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DETERMINANTS OF SCHOOL CHOICE: A STUDY ON KHULNA CITY CORPORATION (KCC) AREA OF BANGLADESH

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Abstract: This study attempts to sort out the factors influencing school choice decision of parents in Khulna City Corporation (KCC) of Bangladesh. A semi-structured interview schedule, containing twenty-five Likert-type questions on determinants of school choice, was used to collect the data. A total of 150 randomly selected mothers, having at least one school going child, residing at *Nirala* Residential area of KCC were interviewed. Findings indicate that parental education and income play a decisive role in the decisions of school choice. The education level of children (p<0.000), the size of family (p<0.004) and the number of offspring are evidently influencing the selection of school as well. Moreover, parents' psychological impression about schools (p<0.000), together with financial aspects (p<0.040), proved to be more pronounced than the schools' academic reputations and facilities (p<0.065), nevertheless, the aforesaid issues are found to be positively linked with school choice (p<0.018). Parents' preference for private schools over government schools, especially, for young educands (Class I to Class V), however, suggest their growing dissatisfaction about the quality of education offered by government primary schools. Therefore, to restore parents' faith in government schools, concerned authorities should value the demands of parents and their children to improve the quality of services in schools and to enhance the efficiency of the teachers to increase academic opportunity, success and social responsibility across the country.

Keywords: School choice, quality education, socio-economic factors, psycho-social factors, academic and infrastructural factors

Introduction

Education has long been hailed as the key to extend individual's creativity and imagination plus it expands freedom and empowerment through better understanding and critical view of choices (Kamal & Zunaid, 2006; MacPherson, 1982; Nussbaum, 2000). In addition to its intrinsic values, it has substantial instrumental value to reproduce cultural heritage and accelerate economic progress through better use of both human and non-human resources (Asadullah, 2005; Hurt, Ronsmans, & Saha, 2004; MacPherson, 1982).

Realizing education's potentiality for socio-economic development, countries across the world promote education by implementing policies at national and regional levels, incorporating both GOs and NGOs. As a result, people around the world today have much higher levels of education than before. Average years of schooling per person, for example, in 1960 were fewer than 4 years and by 2010 this number had doubled globally and more

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than tripled, from 1.9 years to 6.4, in developing countries (United Nations Development Programme, 2010).

Like other countries, Bangladesh makes provisions of education for all in its maiden constitution[1] to foster its socio-economic and politico-cultural development. Now, over 1,00,000 primary schools and 19,684 secondary schools managed by both government and private bodies are providing educational services (Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information & Statistics, 2015). The net enrolment rate as well as literacy rate in Bangladesh has been increasing gradually from 71.2 percent in 1990 to 91.1 percent in 2007 and from 32.4 percent in 1991 to 51.3 percent in 2008 respectively, with gender parity (DPE, 2008; EW, 2008). In terms of public spending on education, the public spending on education increased consistently from 0.27 percent of GDP in 1973-1980 to 1.96 percent in 2014-2015, about BDT 292,130 million (11.66% share of national budget) in 2014-2015 (Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information & Statistics, 2015).

Despite the government and non-government stakeholders' efforts and initiatives in Bangladesh, there is a disparity of quality education in terms of efficiency and technical know-how of the faculty, learning environment, curriculum, resources, academic performance and so on. In fact, the difference between the schools of countryside and the city or within the city, between private and public schools, has been widened over the years (Center for Education Reform, 2007). The heightened gap between schools alarms parents, because they generally invest in children's education and want to ensure quality education for their kids emphasizing academic as well as life skills (Independent Schools Council of Australia, 2008). Therefore, parents, in urban areas in particular, are compelled to involve in psychologically torment competition to admit their young offspring in most-sought schools (Barua, 2009; Habib, 2010). Regardless of the enormous pressure, experienced by the young children at the tender age, parents often run after topmost schools, either for the betterment of the children or for the social status they hold in the society. There are some others who sought lower-ranked schools in order to ease their financial crisis.

