

## ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF FRENCH LANGUAGE IMMERSION PROGRAMMES ON STUDENT PROFICIENCY AND TEACHING COMPETENCE AT ALVAN IKOKU FEDERAL COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, OWERRI, IMO STATE

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### Abstract

*Language Immersion is an educational paradigm with the goal of helping students achieve fluency in a second language by placing them in a pedagogical environment which simulates first language learning. Immersion refers to this environment, where all (or at least most) verbal transactions occur in the target (second language). This study assessed the effects of immersion programmes in French on the teaching and student proficiency at Alvan Okoku Federal College of Education, Owerri, Imo state. The purpose of the study is to ascertain how Immersion Programmes improve students' proficiency in French and equip them for successful careers as teachers. This study used a descriptive survey approach to investigate the effects of immersion experiences on language fluency, pedagogical abilities, and student confidence. The study was conducted at Alvan Okoku Federal College of Education, Owerri, Imo state, sampling 40 students of NCE 2 & 3 of the department of French. A questionnaire was developed using the Likert scale five points by the researcher with 20 items designed to assess the impact of French Immersion Programs in Nigerian Colleges of Education: A Case Study of Alvan Okoku Federal College of Education, Owerri, Imo state. The study revealed that students' proficiency and their abilities to teach the language have been refined and improved after the immersion programmes, the study also founded that the French immersion programmes is faced with challenges like the insufficient resource materials among others that is affecting its success at Alvan Ikoku federal college of education, Imo. The study recommended among others that the institution must to make Immersion Programmes more accessible, particularly to individuals who intend to pursue careers in French language instruction. The study concluded by advocating that Future studies may include extending immersion programs to more colleges and evaluating the results over an extended period of time.*

**Keywords:** Educational, Immersion programmes, French, Proficiency, Language immersion

## Introduction

Communication, cultural awareness, and academic achievement are all influenced by language, which is an effective instrument. Being bilingual or multilingual is a valuable skill in today's increasingly interconnected world, as it facilitates cross-cultural interactions, improved cognitive capacities, and employment prospects. Immersion language programmes are one of the most promising ways to become multilingual, especially when it comes to French, which is spoken by more than 300 million people globally. Still, little is known about the precise effects of immersion programmes on student results and teacher effectiveness in Nigerian educational institutions, despite the fact that language proficiency is becoming increasingly important in today's educational environment (Vincent & Tataw, 2024).

French language instruction in Nigeria is crucial for its linguistic and diplomatic environment, as it is strategically vital due to its proximity to Francophone nations like Benin, Niger, and Cameroon. Initially offered during the colonial era, it gained momentum after Nigeria gained independence in 1960, with numerous initiatives aimed at promoting French as a second foreign language (Ndukauba, 2020).

Through a number of initiatives and programs, such as the National Policy on Education (NPE), which included French as a second foreign language in the curriculum, the Nigerian government has worked to encourage the study of the language. Nevertheless, this proclamation has not been consistently put into reality, and it is still mainly theoretical. While French is taught in certain elementary schools nationwide, its implementation varies. A lack of resources and skilled instructors is a problem that many public schools encounter, which makes it difficult to teach French effectively (Yusuf, Ashiru & Bada, 2023).

Alvan Okoku Federal College of Education (FCE) in Owerri, Nigeria, is a prominent center for teacher preparation, providing a range of language courses, including immersion in French. Although the goal of these programme is to enhance students' French language skills as well as prospective teachers' teaching abilities, their efficacy has not been thoroughly investigated in the literature to date. A targeted investigation of the ways in which French language immersion affects teacher professional development and student outcomes in the setting of Nigerian higher education is necessary to fill this gap in the literature.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the following research question: How do French language immersion programmes affect the teaching and student performance at Alvan Okoku Federal College of Education, Owerri? By examining this issue, the study aims to determine whether immersion in French improves students' language proficiency and whether it advances language teachers' careers. In order to provide a comprehensive knowledge of the possibilities and limitations of such programmes, the study also looks at the elements that either help or impede their efficacy.

