

Social-Emotional Learning in Teacher Education Programs in Nigeria; the Role of Teachers

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Abstract: *This study examined social-emotional learning in teacher education programs in Nigeria; the role of teachers. The study's focus was on inclusive education. Social Emotional Learning is the acquisition of core competencies including one's ability to recognise one's own emotions, set and achieve goals, recognise the emotions and perspectives of others, constructively, manage interpersonal situations including problem-solving and conflict resolution and maintain positive relationship with others. Data revealed that teachers showed willingness to infuse SEL in their day to day class teaching. Although statistical difference was observed between male and female teachers in the extent to which they are comfortable to use SEL. Teachers reported that participatory teaching and feedback are important topics that need priority attention in schools. Most of the students with disabilities were those with visual impairment and physical/motor disability.*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this article we seek to provide the Definition of Social Emotional Learning, where we aim to provide you with a simple and concise understanding of this essential educational concept. In today's fast-paced and interconnected world, academic achievement alone is no longer sufficient to prepare students for success in life (Rogers, 2013).

Recognizing the significance of nurturing students' emotional and social development, educators and experts have emphasized the integration of social emotional learning into the curriculum. In this article, we will break down the components that make up the Definition of Social Emotional Learning, explore its key aspects, highlight the benefits of implementing an SEL curriculum, and provide practical strategies for incorporating SEL into educational settings (Tidmarsh and Volkmar, 2015).

1.1 Understanding Social Emotional Learning: Defining the Concept Social Emotional Learning

Researchers are unanimous about social and emotional learning (SEL) and they have argued that it has positive impact on students in schools (Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015; Jones *et al*, 2017). They suggested five (5) key competencies of SEL namely; self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making. Working on a Scan project of Reach the Students, Teach the Teachers, Kimberly, Kitil, Hanson-Peterson (2017) reported that as a new area of education, teachers lack appropriate skills on how to impart SEL skills to their students. As such proffered a number of recommendations for the inclusion of SEL education in teacher preparatory curriculum. There is growing evidence of positive relationship among SEL, academic performance, and prosocial behaviours. For instance, Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor & Schellinger (2011) reported a study from Meta-

analysis, 270, 034 kindergartens through high school students. It showed that SEL participants demonstrated significant improvement in social and emotional skills, attitudes, behaviours and academic performance. The teachers were found to be knowledgeable in the use of SEL programmes in these schools.

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is a critical educational approach that focuses on nurturing students' emotional intelligence, interpersonal skills, and self-awareness. It aims to equip individuals with the necessary tools to navigate their emotions, establish healthy relationships, and make responsible decisions. At its core, SEL recognizes that emotional well-being is a fundamental component of overall academic and personal success (Wolfensberger, 2017).

1.2 Domains Social Emotional Learning

The five domains of SEL are explained by Weissberg & Domitrovich (2015) as follows:

- a. Competencies in the self-awareness domain involves understanding one's emotions, personal goals and values. In this regard, one's strength and limitations are measured.
- b. Self-management domain requires skills and attitudes that facilitate the ability to regulate emotions and behaviours. This includes the ability to delay gratification, manage stress, control impulses, persevere through challenges in order to achieve personal and educational goals (Wolfensberger, 2017).
- c. Social awareness domain involves the ability to take the perspective of those with different backgrounds or cultures and to empathize and feel compassion. It also involves understanding social norms for behaviour and recognizing family, school and community resources and supports
- d. Relationship skills provide children with the tools they need to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships, and to act in accordance with social norms.

Competencies in this domain involves communicating clearly listening actively, cooperating, resisting inappropriate social pressure, negotiating conflict constructively, and seeking help when it is needed.

- e. Responsible decision making domain requires the knowledge, skills and attitudes need to make constructive choices about personal behaviour and social interactions across diverse settings. Competencies in this domain requires the ability to consider ethical standards, safety concerns, accurate behavioural norms for risky behaviours, to make realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and to take the health and well-being of self and others into consideration (Wolfensberger, 2017).

