TETFLE TEACHER EDUCATION THROUGH FLEXIBLE LEARNING IN AFRICA
JOURNAL

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Vol 5, 2024

ISSN 2788-6298

TETFLE TEACHER EDUCATION THROUGH FLEXIBLE LEARNING IN AFRICA JOURNAL

Official publication of the Unit for Distance Education
Faculty of Education
University of Pretoria
Web address: https://upjournals.up.ac.za/index.php/tetfle
Email address: tetflemanager@up.ac.za

Comparative and International Education as a Way to Strengthen Internationalisation in Teacher Education Programmes at Universities in Africa

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Abstract

One lacuna in teacher education programmes at universities in Africa is a lack of internationalisation. This is a position paper, using the method of comparative and international education. The paper argues that imbuing teacher education programmes at universities in Africa with comparative and international education is an obvious way to counter such detrimental trends of parochialism, universities appointing their alumni, an inward orientation and to effect internationalisation in such programmes. This is particularly significant at this point, when the constraints brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic have rendered many of the other conventional means of internationalising higher education difficult or impossible. The article concludes comparative ad international education courses in teacher education programmes fully serve a host of purposes. These include description of education systems, understanding of education systems, improvement of education practice (both at policy and at classroom level), applying the comparative method to investigate or illuminate education issues, and furthering of the philanthropic ideal. Furthermore, such courses appear to be ideally suited to bring about much-needed internationalisation in such programmes. Being part of an internationalisation drive, it may have several additional benefits related to the countering of Northern hegemony in education, and shaping the course of the decolonisation of education drive.

Keywords: Comparative and International Education, COVID-19 pandemic, internationalisation, internationalisation at home, teacher education.

ISSN 2788-6298

Introduction

Parochialism—universities appointing their own alumni and an inward orientation—are anathema to the ethos of a university, for very sound reasons. Yet these are dangers to which teacher education programmes at universities easily fall prey, especially at universities in the Global South. This is a position paper, using the comparative and international education method to argue that imbuing teacher education programmes at universities in Africa with comparative and international education is an obvious way to counter such detrimental trends and bring about internationalisation.

The paper commences with an exploration of the international dimension of higher education or the internationalisation of higher education: definition, history, and rationale. The matter of how challenging internationalisation is for universities in Africa is discussed next. The focus is then narrowed to internationalisation in teacher education programmes at universities in Africa. Comparative and international education is then suggested as a field of scholarship that may potentially promote internationalisation in teacher education at universities in Africa.

Research method

This is a position paper. A position paper describes and defends a position concerning an issue, presenting an argument based on evidence and authoritative sources for that position (Xavier University Library, 2014). It has been written from the vantage point of comparative and international education, the field of scholarship in which the author of the article is active. The conceptual and methodological apparatus of comparative and international education is utilised in building the argument proposing the internationalisation of teacher education programmes at universities in Africa by drawing on comparative and international education.

Comparative and international education can be described briefly as a study of education systems in their societal-contextual embeddedness and a comparison of education systems in their societal-contextual interrelationships (Wolhuter et al. 2018). Using international-comparative perspectives is a widely accepted and used method to explore and interrogate societal issues (Pawson 2006), including education issues (Crossley, 2014). Comparative and international education has a dual nature, denoting at the same time an object of study (education systems in the contextual embeddedness) and entailing a method of study (the comparative method) (see

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Wolhuter 2022).

The literature on higher education institutions and systems in Africa and teacher education programmes at such higher education institutions were interrogated and interpreted in the societal context of such systems, forming the basis for the argument of the paper. Literature was identified and selected by using the database ERIC and the keywords "universities", "Africa", "Comparative and International Education", "internationalisation of higher education", and "teacher education".

Internationalisation of universities

In higher education scholarship it has become conventional to take the definition of University of Toronto scholar Jane Knight as a working definition of internationalisation of higher education. Knight (2003: 2) defines the internationalisation of higher education as "integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education".