Previous research on language immersion programmes, especially French-oriented ones, has mostly focused on non-African environments. Few studies have assessed the unique dynamics in Nigerian institutions, despite some highlighting the effectiveness of immersion in fostering bilingualism in North American or European contexts. The effectiveness of language programmes in African higher education has been the subject of notable research by authors like Thomas (2018)

and Ajani (2020); nevertheless, little is known about the relationship between immersion and teacher competency. By offering empirical data from an educational context in Nigeria, this study closes this gap.

The research method adopted in this study was a quantitative descriptive survey. Through structured questionnaire administered to student teachers, this was to evaluate their competence levels, the ability to teach French Through the analysis of answers, the study provides a thorough assessment of the immersion efficacy.

The potential for this study to influence language education policy and practice in Nigerian institutions is what makes it valuable. The study provides important insights that could direct future curriculum development, enhance teaching methods, and ultimately improve students' linguistic and professional outcomes in Nigerian colleges of education by illuminating the advantages and disadvantages of French language immersion at Alvan Ikoku FCE Owerri.

### **Objectives**

The main objectives of this study are:

1. To assess how French language immersion programmes, affect students' language skills.
2. To assess how the programmes, enhance teaching competence.
3. To determine the key factors influencing the success of the French language immersion programmes at Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri.

### **Research questions**

1. How do French language immersion programmes impact student proficiency in French at Alvan Ikoku t Federal College of Education, Owerri?
2. What are the perceptions of students and faculty regarding the effectiveness of French language immersion programs in enhancing language proficiency and teaching competence at Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri?
3. What are the key factors that influence the success of the French language immersion programmes at Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri, and how do these factors impact programmes outcomes?

### **Statement of the problem**

French is becoming more and more important in Nigerian business, diplomacy, and international communication. The results of French Immersion Programmes fall well short of expectations, even with their execution. Graduates' inability to utilize French successfully in academic and professional contexts is sometimes hampered by their lack of competency and teaching competence. Deficits in educational techniques and instructional quality are the cause of this problem. Furthermore, there is a mismatch between what participants really accomplish and the objectives that French immersion programmes set out to accomplish. In order to improve French language instruction in Nigeria and provide better results for students, it is imperative that these issues be addressed. "Assessing The Impact of French Language Immersion Programmes on Student Proficiency and Teaching Competence in Colleges of Education has not been studied before, this study tends to look deep into.

## Literature review

### Conceptual Framework of Language Immersion Programmes

Programs for language immersion teach pupils and students a second language by incorporating it into their regular academic activities. By incorporating the target language into regular interactions, these programs seek to improve language competency. Full immersion, partial immersion, dual language immersion, early immersion, late immersion, and content-based immersion are the three categories of immersion programs. While partial immersion employs the target language for certain courses or for a portion of the school day, full immersion concentrates on teaching the curriculum nearly exclusively in the target language. In order to promote bilingualism and biliteracy, dual language immersion entails both native speakers of the teaching language and native speakers of the target language. While late immersion programmes start training at a later age, early immersion programmes start instruction at a younger age. Language instruction and subject-specific material are combined through topic-based immersion. With the ability to be customized to match various learner requirements and educational goals, each style of immersion programme has its advantages (Botezatu, Trachsel & Guo, 2020).

Immersion programmes have changed over time. They were first introduced in Canada in the 1960s to meet the requirement for bilingualism in a country where people speak both French and English. The goal of the earliest French immersion programmes, which were created in Quebec and later spread to other areas, was to educate young students the language. Immersion programmes had expanded to several nations by the 1980s, including the US, Australia, and several regions of Europe. During this time, studies showed that immersion was a successful method for reaching high levels of language competence as well as cognitive advantages including improved problem-solving abilities and increased cultural awareness (Gillet, Barbu & Poncelet, 2021).

In the late 1990s, immersion programmes in Nigeria emerged as a response to the need for efficient language teaching methods and international trends. Despite challenges like lack of funding, a shortage of qualified teachers, and limited exposure to native speakers, these programmes gained popularity in the 2000s. Despite challenges like poor infrastructure, uneven execution, and a scarcity of qualified teachers, immersion programmes aim to improve language proficiency and prepare students for global opportunities (Olakunle, 2020).

