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Article Title

Developing English Reading Comprehension Skills through Collaborative Strategic Reading: An Action Research at Eighth Grade

Abstract

Reading comprehension is the capacity to make sense and deduce the meaning of a text. Students actively engaged in collaboration and deep thinking enhance their reading comprehension skills. This action research examined the role of Collaborative Strategic Reading(CSR) in enhancing the English reading comprehension skills of eighth-grade students in a private institution in Mansehra, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The purposive sampling technique was used to gather data from 30 students studying in the eighth grade. Ten observations of the class were made to define the students' current comprehension level. Pre- and post-tests were conducted to gauge the effectiveness of student-student interaction offered through pair work. The quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS version 26. The comparison of the pre-test and post-test scores indicated significant improvement in students' reading comprehension. The findings suggested that CSR is an effective strategy that teachers may use to improve the reading comprehension skills of their students.

Keywords: Collaborative Strategic Reading, EFL classroom, Reading Comprehension, Action Research

Authors:

Hasnain: English Teacher, Unique Learning Academy, Baffa, Mansehra, KP, Pakistan.

Shawana Fazal:(Corresponding Author)
Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Hazara University Mansehra, KP, Pakistan.
(Email: drshawana@hu.edu.pk)

Shaista Irshad Khan: Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan, KP, Pakistan.

Google scholar

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Title

Developing English Reading Comprehension Skills through Collaborative Strategic Reading: An Action Research at Eighth Grade

Authors:

Hasnain: English Teacher, Unique Learning Academy, Baffa, Mansehra, KP, Pakistan.

Shawana Fazal:(Corresponding Author)
Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Hazara University Mansehra, KP, Pakistan.
(Email: drshawana@hu.edu.pk)

Shaista Irshad Khan: Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan, KP, Pakistan.

Contents

Abstract

Reading comprehension is the capacity to make sense and deduce the meaning of a text. Students actively engaged in collaboration and deep thinking enhance their reading comprehension skills. This action research examined the role of Collaborative Strategic Reading(CSR) in enhancing the English reading comprehension skills of eighth-grade students in a private institution in Mansehra, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The purposive sampling technique was used to gather data from 30 students studying in the eighth grade. Ten observations of the class were made to define the students' current comprehension level. Pre- and post-tests were conducted to gauge the effectiveness of student-student interaction offered through pair work. The quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS version 26. The comparison of the pre-test and post-test scores indicated significant improvement in students' reading comprehension. The findings suggested that CSR is an effective strategy that teachers may use to improve the reading comprehension skills of their students.

Introduction

Reading comprehension is a cognitive process that involves making meaning by using previous knowledge, printed text, and comprehension ability (Esfandiari et al., 2021). It changes the act of reading for students, enabling them to analyze and understand the text they read, ultimately helping them formulate their views and questions (Andsager, 2024). It is vital for the academic success of students, especially in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), where comprehension nurtures language expertise and cognitive progress. It allows students to efficiently use, approach, and apply data (Nurjanah, 2018). Nevertheless, many EFL learners face problems in reading

comprehension due to inadequate vocabulary, a dearth of prior knowledge, insufficient reading abilities (Nanda & Azmy, 2020), and difficulties with syntax (Apolinario et al., 2024).

Reading is a crucial element of language learning, which serves as an entrance to information and linguistic competence (Monarisa & Suwarno, 2016). Many researchers have highlighted the vital role of overt instructions in reading strategies for cultivating comprehension skills (Pressley et al., 2023; Li et al., 2024). Teachers can encourage students' participation in reading lessons by using interactive reading activities to enhance their comprehension skills. Such activities help students understand the text and offer an awareness of their cognitive processes and the way they obtain information (Yusuf, 2015). Conversely, understanding needs effective teaching methods that encourage deep thinking, teamwork, and independent learning (Alenizi, 2019; Taky-Eddie & Madaoui, 2024). Traditional language classroom usually emphasizes individual comprehension skills, disregarding the advantages of social engagement in meaning-making (McDonough & Shaw, 2003).

