

Christian Religious Studies Teachers' Content Knowledge: Do Areas of Specialisation, Teaching Experience, Professional Qualification and Academic Qualification Matter?

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ABSTRACT

This paper ascertained the influence of the area of specialisation, teaching experience, professional qualification, and academic qualification on CRS teachers' content knowledge. Cross-sectional survey was the design employed to conduct the study. The population comprised 3,523 individuals including both CRS teachers and students from form 1 and 2. The study utilised a sample size 423 made up of 23 teachers and 400 students. The students were sampled using the proportionate random sampling procedure from a population of 3,500 whereas all the teachers were selected with the census method from eight senior high schools. Data from CRS teachers and students were collected using questionnaires. The results showed that teachers of CRS have a high level of content knowledge even though more than half of them did not specialise in religion. It was found that there was no statistically significant effect of CRS teachers' area of specialisation, teaching experience, professional qualification, and academic qualification on their Content knowledge, $F(16, 6) = 1.097$, $p = .489$, partial $\eta^2 = .245$. There was a significant interaction effect of teachers' area of specialisation and professional qualification on their content knowledge $F(1, 6) = 0.00$, $p = .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .000$. This indicates that the effect of area of specialisation on a teachers' content knowledge depends on their level of professional qualification. There was also a significant interaction effect of teachers' professional qualification and academic qualification on their content knowledge $F(1, 6) = 0.00$, $p = .000$, partial $\eta^2 = .000$, implying that, the effect of professional qualification on content knowledge depends on the teacher's level of academic qualification. It is recommended that the Ghana Education Service in the Eastern region ensure regular workshops and upgrading are provided for teachers of CRS despite their high level of content knowledge. This is because more than half of the teachers did not specialise in religion and may encounter some bottlenecks in their lesson delivery.

Keywords: Academic Qualification, Content knowledge, Professional qualification, Teachers, Teaching Experience

I. INTRODUCTION

The changing cultures in Western societies have influence and caused a steady decrease of some social values (respect, obedience, hard work etc.) of the African society. Civil society and human rights advocates have worsened the already bad situation by creating the awareness that punishments should not be meted out to students by school authorities. Disruptive behaviours of students that hinder learning can contribute to teachers' burnout and stress (Vaaland, 2016). Research on factors that influence student learning has shown that teachers are the most influential school factor on students' learning and interest in a particular subject (Rockoff, 2004; Aaronson et al., 2007). Teachers act as parents to pupils in the educational setting (they mentor, safeguard, and inspire the learner), and this has had a big impact on classroom instruction. Classroom instruction and interaction greatly benefits from the

teacher's authority in the classroom (Pace, 2003). For pupils to finish the prescribed curriculum and meet their academic objectives, teachers, who hold power over them, are responsible for influencing their ideas and actions.

Darling-Hammond (2008) indicated that the most important component affecting classroom management and student learning is instructor authority. Therefore, it is undeniable that a teacher's authority is important in the classroom. Christian Religious Studies (CRS) is perceived to be an easy subject therefore, to effectively implement its curriculum and ensure adequate improvements in the students' lives; the teacher of the subject must exercise authority in the subject. Esmaeili et al. (2015) argue that a teacher's effectiveness in positively influencing their class is closely tied to the successful implementation of the CRS curriculum. This to me is the authority of the teacher. This means that an active teacher is accountable for ensuring that the goals of the subject are met through his or her authority as an arbiter, as someone knowledgeable and skilled in the subject, as well as by the power obtained from his or her general conduct both inside and outside of the classroom. The teacher's authority transcends to his subject knowledge as well as his content knowledge (Darling-Hammond, 2008; Pace & Hammings, 2007). It cannot be denied that teaching is a difficult job. The instructor is in charge of organizing and planning the students' education.

Based on the teacher's knowledge of the content; the teacher's effectiveness in teaching a subject, by his expression of knowledge and control over the various topics is a form of authority that his students respect so much. Pace and Hammings (2007) claimed that the teacher can gain the attention of the class because every student believes him to be the repository of knowledge in the subject area. They observed that most students are encouraged to learn a particular subject because the teacher expresses much authority in that subject area, which helps that teacher easily control students' learning. They noted that, in a class where the majority of the students know that the teacher has control over what he teaches, students' learning is affected positively.

