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THE APPLICATION OF E-LEARNING IN HISTORY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: NIGERIA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

The concept of Sustainable Development emerged from a series of Conferences and Summits, where influential people have tried to agree on how to tackle "the burning issues "of the 21st Century: poverty, increasing inequality, and environmental and human health degradation. In line with the aforementioned, the thrust of this paper is to apply the e-learning approach in History for the realization of Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria particularly in this 21st Century. The objectives of the study were to: trace the evolution of e-learning in Nigeria, explain the concept of sustainable development, explore the effects of e-learning in History, and identify obstacles to Sustainable Development in Nigeria. The study relied on secondary sources of data which included: textbooks, and reputable journal publications from recognized databases. The study established that since History is the study of life in society in the past about the present development and future hopes, the application of e-learning remains very apt if the burning issues that characterize Nigeria in the 21st Century such as poverty, inequality, environmental and human health degradation must be tackled. The paper concludes that despite different measures put in place by the Nigerian government, the challenges bedeviling Nigeria about Sustainable Development are still unresolved.

Keywords: E-learning, History, Sustainable development, Nigeria, 21st Century

Introduction

The thrust of this paper is on the application of E-learning for sustainable development in Nigeria in the 21st Century. For ease of presentation, the paper is segmented into the following themes: Introduction, Conceptual clarifications, the Evolution of E-learning, Emergence of Sustainable Development, Effects of E-learning, and obstacles to Sustainable Development in Nigeria. Twenty-first-century education is awash with seismic pedagogical shifts orchestrated by rapid advances in technology witnessed in the last three decades, particularly, the boom in information and communications technologies (ICTs) like the Internet (Liverpool, Marut, Ndam & Oti, 2009; Yunusa, Umar & Bervell, 2019). In fact, ICTs employed in online learning

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environments now form an integral and essential feature in the instructional delivery for education and training, particularly for open and distance learning (ODL) in many educational and training institutions across the globe (Bawa, 2016; Lawn, Zhi & Morello, 2017). Some scholars, including (Khan, 2005; Obi, Charles-Okoli, Agunwa, Omotowo, Ndu & AgwuUmahi, 2018) state that e-learning was originally assumed to be the same thing as distance education where learning took place solely via a web-based medium. Equally, it was initially viewed as technical support or technical improvement of online education (Meskhi, Ponomareva & Ugnich, 2019). Nevertheless, soon there arose the need for the purposeful design of education courses, their adoption, and adaptation to the virtual learning environment (Meskhi, Ponomareva & Ugnich, 2019).

Conceptual clarifications

The Concept of E-learning

E-learning as a concept is commonly referred to as the intentional use of networked information and communications technology in teaching and learning. Several other interrelated terms are also used to describe this mode of teaching and learning. They include online learning, virtual learning, distributed learning, network, and web-based learning (Mohammed, 2013). It is a type of online education, training, and knowledge sharing that is conducted over the Internet. It can be utilized in various settings, such as academic education, corporate training, continuing professional development, and skill development courses (www.ispringsolutions.com). Learning and teaching settings for E-learning include among others virtual learning, blended learning, visual classrooms, or content sharing platforms. Electronic tools and software for the realization of these settings encompass Video Conferencing, Mobile devices, Audience Response Systems (ARS), Webcams, or Educational games.

The launch of personal computers and networks (Internet and intranet) has played a crucial role in the expansion and distribution of a wide range of applications for E-learning. It has provided new ways to deliver learning content types such as slide-based courses, Quizzes, Webinars, Screencasts, Talking head videos, eBooks, Simulations, and Podcasts amongst others (Otto and Becker, 2019).

Defining History

History is the study of life in society in the past, in all its aspects, about present development and future hopes. It is the story of man in time, an inquiry into the past based on evidence. Indeed, evidence is an inquiry into what happened in the past, when it happened, and how it happened. It is an inquiry into the inevitable changes in human affairs in the past and the ways these changes affect, influence or determine the patterns of life in the society (Collingwood, 1951).