Internationalisation as a distinguishing, essential feature of a university has a long history and can be detected at the very first universities. Duggan (1916: 100) enumerates five features of the medieval university in Europe (which can be taken as the prototype of the modern university) that distinguished the medieval university from the other two types of education institutions (cathedral schools and monastic schools) of the time. One of these features is that, compared to the cathedral and monastic schools, which drew their students from the immediate geographic area where such an institution was located, the university attracted students from all over Europe.

In parts of the world beyond Europe (even in North America), the university, at least in its present form, commenced as an importation (usually closely entwined with the colonisation project), not autochthonously (see Wittrock 2019). Hence the first batch of professoriates were always ex-patriates (in practice in the new world, much more so in the Global South, this dominance of ex-patriate faculty continued long after the founding of the universities in those regions). Curricula, too, had a strong element of being imported. Hence there was, from the beginning, a strong element of internationalisation, even though an objectionable kind thereof.

One of the key features of education development in the past 35 years (commencing around 1990), even of world history, has been the global higher

education revolution (Altbach, Reisberg, and Rumbley 2010). This revolution has been driven by a collection of interrelated societal drivers. These drivers are demographic shifts, increasing affluence, the rise of knowledge economies, the neoliberal economic revolution, the information and communication technology revolution, the rise of multicultural societies, democratisation, individualisation, and the rise of the Creed of Human Rights (Wolhuter and Jacobs, 2021). The signature feature of this global higher education revolution has been massification. Globally higher education enrolments expanded from 88.6 million in 1990 to 236.1 million in 2020 (UNESCO 2023) (latest available figure at time of writing). Even after factoring in global population growth, the enrolment explosion of higher education remains spectacular. On a global aggregate level, gross higher education enrolment ratios rose from 14% in 1990, to 40% in 2020 (World Bank, 2023a) (latest available figure at the time of writing), growing during this time at a rate of roughly one per cent per year.

While massification is the most salient feature of the global higher education revolution, this revolution has a host of other features too. One of these other key features of the global higher education revolution has been accelerated internationalisation (see Welch 1997). Globally, the number of international higher education students has grown from 2.1 million in 1990 to 6.4 million in 2020 (latest available figures at the time of writing) (UNESCO 2023). This growth was facilitated by the global economic upswing of the time and a more relaxed international political situation.

Rationales for the internationalisation of universities are manifold, more so in the contemporary world. Knight's (1996) taxonomy of rationales includes political, economic, academic, and cultural rationales for the internationalisation of higher education. Welch, Yang, and Wolhuter (2004) add scientific and scholarly rationales to these categories. Lastly, considerations of education, that is, the significance of internationalisation in the education supplied to students, should also be mentioned. What is relevant here is the aims of Intercultural Education, Global Education, and Education for Global Citizenship and the ideals of education found, for example, in the United Nations and its charter (Jones 1999: 147). The internationalisation of higher education is instrumental to the cultivation of an internationalist value system, achieving the goal of an international moral and political order predicated on respect for difference, social justice, and mutual respect within and between nations as a key element, as is the rejection by the weak of domination by the powerful (e.g., of politically and economically strong nations over those economically less developed,

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or of the majority of a nation's populace by powerful politico-economic elites, or of a single ethnic or religious power block) (Welch 2002: 434; see also Bu 2020). Here it is a matter of education as *Bildung* (using Alexander von Humboldt's term) where the student's learning is integrated into his or her own life and understanding of him- or herself (Sjöström and Eilks 2020).

