversities – 26 districts across 24 states and in 14 languages. The results reveal both the limited skills that children acquire in SEL and its consequences.

There is a confluence of research from multiple studies showing that students who participate in SEL programmes, relative to students who do not, demonstrate significantly improved social-emotional competencies, attitudes, and behavioural adjustment. In addition, research indicates that students who participated in SEL programmes also outperformed those students who did not participate in such programmes, on indices of academic

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achievement by 11-percentile points. “Mainstreaming SEL into education can contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 by allowing all learners to be better prepared to learn and to help develop empathy, compassion and a sense of solidarity with humanity,” he said.

New Education Policy (NEP) also talks about SEL for the holistic development of the child, which is a step in the right direction.

Thus, various studies and research have pointed out the impact of SEL on the ability to express and ability to manage emotions which in turn contribute to holistic development of children, their academic as well as behavioural skills. There is very limited research done in Indian context. The current research aims to understand the impact of the intervention on Indian students.

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Self-awareness and self-management are the base competencies out of 5 competencies defined by CASEL. Understanding, expressing and managing emotions is one of the most important aspects of managing classroom behaviour to handle different life challenges. Teaching students an emotion vocabulary, the need to express emotions and way to manage emotions will help in a long way.

Students have lots of opportunities to practice these skills at school to manage their own behaviour and improve their academic skills.

Typically, in schools when students don't know how to express and manage their emotions leads to fights, bullying, isolations, name calling which affects their self-esteem and in term impacts their focus which leads to academic challenges. When students understand that Anger as emotion is not bad but how they express and manage it makes good/bad. This understanding gives them power to make a choice of their expression which is assertive and at the same time not harmful to them as well as to others. This learning encourages them to express their emotions and helps them to manage it in more constructive manners.

The present study will help the school management to customize the interventions, duration, frequency and additional training programs for parents and teachers in Indian context.

The present study will be done to observe two variables: emotion expression and emotion management before and after intervention. The relationship among these two variables is significant in nature because without knowing how to express emotions, it is challenging to manage emotions. Our current generation finds it challenging to express and manage emotions which lead them to depression, relationship issues, suicide, self-efficacy issues etc.

Hence an attempt has been made to assess the impact of SEL interventions in emotion expression and management. Developing these abilities will help children to foster other skills like interpersonal, intrapersonal, critical thinking, problem solving to be better and have a better life.

The present study aims to measure the impact of SEL intervention on two variables 1) Emotion Expression 2) Emotion Management for the children aged 10 – 15 years.

- **Emotion Expression:** It is an individual's ability to express what they are feeling, through verbal or non-verbal communication, art, writing etc.

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- **Emotion Management:** It is an individual's ability to manage emotions which will prevent any damage to self and others. It is about learning WHY they are feeling WHAT they are feeling to manage those feelings.

The research design used was a quantitative design focusing on a within-subjects type. The participants were tested on EESC and ERQ questionnaires before the intervention and after the intervention.

The sample comprised 50 students in the 10-15 years age group who are currently pursuing formal education in an IGCSE school. All the participants were residents of Chennai. No students were excluded from the studies in the 10-15 years age group. There are two hypotheses in consideration for this study.

The following tools were utilized to assess ability to express and ability to manage emotions.

### **Emotion Expression Scale for Children (EESC) – 16 items (Penza-Clyve and Zeman (2002):**

The Emotion Expression Scale for Children (EESC) is a 16-item self-report questionnaire assessing children's difficulties in emotion expression (i.e., poor emotion awareness and reluctance to express emotions). The respondent has to rate themselves on a 5 – point Likert scale with scores of 1 (not at all true), 2 (a little true), 3 (somewhat true), 4 (very true) and 5 (extremely true) to indicate how each item describes their experience with these expressive difficulties.

Higher scores indicate poorer emotional awareness and greater reluctance to express emotion.

