

การประเมินผลการเขียนเรียงความเชิงพรรณนาของนักเรียนชั้นมัธยมศึกษาปีที่ 2 ของโรงเรียนระดับมัธยมศึกษาตอนต้น ในประเทศภูฏาน

Peer Assessment on Grade Eight Students' Descriptive Essay Writing at a Lower Secondary School in Bhutan

Tashi Tshering*

Ubon Sanpatchayapong**

ABSTRACT

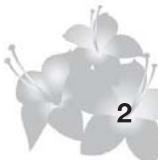
This research was conducted to explore how Grade Eight students developed and valued peer assessment in descriptive essay writing. The study was conducted in a Lower Secondary School in Bhutan in the second semester of the school year 2015 from August until the end of September. The study was conducted with 35 Grade Eight students in a Lower Secondary School in Bhutan. These 35 participants were selected based on the scores they have secured in their descriptive essay writing in the midterm exam in 2015. The researcher adopted mixed method research design for the study. Data were collected from interviews, questionnaires, students' reflective journals and teacher's journal.

The first finding discovered that the development of peer assessment encouraged the participants to shoulder the responsibility as the assessors, enhanced collaboration among the peers, improved their language in writing essay, and provided them the opportunity to experience peer assessment. The second finding from the study revealed that peer assessment training improved participants' learner satisfaction. The post-questionnaire (Part II) helped the researcher in confirming this finding. The overall mean which

was 3.7 indicated that the participants agreed with almost all the statements which reckoned the practices and facts of descriptive essay and peer assessment. The result also depicted that the participants' gained improvement in writing after experiencing peer assessment. The finding also revealed that the peer assessment intervention led to change students' attitude towards positive perspectives of peer assessment. While the learners expected the practice to be difficult, they found it not to be so; learners became assured that peer assessment was useful, motivating and interesting.

บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยนี้เพื่อศึกษาวิธีการที่นักเรียนชั้นมัธยมศึกษาปีที่ 2 พัฒนาและใช้การประเมินโดยเพื่อนในการเขียนเรียงความเชิงพรรณนา ซึ่งได้ดำเนินการวิจัยที่โรงเรียนมัธยมศึกษาตอนต้นในประเทศภูฏานในภาคเรียนที่ 2 ปีการศึกษา 2558 ระหว่างเดือนสิงหาคมถึงเดือนกันยายน กลุ่มตัวอย่างได้แก่ นักเรียนชั้นมัธยมศึกษาปีที่ 2 จำนวน 35 คน ที่คัดเลือกจากผลกระทบแคนงานเขียนเรียงความเชิงพรรณนาในการสอบกลางภาคในปีการศึกษา 2558 การออกแบบการวิจัยชิ้นนี้เป็นการวิจัยแบบผสมโดยรวมข้อมูลจาก การสัมภาษณ์ แบบสอบถาม บันทึกการสะท้อนผลของนักเรียนและบันทึกของครู



ผลการวิจัยประเด็นแรกพบว่า การพัฒนาการประเมินงานเขียนโดยเพื่อนกระตุ้นให้ผู้เรียนเกิดความรับผิดชอบในฐานะผู้ประเมิน ส่งเสริมความร่วมมือระหว่างกันของผู้ประเมิน พัฒนาภาษาที่ใช้ในงานเขียนและทำให้มีประสบการณ์ในการประเมินโดยเพื่อน ผลการวิจัยประเด็นที่สอง พบว่า นักเรียนมีความพึงพอใจในการฝึกการประเมินงานเขียนโดยเพื่อน ผลจากแบบประเมินหลังการฝึกซึ่งให้เห็นค่าค่าเฉลี่ยโดยรวมที่ระดับ 3.7 ที่บ่งชี้ว่า นักเรียนส่วนใหญ่เห็นความสำคัญของการฝึกการเขียนเชิงพรรรณ และการประเมินโดยเพื่อน นอกจากนี้ยังพบว่า นักเรียนมีพัฒนาการในการเขียนเชิงพรรรณ หลังจากการฝึกการประเมินโดยเพื่อน อีกทั้งการมีส่วนร่วมในการประเมินทำให้นักเรียนมีทัศนคติต่อการประเมินในเชิงบวก

