

Understanding Teacher Talk at Islamic Secondary School : A Pilot Study

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Abstract

This study explores the teacher talk at Islamic Secondary School during the English language classroom. This study follows a research paradigm associated with a naturalistic qualitative inquiry where the main focus is to understand the teacher talk's complexity. The study mainly employed audio recording for data analysis. There were two audio recording sessions in form four classes. The researcher selected two teachers for the audio recording. The findings shows teacher talk time had dominated most of the class time in which Teacher A had talked for 74% of the class time and Teacher B had talked for 68% of the class time.

Keywords: Teacher Talk, English as a Second Language, Islamic Secondary School

1. INTRODUCTION

In the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), interaction has always been considered an important element in language learning (Hall & Verplaetse, 2014). Walsh (2003) classified interaction in the classroom into five types; teacher - learner, teacher - learners, learner - learner, learner - learners and learners - learners while Van Lier (2014) classified it into two main types; teacher - learner interaction and learner - learner interaction. Walsh (2011) claimed that in second language classrooms, teachers control the types of interaction, interrupt the lesson and the teaching process whenever they like, direct the discussion, hand over a turn and switch topics since they are the authority. These are considered as teacher talks. It is regarded as a tool which helps teachers to implement and execute their teaching plans. It also provides an input source for the learners (Jing & Jing, 2018). This illustrates that the role of teacher talk in the second language learning is significant.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

In the past five years, a number of the research on teacher talk have focused on various aspects such as the amount of teacher talk time (Zare-Behtash & Azarnia, 2015), students' perception on teacher talk (Handayani & Umam, 2017) and EFL teacher talk in a non-native English classroom (Jing & Jing, 2018). However, studies on factors and the impacts that influence the amount of teacher talk are very limited and most studies tend to focus on Malaysian national's primary and secondary schools. This prompts study such as this that looks at teacher talk in other school settings such as ESL classes in Islamic secondary school.

The following table showed the various amount of teacher talk in four different studies. It illustrated that teacher talk still dominates in language classrooms which amounted between 67.96% to 80.1%. As portrayed in Table 1.1, the four studies had a similar issue with national primary schools such as the ones reported by Jeyasingam & Azahar (2015) and Tisha Nair (2018).

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Table 2.1 The amount of teacher talks by various researchers from 2016 to 2019

The amount of teacher talks	Authors, Year
67.96%	Abbasian & Afghari, 2016
74.9 – 70.7%	Winarti, 2017
75.6%	Huriyah & Agustina, 2018
80.1%	Ahmad, Shakir, Siddique, 2019

These research point to problems in national schools, and therefore, it is assumed that the problem is much more apparent in Islamic school. This is because in this kind of setting, very often, teachers would be interested in delivering the subject content; thus, disregard the students' needs. Teachers are unaware of the fact that students in Islamic secondary school might not be able to learn during the class and make noticeable progress within a day or a week as they are often needed to learn, acquire and master three languages such as Malay, English and Arabic languages, (Met, 2004). The pressure of acquiring and mastering these three languages is very much stressful because between English and Arabic, and students will choose the Arabic language. This is because as Islamic scholars, the emphasis would be on them mastering the Arabic language since this is the language of the Holy Quran and Islamic teachings.

In Indonesia, a study at Islamic senior high school explored interactional features performed by English teachers during the teaching-learning process in classroom interaction, how the teacher performed it, and how interactional features helped the teacher achieve pedagogical goal. (Wasiah, 2016).

Meanwhile in Malaysia, the pedagogical shift is needed to transform the education sector from being heavily traditional to being one of 21st century to ensure that on graduation, students will be job-ready with skills especially communication skill that is often regarded as a highly acquired skill in the 21st century workplace (Kivunja, 2015; Ab Rahman et al, 2019). Those who are not able to use English to communicate verbally may lose out on job opportunities (Zainuddin, Pillai, Dumanig & Phillip, 2019). The source of this problem could be rooted in the way our teachers taught their class and most likely linked to the teacher talk. As implicated, excessive teacher talks lead to severe implications as it may restrict student talk severely (Ahmad, Shakir, Siddique, 2019). Md Yusof and Masdinah, (2018) conducted a study that communication skills especially the English language speaking skill is one of the criteria used to select fresh graduates for employment. This is supported by the findings in Ab Rahman, Mohamed, Nasir, & Saidin (2020), investigating the employers' perception on communication skills among fresh graduates who found that the communication ability is one of the skills needed to get hired.

