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EXPLORING THE LINK BETWEEN EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND EXAM ANXIETY IN BACCALAUREATE-PREPARATORY CLASSES FOR MOROCCAN STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence and exam anxiety among second-year baccalaureate students. Specifically, it examines whether a significant correlation exists between emotional intelligence and exam anxiety levels within a sample of 100 students, evenly divided between males and females. The research utilizes the Arabic versions of Bar-On's Emotional Intelligence Scale (2002) and Sarason's Exam Anxiety Scale (1960) for assessment. The results indicate a statistically significant negative relationship between emotional intelligence and exam anxiety, as demonstrated by a Pearson correlation coefficient of -0.767. This finding suggests that students with higher emotional intelligence tend to exhibit lower levels of exam anxiety. Therefore, the study concludes that emotional intelligence is associated with reduced exam anxiety among second-year baccalaureate students. Furthermore, the study determined that there were no statistically significant differences in emotional intelligence levels between males and females, as assessed by the t-test for mean differences. Thus, gender does not seem to influence emotional intelligence levels in this context. However, gender-based differences were observed in test anxiety, with females exhibiting higher levels of test anxiety compared to males.

Introduction

Examinations are considered an integral part of the education and academic assessment system, serving as an evaluative process aimed at measuring students' understanding and assimilation of knowledge and skills taught during a semester over a specific period. Exams pose a challenge for students to determine their academic achievement in a specific subject and can be indicative of their abilities in critical thinking, analysis, and problem-solving within an academic framework. Examinations are pivotal milestones in a student's academic life, influencing their overall academic trajectory, especially when used as criteria for success or failure in academic progression or in determining their choices and inclinations towards specific specializations.

In the midst of these circumstances, many students experience significant anxiety towards examinations. This anxiety can lead to various issues related to their performance and coping systems with tests, often resulting in lower academic achievement (Reyhani, 1981). Exam anxiety may also be linked to several other psychological factors, such as emotional intelligence, which plays a crucial role in determining how individuals cope with stressful situations, such as examinations.

Emotions fundamentally contribute to the learning process (Dirkx, 2001), with numerous studies concurring that emotions are essential for the proper functioning of many cognitive processes, including memory (Rusinek, 2014), attention (Sennwald et al., 2015), and problem-solving (Damasio, 2010).

Different contexts in which students find themselves can generate a variety of emotions, both positive and negative. Positive emotions broaden an individual's repertoire of actions and thoughts, unlike negative emotions that yield opposite results (Fredrickson, 2004). Thus, the examination context becomes a significant source of various emotions, such as anxiety or fear of failure, particularly for academically weaker students or even high-achievers. Students experiencing anxiety at this stage tend to be more preoccupied with their performance-related concerns. These emotions inevitably interfere, to varying extents, with their ability to focus and hinder the use of cognitive processes that facilitate performance during exams. This situation makes it difficult for students to recall or

utilize the information at their disposal .Motivated by these considerations, the present study aims to explore the relationship between exam anxiety and emotional intelligence among secondary-level students. Our analysis will involve assessing the level of exam anxiety among these students and evaluating their emotional intelligence using reliable tools.

Statement of the Problem

Exam anxiety is a prevalent challenge faced by students during exam periods or when a teacher announces dates for continuous assessments or specific tests. The manner in which students handle these situations can vary significantly, influenced by numerous psychological and social factors. The diversity in responses to exam-related stress may also be linked to emotional regulation, which underscores the importance of emotional intelligence. According to Goleman (2001), emotional intelligence plays a crucial role in achieving success in both career and academic domains, accounting for up to 80% of success. This insight prompts an examination of the phenomenon of exam anxiety among students and the potential impact of emotional intelligence on this anxiety. This study aims to explore the relationship between emotional intelligence and exam anxiety among second-year baccalaureate students in Morocco. It seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. Is there a relationship between the level of emotional intelligence and the level of exam anxiety among second-year baccalaureate students?
2. Are there differences in the level of emotional intelligence between female and male students in the studied sample?
3. Are there differences in the degree of exam anxiety between female and male students in the studied sample?

