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Social Support as a Correlate of English Language Reading Comprehension Self-Efficacy Among Grade Six Learners in Gatundu South Sub County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Globally, English is a popular second language that is not only used for official communication, but also used as the language of instruction in many learning institutions. Being proficient in English Language enables learners to interpret and derive meaning from written texts, thereby enhancing comprehension, supporting critical thinking, problem solving, and effective communication skills, all, which are essential for understanding other subjects. Consequently, English is regarded as a fundamental component of the educational curriculum. Despite the importance of English language, reading comprehension still remains a challenge for many learners. There are limited studies on the relationship between social support and English language reading comprehension self-efficacy. This study therefore, examined social support as a correlate of English language reading comprehension self-efficacy among Grade Six learners in Gatundu South Sub-County, Kenya. Self-Determination Theory and Self-Efficacy Theory guided the study. Correlational research design was used. The target population comprised of 3,220 Grade Six learners in 2025. Simple random sampling was employed to select respondents whereas stratified and proportionate sampling methods were employed to select schools. A sample of 356 learners participated in the study. A social support questionnaire and a Questionnaire of English self-efficacy (QESE) were used to collect the data. Data analysis was done using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The results showed that there is a moderate, positive, and statistically significant correlation between social support and reading comprehension self-efficacy ($r = 0.39$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that increased support from teachers, peers, and parents is associated with higher levels of learners' confidence in reading comprehension. The study recommends implementing structured school-based reading support programmes, strengthening teacher and parental involvement in learners' reading activities, promoting peer-assisted learning, providing regular formative feedback, and increasing access to age-appropriate reading materials to enhance learners' reading comprehension self-efficacy.

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary globalized world needs people who know a second language to be able to communicate with people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. English language that has been introduced as a second language in most of the countries is now widely used as a means of communication in the whole world. In most cases, it is used as the official language and is the main language of instruction in schools, colleges and institutions of higher learning. English proficiency allows the learners to acquire meaning out of the written texts hence improving comprehension and facilitating proper problem-solving. This is a fundamental competence that is critical in understanding content in other subjects and solving difficult societal problems (Concepcion & Melchor, 2024). As a result, English is viewed as an essential part of the education programs since they depend on it as one of the key instruments of learning and further development of their academic concerns.

As a way of mastering the English language, learners need to gain mastery of four basic language skills, which are speaking, listening, writing, and reading. One of such skills is reading comprehension, which refers to

the conception of being able to read and comprehend written texts which is significant in academic achievement (Saro *et al.*, 2024). Reading enhances vocabulary, grammar, spelling, and punctuation and develops superior order thinking, including critical thinking and problem solving, and decision-making. The competencies are crucial because they determine the performance of the learners not only in language subjects but also in other areas that do necessitate the understanding of literature. To achieve this, learners need to have high level of English language reading comprehension self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy of learners is closely connected with the development of reading comprehension skills. Self-efficacy is the conviction that an individual has regarding the capability of employing his skills successfully to achieve certain tasks (Bandura, 1997). The beliefs that learners have about themselves and their abilities determine the way they put the acquired knowledge and skills into use. The self-efficacy also influences the decisions that the learners make, the efforts that they apply to the learning activities and the determination that they apply when they do not get the needed results. Reading comprehension self-efficacy in English language learning helps learners

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to be confident when working with texts of different levels of complexity hence improving their academic performance.

Although reading comprehension is critical, most learners still have problems with understanding written texts. These barriers have also led to low academic performance not only in English but also in other subjects that involve interpreting written information (Gedik & Akyoli, 2022). There are studies done that point out to the same issues. Kaana *et al.* (2023) found that elementary school students in Uganda have poor reading skills, whereas Kamanzi and Seni (2024) found that learners in the early grades in Tanzania perform poorly in English language. In Kenya, Cherokee and Atoni (2022) revealed that primary school learners in the Nandi County exhibit low reading achievement while Mwoma (2017) found that early grades of primary school learners in rural Narok County have poor performance in English language. These results indicate the enduring issues of reading comprehension among primary school learners.

