



## EFL Learners Belief about Vocabulary Learning

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to determine the beliefs of EFL students about vocabulary learning. The data was taken from 20 students of an English Education Study Program at a University. Qualitative data is the design of this study using a reflective journal as instrument. The result of study reveals how the students' beliefs about vocabulary learning are; learners' reactions in vocabulary, learners' belief about difficulties in learning vocabulary, learners' belief of proficiency in vocabulary learning, learners' belief on the benefits of vocabulary learning, learners' belief on strategies in vocabulary learning, learners' belief of perceived confidence used English in communication. These research methods use descriptive data analysis techniques. Furthermore, this study would provide information to readers about the importance of knowing the beliefs of EFL students so that students can improve their skills in learning vocabulary.

**Keywords:** *EFL learners; learner's belief; vocabulary learning.*

### INTRODUCTION

As a foreign language in Indonesia, English has taken an important role in learners' study. It can be found in most of school in Indonesia have taught English at their school. Some of them might be only as local content, but the rest of them have made English as one of the most important lesson because it would be tested as national examination. In another word, English is language that the students need to learn.

Since English becomes substantial language that learners need to use, they must have their own idea about learning English. The first thing that comes to people mind when they talk about language must be "words". Words here are vocabularies. Ghazal (2007) indicates that vocabulary is central to language and is of great significance to language learners. Because of its importance, the learners need to learn vocabulary more. Besides, Ahour and Salamzadeh (2014) also state that vocabulary is basic who people have to learn to make sentence that have meaning, the units of meaning from which larger structures such as sentences, paragraphs and the whole texts are formed. It means that learners should know more about English vocabularies if they want to be able to speak and use English. The more vocabularies they know, the better their ability in English (Shadikah, Fauziati, Supriadi, 2017).

In Indonesian context, learners' belief has been an issue in EFL classroom. Many researchers have conducted research related to learners' beliefs, but the researchers did not find any research on learners' beliefs that specifically focused on vocabulary learning. Such as the research conducted by Ali (2017) which aims to find out learners' beliefs about speaking skills. Then, other researchers conducted research related to learners' belief in English in general, not only investigating one English skill. Such as research conducted by Luluk (2019) where this research focuses on learners' belief in English as a foreign language.

This study by Luluk (2019) shows are the students' self-efficacy and expectations about learning English, learners' perceived value and nature of learning spoken English, learners' beliefs about foreign language aptitude, learners' beliefs in formal structural studies. Regarding vocabulary, this research shows that the most important part of learning a foreign language is learning vocabulary. Vocabulary is related to self-efficacy, so if students had good self-efficacy, it would affect students' vocabulary.

Based on the research above, explore the beliefs of language learners are still needed because it had the potential to offer language teachers important insights to understanding and improving language learning processes, as well as implementing better teaching practices (Dincer, 2017). Then, most researchers only do the research about students' beliefs about language learning in general even though they have different goals. Only a few studies that discuss about the field of learning English specifically. Researcher has not yet found studies that specifically such as student beliefs about vocabulary. Therefore, researcher conduct more significant research in the sense that researchers explain more about students' beliefs about vocabulary learning during the process of learning English from the English Department at University.

This study is to determine the beliefs of EFL students about vocabulary skills in the Indonesian context. It is expected that in this study the researcher can explain or present the results in more detail about students' beliefs about vocabulary skills and can also have a positive impact on students and teachers, because by knowing students' beliefs, teachers can create or design and improve teaching materials that are appropriate to help students become more enthusiastic in learning and improve vocabulary.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study uses a qualitative research design as a data collection method. Qualitative design is intended to understand and interpret the experience of human behavior interaction in a particular situation. Heighham & Croker (2009) stated that qualitative research is focused on finding out how the participants' experiences were in a certain time and context. This research design was adopted to gain or add deeper knowledge of students' belief in vocabulary skills by using a reflective journal to determine beliefs of each participant. This study focuses on to investigate students' belief in vocabulary learning of English department at University. The participants of this study were 20 students at the 2019/2020 academic year, where they had completed the Vocabulary course for second semester. They are between 18 and 19 years of age and each student has different beliefs about learning vocabulary. The researcher chose the students in this class as participants because it was based on their experience in learning vocabulary. Most of the students in this class have a lot of vocabulary and they always apply it in their daily communication, so the researcher sees that the students have good belief in vocabulary. The data collection, first is

researcher need to prepare a reflection. This reflection is related to the research title. Then give it to the respondent and ask the respondent to provide an answer. Then the researcher collected data and analyzed the answers of participants. However, the researcher first explained what was meant by reflection and gave an example of how to answer the reflection so that participants would not experience difficulties. After that, participants gave their reflective answers to the researcher. After all the required data has been collected, the researcher were analyzed all students' answers regarding their beliefs in vocabulary learning.

