

Exploring the Barriers in Passing the Licensure Examinations Among Education Graduates

Henry Alwayne Rebato Mercado^{1*}, Mary Grace Hingpis Aruta¹, Lydia Moraleta Morante², Bryan Hayahay Gervacio¹, Joel Alambra Alfarero³, Rex Baribe Palompon¹

¹Elementary Education Department, ²Graduate School, Eastern Visayas State University, Tacloban, City, 6500, Leyte, Philippines, ³Culture Arts and Physical Education Department, College of Education, *Corresponding Author's Email: alwayne.mercado@evsu.edu.ph

Abstract

Several concerns from previous studies were regarded as potential reasons in failing the national licensure examination for teachers (LET) particularly in State Universities of Eastern Visayas, Philippines. In this study, the authors explored the experiences and identified the potential causes in the success of aspiring teachers in the licensure examination. The study utilized a case study method to uncover the unique experiences of ten (10) participants who are education graduates and non-LET passers. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews and analysed using thematic analysis. Results indicated that education graduates experienced issues such as test-anxiety, pressure, overconfidence, insufficient education foundation, alongside financial burden, personal responsibilities and difficulties in managing time that prevented them from passing the test. The interplay of these concerns as determined by informants hindered their success in the licensure examination. Addressing these problems, educational institutions may introduce programs for anxiety management and test-taking tactics and offer financial aids and subsidies for those with financial issues. Moreover, comprehension skills enhancement programs may be considered to improve the cognitive skills of the education graduates and students. Regular review of the curriculum and updating of course syllabi to confirm alignment with the standards in the licensure examination for teachers must be ensured.

Keywords: Barriers, Case Study, Education Graduates, Licensure Examinations.

Introduction

One of the crucial requirements to practice the teaching profession is to pass the licensure examination as it is a way to guarantee that the teachers have acquired the necessary skills and capabilities in delivering high quality education (1). One of the challenges faced by prospective professionals is passing a licensing exam. It is administered in order to evaluate the candidates' aptitude for competent practice of their chosen field (2). Passing the board examination brings pride to teacher education graduates and the school they came from, which in turn, are indicative of the efficacy of the education program (3). It can be seen that passing said biannual examination is somehow difficult and challenging because for the last four years since 2018 – 2023, the results of Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET) show very dismal performance across the Philippines. In fact, reports indicate that only 34.16% of combined passing percentages from

elementary and secondary level in 2018 examinations. In 2019, 35.51% combined percentage from elementary teachers and secondary level. In June and October 2022, elementary and secondary level got 51.59% passing percentage. In 2023, 47.74% shared passing rate from elementary and secondary level (4–11). Clearly, the outcomes are very alarming as almost half of the takers fall below the passing percentage every year. Many studies attempted to establish rooted causes that contribute to failing the licensure examinations. For instance, predictors in the licensure examination performance such as teachers' educational attainment, teachers' length of service, quality of library facilities, quality of laboratory facilities, students' intelligence quotient, and students' grade point average (12). Correspondingly, demographic profiles which include age, academic performance and comprehensive review success

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are likewise identified predictors of the said examination (13). Meanwhile, scoping review on licensure examination for teachers which listed all the alternatives suggested from previous studies and explained it well on how it will be done to improve the success of teacher education graduates in the LET were outlined (14). Despite these efforts of many researchers in helping to increase the numbers of passers compared to those who failed the exams, outcomes remain to be dismal. In the context of this study, it has been observed that many teacher education graduates are failing to pass the Licensure Examination from State Universities of Eastern Visayas, Philippines. To validate this observation, the authors initially interviewed one of the key officials of the university under the College of Education with regard to passing percentage status of teacher education graduates. He mentioned that almost one-half of the takers have fallen below the passing rate for over the last four years. Moreover, the authors further asked two takers who failed the test about their experience in the Licensure Examination. They attributed their failure to being not confident about their answers because most questions in Professional Education Courses are challenging, especially since these questions are situational in nature and difficult to understand. Their statements are clear indications that they were not able to comprehend and understand the questions resulting in failure in the examinations. In addition, they also mentioned that they were unable to attend review classes due to financial issues, which reflectively contributed to their exam failures. This initial information mentioned overlooked to investigate from the previous existing study for which this could potentially contribute to failing the licensure examination for teachers. These situations can be considered left unchecked or oftentimes, neglected, because it is not easily identifiable from individuals. Thus, it is necessary to further establish this area of study to gain meaningful insights of these barriers as prospective reasons for failing the examination. Furthermore, studies focused on quantitative methods particularly descriptive-correlational and documentary analysis were used to examine the predictive factors that influence in failing the licensure examination (15–21). There are existing studies that utilized qualitative methods on