History aims at helping students to understand the present existing social, political, religious, and economic conditions of the people. The teaching and learning of History can help students to explain the present, to analyze it, and to trace its course. History thus, helps students to understand the present-day problems both at the National and International level accurately and objectively. All these can be achieved through E-learning by students as they can even remain in the corridor of their homes anywhere and at any time at their own pace and acquire such knowledge.

The Concept of Sustainable Development

Sustainable Development is a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concepts:

(i) the concept of **'needs'**, in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and

(ii) the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs. According to Brundtland's (2006) definition of Sustainable Development, means that the needs of the present generation should be met without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs. It is about safeguarding the earth's capacity to support life in all its diversity and is based on the principles of democracy, gender equality, solidarity, the rule of law, and respect for fundamental human rights, including freedom and equal opportunities for all. It aims at the continuous improvement of the quality of life and well-being on Earth for present and future generations. To that end, it promotes a dynamic economy, with full employment and a high level of education, health protection, social and territorial cohesion, and environmental protection in a peaceful and secure world, respecting cultural diversity.

Sustainable economic development is the process in which the exploitation of natural resources, the direction of investment, the orientation of technological development, and institutional change or reform are all in coordination and harmony and enhance both the current and future potential for meeting human needs. The goal of sustainable development is to secure a good living opportunity for present and future generations, that is, using natural resources sustainably. Economic sustainability refers to balanced growth that is not based on the loss of resources or indebtedness (https://www.ykliitto.fi/yk-teemat/kestava-kehitys).

Cameron (1993) opines that sustainable development encompasses the progressive economic and social development of human society through maintaining the security of livelihood for all peoples and by enabling them to meet their present needs, together with a quality of life through their dignity and well-being, without compromising the ability of future generations to do likewise. Without questioning the principle of "development" as a method for satisfying the needs of current generations, it explicitly recognizes that future generations also have interests and even rights deserving protection in this new model of development. The essential features of sustainable development according to Idisi (2002) and Offiong (2001) include the following:

- ecological integrity and sustainability;
- equity and distributive justice at all levels;
- socially-relevant economic productivity and technological development;
- popular participation and collective autonomy and
- prevalence and institutionalization of human development.

The Evolution of E-learning

The development of e-learning in Nigeria could be traced back to the development of telecommunication which began in 1886 when the e-cable connection was established by the colonial authorities between Lagos and the colonial office in London to transmit information and receive feedback (www.files.eric.ed.gov). By 1893, all government offices in Lagos were provided with telephone service for easy communication, feedback, and easy access. Later, all other parts of the country were provided with telephone services (Mohammed, 2013).

Worldwide, the growing interest in e-learning has evolved from several dimensions and directions. These include organizations that have offered traditional distance education programs either in a single, dual, or mixed-mode setting. The corporate sector on the other hand became interested in e-learning as a way of rationalizing the cost of their in-house staff training activities. In another perspective, e-learning became of interest to residual campus-based educational organizations as well. They see e-learning as a way of improving access to their programs and also as a way of tapping into a growing niche market (Singh, 2016).

In a similar development, (World Bank, 2000) has observed that the awareness to advance in e-learning in Nigeria started gathering momentum two decades ago. The early exposure came through lecturers who studied abroad and had opportunities to attend conferences on e-learning technologies. Even though some universities like that of Abuja had aspects of ICT such as print, audio/video tapes, and digital radios, it was at the lowest level. The most common e-learning mode adopted in Universities was then and Distance Learning was conducted in the form of lecture notes on CD-ROM played at the learner's desire (Mohammed, 2013).

Similarly, due to accreditation criteria set by the National Universities Commission, for certain programs to pass accreditation, they must satisfy certain requirements like equipped ICT facilities, Laboratories, and Libraries among others. In this regard, students use e-learning equipment for their lectures. Other projects that have semblance with e-learning include the initiative of the Nigerian Universities Commission to set up a Management Information System (MIS) project, about fifteen years ago (Mohammed, 2013).

Arguably, many Nigerian Universities today have Local area networks in their Libraries, finance departments, MIS Units, some faculties/departments, etc. The need to link up these and be able to link up to the National Universities Commission's network gave rise to another project initiated by the NUC, called NUNet Project. The NUNet stands for Nigerian Universities Networks.