## 2. French Language Proficiency and Pedagogy in Nigeria

### State of French language education in Nigerian colleges of education.

The teaching of French in Nigerian educational institutions is influenced by policy, historical influences, and challenges. Introduced during the colonial era, the program aims to promote regional cohesion and improve foreign language competency. It emphasizes grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and speaking, listening, reading, and writing abilities. Cultural studies are introduced to enhance students' understanding of French-speaking cultures. However, low infrastructure, a lack of competent teachers, low student enthusiasm, and resource constraints hinder the effectiveness of French language instruction. To improve foreign language instruction, the Nigerian government has implemented regulations and partnered with French educational institutions and cultural associations for additional funding and training. The integration of technology into language instruction is also growing. Future developments may involve more

funding, professional growth opportunities, and curriculum revisions that consider contemporary language usage and cultural settings (Lawal, 2020).

### **Challenges and success stories in teaching French in Nigeria**

According to Folorunsho & Iyanda (2022). Teaching French in Nigeria is a challenging and demanding task, with numerous obstacles and success stories. The main challenge is the lack of necessary resources, particularly technology and textbooks, which can hinder students' participation and educational process. Additionally, there is a lack of professional development opportunities and insufficient training, which affects the competency of French instructors. Sociocultural factors, such as the predominant use of English and native tongues, may deter students from studying French. Curriculum limitations and economic factors can also impact students' exposure to French. However, innovative teaching techniques like immersive experiences, language laboratories, and interactive games have made learning French more efficient and interesting. Community support, such as language clubs, cultural exchange initiatives, and alliances with French-speaking nations, has been crucial in developing French education. Dedicated teachers and government and non-governmental groups have also made progress in enhancing French language instruction and creating new instructional resources. Despite the challenges, significant achievements have been made possible by the efforts of educators, creative approaches, and supportive partners (Ortikovna, 2022).

### **3. Impact of Immersion Programmes on Language Proficiency**

Language competency during immersion programmes is influenced by various factors including time, exposure, curriculum, motivation, sociocultural influences, and support systems. Extended immersion programs yield more linguistic progress than shorter ones, as regular exposure to the target language promotes strong development. Higher competence is promoted by curriculum and instructional techniques that integrate language training with other subjects. The efficacy of immersion is heavily influenced by learners' motivation and attitude towards the language and its culture. Sociocultural aspects, such as cultural practices, traditions, and societal norms, enhance the immersion experience (Ryan, 2020). Support systems in educational environments, such as competent teachers, resources, and organized feedback, significantly impact language competence. In conclusion, various elements, including length, exposure, curriculum design, learner motivation, sociocultural involvement, and supporting educational institutions, contribute to enhancing language competency through immersion programmes. A variety of elements, such as length, exposure, curriculum design, learner motivation, sociocultural involvement, and supporting educational institutions, are involved in enhancing language competency through immersion. The most notable language improvements are often achieved by programmes that provide long-term, high-frequency exposure, meaningful integration of language and subject, and robust frameworks for support and incentive (Serafini, Rozell & Winsler, 2020).

### **4. Teacher Competence and Immersion Programmes Outcomes**

Immersion programmes are an excellent way to hone your pedagogical abilities, particularly in the areas of cultural competency and language instruction. These courses give educators an opportunity to become familiar with the language and culture they will be teaching, offering a rare

chance for in-depth involvement and practical learning. Teachers get direct knowledge of how languages are acquired, as well as an appreciation of the cultural quirks and situations that influence communication. Their profound comprehension enables them to relate to the difficulties pupils encounter when learning a new language and are more effective in the classroom. Teachers who participate in immersion programmes also get more flexibility and classroom management abilities, which empowers them to respond quickly to changing circumstances and come up with original solutions. By fostering empathy and intercultural competency, these programs help instructors create more welcoming and encouraging learning environments. All things considered, immersion programmes prepare instructors (Buchanan, Velandia, Weckend & Bayes, 2021).

In general, immersion programmes give instructors the fundamental pedagogical abilities they need to motivate and instruct their pupils. This makes them more competent, self-assured, and ready educators.

