



Female EFL Pre-Service Teachers' Experiences During Field Teaching Practice at Vocational School

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ABSTRACT

In the context of teacher training, the integration of gender dynamics within the educational setting has received increasing attention, particularly in environments where gender roles are distinctly emphasized. However, there remains a significant gap in the literature concerning the specific challenges and strategies of female EFL pre-service teachers in male-dominated vocational schools, which this study seeks to explore. This qualitative study aims to uncover the experiences of female EFL pre-service teachers during their field teaching practice in a male-dominated vocational school. The data were gathered from the reflections of nine female pre-service teachers. The findings revealed a variety of experiences encountered by the participants. They shared their initial reactions and feelings upon being assigned to teach at the school, the challenges they faced during the teaching practice, the difficulties encountered when interacting with male students, and the strategies they developed to overcome these interaction challenges.

Keywords: *Female EFL pre-service; field teaching practice; vocational school*

INTRODUCTION

Field teaching practice is designed for senior students as a training platform to equip prospective teachers with teaching skills (Cohen, Manion, Morrison, & Wyse, 2010). This program includes direct practical teaching training with students in the classroom. Trent (2010) maintains that teaching practice is a crucial aspect of a teacher education program. During the practicum, pre-service teachers gain relevant classroom experience, translate theory into practice, expand their awareness of goal setting and reflect on teaching and learning philosophies (Gebhard, 2009). Freeman (2001) argues that teacher education is the sum of experiences and activities through which individuals learn to be language teachers. Teaching experience is invaluable for teachers as it significantly contributes to success in education. Teaching is a skilled craft, especially for pre-service teachers who need to develop their professionalism. This aligns with Nurfaidah's (2016, 2017, 2018) study, which found that pre-service teachers, having limited teaching experiences, need to develop their professional identity through greater exposure to reflective teaching practices.



In their teaching experiences, pre-service teachers encounter various problems during the teaching process at school, ranging from interaction and class control to arrangement issues. However, these challenges also make pre-service teachers more vigilant as future educators. Both Dewey (2008) and Vygotsky (2001) viewed experience as a fundamental category for understanding learning and development, serving as the basic analytic unit that encompasses all aspects of the whole. Moreover, female EFL pre-service teachers undertaking field teaching practices at male-dominated vocational schools face unique challenges (van den Hoven, 2017). This research is important because it shows that through reflection on their experiences, pre-service teachers are continually improving in applying theoretical concepts to practice (Turunen & Touvila, 2012). Furthermore, Ismail's (2011) study focused on the experiences of student teachers during their microteaching in a pre-service English teacher education program. This study shows that students were very positive about the impact of microteaching practices on their language skills and on their growing enthusiasm for teaching methods. The results from focus-group interviews also confirmed students' positive attitudes towards microteaching.

In Indonesia, studies on the experiences of EFL pre-service teachers have been conducted with various focuses and objects. One example is the study by Azizah, Nurkamto, and Dradjati (2018), which explores the experiences of pre-service EFL teachers in teaching English. The findings of their study indicate that EFL pre-service teachers need to engage in reflective practice more professionally by using specific tools and receiving training in reflective practices to help them develop professionally as future teachers. Furthermore, Mudra's (2018) study, which focuses on the experiences of pre-service EFL teachers during teaching practicum in rural schools in Indonesia, shows that these teachers face various obstacles, especially in rural schools. The obstacles include difficulties in classroom control, finding learning materials or resources, accessing teaching aids or media, choosing effective teaching methods, addressing learners' English skills, dealing with unstable internet connectivity, motivating learners, selecting appropriate evaluation techniques, and garnering parents' support.

There are many studies about EFL pre-service teachers, but these studies primarily examine and focus on perceptions, general experiences, or learning methods used by EFL pre-service teachers in the classroom during field teaching practice. However, there has been limited exploration into the specific experiences encountered or faced by female EFL pre-service teachers, especially during field teaching practice at male-dominated vocational schools. This study is important because the experiences of female EFL pre-service teachers in teaching are one of the supports for student learning in improving their skills as prospective teachers. Therefore, this study focuses on the experiences of female EFL pre-service teachers' during their field teaching practice. The researchers were interested in discovering and analyzing the experiences of female EFL pre-service teacher who taught English at vocational schools. Furthermore, it is necessary to understand the female EFL pre-service teachers' experiences during field teaching practice so that future teaching and learning processes can be implemented more effectively.



RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research method. Qualitative research starts with assumptions and uses interpretive/theoretical frameworks to explore research problems, focusing on the meanings that individuals or groups attribute to social or human problems (Schwandt, 1994). To investigate the issue, qualitative researchers adopt an emergent approach to inquiry, collecting data in natural settings sensitive to the people and places under study. Data analysis is both inductive and deductive, identifying patterns or themes. The final report or presentation includes participants' voices, the researcher's reflexivity, a detailed description and interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the literature or a call for change (Creswell, 2013). Further, Yin (2003) maintains that qualitative case-study research in education enables researchers to explore individuals or organizations, simple to complex interventions, relationships, communities, or programs. Therefore, this study allowed the researchers to explore the experiences of participants from various perspectives.

The participants were student-teachers from the English Education Department in their fifth semester, who had completed their field teaching practice at a male-dominated vocational school. All nine participants are female. Data were collected using a reflection sheet distributed via Google Forms, with participants given 2-3 days to respond. The first question asked "How did you react when you found out that you were assigned to practice teaching in this school? Why?" to understand participants' initial reactions. The second question "What obstacles did you encounter during your teaching practice at this school? Tell me," aimed to identify challenges faced. The third question inquired about problems interacting with male students in class, seeking to uncover any interaction issues. The final question, "What strategies do you use to deal with interaction problems with your students? Explain," aimed to find learn about the strategies used by participants to address interaction problems.

Data analysis involved coding and categorizing responses from the reflection sheets, which contained four questions related to the research focus. The researchers organized a WhatsApp Group, added all participants, and shared the Google Forms link for data collection. After collecting the data, the researchers began analysis by coding (Saldana, 2015), categorizing, and thematically arranging the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006), from the most to the least dominant responses, then interpreting the findings. Vygotsky's social constructivism (Palincsar, 2012) was used as the theoretical framework to analyze how participants describe their experiences and strategies for dealing with classroom challenges.

RESULT

In the reflection sheet distributed online via Google Forms, participants were asked four questions related to their experiences during field teaching practice. The first question explored participants' reactions upon learning they were assigned to undertake field teaching practice at the school. The second question inquired about the obstacles participants faced while conducting field teaching practice. The third question addressed issues related to interacting with male students in the classroom. Finally, the fourth question inquired the strategies participants employed to overcome challenges encountered with students.



Emotional Responses to Being Assigned to a Male-Dominated Vocational School

In terms of emotional responses, the results indicated that participants had various reactions to their teaching practice assignment at male dominated vocational school. The responses were influenced by each participant's reasons. The range of emotions included fear, shock, nervousness, displeasure/restrain, and calmness/neutrality. Fear and nervousness were predominant upon discovering they were placed in this school, with some participants also experiencing shock. Moreover, a few participants felt relatively calm about the assignment, while others expressed their dislike being placed at the school. The feelings of fear, nervousness, shock, and dislike stemmed from the school being male-dominated and having reputation within the community for misbehaviour, including numerous instances of student brawls outside the school. On the other hand, some participants who felt calm or neutral upon being assigned to the school attributed their reactions to previous experiences there during their initial practicum, which allowed them to become familiar with the school's conditions and adapt to the environment. The following excerpts reveal the participant's reflections:

"When I found that I was assigned to this school for teaching practice, I felt nervous, scared, and confused. This was because I was previously unaware of the conditions or situation at the school. Besides, I did not know and had not seen the character of the students or the teachers/staff. I also doubted my own abilities to deliver or explain material to students in the classroom like a teacher, because I had never undertaken direct teaching practice in schools before." (P1)

"When I found out that I was assigned to practice in this school, I was initially scared and a little shocked. This was because I had previously heard that the students in this school were almost 100% male. I am worried that I might not be able to teach well." (P7)

The participants' statement above reveals that the participants experienced both shock and fear upon learning that they were assigned to practice teaching at the school. This reaction is attributed to the school being dominated by male students and its notoriety within the community for student delinquency. Furthermore, the school has a reputation for frequent brawls involving students.