Closely related to content knowledge is the area of specialization. Teachers can exhibit content knowledge when they major or specialised in the subject they are teaching. One of the issues that has taken centre stage in recent research especially, in religious education, is 'Out of field teaching.' This is where teachers teach subjects that are out of their field of specialization (Owusu & Mensah, 2022). Extensively, it has been established that out-of-field teaching is one of the critical issues affecting teachers' content knowledge levels and students' performance (Esmaeili et al., 2015).

Professional qualification relates to competences (skills, expertise etc.) that are required for a particular profession. Over the years, a lot of research has evolved around professional qualification of teachers in the classroom. It has been established that professional qualification is integral to the teaching profession and so teachers are supposed to make conscious and planned efforts to ensure constant self-enhancement (Oluremi, 2013). One of the key determinants of employment and retention of teachers in modern educational systems is the professional qualifications they possess. It is evident that professional qualification is critical determinant of effective classroom quality instruction. Oluremi, (2013) is of the view that, a teacher's professional qualification augments his instructional abilities and conduct in the classroom and that; plans should be put in place to ensure continuous professional development of teachers. Research has indicated that there is a positive relationship between teachers' professional qualification and academic performance of students and enables teachers build themselves up in terms of mastery of the subject matter they teach (Agharuwhe, 2013). A CRS teacher's professional qualification is therefore essential to help improve his content knowledge as well as his teaching practices and classroom quality instruction.

The number of years a teacher teaches has also been seen as one component that adds to his or her content knowledge development. The impression created is that the more someone teaches, the more experienced they become and experienced relates with mastery of content. Experienced teachers are believed to be a factor of students' attainment in academics (Boyd et al., 2008). This follows that teachers who are not experienced would not be efficient and effective in the classroom as compared to those who have gained some amount of experience (Darling-Hammond, 2008). Agharuwhe (2013) found in a study that teacher effectiveness positively correlates with the number of years they have been teaching. Again, it was established that teachers who are efficient and effective have an impact on the academic attainment of students.

Over the years, it has been observed that most CRS teachers are not motivated to further their studies. This lack of recognition and opportunities may be attributed to the fact that subjects like mathematics, the sciences, and English receive more recognition and opportunities compared to CRS. Lawal (2010) rightly noted that the number of teachers of Christian Religious Knowledge (CRK) who do not hold CRK certificates is higher compared to teachers of other subjects. Hence even when such teachers go on for further studies, they would not do them in CRK. He observed that although students with such teachers may achieve higher marks in their terminal examinations in CRK, their performance in the Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) declines significantly. Similarly, Ntamu et al. (2016) found a decline in students' academic performance in CRK over the years compared to other subjects in the

school system. In the Nigerian school system, CRK is a general elective and can be picked by even science students to make up their required number of subjects. More teachers are therefore needed to accommodate the high number of students picking the course. Therefore, if interest in reading CRK as a program is hampered, then there will be fewer qualified teachers to handle the course, hence any clergyman can be pointed to fill in the void irrespective of his or her educational discipline and or background. Kimosop (2015) also posited that teacher knowledge of the CRS content is known to impact student learning in Kenya's second-cycle schools. CRS as a subject demands quality teachers in its delivery explicitly. However, this is not so because in most schools in the New Juaben Municipality, CRS is regarded as a simple subject, hence someone without the necessary credentials, may be seen handling the subject. These teachers will lack content knowledge as they had not read the required courses as well as methods of teaching CRS which is for only those that major in religion. Njoku and Njoku (2015) and Annobil (2017) have suggested that student achievement in Christian Religious Studies (CRS) in Sub-Saharan Africa has been hampered by some teacher-related issues – such as teachers' expertise – which have been overlooked. In Nigeria, Njoku and Njoku (2015) observed that interest in the CRS has dropped because of a lack of motivation from both teachers and what they hoped to achieve from the study of the course. They argued that a teacher's effectiveness or capacity to positively affect his class is largely related to how well the CRS curriculum is implemented. As a result, an effective teacher is accountable for making sure the goals of the subject are met under his expertise as a facilitator, as someone knowledgeable and skilled in the subject matter, as well as by the prestige he derives from his general conduct both inside and outside of the classroom. However, the situation in Ghanaian schools is yet to be empirically tested as very little research has been done on the influence of teaching experience, professional and academic qualification on CRS teachers' content knowledge in the Senior High School. The study was steered by the following research questions;

1. What is the level of CRS teachers' content knowledge in the New Juaben Municipality?
2. What difference exists in CRS teachers' content knowledge based on their area of specialization, teaching experience, professional qualification, and academic qualification?

II. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Paradigm and Design

The paradigm underpinning this research is positivism. Its emphasis is typically on the objectivity of the research process (Creswell, 2014). The positivism believes that reality can be viewed and understood from an objective perspective, measured, and comprehended (Babbie, 2021; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). This research paradigm chosen enabled researchers to be external to the research site and the controller of the whole research process. Given the quantitative nature of this research, adopting the positivist view allowed the researcher to study concrete data objectively and analyse results. Information was gathered from both teachers and students to ascertain the content knowledge of CRS teachers. To this end, a cross-sectional survey design was utilized. This design was selected because it allows for the testing of assumptions and hypotheses.

2.2 Population and Sampling

The study was conducted in the New Juaben Municipality in the Eastern Region. The study covered all CRS teachers and students of the eight public senior high schools in the Municipality. The population comprised all CRS teachers and form 1 and 2 CRS students. The population was 3,523 teachers and students offering CRS. There were 23 CRS teachers and 3,500 students in forms one and two in all the eight senior high Schools in New Juaben Municipality (New Juaben Municipal Education Office, 2020). The census method was used to include all 23 CRS teachers (see Table 1). According to Tracy (2013) census method is most preferred when the target population is small, and you want to ensure representation of all. Also, out of the 3,500 SHS students in New Juaben Municipality, 400 students were sampled (see Table 2) using the proportionate simple random procedure (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970).

Table 1 below indicates that not all CRS teachers specialised in Religion. More than half (13, 56%) specialised in other subjects. Again, male teachers are many when it comes to teaching CRS. In terms of teaching experience, it was found that most of them have taught the subject for 8 years. With regards to their academic qualifications, the results indicate that 12 (52%) of them have a bachelor's degree whereas 3 (13%) have a Master of Philosophy degree. Also, 8 (35%) have a Master of Arts degree. On professional qualifications it is seen that 3 (13%) of the teachers have Teachers' Certificate A, while 6 (26%) have a Diploma in Education. Again, 1 (4.2%) person had Post Graduate Diploma in Education. Those who have a Bachelor of Education were 7(30.4%) whereas 4(17.4%) of the teachers have a Master of Education degree.

Table 1
Characteristics of Teachers (n=23)

Variable	Sub Scale	No.	%
Area of Specialization	Religion	10	44
	English	5	22
	History	7	30
	Twi	1	4
Number of Years in Teaching CRS	1- 5 years	7	30
	6-10 years	3	13
	11-15 years	5	22
	16-20 years	8	35
Academic Qualifications	Bachelor's Degree	12	52
	Master of Arts	8	35
	Master of Philosophy	3	13
Professional Qualifications	Teachers' Certificate A	3	13
	Diploma in Education	6	26
	Post Graduate Diploma in Education.	1	4.2
	Bachelor of Education.	7	30.4
	Master of Education	4	17.4
	Non-Education Masters	2	9

Source: Field Data (2023)

2.3 Instrument for Data Collection

Two set questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data from CRS teachers and students. The questionnaire for CRS teachers had 14 closed-ended items in two sections. Section A had 4 items that collected information on teachers' demographic characteristics related to research question 2. Section B consisted of 10 items that measured CRS teachers' content knowledge. The instrument for CRS students also had 7 close-ended questions. Section A had two items on CRS students' demographic characteristics and section B had 5 items that measured their view on CRS teachers' content knowledge. The items that measured teachers' content knowledge in both questionnaires were adapted from Mensah and Ampem (2023).

To ensure both face and content validity, the two questionnaires were subjected to review by colleagues in the area. Furthermore, a pilot test was conducted in the Abuakwa South Municipality of the Eastern region. The pilot testing helped to determine the Alpha Cronbach reliability coefficient of the questionnaire for CRS teachers (0.809) and CRS students (0.810) and both were determined to be reliable.