Research has also shown that reading comprehension enhances learning motivation and self-esteem among learners. Learners who manage to understand texts are likely to perceive themselves as competent, skilled, and this boosts confidence and makes them want to interact with one another positively to solve problems (Rosalina & Nasrullah, 2019). Consequently, there is need to assist the learners to cultivate good reading comprehension skills to be able to achieve the academic and societal demands. To do this, it is necessary to implement systematic interventions, including professional development of teachers, their direct instruction, coaching, and mentoring (Diaz-Iso *et al.*, 2022; Bucheit, 2023). Nevertheless, the success of such interventions is determined by the willingness of teachers to provide social support to the learners.

The term social support is used to refer to the help and encouragement the learners get through their social surrounding, such as teachers, peer group members, family members, and the community at large (Karen & Sanders, 2021). Within the school setting, teachers are critical to assist the learners in dealing with academic anxiety and personal challenges. This support can be positive words, education, training, feedback, and counseling to enhance engagement and well-being of learners. Social support has generally been divided into three types which include emotional support, instrumental support, and informational support.

Emotional support involves concern, understanding, and empathy towards the experiences of the learners. Learners with low emotional support usually have low self-esteem, anxiety, and negative learning attitudes, which can have an adverse impact on reading (Lei *et al.*, 2018). On the other hand, sufficient emotional support facilitates emotional stability and desirable relations that lead to improved academic performance (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). Instrumental support refers to the practical assistance including reading materials, technology, or

other instructional sessions that help learners to improve their reading skills (Wong *et al.*, 2018). Educators can also receive independent reading tasks or provide favorable conditions like libraries where students can read (Lei *et al.*, 2018). Informational support entails the guidance and feedback about the effective reading strategies so that learners could become more independent and self-confident readers (Lloyd-Jones, 2021).

Competency-Based Education (CBC) is a curriculum in Kenya emphasizing on learner-centered learning and acquisition of competencies as opposed to the conventional subject-based learning. Although this has changed, English has been one of the major learning areas of focus since it is the major medium of instruction at all the levels of education (Cubillan *et al.*, 2024). In CBE framework, reading, listening, writing, and speaking are some of the strands that are emphasized in improving the skills of learners in the process of communication. The report of Kenya Primary School Education Assessment (KPSEA) (2023) showed that the performance of learners in most subjects at Grade Six was more than the average mean score (KNEC, 2024). Nevertheless, English showed maximum standard deviation (9.06) and it was a sign that there was a wide range of difference in performance amongst learners. It means that although there are learners who perform well other learners have significant problems especially in reading comprehension. There are previous studies on reading comprehension performance, there is a lack of research on the association between social support and reading comprehension self-efficacy in Kenya specifically in Gatundu South Sub-County. Thus, the current study aimed to establish the existence of a relationship between teacher attitude, social support, and reading comprehension self-efficacy in Grade Six learners of Gatundu South Sub-County in order to guide strategies that will enhance reading comprehension performance and academic success of learners.

Statement of the Problem

The English language is widely used as a second language in most countries and has become a significant communication tool both academically and professionally. In Kenya, the language is a study subject as well as the overriding language of instruction by which most of the subjects are taught and examined. Therefore, the level of English competence in reading comprehension of learners is very important in determining academic success in the curriculum. Nonetheless, issues of persistent English language performance problems are being reported among the learners in primary schools. According to KNEC, in Gatundu South Sub-County, performance of English in the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education level has been relatively low over the years. With the shift to the Kenya Primary School Education Assessment in the Competency-Based Education, the results of national assessment still indicate some significant gaps in the performance of English language. For instance, results of KPSEA nationally

show that about 3.94% and 6.53% of learners in 2022 and 2023 exceeded expectations in English and 35.88% and 32.12% of the learners approached expectation. This means that a significant percentage of learners fail to acquire the desired competencies in English.