### **5. Challenges in Implementing French Immersion Programmes**

Educational institutions face significant challenges due to administrative and structural impediments, such as insufficient infrastructure, rules, and bureaucratic procedures. These obstacles restrict the educational system's flexibility and increase the disparity in educational quality between different geographic and socioeconomic groups. Motivational issues affect both instructors and students, leading to poor academic achievement, disengagement, and increased dropout rates. Teachers struggle with motivation due to low pay, limited professional growth opportunities, and lack of school management support (Thakral, Manhas, & Verma, 2020).

Resource availability is another significant issue, as underfunded schools often lack basic educational supplies, making it difficult for instructors to provide quality instruction and stay current with the latest practices and technologies. Assessment procedures, such as standardized testing, may not accurately represent students' learning and capabilities, limiting concentration on test preparation. To address these issues, an all-encompassing strategy should be implemented, including raising motivation, ensuring sufficient resources, optimizing administrative procedures, upgrading infrastructure, and implementing better evaluation techniques. This will help educational institutions become more equal and inclusive, serving the different needs of instructors and students (Mbon, Ntamu & Owan, 2023).

### **6. Theory of Language Acquisition and Immersion**

It's crucial to comprehend how children learn a second language, like French, in order to create instructional techniques for immersion programs that work. A number of well-known theories provide light on the procedures and elements that go into making language acquisition successful. Krashen's, in his theory Input Hypothesis provides insightful frameworks for analyzing how language learners pick up and hone competency in a second language.

Regarding second language acquisition (SLA), one of the most well-known ideas is Stephen Krashen's Input Hypothesis. This theory's main tenet is that language acquisition works best when students are exposed to language input that is only marginally more complex than they are now able to speak it. Krashen calls this idea "i+1" (where "i" stands for the student's current level and "+1" for the next level of complexity).



According to Krashen, the secret to learning a language is understanding the input. This indicates that language should be presented to learners in a mainly understandable format, with just enough novel content to keep them interested and help them stretch their language skills. For instance, pupils may learn French more quickly in an immersion program if they are often exposed to spoken and written French that is slightly more advanced than their current abilities, but still within their grasp to understand with some effort (Bailey & Fahad, 2021).

Krashen also highlights the significance of having a low emotional filter, which is a psychological barrier that can impede language learning in students who are depressed, uneasy, or uninspired. Students are more likely to interact with the language and take in the information when they are in a safe, encouraging setting where they feel at ease and confident.

### **Empirical studies**

The study of evaluating the impact of French language immersion programmes on student proficiency and teaching competence in colleges of education: a case study of Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri cannot be overemphasized without mentioning some researchers who in one way or the other investigated and written about the study.

Jérémie et al (2021). In their work, "Exploring the longitudinal impact of university immersion: Bilingual spaces, multilingual values" looks into how students' language habits and cultural values change over time as a result of immersion at university. It uses a longitudinal method to monitor how students' cultural attitudes and language use evolve over time. According to their research, being immersed in bilingual environments promotes language competency and an understanding of multilingual values, which improves communication abilities and builds tolerance for different cultural perspectives. For inclusive learning experiences, the research highlights the significance of developing bilingual and multilingual settings. To fully comprehend the long-term advantages of bilingual education, more study is required.

Research indicates that students in immersion settings often perform better than their peers in traditional classrooms, particularly in fluency and communicative competence, due to constant exposure to the target language. Samuel et al (2023) in their work, "the influence of immersion learning and formal classroom settings on English language acquisition", drew attention to the differences between acquisition and learning and emphasized how immersion is a very effective way to become proficient. It does, however, also recognized the drawbacks of immersion, such as the possibility of academic hindrance. The study proposed a well-rounded strategy that combines formal education with immersion to offer a thorough learning environment that fosters accuracy and fluency. The study emphasized how crucial it is to comprehend various language learning approaches in order to achieve the best outcomes.