คำสำคัญ : การประเมินโดยเพื่อน, การเขียนเรียงความเชิงพรรรณ, โรงเรียนมัธยมศึกษาตอนต้น

Keywords : Peer assessment, Descriptive Essay Writing, Lower Secondary School

Introduction

Writing can be seen as a difficult skill in the language learning process. Most English language learners encounter several problems while learning writing skills. Some of the problems that are manifested in a child's writing are poor vocabulary, many misspelled words, frequent capitalization, punctuation, and basic grammar errors. Hence, facilitating students to improve have errors: limited, repeated or unrelated ideas and inappropriate word choices. As juxtaposed in Gelb & Whiting's study (1993), writing involves far more than just linguistic knowledge. It also entails gathering ideas and information, analyzing and organizing this information and presenting it in a way that effectively communicates those ideas to the reader. The findings in the study by Gooden-Jones (2000) also support that via sharing ideas in carrying out peer assessment in learning activities, the learners could generate more ideas, learn new words, understand the language they were learning, and gain the writing structure. Secondly,

writing performance is a major concern for language specialists in education in general. Specifically, the Ministry of Education in Bhutan encourages school teachers to teach students to enhance their writing skills. In this regard, two significant learning objectives for writing, as prescribed by the Department of Curriculum and Research Division (2012 : 7) are that a student will be able to do the following :

- Evaluate their own writing using the criteria for good writing.
- Help with editing the work of their fellow students.

The guideline used in Bhutan for the English subject truly serves what has been printed in "Effective Learning in Classroom" by Watkins and others (2007 : 146) as '*making the classroom assessment active*'. Peer assessment, or self-assessment, is one form of a formative assessment that could be used.

Despite the endeavors from teachers to improve classroom performance, students still face problems in writing. From the researcher's perspective, the first reason for this problem may be because the learners lack ideas and vocabulary. They only get the ideas from teacher writing prompts. They rarely have chance to refer to the ideas or words used by their friends or from other sources. For this reason, their writings often the teachers' assessment governs the assessment processes. The learners do not have exposure to the language. They do not have a chance to reflect on what they or their friends have written. The fact that students are not involved in the assessment process, they are not able to recognize and correct mistakes in their writing. They are not confident of what is required in the writing and thus, they write without employing the demanded contents and criteria. Precisely, students remain dormant with the assessment standards of their writing. Therefore, they do not gain improvement in their writing. Dollard &

Christensen (1996 : 22) admitted that in the teacher-centered classrooms, the teacher exerts control over the students which stands true in the Bhutanese classroom context. In the same context, McLaughlin & Simpson (2004 : 143) argued that assessments made only by teachers limit the understanding of the individual student's assessment skills, students' educational targets and how these relate to educational applications. Lastly, most of the writing assessments in the class are summative meaning that students' writings are assessed once or twice at the final test of a course which actually cannot possibly display their writing ability completely.

Therefore, teachers should look for alternatives which can help the learners expand their ideas and word choice, provide chances to reflect on their own and peers' writings and assess the whole writing process rather than assessing the product only. It is suggested that peer assessment can be espoused as an assessment method that addresses these needs. Lundstrom & Baker (2009) explains that assessing and editing peer's writing helps learners gain more knowledge and ability in gathering, acquiring, analyzing and synthesizing information, reading and writing skills. Through the assessing and editing process, learners become more patient, responsible and learn how to think systematically.

Beaver & Beaver (2011 : 210-314) believed that peer assessment in writing could help students develop not only critical thinking and analysis skills, but content-related and reflective skills. Moreover, Brown (1998) has stated that the advantages of peer evaluation in addition to increasing motivation of students for learning: taking the responsibility of their own learning, making evaluation a part of learning, considering mistakes not as failure but as opportunity for re-learning, putting into practice the skills for knowledge transfer, using peer evaluation as a self-evaluation form, providing deep-learning

instead of superficial learning (Cited in Sami Sahi. 2008 : 1). Yet again, Beaver & Beaver (2011: 3) have argued that peer assessment can be a tool for increasing student performance. They believed that if students could read each other's written solutions and take part in the assessment process they would experience firsthand the lack of clarity and understanding demonstrated in their peers' writings.

In order to encourage the teachers and learners to employ peer assessment in writing, it was significant to conduct a study which examined the extent of values of peer assessment on Grade Eight students' descriptive essay writing in the researcher's context.