Both lower-level and higher-level cognitive and metacognitive processes are involved in reading comprehension (Grabe & Stoller, 2002). Various factors may give rise to comprehension difficulties, including lack of linguistic competency, motivation, and the way to deliver instructions. Research has also emphasized the impact of sociocultural aspects on reading comprehension, such as students' social and cultural experiences, their aspiration to read in a second language, and their knowledge of metacognitive processes (Walter, 2007). Such features contribute to the complexity of reading comprehension studies, emphasizing the need to plan teaching methods to match individuals' various learning needs.

Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) is a valuable teaching strategy for enhancing reading comprehension in EFL classes. This metacognitive and collaborative learning strategy enables learners to get engaged with texts together, using cognitive and social practices to enhance reading comprehension (Boardman et al., 2015; McCown & Thomason, 2014). A peer-supported learning environment is created while using the CSR technique, where students utilize their prior knowledge, negotiate meaning, and develop understanding (Klingner et al., 2012). Research provides evidence that the CSR technique promotes

EFL learners' participation, deep thinking, and comprehension skills (Klinger & Vaughn, 1999). Nonetheless, the study on its use in a totally collaborative classroom context is inadequate. Additionally, most research has investigated the CSR technique as an independent strategy rather than exploring how teachers might adjust to meet the diverse needs of students.

Although previous research has shown CSR's importance in improving reading comprehension, several studies have investigated its implementation in collaborative classroom environments. Similarly, the existing literature does not sufficiently address the critical role of teachers in facilitating CSR for different EFL learners. This study aims to fill these gaps by exploring how classroom collaboration improves eighth-grade students' reading comprehension skills using CSR as the instructional technique.

Research Question

The study focused on the following research question:

To what extent do classroom interactions (Collaborative Strategic Reading) facilitate the reading comprehension skills of eighth-grade students?

Review of Literature

Reading comprehension involves collecting and integrating information from a written text. It occurs through a conversation between the reader and the text, with comprehension determined by the reader's prior knowledge and language proficiency. This shows that readers actively interact with the content while analyzing and understanding it considering their prior knowledge and cognitive abilities (Urquhart & Weir, 1998). Effective reading comprehension is understanding the text, instead of extracting meaning from words or phrases. Students can efficiently acquire and transmit knowledge using mental models to collect and remember information. Readers must be involved with the text to decode words to understand the written content (Woolley, 2011).

Teaching is an interactive process where teachers and students work collaboratively to accomplish learning outcomes (Handeland, 2020). Teachers utilize various teaching techniques for communication to help students learn a language, such as question-and-answer sessions, lectures,

directions, and explanations. Effective classroom management and teacher-student interaction is important for overall learning outcomes. Carefully designing learning activities that let students engage with their peers can build a more effective learning environment (Muin et al., 2018).

The main goal of teaching reading comprehension is to assist students in understanding, interpreting, and applying the author's message successfully. The ability to understand written text is directly related to a student's proficiency in reading. Simple ideas are easy to grasp; however, complex ideas require particular techniques to understand the author's message. Skilled readers utilize various reading techniques and learn to apply them purposefully (Gani et al., 2016). Thus, proper teaching methodologies are important for enhancing students' reading comprehension (Zagoto, 2016).

Interactive feedback is an important source of information for learners. It provides students with valuable insights into the effectiveness of their responses and encourages them to focus on production and comprehension (Gass & Selinker, 2008). Instructors play a key role in assessing students' responses, and constructive feedback is vital for maintaining student motivation. Without adequate feedback, students may become disengaged and frustrated. Teachers must balance corrective feedback with encouragement to ensure that students actively participate in meaningful discussions and improve their language skills.

The impact of reading comprehension on academic success cannot be overstated; nevertheless, reading alone is insufficient; one must also understand what is being read (Pallathadka et al., 2022). The essence of reading is comprehension, which determines the meaning of the text using intellect (Syafii, 2022). Reading is a dynamic and complex process, suggesting that understanding the text requires the reader's familiarity with word and phrase structure (Gopal & Ton, 2019; Ying & Veerappan, 2021). Therefore, to help students understand the meaning of the texts they read, teachers should choose a suitable teaching approach focusing on reading proficiency.