## RESULTS

This study aims to determine students' beliefs about vocabulary learning. This finding described students' beliefs in vocabulary learning. The results of students' reflections show that; the students like and happy when learning vocabulary because it can help them had a lot of vocabulary to communicate in English. Some students stated that they still did not master the vocabulary well. The students still found it difficult to translate or interpret the English sentences that they read. While, students said that they have mastered English vocabulary well.

Furthermore, most of the students in the reflection stated that the vocabulary would be very useful for their lives in the future because English is an international language. In respect of efforts or solutions for mastering vocabulary, students had an effort to master English vocabulary by watching films/videos in English subtitle and also reading articles or books in English, and then taking notes of new words and using them in daily life. Some students stated that they are very confident with the vocabulary that they use in their daily life. The other students said they are still not confident in the vocabulary that they have. Finally, the results of this study revealed that their vocabulary was very good. The following has provided the results of the research obtained.

In reflection in this study, there are 6 questions related to students' beliefs about vocabulary learning. The researcher classified the answers based on the students' answers in questions given previously. Some of the student answers displayed is representative of the answers of all students in the classification.

### 1. Learners' belief about their felting in vocabulary learning

Students have reasons why they like, fun, and felt happy in learning vocabulary. Students' answer as follow:

"I like learning vocabulary because the method used by lecturers when teaching is very fun".P3.Q1

"It's fun because I can know a lot of vocabulary so I can understand when reading English writing and the way the lecturer is very good at explaining".P2.Q1

"Yes, I like it, and it is fun because I think by learning vocabulary, we can know new vocabulary which can make it easier for us to speak in English." P4.Q1

"Yes, I like learning vocabulary and I think it is fun because from learning vocabulary I can know many new vocabularies, so I can use them in daily conversations and also can increase my vocabulary would be better". P8.Q1

"I like learning vocabulary because it can help me find out the meaning and meaning of words in a sentence and I can write English sentences". P9.Q1

“It's fun because I can know a lot of vocabulary so I can understand when reading and writing English sentences and the way the lecturer is very good at explaining it.” P10. Q1

Based on the students' answer above, students stated that they like and felt happy when learning vocabulary because it could help them to translate the text of language properly like English - Indonesian or Indonesian – English. And some students said that vocabulary learning is fun because the method used by lecturers when teaching is very fun and easy to understand.

## **2. Learners' belief about difficulties in vocabulary learning**

Furthermore, these findings show how difficult students in learning English vocabulary. Based on the students' answers about some difficulties of learning vocabulary, there are several things that made students difficulties in vocabulary learning.

### **a. Easy to learn vocabulary**

There were some students who stated that easy to learn vocabulary as long as they knew the context. Here the display of student answers:

“It's not that difficult as long as we know the context and have a lot of vocabulary.” P2.Q2

“It's not too difficult; it just takes persistence and lots of reading”. P3.Q2

Based on the students' answers above, it was concluded that some students stated that easy to learn vocabulary as long as they know a lot of vocabulary and know the context.

### **b. Difficulty to learn and recall the vocabulary in daily life**

There are several things that make students were quite difficult in vocabulary learning, among which students were quite difficult to remember new vocabulary and did not apply it in everyday life. Here this the representative answers of all students;

“I think it's quite difficult to learn English vocabulary because there are so many vocabulary words in English and it's hard for me to remember all these words when I rarely use them in my daily life.” P4.Q2

“I think learning English vocabulary is quite hard because when I don't use the vocabulary in my daily life, I would forget the vocabulary that I have learned. As a result, my vocabulary does not increase.” P7.Q2

“In my opinion, sometimes it is a bit difficult to learn Vocabulary because there are many foreign words that are difficult to remember.” P1.Q2

From the statement above, the following were the data obtained by the researcher regarding the difficulties of students in vocabulary learning. Some students stated that vocabulary learning is quite difficult. Because they were difficult to remember or recall the vocabulary in their daily life, so their vocabulary not increases.