Peer assessment helps students to become more autonomous, responsible and involved. It encourages students to critically analyze work done by others, rather than simply seeing a mark.

Aims of the study

The study was conducted to exhibit how Grade Eight students developed peer assessment for descriptive essay writing in the study. It is also aimed to assess participants' views on the use of peer assessment in descriptive essay writing among Grade Eight students. Furthermore, the findings were to be disseminated to the English teachers and other interested subject teachers who might apply peer assessment for the benefit of students in their context.

Scope of the study

Target Population

The study was carried out in Sarpang District, one of the districts in Southern Bhutan. There were five grade eight sections (in the researcher's context, section is same as groups or classrooms) with a total of 165 students. 35 students were the target population in the study. This research was conducted during the second



term of the 2015 Academic Year in one of the lower secondary schools in Bhutan. The purposive sampling technique was used to select these 35 participants for the study.

Research Methodology

Interviews, questionnaires, students' reflective journals and teacher's journal were the instruments used to gather data from the participants in the study. 1) The pre- and post-semi-structured interviews were used with the 35 Grade Eight students. In both the interviews, they were asked about peer assessment, descriptive essay writing, writing processes, rubrics, feedback and the assessment trends in general. 2) The pre- and post-questionnaires were used in this study. The first part of the questionnaire revealed demographic information of the participants. The second part of the questionnaire was used to gather data to compare the value-effects of the implementation of peer assessment in their descriptive essay writing. However, third part of the questionnaire was used to generate the participants' opinions regarding the knowledge they have gained from peer assessment in descriptive essay writing. 3) For students' reflective journals, the participants reflected their gained knowledge, opinions and doubts after the class was over. 4) The teacher's journal was used to note significant behaviors of the participants while carrying out peer assessment in the class. It aided the researcher during the data analysis to both strengthen and disapprove the participants' views in the interviews, questionnaires and student journals.

The data were analyzed by following grounded theory. The coding process involved three levels of analyses: 1) Open coding, where data obtained from the interviews and group discussions were organized in a systematic manner; 2) Axial coding was used when data were identified and categorized; and 3) Selective coding

was employed for data categorization and interpretation to gather the study results.

Research Materials

In this study, the researcher used two important materials: 1) The assessment rubric was found to be essential to employ peer assessment in descriptive essay writing. Rubric was originally created in the class with the participants along with the researcher. Therefore, it was convenient to describe the collective effort as the student rubric. It was later assessed by one of the English teachers in the school who taught Grade Eight students. Participants used this rubric to see the standards and criteria set for descriptive essay writing. Moreover, it was used while the participants carried out peer assessment to assess their work; 2) Friend's Feedback Ladder was used as a guide for the participants so that they could be confident and fair enough in providing feedback, comments and suggestions owing to peer assessment. The use of David Perkin's (2000) Friend's Feedback Ladder as the peer assessment checklist acted as a protocol or structure that established a culture of trust and constructive support by sequencing feedback in an order that is constructive.

Results

The results of this study encompass two major areas; 1) Ways students developed peer assessment and 2) Knowledge gained from peer assessment. The findings for the first research question (*How did Grade eight students develop peer assessment in a descriptive essay writing in this study?*) were based on the pre and post semi-structured interviews, students' reflective journals, third part of the questionnaire and teacher's journal. Likewise, findings for the second research question (*What did students learn from peer assessment in descriptive essay writing in this study?*) were garnered from the questionnaires,

interviews, student reflective journals and teacher's journal.

1. Ways students developed Peer assessment

Three themes were generated using pre and post semi-structured interviews, students' reflective journals, third part of the questionnaire and teacher's journal. Those were : 1) Students as the assessors; 2) Collaboration; and 3) Student experiential learning. It was found that the participants saw themselves as the assessors and understood the assessment process better. Participants worked in groups while peer-assessing each other's essays. It was discovered that the development of peer assessment helped them improve their language while writing descriptive essays. Participants voiced their opinions and reported in all the data that they wished to remain persistent in developing peer assessment in descriptive essay writing in the future too.

2. Knowledge gained from Peer Assessment

Using the set questionnaires, interviews, student reflective journals and teacher's journal, there were seven themes garnered in this study : 1) Better understanding of criteria in the rubric ; 2) Learning productive;3) Inspiration; 4) Empathy; 5) Motivation; 6) Difficulty in being objective; and 7) Uneasiness while peer assessing friend's work.

