

An Investigation into Factors that Contribute to Cheating in Examinations in Technical Institutions in Central Province, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Cheating in an examination is an act of deception by students to gain unfair advantage over others by using unauthorized materials and information. There is a significant increase in test cheating. Among those who cheat are students in technical institutions, where there is recurrence of cheating in the internal examinations. Some studies identify factors such as the following that contribute to cheating: students learning from a dishonest society, poor teaching, poor learning environment and lack of facilities, an education system that is concerned about performance, poor time management, lack of effective study habits and technology. However, there is no readily available information on factors that contribute to cheating in technical institutions. The purpose of this study was to investigate factors that contribute to cheating in internal examinations, methods used in cheating and reasons for students to cheat; and the main aim was to devise and recommend strategies that can be applied to curb cheating in examinations in technical institutions in Central Province, Kenya. The results of the study show several factors that contribute to cheating. These are: contextual factors such as class attendance, lecturer-student interactions, poor invigilation, and lack of adequate facilities. The participants raised the following suggestions on how cheating may be curbed: strict supervision of examination, provision of adequate facilities, and frequent administration of tests and assignment. Recommendations on measures to be applied were presented along with suggestions for further research in this area.

Key Words: Examinations, Education, Technical Institutions, Cheating

INTRODUCTION

Technical Institutes are middle level colleges which offer technical education to students who have not obtained the minimum requirement for University admission at C+ (Session paper, 2012:10). The programmes offered take two years in certificate courses and three years in diploma courses. Students studying craft courses take shorter time since they are employed as operatives while those studying for diplomas are employed as technicians with a supervisory role (Ngerechi, 2003:4). Cheating is a form of stealing, which results in the cheater attaining recognition and grades that he or she does not deserve. It is an act of obtaining or attempting to obtain, or aiding another person to obtain academic credit for work by use of dishonest, deceptive or fraudulent means (Pavela, 1997; Blankenship & Whitley, 2000 as cited by Lambert et al., 2003, Cizek, 1999:3).

Cheating has become an epidemic in our country. According to Centre of Academic Integrity (<http://www.academiintegrity.org>), there is a significant increase in test cheating, unpermitted student collaboration and an increased prevalence of chronic cheating. At the end of the term when the end-of-term examination marks are submitted, there are always cases of students who either

cheated in the tests given during the term or at the end-of-term examination, reported. Cases of cheating are reported every term by teachers who catch students with relevant materials during continuous assessment tests (Aullo, as cited by Nyandoro, 2008:43). There are other cases of students who are not caught red-handed but reported to the principals or heads of departments through the suggestion box.

Majority of student cheaters are usually caught cheating in the subjects they perceive to be difficult (Diekhoff et al 1996; Lambert et al 2003). Students who cheat are either caught in possession of written materials in the form of crib notes, with written notes on the desks, copying from each other's work, or with formulas written on their calculators (Nyandoro, 2008:39; Adhola 2009:10). The problem is specifically rampant during the end-of-stage examination, which is administered at the end of the year in each course. Those who pass the end-of-stage examination move to the next level while those who fail are made to seat for supplementary examination or forced to repeat the course. These consequences make those who are not well prepared to cheat in order to pass and move to the next level.

Problem statement

Despite the fact that many institutions have examination policies that give information on consequences of cheating in examination, there has been recurrence of cheating in the internal examinations in Technical Institutions. Education by its nature and purpose is meant to teach students to be good citizens by developing in them a good character based on sound morals that would enable them to play a constructive role in their society. However, this is totally undermined when cheating in examinations is allowed to take place without serious consequences. In reality, cheating does not allow the teacher to know whether the students have understood the course content and therefore the teacher is not able to correct the gaps in student learning by re-teaching current students and when preparing notes to teach future students (Nyandoro, 2008:17).