More elaborately, (Mac-Ikemenjima,2005) traced the origins of NUNet which dates back to 1994 with the following objectives:

- to end the isolation of Nigerian academic staff and students from each other and the global academic community;
- to ameliorate staff shortages arising from the brain-drain, by providing the ICT facilities required by our academic staff-in –Diaspora to make their contributions regardless of where they live or work;
- to encourage the sharing of resources, and foster academic and research collaborations among Nigerian Universities, and with their counterparts throughout the world;
- to provide Universities with access to electronic databases, journals, and books many of which are increasingly available only in digital formats;
- to serve as a vehicle to expand access to education at minimal cost of capital building expenditure; and
- to place Nigerian Universities at the forefront of the information revolution, so that they might serve their proper roles as foci for national development.

The Emergence of Sustainable Development

Historically, the 1972 Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, Sweden, attended by 113 states and representatives from 19 International Organizations, was the first genuine

International Conference devoted exclusively to environmental issues. There, a group of 27 experts articulated the nexus between environment and development stating that: "although in individual instances there were conflicts between environmental and economic priorities, they were intrinsically two sides of the same coin" (Dillion, 2019). Another result of the Stockholm Conference was the creation of the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP), which had the mission "to provide leadership and encourage partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of the future generations".

This conference marked a significant turning point in the origin of Sustainable development as it played a catalytic role in promoting the subsequent adoption of International agreements concerned with ocean dumping, pollution from ships, and the endangered species trade (Dillion,2019). It also adopted the "Stockholm Declaration on the Human Environment", which included forward-looking principles, such as Principle 13167, that declared the need for integration and coordination in development planning to allow for environmental protection. However, "the Stockholm Conference was limited in its effectiveness because environmental protection and the need for development, especially in developing countries, were seen as competing needs and thus were dealt with in a separate, uncoordinated fashion". Some critics concluded that "the conference was more concerned with identifying trade-offs between environment and development than with promoting harmonious linkages between the two"(Dillion,2019). Even UN documents acknowledged after the Stockholm conference that little was accomplished to concretely integrate environmental concerns into development policies and plans. A more integrated perspective that incorporated both economic development and environmental sensitivities was needed.

In 1983, the UN General Assembly created the World Commission on Environment and Development which was later known as the Brundtland Commission, named after its Chair, Gro Harlem Brundtland, then Prime Minister of Norway and later head of the World Health Organization. In 1987, the commission published the Brundtland Report, entitled '**Our Common Future'**. It built upon what had been achieved in Stockholm and provided the most politically significant of all definitions of sustainable development: "Sustainable development is a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". The definition contains two major concepts: firstly, the concept of '**needs**', in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to whom overriding priority should be given; and secondly the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs (Singh, 2016).

In that period, the concept of sustainable development acquired political momentum "through rising public concern in the developed countries over the new and alarming phenomenon of global environmental change, and in some ways, it replaced fears of nuclear war that had prevailed in the early 1980s".

Some critics argue that "the Brundtland Commission Report's discussion of sustainability is both optimistic and vague. The Commission probably felt that, to be accepted, the discussion had to be optimistic, but given the facts, it was necessary to be vague and contradictory in order not to appear to be pessimistic" (Bartlett, 2006).

The year 1992 also featured prominently in the evolution of the concept of sustainable development. This year, the UN Conference on the Environment and Development (UNCED), was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, with an unprecedented attendance of 114 heads of state, including 10,000 representatives from 178 countries and 1400 nongovernmental organizations represented by additional thousands.

The conference itself proved to be an international event on an unprecedented scale as heads of government tried to make their mark on what was dubbed the Rio Earth Summit. The association in the title "Connecting Environment and Development, was indicative of North-South bargaining at the UN, in which demands for international action on the environment, were set against claims for additional development aid and technology transfer" (Singh, 2016). The major outputs of the conference were: the Rio Declaration, Agenda 21173, and the Commission on Sustainable Development. All were quite explicitly concerned with sustainable development and it is thus, after the Earth Summit that the concept truly arrived at the international scene.