### **c. It confuses to understand and use the words**

In vocabulary learning, some students stated that quite difficult to understanding and used the words in everyday life. Here this the representative answers of all students;

“It is difficult because they are still not used to using English vocabulary.” P8.Q2

"It's quite difficult. There are several words that have the same usage/meaning which sometimes makes me confused about which one to use and understanding the words". P9.Q2

"Its difficulties to understand of use vocabulary in the sentences and much vocabulary that have the same meaning. It makes me confused as to which one to use". P3.Q2

From the statement above, the following were the data obtained by the researcher regarding the difficulties of students in vocabulary learning. Some students stated that vocabulary learning is quite difficult. Because they were still not understanding of using vocabulary in the sentences and in vocabulary have the same meaning so students sometimes confused to which one to use in their sentences.

#### **d. Difficulty to learn academic and non-academic words**

Other findings, the researcher found 2 answers from students who said that it was very difficult to learn vocabulary, the following are student answers:

"I think it's very difficult to memorize if you've never used it. and also vocabulary is difficult to master because we have to know all academic and non-academic vocabulary or formal and non-formal vocabulary. " P3.Q2

"It's very difficult because we have to know all the vocabulary from formal and non-formal." P10.Q2

It can be said from the student's answer above, the student stated that it is very difficult to learn vocabulary because it is very difficult to remember vocabulary if it is not used every day and the student revealed that it is very difficult because we have to know all vocabulary academic word and non-academic.

### **3. Learners' belief of proficiency in vocabulary learning**

The next finding is related to the extent of students' belief of proficiency in vocabulary. The researcher made two categories of proficiency in vocabulary learning; learners' belief very proficient in vocabulary learning, and learners' belief not very proficient in vocabulary learning.

#### **a. Understanding the meaning of the sentences**

Next, there were students stated they proficiency in vocabulary is very well. Here is students' answer:

"It's quite a lot; I can always understand the meaning of a text or novel in English without looking at a dictionary." P8.Q3

"I mastered it by reading a lot and using it right away." P7.Q3

"In my opinion, I have mastered the vocabulary because I can always understand the content or meaning of a text or novel in English without looking at a dictionary." P1.Q3

#### **b. Easy to use informal words in conversation**

One of students stated that they proficiency in vocabulary is well. Here's students' answer:

"So far, I am quite proficient in using vocabulary for everyday conversation and more in informal vocabulary. Meanwhile, for formal vocabulary and academic words, I have not mastered a lot of vocabulary from that category. P5.Q3

Based on the answers above, it can be concluded that students was proficiency in vocabulary is very well. Students stated that they can used English in

daily conversation although using informal vocabulary, because they have not proficient in formal and academic words is well.

### **c. It cannot help to understand contents in reading**

In learning vocabulary, most of students stated their vocabulary proficiency was still not well to understanding the meaning of the sentences. Students answers as follow:

"In my opinion, my proficiency vocabulary still lacking because when I read an article or other reading, I still find it difficult to understand it".

P1.Q1

"For now, my proficiency in vocabulary is still very lacking because when I read a novel, article, journal, etc. I'm still having trouble understanding the contents."

P2.Q3

"I think I am in category standard. Because sometimes I still don't understand the English sentences I read".

P9. Q3

"I can understand the essence even though I don't know the meaning of word for word in a sentence. However, I get the point".

P10.Q1

"I don't think it's too far and there's still a lot to learn. Because there is still a lot of vocabulary that I don't know and it's still difficult for me to understand English sentences".

P11.Q1

Most of the students' answers above, it can be known from students statement who stated that they still have a little difficulty in understanding the meaning of sentences from a novel, article, or book they read so they are not understanding the meaning or content of the reading.

### **d. Difficulty to memorize the words**

Furthermore, some students stated they can't memorize many vocabularies. Here is students' answer:

"Currently my vocabulary has not improved well sometimes I also forget the vocabulary that I already understand/memorize".

P12.Q3

"So far, there are still many vocabularies that I don't know, because I still don't remember the vocabularies".