The definition of Social Emotional Learning encompasses a range of skills and competencies that contribute to the holistic development of students. These skills include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Let's explore each of these components in detail (Weissberg *et al.*, 2015).

a. Self-awareness

This involves recognizing and understanding one's emotions, strengths, and weaknesses. It includes developing a sense of identity and being mindful of one's thoughts and feelings.

b. Self-management

Referring to the ability to regulate and control one's emotions, self-management focuses on impulse control, stress management, and goal setting. It teaches students how to effectively manage conflicts, adapt to change, and persevere in the face of challenges.

c. Social awareness

This component emphasizes empathy and perspective-taking. It involves understanding and appreciating the feelings and experiences of others, as well as cultivating a sense of respect and inclusivity.

d. Relationship skills

Developing healthy and positive relationships is crucial for social emotional growth. This skill set encompasses effective communication, active listening, cooperation, and collaboration. It promotes teamwork, conflict resolution, and the ability to build and maintain meaningful connections with others (Tidmarsh and Volkmar, 2015).

e. Responsible decision-making

Making informed and ethical choices is a vital aspect of SEL. It involves considering the consequences of actions, problem-solving, and evaluating potential solutions in various situations. By integrating SEL into educational settings, students not only enhance their emotional intelligence but also develop vital life skills that support their overall well-being. SEL programs create nurturing environments where students feel valued, safe, and supported. They encourage positive behavior, promote a sense of belonging, and empower students to become active participants in their own learning journey (Tidmarsh and Volkmar, 2015).

Social Emotional Learning is a comprehensive concept that goes beyond traditional academic education. It encompasses a set of skills and competencies that enable individuals to navigate their emotions, develop strong relationships, and make responsible choices. By understanding and implementing SEL principles, educators can create empowering environments that foster the social and emotional growth of students, preparing them for success in both their academic and personal lives (Tidmarsh and Volkmar, 2015).

2.0 The Benefits of Implementing a Social Emotional Learning Curriculum

Implementing a Social Emotional Learning (SEL) curriculum in educational settings brings forth a wide range of benefits for students, educators, and the overall school community. This comprehensive approach to education goes beyond traditional academics and focuses on nurturing students' emotional well-being, social skills, and character development. Let's explore some of the key benefits of incorporating SEL into the curriculum (Wolfberg and Schuler, 2019).

a. Academic Success and Emotional Well-being

Research has consistently shown a strong correlation between social emotional skills and academic performance. When students develop self-awareness, self-regulation, and problem-solving abilities, they are better equipped to manage stress, stay focused, and engage in the learning process. SEL helps create a positive and supportive classroom environment, reducing anxiety and enhancing overall emotional well-being, which in turn leads to improved academic outcomes (Wolfberg and Schuler, 2019).

b. Nurturing Essential Life Skills

Social emotional learning equips students with crucial life skills that extend far beyond the classroom. By fostering self-awareness, empathy, communication, and conflict resolution skills, SEL prepares students for success in various aspects of their lives, including personal relationships, career development, and civic engagement. These skills promote resilience, adaptability, and a sense of responsibility, empowering students to navigate challenges and contribute positively to society.

c. Fostering Positive Relationships and Inclusivity

SEL emphasizes the importance of healthy relationships and social connections. Through collaborative activities, teamwork, and communication exercises, students learn to build and maintain positive relationships with their peers, teachers, and the wider community. SEL fosters inclusivity by promoting respect, empathy, and appreciation for diversity, creating an environment where all students feel valued and supported (Wolfensberger, 2017).

d. Improved Classroom Climate and Behavior

Incorporating SEL into the curriculum positively impacts the overall classroom climate. SEL practices help establish a safe and supportive learning environment, where students feel comfortable expressing themselves, taking risks, and learning from their mistakes (Wolfensberger, 2017). By developing self-management skills and responsible decision-making abilities, students are more likely to exhibit pro-social behaviors, reducing instances of bullying, aggression, and disciplinary issues.

By implementing a Social Emotional Learning curriculum, schools create a holistic educational experience that addresses the social, emotional, and academic needs of students. Through the cultivation of crucial life skills, promotion of positive relationships, and enhancement of classroom climate, SEL empowers students to thrive academically, emotionally, and socially. Moreover, the benefits of SEL extend beyond the school years, preparing students to become compassionate and responsible individuals in their personal and professional lives.