The overall result depicted that the participants' gained improvement in writing after experiencing peer assessment. The finding also revealed that the peer assessment intervention led to change students' attitude towards positive perspectives of peer assessment.

Discussion

In the light of the data analysis, the researcher found the following significant outcomes.

1. Mean score for questionnaires

The difference in the pre and post-questionnaire indicated that the participants learnt a lot about peer assessment and descriptive essay writing prior to mean score in the pre-questionnaire which was 2.2. Therefore, the effect (1.5) was added onto the mean score in the pre-questionnaire (2.2) to conclude that there was a significant change in the participants' learning satisfaction at the end of the study (3.7). Significant change in the researcher's context meant that the participants prior to the study knew least about peer assessment in descriptive essay writing. After the implementations of peer assessment in writing, students were able to peer assess their works, follow writing processes, provide feedbacks, refer rubrics, and of all, change the role of an assessor from teachers then to students now.

2. Peer Assessment Development

Students as the assessors.

According to Stefani (1994 : 69), there are a large number of potential benefits of peer assessment. The first one is that peer assessment installs autonomy in learners and empowerment of the learner in a learning environment. The next one is developing learners' confidence in assessing or marking peers through practice and learners' ability to self-evaluate and reflect.

Participants created a rubric along with the researcher in the study. This was the first instance when they prepared for the peer assessment process in the study: 1) creation of rubric, 2) writing, 3) peer assessment, 4) peer review or feedback, and 5) rewriting. Therefore, the role of instructor progressed into a partnership with the students to help students learn how to evaluate their own writing and learning. Students wrote essays individually, which were assessed by their friends using the rubric and feedback chart. They exchanged their essays with their friends. In peers, essays were corrected referring to the rubric



and the 'friend's feedback ladder'. Some of the examples are:

"By taking part in the assessment process, I learnt to help by correcting friend's work and learn ourselves too." (I1-5)

"I could check /work along with teacher so that we know how to assess ourselves." (I1-6)

When students are trained on how to give and use feedback (Min. 2006 : 121), peer evaluation can be extremely effective. Teachers can incorporate it as a way to present writing skills to students, ideally creating a student-centered classroom with learners, capable of critically evaluating their own written work. In the course of this study, participants displayed their learner autonomy by sharing their writings, correcting minor errors, providing feedbacks and suggestions. They timely referred the designed rubric.

Collaboration: The researcher saw that participants were cooperative during the peer-assessment process of their work. Using the rubric and the feedback chart, they provided true comments and feedback. During the feedback session, they sat together and discussed issues pertinent to their essays. Even while writing the essays, participants sought help from their peers in terms of spelling and grammar. Moreover, proponents of collaborative learning namely Vygotsky claimed that the active exchange of ideas within small groups not only increases interest among the participants but also promotes critical thinking. On the same ground, Gokhale (1995 : 7) also agreed that the students are responsible for one another's learning as well as their own. Thus, the success of one student helps other students to be successful.

Student experiential learning:

Participants were given the opportunity to individually experience their own learning through peer assessment. The study found that participants enjoyed "learning by doing," learning through mistakes and reinforcement. This was done through

peer feedback and comments. During the interview at the end of the study, participants commented that they would prefer a peer-assessment activity rather than the teacher's assessment because it allowed them to foster learner autonomy and experience self-evaluation and reflection.

Various advantages to peer assessment are suggested in the literature, a summary of which is presented by Cassidy (2006 : 509), and includes: "Increased student responsibility and autonomy; evaluative skill development; insight into assessment procedures and expectations for high quality work; students work harder with the knowledge that they will be assessed by their peers; potential for providing increased levels of feedback without increased demands on tutors; and encourages deep rather than surface learning."

In addition, peer assessment is advocated as a means of improving employability skills, especially those related to non-technical (generic) aspects including oral and written communication, reading, learning skills and strategies, problem solving, decision making, dependability, and responsibility (Cassidy. 2006 : 516).