Internationalisation in teacher education programmes

It should be borne in mind that teacher education programmes (and faculty at faculties or schools of education) are beset by a series of concern-raising problems. Very salient and high on the list is the lack—real or perceived (by such faculty themselves and/or faculty of other fields)—of academic depth and rigour in such programmes, an allegation first raised to prominence in the scholarly literature by the article of David Larrabee (1998) a quarter of a century ago, and since then repeated regularly (see Steyn, Van der Walt, and Wolhuter 2016). Other problematic issues (which may not be unrelated to the problem of a lack of intellectual depth and rigour) include high student-staff ratios and that—real or alleged—faculties or schools of education attract less academically endowed students than other faculties or schools (Steyn *et al.* 2016). However, a challenge that is relevant to the topic of this article is a relatively inward orientation or focus and a lack of internationalisation in teacher education programmes (e.g., see Tran and Pasura 2021). As a measure of the lower level of internationalisation of education schools or faculties, Leutwyler, Wolhuter and Popov (2017: 71) mention that whereas 8.3% of the teacher education students in Switzerland hold a foreign passport, the foreigners in traditional universities amount to 27.2%. This problem may be related to the fact that teacher education programmes were mostly set up to educate a national teacher corps and historically national education systems were created as part of a national project of nation building (e.g., see Porto 2016: 3), although, admittedly, distance education units (such as at the University of South Africa or the North-West University in South Africa), may have a more cosmopolitan student body than contact education institutions. The North-West University, for example, has six centres in Namibia, the bulk of students being education students, albeit in postgraduate programmes. There is also the challenge of managing teaching practice facing faculties or schools of education. A wholesome development in many parts of the world has been recent attempts to reform teacher education to equip

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teachers with a global mindset to function as global citizens (e.g., this was one of the motivations for the major reforms in Belgian teacher education programmes recently; see Kowalczuk-Walêdziak et al. 2019: 51).

Internationalisation of universities in Africa

When considering the internationalisation of universities in Africa, a few factors of the contextual ecology (that is the societal context as well as the higher education system context) of these universities should be kept in mind. Whereas the University of Karaouine, founded in 759 at Fez, Morocco, lays claim to being the oldest university in the world, on the other hand, the continent, especially sub-Saharan Africa, was very sparsely supplied with universities until very recently. Most of the states got their first university around independence in 1960, wich remained the situation until 1990, after which the number of universities mushroomed. Still, most universities in Africa are young and do not have a long historical legacy of contact with universities abroad.

Demographically, Africa is a young continent with a growing population. With universities sparsely supplied on the one hand, and, on the other hand a growing segment of young people wanting a place at university, internationalisation has been shunted to the back of the priority queue.

Economically, the countries in Africa are not strong. In terms of the World Bank classification, not a single country in Africa is a high-income country and only five are upper-middle-income countries. The economic predicament of the continent is clear from the fact that 21 countries are lower-middle-income countries and 24 are low-income countries (World Bank, 2023b). This means there is little funding for the higher education sector and whatever little funding is available should be allocated to staff salaries, infrastructure, and priorities such as opening more space to increase access to higher education, rather than channelling funds into the expensive and relatively luxury activity of internationalisation.

The economic predicament of the nations of Africa results in some challenges within the higher education system, which are also detrimental to pursuing a forceful internationalisation project. The infrastructure on campuses (including libraries, laboratories, and information technology) often leaves much to be desired (see Kigotho 2021), rendering these institutions not very attractive for international students and faculty.

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Then there is widespread discomfort (among faculty, students, and the public at large) about the universities in Africa still being tied in the grip of the colonial past, and the feeling is that the decolonisation of these universities should take priority (see Jansen and Walters 2022). This imperative for decolonisation distracts attention away from internationalisation. Not only does the call for decolonisation, *prima facie*, constitute a call to turn away from a part of the foreign world and turn to domestic turf, but, furthermore, scholars critically analysing the internationalisation of universities in the developing world often argue that internationalisation is a force promoting the persistent colonialisation or the re-colonisation of higher education (e.g., see Guo, Guo, and Liu 2022; Xu 2022). In fact, there is a whole school of scholars critical of internationalisation, led by Sharon Stein (e.g., see Stein, 2019), on this issue.

Because of all the above enumerated societal-contextual and higher education sector factors, internationalisation has thus far not enjoyed priority under national or institutional governance. Jooste and Hagenemeier (2022) draw attention to the fact that the South African government (it should be remembered that South Africa has the oldest and most expanded higher education system in sub-Saharan Africa) only in 2020, 26 years after the dawn of the new socio-political dispensation and restructuring of higher education, published the first policy framework for the internationalisation of higher education. Crăciun (2018) found that in 2018, only 22 countries in the world (11%) had a relevant official internationalisation strategy; none of these was located on the African continent.