licensure examinations for teachers in diverse contexts, but still only few who conducted using this approach (22–24). Hence, there is a need to further explore the experiences of the education graduates to unlock the unique trends that cause the failing of LET using a qualitative approach. Nevertheless, it can be seen that there is also a dearth of information regarding the existing problem that the authors cited in the current study about the problem mentioned by the takers who flunked the licensure examination. Accordingly, bridging this research gap can ultimately contribute to the literature in teacher education. Authors argued that exploring these first-hand experiences of teachers' education graduates who failed the LET would uncover specific experiences as barriers that resulted in failing the test. Inputs gained from the study may serve as bases to offer specific alternatives and solutions to address this problem. As mentioned, the present study aimed to explore the experiences of teacher education graduates, who failed the licensure examination and identify barriers that contribute to their failure on licensure examinations.

Methodology

Research Design

The researchers used a single case study approach with the primary purpose of helping participants to explain and communicate their knowledge of their experiences throughout the licensure examination through individual in-depth interviews. Using this approach, the researchers were able to provide a thorough and clear condition of the participants' experiences after failing licensure exams. Considering their experiences and perspectives, it may reveal facts and reasons that contributed to their failure on the exam. In addition, the findings may provide or contribute to insights on this problem.

Sampling

The research participants consist of ten (10) teacher education graduates in State Universities of Eastern Visayas, Philippines. These participants belong to the 23-28 age group, with seven females and three males. All these 10 participants graduated from school year 2022-2023. The author used purposive sampling to select the participants with the following criteria: The first criterion was that the participants should be a

teacher education graduate, and that the participants should have at least taken and failed to pass the licensure examination at least twice from 2023-2024.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers utilized semi-structured questions aligned with the study objectives to collect the data. Three sections of the guide questionnaire covered the general information provided by the participants, the experiences of teacher education graduates taking the examinations, and the barriers that prevented them from passing the licensure exams. Research experts validated the questionnaire, and a pilot answering was done to address any issues before data collection for accuracy and reliability.

In addition, the data collection was done through an in-depth interview, followed by transcribing the data and sending the final transcription to the participants through email for triangulation to avoid subjectivity and biases. This action would help the authors to validate and verify the accuracy of data collected and ensure the information obtained is reliable which reduces risk of biases and inaccuracies.

Prior to data collection, approval was obtained from the key officials in the university. Participants were notified and given consent forms. Participants were informed in advance that right after gathering the data, a recorded interview would ensue for transcription purposes. Participation was voluntary with no coercion. During interviews, transparency and trust were established with the participants. They were encouraged to expound their experiences. To protect confidentiality of the data collected, the researchers used unique codes for each participant and stored personal details in a file. As a general principle, audio recordings and transcribed data were safely kept in a hard drive for five years. Data gathered from interviews were also archived for the same long years. Only researchers had access to the information provided. This would be kept for legal and compliance reasons, and it would also help in resolving disputes and provide a historical record for analysis, training, or future reference. After five years, all data would be deleted from the hard drive and shall be disposed accordingly to comply with privacy regulations and protect sensitive information.

Data Analysis

Thematic Analysis was utilized by following a systematic and rigorous procedure which includes familiarizing to understand the depth and breadth of the content, generating initial codes through producing initial description of the content and capturing key concepts. These initial codes are sentences or words that helped the researcher understand the experiences of the participants of the phenomenon under investigation. These statements or codes are then grouped into clusters of themes. These coded data are grouped to significant broader patterns that capture something important about the data; reviewing themes which involves refining the themes to ensure they write and tell a compelling story about the data; defining themes by identifying the essence of each theme; and finally creating the report by weaving together the analytic narrative and data extracts.