P13.Q3

"I don't think it's too far and there's still a lot to learn. Because there is still a lot of vocabulary that I don't know and it's still difficult for me to understand English sentences".

P14.Q3

Some of the students' answers above, it can be known from students' statement who stated that they still have a little difficulty to memorize the vocabulary in English, so they can't understand the sentences.

## **4. Learners' belief on the benefits in vocabulary learning**

In this part provided the information regarding students' beliefs about vocabulary would be useful in their future. Most of the students' answer stated that the vocabulary would be very useful for their future life and stated vocabulary just useful for their life or the answer is neutral. Here dominant comments include:

### **a. Using English as an international language helps to communicate with foreigners**

From the results of student reflection on the benefits of vocabulary it was also found that students argue that English is an international language and can help students in communicating. The students' responses based on the statement are as follow:



"It is very useful because in this era English is an international language. So, to be able to communicate with the outside world we must be able to speak English. And now, companies prefer people who are fluent in English and can communicate well." P6.Q4

"Yes. Because English is an international language and with English we can communicate with foreigners." P2.Q4

Based on the students answer, learning vocabulary is very useful for their lives in the future because English is an international language that can help to communicate with foreigners in the world of work

#### **b. Useful to understand conversations and communicate with foreigners**

In learning vocabulary, most of students argue that learning vocabulary is very useful to understand conversations and can help to communicate with foreigners. Student's answered on student reflections:

"Yes. The more vocabulary I know, the easier it would be for me to speak and understand conversations in English. For me, this is very helpful when I communicate with friends from outside Indonesia." P3.Q4

"Yes, because with vocabulary we can talk or communicate with foreign people." P5.Q4

"Yes, I think learning English vocabulary would be useful for my life in the future. This is because when I have a lot of vocabulary, then I can use it to communicate using English well." P6.Q4

"I think it would be useful for my life in the future. This is because by studying English vocabulary well, it would be easier for us in the future to speak in English." P7.Q4

"Of course, because by having a lot of vocabulary, our choice of words would be more and more precise in speaking." P8.Q4

"Yes, of course. Because I God would become a teacher in the future, of course, I have to have a lot of vocabulary so that I can talk/communicate with my students or other people who are proficient in English." P4.Q4

Based on the students' answers above, learning vocabulary very useful to help students to communicate with other people or foreigners and another student said that if they were to become English teachers, they have to learn a lot of vocabulary. So, they could communicate with students and can teach speak in English for their students in the future.

#### **c. They cannot recall the vocabulary**

Meanwhile, there were some students stated just useful or the answer is neutral. They did not think that learning vocabulary would be useful for future life and did not give a clearer reason. One of them argued:

"Maybe, because not all the vocabulary we learn would forever be remembered. Sometimes we forget." P9.Q4

"Maybe, because we don't use English every day, we only use communication with foreigners we meet, so we can't remember all the vocabulary." P10.Q4

So, it can be concluded that vocabulary learning for other students said it was only useful because they could not remember all the vocabulary sometimes, they forgot and they thought that in communicating they did not use English every

day. In this case the researcher did not find student answers that strengthen the argument.

### **5. Learners' belief on strategy used in vocabulary learning**

From reflection questions about the strategy made by students to develop their vocabulary, the researcher found six strategy that each of them did to develop their vocabulary skills were listening, watching, reading, writing, memorizing, and practicing.

#### **a. They used reading, watching, writing, listening and practice strategy**

In vocabulary learning, it was found most of students used three strategies to develop their vocabulary. The students' responded were as follows:

"By reading articles in English, watching movies/videos like Ted Talk on the YouTube app and writing every new vocabulary that I don't know the meaning of on paper and making each example sentence on each vocabulary". P1.Q5

"The effort I make to develop my English vocabulary is by writing every new word I find when I read or watch movies and try to use this vocabulary in everyday life so that my vocabulary continues to grow and I can communicate well in English using the vocabulary". P7.Q5

"I read more often. While reading, I can see firsthand how the words are written and can see the changes". P8.Q5

"To develop my English vocabulary by reading novels or articles in English, if there is a word that I don't know the meaning of then I would look up the meaning of the word in the dictionary and make sentences with that word". P9.Q5

"I always repeat words or practice what I see either on YouTube or TV." P4.Q5

"The effort I make to develop my vocabulary is by writing new vocabulary that I find when I read or watch English films, and then use the vocabulary in everyday life". P10.Q5

"Especially listening to songs in English if there is a new word then we open the dictionary to find out". P11.Q5

"By listening to a lot of audio, watching, and reading books in English." P12.Q5

From the students' reflection above, most of students thought those strategies could be support them to Master English vocabulary. They choose five ways to develop their vocabulary; reading, watching, writing, and practice. Learners' beliefs in this way can improve their vocabulary quickly.

