

## The Impact of ESP Subject Specificity on the Necessity of Collaboration among ESP Practitioners and Subject Specialists

تأثير خصوصية موضوعات الانجليزية لأغراض خاصة على ضرورة التعاون بين أساتذة الانجليزية  
لأغراض خاصة وأساتذة مواد التخصص

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### Abstract

The aim of ESP courses is to aid learners develop a new type of literacy highly associated with their academic discipline but in a foreign language. However, as most English teachers are trained for teaching English for General Purposes (EGP), ESP practitioners are teaching with limited knowledge in the students' field of study. Thus, teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) requires special collaboration among ESP practitioners and subject specialists or content teachers in order to overcome the hinders of subject specificity. The present study aims at investigating the trends of teaching ESP in the Faculty of Technology at the University of El-Oued, Algeria. It also attempts to identify the impact of ESP specific content on the necessity of collaboration between ESP practitioners and content teachers. In order to achieve these objectives, a structured interview was done with the heads of the different departments of the faculty, in addition to structured questionnaire administered to ten (10) ESP practitioners and ten (10) subject specialists. The findings of the study revealed that the respondents stressed the necessity and importance of collaboration among ESP practitioners and subject specialists to support ESP instructors to design effective ESP content to ESP learners.

**Key words:** Collaboration, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), ESP practitioner, Subject specialist, Subject specificity.

ملخص البحث

الهدف من دروس اللغة الانجليزية لأغراض خاصة هو مساعدة المتعلمين على تطوير نوع جديد من المحتوى التعليمي، يرتبط ارتباطاً وثيقاً بتخصصهم الأكاديمي ولكن بلغة أجنبية. ومع ذلك، نظراً لأن معظم معلمي اللغة

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الإنجليزية يتم تدريبهم على تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية للأغراض العامة ، فإن أساتذة الإنجليزية لأغراض خاصة يقومون بالتدريس بمعرفة محدودة في مجال الأكاديمي للطلاب. وبالتالي ، فإن تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية لأغراض خاصة يتطلب تعاونًا خاصًا بين مدرسي الإنجليزية لأهداف خاصة وأخصائيي المواد أو معلمي مواد المحتوى من أجل التغلب على معوقات خصوصية المحتوى. تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى التعرف على اتجاهات تدريس الإنجليزية لأهداف خاصة بكلية التكنولوجيا بجامعة الوادي بالجزائر. كما حاولت تحديد تأثير المحتوى المحدد الواجب تدريسه من خلال الإنجليزية لأهداف خاصة على ضرورة التعاون بين أساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية لأغراض خاصة ومدرسي مواد المحتوى. ولتحقيق هذه الأهداف ، تم إجراء مقابلة منظمة مع رؤساء الأقسام المختلفة بالكلية ، بالإضافة إلى استبيان منظم لعشرة (10) أساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية لأغراض خاصة وعشرة (10) متخصصين في مواد المحتوى. كشفت نتائج الدراسة أن المشاركين أكدوا على ضرورة التعاون بين أساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية لأغراض خاصة ومتخصصي المواد لدعم أساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية لأغراض خاصة لتصميم محتوى أكاديمي فعال يتماشى مع طبيعة اختصاص الطلبة .

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** التعاون، اللغة الإنجليزية لأغراض خاصة، مدرسي الإنجليزية لأغراض خاصة، أساتذة الاختصاص، خصوصية المادة.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) refers to the teaching and learning of English as a second or foreign language where learners aim is to use English in a particular academic domain. Basturkman (2010: 7) noted that ESP teachers may find themselves dealing with academic content in a subject of study that themselves have little or no prior knowledge of. They may find they have far less knowledge and experience in the subject than their learners. Generally, ESP practitioners are not specialists in the field, but in teaching English.

A professional ESP practitioner should be able to switch from one specific academic discipline to another where s/he brings the necessary tools and principles of ESP course design to apply them to the new content material. However, the course content should be provided in collaboration with professors or experts in the subject as teaching materials should be authentic and relevant to the learners' academic discipline respecting the norm of the specificity of ESP content.