2.1 How to Integrate Social Emotional Learning in Educational Settings

Integrating Social Emotional Learning (SEL) into educational settings requires a thoughtful and strategic approach that involves collaboration among educators, administrators, and other stakeholders. By following key principles and implementing effective strategies, schools can create an environment that supports the development of social emotional skills in students. Here are some practical ways to integrate SEL into educational settings:

2.2 Incorporate SEL into the Curriculum

Embedding SEL into the academic curriculum ensures that it receives dedicated time and attention. Identify opportunities to infuse SEL concepts and activities across different subjects and grade levels. For example, integrate discussions on emotions and empathy in language arts or incorporate cooperative learning projects that promote teamwork and communication skills.

a. Provide Professional Development

Offer professional development opportunities for educators to deepen their understanding of SEL and develop effective instructional strategies. Training sessions can focus on topics such as creating a positive classroom climate, incorporating SEL practices into daily routines, and implementing effective SEL assessment techniques. By empowering educators with the necessary knowledge and skills, they can effectively integrate SEL into their teaching practices (Wanless, S. and Domitrovich, 2015)

b. Foster a Positive School Climate

A positive and supportive school climate is essential for the successful integration of SEL. Establish clear behavioral expectations and create opportunities for students to participate in the decision-making process. Encourage inclusive practices, promote respectful communication, and celebrate diversity within the school community. By nurturing a safe and inclusive environment, students feel valued and are more receptive to SEL practices (Suomi *et al*, 2013).

c. Build Partnerships with Families and the Community

Engage families and the broader community in supporting SEL initiatives. Share resources, provide workshops, and encourage parents to reinforce SEL concepts at home. Collaborate with community organizations and leverage their expertise to provide additional support for students' social emotional development. When families and the community are involved, SEL becomes a shared responsibility and reinforces the skills taught at school.

d. Assess and Monitor Progress

Regularly assess students' social emotional skills to monitor their progress and adjust instructional strategies accordingly. Use a mix of qualitative and quantitative assessments, such as self-assessments, surveys, and behavior observations, to gather comprehensive data on students' social emotional competencies. This information can guide targeted interventions and help track the impact of SEL integration (Shakespeare, 2016).

Integrating SEL into educational settings requires a comprehensive and systemic approach. By incorporating SEL into the curriculum, providing professional development, fostering a positive school climate, building partnerships, and assessing progress, schools can create an environment that promotes the social emotional well-being and success of all students. Ultimately, integrating SEL enhances the overall educational experience, equipping students with the necessary skills to thrive academically, emotionally, and socially.

3.0 SEL Theory and Development

Prior to the development of SEL principles, it was common for pedagogical theorists to posit that reason and emotion were two separate processes, with reason being necessary to control emotion. Theorists are now finding that this is not the case and that the two processes are necessarily and inextricably intertwined. Fostering positive emotional development, therefore, has wide-ranging benefits for learning and reasoning skills (Rogers, 2013).

SEL has been developing as a theory for many years, with elements of social and emotional learning being introduced to the pedagogical discourse in the early 20th century. However, it was not until 1994 that the theory took shape in its current form. Since that time, schools have been

gradually implementing elements of social-emotional development. In the last few years, SEL has really taken off: a recent survey of K-12 school districts in the US found that nearly 90% of districts have already invested in SEL educational tools or are planning to do so. As such, it is very likely that your children's or students' school districts already have some of the resources you will need to effectively implement SEL principles into your classroom or home life (Metts, 2004).

3.1 Elements of SEL

The theory consists of five major principles that guide children's ability to emotionally self-regulate and grow:

Self-awareness: Through SEL, students become aware of their own emotions. They develop stronger vocabularies for describing their feelings, and they learn to pinpoint what triggers anger and frustration for them. With self-awareness, they learn to identify emotions through bodily responses, and they become more aware of their strengths and weaknesses (Cigman, 2017).

Self-management: SEL also helps students regulate, or self-manage, themselves more effectively. These techniques include calming down when they feel frustrated, negotiating conflicts and strong feelings appropriately, and managing their behaviors and interactions with others.

Social awareness: Via SEL instruction, students become more empathetic of other people and their perspectives. Students learn more about reading social cues and the overall importance of relating sensibly and thoughtfully to others.