Cheating is very costly because of the consequences it has on all affected. Furthermore, it affects the students and the entire department's morale, and the reputation of the affected institutions as the public loses confidence in the education programmes offered in technical institutions (Nyandoro 2008:18, Knowledge,2004 as cited by Simkin & McLeod,2009:1)). It wastes time as teachers have to sit and discuss the problems associated with cheating because those caught cheating have to be dealt with (Nyandoro 2008:18; Chinamasa et al 2011:89). Generally speaking, there has been wastage of resources for parents who end up paying extra cash when children are suspended and consequently forced to retake courses as a result of cheating(Nyandoro 2008:17; Chinamasa et al 2011:89). Students who cheat at colleges will end up cheating at their workplace when employed and when caught they will consequently lose their jobs. In conclusion, cheating has become a big challenge in many institutions and the problem is that factors causing internal examinations cheating are not well understood and as such the problem persists. It is therefore necessary to investigate the causes, nature and purpose of cheating with the aim of coming up with solutions for curbing the vice.

The objectives of the study

To determine how cheating takes place especially in the examinations in Technical Institutions in

Central Region, Kenya.

To examine the methods used in cheating in the examinations in Technical Institutions in Central Region, Kenya.

To investigate the reasons for cheating in the examinations in Technical Institutions in Central Region, Kenya.

To enquire from the stakeholders into how cheating in internal examinations can be curbed in Technical Institutions in Central Region, Kenya.

Research questions

What are the methods used by students to cheat in the examinations in Technical College in Central Region, Kenya?

What are the reasons that lead to cheating in the examinations?

How can cheating in the examinations be curbed?

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted using qualitative approach was used to help understand the meanings individuals constructed in the cheating phenomenon. Case study design of two technical institutions in central province, Kenya was adopted. Purposive sampling strategy was used due to the sensitive nature of the subject where sixteen students, 4 lecturers and 2 heads of departments were interviewed. Participant observation was used to provide detailed description of events, people, actions and objects in their settings. Document analysis of several records including crib notes and books confiscated from students, warning letters was done to complement data collected from interviews. Data from interviews was transcribed, and with the help of literature and research questions themes were identified and then data was coded, placed in categories and sub categories. The facial and content validity was achieved through the use of combined methods to provide information on the issue of cheating in examination.

RESULTS

This study found out various trends in examination cheating, discussed as follows:

Factors that contribute to cheating in internal examinations

From the data, several contextual factors were raised. Attendance rate both for lecturers and students was found to affect learning. On one hand, the literature posits that teachers absent from work frequently would lead to cheating in examination (Eckstein, 2003; Kathuri, 2002; Steininger & Kirits, 1964). The results of this study found that lecturers who miss classes tend to give notes to the students to copy without discussing them, ask the students to read and make their own notes. Absenteeism results in not covering all the topics as outlined in the course content. When lecturers miss lessons, respondents felt that students would not be guided, assessed and motivated as when lecturers attended lessons. Therefore, when the examination time comes students may not be well prepared, especially that examinations are based on all topics, including those not covered in class. In order to pass the examinations, the students may plan to cheat. This supports the expectancy theory whereby students will be motivated to write crib notes, use cell phones, or collaborate in order to be able to answer questions in the examinations and subsequently pass the examination.

On the other hand, poor attendance rate of students would affect learning thus leading to cheating. When students miss lessons, especially practical lessons, they may not be in a position to answer questions in examinations, since in an examination they are expected to apply theory to practice. They usually lack understanding of concepts learnt during their absence; to avoid failure they resort to cheating in examination. One respondent felt that in case of a practical question based on a topic a student missed when it was taught, a student cannot attempt to answer such a question based on the content he or she has never seen.

The results of the study indicate that there was adequate lecturer-student interaction and as a result, cheating was discouraged. On one hand, literature supports that students cheat less when professors show a real concern, are kind, respectful and understanding to the students (Roig & Ballow, 1994; Davis & Lodvigson, 1995; Genereux & McLeod, 1995 as cited in Wikipedia webpage). One respondent (S7) stated that adequate lecturer-student interaction would discourage cheating because students are able to discuss and interact well with the lecturers and can therefore solve their academic related problems. There would therefore be no need to cheat because lecturers would have explained difficult concepts and shown them (students) how to tackle problems, thus promoting their learning. It may be said that when lecturers are approachable, students feel free to ask questions and responses to their questions improve their learning.