This study aims at highlighting the specificity of ESP content and its impact on the necessity of collaboration among ESP practitioners and subject professors. The study attempts to answer the following key questions:

- How can ESP practitioners adapt themselves with teaching discipline-specific knowledge ?

- What impact has the ESP specific content on the necessity of collaboration among ESP practitioners and content teachers ?

The present study tries to test the following two (2) hypotheses: To begin with, the readability to collaboration among ESP practitioners and subject specialists can provide effective teaching and learning framework for both ESP practitioners and learners. In addition, administrators of the Faculty of Science and Technology can accelerate and enhance collaboration among ESP practitioners and content teachers which lead by the end to designing effective ESP courses for the targeted learners.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Subject Specificity in ESP

One of the critical features of ESP is that its course should involve language specialists, especially when dealing with related terms, terminologies, and contents. That is, the success of ESP has given rise to the fact that ESP practitioners must be experts in the target discipline or at least know the subject material as well as the learners. This assumption has largely been an outcome from teachers assuming that ESP is a product-based approach. In which teaching focuses on the observable features of target texts (the products), as such, vocabulary usage, grammar and discourse structure, and the positioning of information. However, today it is unconceivable that ESP practitioners would adopt the same approach in preparing an ESP course, especially considering the factor of time constraints they have, and many ESP courses are composed of a heterogeneous group of learners from multiple disciplines or professions (Laurence, 2011: 02).

The justification for these subject specific classes is that students have problems in adapting to the demands made on them by their departments. Within a specific discipline there may also be particular features that distinguish it from other, even closely related disciplines. Herrington (1985) in a study of the writing requirements in a Department of Chemical Engineering showed that even within one discipline there may be variation in the discourse patterns in the different subject courses that make up the discipline (Dudley-Evans, 1993: 02).

However, Hutchinson and Waters have in a number of influential articles and their book English for Specific Purposes (1987) argued that a narrow angle ESP is demotivating and irrelevant. They suggest a "common-core" ESP approach for students of any discipline using texts, topics, and situations from a variety of subject areas. "Common-core" approach can be accepted up to a certain point. There are a number of features for English for Academic Purposes that do not differ across the range of disciplines and it is clearly more efficient to produce materials that can be utilized with students

from different academic branches. Classes can be organized on a collaborative basis involving the preparation of materials outside the classroom or can be a team-taught by a language teacher and a subject specialist (Henderson and Skehan 1980; Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1988).

## 2.2. The Role of ESP Practitioner and the Subject Specialist

Richards (2001) mentions that being a good and effective teacher means more than being a skillful and experienced classroom practitioner. It means having the ability to develop and adapt materials, plan and evaluate courses, and adapt teaching to learners' needs.

As ESP teaching is extremely varied some authors as (Dudley Evans and St John, 1988) use the term 'practitioner' rather than 'teacher' to emphasize that ESP work involves much more than teaching. They have identified the following five key roles for ESP practitioners who need to play the following roles:

- (1) Teacher;
- (2) course designer and materials provider;
- (3) collaborator;
- (4) researcher;
- (5) evaluator.

The role of an ESP practitioner as a teacher "becomes more pronounced as the teaching becomes more specific" (Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998: 13). It is true that the ESP teacher and the GE one share common roles as teaching English language. Yet, the difference lies in the objective behind teaching. In ESP, the teacher is a needs analyst, that is, he/she has to understand his/her learners' needs in order to understand their knowledge of the content so as to bring the relevant materials required by the group of learners in class.

It is not easy task to find teachers who know English as well as the subject of the students. The students, especially where the course is specifically oriented towards the subject content or work the students are engaged in, may know more about the content than the teacher. He/she has the opportunity to draw on students' knowledge of the content in order to generate communication in the classroom. ESP teachers need to have considerable flexibility, be willing to listen to learners, take interest in the disciplines or professional activities the students are involved in when engaged in the process of teaching.