"For me personally, I feel quite calm because my first practicum learning program (PLP I) was also conducted at this school. At least I am already familiar with the teaching practice environment I will be entering. However, I'm still a bit worried about which class I will be assigned to. If I am placed in a class where the majority of students already know each other, I might feel a bit awkward" (P5)



“At that time, my reaction was normal because I already knew more or less about this school. So, I knew I had to prepare mentally, physically, and ensure I had a loud voice because the students in this school are predominantly male, and patience is required if sometimes they behave badly” (P8)

Based on the participants' statements above, it is evident that some participants are familiar with the school and are making efforts to better prepared for the challenges of teaching there. Despite this preparation, there remains a sense of worry about conducting teaching practices at the school. This concern stems primarily from the fact that the school is dominated by male students, who are perceived as difficult to manage.

Obstacles During Field Teaching Practice

Female pre-service teachers often encountered various obstacles during their teaching practice. The challenges were diverse, ranging from issues in classroom management, such as non-conducive environments, difficulty in maintaining control, to the use of teaching media, implementation of learning methods, and interaction with both students and mentor teachers. Additionally, challenges stemmed from the students' background, including lack of enthusiasm for learning and a deficiency in basic English knowledge. A significant concern reported in the reflections was the difficulty in managing classes, especially with students who were hard to organize or instruct. This issue was particularly pronounced in schools dominated by male students who were described as quite active. As noted by the participants:

"Students who are difficult to manage in the classroom pose a significant challenge. During the teaching and learning process, these students often fail to pay attention to the material being presented and disrupt their peers. As a result, I find myself having to quiet them down and ensure they sit still. Additionally, it becomes necessary to repeat the material I had previously explained " (P2)

Participant 2's statement highlights the complex challenges teachers face with students who are hard to manage in class. These students not only hinder their own learning by not paying attention to lessons but also disrupt their classmates. As a result, the teacher must work hard to maintain classroom order and keep students focused, which includes calming disruptive students and often revisiting lesson material. This situation disrupts the teaching and learning process and demands more from the teacher's time and effort. It emphasizes the importance of having strong classroom management skills to create a learning environment where all students can benefit.

Participants in this study also highlighted several significant barriers to effective teaching, primarily centered around the insufficiency of educational resources and facilities. These challenges are revealed in the following vignettes, where P4 noted the restrictive availability of essential teaching aids and P8 emphasized: the broader issue of inadequate school facilities.



"Another obstacle is the lack of learning media provided by the school, such as LCD projectors, which are only available for use in the Lab room" (P4)

"The school's facilities for teaching, such as LCD projectors, are not available, and resources like printed books for students and some teaching media are inadequate" (P8)

P4 mentions that LCD projectors are only available in lab rooms, which shows not only a shortage of equipment but also limits on where they can be used. This makes it hard to use multimedia in different classroom situations, affecting the ability to provide lively and interactive lessons that could improve students' learning. Meanwhile, P8 expands on this by showing that the problem goes beyond just projectors to include essential teaching resources like printed books, which are also in short supply. This situation makes it difficult to teach effectively and creates a tough environment for students, who may find it hard to get the materials they need for learning.

The next obstacle involves classrooms that are not conducive to learning. This school, which focuses on the Engineering Department, is equipped with numerous practice rooms filled with machinery. Because the study rooms are adjacent to these practice rooms, the noise from the machines adversely affects the learning process. As stated by a participant:

"My obstacle is that the room where I used to teach was less comfortable because the classroom is adjacent to their practice class" (P6)

The next obstacle is the students' lack of basic knowledge in English, such as understanding the simple formula of the present tense, among others. As revealed in their reflections:

"I find it a little difficult to give the learning material in the class where I was assigned because most of the students are very unfamiliar with learning English (Basic English). For example, they don't know the Subject + Predicate + Object formula." (P7)

"The obstacle I experienced was deciding which learning method or technique to use in class so that my students could feel comfortable and happy while learning English. This is because, based on my observation, they dislike learning English due to their inability to understand the meanings of the sentences they read" (P4)

The reflections from P7 and P4 show a significant challenge in teaching English to students with limited foundational knowledge in the language. P7 highlights the difficulty in presenting learning material to students who lack familiarity with basic English concepts, such as the fundamental structure of sentences involving the subject, predicate, and object. This gap in



understanding poses a barrier to grasping more complex language constructs and engaging with the material effectively. In the same vein, P4 addresses related concern, focusing on the pedagogical approach. The participant highlights the struggle in selecting appropriate teaching methods or techniques that would make learning English enjoyable and accessible for students. This dilemma is compounded by the students' aversion to English, rooted in their difficulty with comprehending sentence meanings. This aversion likely stems from their limited exposure to the language and the lack of a strong foundation in basic linguistic principles.