### **Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) – 10 item (Gross and John (2003)**

The ERQ is a 10-item self-report questionnaire based on Gross's (1998) process model of emotion regulation. This model categorizes emotion regulation strategies based on how early they are activated in the emotion generation process, and hypothesizes that different regulation strategies might have different consequences. The ERQ is designed to measure people's usage of two regulation strategies: an antecedent-focused strategy called cognitive reappraisal (6 items, e.g., "When I'm faced with a stressful situation, I make myself think about it in a way that helps me stay calm") where a person attempts to change how he or she thinks about a situation in order to change its emotional impact, and a response-focused strategy called expressive suppression (4 items, e.g., "I keep my emotions to myself") where a person attempts to inhibit the behavioural expression of his or her emotions (Gross & John, 2003). Separate scale scores are derived for these two regulation strategies. All items are answered on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating higher usage of that strategy. (Preece, David & Becerra, Rodrigo & Robinson, Ken & Gross, James. (2020). The Emotion Regulation Questionnaire: Psychometric Properties in General Community Samples. *Journal of Personality Assessment*. 102.348-356. 10.1080/00223891.2018.1564319.)

The intervention modules were used 40 minutes/week for 3 months duration. The modules were developed and executed by the researcher themselves. The intervention was covering three broad topics to build emotion expression and emotion management capability. 1) Emotion Vocabulary 2) Understanding and expressing emotions 3) Tools for emotion management. Each topic had a set of sub-topics along with the activities. The aim of the

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intervention was to build vocabulary and confidence for emotion expression and introduce tools for emotion management. The students were asked to practice these at school and home.

The school principal was approached and briefed about the research study, and permission was requested to conduct the research. The study was conducted in an IGCSE school during the month of Sep 2022 – Dec 2022 once a week for 40 minutes by researcher herself. The intervention modules were executed in the order of the topics along with the activities given.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data was collected using survey method from 50 children aged between 10-15 before and after the SEL intervention of 3 months. Based on the objective of this research, the data were processed and analysed using statistical method.

#### Objective 1:

Emotional Expression - It is individual's ability to express what they are feeling, through verbal or non-verbal communication, art, writing etc.

The ability to express emotions will improve by 40 minutes/week SEL intervention for 3 months for the children aged 10-15 years.

**TABLE 1:**

|                |                                  |             | Statistic | Std. Error |                 |                                  |             | Statistic | Std. Error |
|----------------|----------------------------------|-------------|-----------|------------|-----------------|----------------------------------|-------------|-----------|------------|
| <b>PreEESC</b> | <b>Mean</b>                      |             | 40.80     | 1.45       | <b>PostEESC</b> | <b>Mean</b>                      |             | 39.22     | 1.42       |
|                | 95% Confidence Interval for Mean | Lower Bound | 37.89     |            |                 | 95% Confidence Interval for Mean | Lower Bound | 36.37     |            |
|                |                                  | Upper Bound | 43.71     |            |                 |                                  | Upper Bound | 42.07     |            |
|                | 5% Trimmed Mean                  |             | 40.50     |            |                 | 5% Trimmed Mean                  |             | 39.14     |            |
|                | Median                           |             | 41.00     |            |                 | Median                           |             | 39.50     |            |
|                | Variance                         |             | 104.98    |            |                 | Variance                         |             | 100.83    |            |
|                | Std. Deviation                   |             | 10.25     |            |                 | Std. Deviation                   |             | 10.04     |            |
|                | Minimum                          |             | 23.00     |            |                 | Minimum                          |             | 20.00     |            |
|                | Maximum                          |             | 68.00     |            |                 | Maximum                          |             | 61.00     |            |
|                | Range                            |             | 45.00     |            |                 | Range                            |             | 41.00     |            |
|                | Interquartile Range              |             | 15.25     |            |                 | Interquartile Range              |             | 16.75     |            |
|                | Skewness                         |             | 0.33      | 0.34       |                 | Skewness                         |             | 0.18      | 0.34       |
|                | Kurtosis                         |             | -0.14     | 0.66       |                 | Kurtosis                         |             | -0.74     | 0.66       |

As represented in **Ref. Table 1**, the mean has lowered after intervention means that students' reluctance to express emotion has reduced. The regular intervention may have helped students with their emotion awareness and vocabulary. Building emotional vocabulary is very important for the emotion expression. Without enough emotion vocabulary, it is likely that expression of emotions may be displayed in a non-constructive ways. The intervention builds emotion vocabulary and attempt to emphasize the need of emotion expression and normalize the fact that any emotion OK.

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The confidence to express emotions depends on various other factors like, the particular emotion/situations, parents' relationship, peer relationship, self-esteem, fear of rejection etc. which is beyond the scope of intervention and may have limited the effect of intervention for larger population of students.