Relationship skills: SEL helps students develop skills for building and maintaining friendships and collaborative working relationships.

Responsible decision-making: SEL helps students practice ethical and constructive decision-making to take responsibility for their academic and social worlds.

3.1 Teacher Experiences of SEL

Accordingly, CASEL has suggested that over 83% of teachers in the US are in need of training in SEL (SchomenReichl & Zakrzewski, 2014). It is evident that SEL has not gained grounds in most developing countries and the need for its inclusion. There are many factors that might prevent teachers from caring out SEL programmes in schools. Researches have shown significant impact of teachers experiences in the use of SEL programmes in schools. In one of such studies, 935 teachers were surveyed. Confirmatory factor analysis was done that yielded positive, three reliable scales pertaining to teachers' comfort, commitment and school culture support for the use of SEL in schools (Brackett, Rivers, Elbertson & Peter, 2012).

In a similar study, Ee and Quek (2013) found that teachers' perception for infusing SEL in the school curriculum is needful. To this end there seem to be readiness to implement SEL in schools in most countries in order to maximise quality Wanless & Domitrovich (2015) noted. One of the problems that teachers are likely to face in the implementation of the SEL in schools has to do with policy, and school curricula. However, research supports the importance of policies and intervention to infuse SEL in school curricula (Badiyyah, Garner & Owen (2013). This shows that the teachers pedagogy curricula should be all encompassing, besides the subject content of the curricula there is need to infuse the teaching of SEL to children and students in schools. For example, Youngblood (2015) reported four major findings showing that teachers perceived they had contextual support for implementation of SEL, although they encountered challenges in implementing the SEL, but importantly, they reported positive changes in their roles as teachers and above all there was increase awareness of the value of building student-teacher relationship. Tom (2012) reported a study involving 302 teachers in

which teacher-student relationships, emotional regulation, social awareness and interpersonal relationships were found to have positive correlation.

Research has shown that teachers' attitude towards implementing SEL, is dependent on their reaction to the idea of change which could determine if the programme was successful, and if it added to the education of the child as a whole (Holmes, 2017). This is possible because the teachers spend too much time in school with the students and ensure that students' needs are met. It is important, Reynolds (2016) has argued that knowledge and attitude of teachers towards SEL standards can influence the quality of social and emotional learning of students.

4.0 Benefits of SEL

What are the benefits of emotional development that are making this theory so popular among schools and parents? According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), SEL's advantages can be divided into four categories: benefits to students, to schools and teachers, to families, and even to communities. The advantages of improved social-emotional learning are clear in both the short term and the long term, and they may even be indicative of a broader cultural shift toward improved emotional development for everyone.

For Students

By far the most significant beneficiaries of the SEL system are students themselves. After all, children and teenagers spend a great deal of time in a school environment during the most formative years of their lives (Degener, 2016). Having access to an educational system that prioritizes their emotional and social growth and wellbeing is highly advantageous for many reasons. Some of the advantages of SEL that students experience include:

- **Better academic performance:** Students whose classrooms practice SEL techniques have notably better academic performance than their peers, according to surveys by CASEL.
- **Improved behavior:** Fewer behavioral problems are reported in classrooms that use SEL, with students having improved abilities to manage their own emotions and resolve conflicts productively. Students may also have an easier time understanding social cues when they have been exposed to SEL techniques.
- **Better problem-solving skills:** Improved self-esteem and the use of the SAFE elements give students the ability to solve problems creatively and effectively.
- **Improved self-understanding:** Students who learn in environments that prioritize social-emotional learning have a better ability to understand what they are feeling and to pinpoint and address their unique needs.
- **Improved emotional resilience and mental health:** Classrooms that implement SEL techniques have students who report lower rates of depression and anxiety and an improved ability to understand and process negative emotions as they arise.
- **Long-term benefits:** The effects of SEL do not seem to fade over time, with long-term studies finding that SEL provides a substantial return on investment and life-long emotional skills that help students as they grow.
- **Better economic mobility:** Links have even been found between SEL and a reduced likelihood of students needing to access public housing or developing a criminal record.

SEL is clearly designed primarily to benefit students, but classrooms, schools, and teachers can be helped by the system as well.