All of the above-enumerated contextual impediments, and being relegated to low on the priority list, make it difficult for universities in Africa to internationalise. To the extent that there is evidence of internationalisation, such internationalisation has a very preposterous structure and has had unintended and undesired consequences. This statement can be illustrated by taking the ratio of inbound and outbound international students as an example. A glaring lopsidedness is evident from the incidence of international students and the ratio between inbound and outbound international students. These figures for Africa compared to global patterns are presented in Table 1.

The first observation from Table 1 is the lack of balance between the inbound and outbound student mobility rates. Rather than a global mix and global interaction and network formation, it seems that the international student mobility flows to and from Africa are a unidirectional movement. Students from Africa head to universities of the Global North. There is not a reverse flow of students from outside Africa to Africa, nor

Table 1: Internationational Student Mobility Rates for Africa Compared to Global Patterns		
Region	**Inbound International Student Mobility Rate (%)**	**Outbound International Student Mobility Rate (%)**
Sub-Saharan Africa	1.49	2.56
Saharan Africa	1.26	4.71
World Aggregate	2.69	2.69
Europe and North-America	7.54	*2.39*
Oceania	24.58	*1.5*

Source: UNESCO, 2023, data for 2020

is there a strong vector of intra-African international student mobility.

This one-way flow should be seen in part of its bigger context, namely to feed the brain drain plaguing the continent—a massive problem in Africa (see Macaulay 2022). It is estimated that Africa loses US$4 billion annually by outsourcing jobs in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics—the so-called STEM fields—to foreign professionals (Guilbert 2016). At least a significant part of this could have been obviated by retaining its best-qualified human resources in these fields. Africa accounts for only one per cent of global scientific research (Guilbert 2016). This is detrimental to the continent in many aspects (including feeding the vicious circle of rendering the universities on the continent not very attractive for international researchers, faculty, and students).

Another aspect of distorted internationalisation patterns in Africa occurs in countries that can be regarded as second-order nodes or regional nodes in a very unbalanced global higher education system (first-order nodes then being the higher education systems of the Global North). Certainly, in Africa, the most salient second-order node is that of South Africa. Statistics from the South African Ministry of Higher Education and Training, indicate there were 69 381 foreign students studying at all South African universities in 2016 (including distance education units and universities) (Republic of South Africa 2019:31). This constitutes seven per cent of the student corps at South African universities, but 66.1% of these students are from

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other Southern African countries. Turning to outbound international students, these total only 9 130 (2018 figure, UNESCO 2023). This is far out of balance with the number of inbound international students, and while hard statistics are not readily available, it can safely be hypothesised that these are largely students at universities in the Global North, and such outbound mobility is a stepping stone in such students joining the brain drain from South Africa to the Global North. Thus, the inbound and outbound student mobility rates in South Africa do not testify to the acquisition of a global mix in promoting academic excellence and competitiveness—the stated and expected goals of internationalisation—and it is a pattern repeated in all regionally strong higher education systems in Africa.

Internationalisation marred by the COVID-19 pandemic

Finally, it should be mentioned that the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic was for obvious reasons a setback in the internationalisation drives of universities, with the severe limitations that the pandemic placed on international travel. Jacobs and Mitchell (2021) did a content analysis of 116 articles published on the topic of internationalisaton in the 2020 editions of *University World News Global*. The largest single set of articles, 45.7%, discussed internationalisation in view of the COVID-19 pandemic, the most salient narrative being the adverse, drastic effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on higher education internationalisation, specifically regarding student mobility, enrolment, the loss of tuition revenue, and the declining financial stability of higher education institutions. Studying abroad has become less attractive, more difficult, and even impossible due to the pandemic. This adverse effect of the pandemic on the internationalisation of universities has also been pointed out by other extensive research, some of these even concluding that the setback the pandemic has caused for the internationalisation of higher education will be permanent (e.g., see Liu and Gao 2022).