As there are many issues on unemployment and English proficiency, competence and communication skills, serious consideration and action need to be taken to overcome these issues as early as possible. One of the main objectives of this study is driven by poor communication skill in the English language among Malaysian students (Charles Spawa & Hasan, 2013) especially in secondary Islamic schools. This study addresses its concern by analyzing of the teacher talk of Islamic secondary school English teachers in Perlis.

3. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The result of this research will contribute an in-depth understanding the factors and impact that influence the amount of teacher talk in Islamic secondary school. This will help teachers to reflect their teaching practices. The finding will ultimately assist teachers in conducting an effective teaching for ESL teachers in class. In addition, it can be clearly seen the need to improve the learning and teaching quality in Islamic secondary school, thus it is unavoidable that teachers ought to consider not only the content and products such as educational modules, exams, evaluations but the method issues should be considered too such as the teacher talk.

Directly, teachers can help learners to acquire language skills. If the teachers are aware of this method issue, they can actually improvise their method in teaching. For example, they change the way they deliver the content in the syllabus. Learners will be able to communicate in English language frequently without any restrictions from the teacher because of the excessive of teacher talk previously. When students can speak, they can gain more confidence in using the target language. Those who are able to use English language fluently might have higher possibility to get a chance in a prominent tertiary education and then to be employed in any jobs.

Other than that, this research can change the role of teacher and setting up a new teacher- student relationship. Teachers are the medium of instructing. It is the teachers' duty to organize the classroom as a setting for classroom activities. It is advisable during the activity, the teacher monitors, empowers and organizes the students and gives

them with information of each specific course and methodology of learning. Thus, teacher is not a sage on the stage anymore but a guide on the side.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

Prior to the 21st century, there had been Foreign Language interaction analysis models which were designed to investigate and understand the relationship between teacher talk (TT) and language learning like FIAC (Flanders Interaction Analysis Categories) by (Flanders, 1970) and the FLINT (Foreign Language Interaction) system (Moskowitz, 1971). This analysis system has several benefits. It is helpful in developing interactive language teaching since it gives the researcher taxonomy for observing teachers, set a framework for evaluating and improving the teaching, and helps to set a learning climate for interactive teaching (Brown, 2001).

However, Walsh (2006) stated that the categories in FIAC are rather broad and it is questionable whether the instrument could adequately account for the complex interactional organization in a contemporary classroom. While the FLINT system, according to Walsh (2006), though more sophisticated than the original Flanders System, it is also more complex and Moskowitz recommended that a language user should master the Flanders system before employing her modified version. Therefore, Seedhouse (1996) suggested, in an attempt to evaluate classroom communication, that the characteristic features related to pedagogical purpose should be considered.

Self-Evaluation Teacher Talk (SETT) offers a new approach to help a teacher develop a clearer understanding of the relationship between TT, interaction, and learning that was proposed by Walsh (2006). The SETT framework is designed to raise awareness of TT and a realization of the importance of using appropriate TT according to pedagogic goals because the language used by the teachers in the classroom varies according to their pedagogic purpose at a given point in a lesson. Besides that, SETT aims to provide a descriptive system which teachers can use to extend an understanding of the interactional processes operating in their own classes. This study has adopted SETT Framework to analyze the data and mainly focus on the teacher talk categories.

The SETT Framework consist of fourteen categories based on the main features of classroom interaction in second language classroom. Walsh (2002) stated that, teacher talk can create more learning opportunities and it can also hinder the learning opportunities. In short, teacher talk is either can construct or obstruct the learning opportunities. Table 2.4 showed the Self Evaluation Teacher Talk Framework that has been adopted from Walsh, (2006).