The commitment of leaders from around the world to sustainable development was clearly articulated in Agenda 21, the key document of the summit- a 500-page collection of agreed healthy practices and advice for achieving sustainable development in almost any area on the surface of the earth. Agenda 21 activities are organized under environmental and development themes: quality of life, efficient use of natural resources, protection of the global commons, management of human settlements, and sustainable economic growth. It recognizes that the persistence of severe poverty in several parts of the world alongside a standard of living based on wasteful consumption of resources in other parts is not a sustainable model and that environmental management must be practiced in developing and industrial countries alike.

During the 1992 conference, it was agreed that to implement Agenda 21, countries should prepare a national sustainable development strategy (Singh, 2016). While sustainable development was conceived as the unifying principle during the Rio conference, there was disagreement about its meaning and implications. The UNCED process attempted to provide guidance in implementing sustainable development by laying out a set of principles and a plan of action based on the concept. Indeed, Rio was less about debating the definition of sustainable development than it was about developing approaches to ensure its implementation. Some critics argue that "implementing the principles of equity and living within ecological limits can only be accomplished if social, political, and economic systems have the flexibility to be redirected toward sustainability as well as integrated and the environment" (Singh, 2016).

In the 1997 Kyoto Conference on climate change, developed countries agreed on specific targets for cutting their emissions of greenhouse gases, resulting in a general framework, which became known as the Kyoto Protocol, with specifics to be detailed over the next few years. The U.S. proposed to stabilize emissions only and not to cut them at all, while the European Union called for a 15 % cut. In the end, there was a trade-off, and industrialized countries were committed to an overall reduction of emissions of greenhouse gases to 5.2% below 1990 levels for the period 2008-2012. However, the complexity of the negotiations created considerable confusion over compliance even after the Kyoto Protocol itself was adopted because it only outlined the basic features for compliance but did not explain the all-important rules of how they would operate. Although 84 countries signed the protocol, indicating the intent to ratify it, many others were reluctant to even this step.

Unfortunately, the USA has refused to ratify the Kyoto Protocol. The EU has ratified the Kyoto Protocol but this has not been enough. The Union has failed to reduce CO_2 emissions. About 1990 figures, the US's contribution to CO_2 emissions is most likely to increase by 50%, compared to an 18% EU increase (Singh,2016). The Kyoto Conference remains one of the most debated international agreements between the "greens" and the neo-liberals".

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In September 2000 at the Millennium Summit held in New York, world leaders agreed on the Millennium Development Goals, most of which had the year 2015 as a timeframe and used 1990 as a benchmark. The Millennium Development Goals demonstrate that "the livelihoods and well-being of the world's poor are now conceptualized in terms of access to opportunity and absence of insecurity and vulnerability" (Adger,2007). They represent a more practical expression of the principle of equilibrium between the economic, social, and environmental pillars of sustainable development. They include(i) having the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day and those suffering from hunger, (ii)achieving universal primary education and promoting gender equality, (iii) reducing child mortality and improving maternity health, (iv) reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS, (v) integrating the principles of sustainable development into country policies and (vi) reducing by half the proportion of people without access to potable drinking water. It is heartbreaking that even with the laudable pillars, the world still has to tackle "this dangerous blend of indifference (Gorbachev, 2006).

The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg in 2002 was a landmark in the business of forging partnerships between the United Nations, governments, businesses, and NGOs to gather resources for addressing global environmental, health, and poverty challenges. The Johannesburg Summit reconfirmed the Millennium goals and complemented them by setting several additional ones such as halving the proportions of people lacking access to basic sanitation; minimizing harmful effects from chemicals; and halting the loss of biodiversity. As opined by (Asefa,2005), the Johannesburg Conference was apt in different ramifications: (i) the conference was a progress in moving the concept of Sustainable Development toward a more productive exploration of the relationship between economic development and environmental quality,(ii) the WSSD filled some gaps in the Agenda 21 and the Millennium Development Goals and addressed some newly emerging issues, including to halve the proportion of people without access to basic sanitation, (iii) to use and produce chemicals in ways that do not lead to significant adverse effects on human health and the environment; (iv) to maintain or restore depleted fish stocks to levels that can produce the maximum sustainable yields on an urgent basis.