On the other hand, students who perceive their instructors as grumpy, callous or unfriendly, indifferent and who do not care whether or not they learn the course materials are more likely to cheat (LaBeff et al., 1990; Diekhoff et al., 1996). The results of this study suggest that there are cases where lecturers' attitude towards students is negative and this would lead to cheating since learning in such an atmosphere is usually not effective. In such a situation the student may not internalize or absorb the course material effectively because the lecturer has no time to explain and help students in tackling questions. Students may also fear to approach such a lecturer when they have unresolved issues about topics covered. When the examination time comes, the student may realize that he or she needs to cheat in order to pass the examination.

There lies a connection between this finding and the Expectancy Theory posited by Vroom (1964). This theory proposes that an individual will decide to behave or act in a certain way because he or she is motivated to select a specific behaviour over other behaviours owing to what he or she expects the result of that selected behaviour to be (Oliver, 1974). Owing to poor performance of the lecturer in class, which led the students not understanding the subject well from the beginning, students may assume that they can only pass the examination in that subject through cheating.

According to Chinamasa et al. (2011:98) and Adhola, (2009) poor supervision of examinations and large class sizes create opportunities for students to cheat since no effective invigilation is done. Steininger, Johnson & Kirts (1964) found that invigilators leaving the room during an examination could cause students to cheat more than they would normally do. This study found that out of twenty respondents, fourteen indicated that poor invigilation is prevalent. The respondents agree that some lecturers leave the examination rooms unattended to. Others would remain in the room seated in one position, either in front of the students or at the back, throughout the examination

session. They are not on the alert against what is going on in the examination room. Since students may have observed the behaviour of the invigilators for some time, they may decide whether to cheat or not, when they see who is going to invigilate their session on the timetable, depending on the strictness of the invigilator concerned.

The results of this study support both the expectancy theory and the theory of planned behaviour. For the expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964), students who have prior knowledge that a certain invigilator is not focused when invigilating may prepare crib notes assuming they will be in a position to use them without being detected. This will help them answer questions in examination and thus lead to passing the examination without exerting much effort on their studies. The theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) supports this sub-category in that students may have the attitude that cheating helps them to pass and that because other students cheat and have not been caught since some invigilators are neither vigilant nor keen to take action when they see a student cheating, they believe they would succeed in cheating which will help them to pass the examination. The study found there is poor invigilation of examination and that students take advantage of the opportunity to cheat in the examinations.

In addition to the above factors, the results from the study showed that provision of course outline did not inhibit cheating in examination. Eleven respondents in the study agreed that at the beginning of each term, the lecturer in charge of a certain subject issues the course outline, and that the examination is set from the topics covered within that particular term. Because the students are well aware that the examination will come only from what they have covered, it makes it easy for them to write crib notes highlighting the main points as per the topics covered in the course outline. While the course outline is meant to inform them of what they should expect within the term, it may also become a tool used as a guide to perpetrate cheating in examinations.

As it has been identified in this study, on one hand, lack of enough facilities may lead to cheating. Asuru (1996) as cited by Korbs (2009:2) contends that poor learning environment and lack of facilities are factors that influence cheating. In the study, there were two cases observed where 42 students were taking their examination in a small room. Five students shared one desk and as a result, did not have enough space to sit comfortably. This led to collaborative cheating. That class had the highest number of students observed cheating.

According to Adhola, (2009) a school environment, which is not properly arranged for the number of students taking the examination, promotes cheating in examinations. When students are placed in such a congested environment, even those who did not have the intention to cheat may find themselves copying the work of their neighbours when stuck in a question. Lack of adequate facilities as a cause of cheating is supported by the Theory of Planned behaviour. When students know they are going to take examinations in a congested room, they may plan in advance to write crib notes with the intention of using them in the examination. They may also plan to sit in a place where the invigilator may not be able to see them when they refer to their crib notes. Others may plan to collaborate to copy from each other's work depending on how each is able to answer the questions.

On the other hand, where there are adequate facilities, and the sizes of rooms correspond to the number of students, cheating may be less, especially collaborative cheating, since students will be well spaced. The results of the study make it clear that lack of clear information on academic policy contributed to cheating in examination. According to literature reviewed institutions, which communicate effectively their policies on academic dishonesty and on common penalties, substantially reduce the amount of cheating on campus (Stuber-McEwen et al., webpage). The researcher observed that in one of the institution, three out of eight respondents did not have an idea of what the academic policy states. S6 when asked whether there is an academic policy said, "I have never heard of it" and when asked what is done to students who are caught cheating said, "I don't know". This shows that there is need to make every student aware of examination regulations as soon as they join the institution so that they can be aware of the consequences early enough. In the same institution, it was observed that there were more cases of cheating reported than in the other institution whose academic policy is well known to the students and whose penalties are severe. Therefore, it may be said that a perception of severe penalties has the likelihood of inhibiting or deterring cheating behaviour in direct proportion to perceived probability and severity of punishment.