Course designing and providing relevant materials is one of the most important aspects of ESP teaching. And as ESP courses aim at motivating learners to use English in an academic or a professional setting, both ESP courses and materials are based on analyzing the learners' needs, however,

teachers and sponsors' needs are also taken into account in most educational institutions. Thus, the needs of ESP learners are specific, and ready-made teaching materials may not suit their learning objectives. For that reason, Dudley-Evans and St John (1988: 10) have chosen the term 'material provider' to emphasize that the ESP teacher should survey what is available, select units from a number of course books, adapting these if necessary, and write a number of extra units. In this context, Dudley-Evans and St John (1988: 15) state that:

*"Role of ESP teachers as 'providers of material' thus involves choosing suitable published material, adapting material when published material is not suitable, or even writing material where nothing suitable exists".*

It should be noted, here, that there is a controversy on whether the materials provider should adopt authentic textbooks or write his/her own. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), materials writing should be the last step when the other possibilities are exhausted.

Additionally, ESP practitioners also need to assess the effectiveness of the teaching material use whether it is published or self-produced.

According to Nunan (1988), coordinating with colleagues is considered to be an essential step in any educational task. It is believed that subject-specific work is often best approached through collaboration with subject specialist. It may involve specific collaboration so that there is some integration between specialist studies or activities and the language. The aims of this cooperation can be having sufficient knowledge about the subject skills, tasks, and syllabus, and discovering how the subject integrates with the language in order to bring the suitable material and courses for the learners (Dudley-Evans and St John 1988).

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) argue that ESP teachers do not need specialized subject knowledge in order to teach content-based language courses; they require the following three key features:

- (1) A positive attitude towards the ESP content;
- (2) A knowledge of the fundamental principles of the subject area;
- (3) An awareness of how much they already know.

In other words, the ESP teacher should not be the teacher of the subject matter, but rather an interested student of the subject matter.

ESP teachers should also have the ability to actively integrate students' knowledge about the subject matter as Ellis and Johnson (1994: 26) say: "learner who has the specific content knowledge and who is able to bring that knowledge to the classroom".

The curriculum design process of all ESP courses requires a concerted effort from subject specialists and language teachers. Cooperation and collaboration among ESP instructors and subject specialists are essential for the success of such courses. In this context, Dudley-Evans and St. John (1988: 15-16) state that: "[...](Subject –specific work) may involve specific collaboration so that there is some integration between specialist studies or activities and the language. This might involve relating the reading component of an EAP course to the actual content of a subject course by exploiting texts in English that present additional relevant material, in other words, the subject teacher provides 'the carrier content' for the English course".

In this case, discussions between subject specialists and language teachers revealed gaps in learners' knowledge and language abilities, which should be addressed in the design of the course.

As a researcher, the ESP practitioner needs to be in touch with the latest researches, incorporating their findings. Thus, before designing courses or providing materials, ESP practitioners need to do research in order to investigate the genres of texts, language, and skills required by the specific field of the study (Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998). They need to update their knowledge by remaining constantly in touch with the research in the various fields of ESP. ESP practitioners carrying out needs analysis, designing a course, or writing teaching materials need to be capable of incorporating the findings of the research, and those working in specific ESP situations need to be confident that they know what is involved in skills in the academic context. In this context, Dudley-Evans and St John (1988: 15) state that "Those carrying out NA, designing a course, or writing teaching materials need to be able to incorporate the findings of the research". They suggest that ESP practitioners have to go beyond NA and should be able to carry out research to understand the discourse of the specialized texts that students use.

As evaluator, the ESP practitioner has to evaluate students, courses, and teaching materials. Students evaluation should be done in order to assess how much they have learnt from the course. It should be mentioned that evaluation of course design and materials design should be done during, at the end, and even after the course. In this framework, Dudley-Evans and St John (1988:16) assert "evaluation of course design and teaching materials should be done while the course is being taught, at the end of the course, and after the course has finished".

In ELT in general and ESP in particular, evaluation plays a role as a feedback for learners and the course achievement. Nunan (1988: 299) argues that:

"Monitoring and evaluation are essential parts of everyday life. We monitor ourselves and others as we carry out the many tasks of everyday life, shopping, riding the subway to work, looking after our kids in the park, watching television, and so on".

### **2.3 The Necessity of Collaboration between ESP Practitioners and Subject Specialists**

The cooperation between ESP practitioner and subject specialist is crucial in developing effective ESP materials. This means that ESP programmes are highly beneficial if English teachers and subject specialists negotiate with each other.