3. Participants' satisfaction on peer assessment Better understanding of criterion the rubric.

The study revealed yet another viewpoint from participant. Participants expressed that the peer assessment activity, in particular the rubric and feedback, allowed them to experience something new and valuable. They learned from each other's work and related the skills of writing in their own writing. For example, if participant 1 read participant 2's essay and liked his/her skill of writing, he could learn to write like him/her gradually. Participants agreed that they could sense and understand their writing's strengths and weaknesses better when viewing others' essays. They learned more from their peers' viewpoints. Furthermore, participants grew more aware of the

marking criteria prior to writing which allowed them to plan and formulate headings and contents. This also assisted with knowing weightings for certain categories in the rubric.

Learning productivity: Peer assessment has helped the participants get more feedback. This helped them to examine their own essays more comprehensively and to follow the criteria of the essay more carefully. Likewise, peer assessment has made them aware of what they needed to do to improve their essays and writing as well. It helped the individuals develop their critical thinking as well as comparing their own work. Above all, peer assessment has helped them look at their essay writing more critically than they would have. Peer assessment in descriptive essay writing helped the participants learn what others had done. It encouraged them to read someone else's essay and learn their fellow friends' writing styles and ideas. Likewise, peer assessment facilitated the participants to get a good idea of the standards of others' work. Formative benefits of peer assessment include an increased understanding of the learning content, the development of assessment skills and reflection on one's own learning performance (Sluijsmans. 2004 : 77).

Empathy: One fascinating finding in the study was that participants developed empathy towards the teachers especially the English teachers.

"I feel pity for teachers who are so hard working especially when assessing their students' writings." (Questionnaire 2-34)

"It is rightly said that it is easier to be in other's shoes but it is much more difficult to walk with those pair of shoes." (Questionnaire 2-17)

"We just assessed around 8 essays and that was too tiring. I have started imagining how many essays and other assignments are being assessed by our teachers." (Questionnaire 2-16)

The participants inferred that peer assessment gave them insight into the difficulty teachers experience in assessing the students. They added that they felt sympathy for the teachers who had to evaluate large numbers of essays on their own.

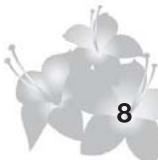
Motivation: Peer assessment in descriptive essay writing encouraged the participants in the study to work harder on their own writing and essay in order to make it more understandable and interesting for others. The fact that their writings were assessed by peers forced and pressured them to put more effort into their work.

"The class grew more interactive and cooperation was there among the peers; those who had problems with spelling and sentence structures, they were seeking help from their friends. Peers in group showed no sign of negligence and selfishness. Upon asking the participants in general for why they were so engaged in their essay writing, many spoke to me that since their essays are being read and assessed by their peers that they are encouraged to writing more understandable and interesting essay." (Teacher's Journal)

Inspiration: Participants showed great enthusiasm and interest. Participants read the essays and discussed the pros and cons of their writing in the classroom. They were inspired by their friends' writing and motivated them to replicate their friends' writing styles. Unlike other assessment methods, peer assessment encouraged the participants to develop such values of practice.

"Peer assessment helped me read others' work and know the strengths and weaknesses of my friend's essay and about mine also." (Post-Interview- 3)

"I could know my friend's writing standard-whether she writes good or bad." (Post-interview2-8)



“Because of peer assessment, I got a chance to copy my friend’s writing style. I knew how to write good and systematic paragraphs in the essay.” (Post-Interview-10)

Peer assessment in descriptive essay writing helped the participants learn what others had done. It encouraged them to read someone else’s essay and learn their fellow friends’ writing styles and ideas. Likewise, peer assessment facilitated the participants to get good idea of the standards of others’ work.

Difficulty in being objective: The study discovered that participants found peer assessment in descriptive essay writing to be difficult in terms of not being able to be objective and impartial. Participants were not able to be objective because peers were relatively easy in correcting their friend’s work. They couldn’t be harsh with their friends. Moreover, they stated that they were unfamiliar with marking and were not sure of the standards:

“I could not be fair in assessing my friend’s essay because I was worried if he would become angry, after seeing my comments and feedback.” (Post Interview-7)

“Peer assessment can be easy if we have practiced in our earlier classes and grades because it is difficult to be fair in assessing other’s work” (Post Interview -5)

Even in the research conducted by Azarnoosh (2013), it revealed that the impact of peer assessment on language learning is considerable, but its efficacy seems to depend on many factors including students’ attitudes, language levels, familiarity with the assessing criteria, the type of skill being assessed, and the possible presence of bias such as gender and friendship. One more problem is identified by Brown (1998 : 112) that subjectivity as the primary weakness of peer assessment needs to be resolved. Several students may either be too critical on themselves or too blustered.