Study Hypotheses

1. There is a statistically significant relationship between the level of emotional intelligence and the degree of exam anxiety among the studied sample of second-year baccalaureate students.
2. There are no statistically significant gender differences in emotional intelligence levels among the studied sample of second-year baccalaureate students.
3. There are statistically significant gender differences in the degree of exam anxiety among the studied sample of second-year baccalaureate students.

Study Scope

This research is situated within Dar Al Salam High School, selected for its considerable social diversity. The school is located within the territorial area of the Youssefia community in Rabat, one of the largest and most diverse territorial communities, encompassing a wide range of social strata. The investigation was conducted during the second semester of the 2022/2023 academic year, a period coinciding with the intensive preparation for the national baccalaureate examinations. This timing was strategically chosen to ensure that the phenomena of interest—emotional intelligence and exam anxiety—were observed under conditions of heightened academic pressure. During this period, the Arabic versions of Bar-On's Emotional Intelligence Scale (2002) and Sarason's Exam Anxiety Scale (1960) were administered to the study sample, facilitating a comprehensive analysis of the variables in question.

Conceptual Framework

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence, rooted in the conceptual work of Salovey and Mayer (1990), is defined as the ability to perceive and express one's own emotions, translate emotions into thoughts, understand and contemplate one's emotions, and manage the emotions of others. Since then, three theoretical models have been introduced: the first refers to a set of skills (Salovey & Mayer, 1990), the second to a combination of skills and personal traits (Bar-On, 1997), and the third to a set of skills (Goleman, 2001). Only the hierarchical model developed by Mayer and Salovey (1997) characterizes emotional intelligence as a form of intelligence in the traditional sense, meaning a series of mental skills. This hierarchical model consists of four levels, progressing from the lowest to the highest: perceiving emotions, facilitating emotions, understanding emotions, and managing emotions. In Goleman's model, we find self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills.

Caution is advised in using these models because the authors do not agree on a common definition for the concepts used. Indeed, what do they mean by "emotional intelligence" and "level of emotions"? Not to mention the subtle differences and variations introduced to incorporate "dimensions" or "factors" or "traits." Clear answers to these questions, crucial in scientific research related to emotional intelligence as a highly significant subject, have not been provided.

Exam Anxiety

According to Spielberger (1993), anxiety is considered a negative and uncomfortable emotional experience, often temporary and associated with a specific situation that an individual is going through. It can be characterized by varying levels of intensity among individuals and how they cope with anxiety-inducing situations, involving feelings such as tension, nervousness, and negative thoughts. Additionally, Spielberger (1993) introduces the concept of trait anxiety, which is a more enduring characteristic (as opposed to situational anxiety) and is related to various psychological structures and individual traits. This concept helps distinguish between individuals who generally exhibit a high level of anxiety as a personal trait and those who show high levels of situational anxiety when faced with specific situations and conditions. In this context, Bolger (1990) emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between anxiety as a trait and anxiety as a state associated with a specific time and place, such as exam-related anxiety during the exam and test period.

According to Spielberger (1980), exam anxiety can be defined as a psychological experience involving a set of negative feelings and thoughts that individuals experience before and during their performance in tests or exams. Individuals may feel fear and tension,

"Affecting their performance during the exam. Ian and Owens (1996) note that exam anxiety often includes cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses that may lead to poor performance during exams and even failure. In the same context (Lipsey et al., 2017).", Cohen (2004) suggests that exam anxiety can negatively impact individuals whenever and wherever they are assessed, categorized based on their abilities, achievements, or interests.

Both Spielberger and Vagg (1995) consider exam anxiety as a situation-specific state and not related to continuous anxiety disorders as a stable personal trait. Exam-related anxiety, according to these researchers, is a temporary emotional state (Spielberger et al., 1978). Individuals experiencing exam anxiety are more prone to excessive worry during exam situations, exhibiting various symptoms such as mood disturbances, negative thoughts, nervousness, and physiological symptoms like sweating and increased heart rate. It can be concluded that individuals with exam anxiety experience higher levels of situational anxiety in every exam or test situation aimed at academic evaluation. The high level of situational anxiety activates negative experiences stored in the individual's memory, plunging them into a whirlwind of affective disturbances, negatively impacting their performance and how they handle exams (Zeidner, 1998).