Interactional Experiences with Male Students

Most participants reported experiencing interaction problems with male students in the classroom. However, there were also participants who stated they had not encountered any interaction issues during their teaching practice in schools predominantly attended by male students. The interaction challenges with male students mentioned by the participants included difficulties in managing the classroom. Students often disregarded instructions, contributing to a rowdy and uncontrollable classroom atmosphere. They were sometimes noisy and displayed a lack of participation in the learning process, such as during ongoing class discussions. At times, students did not respond to questions posed by the participants. Moreover, participants encountered situations where fights broke out among students during the learning process. These interaction problems were most prevalent during the participants' first week of teaching practice at the school. The following reveals the participant reflection:

"The problem I have experienced when interacting with male students in class occurs when I ask questions and gave exercises, some of them respond ignorantly and ignore me" (P7)

Participant P7's experience highlights the difficulty in getting male students involved in class activities, especially when asking them questions or giving them exercises. The fact that some students either ignore the questions or respond in a dismissive way shows there is a problem in creating a respectful and effective communication between students and teacher.

Another participant shared a serious problem with student behavior in the classroom. It reveals how disagreements between students can lead to physical fights, especially when a teacher is harassed, as in the following excerpt:

"At that time, two students engaged in a physical altercation in the classroom because one student kept harassing the apprentice teacher in the classroom" (P2)

Furthermore, participants encountered instances in the classroom where fights broke out between students, as stated by P2 during the learning process. This issue with interaction typically arises in the participants' first week practice teaching at the school. According to the participants' reflections, the interactions between students and participants began to improve over time. The following vignette illustrates this issue.



“In the first week I thought I was still having problems interacting with my students because I didn’t really know them yet. However, after teaching in two classes for a few weeks, I started to understand the students’ behavior better, and our communication improved.” (P4)

Participant P4 acknowledged that she experienced difficulties in engaging with students, attributing these challenges to a lack of acquaintance. As time progressed and P4 spent more weeks teaching across two classes, a deeper insight into the students’ behaviors was gained. This growing understanding facilitated improved communication between P4 and the students. This reflection implies that time and patience play a role in building effective teacher-student connections, ultimately leading to a more conducive learning environment.

“In my teaching experience, I’ve noticed that sometimes there are students who do not focus on learning and are lazy. Besides, some students lack proper ethics. However, I have to remain patient and enthusiastic when teaching them, especially male students, as patience is essential due to their varying characters.” (P8)

The reflection from P8 sheds light on the multifaceted challenges encountered in the classroom, specifically pointing out issues of student disengagement and ethical shortcomings. Despite the hurdles, P8 emphasizes the critical role of maintaining patience and enthusiasm in teaching. This approach is deemed particularly vital when dealing with male students, who may exhibit a wide range of personalities and behaviors. This finding implies the need for resilience and adaptability in addressing diverse student needs.

Strategy to Solve Interaction Problems with Students

The participants encountered several problems during their interactions with students. The findings revealed various strategies implemented to engage the students, including getting to know the students’ characteristics, creating a comfortable environment, motivating the students, and acting as mediators to facilitate student interactions. Other strategies involved providing engaging activities, such as warm-ups or icebreakers.