2.4 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are very crucial in research. Issues of ethics including confidentiality, informed consent and anonymity among others were ensured. Participants were informed that the data collected was purely for academic purposes and that any information provided would be handled with respect. Permission was sought from Heads of various institutions as well as the teachers involved. Data was gathered with the permission of the headmasters of the various schools from both teachers and students.

2.5 Data Analysis

Data from CRS teachers and students were quantitatively analysed with the help of SPSS (version 25) for Windows. Statistical measures like frequency counts, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to organise and summarise the data to answer research question one. Since the study sought to find the difference in teachers' content knowledge based on their characteristics, factorial ANOVA was employed to analyse data to answer research question 2. The dependent variable was CRS teachers' Content knowledge and the independent variables were, Area of specialisation, Teaching experience, Professional qualification, and Academic qualification.

III. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Research One: *What is the level of CRS teachers' content knowledge in the New Juaben Municipality?*

The study sought to find out the level of CRS teachers' content knowledge in the teaching of CRS. The coding of the items was done with the scale; 5= Strongly Agree, 4= Agree, 3=Disagree, 2= Strongly Disagree, and 1 = Uncertain). The mean scores were interpreted as follows: 1.00 - 1.9 (low), 2.0- 3.5(moderate) and 3.6-5.0(high).

Table 2

Level of CRS Teachers' Content Knowledge (n=23)

Statements	SA/A		DA/SDA		U		M	SD
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%		
CRS focuses on carefully selected major themes in the bible	23	100	0	0	0	0	4.48	0.51
The subject matter of CRS borders on the life stories of prominent characters of the Bible	23	100	0	0	0	0	4.57	0.51
CRS contains purely religious issues related to Christianity	23	100	0	0	0	0	4.81	0.41
The content of CRS has some aspects of social issues that influence students' daily lives	23	100	0	0	0	0	4.52	0.51
The content of CRS exposes students to biblical principles and values to help them in making sound value judgments	23	100	0	0	0	0	4.74	0.45
The content of year two includes heading like; Making decisions, Greed and its effects, Supremacy of God	21	91	2	9	0	0	4.39	0.66
The content of CRS has two main sections: Old Testament and New Testament	20	87	3	13	0	0	4.24	0.56
The content of CRS is structured in two sections for years one, two, and three	19	82	4	18	0	0	4.11	0.61
The content for year one has headings like Leadership roles Parental responsibility, Disobedience, and consequences	23	100	0	0	0	0	4.57	0.51
The content for year one has headings like; Individual responsibilities, concern for one's nation, and faith in God	19	82	2	9	2	9	4.0	0.85
Average							4.44	0.65

Source: Field Data (2023)

Table 2 presents details of CRS teachers' responses to items measuring their content knowledge. All the 23 (100%) teachers strongly agreed or agreed that CRS focuses on carefully selected major themes in the bible (M= 4.48, SD= 0.51), that the subject matter of CRS borders on the life stories of prominent characters of the bible (M= 4.57, SD=0.51), that the content of CRS has some aspect of social issues that influence students' daily lives (M= 4.52, SD=0.51), that the content of CRS exposes students to biblical principles and values to help them in making sound value judgments (M= 4.74, SD= 0.45), that the content for year one includes headings like; Leadership roles, Parental responsibilities, Disobedience, and consequences (M= 4.57, SD=0.51) and that CRS contains purely religious issues related to Christianity (M= 4.8, SD=0.41). Again, majority (21) either strongly agreed or agreed that the content for year two includes heading like; Making decisions, Greed and its effects, Supremacy of God (M= 4.39, SD=0.66). Lastly, 19 (82%) either strongly agreed or agreed that the content of Year Three includes headings like; Individual Responsibilities, concern for one's nation, and faith in God (M= 4.00, SD=0.85).

To triangulate the results, CRS students were also tasked to give information on the content knowledge of their teachers. The students also responded to closed-ended to measure their teachers' content knowledge. The coding of the items was done with the scale; 5= Strongly Agree, 4= Agree, 3=Disagree, 2= Strongly Disagree, and 1 = Uncertain). The mean scores were interpreted as follows: 1.00 - 1.9 (low), 2.0- 3.5(moderate) and 3.6-5.0(high). Table 4 has details of their responses.