Table 4.1: Self-Evaluation Teacher Talk (2006) Framework

Features of Teacher Talk	Description
1. Scaffolding (S)	1. Reformation (R) (Rephrasing a learner's contribution) 2. Extension (E) (extending a learner's contribution) 3. Modelling (M) (providing an example for the learner)
2. Direct Repair (DR)	Correcting an error quickly and directly
3. Content Feedback (CF)	Giving feedback to the message rather than the words used.
4. Extended Wait Time (EWT)	Allowing sufficient time (several seconds) for students to respond or formulate a respond.
5. Referential Questions (RQ)	Genuine questions to which the teacher does not the answer.
6. Seeking Clarification (SC)	1. Teacher asks a student to clarify something the student has said. 2. Students ask the teacher to clarify something the teacher has said.
7. Extended Learner Turn (ELTN)	Learner turn of more than one utterance.
8. Teacher Echo (TE)	1. Teacher repeats the teacher's previous utterance. 2. Teacher repeats a learner's contribution.
9. Teacher Interaction (TI)	Interrupting a learner' contribution.
10. Extended Teacher Turn (ETT)	Teacher turn of more than one utterance.
11. Turn Completion (TE)	Completing a learner's contribution to the learner.
12. Display Questions (DQ)	Asking questions to which the teacher knows the answer.
13. Form-focused Feedback (FFF)	Giving feedback on the words used, not the message.
14. Confirmation Check (CC)	Confirming understanding of a student's or teacher's contribution.

After the pilot study has been conducted at the Islamic secondary school, the researcher added other categories in the teacher talk categories. The researcher found that in Islamic secondary school, most of the teachers will start the class with values such as reciting prayers and at the beginning or the end of the lesson with giving greeting.

Table 4.2

Features of Teacher Talk	Description
15. Greeting (G)	Teacher gives greeting
16. Values (V)	Ask to do or inform the values containing Islamic values
17. Ripple Effect (RE)	Teacher corrects a misbehavior in one student / reward a good behavior

5. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

These are the research objectives for this study which are:

1. to explore the proportion of teacher talk to students talk in ESL classrooms at Islamic secondary school,
2. to investigate the different categories of teacher talk in ESL classrooms at Islamic secondary school,
3. to discover impacts of teacher talk on students' potential in ESL classrooms at Islamic secondary school

This research examines teacher talk in ESL classroom in Islamic school in Perlis with the following research questions:

1. What is the proportion of teacher talk to student talk in ESL classrooms at Islamic secondary school?
2. What are the categories of teacher talk in ESL classrooms at Islamic secondary school?
3. What are the impacts to students' potential in learning in ESL classrooms at Islamic secondary school?

6. METHODOLOGY

Mohajan (2018) stated that qualitative research methods are mainly concerned with stories and accounts including subjective understandings, feelings, opinions and beliefs. Qualitative data is normally gathered when a justified belief is taken and when the data is the word of expressions of the research participants themselves (Matthews & Ross, 2014). In this research, qualitative method will be chosen. The researcher uses a qualitative study design in order to gain an insider view (Yin, 2015, p. 18). This coincides with this research because teacher talk as a phenomenon cannot be understood outside of its real-life context and it is taken into account only in the when the teacher talks in the classroom only for this study. Therefore, qualitative studies have been recognized as one of the interpretative qualitative approaches, in spite of its small sample size, contributes to larger practical theoretical issues of language instruction and learning.

7. INSTRUMENTS

7.1 Audio recordings

This research involves audio recordings. The audio recorder was used in the classroom to record the teacher talk and then transcribe it to find the different categories of the teacher talk. Audio recordings are chosen to capture a detailed account of the interaction between the teachers and students. Two advantages of recording a lesson are it can be replayed and examined many times and can capture many details of a lesson that cannot easily be observed by other means (Nunan & Bailey, 2009). Audio recordings was used since they are less intrusive than video cameras. Since video camera is not allowed by the Ministry of Education Malaysia, audio recordings are the best choice.

8. DATA ANALYSIS

1. The Proportion of Teacher Talk to Students Talk

Based on the two audio recordings, the proportion of teacher talk and students talk time in both English lessons were calculated and presented in Table 8.1.