An analysis of school report in Gatundu south sub-county depicts a similar pattern. The results of the 2023 and 2024 KPSEA indicated that the mean scores were as low as 6.39 out of a potential 15.20 in English language comprehension in most schools. This suggests that most learners have problems with the interpretation of the information, prediction, and the recognition of major ideas in the texts. These trend is worrying since understanding English is the basis of other subjects learning. Despite the past studies in this area, little studies have attempted to establish the relationship that exists between social support and the self-efficacy of learners in reading comprehension. Thus, this research aimed at exploring the correlation between the variables with Grade Six learners in the Gatundu South Sub-County.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate teachers' attitude and social support as correlates of reading comprehension self-efficacy among grade six learners in Gatundu South Sub County. These findings may form the basis for effective interventions for enhancing English comprehension performance levels among grade six learners.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The role of social support in academic achievement and psychological growth of learners has been an area of research interest. As an example, Wang *et al.* (2024) carried out research to examine the role of perceived teacher support on academic self-efficacy of learners. The sample used in the study was 930 Chinese college learners. Structured questionnaires were used to collect data and statistical methods, such as descriptive and correlation analysis methods were used to analyze the data. The results showed that the perceived teacher support had a positive correlation with the academic performance of the learners. The findings indicated that positive teacher-learner bonds establish an opportunity to have a favorable learning environment, which boosts the confidence of the learners and eventually leads to better performance in school. Nevertheless, the research was carried out among college students under a foreign setting and this limited the applicability of the study to primary school learners in Kenya. Hence, this study aimed at investigating the relationship between social support and reading comprehension of the English language self-efficacy among Grade Six learners in Gatundu South Sub-County, Kenya.

In another study, Apeh and Nteh (2020) examined how social support impacts academic performance of learners in Nigeria. The research adopted descriptive research design and proportionate sampling technique to sample

377 students of senior secondary school in Abuja State. Questionnaires were used to collect the data and analyzed through both descriptive and inferential statistics. The results revealed that parental, teacher, peer, and classmate social support were important factors that affected the performance of learners academically. The research established that academic performance of learners with the proper support of the social environment is more probable. Nevertheless, the research was mainly on the role of social support on the general academic performance and not on the self-efficacy of the learners in particular academic skills. In order to fill this gap, this study focused on the correlation between social support and self-efficacy of learners in English language reading comprehension.

Wanja and Adhiambo (2021) investigated the role of teachers and parents in the psychological adjustment of learners with learning disability in Kenya. The research used a mixed-methods design and purposive sampling was applied to sample ten head teachers, ten parents and ninety-six learners. The results established that social and emotional teacher, parent, and peer support contributions have a great role in improving the learning experiences and psychological accommodation of learners with disabilities. Although these significant results were obtained, it is important to note that the sample size used was relatively small thus limiting the generalization of the findings to the wider education setting in Kenya. Moreover, the research was specifically aimed at dyslexic learners. By contrast, the present research was broader in its scope because it included more participants and concentrated on the Grade Six learners. This method will give a better insight on the interaction between social support and the reading comprehension self-efficacy in the English language among primary school learners.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Design

The study used correlational research design. This design was chosen because it allowed the researcher to examine the relationship between social support and English language reading comprehension self-efficacy among grade six learners. The design was appropriate to determine the strength, and direction of these associations in a real classroom where the manipulation of support systems might be cumbersome or even unethical to perform (Hassan, 2024).

Measures

The study used adapted version of Sherbourne and Stewart (1991) Social Support Questionnaire whose original reliability coefficient was reported to be 0.78. It was used to measure perceived emotional support, general informational support, customized appraisal support and instrumental support among the learners. The responses were measured on a 5 point Likert scale consisting of; Never (1), Rarely (2), Sometimes (3), Often (4), and Always 5. The method of scoring on the Social

Support Questionnaire has given scores that shows how much support an individual get in the different categories, a range of 60 and above considered those as with high social support in that particular area while those with a score of below 60 were considered to have low social support.