Table 3
Students' Response to CRS Teachers' Content Knowledge (n=400)

Statements	SA/A		DA/SDA		U		M	SD
	No	%	No	%	No	%		
My teacher focuses carefully on the selected themes in the bible.	371	93	18	4	11	3	4.41	.82
My teacher teaches content that has aspects of social issues that reflect on our daily lives	389	97	9	2	2	1	4.48	.60
The content my teacher teaches exposes me to biblical principles and values to help in making a sound value judgment	386	96	7	2	7	2	4.42	.72
The content my teacher teaches relates to the life experiences of students	332	83	51	13	17	4	4.07	.95
The content of CRS my teacher teaches has two main sections (New Testament and Old Testament)	397	99.2	2	.6	1	.2	4.72	.50
Average							4.42	0.72

Source:FieldData (2023)

According to Table 3, almost all (389) the students either strongly agreed or agreed that their teachers teach content that has an aspect of social issues that reflect on our daily lives (M= 4.48, SD=0.60) and that the content their teachers teach exposes them to biblical principles and values to help in making sound value judgments (M= 4.42, SD= 0.72). Again, most (83%) of the students either strongly agreed or agreed that the content their teachers teach relate to their life experiences (M= 4.07, SD= 0.95).

The overall mean score for CRS teachers' responses was 4.44 (SD= 0.65) and 4.42 (SD= .72) for students' responses which indicates that CRS teachers have a high level of content knowledge in the teaching of CRS even though not all of them specialised in Religion. The final mean scores for teachers' and students' responses do not show glaring discrepancies that raises red flags. Although more than half of the teachers were not trained in content to teach CRS, the responses show they have high content knowledge and this may be due to experiences they have gained with teaching the subject over the years. However, a critical look at the results for individual statements indicates some of the teachers were unfamiliar with some aspects of the content of CRS and this is what makes specialisation a critical issue. Afari-Yankson's (2021) study conducted in the Central region also found out the most CRS teachers had high content knowledge despite the fact that some lacked some specific content knowledge. Also, Mensah and Owusu (2022) found that CRS teachers in the Greater Accra region had a high content knowledge in the teaching of CRS and this finding corroborates that.

Research Question Two: *What difference exists in CRS teachers' content knowledge based on their area of specialisation, teaching experience, professional qualification, and academic qualification?*

This research question sought to examine the difference that exists in CRS teachers' content knowledge based on their teaching experience, professional qualification, and academic qualification. A three-way factorial ANOVA was conducted to examine the effects of teachers' demographic features on their content knowledge. The dependent variable is CRS teachers' Content knowledge and the independent variables were, Area of specialisation, Teaching experience, Professional qualification, and Academic qualification. Table 4 has details of the results.

Table 4*Test of Between Subjects Effects on CRS Teachers' Content Knowledge*

Source	Df	F	Sig.	Partial Eta ²
Corrected Model	16	1.097	.489	.245
Intercept	1	2276.8	.000*	.997
Area of Specialisation	3	1.674	.521	.132
Teaching Experience	3	.707	.582	.261
Professional Qualification	2	.209	.817	.065
Academic Qualification	5	1.305	.373	.521
Area of Specialisation* Teaching Experience	1	.001	.256	.234
Area of Specialisation * Professional Qualification	1	.000	.001**	.000
Area of Specialisation * Academic Qualification	1	1.67	.342	.321
Teaching Experience * Professional Qualification	1	.000	1.00	.000
Teaching Experience * Academic Qualification	1	2.904	.139	.326
Professional Qualification * Academic Qualification	1	.000	.000**	.000

*Significant at 0.05; ** Significant Interaction Effect

The results of the General Linear Model (GLM) corrected model showed no statistically significant effect of CRS teachers' area of specialisation, teaching experience, professional qualification, and academic qualification on their content knowledge, $F(16, 6) = 1.097, p = .489$, partial $\eta^2 = .745$. There were statistically significant interactions between the area of specialisation and professional qualification $F(1, 6) = 0.00, p = .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .000$, and professional qualification and academic qualification $F(1, 6) = 0.00, p = .000$, partial $\eta^2 = .000$. The results indicate that there was no statistically significant effect for the area of specialisation $F(3, 6) = 1.674, p = .521$, partial $\eta^2 = .132$, teaching experience $F(3, 6) = .707, p = .582$, partial $\eta^2 = .261$, Professional Qualification $F(2, 6) = .209, p = .817$, partial $\eta^2 = .065$, Academic Qualification $F(5, 6) = 1.305, p = .373$, partial $\eta^2 = .521$ on CRS teachers content knowledge.