“The strategy I used to overcome this involved getting to know each student’s character, being open with them, and making them comfortable with me. When presenting the material, I ensured that students did not feel tense or overly serious. I designed the material to be more engaging so that they wouldn’t get bored in class. I also incorporated more learning activities, such as discussions with peers and answering questions in front of the class.” (P3)



“I approach the students to get to know them better, so they can feel comfortable during my class.” (P4)

The reflections from P3 and P4 illustrate a common understanding of the importance of building rapport and positive atmosphere in the classroom to enhance learning outcomes. P3’s approach focuses on personalizing interactions by understanding each student’s unique character, fostering openness, and ensuring comfort. This strategy extends to the pedagogical method, where P3 deliberately crafts engaging material and integrates interactive activities like peer discussions and public question answering to maintain interest and reduce stress. In a similar vein, P4 also emphasizes a similar strategy, highlighting the significance of getting to know the students to make them feel at ease during class sessions. Both participants recognize that creating a learning environment where students feel understood and comfortable is key to preventing disengagement and fostering a more productive and enjoyable learning experience. This strategy also resonates in the following vignette:

“I also offer motivation and often remind the students about the importance of attending school and studying diligently, encouraging them to always remember their parents’ efforts and expectations.” (P8)

Participant P8 highlights a proactive approach to fostering student engagement and responsibility towards education. By offering motivation and regular reminders, she aims to instill in students the value of consistent attendance and diligent study habits. The encouragement to remember their parents’ efforts and expectations serves as a powerful motivational tool, linking students’ academic behaviors to familial respect and gratitude.

In terms of strategies employed to address student misbehavior, another participant tries to act as a mediator during fights between students. The following excerpt reveals this approach as P2 describes a method for solving conflicts between students by stepping in to separate them and calm the situation.

“I attempt to separate them and provide advice aimed at improving their behavior.” (P2)

As P2 acknowledged further, this strategy not only resolves the immediate problem but also helps her student grow by making them think about their actions and their effects. In short, P2 uses a practical approach to handle classroom disputes, focusing on solving the problem and teaching students to create a better and more respectful learning space.

The next strategy mentioned by the participants involves providing interesting activities during the learning process. Such activities have been effective in enhancing classroom engagement, thereby encouraging greater student participation as disclosed in the following reflection:



"I approach the students to get to know them better, ensuring they feel comfortable in my class. My approach includes: Before presenting the materials to them, I encourage them to share stories about things they enjoy. Additionally, I provide some fun activities (ice breaking) so that they did not get bored." (P1)

"My strategy is to ask them to share stories first to lighten the mood so they don't feel tense." (P6)

The findings above show that P1 and P6 prioritize creating a comfortable and engaging classroom environment. P1 focuses on building rapport through storytelling and fun activities to prevent boredom, while P6 uses storytelling to reduce tension. Meanwhile, other participants provide interesting learning materials to capture the students' attention during the learning process as revealed in the following reflections:

"I make the materials I provide more interesting to prevent boredom in class and to encourage more learning activities, such as discussions with friends and answering questions in front of the class." (P3)

"My strategy involves providing interesting activities, such as games that include exercises or learning evaluations." (P7)

Participants P3 and P7 share a common goal of enhancing student engagement and combating boredom through the deliberate design of their teaching materials and class activities. P3 emphasizes the importance of making learning materials captivating, with the aim of fostering an active and dynamic classroom environment. This includes promoting peer discussions and interactive question-and-answer sessions to encourage deeper involvement. P7, on the other hand, focuses on integrating games into the curriculum, which serve not only as a means of engagement but also as tools for reinforcing learning and conducting evaluations.

DISCUSSION

This study explores the teaching experience of female EFL students during their teaching practice in schools. Teaching experiences is a crucial factor that supports pre-service teachers in enhancing the quality of their teaching. Through their teaching experiences, pre-service teachers become more acquainted with the teaching and learning atmosphere in real schools. Additionally, these experiences enable pre-service teachers to be more vigilant in anticipating potential classroom occurrences during the teaching process. This study has found that field teaching practices provide hands-on experience in real classrooms, which is often new to EFL pre-service teachers and elicits diverse responses from everyone. EFL pre-service teachers undergo field teaching practices to refine their teaching methodologies and improve the quality of their protocols. This is because teacher effectiveness extends beyond personal characteristics or adhering to specific criteria. It also involves applying teaching practices that are valued and



contribute to the broader community where teaching occurs (Celik, 2013). Consequently, pre-service teachers engage in thorough preparation, including lesson planning and method development, as part of their field teaching practice. Field teaching practice is essential for enhancing the competencies of EFL pre-service teachers. The Field Experience Program includes several preparatory steps to ensure pre-service teachers gain valuable experience and skills. These steps involve a briefing about the program for all pre-service teachers, an opportunity for them to conduct observations of their practice locations, participation in classroom learning through teaching exercises, and finally, an evaluation of the field experience's effectiveness and the achievement of objectives by compiling a report.