Studies on school choice were largely concentrated in the United States and Europe (Ambler, 1994; Andre-Bechely, 2007; Anemone, 2008; Bell, 2009; Teelken, 1999). In Asia, studies have predominantly been conducted in the middle and south-east regions, and very few exist in south Asian countries (Cameron, 2011; Goldring & Shapira, 1993; Tooley, Bao, Dixon, & Merrifield, 2011). In Bangladesh, researchers barely paid attention to this issue, despite frequent reports in print media (Habib, 2010). There is no denial of the fact that the competition to be enrolled in well-sorted schools has been intensified in Bangladesh with growing enrolment as well as completion rate at primary and secondary education. The choice of school, however, is not only influenced by the quality, but there are some factors, *i.e.* social class and status, social, financial and cultural capital (education, income) of the family, academic history and available resources of the school and so on, that step up to guide parents' decisions. It is, thus, necessary to know what factors are influencing parents'

[1] Article 17 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh demarcates education as a uniform, mass oriented and compulsory means to train and motivate people, irrespective of sex, age, religion, ethnicity and place, to serve the country and to remove illiteracy (Ministry of Law Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, 2011).

decisions of school choice in Bangladeshi society. This study is designed to identify the underlying factors – socioeconomic, academic and psycho-social issues included – associated with parental choice of schools that, in turn, shape the children's future well-being.

Materials and Methods

The study was carried out in Khulna City Corporation (hereafter KCC) area, an industry-oriented urban area in the south-west coastal region of Bangladesh. During 1980s, the promise of lucrative living standard and better job opportunities in industries in and around KCC observed heavy influx of in-migrants from adjacent economically-trailed districts. To fulfill required educational facilities for ever increasing population various educational institutions, largely government-supported, sprung in different parts of the KCC. The inflow of climate-induced migrants, in early twenty first century, also triggers the establishment of more educational institutions, both private and semi-government in nature, providing primary and secondary education. The great number of available institutions, therefore, makes it difficult for parents to select the most suitable educational institution for their children.

For this study, a number of specifications have been made to identify the participants, such as (i) mother, at her reproductive span, (ii) living with working spouse, (iii) having at least one child currently enrolled in school, and (iv) residing at the same place for at least three consecutive years. The Ward # 24, *Nirala* Residential Area under KCC, represents all economic variations that exist in urban Bangladesh. Before the actual fieldwork, a household census was undertaken to find out the definite size of the universe at the selected study area. A group of ten senior female undergraduate students of Sociology Discipline was initially trained to conduct a door-to-door household census considering the aforesaid criteria and an inventory list of 574 households was developed from which a representative sample of 150 was drawn randomly[2].

From the randomized household, data were collected by administering a semi-structured interview schedule (containing both open and close-ended items) in English, developed after reviewing relevant literature (Andersen, 2008; Bell, 2009; de Guzman et al., 2008; Nguyen & Taylor, 2003). It is important to note that to maximize validity and reliability of the data collection instrument, as well as to minimize inconsistencies, a pre-test was carried out on 10 participants, and later excluded from the main fieldwork. Following some necessary modifications, the interview schedule was finalized and data were collected in two months, June – July, 2011. The participants, selected randomly from the inventory list, were interviewed by ten female undergraduate students, who have already been familiar with the participants during household census. They were trained extensively on the semi-

[2] The sample size of the study was determined by the following formula –

$$SS = \frac{Z^2 x\, \mathrm{P}(1-\mathrm{P})}{C^2}$$

$$SS_i = \frac{\mathrm{SS}}{2a + \frac{SS-1}{Pop}}$$

Here,
SS = Sample Size
SS_i = Sample Size, according to Population
Z = Confidence Level (*i.e.* 1.96 for 95% confidence level)
P = Percentage of Picking a Choice (*i.e.* 0.05 used for sample size needed)
C = Confidence Interval (*i.e.* 7)
Pop = Population

structured interview schedule to maintain uniformity in the survey process as well as to keep anonymity of the participants. It is important to note that the participants during the interview – lasted, on an average, for 20 minutes – were free to decline at any moment, and in such cases, the next household was selected.