However, the pandemic was met as not only a challenge but also a catalyst for opportunity. Opportunities to bring about internationalisation employing technology were seized and the concept of "internationalisation at home" became a common call (see Kor et al. 2022). Internationalisation at home has been defined as "the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environments" (Beelen and Jones,

as cited by Jones and Reiffenrath 2018). Jacobs and Mitchell (2021: 24) comment that the internationalisation measures of the higher education sector, precipitated by the pandemic, are of interest to scholars of comparative and international education. However, deliberating on the prospects of employing the field of comparative and international education as a means to strengthen internationalisation has not yet taken place. Doing so, especially concerning teacher education programmes at universities in Africa, is the purpose of this article.

Comparative and international education

Conceptual clarification

Among scholars in the field, much less so among the larger field of scholars of education, there is no unanimity as to how to define comparative and international education or to answer the question: "What is comparative and international education?" (see Wolhuter 2008: 323). In a survey of the range of definitions for comparative and international education in circulation, Maria Manzon (2011: 199-205) classifies these definitions into three categories. First, some definitions are based on holding forth a unique object of study as a distinguishing and defining feature of comparative and international education. Second, there are definitions pivoting on the (comparative) methodology being the defining feature. Third, there are definitions taking the role(s), purpose(s), or use(s) of the field as their distinguishing feature(s). The author of this paper has been working with, and published, the following as a working definition of comparative and international education (e.g., see Wolhuter 2023): comparative and international education is defined by studying education from a three-in-one perspective. These three perspectives are as follows:

- An education system perspective: The single case or instance of one educator to one educand is not of interest to comparative and international education, but rather the study of entire education systems (such as the French or the Nigerian education system).
- A contextual perspective: Education systems are shaped by their societal contexts and also serve their societies. Comparative and international education studies education systems within their contextual interrelationships, entailing both societal contexts as shaping factors of education systems, and the societal outcomes of education.

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- The comparative perspective: Comparative education scholars compare education systems and education system-societal context interrelationships in different nations or locations. In this way, both general statements and more nuanced or refined statements regarding education system-societal context interrelationships can be distilled.

In recent times, there has been a call among scholars in the field that the name 'comparative education', should be superseded by 'comparative and international education" (see Wolhuter 2016). The term 'international education', as used here, is defined by David Phillips and Michelle Schweisfurth (2014: 60) as a scholarship studying education from a global or an international perspective. With the scholarly field of comparative education evolving into comparative and international education, the belief is that single- or limited-area studies and comparisons should eventually feed into the all-embracing, global study of the international education project (Wolhuter, 2016).

Purposes or significance of comparative and international education

One of the reasons for the lack of a short and simple, unanimously accepted definition of the field of comparative and international education is the nature of the field as a continuously expanding field—a feature of the field expressed in the collected volume on the state of the field *Comparative and International Education: Survey of an Infinite Field* (Wolhuter and Wiseman eds. 2019). In its historical evolution, the field has been ever-testing new frontiers and has found new themes, aims, methods, and paradigms. The same applies to the purposes or roles of significance of the field. While the use or aims of the field are generally enumerated in textbooks as the description of education systems, understanding of education systems, improvement of education practice (both at policy and at classroom level), applying the comparative method to investigate or illuminate education issues, and furthering of the philanthropic ideal, research has shown that in every new context the field finds a new role or purpose (Wolhuter 2012). One role or potential significance thus far overlooked and not noted in the literature, including in the most recently published collected volume on the intersection between comparative and international education and teacher education (Salajan, Jules, and Wolhuter eds. 2023), is that of comparative and

international education enhancing the internationalisation effort of universities. The last section of this article will now argue the potential of the field to fulfil this role, especially at the current time in teacher education programmes at universities in Africa. Similarly, in the last volume on comparative perspectives on teacher education and global citizenship education, the edited volume of Schugurensky and Wolhuter (2020), the role of comparative and international education in contributing to the global citizenship education of teachers was not covered.