The study found several personal characteristics contributed to cheating in examination. As it is postulated in the literature reviewed, students are more likely to cheat when they doubt their intelligence, lack academic confidence or expect failure (LaBeff et al., 1990; Schab, 1991; Tana & Zuo, 1997 as cited by Robinson et al., 2004:2). McCabe & Trevino, (1997:380) found that students who perform poorly tend to cheat more than students who perform well. Some of the respondents agreed that when one is not sure of himself or herself, one is likely to prepare to cheat before the examination is taken. Students who are weak may cheat in examinations because they may not remember all the concepts learned in class. The pressure to get good grades in order to proceed to the next level in the course, places those students with low self-esteem, lack of self-confidence in a fix because they feel they have no ability to take up the challenge of examinations. Most of these types of students do not exert much effort on their studies as literature states. Davis and Ludvigson as cited by Bjorklund & Wenestam (1999) conclude that cheating in this case would be reduced by using positive reinforcement and by encouraging and fostering the students to acquire an outlook on life that will prevent them from cheating.

Another example from the data that assists in illustrating the value of Vroom's theory of expectancy and Ajzen's theory of planned behaviour is found in peer influence. In the data, respondents reported that students who had friends who cheated and were successful tended to follow suit. Others would cheat to compete favourably with their friends. Those who are not strong in moral values would be led astray by becoming indisciplined or abetting cheating. Although peers may influence students negatively, there were those who felt they also exercise positive influence on others by way of acting as role models, and by assisting them in their weak areas.

Those involved in extracurricular activities find themselves with less time to study and therefore, lack behind with their work and the examinations find them unprepared. They, as a result, decide to collude with their friends to cheat in the examination. The results of the study posit that as

students form relationships with peers, they may develop behaviours and ways of thinking that are in keeping with these groups. The behaviour may be positive or negative thus conforming to expectancy theory and theory of planned behaviour. Two respondents felt that extracurricular activities help one become revitalized in body and mind thus students will be in a better position to understand the course content because the brain becomes more alert when one exercises.

Report from the literature cites that two thirds of teachers believe that poor time management was the principal cause of cheating as a result of social engagement (Caroll, 2006 as cited in Wikipedia webpage). One respondent commented that students who participate in extracurricular and social activities spend the time they would have used to study away in these activities, leaving them not being prepared when examination time comes. This leads them to look for an option of cheating to pass the examinations. Students who plan their time well and start studying from the beginning of the term, perform well as they are not forced to rush to learn the content at the eleventh hour they supposed to have learnt throughout the term. There is need for students to set priorities and be disciplined so that they can better co-ordinate their activities.

Chinamasa et al. (2011:91) noted that students cheated for lack of orientation to university study methods. From the study results, it was clear that the two technical institutions did not have time set aside for students to study. There was also no lecture given to new students on how to study. Therefore it is left to the students to organize themselves on how and when to do their studies. The study shows that most students have poor study habits that hinder them from preparing effectively for their examinations. From the study, one of the reasons for cheating is unpreparedness. According to GSI (2011), ineffective or inadequate study habits influence cheating. Students lack the skills of studying that would help them retain what they have read. This study shows that most students do not read their course material until they know the examination is near thus leaving them unprepared to tackle the examination with confidence. Due to unpreparedness, students resort to cheating to pass the examinations. Most of the students in regular courses spend most of their time in social and extracurricular activities. Therefore, there is need for lecturers to counsel students from the beginning of the course to study hard and give them guidelines on how to study. There is also need for giving the schedules of tests and end of term examination so that students can prepare themselves accordingly.

From the results of the study, it was found that parents do not contribute much to cheating in technical institutions. Although they expect their children to have good grades, they do not have a great influence on the performance of the students. One respondent felt that parents would condemn cheating if they found that their son or daughter had cheated. Three respondents felt that parents would abet cheating in primary or secondary schools more that they would in tertiary institutions.