There have been always many controversial opinions about the most effective methodologies in ESP programs and the role of language and subject teachers. A considerable number of studies indicated that language-teaching programs cannot be separated from other academic programmes (Bacha, 2003; Bhatia and Candlin, 2001; Swales, 1990).

Swales (1988) emphasized the importance of interdisciplinary approach to ESP programmes. He developed a framework and categorized the interdisciplinary activities into three (03) groups of cooperation, collaboration, and team-teaching based on useful insight from Dudley-Evans and St. John's (1988) frameworks.

Based on Swales' framework (1988), cooperative activities are concerned with a low level of cooperation between English teachers and subject specialists in which ESP practitioners consult subject specialists about different aspects of academic fields. In collaborative activities, ESP practitioners and subject specialists work together to devise appropriate negotiated syllabuses as well as teaching/learning activities. Finally, in team-teaching activities, both ESP practitioners and subject specialists work together in the same ESP classroom to teach the material simultaneously.

From the previous considerations, it can be inferred that those who are dedicated to teaching English for Specific Purposes should not misconceive their role: to match learning needs with target needs. In order to translate what is theory to practice, collaboration between ESP practitioners and subject specialists is needed regarding specific aspects. It should be noted also that the effectiveness of cooperation, collaboration, and team-teaching between the ESP practitioner and subject specialists depends on the former's interest in the field of specialization of students, as well as on the latter's positive perception of the crucial role of English for the students, for instance, in the field of science and technology, as well as of the subject specialist's proficiency in English. The ESP teacher's role is to define students' learning needs and assume the role of language consultant, while the subject specialist

is the provider or carrier content, as well as of professional skills consultant in different situations (Esteban and Vallejo, 2002: 18 – 19).

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Description of the Research Method

The present study combines quantitative and qualitative methods of research. As the purpose of this study is identifying the attitudes towards collaboration between ESP practitioners and subject specialists regarding both teachers and administration staff views, the qualitative approach seems to be appropriate as a part of this mixed-methods research. Besides, as the focus of the quantitative research is to represent the actual results derived from research instruments in terms of numbers and statistical results, quantitative approach also seems to be suitable as a part of this mixed-methods research.

Triangulation as a strategy for increasing the validity of evaluation and research findings is adopted in this research work. By definition,

*"Triangulation is a process of verification that increases validity by incorporating several viewpoints and methods. In the social sciences, it refers to the combination of two or more theories, data sources, or methods in one study of a single phenomenon to converge on a single construct, and can be employed in both quantitative and qualitative studies"* (Sabina and Khan, 2012: 156).

This research is a descriptive study which aims to investigate the trends of ESP teaching at the Algerian higher education institutions with a special reference to the feature of the specificity of educational content in ESP and its impact on the necessity of coordination and cooperation among ESP practitioners and discipline subjects professors.

#### 3.2. Sampling

The participants of the study consist of ten (10) ESP practitioners taught English at the Faculty of Technology in addition to ten (10) subject specialists from the same faculty who answered a structured questionnaire investigating their attitudes towards collaboration to overcome the obstacle of the specificity of ESP content from the part of ESP practitioners. ESP practitioners include two (2) permanent teachers borrowed from the Department of English holding doctorate and magister degrees in addition to eight (8) temporal teachers holding master degree, while all subject specialists are permanent teachers holding the doctorate degree.

Besides, the sampling of the study includes five (5) administration staff members who were interviewed face to face by the researcher, namely Heads of Departments of Electrical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Civil Engineering, Chemistry and Petro-Chemistry at the Faculty of

Technology, University of El-Oued, Algeria who are officially responsible on urging collaboration between ESP teachers and subjects' specialists, and the operation of ESP course design. The table below gives details about the sample of the study:

**Table. 1:** The Sample of the Study

Teachers	ESP Practitioners		Subject Specialists		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
	4	6	9	1	20
Administration Staff Members	Male		Female		Total
	5		0		5

### 3.3. Data Gathering Tools

A structured questionnaire was used as a data gathering tool targeting ten (10) ESP practitioners and ten (10) content teachers to identify their attitudes and views towards collaboration among them. The questionnaire comprises twelve (12) statements revolve around the axis of the specificity of ESP content and collaboration among ESP instructors and the different discipline subjects teachers. Teachers were asked to express their agreement or disagreement with each item.