For Schools

Passing the Praxis and becoming a teacher is a challenging process that requires learning about many different pedagogical systems and how to implement them in classes. Understanding how SEL can help not only students but also teachers and schools is important, both for brand new teachers and for seasoned educators. Positive attributes of SEL for schools include:

- **Fewer class disruptions:** Because SEL can improve students' behavior, it can also lead to fewer disruptions during class time. For teachers, this means an easier and smoother teaching experience with more time spent on learning new material and less time spent on classroom discipline and conflict resolution.
- **Healthier classroom environments:** Students with good social-emotional understanding may be better at understanding instructions, making friends, and creating a positive bond with their teachers. As teachers know, the energy that students bring to a classroom can make all the difference when it comes to teaching (Jimenez and Graf, 2018).
- **Better school-wide cohesion:** If many or all classrooms in a school are implementing SEL, teachers and administrators may notice improved interactions between students of all ages, resulting in less stress for adults in the school.
- **Improvements in adult SEL:** Teaching SEL to children can also allow teachers to learn to manage their own emotions better. Not everyone grew up emphasizing social and emotional learning; the practice is relatively new. It is not only children who can benefit from good conflict resolution and emotion regulation skills (Hastings and Oakford, 2018).
- **Diversification of learning:** A class with students who have good SEL might have time for more kinds of learning. Teachers might have the opportunity to work on more challenging and interesting projects with their students, resulting in a richer educational environment for everyone.

All of these elements of SEL can make the school environment a more vibrant, interconnected, and positive space for students and adults alike.

For Families

When children and teenagers learn about social and emotional development, their learning can also help their families. Whether this learning takes place in the classroom, at home, or both, families can experience the following improvements in their home life:

- **Better communication:** When children and other family members learn about social and emotional stability and development, they may have the opportunity to put better systems of communication in place. This can help family members learn about each other's interests and boundaries.
- **Meeting children's needs:** As children grow, their needs will change. Children who are more in touch with their emotions and needs may be better at communicating those needs to parents and other family members, reducing the chances of misunderstanding.

- **Fewer conflicts:** As with teachers, not everyone in older generations has had the opportunity to practice SEL in their own school years. When children's social-emotional learning improves, adults have the opportunity to learn from them and this can result in fewer conflicts at home.
- **Respect and understanding:** Respecting one another's boundaries and needs, and understanding one another, can be positive results of SEL in family life.
- **Emotional maturity:** Children with good SEL may have better emotional maturity than their peers, which can create long-lasting and positive family bonds as children grow up.

According to CASEL, many parents believe that SEL is just as important in their children's lives as academic learning is, and they may well be right given the improvements that children and families can see as a result of SEL.

For Communities

SEL is a broad-reaching set of skills that can help children and their communities in the following ways:

- **Improved community engagement:** One of the main goals of SEL is to improve community engagement for children and, ultimately, for everyone. Creating strong community bonds with good conflict resolution and positive emotional connections can lead to all kinds of advantages in community life.
- **Economic and social mobility:** As mentioned above, those who learn social and emotional skills from a young age are more likely than their peers to improve their economic and social well-being throughout their lives. This can also have a ripple effect that benefits their families and communities.
- **Reduction in crime and poverty:** While poverty and crime are complex socio-economic issues, there is evidence that children who have better emotional regulation and conflict resolution skills are less likely to commit crimes and are less likely to experience lifelong poverty, ultimately helping their community as well as themselves.

These are just some of the ways that SEL can help people better understand and engage with their own emotions and the needs and experiences of others around them.

How to Teach Social-Emotional Learning

It is clear that SEL is beneficial, but how are teachers meant to implement SEL curriculum and social-emotional learning activities on a daily basis? In addition to the other skills and

qualifications needed to become a teacher, SEL requires a few thoughtful additions to classroom practice. Many of these tips can be implemented with few external resources and can be practiced on a daily basis in classrooms with students of all ages (Ee and Cheng, 2013).