This study has found various obstacles, problems and challenges that female pre-service teachers encounter during their field teaching practice. These challenges include managing non-conducive classrooms, difficulties with teaching media, applying learning methods, and interacting with students and the mentor teachers. A previous study by Esthiningkrida and Munir (2019) on ELT challenges in state vocational high schools highlighted difficulties in transferring English knowledge to students, mismatches between student's English proficiency and the curriculum, inadequate language laboratories, and excessive workloads for English teachers. This study found no significant differences in responses to English language teaching challenges among teachers based on their age, education level, or teaching workload, concluding that English teaching faces similar challenges. Conversely, Mudra (2018) focused on pre-service EFL teachers' experiences in rural schools in Indonesia, identifying obstacles such as classroom control, finding learning materials, teaching aids, methods, learners' English skills, language choice, unstable internet connectivity, learner motivation, evaluation techniques, and parental support. In line with Mudra's (2018), this study reveals pre-service EFL teachers' difficulties with classroom management, attributed to noise, learner boredom, off-topic chats, and lack of attention and respect towards the teacher. In similar vein, Apriauny's (2020) study explored EFL teachers' experiences post-teaching practices, showing that pre-service teachers reflect on their journey towards becoming new teachers. It highlights the transformative experience of teaching practicum in the field.

Regarding the factors of obstacles, problems, and challenges in terms of interaction issues, this study reveals the strategies pre-service teachers employ to address these problems. Most strategies involve engaging with students by getting to know their characteristics, creating a comfortable atmosphere, motivating them, and acting as mediators to facilitate interactions. The findings resonance a study conducted by Permatasari, Mulyono and Ferawati (2019), which discusses the contributing factors to teaching anxiety during teaching practicum. Their study shows that pre-service EFL teachers often feel anxious when performing classroom teaching. Identified factors contributing to such anxiety include feelings of incompetence in the classroom, disliking teaching, career uncertainty, inability to answer the students' questions, and negative attitudes. The analysis also highlighted differences between male and female pre-service teachers regarding anxiety over being unable to answer students' questions. Moreover, no significant differences were found in the experiences of teaching at primary, lower secondary, and upper



secondary schools, indicating a variety of experiences faced by pre-service teachers during their field teaching practice at school.

Based on the findings obtained of this present study, participants encountered a range of experiences during the teaching practice. Initially, participants reacted in various ways upon learning they were assigned to teaching practice at a male-dominated vocational school. They also faced multiple challenges, including uncooperative classroom environments, students who were difficult to manage, and inadequate learning resources. Moreover, participants had diverse interaction experiences with male students, often encountering issues like students not following instructions and showing low participation during interactions. To address these challenges, participants employed various strategies, including making efforts to approach and get to know the students better.

CONCLUSION

This study has extensively explored the experiences of female EFL pre-service teachers during their field teaching practice, uncovering the multifaceted challenges they face, from managing classroom dynamics to engaging with male students and utilizing inadequate learning resources. Participants employed a variety of strategies to address these challenges, including creating a welcoming classroom environment, personalizing learning experiences, and fostering interactive and engaging teaching methods. The findings highlight the critical importance of practical teaching experience in preparing EFL pre-service teachers for the complexities of real-world teaching environments. These experiences not only equip them with necessary classroom management skills but also enhance their ability to adapt teaching methods to meet diverse student needs and learning environment. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the need for pre-service training programs to incorporate comprehensive strategies that address classroom management, and the effective use of teaching resources.

Implications of this study extend to teacher education programs, suggesting the integration of moral practical, hands-on training components that stimulate real classroom challenges. This includes providing pre-service teachers with opportunities to engage in problem-solving scenarios, classroom management strategies, and the development of engaging learning materials. Additionally, fostering a reflective practice among pre-service teachers can further enhance their adaptability and effectiveness in diverse teaching contexts. Ultimately, this study urges that teacher education not only focuses on theoretical knowledge but also emphasizes practical skills and emotional intelligence. By equipping future teachers with a comprehensive toolkit to navigate the multifaceted challenges of teaching, teacher educators can enhance the quality of education and support the development of more resilient, adaptable, and effective educators.

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