Teachers in immersion programmes need ongoing professional development to adapt to multilingual pedagogies effectively. A study highlighted the shift in teachers' language awareness, emphasizing the importance of integrating students' home languages into the learning process. Latisha et al (2023). In their study examined the difficulties and modifications in instructional strategies in a primary French-English immersion school. It drew attention to the rigorous language separation policy, which may restrict the usage of the native tongues of the pupils. The study focused on the opinions of educators on the functions of the target language, the dominant

language, and the home languages of the pupils. Focus groups, observations, and interviews were a few techniques used in data collecting. The results showed that instructors' knowledge of language has changed, and they now understand how valuable it is to use students' native tongues as resources. Nevertheless, there are difficulties in putting flexible multilingual pedagogies into practice.

Despite several research on language instruction conducted in the US and Canada in Nigeria, this study intend to cover gaps in the literature about the evaluation of teacher preparation in French language immersion contexts and localized research, and it is important for improving language education in Nigeria. It also benefits the field by offering empirical data on the effectiveness of immersion programs at institutions like Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri are needed.

### Methodology

The research method adopted in this study was a quantitative descriptive survey. The study was conducted at Alvan Ikoku Federal College Education, Owerri, sampling 40 students of NCE 2 & 3 of the department of French. they were chosen because at the time the study was conducted they had undergone the French Language Immersion Programs as stated in the Minimum Standard, document provided by the Nigeria Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE, 2022), To obtain data for this study. A questionnaire using the Likert scale five points was developed by the researcher with 20 items designed to assess the impact of French Immersion Programs in Nigerian Colleges of Education: A Case Study of Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri. The questionnaire was administered to only students of the department as they all participated in the study, the data collected from the participants were presented in table.

### Analysis and data presentation

**Table 1:** How do French Language Immersion Programmes impact student proficiency in French at Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri?

Questions	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
1. The program has improved my speaking skills	5	1	1	15	13
2. My listening comprehension has improved	3	2	0	15	15
3. I feel more confident in conversations	3	7	1	14	15
4. My reading and understanding of French texts	1	1	1	17	20



5. My writing skills have improved	3	4	0	15	13
6. There are enough interactions with native speakers	5	10	0	15	10
7. Teaching methods are effective	15	5	5	10	10
8. I understand French culture better	2	5	0	13	15
9. I can use French in real-life situations	3	1	2	14	20
10. Overall, I am satisfied with the program	0	0	5	20	15

This table shows how respondents responded to the questionnaire administered to them, from the look of things, the data collected from respondents show that French language immersion programs is impactful at Alvan Ikoku federal college of education, Owerri. Respondents in their high number responded positively to all the items in the questionnaire with 20 respondents being half of the entire population agreeing and indicating their satisfaction with the Immersion Programme, as it is improving their oral skills in French language.

**Table 2:** What are the perceptions of students regarding the effectiveness of French language immersion programmes in enhancing language proficiency and teaching competence at Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri?

Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly agree	Agree
1. The immersion program has improved my ability to understand spoken French.	0	5	0	25	10
2. The immersion program has	1	1	1	20	17

significantly enhanced my French speaking skills					
3.The immersion program has improved my ability to teach French effectively	3	2	2	20	14
4.I feel more confident in my teaching skills after participating in the immersion program	3	5	1	24	7
5.I would recommend the immersion program to others seeking to improve their French.	0	0	0	25	15

This table shows the data collected from respondents regarding the perception of students regarding the effectiveness of French language immersion programme in enhancing language proficiency and teaching competence at Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri. The data collected shows that, student teachers are very refined and improved after the French language immersion programme, the immersion programme improve their competency in teaching, more than half of the population (25) recommend the immersion programme to others willing to improve their French skills.

**Table 3:** What are the key factors that influence the success of the French language immersion programs at Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri, and how do these factors impact program outcomes?