Comparative and international education to provide momentum to internationalisation at universities in Africa: exploration, assessment, recommendations

Returning to Jane Knight's definition of internationalisation proffered earlier, it seems that 'to imbue teacher education programmes at universities with integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education' so sorely needed but so difficult at this point in time, the best available means, in view of the scope and purposes of the field as explained above, would be to imbue such programmes with comparative and international education modules. Such modules can counter the parochial nature of teacher education programmes, a detrimental feature that plagues teacher education programmes worldwide, including at universities in Africa.

Furthermore, comparative and international education modules can also contribute to the Global Citizenship Education of student teachers. Given the rise of the call for Global Citizenship Education, also in teacher education programmes (see Schugurensky & Wolhuter 2020), that is also an issue designers of teacher education programmes at universities in Africa should urgently attend to.

The call for the decolonisation of education has, in the recent past, generated much enthusiasm and heated discussion among students and progressive scholars (along the entire line of scholarly fields, especially the social sciences), as well as among the progressive sector of the public discourse on education (e.g., see Jansen and Walters 2022). Scholars have pointed out that the decolonisation of education is an imperative facing not only the nations of the Global South but is as much a challenge facing education in the Global North (although in the Global North the challenge may not be identical to that of the Global South) (e.g., see Sappleton and Adams 2022).

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Yet the concept of the decolonisation of education is difficult, with a wide range of meanings attached to it. In a thorough survey of these different meanings, Jansen (2017: 156-173) distinguishes between eight different meanings attached to the term. If the conceptual clarification of 'decolonisation' is difficult, much more so is the practical realisation thereof. In this regard, nations can learn much from one another's experience, as explained by Sappleton and Adams (2022). The field of scholarship then best suited to equip student teachers for their task to tease out the meaning and the realisation of decolonisation, a task they seem to have to face in their studies as well as in their forthcoming career, is the field of comparative and international education.

When the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on education have subsided and when the force of globalisation resumes, the internationalisation of education (at all levels) will also be a phenomenon that student teachers will encounter in their studies and in their ensuing careers. Given the kind of internationalisation resulting from asymmetrical power relations, and its less-than-just-beneficial or even adverse effect on the Global South, the field of comparative and international education and, in particular, the thoughts and literature of critical scholars of internationalisation, such as Sharon Stein (e.g., see Stein 2019) are best suited to alert students to the adversarial effects of these kinds of internationalisations (a topic high on the research agenda and being thoroughly studied by scholars of comparative and international education (e.g., see Asare, Mitchell, and Rose 2022) and how to counter them.

Conclusion

Internationalisation is a quintessential feature of a university, and for sound reasons, although the kind of internationalisation taking place at many universities in the world, notably in the Global South, can be criticised as not serving the best interest of the university and its clientele. Teacher education programmes have tended to be parochial, not echoing the strong internationalisation detectable in other sectors of the higher education sector. This neglect of internationalisation in teacher education programmes has been more pronounced in Africa and, in recent times, as one of the results of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has induced the higher education sector globally to devise 'internationalisation at home' as one way to improvise, that is, to internationalise despite the constraints brought about by the pandemic. Thus far, the possibility of using comparative and international education to bring

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about internationalisation at home in initial teacher education programmes as well as in continuous professional development programmes for teachers, has escaped the attention of scholars, teacher educators, and those drawing up teacher education programmes. This article investigated that possibility and found it to be promising. Besides the host of purposes of courses in comparative and international education, usually enumerated as a description of education systems, understanding of education systems, improvement of education practice (both at policy and at classroom level), applying the comparative method to investigate or illuminate education issues, and furthering of the philanthropic ideal—all relevant, if not sorely needed in initial teacher education programmes—and continuous development programmes for teachers at universities in Africa, such courses appear to be ideally suited to bring about much-needed internationalisation in such programmes. Being part of an internationalisation drive, it may have a number of additional benefits related to the countering of Northern hegemony in education and to shaping the course of the decolonisation of education exercise. This is, as has been explained at the beginning, a position paper. There is a need, as follow-up research, for empirical research in cases where comparative education modules do form part of teacher education programmes at universities in Africa, both as object lessons for other universities to learn how to employ comparative education in internationalisation exercises and also to improve such modules as vehicles of the internationalisation of universities.

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