#### **b. They used memorizing strategy**

Meanwhile, some of students stated that with memorizing strategy can be develop their vocabulary. Students' answer was as follow;

"By memorizing or learning from those that are easy to memorize." P13.Q5

"I memorize the words that I get or learn from that are easy to memorize." P14.Q5

"I need to read a lot, watch English and then directly apply it to everyday life in speaking so that it is easy to remember." P15.Q5



From the students' reflection above, most of students thought those strategies could be support them to Master English vocabulary. They choose memorize strategy to develop they vocabulary.

## **6. Learners' belief of perceived confidence used English in communication**

The last finding described their confidence in using English in daily conversation. Most of the students stated that they were more confident with their use of English in daily conversation than the other students stated that they're not confidence used English in communication.

### **a. Confidence to used English in communication**

Most of the students stated that they were more confident with their use of English in daily conversation than the other students stated that their not confidence used English in communication the previous year. Students already have a good vocabulary so they were more confident when they communicated by using English.

From the statement above, the following data were obtained by the researcher on the students' confidence in using English in daily conversation were most of students stated that they were very confident in using English in their daily life. Some of the student answers displayed was representative of all student answers in the classification:

“For now, I am confident when using English vocabulary in daily conversation compared to previous years”.P5.Q6

“I am confident if I know the vocabulary then I would use it, otherwise I would not be confident.” P2.Q6

“Sometimes I felt confident and I don't. Depending on the accuracy of the vocabulary that I think is true, half true, or not true.” P6.Q6

Both of his classmates also stated:

“Yes, because I felt I can use English well because I have a good vocabulary.” P7.Q6

"Yes. I don't feel too nervous when conversing with everyday vocabulary because I felt quite familiar with the vocabulary”. P8.Q6

### **b. It not confidence to English in communication**

Furthermore, there were some students who stated that they were not confident in their use of English. The following were display of student answers:

“Honestly, I am not confident enough, because there are still many shortcomings. P13.Q6

"I'm not confident and I'm afraid to use it wrong in certain sentences". P4.Q6

It can be concluded that at this time, there were still some students who were less confident with the vocabulary they have to use in daily conversation and they are still afraid if the context was wrong in using English sentences.

## **DISCUSSION**

This part presented the discussion from the research findings. This study analyzed students' beliefs regarding their vocabulary learning. At the beginning, the result of this study indicated that through vocabulary learning, students felt easy to communicate in English because they have mastered several vocabularies. It was similar with the result of the studies done by (Simon & Taverniers, 2011) who explained that learners considered vocabulary to be significantly more important for efficient communication than pronunciation or grammar and reported that, in

general, vocabulary errors are significantly more likely to lead to communication breakdown than errors in the other two components.

Based on the other result that presented, learning vocabulary was difficult for students because students find it difficult to remember new vocabularies that they got. Additionally, students also find it difficult to use vocabularies in their sentences because they thought that several vocabularies should be used in appropriate context. The results of this study was in line with the previous study that has been carried out which explains the difficulties when learning vocabulary due to the lack of vocabulary possessed by students, difficulties in spelling new words, using new words correctly, guessing the meaning from the context (Afzal, 2019).

Furthermore, this study also shows that there are students who not difficult when learning vocabulary as long as they have a lot of vocabulary and know the context of their use. In addition, there are also students who find it very difficult to learn vocabulary because they think that it is very difficult to remember vocabulary if it is not used daily. Reflection result also showed that the majority of students had not proficient the vocabularies understanding because they still had a little vocabulary. While other students delivered the opposite thing that they have mastered vocabularies understanding properly because they had a lot of vocabulary. As a result, when they read an English text they have understood what the meaning of the text is. The results of this study was in line with the previous study that has been carried out by Mizumoto's study (2013) who stated that vocabulary is related to self-efficacy, as higher self-efficacy would lead to more knowledge of vocabulary. Second language learners are often conscious of the extent to which limitations in their vocabulary knowledge hamper their ability to communicate successfully in the target language which gives vocabulary learning a salience for learners that may be lacking in the acquisition of other features of the language (Read, 2004).