Uneasiness while assessing friend’s work; Participants felt uncomfortable having peered read their own work. They reported that they felt being pressured and awkward too. Participants added that their peers were too critical. However, it was observed that assessing others’ work gave them a good feel for their own work. On the contrary, participants were anxious of how their essays were evaluated by their peers:

“I felt uncomfortable when my essay was read and assessed by my friend.” (Post-interview-5)

“I felt awkward while writing essay because I was worried that it will be assessed by my intelligent friends.” (Post-interview-11)

“I feel awkward to judge friend’s work because friends feel bad when comments and suggestions are provided for their essays. They think that we are acting like a teacher.” (Post-interview-34)

Participants felt uncomfortable having peer-read their own work by their peer. They reported in the post interview that they felt being pressured and awkward too. Participants added that peers were too critical in assessing their essay. However, it was observed that assessing others work gave them a good feel of their own work. On the contrary, participants were anxious of how viciously their essays were evaluated by their peers. Discussions with regards to challenges in peer assessment so far being practiced by the participants were of mixed inferences.

Recommendations

According to the findings of this study, the following recommendations are suggested for the effective implementation of peer assessment in descriptive essay writing as follows:

1. Peer assessment could be used as one of the formative assessments if English teachers

create some more assessment occasions for the learners to conduct this method in writing classes.

2. It is mandatory for English teachers to spend adequate time discussing with the students the rationale for doing this assessment method because discussions can provide tremendous opportunities to engage students' thinking about learning and assessment. The amount of time used during training session for peer assessment could alter students' way of peer- assessment. For example, students can be fair in assessing their peers' work and they can also avoid feeling uneasy while doing peer assessment.

3. One significant recommendation is that when operating peer assessment in English writing classes, student -rubric must be created as a tool to understand the standards and criteria used in the rubric which are ultimately used in the essay writing.

4. Above all, students need to be trained with peer assessment activities with repeated practice and with substantial amount of time; if students are given enough training to using different peer assessment tools, students become aware of peer assessment. In the researcher's context, only two months was used for peer assessment with the participants. And the result yielded mixed inferences from the students' side in the questionnaires and interviews.

Further research on the same topic should be conducted for a longer period of time so as to highlight the development of participants' writing performance as well as to display the impact of peer assessment on learners' writing performance.

Further research may be carried out to study the effectiveness of peer assessment on students' writing skills in other subjects as well with more research samples. Peer assessment in descriptive essay writing can be implemented in different classes, in different schools with different levels of student ability to determine its

effectiveness. Research has shown that peer assessment functions as an effective means of formative assessment across all subjects. Azarnoosh's (2013) research on 'Peer Assessment in an EFL Context: attitudes and friendship biases. His research finding was that the peer assessment intervention led to the change of students' attitude to a positive perspective on peer assessment. While the learners expected the practice to be difficult, they found it not to be so; learners became assured that peer assessment was useful, motivating and interesting and they found it not to be boring.

Conclusion

The researcher validated the data mentioned above to answer the two research questions and found the following findings:

Ways students developed peer assessment

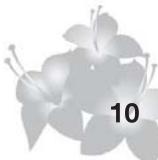
From the data analyses, it was found that the participants became the assessor of their own essay and their peers' as well. The participants worked collaboratively while developing peer assessment by cooperating with each other. They acknowledged one another's feedback and comments.

Knowledge gained from peer assessment

The study also revealed that peer assessment development helped them improve both their language input in writing essays and providing feedback. In addition, peer assessment helped the students "learn by doing." Some resulting experiences such as time management, self-directed learning and extensive reading were traced and mentioned during the interview with these participants.

Value of peer assessment

The findings for the second research question exposed the affective domain, both positive and negative. There are seven major themes: five positive effects and two negative



effects. The five positive effects of peer assessment were 1) participants' better understanding of the criteria, 2) work productivity, 3) inspiration, 4) empathy, and 5) motivation to work hard. On the

other hand, the two negative effects of peer assessment that emerged on the verge of this study were 1) difficulty in being objective and 2) uneasiness in assessing their peer's work.

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