Research Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative research methodology in nature, utilizing a descriptive-analytical design to delve into the complex relationship between emotional intelligence and exam anxiety among second-year Baccalaureate students in Morocco. This inquiry constitutes the central focus of our study. The selection of this methodological approach is informed by nuanced deliberations surrounding the nature of the research, its constituent variables, and central objectives. Within the purview of the descriptive-analytical design, our aim is twofold: firstly, to scrutinize the nexus between the study variables and their respective magnitudes and manifestations within the context of secondary education, particularly among cohorts on the cusp of baccalaureate examinations. Secondly, we endeavor to delineate, quantify, and assess gender-based differentials pertaining to the study variables, employing meticulously calibrated measurement instruments tailored to address the research inquiries and sample characteristics

Research Instruments

In this quantitative study, two validated scales were utilized to assess the levels of emotional intelligence and exam anxiety. The adaptation of these scales for the Moroccan context was overseen by Professors Benissa Zghboush, Ismail Alawi, and Karima Al-Ghoudzani (2021) from Sidi Mohammed Ben Abdellah University in Fez, Morocco, in collaboration with research faculty from the University of Jaén in Spain.

Bar-On Emotional Intelligence Scale:

This scale was designed and developed by Bar-On (1997), undergoing several modifications to adapt it to various cultures and languages. Bar-On's Emotional Intelligence Scale, based on the trait or mixed model, is a self-report measure grounded in research conducted by Bar-On (1997) on emotional intelligence. The scale was applied on a sample consisting of thousands of individuals across different age groups, aged 16 and above, in several countries. It is a multidimensional scale with a high predictive ability for an individual's future emotional intelligence skills (Bar-On, 1997).

The Bar-On scale comprises 35 items distributed across four dimensions, each dimension measuring a component of the core elements of emotional intelligence, as illustrated in the following table:

Dimension Number	Scale Dimensions
1	Self-Awareness
2	Relationship Management
3	Stress Management
4	Adaptability

Table 1. Bar-On Emotional Intelligence Scale and its Four Dimensions.

Test Anxiety Scale (TAS):

We employed the Test Anxiety Scale (TAS) questionnaire as a tool to measure the level of anxiety individuals experience during exams or tests. This scale was developed by David Sarason (1952), an American psychologist and researcher in the field of educational psychology. The purpose of this scale is to understand the extent of stress and psychological anxiety that can impact individuals' performance during tests and exams.

The scale consists of 38 statements designed to measure anxiety and psychological stress. Individuals are required to respond to these questions on a four-point scale (Strongly Agree – Agree – Disagree – Strongly Disagree). Subsequently, the responses are analyzed to estimate the personal anxiety level for each individual, utilizing appropriate statistical methods.

Sample Population:

The research sample consisted of high school students in the second year of the Baccalaureate program in the city of Rabat. Their ages ranged from 17 to 19 years old, and they were randomly selected, totaling 100 male and female students, as illustrated in the table below. The selection was made during the second semester of the academic year, ensuring the ethical considerations of scientific research were adhered to, including obtaining permission from the institution where the tests were administered.

Data Analysis and Interpretation:

Prior to the presentation of statistical findings, it is essential to highlight that the data obtained from administered tests, complet-

ed by the sampled population, underwent processing through Excel. Subsequent data analysis was carried out utilizing the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Employing statistical methodologies such as the Pearson correlation coefficient facilitated the measurement of the strength and direction of relationships, while the t-test was employed to investigate differences and ascertain the significance of disparities between the means of two independent samples.

Statistical Data related to Exam Anxiety:

We will present the statistical data collected using the Emotional Intelligence Scale, applying it to male and female high school students.

Gender	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation
Male	50	2.024	0.624
Female	50	2.294	0.526
Total	100	2.159	0.590

Table 3. Data related to the level of exam anxiety in the study sample by gender.

The table above displays data on the level of exam anxiety based on the gender variable. Overall, the data shows that the mean level of exam anxiety for females is 2.294, while for males, it is 2.024. These data suggest that the level of exam anxiety is higher in females compared to males.