The main effect of area of specialisation $F(3, 6) = 1.674, p = .521$, partial $\eta^2 = .132$, teaching experience $F(3, 6) = .707, p = .582$, partial $\eta^2 = .261$, professional qualification $F(2, 6) = .209, p = .817$, partial $\eta^2 = .065$ and academic qualification $F(5, 6) = 1.305, p = .373$, partial $\eta^2 = .521$ on the content knowledge of teacher was not statistically significant. Results show that teachers' demographic characteristics (area of specialisation, teaching experience, professional qualification, and academic qualification of teachers) combined, do not influence their Content knowledge.

A careful examination of the results revealed that all the traits had no significant effect on teachers' content knowledge. This implies that there is no difference in teachers' content knowledge based on their area of specialisation, teaching experience, professional qualification, and academic qualification of teachers. The results also showed that the influence of the teaching experience of teachers on content knowledge does not depend on whether the teacher has taught for a long or short period. Also, the influence of teaching experience of teachers on content knowledge does not depend on whether the teacher has a master's degree or bachelor's degree.

The findings contradict some studies (Holvio, 2022; Asare-Danso, 2017; Abbitt, 2011; Mensah & Owusu, 2022) that have discovered an influence of teacher characteristics on their content knowledge. Whiles some found that area of specialization (Mensah & Owusu, 2022), teaching experiences (Jordan, 2013), and professional qualifications (Asare-Danso, 2017) influence teachers' content knowledge, others (Abbitt, 2011) found a direct influence of academic qualification on both content and pedagogical knowledge of teachers. This finding may be because the teachers have high content knowledge as seen in the previous results.

The finding however confirms Afari-Yankson (2021) who found that teachers had low content knowledge meanwhile the same teachers have masters degrees. Shukla et al. (2018) found that teachers' academic qualifications and experience do not automatically account for their content mastery as a lesser qualified teacher can attain Content knowledge. They further found that in mastering the content of a subject, the academic qualification does not count much, while long-serving teachers who were not trained to teach CRS may not have mastery of the subject matter.

V. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

From the findings, it is concluded that the CRS teachers in New Juaben Municipality (although not all specialise in Religion) would prepare lessons that reflect the scope and philosophy of the CRS curriculum which have a direct bearing on the rationale and impact students' lives positively making active problem solvers. This implies that CRS students are taught the suggested content and exposed to the techniques of expository discourse to aid their understanding of the content of CRS. This is because their teachers know what they are supposed to teach.

Again, to be knowledgeable in content for teaching CRS does not require specialisation in religion, many years of teaching, a particular degree, or professional training. It implies that a CRS teacher's ability to deliver the content of CRS and relate to learners is not influenced by his or her area of specialisation, teaching experience, professional qualification, and academic qualification.

5.2 Recommendations

Reflecting on the revelations and discussions, it is recommended that the Ghana Education Service in the Eastern region ensure regular workshops and upgrading are provided for teachers of CRS despite their high level of content knowledge. This is because more than half of the teachers did not specialise in religion and may encounter some bottlenecks in their lesson delivery.

Also, the CRS teachers should keep on upgrading themselves on issues revolving around the content of CRS and identify strands and substrands they feel handicapped in teaching and find help from other teachers who are comfortable and well equipped. This will ensure that CRS teachers are more acquainted with the subject matter of CRS to ensure students' academic accomplishments.

Even though CRS teachers' demographic characteristics do not influence their content knowledge, it is recommended that only teachers who specialised in Religion and have the required qualification be assigned to teach CRS. This is because there is a significant interaction effect of Area of specialisation and professional qualification as well as professional qualification and academic qualification on CRS teachers' content knowledge.

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