Table 8.1

Class	Teacher Talk		Student Talk		Other	
	minute	%	minute	%	minute	%
Class 1 (Teacher A)	29m 32s	74	6m 27s	16	4m 15s	10
Class 2 (Teacher B)	31m 48s	68	7m 49s	17	6m 53s	15

From the empirical data in Table 8.1, it can be concluded that teacher talk time had dominated most of the class time in which Teacher A had talked for 74% of the class time and Teacher B had talked for 68% of the class time. The data also shows that students talk time were only accounted for 16% and 17% in both of the classes. The findings are similar with the findings from Zare-Behtash and Azarnia (2015) which revealed that teachers talked nearly 75% of the whole lesson time. Whereas, students only talked for 19% of the whole lesson time and 6% of the lesson time was used on various activities in the classroom (Zare-Behtash & Azarnia, 2015).

Zhao (1998) found that in a teacher-centred English class, teacher talk time accounted for nearly 70% of the whole lesson. Therefore, it can also be concluded that the lessons conducted by Teacher A and B were teacher-centred and there were little communicative interactions between the teachers and students. The teachers talked most of the lesson time possibly because they were afraid of the silent as they viewed talking as sign of effective teaching and learning processes (Ollin, 2005). Furthermore, Liu and Zhu (2012) mentioned in their findings that many teachers dominated the talking time in the classroom because they still aimed at imparting knowledge to students.

Paul (2003) claimed that the greater the amount of teacher talk time (TTT) in a lesson, the less the students' opportunities to practice the target language and therefore the lesson will become ineffective. This is because, Nunan (1999) stated that an important part of the language acquisition process is the active use of the target language by the students. According to Thornburry (1996) and Paul (2003), since there are limited opportunities for students to use the target language outside the classroom, it is paramount for them to practice the target language in the classroom which can help them to acquire the target language.

Equally, it is undeniable that in the second language classroom setting, the teachers are almost always the main source of comprehensible input and sole genuine interlocutor (Farokhipour, Ghazaan & Jabbari, 2015). Thus, Teacher A and B should reflect on and adjust their teaching practices so that they will be able to transfer the content knowledge and at the same time allow more active communication in their classroom so the students can better acquire the target language.

II. The Proportion of Display Questions to Referential Questions

Table 8.2

Class	Total number of questions (n)	Display Questions		Referential Questions	
		n	%	n	%
Class 1 (Teacher A)	101	89	88	12	12
Class 2 (Teacher B)	35	24	69	11	31
Total	136	113	83	23	17

The second analysis and findings of the research is the proportion of display questions to referential questions. Arifin (2012) asserted that questions have an important role in teaching and learning processes as they can contribute to students' language development. Boyd and Rubin (2006) stated that display questions ask students to recite information already known by the teacher. This question form is mainly used in order to assess the level of students' recollections of content matter (Boyd & Rubin, 2006). Whereas, Boyd and Rubin (2006) mentioned that referential questions ask students to provide information unknown to the teachers such as students' own evaluations and interpretations of the class content. According to Boyd and Rubin (2006), teachers who use this question form are often genuinely interested in listening to what the students has to say.

From Table 8.2 it can be inferred that in both lessons, Teacher A and B had asked a total of 136 questions. Both teachers used display questions in their lessons far more often than referential questions. Teacher A had asked

101 questions within the 40 minutes of her lesson with 88% of the questions asked were display questions and only 12% were referential questions. On the other hand, Teacher B had asked 35 questions in 46.30 minutes with 69% of the questions asked were display questions and only 31% were referential questions. Teacher A asked more questions compared to Teacher B presumably because she wanted to check on her students' understanding of the words being said and ensuring that all her students grasped the key words during the lesson. Teacher B asked lesser questions in his lesson due to the fact that they were revising and practicing conversations which involved telephone skills.

Lee (2006) stated that display questions are considered to be less likely to engage students in meaningful interaction which can prepare them for the real language communication outside the classroom. Thus, due to the limited nature of display questions, several researchers suggested that teachers use referential questions in the classroom that will allow more opportunities for communicative language use and less control over the interactional sequence (Lee, 2006).

Contrary to Lee (2006), David (2007) and Shomossi (2004) concluded that asking display questions is more beneficial and effective than referential questions because this form of question facilitates students' participation in language classes. According to David (2007) display questions create more opportunity and exchanges between teachers and students because they can stimulate students' interests and produce greater participation in the lessons.

Therefore, Teacher A and B should improve on their questioning skills so that they can create more communicative and meaningful interaction in their language classroom. Furthermore, they should learn how to use a balanced mixture of both questions as both types of questions are needed to maximize students' learning potential.