Check In

A check-in is a brief activity at the start of each school day that helps students ground themselves and prepare to engage with the tasks ahead. Check-ins can take many different forms as long as they allow students to connect with their emotional states and with each other and get ready to learn. Some check-in activities can include:

- Listening to a piece of music in silence to start the day and provide a moment of reflection
- Allowing students to say something brief about their mental states, like something they are looking forward to for the day
- Explaining the day's schedule to students so they know what is coming, allowing time for questions
- A brief, non-competitive activity that allows students to brainstorm or collaborate

Check-ins help regulate emotions and help students start off a new day on the right foot with a clear head and a positive attitude.

Foster Student Communication

One important aspect of SEL is teaching students how to communicate with and rely on one another. Teachers should encourage students to ask each other for help, discuss possible solutions to academic problems, and work collaboratively. Through these kinds of activities, students can learn to value the contributions and various skills of group members rather than approaching all academic tasks from an individualistic perspective. Teaching students when these kinds of collaborations are appropriate and how work can be enriched by various perspectives is a kind of social learning.

How to Implement Social-Emotional Learning at Home

SEL resources are abundant for school environments, but how can parents implement SEL at home? Fortunately, just as in-class SEL requires few external resources, parents and families can encourage each other and improve social and emotional understanding with a few simple activities and practices. These practices can also be helpful for parents who homeschool their children and who need to find ways of bridging the gap between SEL during school hours and SEL during free time.

a. Eat Together

Eating a meal together as often as possible is a great way for everyone in a family to emotionally self-regulate, catch up, and connect. Every member of a family can benefit from this, and the effects may be compounded if everyone cooks together, too. Doing this once a day is ideal, but even once a week can be a big help depending on everyone's schedules. Like many elements of SEL, eating together is an intentional action that grounds people in the present moment and makes them feel connected to each other and to themselves. Making food for each other is an explicit and universal form of care that can also strengthen familial bonds.

b. Encourage Active Listening

Active listening is a practice that ties in well with SEL. It involves paying close attention to someone when they are speaking and offering effective and compassionate responses, particularly during difficult conversations. Using not just kid-friendly active listening strategies but also active listening strategies as adults can reduce conflict, improve trust, and help everyone in the family understand one another better. Active listening prioritizes and provides legitimacy for people's emotions and encourages those closest to them to try and understand their perspectives. This is a great option for parents to participate in their children's education in a productive way.

Find Productive Ways to Communicate

In addition to active listening, families can practice SEL by finding productive ways to communicate, especially about difficult topics. For some people, this might mean giving everyone a turn to speak without interruption. For others, it might mean avoiding difficult conversations when there is a time limit to the discussion, such as in the morning before school. Understanding each family member's communication style and prioritizing good communication can improve everyone's social and emotional development and give younger generations the tools that they will need for the future.

c. Respect Privacy and Boundaries

Everyone needs their own space, and everyone has their own boundaries. For parents, this might mean that children need to knock before entering an office or bedroom, or that there are certain hours in the day when children should be quiet because parents are working from home. This respect for privacy and boundaries goes both ways: parents also need to respect their children's privacy and knock before going into a bedroom, for instance. Teaching reciprocity and mutual respect can help children feel safe at home and can foster trust.

Make Time for Play and Connection

Everyone, but especially young children, learns about social connection and emotional development through play. Finding time to have fun together, play games, and engage in leisure activities as a family can create lasting memories and improve children's emotional development. If you all spend time doing things that you enjoy, you will find your time together more engaging and valuable in the long run (Wolfensberger, 2017).

5.0 Conclusion

The Social Emotional Learning (SEL) curriculum provides a simple yet powerful framework for nurturing students' emotional intelligence, social skills, and overall well-being. By understanding the key components of SEL, such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making, educators can create a supportive and inclusive learning environment that benefits students academically, emotionally, and socially. The integration of SEL into educational settings offers numerous advantages, including improved academic performance, the development of essential life skills, the fostering of positive relationships, and the promotion of a positive classroom climate.

By implementing practical strategies like incorporating SEL into the curriculum, providing professional development, fostering a positive school climate, building partnerships, and monitoring progress, schools can successfully integrate SEL and empower students to thrive in all aspects of their lives. Ultimately, embracing the Social Emotional Learning curriculum has the potential to transform education and contribute to the holistic development of students, equipping them with the skills and competencies necessary to navigate challenges, build meaningful connections, and become responsible, compassionate members of society.

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