Several reading strategies have been classified as effective in addressing difficulties related to reading comprehension. These strategies include CSR and SQ3R (Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review). CSR was developed to enhance students' text comprehension. It is designed to help learners work collaboratively in groups to identify and understand key ideas within a text (Nurdiana et al., 2024).

Collaborative Strategic Reading

CSR integrates collaborative learning with reading comprehension strategies. Students read and discuss texts through teacher-directed tasks and group projects guided by their peers. Klingner et al. (2012) classified CSR into three stages: 1 (preview) before reading, 2 (Click and Clunk and Gist methods) while reading, and 3 (wrap-up) after reading.

Before Reading: Preview

Teachers and learners review the content to enable existing knowledge, establish connections between the day's topic and previous lessons, predict learning outcomes, and determine reading objectives. During this phase, the teacher guides students to scan the title, heading, pictures, and charts or tables in the passage(s). The teacher encourages brainstorming ideas and their existing knowledge about the topic and asks them to share with their peers.

During Reading Activity: Click and Clunk, and Get the Gist

The click-and-clutch method evaluates understanding and identifies difficult words or ideas while reading. It clicks when the content makes sense; otherwise, it clunks. When students finish a particular section, they use several fix-up techniques for the unclear words and concepts: (1) Reread the section containing the clunk, along with the sentences before and after it, to look for clues that may help you identify the clunk (2) Reread the section with the clunk and see if they can predict meaning from context (3) Take the idea away and find a base word, prefix, or suffix; (4) Look for logically related meanings. Students return to the text and add a new meaning to ensure its meaning and verify their definition's accuracy. Once their mistakes have been fixed, students progress to the Get the Gist phase, where they classify the main idea of the passage they have read.

After Reading Activity: Wrap Up

Students complete their reading tasks by identifying the key points of the passage and by asking and answering questions led by the teacher about the content they have just read. They

attempt easier and more complicated questions that call for reading comprehension and a connection to existing knowledge. Finally, they summarize one or two of the main ideas in writing and are ready to discuss why they think their concepts are meaningful.

The Implications of Vygotsky's Sociocultural Approaches on Enhancing Interaction in EFL Classroom

The idea of collaborative learning is significantly rooted in the sociocultural framework. Vygotsky (1978) argues that a social context, interaction, and support from peers or adults mediate individual development and learning. In other words, the learning process involves direction, support, and mentoring from more well-informed individuals, who interact with less experienced individuals in a collaborative learning process (Lin, 2016). Scaffolding is a conversational and interactive relationship that reduces task difficulty, engages and maintains learner attention, guides learners through completing a task, and ultimately transfers responsibility to the learner (Poehner & Infante, 2016). In an EFL classroom, the teacher assists students, even those with little English competence, in helping their peers. The responsibility for scaffolding students rests not solely with the teacher; students with less ability also help their peers.

Scaffolding enables a child to complete a task with the guidance of an experienced person, which they couldn't do on their own. The adult aids when the child needs help and gets into trouble, allowing them to work on a task that exceeds their current level of competency (Khaliliaqdam, 2014).

The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is the gap between the actual level of development that individuals have achieved through independent problem-solving, and the expected developmental level of development identified with the supervision of an adult, in collaboration with more experienced peers (Vygotsky, 1978). Individuals learn best when they collaborate with more experienced people to help beginners understand ideas and concepts or complete tasks they couldn't do alone without guidance, encouragement, or collaboration (Mahn, 2012).

Vygotsky's Sociocultural theory highlights that learning happens within a social environment, and interaction with more informed peers or teachers facilitates cognitive growth. According to his Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory, learning occurs best when tasks are just a little bit difficult for individuals to complete on their own but easy to complete with help. CSR aligns with Vygotsky's theory by enabling peer-assisted learning, where students support one another in comprehension tasks. Research shows that scaffolding techniques in reading instruction enhance students' ability to process and analyze texts effectively (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

Methodology

A one-group pre-test, formative assessment, and post-test design were employed in this action research due to practical and contextual considerations specific to the school setting. Firstly, all Grade VIII students were required to receive the intervention CSR as part of the instructional improvement plan, making it ethically challenging to withhold the treatment from a control group. Secondly, the design was chosen for its feasibility in terms of time and resources, which are often limited in school environments (Fraenkel et al., 2012). While this design allowed the researcher to measure gains in reading comprehension following the CSR intervention, it is important to acknowledge its limitations, primarily the lack of a comparison group, which restricts the ability to make strong causal inferences. Confounding variables such as maturation or external influences cannot be ruled out; therefore, findings should not be generalized and viewed as preliminary evidence in improving reading comprehension through CSR among EFL students in the district of Mansehra, in the Pakistani context.