Additionally, we observe that the standard deviation for the level of exam anxiety is 0.6247 for males and 0.5265 for females. Since the standard deviation measures the extent of data dispersion from the mean, we can see that the standard deviation for females is slightly lower than that for males. This indicates that the level of exam anxiety among females is subject to slightly less variability from the mean compared to males.

These data suggest that females, in general, may have a higher level of anxiety during exams compared to males. However, statistical analysis is needed to determine whether these differences are statistically significant.

Statistical Data related to Emotional Intelligence:

We will attempt to present the statistical data collected using the Emotional Intelligence Scale, by applying it to male and female high school students.

Gender	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation
Male	50	2.000	0.740
Female	50	2.028	0.676
Total	100	2.014	0.706

Table 4. Level of emotional intelligence in the study sample by gender

The table above displays data on the level of emotional intelligence based on the gender variable. Overall, the data shows that the mean level of emotional intelligence for females is 2.028, while for males, it is 2.000. These data suggest that the level of emotional intelligence is relatively similar between females and males.

Based on this data, we can see that there is a slight difference in the mean level between males and females. Although the mean level of emotional intelligence among females shows a slight increase compared to males, this difference does not constitute a tangible gap between the genders.

We also observe that the standard deviation for the level of emotional intelligence among males is 0.740, while for females, it is 0.676. These data indicate that the standard deviation for males is slightly higher than that for females, suggesting a slightly greater dispersion and divergence of data from the mean in the level of emotional intelligence among males.

Based on this information, we can conclude that there are subtle differences in the level of emotional intelligence between males and females, as preliminary data that need further confirmation through statistical tests measuring individual differences.

Presentation and Analysis of Results in Light of Hypotheses:

Presentation and Analysis of the First Hypothesis: There is a statistically significant relationship between the level of emotional intelligence and the degree of exam anxiety among the studied sample of secondary school students.

Calculating the correlation coefficient between the level of emotional intelligence and the level of exam anxiety:

Sample (N)	Correlation Coefficient (Pearson)	Significance Level
100	-0.767**	0.01

Table 5. Statistical data for the correlation coefficient between the level of emotional intelligence and the level of exam anxiety.

The table above presents the data on the calculation of the Pearson correlation coefficient to measure the strength of the relationship between the level of emotional intelligence and the level of exam anxiety among secondary school students. The data indicates a strong and statistically significant inverse relationship (-0.767) at the 0.01 significance level. This implies that students with

higher emotional intelligence levels exhibit lower levels of anxiety during exams, and vice versa.

These findings confirm our first hypothesis, suggesting a statistically significant relationship between the level of emotional intelligence and the degree of exam anxiety among the studied sample of secondary school students. It appears that as the level of emotional intelligence increases, the level of exam anxiety decreases among students.

Our research results align with several studies that affirmed a correlation or impact between emotional intelligence and exam anxiety. In a study conducted by Tabibi Baghdad and Sakri Mohammed (2021) on emotional intelligence and its relation to exam anxiety levels among third-year high school students in some schools in Algiers, the results indicated a strong inverse correlation between emotional intelligence and exam anxiety levels. Similarly, Dutta and Dasgupta (2013) found in their study in India, on a sample of secondary school students, a strong inverse correlation between emotional intelligence and the level of exam anxiety. In other words, students with higher emotional intelligence were less prone to exam-related anxiety.

Given that the results indicate a strong and statistically significant relationship between the level of emotional intelligence and the level of exam anxiety, it can be inferred that students with high emotional intelligence may possess better skills in dealing with emotions arising from pressure and challenges they face during exams. On the other hand, students with low emotional intelligence levels may be more prone to feeling anxious, pressured, and unable to control their emotions, which could impact their performance in exams.

Presentation of Results Related to Hypothesis Two:

We hypothesize no statistically significant differences between genders regarding the level of emotional intelligence in the studied sample of secondary-level students. To test Hypothesis Two, the Student's t-test was employed to calculate individual differences in emotional intelligence between two independent groups, represented in this study by the male and female groups.

Upon conducting the t-test, the following results were obtained:

t-Test	**Levene Test**
Significance Level	Degrees of Freedom
0.843	98

Table 7. Statistical data related to the t-test measuring differences between genders in terms of exam anxiety level.