**TABLE 2:**

|                 |                                  |             | Statistic | Std. Error |                  |                                  |             | Statistic | Std. Error |
|-----------------|----------------------------------|-------------|-----------|------------|------------------|----------------------------------|-------------|-----------|------------|
| <b>PreERQCA</b> | <b>Mean</b>                      |             | 29.08     | 0.93       | <b>PostERQCA</b> | <b>Mean</b>                      |             | 29.36     | 0.92       |
|                 | 95% Confidence Interval for Mean | Lower Bound | 27.22     |            |                  | 95% Confidence Interval for Mean | Lower Bound | 27.51     |            |
|                 |                                  | Upper Bound | 30.94     |            |                  |                                  | Upper Bound | 31.21     |            |
|                 | 5% Trimmed Mean                  |             | 29.23     |            |                  | 5% Trimmed Mean                  |             | 29.44     |            |
|                 | Median                           |             | 30.50     |            |                  | Median                           |             | 30.00     |            |
|                 | Variance                         |             | 42.97     |            |                  | Variance                         |             | 42.24     |            |
|                 | Std. Deviation                   |             | 6.56      |            |                  | Std. Deviation                   |             | 6.50      |            |
|                 | Minimum                          |             | 16.00     |            |                  | Minimum                          |             | 17.00     |            |
|                 | Maximum                          |             | 39.00     |            |                  | Maximum                          |             | 42.00     |            |
|                 | Range                            |             | 23.00     |            |                  | Range                            |             | 25.00     |            |
|                 | Interquartile Range              |             | 11.00     |            |                  | Interquartile Range              |             | 8.75      |            |
|                 | Skewness                         |             | -0.41     | 0.34       |                  | Skewness                         |             | -0.24     | 0.34       |
|                 | Kurtosis                         |             | -0.92     | 0.66       |                  | Kurtosis                         |             | -0.81     | 0.66       |

As represented in **Ref. Table 2**, the mean has increased after intervention means that students were able to use more cognitive reappraisal to manage their emotions. The intervention may have helped few students to understand and implement positive self-talk in tough situations. Students' capability to manage emotions depends on lots of factors which are innate, genetic, environment related, how their relationships are with people around them and conditioning. The movement in the score does give us an indication that there is a possibility to improve students' self-management ability in spite of many factors which are beyond our control. To implement different strategies in real time situations, students need to have more practice and guidance. In our current study, the intervention duration was 3 months with a weekly session for 40 minutes. Increase in frequency of sessions and duration of intervention will more likely to show desire evidence for cognitive reappraisal strategy for emotion regulation.

**TABLE 3:**

|                 |                                  |             | Statistic | Std. Error |                  |                                  |             | Statistic | Std. Error |
|-----------------|----------------------------------|-------------|-----------|------------|------------------|----------------------------------|-------------|-----------|------------|
| <b>PreERQES</b> | <b>Mean</b>                      |             | 16.54     | 0.76       | <b>PostERQES</b> | <b>Mean</b>                      |             | 15.56     | 0.72       |
|                 | 95% Confidence Interval for Mean | Lower Bound | 15.02     |            |                  | 95% Confidence Interval for Mean | Lower Bound | 14.12     |            |
|                 |                                  | Upper Bound | 18.06     |            |                  |                                  | Upper Bound | 17.00     |            |
|                 | 5% Trimmed Mean                  |             | 16.61     |            |                  | 5% Trimmed Mean                  |             | 15.52     |            |
|                 | Median                           |             | 16.00     |            |                  | Median                           |             | 16.00     |            |
|                 | Variance                         |             | 28.70     |            |                  | Variance                         |             | 25.72     |            |
|                 | Std. Deviation                   |             | 5.36      |            |                  | Std. Deviation                   |             | 5.07      |            |
|                 | Minimum                          |             | 6.00      |            |                  | Minimum                          |             | 4.00      |            |




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|  |                     | Statistic | Std. Error |  |                     | Statistic | Std. Error |
|--|---------------------|-----------|------------|--|---------------------|-----------|------------|
|  | Maximum             | 27.00     |            |  | Maximum             | 26.00     |            |
|  | Range               | 21.00     |            |  | Range               | 22.00     |            |
|  | Interquartile Range | 8.00      |            |  | Interquartile Range | 7.00      |            |
|  | Skewness            | -0.28     | 0.34       |  | Skewness            | 0.06      | 0.34       |
|  | Kurtosis            | -0.70     | 0.66       |  | Kurtosis            | -0.40     | 0.66       |