Besides, a structured interview was administered to the heads of the faculty of Technology five (5) departments aiming at investigating the administration staff members' stance towards the necessity of facilitating collaboration among specific-discipline subjects teachers and ESP practitioners. The interview comprises ten (10) choice questions focusing on three (3) key axes: The criteria of selecting English teachers, the criteria of designing ESP courses, and their attitudes towards the collaboration among ESP practitioners and content teachers.

## 4. Data Analysis and Interpretation

### 4.1. Teachers' Structured Questionnaire

The findings derived from teachers questionnaire (See table. 2 below) revealed that both ESP practitioners and subject specialists have positive attitudes towards the necessity and importance of collaboration among them in designing ESP linguistic content. ESP practitioners and content teachers agreed that the discipline specific content is important and essential and should be the basis of any ESP course design. To reach that objective, according to 70 % of them, there should be a continuous serial collaboration among them.

**Table. 2:** The Findings of Teachers' Questionnaire

Statements	Agree	Disagree	Neutral
ESP content should be highly attached to the students' academic discipline.	75 %	20 %	05 %
ESP practitioners need to develop students specific academic branch vocabulary and knowledge in English.	60 %	40 %	00 %
The discipline-specific linguistic content is essential to be incorporated in ESP course design.	70 %	30 %	00 %
The discipline specific content of ESP complicates teaching ESP for most English teachers.	70 %	30 %	00 %
Teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) requires specific professional training focusing on the specificity of ESP.	75 %	25 %	00 %
ESP course should be designed and provided by English teachers.	55 %	40 %	05 %
ESP practitioners can teach ESP in isolation from subject specialists.	35 %	65 %	00 %
ESP course should be designed in collaboration with content teachers.	80 %	20 %	00 %
Effective ESP courses require effective collaboration among ESP practitioners and subject specialists.	70 %	30 %	00 %
The discipline-specific linguistic content should be acquired by ESP practitioners via autonomous learning and/or collaboration with subject specialists.	65 %	30 %	05 %
Universities' administrations should encourage and impose collaboration among ESP practitioners and content teachers in different faculties and departments.	75 %	20 %	05 %
Collaboration among ESP practitioners and subject specialists is the key to effective ESP teaching.	70 %	20 %	10 %

More than this, 75 % of the participants urged the universities' administration represented by the different faculties and departments to intervene and impose this collaboration. Furthermore, most of the respondents (70 %), asserted that collaboration among ESP practitioners and content teachers is the key to effective ESP teaching (details about the findings of teachers questionnaire are demonstrated in table. 2 above).

#### 4.2. Administration Staff Structured Interview

The first part of the administration staff structured interview dealt with investigating the criteria of selecting and recruiting English teachers at the five departments of the Faculty of Technology at the University of El-Oued, Algeria. In this framework, the findings (demonstrated in table. 3 below) revealed that 60 % of the respondents preferred recruiting English teachers for teaching ESP while 40 % favored subject specialists. This indicates that the administration staff of the Faculty of Technology at the University of El-Oued, Algeria are aware of the specificity of ESP content that may constitute a real challenge for English teachers. The criteria of selecting ESP practitioners at the five (5) departments ranges from the academic degree of teachers to the experience and knowledge in the students' academic field with 40 % for each answer option.

In order to acquire discipline-specific content, 60 % of the participants said that ESP practitioners need to collaborate with subject specialists while 40 % answered that ESP practitioners should participate in a professional training program to master the specialized discourse of science and technology academic fields. In the same vein, 80 % of the population of the study agreed that collaboration is the key to facilitate ESP practitioners profession and to overcome the complexity of English for Science and Technology (EST) educational content.

As far as ESP course design is concerned, the findings of the administration staff structured interview showed that the study' s subjects favored the collaboration between both sides in designing ESP educational content.