III. The Average Wait Time for Answering Questions in 15 minutes

Table 8.3

Class Average wait time	Class 1 (Teacher A) (05.00 – 20.00)	Class 2 (Teacher B) (25.00 – 40.00)
	Frequency (f)	Frequency (f)
1 – 2 seconds	33	11
3 – 4 seconds	2	-
5 – 6 seconds	3	1

Wait time is defined as the duration of pauses separating utterances during verbal interaction between speakers (Tobin, 1987). Tobin (1987) stated that longer wait time in classroom interaction appears to facilitate higher cognitive level learning by providing teachers and students additional time to think. This view is supported by Winne and Marx (1983) who claimed that for effective language learning to occur, students must be given adequate time to cognitively processed the verbal information presented by the teacher.

The average wait time for both lessons was taken from a 15 minutes section from each lesson. From the classroom transcriptions and the audio recordings, the researchers determined the average wait time in both lessons. From Table 3, it can be deduced that Teacher A only waited 1 to 2 seconds mostly before giving feedbacks or interrupting her students' speeches. This was also the same phenomenon in Class 2 where Teacher B only waited for 1-2 seconds before interjecting his students' responses. It is apparent that both teachers did not give longer wait time for their students to think and respond and expected the students to produce intelligible responses in 1 to 2 seconds only. According to Rowe (1986), this situation is typical with many teachers because majority of teachers only wait for 1 second or less for the students to respond as well as giving reactions after the students stop speaking. The shorter wait time observed in both lessons also indicated that the pace of interaction between teachers and students was very rapid for both English classes. It is also noted that under the 1 second average wait times, students responses in both classes tended to consist short phrases and rarely involved long explanation.

The longest wait time recorded for both Teacher A and Teacher B's classes were 5 - 6 seconds. For example, in Class 2, Teacher B asked referential question about what were some elements that they needed to consider when they wanted to rent a car. After 5 seconds, a female student replied "types of car". This situation explained that the longer wait time given by the teachers, the more possible correct and longer responses can be obtained from the students. Thus, teacher A and B should exercise longer wait time in their classes so as to ensure that the

responses they get from the students will not be mere reporting back content knowledge but rather involves clarification, justification and elaboration of their understanding about the content knowledge (Rowe, 1986).

IV. What are the impacts to students' potential in learning in ESL classrooms

Walsh (2002) mentioned that teachers consciously but inconsistently facilitate learning opportunities that promote involvement from the students. However, some of the language and pedagogic choices made by the teachers may hinder students' involvement and restrict learning potentials (Walsh, 2002) include the following.

V. Construction – Increasing Learning Potential

a. Direct Error Corrections

Direct error correction is inevitable in the process of teaching and learning a second language. In direct error correction, specific information is provided by the teachers on aspects of students' competence and performance through explanation, provision of correct forms or other alternatives and elicitation of these from the students (Ur, 2000). According to Walsh (2002), apart from being less time-consuming direct error correction can construct students' learning in which it helps students to notice and immediately correct the errors. For example, in turns 335, Teacher A was correcting her student's responses over the meaning of the word 'princess'. In turns 144, 361 and 363, Teacher B was trying to correct students' pronunciations of the words 'certainly' and "Michelle".

b. Scaffolding

Walsh (2002) defined scaffolding as an intervention strategy used by teachers in helping students who face communication breakdown by feeding in the missing language. Communication breakdown happens when the students do not know a particular word or phrase when they are giving responses (Walsh, 2002). In Extract 4, Teacher A was trying to elicit students' responses about the equivalent word for 'beautiful' which could be used to describe a boy/man's features. After several questions, the students were able to come out with the word 'handsome' which was suitable to be used with the male subject.

In Extract 5, there were several attempts made by Teacher B in eliciting students' responses about the word 'reservation'. For example, in turn 321, Teacher B was prompting the students to give the equivalent word for reservation in English. After several scaffolding, the student was able to come out with the word 'booking'. Therefore, from this extract, it can be said that scaffolding helps in maximizing students' learning opportunities by filling in the gaps of the students' missing language.