Results

Five themes emerged from the interview responses about the experiences from the education graduates as barriers that contributed to the failure of Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET). These themes include test nervousness and pressure, overconfidence in taking the LET, insufficient educational foundation, limited resources and lack of preparation, personal commitments and managing time challenges.

Test Anxiety and Nervousness

The teacher education graduates testified that they experienced anxiety and pressure during the day of their Licensure examination. They also highlighted their emotions and thoughts that while taking the exam, they felt uncomfortable because of apprehension. In fact, the authors' report supported the statement of the participant who said that: "I felt incredibly nervous during the exam. My palms were sweaty, my heart was pounding, and my mind was racing with all the things I had to remember (P5)". In addition, another participant added saying, "I was also worried about the constraints thinking that I do not have the luxury of reading the questions more than twice (P10)". Moreover, some participants likewise emphasized the same dilemma about their experience in licensure examinations for teachers of being uncertain and undervalued. One

of the participants expressed that: "Looking back, I think that the doubts in my head during the exam were the main reason why I failed the exam. I should have had those doubts prior to the exam so that I would have prepared for it even more (P7)". Another participant mentioned that: "However, during the exam, I felt nervous because I realized that I underestimated the exam (P8)". Those graduating education students who are preparing for Licensure examination for Teachers tend to increase high levels of test anxiety (25). The study likewise supported the findings of the existing study in which the data showed that the education graduates are categorized having high levels of test apprehension (26).

Overconfidence in Taking the Licensure Examination for Teachers

During the interview, the participants revealed that they were overconfident during their LET. In fact, one participant mentioned that: "I don't think I did. I was too confident in my own abilities. Or I was too arrogant to seek help from other people. I did not want to seek comfort from other people. I faced that challenge on my own and relied on my sole effort and prayers (P1)". One participant also brought it up, admitting that they overestimated their ability to manage work and studying for the teacher licensure. This information was confirmed by the participant's statement who said, "But I really overestimated myself, thinking that I can manage the work and the exam easily (P2)". Additionally, the participants acknowledged that their reluctance to seek help from their peers led to a deficiency of crucial information and direction during the exam preparation process. This report validated the point of one participant who said, "Aside from the doubts and worries while taking the exam, I did not have the advice and wisdom I would have had earned from asking my peers since I did not let it be known that I would be taking the exam (P4)". In addition, the participants expressed that their arrogance and self-importance had a role in their failure to pass the LET, as evidenced by skipping classes in review centers. In fact, the researchers' point of view corroborated the thought of one participant who said, "Yes, I have to admit that my ego and pride also played a role in deciding whether or not I am to enroll in review centers. I thought I could pass the LET by reviewing it by myself. My husband also thought the same (P6)". The

participants' statements supported the results of the previous study, which showed that exam performance of education graduates is significantly affected by self-assurance (27).

Insufficient Educational Foundation

The majority of participants shared their experiences of having poor educational background, citing their inability to comprehend test questions quickly and their unfamiliarity with some of the exam's constructed statements. One of the participants shared a sentiment stating that: "Somehow, there are questions that I found hard to understand due to the way the sentences were constructed. Although I tried translating them to Filipino to understand them better, it still was hard to comprehend. There were some terms that I was not familiar with, and I did not know their direct translation to Filipino or even Waray-waray (P1)". Likewise, another participant echoed the same situation, "Maybe, it was the questions that I haven't encountered prior to the exam. Also, the sentence construction which made me need to read the questions at least twice before I can understand them (P3)". These statements align with findings that highlight challenges in comprehending the theories and the English language (28). The inability to understand in the English language results in a lack of comprehension of educational theories. In addition, some participants think that their early school experience contributed to their cognitive issues. The researchers' report supported the statement of one participant who mentioned that: "Maybe, my educational foundation. If only I had a better education starting from my elementary years, I would have understood the questions easier. I would have been familiar with all the terms and words they used in the exam (P6)". It was also highlighted during the interview that consistent classes should be held for them to become strongly prepared in the LET. In fact, one of the participants reported saying, "As I have said, if only my teachers held classes religiously as scheduled, I would have had enough base knowledge needed for the exam. It sounds like I am putting the blame on them, but I can really say for myself that I always attended my school diligently (P4)". Difficult-to-understand and stressful content is one of the elements that lead to failure on the licensing examination (29).