Methods used for cheating

The respondents identified varied methods used in cheating in the interviews for this study. The results show that use of crib notes was the most common method in cheating. The notes were written prior to the examination as S4 commented, “before doing the examinations, someone writes notes expected to come in the examinations and then you carry it to the examination room

and copy answers during examinations”.

Use of cell phones was the second most common method amongst students in the two institutions as per the data collected. It was found that invigilators who understand that cell phones should not be allowed in the examination room did not remember to ask the students to switch off their cell phones and keep them away. Cell phones were used to google answers from the internet, check answers saved in the message inbox; receive messages during examination while others saved answers in their e-mail inbox. Burke et al (2007) found that electronic devices such as cell phones, iPad, electronic calculators and personal data assistants are used for smuggling in formulas and other crucial information.

The collaborative methods commonly used were copying from friends by exchanging scripts and asking for answers to a question, use of codes and discussing with friends. In technical drawing course, students checked the work of the person in front since the desks are high and slanted. Other methods used but not very common were writing on body parts, walls, and desks. Literature reviewed supports the findings of this study as stated by Franklyn-Stokes and Newstead (1995); McCabe and Trevino (1996); William (2001) and Abiodun et al. (2011:278). They listed copying from each other, assisting each other, use of crib notes, asking for help, giraffing, and passing pieces of paper among the frequently used forms of cheating.

From the results of the study, it is clear that students plan in advance to cheat in examination and therefore prepare the materials to be used in answering examination questions. This supports the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen 1991:181), which posits that a person's behaviour is determined by his or her intention to perform the behaviour and that this intention in turn is a function of his or her attitude toward the behaviour and his or her subjective norms. Some students may think they will not pass unless they cheat in examinations; others are driven by the knowledge that some of their invigilators are not keen to catch them while others copy their peers' work when exposed.

Reasons for cheating in internal examinations

The results of the study show that students cheat because they do not want to fail their examinations. Usually they fail because they were not well prepared for the examination, which happens when a student lacks the necessary ability or has failed to manage his or her time effectively. S6 commented, “They cheat because they were not well equipped and not ready for the examinations. Maybe they fear failing. They were not familiar with the course material”.

Others would cheat to obtain better grades. It may be that they would like to be regarded as good or intelligent students. Crome & Marlow (1964) support this finding as they found that college students with a high need for approval cheated more often than others because they are concerned about negative evaluation should they not succeed.

The other reason for cheating given by some respondents was advancement to the next level. S3 commented that “in this school after failing you do not get your results but you are asked to repeat again another year and this is wastage of time”. In the two institutions where the study was carried

out, the pass mark for the end of stage examination is 40%. If a student does not attain that mark in any three subjects, their grade will be a “Fail”. They are required to either repeat the whole year or move to another institution. If they score below 40% in one or two subjects, the results show they are referred and therefore required to sit for supplementary examinations. It is only by passing the supplementary examination that they will be promoted to the next level. It is on the ground of this that students who are weak or not well prepared for the examination would resort to cheating in the examinations. The literature shows that school obsession with performance measures spurs cheating as it was found by Anderman, Griesinger & Westerfield, (1998); Waita (Daily Nation November 24th 2008: web page) and Aullo (2004). The expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964) may be used to explain the reasons for cheating. Some students may decide to cheat because they are motivated by the prospect to pass the examination, to achieve better grades and to move to the next level thus avoiding failure.

Strategies to curb cheating

During the course of the interviews, respondents were asked what they thought should be done to prevent cheating in examinations. They offered measures that should be taken by the administration, the invigilators and the lecturers throughout the course of the student’s stay in the institutions. Those that occurred most frequently included: strict supervision, provision of adequate facilities, maintaining strict rules, strict class attendance, frequent administering of tests and assignments, orientation to academic policy and counselling of students as they continue with their course. Discouraging sharing of materials was mentioned by one respondent.