Based on this study the researcher also found about learners' belief on the benefits of vocabulary learning, student's answers, most of them stated that learning English vocabulary would be useful for their lives because it could help them to communicate with foreigners when working in a company. Other students also explained that mastering the understanding of English vocabulary could help students as a candidate of teacher to teach the use of English vocabulary appropriately. Meanwhile, there are some students who are still confused whether vocabulary can be useful for their future life, because they say it is only useful because they can't remember all the vocabulary sometimes they forget if they don't use the word in daily communication, but the researcher can't find the reason students who are clear about it.

In addition, there also some strategy made by students to develop their vocabulary are as follow; the researcher found some important points to develop their vocabulary skills, which were listening, watching, reading, writing, memorizing, and practicing. Those skills have the same goal which is to increase their vocabulary skills. As well as from the results of student reflection, it can be seen that most of students in an effort to develop their ability in English are more likely to do watching activities. While there were few students choose listening activities. It because each student has their own way of learning that they think is suitable for them.

This research finding was also in line with (Shadikah & Fauziati & Supriyadi, 2017) that there were six strategies applied by students in learning vocabulary, namely guessing strategies, dictionary strategies, note-taking strategies,

exercises, memorization, activation strategies. It also corresponded by Hadi & Guo (2020) stated among the subcategories of cognitive strategies, contextual guessing, dictionary strategies and note-taking strategies were the most frequently used strategies, while activation was the least frequently used strategies. While some researchers have investigated about strategies in vocabulary, the research by Hadi & Guo (2020) stated among the subcategories of cognitive strategies, contextual guessing, dictionary strategies and note-taking strategies were the most frequently used strategies, while activation was the least frequently used strategies. Also (Jones, 1995; Bores & Lindstromberg, 2008; Folse, 2004) even that what learners need to do in order to learn a language is to make a working extensive vocabulary without which they would achieve less than their potentials and may not try to use language learning opportunities which are around them such as talking to native speakers, watching English programs and etc.

With regards their confidence in using English in daily life. Most of the students said that they were more confident when using English in daily conversation compared to the previous year. Because, student's belief already have a good vocabulary so that they can communicate or have conversations in everyday life with friends or other people using English. Same with the result, study of Su (2010) which states that most of the participants predominantly that their belief in vocabulary learning was motivated by its importance in passing tests. However, they also showed confidence in their ability to learn vocabulary. To compare, their opinion on the interest in vocabulary learning (interest) was still on the positive side, but the positive tendency was very weak, near neutral. On the other hand, there are some students who have belief in vocabulary is still small and they are afraid of making mistakes in using vocabulary that is not in the context of the sentences they would use in their daily conversations. So, the students are not confident to communicate in English. On the other hand, there are still some students who are less confident when speaking in English because they are still afraid of the context of using English vocabulary.

## CONCLUSION

Learners' belief reaction in vocabulary learning students showed are very happy and enjoy learning vocabulary because they can have vocabulary, so they can communicate using English and can translate sentences or texts in English. However, some students still find it quite difficult, such as remembering new vocabulary and still not understanding academic and non-academic vocabulary, and then there are other student's beliefs that the use of vocabulary would be wrong if it is not in the context. Some students' beliefs that vocabularies are not difficult as long as they had a lot of vocabulary and know how to apply it. In addition to difficulties, as many as 15 student's belief that their proficiency of vocabulary is not having mastered it because sometimes it was still difficult to understand the meaning of a reading or text. Next, regarding the benefits of vocabulary, students' beliefs that vocabulary learning would be useful in their future lives because it can help them in communicating with foreigners in the world of work. In the aspect of vocabulary learning strategies, students' belief more in watching and reading activities as their vocabulary development. This is because each student has a way of learning that they think is suitable for them. Therefore, the way or strategy of each student in developing their English skills is different. Furthermore, learners' belief is very confident in their English so that they are confident when using or carrying out daily conversations using English.

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