Limited Resources and Lack of Preparation

The education graduates struggled during the licensure examination for teachers due to limited resources and lack of preparation, which included financial burden, inadequate review materials, and readiness. During the interview, some of the participants disclosed that their family faced financial constraints, prompting them to work in the meantime while preparing for the exam. In fact, this report corroborated the statement of one participant saying, "First, the financial aspect of it. My family is not well-off, so I needed to fund my own exam and review by working. The work sometimes got in the way of my review, and it kept me from giving my upcoming exam a hundred percent of my attention (P5)". Another participant added the same predicament who said that: "I also was not financially prepared for the board exam. When I cannot understand the question because of some of the words, I resort to reading the choices instead (P10)". In addition, several participants shared their experiences, expressing that they believed their failure to pass the teacher licensure exam was partly caused by their lack of access to adequate review materials and other resources. This interview report validated the point of one participant who mentioned that: "I really did not have enough reviewers and resources. The only thing I did was buy a book and scan through it from time to time. I lacked preparation (P2)". In the same manner, another participant shared the same scenario saying, "I honestly thought I did. I realized that there were other materials and resources that I was not aware of or was not made available for me (P1)". Moreover, as seen by their statements, it is also noticeable from the reports that they felt unprepared for the test. Indeed, one of the participants said, "Yes. I should have given it my full attention. I should have quit work and dedicated all my effort and time in preparing for the exam (P8)". The participant's report is consistent with the result of a recent study which highlighted that the test-takers' competence was inadequate prior to the license exam because of lack of preparedness, did not have enough time for study, and neglected to access their review resources. (30). In addition, the findings of a prior study corroborated the participants' assertions that being financially prepared really matters,

particularly when it comes to the review procedure before the licensure exam (31-33).

Personal Responsibilities and Difficulties in Managing Time

According to the participants' interview responses, they felt pressured by their personal obligations and difficulties in managing time to ensure they were well-prepared for the teacher licensure exam. This condition includes being new to motherhood, working, and overestimating their readiness. The participant reported that: "Out of focus, instead of thinking about the exam I have a lot to mind outside, especially the situation of my baby. As a new mother, I could not help to think about my baby all the time (P9)". One participant added the same situation saying, "At that time, I had a 9-month-old baby, it was a very difficult time to manage because I still breastfeed my baby, so I need to reach the period by finishing the exam immediately (P4)". The participants also brought up the concern of underestimating their degree of preparation, which prevented them from studying harder for the test. This report supported the statement of one participant who stated, "Looking back, I overestimated my own abilities thinking that I have done just enough to pass the exam. I did not give my full effort and time in preparing for the exam. I juggled my work and preparing for the exam because I assumed that I was that good. If I had to do it again, I would have focused all my time and effort in the preparation for the exam (P5)". In addition, some of the participants prioritized more on their work which led to lack of focus on preparing for the teacher licensure exam. This information supported the statements of one participant who mentioned that: "Another thing that kept bothering me was the time constraints. The fear of not being able to finish answering the questions was always at the back of my head (P10)". In addition, another participant shared the same experience, "I think I focused more on my work and the preparation for the review was not prioritized (P2)". Busy schedules and other obligations outside of studying and working contribute to making time difficult to manage (34).

Discussion

The results of this study revealed that education graduates demonstrated a physiological indicator when taking the teacher licensure examination.

For instance, heart racing, palms sweating, racing thoughts, and other indications which are frequently signs of test anxiety. Test anxiety is an emotional and behavioral condition brought on by the reactive nervous system's activation that is commonly experienced by the test-takers (35). Previous study highlighted the consistency about the manifestation of the said state for the test takers; they explained that it is a common experience of the examinee to feel worried, anxious, and even pressured during examination (36). It is important to understand that this problem is not just an individual attribute that affects their test performance but additionally an underlying issue which demands a solution. The participants' reported experiences suggest a detrimental effect on the outcome and a high likelihood of failing their evaluative scenario. Test anxiety indicates a high chance of failing the licensure examination for teachers (37). In fact, previous studies have shown that the education graduate's subconscious mind perceives these emotional aspects trigger their body's stress reaction, which impresses the belief that they performed poorly on the licensure examination (38). Outcomes of this study further indicated that aspiring teachers were overconfident and underestimated their capacity to pass the teacher licensure examination. Their overconfidence can be attributed to their lack of understanding and being self-sufficient in believing they can pass the LET with little to no preparation. Overconfidence is a prevalent trait among those who possess an overwhelming confidence in their ability that they can successfully make it of a certain thing (39). This information corroborated the results from the previous studies which highlighted that excessive confidence impaired the education graduates' thinking and estimation during the examination (40). The analysis of this study suggested that exam preparation was obviously neglected by these test-takers who evidently believed they could pass the LET while concentrating on other matters. In other words, education graduates ignored the time required for efficient LET preparation that resulted in their test failure suggesting their lack of understanding of the test's rigor, which requires support from those who were qualified and professional experts (41-43). Conversely, recent study has shown that students who feel confident in a