The English language self-efficacy was measured with a scale adapted from Questionnaire on English Self-Efficacy (QESE) developed by Wang *et al.* (2014) with a reliability coefficient of 0.98. The researcher used the scale to assess the level of self-efficacy of the learners in reading and understanding English text. The tool contains 17 items that assessed self-efficacy on a 7-point Likert scale that includes the following: “I cannot do it at all” (1), “I cannot do it” (2), “May be I cannot do it” (3), “May be I can do it” (4), “I basically can do it” (5), and I can do it at all (6) and well (7). The appraisal part examines the remarks that were given to the learner regarding their strengths and weaknesses. The lowest possible score of the scale was 17 and the highest possible score was 119. The interpretation of the scores was as done as follows; low (17-50), moderate (51-85) and high (86-119).

Participants and Procedure

The study used a population of 356 learners drawn from twenty schools- both private and public schools in

Gatundu South Sub-County. Grade six learners consisting of 176 Males and 173 Females participated in the study. Before collecting data, research authorization was sought from; Graduate School of Kenyatta University, National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI), Director of Education, Kiambu County for data collection within the county. In addition, heads of schools gave permission to conduct the study in their respective schools. Because grade six learners are not of age to give informed consent, their teachers and guardians gave informed consent on their behalf before the actual data collection.

On the actual day, the questionnaires were distributed to the learners during pre-planned meeting. In order to enhance the return rate, the researcher controlled the entire process of data collection, and provided assistance where necessary. After data collection, the questionnaires were reviewed to identify any unanswered question or that which had more than one answer. The data was then entered into SPSS Version 25. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of the study.

Table 1 shows the gender of the respondents who participated in this study.

Table 1: Gender of the Respondents

	Frequency	Percent
Male	176	50.4
Female	173	49.6
Total	349	100.0

The results showed that out of 349 respondents, 176 were male (50.4%) and 173 were female (49.6%). The proportion was almost equal, giving equal representation to both gender in the study. This helped in eliminating any possible biases that may arise from varying responses based on gender, such that it was convenient to compare

male and female respondents’ experiences, perceptions, or performances. This enhanced the generalization of the findings to male and female learners in junior schools.

The researcher also conducted type of school and age cross tabulation and the results were as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Type of school and Age Cross Tabulation

Type of School	11 yrs (n, %)	12 yrs (n, %)	13 yrs (n, %)	14 yrs (n, %)	Total
Public	36 (16.5%)	109 (50.0%)	67 (30.7%)	6 (2.8%)	218
Private	28 (21.4%)	67 (51.1%)	32 (24.4%)	4 (3.1%)	131
Total	64 (18.3%)	176 (50.4%)	99 (28.4%)	10 (2.9%)	349

Table 2 shows that whereas within public schools, approximately half of the learners were 12 years old, and this was also almost half for private schools but slightly over half with 12 years old too. A slightly more considerable portion of private school learners were also young, specifically 11 years old and comprising about 21%, which was substantial than about 16% for public school learners too. Older learners such as those aged 14 years were less seen either in private or public schools which indicated that a majority of the respondents were on schedule too. The importance of teaching children

according to their age cannot be overemphasized since children in grade six are predominantly clustered around 12-13 years old. Thus, more youthful children could influence teaching too.

The researcher also computed descriptive statistics of self-efficacy by gender. The results are shown in Table 3. Table 3 shows that female respondents had a higher mean ($M=78.00$, $SD=15.08$), while the male respondents recorded a lower mean of ($M=76.68$, $SD=15.91$). The male respondents recorded a negative skewness of -0.91 and a positive kurtosis of 1.08. This indicates that most

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of English Language Reading Comprehension Self-Efficacy by Gender

Gender	N	Min	Max	Range	Mean	SD	Kurtosis	Skewness
Male	176	24.00	106.00	82.00	77.68	15.91	1.08	-.91
Female	173	36.00	108.00	72.00	78.00	15.08	-.45	.11
Total	349	24.00	108.00	84.00	77.84	15.48	.41	-.44

of the scores lied above the mean. Conversely, the female respondents' score recorded a skewness of 0.11, and a slightly negative kurtosis of -0.45). The results reveals minimal differences in English reading comprehension self-efficacy between both males and females. This

suggests that social influences, such as a teacher's bias, might have more impact than gender.