VI. Obstruction – Decreasing Learning Potential

a. Teacher Echo

Teacher echo is a commonly found occurrence in any classroom as it is used to amplify a student's ideas so that others in the class will hear as well (Walsh, 2002). In turn 315, 317, 216 and 218, the teacher repeated the student's speeches right after the student said them. It was not clear whether the purpose of echo was to amplify or clarify the student's ideas. Yet, the repeated discourse might inhibit negative feeling to that particular students and cause boredom to the others who were listening. As Walsh (2002) mentioned, teachers need to use echo sparingly as it serves very little real language function and may restrict learning opportunities as it minimizes students' involvement.

b. Teacher Interruption

From the extracts above, it can be deduced that both teachers were interrupting students in the middle of the sentences and before the students had the chance to finish their sentences. For example in turns 262, 264 and 266 in Teacher A's Class, the teacher seemed to be impatient with the time taken by the student to formulate a sentence. Teacher A interrupted after every word said by the student.

Meanwhile, in turn 387 in Teacher B's class, the student was still searching for the correct words to read the printed number aloud. However, the teacher did not give enough time for the student to mentally think and formed the words. The teacher just interrupted the flow of the student's speech by blurting out 'three hundred and eight'. Although, this can be argued that the teacher only wanted to help the students, but by doing so the teacher prevented the student to engage in the target language.

Furthermore, in turn 412, the teacher interrupted the student's speech and gave no further recognition to student's idea. The teacher abruptly changed the course of interaction back to his main objective which was to identify types of services which can be cancelled through phone calls. This could have a major impact on students' self esteems and might de-motivate them to participate in class discussion. Teacher should encourage students' ideas and acknowledge students' opinions so that the students will feel appreciated and therefore increase their learning potential.

9. DISCUSSION

From the analysis and findings mentioned above, it is apparent that teacher talk plays a prominent role in second language classrooms as the pedagogic discourse chose by teachers can either construct or obstruct students' learning of the target language. The data found in this research shows that teacher talk dominated in both classrooms in which Teacher A had talked for and teacher B had talked for 68% of the classroom interactions. Students talk time was only for Class 1 and 17% for Class 2. The data gathered shows that both teachers were conducting teacher-centred English lessons and most of the lesson time used by the teachers to impart content knowledge of the English language. In both classrooms, students were seen as passive learners where their roles were just to listen to the teachers and to answer questions only when asked. These situations were not effective for the students as Krashen (1996) mentioned, language acquisition and learning involves active communicative interactions between speakers and in this context, teachers and students in making sense of the target language. As such, both teachers should be mindful as too much teacher talk may hinder students' opportunities to use and experience the language first hand.

Furthermore, the analysis and findings also highlight the preferences of both teachers in using display questions over referential questions in their English lessons which accounted for 83% from the total of questions asked. Teacher A and B used substantial amount of display questions in their lesson presumably because they just wanted to check on their students' competence or understanding of particular topics but not on their communication performances. Therefore, they just asked simple and known questions about the related topics so that they would be able to achieve their lessons objective which were; i) list 6 wishes in their folded book, ii) practice oral telephone skills. Nevertheless, both teachers are encouraged to utilize referential questions when eliciting information from students as students can give elaborate explanation and answer using the targeted language. The chances students get from answering referential questions will be platforms for them in practicing and using language which resembles the authentic use of English in the real world (Zhao, 1998).

In addition, another key issue highlighted from the research is the average wait time during question and answer session. The research concluded that both teachers in Class 1 and 2 only waited for 1 to 2 seconds for the students to answer the questions asked. The limited time given by both teachers hampered students' cognitive processes in formulating elaborated and appropriate answers in the target language. According to Rowe (1986) slowing down may be a way of speeding up in which she asserted that the quality of classroom interactions can be markedly improved by extending 3 seconds or longer wait time used by teachers after a question and after a response. Finally, the findings from this research also disclosed some elements of teacher talk which could impact students' learning. The elements were identified as direct error correction, scaffolding/prompting, teacher's echo and teacher's interruptions. Each of the elements has its own strengths and weaknesses.

10. CONCLUSION

Therefore, teachers should exercise caution whenever they are using these elements in their everyday classroom interaction. This is because, excessive use of any of the elements will restrict learning opportunities and minimize students' involvement in the language lessons (Walsh, 2002)

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