positive way in their abilities to pass the LET are more likely to be committed to take it. This context is an example of being conscious of their own strengths and flaws by the education graduates and more likely eager to learn from others (44). In addition, education graduates often gained more knowledge and confidence for taking such steps to become prepared for the LET like attending review classes and being resourceful (45). The study also revealed that the education graduates who took the licensure exam had cognitive difficulties while responding to test questions, suggesting that they had issues comprehending complex sentence and phrase constructions. The participants realized that they needed to read the questions multiple times and even translate them into their native tongue in order to understand them. They went on to say that this occurred as a result of their lack of early knowledge acquisition (46-48). The process of comprehension is intricate and requires a wide range of language and cognitive abilities (49). They added that deficits in any cognitive function that is essential to the comprehension process may result in deficiencies in the performance of comprehension when reading. In addition, the participants further cited that there is a need for more thorough and consistent educational experiences, especially with regard to the way classes are taught and the development of important academic skills, especially throughout their college years. Apparently, the findings suggest that their struggles with the aforementioned issue may be a consequence of the limited information and abilities obtained through previous education, thereby explaining why they have difficulties comprehending. In fact, in order to provide a strong foundation in comprehension skills, these skills should be taught to youngsters from the very beginning of their school careers (50). As a result, the aforementioned issue of a lack of basic foundation hampered their adequate preparation of the requisite academic knowledge, perhaps leading to failure on the teacher license exam (51, 52). The findings further showed that many education graduates who took the teacher licensure examination faced the same issue of financial constraints preventing them from getting review materials, learning resources and eventually hindered them from attending review classes.

Financial limitations hinder the access of adequate materials and instructional resources that are supposed to help the education graduates gain more knowledge in preparing the LET (53). The scenario of the test-takers in this present study had left them with no choice but to find work to gain income thinking that this could support them in preparation of the LET. In fact, enrolling review classes and having sufficient review materials, education graduates became motivated and more likely perform well in the licensure examination for teachers (54). Consequently, the analysis of this finding suggests that managing the said work demand may result in distracted preparation leading to their learning gaps and eventually experienced challenges during the examination (55). Apparently, this matter generated a difficult environment for the test-takers, preventing them from reaching their maximum potential in passing the LET. Notably, some of the education graduates were new mothers, who had the added personal duty of caring for their children. The duties of parenthood, such as breastfeeding and changing clothes, plainly required them to forgo their study time in order to care for their children. This condition obviously suggests that it may limit their time and make it more difficult for them to manage their study for the teacher licensure examination which may severely impact their capacity to focus on reviewing because they were always engaged with their children's demands. Personal and family factors negatively affect their preparation of the LET (56). Moreover, as previously stated, the test-takers failed the exam because they overlooked their level of preparation, which caused them to prioritize their work and other personal obligations. This viewpoint is in line with earlier research that indicated LET takers had issues managing their time between duties at home and at work (57). Furthermore, the findings suggested that the barriers encountered by education graduates vary widely but are significantly affected by contextual factors, including socioeconomic backgrounds, institutional differences, and regional disparities (58, 59). The struggles experienced by aspiring teachers are influenced by the intricate interactions between these factors (60). Based on the analysis of the authors in this study, institutional resources have a strong connection