The researcher further examined learners' perceived levels of social support by gender. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of Learners' Perceived Social Support by Gender

Gender	N	Min	Max	Range	Mean	SD	Kurtosis	Skewness
Male	176	46.00	82.00	36.00	66.20	7.65	-.16	-.01
Female	173	49.00	88.00	39.00	65.05	8.51	.13	.68
Total	349	46.00	88.00	42.00	65.63	8.10	-.08	.36

As shown in Table 4, the scores on the social support measure were analyzed for males and female respondents separately. The scores for 176 male respondents ranged from 46 to 82, with a range of 36, and the mean score 66.20 (SD = 7.65). The distribution was fairly normal with slight negative kurtosis of -0.16 and minimal skewness of -0.01 . The scores for the 173 female learners ranged from 49 to 88, with a range of 39, and a mean of 65.05 (SD = 8.51). The distribution for female respondents showed slight positive skewness (0.68) and a kurtosis value of

0.13, indicating an approximately normal distribution. The results indicate that both male and female respondents received moderately high level of social support, with the boys showing slightly higher support averages.

In order to find out if a relationship between social support and reading comprehension self-efficacy (SE) existed, the researcher conducted a Pearson product-moment correlation test. Further analysis was also conducted between domains of social support and reading comprehension SE. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Pearson Correlation between Social Support and Reading Comprehension Self-Efficacy

		Self-Efficacy
Social support	Pearson Correlation	.39**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00
	N	349
Emotional support	Pearson Correlation	.36**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00
	N	349
Informational support	Pearson Correlation	.39**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00
	N	349
Instructional support	Pearson Correlation	.39**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00
	N	349

The analysis of the relationship between the overall social support and reading comprehension SE revealed a moderate-positive and statistically significant relationship $r(347) = .39, p < .001$. As a result, the null hypothesis was rejected. Further analysis revealed that all dimensions of social support were significantly related to SE. Emotional support was positively and moderately related to SE ($r = .364, p < .001$). Informational support had a clear positive and moderate correlation ($r = .388, p < .001$). And instructional support had the highest and positive

correlation ($r = .394, p < .001$). A high level of social support with a focus on instructional support is positively related to reading comprehension self-efficacy beliefs.

The researcher conducted multiple linear regression analysis to determine the extent to which emotional, informational, and instructional support jointly and individually predict reading comprehension self-efficacy (SE) among Grade Six learners. The results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Multiple Linear Regression Predicting Reading Comprehension Self-Efficacy from Types of Social Support

Predictor	B	SE B	B	T	p	R	R ²	Adj. R ²	F(3,345)	p(F)	Std. Error of Estimate
Constant	41.33	4.38	—	9.45	< .00	.42	.17	.17	24.14	< .00	14.14
Emotional Support	0.94	0.36	0.18	2.66	.01						
Informational Support	0.16	0.87	0.03	0.19	.85						
Instructional Support	1.08	0.72	0.24	1.49	.14						

A regression analysis examining the relationship between various dimensions of social support and levels of confidence in reading comprehension for respondents found that all the three dimensions of emotional, informational, and instructional support were significant predictors of reading comprehension self-efficacy (SE). The overall model was statistically significant: $F(3, 345) = 24.14$, $p < .001$, and the model as a whole was able to explain approximately 17.3% variance in the dependent variable ($R^2 = .173$; Adjusted $R^2 = .166$). Among the predictor variables, only emotional support was a unique and statistically significant predictor ($B = 0.943$, $\beta = 0.179$, $p = 0.01$). Informational support ($p = 0.85$) and instructional support ($p = 0.14$) were not statistically significant.

The regression equation employing unstandardized coefficients is:

$$SE = 41.34 + 0.94 (\text{Emotional Support}) + 0.16 (\text{Informational Support}) + 1.08 (\text{Instructional Support})$$

The combined social support significantly predicted reading comprehension self-efficacy. Nevertheless, emotional support emerged as the strongest and the only significant individual predictor in the model.

Discussion of the Results

This research found out that there was a moderate positive statistically significant correlation between social support and reading comprehension self-efficacy among Grade Six learners. Specifically, the perception of emotional, informational, and instructional support among learners was correlated with reading comprehension self-efficacy. These findings imply that the interaction between the social environment and learners is important in influencing the beliefs of learners concerning their academic potential. Once the learners feel that they are encouraged, guided, and supported by the significant others in the learning environment, they tend to develop a stronger belief that they can be successful in the undertaking of their reading activities.