The interview schedule was divided into three sub-sections, such as section one entailed for socio-demographic and economic conditions of the participants, section two for detailed information regarding children's school, the nature, type and medium of instruction in particular, and section three highlighted three distinct indices, such as academic and infrastructural, socio-psychological and economic indices, regarding the opinions of the participants about school choice. The later section contained 25 Likert-type question items, offering five choices, where '5' for 'Strongly Agree', '4' for 'Agree', '3' for 'Neither Agree nor Disagree', '2' for 'Disagree' and '1' for 'Strongly Disagree'. To construct the index, the scores for different questions were added up and divided into three equal intervals, *e.g.* 'High', 'Medium', and 'Low' (Table 1). The negative responses were reverse scored; therefore, the highest score represented agreement on school choice. Observing all the scores, the sum of the total responses were finally used to construct the Academic and Infrastructural Factors Index (AaIFi), Psycho-social Factors Index (PSFi), Socio-economic Factors Index (SEFi) and School Choice Index[3] (SCi) to facilitate and to conduct bivariate analyses for hypotheses test through Pearson's Chi-square (χ^2). Whenever the expected values in one or more cells were less than 5, the Fisher exact test was used, along with Pearson's Chi-square.

Table 1: Indices on school choice

Categories	Indices				Cronbach's α
	AaIFi	PSFi	SEFi	SCi	
Low	≤ 38	≤ 27	≤ 7	≤ 80	
Medium	39-49	28-35	8-11	81-97	0.642
High	50 ≥	36 ≥	12 ≥	98 ≥	

AaIFi – Academic and Infrastructural Factors Index; PSFi - Psycho-social Factors Index; SEFi – Socio-economic Factors Index; SCi - School Choice Index

Results

The background information of the participants is presented in the Table 2. The mean age of mothers was around 34 years and for their spouses, it was around 43 years. Majority of the participants (76%) was Muslim, and the spouses had relatively higher education compared to the participants, averaging around 12 years against around 11 years. Eighty (80%) percent of the participants were housewives. Consequently, the average income of the spouses was far greater than the respondents, BDT 17,633 against only BDT 2,803, per month. Nearly 70 percent of the participants have small family and a staggering 80 percent of these families have only two children.

[3] The Cronbach's α was calculated for school choice index (SCI) to provide indications of the reliability and internal consistency of results (α – 0.642). The highest achievable score is 1, thus, an alpha score of 0.7 is considered normal, and anything below 0.6 is regarded as non-usable (DeVellis, 2003).

Table 2: Background information of parents

Variables	*N* (%)	
	Mother	Father
Age structure (in years)		
≤ 30	61 (40.7)	12 (8.0)
31-40	68 (45.3)	68 (45.3)
41-50	21 (14.0)	52 (34.7)
50 ≥	0 (0.0)	18 (12.0)
Statistics (Mean & Std. Deviation)	33.5 & 6.82	41.4 & 8.54
Religion		
Islam		114 (76.0)
Hindu		34 (22.7)
Christianity		2 (1.3)
Year of Schooling		
Illiterate	12 (8.0)	9 (6.0)
Primary (< 5)	10 (6.7)	11 (7.3)
Secondary (6-10)	49 (32.7)	25 (16.7)
Higher Secondary/Degree (11-15)	48 (32.0)	46 (30.7)
Graduation (16 >)	31 (20.7)	59 (39.3)
Statistics (Mean & Std. Deviation)	10.8 & 4.6	12.43 & 4.81
Occupation		
Non-Earning	121 (80.7)	0 (0.0)
Earning	29 (19.3)	150 (100.0)
Monthly income (in BDT)		
No Income	121 (80.7)	0 (0.0)
≤ 15000	19 (12.7)	90 (60.0)
15001-30000	9(6.0)	45 (30.0)
30001-45000	1 (0.7)	8 (5.3)
45001 ≥	0 (0.0)	7 (4.7)
Statistics (Mean & Std. Deviation)	2,803.3 & 6,322.14	17,653. 3 & 11,444.05
Monthly household income (in BDT)		
< 20,000	92 (61.3)	
20,001-40,000	47 (31.3)	
40,001-60,000	9 (6.0)	
60,001 >	2 (1.3)	
Statistics (Mean & Std. Deviation)	20,963.3 & 14,320.88	
Family composition		
Small (≤ 4)	104 (69.3)	
Medium (5-6)	40 (26.7)	
Large (7 ≥)	6 (4.0)	
Statistics (Mean & Std. Deviation)	4.3 & 1.26	
Number of children		
≤ 2	119 (79.3)	
3-4	29 (19.4)	
5 ≥	2 (1.3)	
Statistics (Mean & Std. Deviation)	1.9 & 0.94	