with the possibility of facing barriers as showed in the aforementioned discussion. It can be seen that educational institutions with constrained financial resources often lack access to modern resources, including online learning environments, specialized textbooks, and other relevant resources for practical training to apply in teaching hands-on skills to the test-takers (61). The deficiency in resources distinctly influences the test takers' ability to understand the subject matter while preparing for the teacher licensure examination. In fact, a recent study suggests that education graduates who have the means in accessing the resources are more equipped in preparing for the licensure examination than those who lacked such resources and preparation (62). Additionally, schools with a higher number of teachers who are not trained or experienced in specific areas may face difficulty in giving quality instruction, making things more difficult for education graduates (63). It is also important to take into account that graduates of urban educational institutions usually have easier access to resources like professional development opportunities, well-equipped libraries, and tutoring services (64). However, education graduates from rural and remote regions like in the current study frequently encounter unfavorable situation in obtaining these resources. For instance, insufficient internet access, restricted access to learning resources, and diminished necessary opportunities significantly hinder their preparation for the licensure examination (65). Correspondingly, education graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds frequently encounter extra financial challenges, which restrict their access to crucial resources like tutoring, exam preparation materials, as well as technology (66). The financial limitations, along with challenges in accessing quality education during pre-service training, can significantly affect the preparation for the licensure exam. These contextual variables are clearly interrelated and frequently interact, resulting in heightened challenges for the test-takers. These added challenges could significantly impede preparation and raise the probability of facing the identified barriers to success (67).

Conclusion

Based on the preceding discussion, the education graduates' experiences underscored numerous

difficulties that substantially led to their failure in teacher licensure examinations. They highlighted challenges stemming from emotional and personal factors associated with test anxiety, overconfidence, and cognitive issues, which adversely affect their performance on the teacher licensure examinations. Future educators also emphasized the negative impact of having little resources and those who are dealing with family-related issues, which ultimately hinders participants from being completely prepared for the test. These barriers in the licensure examination for teachers may be taken into account and emphasize the need to offer alternatives, since it indicates the caliber of instruction and learning the school offers which compromising its credibility as an educational resource for future teachers. The researchers are highly suggesting that those schools who offered education programs with the same issue may consider implementing test-taking strategies and anxiety management. Educational institutions offering education programs may offer aid programs for graduates who are financially constrained and those with personal commitments. Access to review materials and other resources is seen as a vital factor in aiding these graduates to pass the examinations. This action could be done in school by answering LET-like tests twice a week every weekend for three to six months prior to the examination for those who graduated that school year. This strategy should also be implemented and applied to all education students once a week every Friday. In addition, schools may conduct a comprehension skills enhancement program that focuses on improving the cognitive skills of first to fourth year students in the College of Education to fill the knowledge gap in their early education which could be accomplished once a week until they graduate. Furthermore, the education program department may also conduct revisiting curriculum and updating course syllabi every school year to ensure the alignment with LET standards and competencies. Moreover, each department head of the college of education may consider regularly monitoring the attendance of the faculty members using technology tracking systems to ascertain that they are religiously conducting classes. Eventually, realizing the cited recommendations would ensure that education graduates could

have the required knowledge and skills to succeed in the teacher licensure examination. Lastly, future researchers may consider conducting similar study in a wide population which could unlock other prospective cases that hinders the test-takers' success in the licensure examination for teachers.

Abbreviations

No abbreviations were used in the study.

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Author Contributions

Author 1: Conceptualizing, writing the original draft, outlining the methods, discussing the formal analysis, interpretation, and implications, framing initial conclusion and recommendations; Author 2: She was responsible of gathering and updating the review of literature, drafting the initial results and discussing draft analysis; Author 3: She did the final editing, validation and supervision; Author 4: The interviewer and transcriber of the data; Author 5: The one who worked on identifying the Significant statements, coding, themes, and formatting Vancouver References Style; Author 6: Interviewer, data cleaning, and editing the Draft Manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The researchers confirm that there is no conflict of interest.

Ethics Approval

This study was carried out in compliance with the Declaration of Self. Research protocol was approved by the Head of the Institution where we collected data. All of the participants in the study provided informed consent. As mentioned in the previous section, unique codes were assigned to participants to maintain the secrecy of the information. Personal information and recordings were stored in a file only accessible to the researchers for confidentiality. Moreover, disclosure of private information that may cause damage to the integrity of the informant or to the family is withheld confidential.

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