Action research is a reflective approach to address a specific teaching and learning problem (Burns, 2009). It is also used to assess the effectiveness of instructional strategies in promoting student learning. This study employed action research to improve reading comprehension skills. A sample of 30 students from the eighth-grade boys' section for the 2023 session at a private sector school in district Mansehra, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan, was selected using a purposive sampling procedure. The study included a pre-test, formative test, and post-test. The researcher incorporated both test and non-test instruments; observations served as non-test instruments, while the pre-tests, formative tests, and post-tests were classified as test instruments. Additionally, the validity of the research

instruments was confirmed through expert opinions.

To initiate the experimental design, a reading comprehension-based pre-test featuring a paragraph test item was administered to assess the student's level of comprehension. Reasonable performance was also noted before the introduction of the test. The selection of question types took the research objectives into account. To save time, the researcher included four questions in each category. Subsequently, students were taught to engage through collaborative strategic reading and peer-assisted learning techniques. Following this, a new reading class was introduced. In addition to typical classes, peer interactions occurred through pair work. A post-test featuring different test items and the same number of questions was administered at the end of the course. The following three forms of raw scores were obtained in the current class action study:

1. Scores reflect the student's prior skill in reading comprehension.
2. Scores that demonstrate improvements in learners' reading comprehension.
3. Scores that illustrate learners' responses to improved reading comprehension within classroom interaction.

The pre-test, formative assessment, and post-test findings have been collected and organized for statistical analysis. A t-test was conducted to assess the significance of the differences between the mean scores of the pre-test, formative assessment, and post-test at a 0.05 confidence level. The experimental design included a pre-test, formative assessment, and post-test as research tools for data collection. The pre-test evaluated the students' current proficiency levels, while the post-test measured the impact of collaboration through strategic reading and peer-assisted learning strategies introduced between the assessments. Given the typical classroom structure and seating arrangements, pair work was adopted to promote peer interaction.

Action Research (AR) Cycle

Action research (AR) involves a systematic and reflective investigation in real classrooms to improve instructional methods and learning outcomes. The action research identifies classroom challenges and develops practical solutions from evidence-based practices. Educators can continuously improve their teaching methodology. It helps enhance student engagement, retention, and overall achievement (Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, 2024)
.

Figure 1
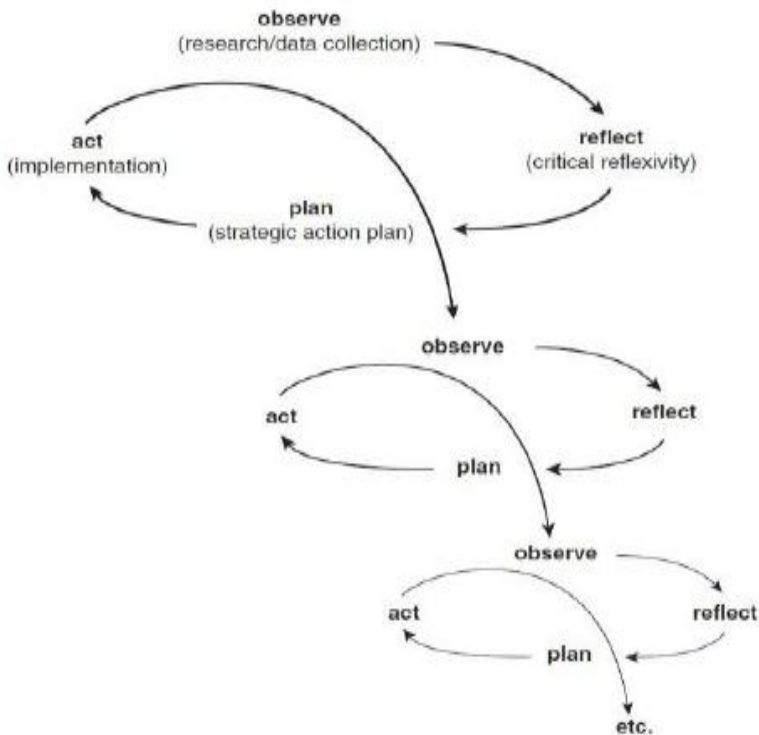
O'Leary's Action Research Cycle