The study found that there was need for strict supervision of examinations. It was observed that most invigilators are not alert and actively involved when supervising an examination. When asked why lecturers are not focused when invigilating, L1 stated, “I think it takes too long and you are not doing anything for 2-3 hours, too long and you are just seated there watching students. The teacher himself or herself is not being supervised by anybody, he or she is left by himself or herself, so it is up to him or her. I also realized there is no motivation like when we do supervision for KNEC, you get nothing from it”. Aullo (2004) recommends a need for lecturers to be trained on invigilation and supervision of examination. This would help them to be able to recognize the importance of invigilation, identify signs of those cheating and be able to catch them thus inhibiting future cheaters.

There are rules that are laid down to be observed when administering an examination. The results of the study found that most invigilators do not adhere to some of these rules. Due to the fact that students know what invigilators do and not do, they are able to look for loop holes. From the study, it was observed that frisking was not done. Students were in the examination room by the time the invigilator arrived with the examination papers. Most of the respondents felt that invigilators should ensure all textbooks, note books are removed from the desks and they should check the entire room. It was agreed by most respondents that invigilators should remind students that cell phones are not allowed in examination rooms. The invigilators need to check that what is written on the desks and walls is not relevant to the particular examination being taken. As S10 commented, “students should be checked on hands, book, invigilators should be keen enough to observe students whether they have materials on them or operating their mobile phones”. When

those intending to cheat realize the invigilators are thorough in their work, they may be hindered from cheating.

Three respondents identified provision of adequate facilities as being necessary during the examination period so that there would be proper spacing and lecturers have room to move around the examination room. One respondent felt that the examination officer should allocate examination rooms according to the class size. There should be enough desks and chairs so that students can be well-spaced to hinder colluding with each other and for easy supervision. Ogumnyi, (1984) recommended that students should sit on alternative seats (that is, not their usual seats) when taking the examination. This may not be possible in the Kenyan situation but if there is enough room between students coupled with strict supervision, it would hinder students copying from each other and exchanging papers. One respondent commented that course coverage was important in preventing cheating. Although most of the respondents indicated that they covered all topics in the course outline, there were those who felt that there should be strict class attendance on the side of both lecturers and students. This would enable those students who are equipped with the necessary abilities, to understand when the lecturer teaches and their motivation for good performance would be heightened.

Another strategy to curb cheating was frequent administering of test and assignments. The respondents who commented on this issue said that there was need to familiarize themselves with examination format and way of answering questions in order for their confidence to be boosted in preparation for the end of term or stage examinations. S14 commented, “Students should be shown how to answer examination questions to minimize examination cheating”; and another respondent said examinations help them to gain more knowledge by applying what they have been taught, for what they practice stays in the mind. It may be concluded that when students understand the course content well cases of cheating would decrease since they would feel confident and prepared to tackle what is expected in the examination.

Effective communication of academic policy and examination regulations is important so that all students are well versed in them before examinations. The study results show that three respondents from one institution did not have an idea of what the academic policy was. Since respondents were chosen randomly, it may be that there are many others who do not know about the academic policy at that institution. Respondents from the other institution had adequate knowledge of the academic policy and the researcher observed that there were less cases of cheating at that particular institution. From this, it may be said that institutions should make sure that new students are oriented to the academic policy and copies of the policy be displayed at strategic positions within the institutions. Strict penalties should be set so that when one is caught cheating is punished; consequently others would fear to repeat the same mistake. No student would like to be disqualified or ordered to repeat a course while his or her colleagues continue to the next level.

Apart from orientation to the academic policy, seven respondents stated that students need to be counselled in order to enlighten them on the consequences of cheating. Counselling is important since it helps to instill self-discipline in students and self-disciplined students are not easily

attracted by bad practices such as cheating. S3 said to prevent cheating, “students need to be counselled on the effects and consequences of cheating”; and another respondent, S5 commented that discipline should be instilled in the students as this may be a process of bringing change in their lives. Counselling that encourage students to work hard to internalize what they learn would go a long way in helping them (students) to discover their potential in their studies. Counselling may also help to instill moral values in students so that they become capable of distinguishing between what is wrong and what is right, as they lead their lives at colleges. If students work hard and pass their examinations without cheating, they will realize they possess the necessary capabilities, and therefore would feel empowered to desist from committing vices such as cheating.

CONCLUSION

Cheating is at its highest levels in our institutions today. Students are taking advantage of technology and lecturers’ reluctance to report cases of cheating. While cheating will likely never be eradicated completely, guidance and counselling may eventually weaken the urge to cheat among students.

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