The results are congruent with the findings of Wang *et al.* (2024), who established that perceived teacher support had significant positive effects on academic self-efficacy of college students in China. Despite the fact that the study by Wang and others involved tertiary level students, the current research shows that the positive effect of social support on self-efficacy can also be observed among

the primary school learners. This implies that even at the initial levels of learning, teacher-learner relationships are crucial since they have the ability to enhance motivation and interest of learners in reading activities.

On the same note, the results are consistent with those of Apeh and Nteh (2020) who also found out that parental, teacher, peer, and classmate social support greatly influenced the academic performance of learners in Nigeria. Although the study focused on the general impact of social support on the overall academic performance, the present research builds on this insight by showing that social support also influences the perception of reading skills by learners. This implies the existence of the influence of social support in other psychological constructs such as self-efficacy rather than in academic results.

The findings also support the results of Wanjia and Adhiambo (2021) who found that social and emotional teacher, parent, and peer support had a positive effect on the psychological adaptation of learners with learning disabilities in Kenya. The current research extends these results to indicate that social support is also relevant to learners whose learning difficulties are not known. This implies that social support systems in schools are not supposed to exist in the format of remedial interventions but rather incorporated into the whole education practice that facilitates all learners.

Subsequently, in a further analysis through regression methods, it was revealed that the three types of support (emotional, informational and instructional) had a combined significant impact on reading comprehension self-efficacy. Emotional support showed a distinct and significant effect. This is consistent with Self-Determination Theory that highlight the significance of relatedness as a key psychological need. Being appreciated, comprehended, and emotionally useful, learners are empowered with the feeling of competence and confidence in their academic skills.

In the perspective of Self-Efficacy Theory, emotional support can also be utilized as a sort of social persuasion that can assure learners that they are able to perform well. When teachers and other significant persons provide support and positive feedback, learners would be less anxious about reading activities and would not give up when challenged by academic problems. As a result, emotional support turns out to be a significant

factor that enhances the confidence of learners in their reading skills and leads to their further involvement in reading. The results emphasize the need to foster positive social conditions at schools and home. The emotional, informational, and instructional support systems could be reinforced and this could help the learners in reading comprehension self-efficiency, increase academic engagement, and finally enhance outcomes in English language learning among Grade Six learners.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results, the study concludes that social support is a critical requirement for Grade Six learners. Support from teachers, peers and parents greatly influences learners' persistence, motivation, and belief in their reading abilities. The positive interactions between teachers and parents and among the learners themselves contribute a lot to increasing their self-belief and motivation in reading comprehension.

Recommendations

- Based on the results, the school administrators should put in place and enhance a structured support system in the school, like mentorship programs and frequent parent-teacher interaction forums, so that the learners can be given adequate support to enhance learning outcomes in English language.
- Teachers should provide on-going academic and emotional support to the learners by guiding them, encouraging them and giving them special attention to boost their confidence in reading comprehension. They should employ peer support tools including group reading, peer tutoring and collaborative learning to enhance the motivation and self-efficacy of the learners in their reading comprehension.
- Parents on the other hand, should support learners at home by getting involved in reading activities, track the progress of their children and be in close contact with the teachers to provide support at school.
- Learners should seek the help of teachers, peers, and parents when working on their reading skills and develop confidence in their abilities.

Limitations

This study however, had some limitations. It used a correlational design which only inferred the association between social support and reading comprehension self-efficacy without revealing causal links between the variables. The study relied on self-report questionnaires, which might have led to response bias because of social desirability and lack of understanding of some questions by the learners. The research was also limited to Grade Six learners in Gatundu South Sub-County, making it difficult to generalize the results to other areas or grades. The study also only examined social support and omitted other variables that may affect reading comprehension self-efficacy such as teaching strategies, socioeconomic background and home literacy environment. Time and

budget constraints also limited the use of other data collection methods such as interviews, which would have given more in-depth information.

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