O'Leary's research cycle is a paradigm or cycle that can be applied in action research. O'Leary defines action research as an experiential learning method to change and constantly refine the techniques, data, and interpretation based on prior cycles' knowledge. (Koshy et al., 2010, p. 6). The primary difference between O'Leary's cycle of research and other methods of research is that O'Leary's cycle focuses on and is more specific about improving action and implementation, evaluating practices between action and critical reflection. The steps are observe, reflect, plan, and act.

The procedure begins when researchers identify the issue that needs addressing. The researcher initially observes the classroom to learn how teachers interact with students during reading sessions. The researchers noted a lack of engagement between the teacher and students during these classes. The researcher also observed difficulties with reading comprehension, as several students struggled to read and understand the text. Some children lack motivation in learning and fail to pay sufficient attention to reading, likely due to the limited interaction between learners and instructors. This deficiency in interaction was linked to time constraints, background knowledge, motivation, and a lack of effective classroom interaction and reading comprehension strategies.

The second step involves implementing the proposed solution, reflecting on observations, and considering ways to enhance the results. The researcher should explore alternative ideas, including the perspectives of teachers and students, to improve reading comprehension skills through classroom interaction. The researcher designed an action research project. The researcher consulted relevant literature to investigate methods for enhancing students' reading comprehension skills through classroom interaction. The literature review on reading provided new procedures and effective strategies for classroom interaction, such as Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR), self-questioning, and peer-assisted strategy. Effective lesson plans were created and delivered, using these classroom activities, to improve students' reading comprehension (Algonaim, 2020). An ongoing assessment was also carried out to examine the effectiveness of the collaborative strategies. A post-test was managed to measure the impact of classroom interactive techniques on refining reading comprehension in English.

Findings

The major findings of the study are presented below:

Table 1

Total Mean Scores in pre-test, formative, and post-test

No	Category	M	SD	S.E.
1	Pre-test	3.00	1.6	.296
2	Formative	3.43	1.04	.19
3	Post-test	5.97	.928	1.69

Mean: M, Standard Deviation: SD, Standard Error: SE

Table 1 indicates the test scores from three assessment phases: Pre-test, Formative, and Post-test. The pre-test's mean score (M) is 3.00, with an SD of 1.6, signifying a moderate score distribution. The S.E. is 0.296, demonstrating some variability in the sample.

The formative test results depict a minor improvement in scores, with a mean score of 3.43 and a lower SD of 1.04, showing less score dispersion than the pretest. The SE is 0.19, indicating an improvement in measurement precision.

The post-test results demonstrate a significant increase in performance, with a mean score of **5.97.** The SD of **0.928** indicates lower score variability compared to previous tests. The SE (0.169) is the lowest among the three assessments, indicating greater reliability in the results.

Table 2

The mean difference between the pre-test and formative assessment scores

Assessments	M	SD	S.E.	t	p
Pre-Test	3.00	1.6	.296		
Formative	3.43	1.04	.19	10.15	0.00*

*p<0.05

Table 2 compares the mean scores obtained by students on the pre-test and the formative assessment. The mean scores of students on the formative test (Mean=3.43, SD=1.04) were higher than their scores on the pre-test (Mean=3.00, SD=1.6). The statistical values, i.e., t (30) =10.15, p<0.05, indicate that the difference in means (difference = 0.43) was significant. Hence, the CSR proved effective in improving students' reading comprehension.