The table above presents data from the t-test, which was used to measure the existence of statistically significant differences in emotional intelligence levels attributed to the gender variable. Before adopting the t-test results, the Levene test was utilized to examine the equality of standard deviations for the male and female groups, to gauge the homogeneity of the studied sample data. The P-value of 0.175, significantly higher than 0.05, confirms substantial convergence in variance between the two groups (males and females), thus allowing the acceptance of the t-test results.

The obtained data indicates an absence of statistically significant differences between males and females, with a significance level of 0.843, markedly higher than 0.05, which is the threshold for significance. These findings tangibly confirm the absence of statistically significant differences between males and females regarding the level of emotional intelligence, supporting our hypothesis that posits no statistically significant gender differences in emotional intelligence.

These results align with studies conducted by Goelman (1998), asserting the lack of any gender differences in emotional intelligence. They also correlate with a study by Rashad Mustafa Al-Astal (2010), examining the relationship between emotional intelligence and coping skills among education college students in Gaza, showing no statistically significant differences attributed to gender across all dimensions of emotional intelligence. Additionally, a study by Extremera, Fernands, Salovey (2006) on high school students revealed no statistically significant differences in emotional intelligence between genders.

Therefore, our study's results affirm the second hypothesis, suggesting the absence of statistically significant differences between males and females in terms of emotional intelligence levels in the studied sample. This implies that gender does not seem to have any impact on emotional intelligence among secondary-level students. This may be attributed to both males and females in the secondary level facing similar pressures, aspirations, and goals, weaving a network of social relationships with peers that enhances their experiences and qualifies them to develop their social competencies and emotional intelligence. Moreover, the equal attention and proximity of parents to both sons and daughters contribute to the similar development of emotional intelligence skills between genders.

Hypothesis Three: Individual Differences in Exam Anxiety Levels between Males and Females:

To test the third hypothesis, the (t-test) was employed to calculate individual differences in exam anxiety between two independent groups, represented in this study by the male and female groups. When conducting the (t-test), the following results were obtained:

t-Test	**Levene Test**
Significance Level	Degrees of Freedom
0.021	98

Table 7. Statistical data related to the (t-test) for measuring differences between genders regarding the level of emotional intelligence.

The third hypothesis assumes statistically significant differences between genders in exam anxiety levels. The results presented in the table above indicate that the significance level obtained is 0.021, which is lower than the significance threshold of 0.05. Therefore, we confirm the third hypothesis, indicating statistically significant differences in exam anxiety levels attributed to the gender

variable.

It is revealed that females experience a higher level of exam anxiety compared to males. This suggests that females exhibit a greater susceptibility to exam-related stressors than males.

Females showed significantly higher levels of exam anxiety compared to males. This aligns with previous research on the impact of gender on exam anxiety, as these results are consistent with a prior study conducted by Spielberger and colleagues (1983) on a sample of students in Florida. They found that female students had slightly higher anxiety scores compared to male students in all anxiety situations. This study suggests that females may have a more sensitive response to exam situations and the associated pressures, affecting their ability to cope with these situations. Our results are similar to several studies conducted by the researcher Hembree (1988) in the United States regarding exam anxiety, finding that females experience a higher level of anxiety compared to males, and this difference increases with advancing academic years.

Social upbringing can be considered a contributing factor to the differences between males and females. Females are subjected to more pressure to achieve success in school compared to males, leading to increased levels of exam anxiety. Females, fundamentally, fear failure more than males, perceiving each exam situation as a potential opportunity for failure. Other possible explanations exist, where males may not acknowledge or express anxiety as it might be perceived as a threat to their masculinity. They are trained to deal with anxiety by denying it or finding means to overcome it (Mousavi et al., 2008).

As demonstrated by previous studies and our findings, there are statistically significant differences in means between males and females in favor of females. This implies that females have a lower ability than males to face exam situations, usually accompanied by anxiety and disturbance that impacts their ability to adapt appropriately to exam situations. This gender difference is attributed to females generally finding it easier to express their feelings, including anxiety, while males exhibit strength and courage towards exams.