The background information about the enrolled children is presented in Table 3. About 70 percent of the children were equal or less than ten years old. These children were studying in primary schools (74%), preferably in privately owned schools.

Table 3: Information about Enrolled Children

Variables	*N* (%)	Statistics (Mean & Std. Deviation)
Age Structure (in Years)		
≤ 10	104 (69.3)	7.9 & 1.05
11 ≥	46 (30.7)	
Year of Schooling		
Primary (1-5)	111 (74.0)	
Junior Secondary (6-8)	24 (16.0)	3.6 & 2.94
Secondary (9-10)	15 (10.0)	
Type of School		
Government	41 (27.3)	
Private	74 (49.3)	-
Semi-Government	35 (23.3)	

Table 4 shows the factors considered by parents while selecting schools for their children. A significant percentage of the parents (43.3%) prioritized schools' academic and infrastructural issues, including the quality of teaching staff as well as the education offered, teacher-parents communication, standard curricular, transportation facilities and so on, when selecting schools for their children. Likewise, parents (39.3%) while selecting schools also well-thought-out the academic expenses charged by the schools for their children. In addition to academic and economic issues, parents also considered the prestige and security issues related to school as well as their prior positive experience with older child when selecting schools (24%). However, the previous (academic and economic) issues got priority among the parents over the later (prestige and security) issue when they were selecting schools for their children.

Table 4: Indices for school selection

Indices	*N* (%)
Academic and infrastructural factors index (AaIFi)	
Low	12 (8.0)
Medium	73 (48.7)
High	65 (43.3)
Psycho-social factors index (PSFi)	
Low	29 (19.3)
Medium	85 (56.7)
High	36 (24.0)
Socio-economic factors index (SEFi)	
Low	13 (8.7)
Medium	78 (52.0)
High	59 (39.3)
School choice index (SCi)	
Low	18 (12.0)
Medium	104 (69.3)
High	28 (18.7)

Table 5 shows the determinants influence the selection of schools. Both mother and fathers' education was positively associated with their preference of school for their children (p<0.000 and p<0.008, respectively). Parents with graduate level education more likely preferred private schools for their children instead of government and semi-government educational institutions. Family's financial capacity to support growing educational expenses also found to be positively associated. Fathers' income (p<0.025) and monthly household income (p<0.072) were more positively associated with school choice preferably private schools. Mothers' income was not significantly associated with school choice for children as majority of them were housewives and could not play decisive roles in school preference like the father did.