Table 3

The mean difference between Formative and Post-test scores

Assessments	M	SD	S.E.	t	p
Formative	3.43	1.04	.19		
Post-Test	5.97	.928	0.169	14.12	0.00*

*p<0.05

Table 3 compares the students' mean comprehension skills scores on the Formative and Post-tests. Students' mean scores on the post-test (Mean=5.97, SD=.928) were higher than those on the formative test (Mean=3.43, SD=1.04). Furthermore, the statistical values t (30) =14.12 and p<.05 indicated that the gain in score (difference = 2.53) was significant. Hence, CSR was an intervention that helped to improve students' reading comprehension skills.

Table 4

The mean difference between pre-test and post-test scores

Assessments	M	SD	S.E.	t	p
Pre-Test	3.00	1.6	.296		
Post-test	5.97	.928	.169	8.92	0.00*

*p<0.05

Table 4 highlights the significance of the difference between the mean scores of students on the pre- and post-tests. Students' mean score in reading comprehension on the post-test (Mean=5.97, SD=.928) was greater than their mean score on the pre-test (Mean=3.00, SD=1.6), showing an impressive increase in reading comprehension skills. The statistical values t (30) = 8.92 and p<.05 indicated a significant difference in students' scores in reading comprehension skills. This suggests that collaborative learning strategies characterized by increased student interaction facilitate students 'learning of reading comprehension skills.

Discussion

This study investigated the effectiveness of classroom collaboration in enhancing eighth-grade students' English reading comprehension skills. Employing a one-group pre-test, formative test, and post-test design, the research assessed the impact of CSR as an interactive instructional strategy. The intervention combined CSR techniques such as peer discussion, guided questioning, and summarization to enhance comprehension. There is evidence that CSR instruction effectively enhanced narrative text comprehension (Nurdiana et al, 2024). The mean score for the pre-test was 3.00, which considerably increased to 5.97 in the post-test, showing a 99% improvement. Statistical analysis (p < 0.05) confirmed the effectiveness of

the intervention, establishing that the increased reading comprehension was not due to chance.

The results of this study endorse the findings of earlier studies by Klingner and Vaughn (1999), who determined that CSR improves students' reading comprehension, mainly among English Language Learners (ELLS) and students with learning difficulties, by promoting collaborative learning and developing metacognitive skills. Similar findings are presented by Zagoto (2016), who inferred that CSR yields better reading comprehension in students. Likewise, Vaughn et al. (2011) concluded that CSR inspires students to engage actively with texts and increases their ability to assess comprehension through planned group roles. The present study is aligned with these conclusions by signifying the effectiveness of the strategy in a real-world classroom with young EFL learners. Syafii (2022) has also presented similar findings and endorsed group strategies for improving reading comprehension skills.

However, the study also exposed challenges in employing CSR and guaranteeing equitable contribution and consistent devotion to student roles. Similar concerns were raised by Boardman et al. (2016), who highlighted the importance of training teachers and students in role responsibilities to make the best use of the benefits of CSR. It is suggested to incorporate more structured group allocation and continuous monitoring to ensure equal participation in future applications of CSR. It is also highlighted in the current study that there is a need for collaborative instructional strategies like CSR for better reading comprehension, student engagement, and overall learning outcomes in English language classrooms.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The outcome of the study indicates that CSR is an effective teaching strategy for enhancing reading comprehension in eighth-grade EFL students. Students' reading comprehension and engagement were significantly improved when CSR was incorporated with guided questioning, group discussions, and structured feedback. These interactive strategies enhance active participation and allow students to construct meaning through interaction. Additionally, the teacher's role is crucial in sustaining student motivation by employing active teaching strategies, positive bolstering, and creating a supportive learning atmosphere. Incorporating technology, group-based tasks, and oral questioning are all beneficial for improving the reading comprehension skills of students. The affirmative outcomes validate CSR's potential as a useful teaching tool even with the limitation of the absence of a control group.

Collaborative Strategic reading (CSR) is suggested for improving other language skills such as speaking, writing, and listening. Future research using a pre-test-post-test control group design with randomly chosen participants may enhance the validity and generalizability of the results. CSR may enhance students' confidence in expressing their views, answering questions, and sharing in conversations. Moreover, longitudinal research is suggested to explore the long-term impacts of CSR on general language efficiency and its broader application in various educational settings.

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