Items	Response option	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
1. Language proficiency of instructors	Very Low	0	0(%)

	Low	3	7.5%
	Moderate	20	50%
	High	15	37.5%
	Very High	2	5%
2. Availability of Learning Resources	Very Insufficient	15	37.5%
	Insufficient	10	25%
	Moderate	5	12.5%
	Sufficient	5	12.5%
	Very Sufficient	5	12.5%
3. Student Motivation And Engagement	Very Low	15	37.5%
	Low	10	25%
	Moderate	10	25%
	High	5	12.5%
	Very High	0	0%
4. Program Structure And Curriculum	Very Ineffective	10	25%
	Ineffective	12	30%
	Neutral	2	5%
	Effective	8	20%
	Very Effective	8	20%
Cultural Exposure And Extracurricular Activities	Never	10	25%
	Rarely	15	37.5%
	Sometimes	10	25%
	Often	5	12.5%
	Very Often	0	0%

This table shows the data collected from respondents on the key factors that influence the success of the French language immersion programme at Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri, and how do these factors impact program outcomes? From this results, it is clear that French Language Immersion Programme is faced with a lot of challenges influencing its success at Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri, ranging from the moderate level of proficiency of instructors, the insufficient resource materials, the low motivation and engagement of students etc...

### Discussions

The findings from this study showed how French Language Immersion Programs impacts students' proficiency in French at Alvan Ikoku federal college of education, Owerri. This finding shows consistency with the earlier finding by Botezatu, Trachsel & Guo (2020), Gillet, Barbu & Poncelet, (2021), Buchanan, Velandia, Weckend & Bayes (2021) and Olakunle (2020) of our literature review, which established the impact and the advantage of The Language Immersion

Programs on students, students' teachers. They demonstrated in their study that French immersion programs refined students and gave them more proficiency to the language, Teachers get direct knowledge of how languages are acquired, as well as an appreciation of the cultural quirks and situations that influence communication. Their profound comprehension enables them to relate to the difficulties pupils encounter when learning a new language and are more effective in the classroom. Teachers who participate in immersion programs also get more flexibility and classroom management abilities, which empowers them to respond quickly to changing circumstances and come up with original solutions. By fostering empathy and intercultural competency, these programs help instructors create more welcoming and encouraging learning environments. All things considered, immersion programs prepare instructors. The study also revealed that the French Language Immersion Programs faces challenges affecting its success at Alvan Ikoku federal college of education, Owerri, this goes in line with finding of Folorunsho & Iyanda (2022), Thakral, Manhas, & Verma (2020), Mbon, Ntamu & Owan (2023). Who demonstrated in their studies the challenges faced by the teaching of French language, they also highlighted the challenges faced by the implementation of the immersion programs in tertiary institutions due to administrative and structural impediments, such as insufficient infrastructure, rules, and bureaucratic procedures. These obstacles restrict the educational system's flexibility and increase the disparity in educational quality between different geographic and socioeconomic groups. Motivational issues affect both instructors and students, leading to poor academic achievement, disengagement, and increased dropout rates. Teachers struggle with motivation due to low pay, limited professional growth opportunities, and lack of school management support. on the opinions of educators on the functions of the target language, the dominant language, and the home languages of the pupils.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

According to research from Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Immersion Programs in French greatly enhance students' language proficiency and the teaching competency of aspiring teachers. When compared to students who used a standard classroom method, students who took part in Immersion programs demonstrated increased competency in speaking, listening, reading, and writing in French. Pre-service teachers' exposure to actual language situations also helped them become more confident and aware of culture, giving them the tools they need to teach French in the real world. In order to develop qualified instructors and proficient language learners, the study highlights the significance of including Immersion Programs within language education curriculum. Future studies may include extending immersion programs to more colleges and evaluating the results over an extended period of time.

### **Recommendations**

The French language immersion programs offered by Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri, have drawn criticism. The following measures should be taken to raise these programs' efficacy.

1. First and foremost, the institution must to make Immersion Programs more accessible, particularly to individuals who intend to pursue careers in French language instruction.

2. Secondly, teacher preparation should be given top priority. with specific training in immersive teaching techniques and participation in exchange programs or workshops in Francophone countries
3. Thirdly, sufficient facilities and resources should be made available, including access to native French speakers, language labs, and French-language media.
4. Fourthly, immersion program durations should be increased. to guarantee continuous exposure to the French language
5. Fifthly, the college need to formally collaborate with academic institutions in Francophone nations to encourage language study across national borders.
6. Sixthly, scholarships and financial aid should be offered. in order to encourage more students to take part in immersion programs.

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