As represented in **Ref. Table 3**, the mean has lowered before and after intervention means that students have reduced suppressing their emotions after understanding the need to express and ways to manage it better. The intervention may have helped few students to be more expressive about their emotion. They may have understood the importance of being expressive about their emotion. Students might be apprehensive in expressing their emotions due to their prior experiences, self-esteem, family background and relationships, peer interactions. While intervention empowers them to open up and express their emotions, it requires constant reemphasis and practice for students to internalize it and make it as part of their routine. Parents and teachers play a very important role in creating a safe space at home and school where students feel heard accepted and respected unconditionally.

To implement different strategies in real time situations, students need to have more practice and guidance. In our current study, the intervention duration was 3 months with a weekly session for 40 minutes. Increase in frequency of sessions and duration of intervention will more likely to show desire evidence for emotion suppression strategy of emotion regulation.

**TABLE 4:**

| Emotion Expression - EESC  | Emotion Management - ERQ  |   |
|--|---|---|
| EESC  | Emotion Suppression  | Cognitive Reappraisal  |
| 25   | 31  | 21  |

**Refer. Table 4**, it shows relationship between emotion expression and emotion management. As students learnt to express their emotions, their emotion suppression reduced and ability to manage their emotion using cognitive reappraisal increased. Many students were not able to express their emotions as they didn't know how to express and what to say. When students were taught emotion vocabulary, reasons to express emotions supported by a safe space and unconditional acceptance, the increase in their emotion expression was observed in the class as well as in the self-report.

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In this research, we sought to understand the impact of SEL intervention on students' emotion expression and emotion management, and how they use different tools to express and manage their emotions in their daily life. We used two different scales EESC and ERQ, self-report questionnaires to measure emotion expression and emotion management respectively. We executed 3 months SEL intervention 40 mins/week, covering knowledge, tools and strategies to improve emotion expression and management. In this section, we conclude by briefly foregrounding some of the research implications for practice.

Our main objective in this research was to understand the impact of SEL intervention on the ability to express and manage emotions for students of the 10-15 years age group. The EESC and ERQ scale was used before and after the intervention to study and analyse the



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impact of the knowledge, tools and strategies delivered through the weekly intervention of 40 minutes over a period of 3 months.

### ***Delimitations, Limitations and Future Suggestions Delimitations***

The target population of students was from a single school. The target population was not taken from multiple schools. How the intervention will impact students from low-income background was not included. The gender-based study for the impact of SEL intervention was not part of the research project. The correlation of EESC / ERQ to other related score like DASS- 21 (Depression Anxiety Stress Scales-21) was not included as part of the research project.

### ***Limitations:***

1. Duration of the intervention was restricted to a weekly session of 40 minutes for 3 months. The duration would have impacted the results as each child differs in their interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence. The longer duration may nullify the gap in the learning pace of the students.
2. The survey was designed and tested for validity and reliability for the non-Indian population. The customization of questionnaire to an Indian context was not part of the research project.
3. The method used for data collection was self-report from students. The other methods such as teachers rating or parents rating scales were not used. The use of only one set of questionnaires for each variable may not give us an objective point of view.
4. The intervention had taken place in the classroom, other impacting factors such as level of intelligence (IQ), cognitive capability, family background and situation and the sincerity while doing the self-report could not be monitored. These could have impacted the results of study too.
5. Given the nature of the study, it is impossible to measure the true effects of the intervention as there is no control or comparison group. The changes in the outcome are assumed to be the effects of intervention, although theoretically it is arguable that emotion expression and emotion management is not steadily measurable at one go and requires consistent and extended follow-up and observation for a long period of time.

### ***Future Suggestions:***

Even with these limitations, this research project has some strong implications for future research and problem development. NEP has clear mention of SEL integration in curriculum for holistic development of the children, it is imperative that more studies will be conducted in this space to design the robust SEL program catering to the diversity in India.

1. As the current research findings were not statistically significant, the future study can be done with the increase duration for intervention. With increased duration, students will get more time to understand and practice SEL elements at home and school increasing their capability to express and manage their emotions.
2. The future studies can consider other potential mediating factors such as parents relationship, family situation/background, cognitive capabilities, peer relationship can impact their ability to work on their emotion expression and management capability.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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