The Johannesburg Conference confirmed a trend, which appeared since the 1992 Conference, of the increasing importance of the socio-economic pillars of sustainable development. The environmental agenda of the two previous UN conferences had been sustained by peaks in the public 'attention cycle' of major developed countries. The WSSD incorporated the concept of sustainable development throughout its deliberations and was initially dubbed "the implementation summit" (Singh, 2016).

Effects of E-Learning in History

It is no longer news that technology is indispensably significant to our daily life, activities as well and development of the society in 21st-century Nigeria. In the education sector and particularly the teaching and learning of History, we are no longer limited to the traditional face-to-face classroom setting due to evolving online learning that characterizes technology(Onyinyechukwu, 2021). This calls for constant re-adjustment especially when it comes to a new way of doing things which constitutes part of learning.

E-Learning which is an alternative method of learning is different from the typical classroom setting that is limited to the four walls exhausted teachers and students, but made possible a whole world of flexible learning environment. It takes place in the form of online classes rather than physical classes just as online certificate courses are taken through various certified platforms.

E-learning of History saves cost and this is a major attraction worldwide (Onyinyechukwu, 2021). Through E-Learning of History, students and Universities do not need to worry about accommodation or feeding payment because everything can be done from home online.

E-Learning of History is a great backup plan for the Nation's economy in the event of unforeseen circumstances. This was evident in the advent of COVID-19 in schools in Nigeria. During this period,

E-learning became a backup plan. E-learning of History can enhance the technological know-how of the students. E-learning has created a paperless community instead of always printing out assignments. Thus, E-learning helps students to manage their time. It helps students understand that every second, minute, and hour counts.

E-learning also enhances class participation. With E-learning, students who are very shy in physical classes could comfortably contribute to learning processes from the comfort of their houses (Onyinyechukwu, 2021).

Through E-learning of History, students' academic performance can be enhanced. In a research carried out at Covenant University as cited by Onyinyechukwu, titled "The Impacts of E-learning in Facilitating Academic Performance among Private Secondary Schools and Tertiary Institutions", it was stated that E-learning has effects on academic performance. This ranges from improvement in results and more engagement in academic activities etc.

However, as sound and effective as the aforementioned points appear to be, E-learning is not a bed of roses. It has its bad sides too. One of the most obvious negative effects of E-learning is that it inhabits interactions among students of History like their contemporaries of other disciplines. Humans are social beings but E-learning does not create avenues for that. There is also a limitation on the type of course that can be historically done via E-learning. Thus, archeologically inclined courses cannot be effectively and efficiently learned via E-learning.

Against the backdrop that E-learning is done on the internet, there is a lot of room for distractions. Students can easily get carried away to other sites. It also creates an avenue for cheating as there is little or no supervision.

E-learning could generate an adverse effect on the mental health of the students. With online learning, there is likely increased anxiety among students about meeting deadlines and attendance. In some cases, uncontrollable forces like a bad network could occur and most of the lecturers are not flexible enough to extend agreed deadlines. This can result in panic, tension, and frustration. Arguably, mental health is very important and in learning, students need sanity and peace of mind.

With E-learning, much information is damped at once and the students need time to process them. This cycle of mental exhaustion in turn pushes the students to a peak where they either tune out or get distracted with something else (Onyinyechukwu, 2021). Worse of all, is the inability of students in rural areas to actively participate in E-learning platforms due to the near absence of electricity in the rural areas. Online learning encourages procrastination as it makes it easy to get carried away with other things at home and keep pushing back on when to do a task. This leads to workload and panic when the deadline dawns.