Recommendations and Implications

Based on the findings of the study, which reveal the significant relationship between emotional intelligence and exam anxiety among students, a set of recommendations and strategies emerges to leverage emotional intelligence in mitigating both general and exam-related anxiety. Firstly, it is essential to elevate students' comprehension regarding the concept of emotional intelligence and its consequential implications for academic performance and adaptive coping mechanisms in the face of adversities. For instance, workshops and educational interventions can be designed to elucidate the multifaceted nature of emotional intelligence, exemplifying its practical applications in educational contexts. Through interactive sessions and case studies, students can discern how emotional intelligence facilitates effective problem-solving, interpersonal relationships, and stress management, thereby enhancing their academic resilience and overall well-being. Additionally, these initiatives can impart specific techniques for emotional regulation, such as mindfulness exercises, cognitive restructuring, and assertive communication strategies, equipping students with tangible skills to navigate academic challenges with composure and efficacy

Secondly, cultivating self-awareness among students emerges as a pivotal endeavor. Encompassing a nuanced comprehension and introspective analysis of their emotional states. For instance, students can be encouraged to engage in reflective exercises, such as journaling or guided mindfulness practices, to deepen their understanding of their emotional responses to various stimuli. Moreover, equipping students with cognitive-behavioral techniques, such as cognitive restructuring and reframing, facilitates the identification and transformation of negative thought patterns into constructive and empowering narratives. By exemplifying how individuals can reinterpret setbacks as opportunities for growth, educators foster a sense of resilience and self-confidence among students, thereby bolstering their capacity to navigate academic challenges with poise and determination.

Furthermore, experiential learning and practical engagement constitute integral components of anxiety management and exam preparedness strategies. For instance, students can partake in immersive simulations and role-playing exercises that replicate the rigors of examination scenarios. Through these hands-on experiences, students gain firsthand exposure to stress-inducing situations, enabling them to develop adaptive coping mechanisms and effective stress-management strategies in a controlled and supportive environment. Additionally, collaborative problem-solving tasks and group discussions afford students the opportunity to share strategies and insights for managing academic stressors collectively. By fostering an experiential learning environment that prioritizes active engagement and skill acquisition, educators empower students to confront challenges head-on and cultivate resilience in the face of adversity

Furthermore, the creation of a nurturing educational setting is essential to nurturing students' academic development and strengthening their self-assurance. This necessitates the cultivation of robust communication channels among educators, academic counselors, and students, underscored by attentive listening, empathetic support, and individualized guidance. For instance, educators can implement regular check-ins and one-on-one sessions with students to assess their academic progress and address any underlying concerns or anxieties. By fostering a culture of open dialogue and mutual trust, educational stakeholders create a supportive ecosystem wherein students feel valued, understood, and empowered to navigate academic challenges effectively.

Moreover, the cultivation of academic achievement skills constitutes a cornerstone of anxiety management and exam preparation initiatives. Educators play a pivotal role in imparting students with essential study strategies, organizational techniques, and time management proficiencies to optimize their learning experiences. For example, educators can provide structured study guides, time management templates, and goal-setting frameworks to aid students in prioritizing tasks, managing deadlines, and maintaining a balanced study routine. Additionally, workshops and seminars can be organized to equip students with effective note-taking strategies, exam revision techniques, and stress-reduction exercises tailored to their individual learning styles and preferences. By equipping students with the requisite skills and resources for academic success, educators empower them to approach examinations with

confidence and competence, thereby alleviating associated anxiety and facilitating optimal performance.

Conclusion

The study concludes that there is a strong inverse relationship between the level of emotional intelligence and the level of exam anxiety among secondary school students. The sample included 100 students (50 males and 50 females). The results tangibly demonstrate the impact of emotional intelligence on exam anxiety, with students possessing higher emotional intelligence exhibiting lower levels of exam anxiety. The results also indicate no individual differences between genders concerning emotional intelligence, suggesting a convergence of levels between males and females.

However, gender differences emerged regarding exam anxiety, favoring females who showed a higher level of exam anxiety compared to males. Nevertheless, these results should be considered in a broader context, as other factors beyond gender, such as teaching methods, school environment, and parenting styles, may have a more significant impact on exam anxiety and emotional intelligence. Nonetheless, it underscores the importance of enhancing students' emotional intelligence to equip them to navigate life's pressures with resilience, without compromising their psychological and social balance.

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