**Table. 3:** The Findings of the Administration Staff Structured Interview

Questions	Choices		
	Specialty	Academic degree	Experience and knowledge in the students' academic field
1. On what basis did you select ESP teachers ?	20 %	40 %	40 %
2. Do you prefer to give the subject of ESP to English teachers or subject specialists ?	English teachers		Subject specialists
	60 %		40 %
3. Do you believe that ESP subject specificity may complicate ESP practitioners profession ?	Yes		No
	80 %		20 %

4. How can English teachers acquire the specific linguistic content of the students' academic fields ?	Professional development programs		Collaboration with subject specialists
	40 %		60 %
5. Do you agree that collaboration among ESP practitioners and content teachers can facilitate ESP practitioners' profession ?	Agree	Disagree	Neutral
	80 %	20 %	00 %
6. Who should design ESP courses?	ESP teachers	Subject specialists	Both of them
	00 %	00 %	100 %
7. What should ESP course include according to your view point ?	General English linguistic content		Specialized linguistic content
	00 %		100 %
8. Do you support collaboration among ESP practitioners and subject specialists ?	Yes		No
	100 %		00 %
9. Do you find out that ESP teachers face difficulties to teach specialized language ?	Yes		No
	80 %		20 %
10. Do you believe that collaboration among ESP practitioners and subject specialists is the key to effective ESP teaching and learning ?	Yes		No
	80 %		20 %

Meanwhile, all the respondents asserted that ESP course should include specialized linguistic content highly associated with the students' micro academic branches. Eighty-percent of them found out that ESP practitioners encounter difficulties while teaching EST specialized discourse. That is why, the entire targeted population said that they support collaboration among ESP practitioners and content teachers.

## 5. Recommendations and Pedagogical Implications

On the basis of the above stated findings, the study ends up with recommendations to simplify ESP teaching at different non-English departments across the country.

Dudley-Evans and St. John (1988) introduced Birmingham University model for collaboration among ESP practitioners and subject specialists that can be effective if adopted in the Faculty of Technology of the University of El-Oued and in the entire Algeria's higher education institutions' atmosphere. They introduced a Team Teaching Approach which includes three key parts: ESP practitioner, subject specialist, and the students. The role of ESP practitioner is to be a mediator between the language and subject-specific knowledge via providing the language needed to express the subject-specific content.

Higher education institutions should play their role in the accompaniment of collaboration among ESP practitioners and subject specialists in terms of providing internal legislative framework that guide and govern team teaching in different universities' departments. Collaboration via team teaching has several advantages, as stated by Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998: 141):

- (1) The student(s) have immediate assistance with any difficulties as they arise.
- (2) Subject specialists find out how effectively they communicate to the learners.
- (3) ESP practitioner gains familiarity with the conceptual matter of the subject and how language is used to represent it.
- (4) ESP practitioner understands where linguistic difficulties arise in relation to conceptual matter.

Finally, through training, as stressed by some participants in this study, ESP practitioners will be provided with the necessary knowledge and educational materials and tools to adjust themselves with teaching English meeting the learners' specific academic needs. Through professional training, ESP practitioners will be able to shift from teaching English to one academic field to another without being obliged to spend long time to adapt themselves with each new educational context.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study contributed to teacher knowledge and practices in the field of ESP from theoretical and pedagogical stance. It filled a gap regarding the necessity of collaboration among ESP practitioners and subject specialists in the Algerian context.

The study revealed that ESP practitioners could not function effectively while teaching the language outside the sphere of English Departments as subjects' specificity may complicate their teaching role. In order to overcome the complexity of discipline-specific content, ESP practitioners should collaborate with subject specialists in terms of designing teaching materials and ESP courses. ESP practitioners limited content knowledge induced most of them to collaborate with subject experts, adopt the team teaching approach or its variation of any form. Despite the benefits of team teaching, some viewed this solution as far from perfect. It needed to be accompanied with providing professional training program for ESP practitioners by the universities' administration to equip English teachers with the necessary theoretical and practical knowledge in teaching ESP. In this context, universities' and faculties' administration should create a strong legislative framework focusing on the issue of collaboration among ESP practitioners and content teachers, as well as effective in-service training programs targeting ESP teachers.

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