Obstacles to Sustainable Development in Nigeria

One of the greatest challenges to sustainable development in Nigeria has been that of evolving and effectively implementing policies and programs that will free the vast majority of Nigerians from abject poverty. Many Nigerians still wallow in abject poverty and perhaps do not receive sufficient nutritious diets to alleviate disease. To achieve sustainable development, absolute poverty must be tackled so that poor people can produce or purchase the food, clothing, and housing necessary to ensure health and self-respect. Ending absolute poverty in Nigeria therefore calls for improved access to education, healthcare, clean water, and sanitation(Ukertor and Vambe, 2018).

Another obstacle to sustainable development in Nigeria is the threatened and degraded agrarian and production environment evident by poor leadership, mismanagement and pauperization of the populace, and inconsistent policies that have taken a great toll on the environment. For instance, Nigeria's Niger Delta area has been in the news. The nation's mangrove forests are being destroyed following poor exploitation of crude oil and gas in the region. The agrarian system in the area is being destroyed. The region has to depend on other regions for food supplies. Again, the

nation has to forgo most of the rubber and oil palm plantations. This depicts the lapses of uncoordinated policy formulation reminiscent of poor leadership.

In northern Nigeria, desertification processes are prevalent, and coupled with heavy fuelwood harvest, poor farming techniques, and annual bush burning, the land is being destroyed. In eastern Nigeria, heavy gully erosion coupled with overpopulation prevails. The results have been failing rural and agrarian sectors, mass poverty of the rural populace, heavy food importation, poor implementation of agrarian policies, and indeed a mass of bandits emerging from the rural areas.

Even in the industrial and modern sector environments, society's greed for quick and cheap money has led to the abandoning of standards especially as seen in the emission of toxic materials into the environment. Sub-standard goods are being produced and imported, thus in Nigeria, it is not so much the quality of life that is at risk because of environmental degradation, but life itself.

Also worthy to mention as obstacles to the quest for sustainable development in Nigeria are instances of anti-development activities such as the constant feud between the executive and legislature both at the Federal and state levels, disrespect for the rule of law and the constitution, poor welfare package, and visionless leadership (Ukertor and Vambe, 2018). Other instances are inter-tribal and intra-tribal as well as inter-religious crises that prevail in most parts of Nigeria. Some glaring examples of such crises include the Kaduna crisis in 2000, the Tiv/Jukun crisis in Taraba State in 1999, and the Jos crisis in 2004. Arguably, more financial and material resources were wasted and economic activities were brought to a halt during such period periods. This in turn affects sustainable development in the country.

Global economy crisis; the financial crisis that occurred during the post-corona virus also features as one of the numerous issues that affect sustainable economic development. Take for example the downturn in the United States and its impact on other nations which Nigeria was not an exemption during the period. As a result of the interconnectedness of world trade, there are many synergies between nations around the world, hence what affects one country can also impact another indirectly (Bogger,2022).

Ignorance, stupidity, apathy, and denial also affect sustainable economic development in Nigeria. The **first** consists of the lack of exposure to information, the **second** is related to the lack of capacity to absorb it, and the **third** and **fourth** of having the information but lacking the conviction optimism, or fortitude to act on it. As is evident in many cases, people in Nigeria most times find it difficult to abandon their traditional ways of doing things to modernize. Thus, new administrative procedures, and modernized agricultural practices including the use of improved seeds, farm implements, fertilizers, and pesticides are seen as an exception rather than the rule of contemporary developmental strategies. These traditional values and practices thus conflict with industrialization and sustainable development. Even though they cannot be said to be bad in any normative sense, they can be best described as uneconomic cultural practices (Abah, 2000).

Another challenge of sustainable economic development is population growth; Nigeria for several decades has been described as the Giant of Africa because of her population. Population growth in Nigeria like any developing nation in the world can be seen as both a success and a challenge for the future. This is because the larger the country's population the more resources are needed to ensure that the people remain out of poverty and have utilities such as fresh water and industries.

Conclusion

Since History is the study of man in time, an inquiry into the past based on evidence, can be achieved through the adoption of an e-learning approach. Incorporating the learning of History into an e-learning approach would help students to understand better the present existing social, political, religious, and economic conditions of the people about the quest for sustainable development paradigm even though Nigeria is yet to achieve the goal of sustainable development as illustrated by the obstacles to sustainable development in Nigeria already explained.

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