Table 5: Determinants for selection of schools

Variables	Type of School			Test Statistics[a](df) (p Value)	Fisher's Exact Test
	Government (N=41)	Private (N=74)	Semi-Government (N=35)		
Year of schooling (mother)					
Illiterate	8 (19.5)	3 (4.1)	1 (2.9)	$35.339_{(8)}$ (p<0.000)*	31.667
Primary (1-5)	2 (4.9)	1 (1.4)	7 (20.0)		
Secondary (6-10)	7 (17.1)	25 (33.8)	17 (48.6)		
Higher Secondary/Degree (11-15)	16 (39.0)	24 (32.4)	8 (22.9)		
Graduation and Above (16 ≥)	8 (19.5)	21 (28.4)	2 (5.7)		
Year of schooling (father)					
Illiterate	3 (7.3)	3 (4.1)	3 (8.6)	$20.543_{(8)}$ (p<0.008)*	21.613
Primary (1-5)	4 (9.8)	0 (0.0)	7 (20.0)		
Secondary (6-10)	7 (17.1)	10 (13.5)	8 (22.9)		
Higher Secondary/Degree (11-15)	10 (24.4)	27 (36.5)	9 (25.7)		
Graduation and Above (16 ≥)	17 (41.5)	34 (45.9)	8 (22.9)		
Monthly income (mother)					
No Income	33 (80.5)	55 (74.3)	33 (94.3)	$7.036_{(6)}$ (p>0.130)	7.260
≤ 15000	5 (12.2)	13 (17.6)	1 (2.9)		
15001-30000	3 (7.3)	5 (6.8)	1 (2.9)		
30001 ≥	0 (0.0)	1 (1.4)	0 (0.0)		
Monthly income (father)					
≤ 15000	24 (58.5)	37 (50.0)	29 (82.9)	$14.445_{(6)}$ (p<0.025)*	13.991
15001-30000	15 (36.6)	26 (35.1)	4 (11.4)		
30001-45000	1 (2.4)	5 (6.8)	2 (5.7)		
45001 ≥	1 (2.4)	6 (8.1)	0 (0)		
Monthly household income					
< 20,000	24 (58.5)	39 (52.7)	29 (82.9)	$11.591_{(6)}$ (p<0.072)**	11.320
20,001-40,000	15 (36.6)	27 (36.5)	5 (14.3)		
40,001-60,000	1 (2.4)	7 (9.5)	1 (2.9)		
60,001 >	1 (2.4)	1 (1.4)	0 (0.0)		

Variables	Type of School			Test Statistics[a](df) (p Value)	Fisher's Exact Test
	Government (N=41)	Private (N=74)	Semi-Government (N=35)		
Family composition					
≤ 4	32 (78.0)	54 (73.0)	18 (51.4)	$15.535_{(4)}$ (p<0.004)*	11.954
5-6	9 (22.0)	19 (25.7)	12 (34.3)		
7 ≥	0 (0.0)	1 (1.4)	5 (14.3)		
Number of children					
≤ 2	32 (78.0)	63 (85.1)	24 (68.6)	$9.052_{(4)}$ (p<0.060)**	6.814
3-4	9 (22.0)	11 (14.9)	9 (25.7)		
5 ≥	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (5.7)		
Year of schooling (children)					
Primary (1-5)	25 (60.9)	71 (95.9)	15 (42.9)	$42.572_{(4)}$ (p<0.000)*	45.052
Junior Secondary (6-8)	12 (29.3)	1 (1.4)	11 (31.4)		
Secondary (9-10)	4 (9.8)	2 (2.7)	9 (25.7)		
AaIFi					
Low	5 (12.2)	6 (8.1)	1 (2.9)	$8.850_{(4)}$ (p<0.065)**	8.499
Medium	19 (46.3)	30 (40.5)	24 (68.6)		
High	17 (41.5)	38 (51.4)	10 (28.6)		
PSFi					
Low	6 (14.6)	13 (17.6)	10 (28.6)	$21.612_{(4)}$ (p<0.000)**	19.675
Medium	15 (36.6)	51 (68.9)	19 (54.3)		
High	20 (48.8)	10 (13.5)	6 (17.1)		
SEFi					
Low	6 (14.6)	4(5.4)	3 (8.6)	$10.054_{(4)}$ (p<0.040)*	9.816
Medium	20 (48.8)	46 (62.2)	12 (34.3)		
High	15 (36.6)	24 (32.4)	20 (57.1)		
SCI					
Low	6 (14.6)	10 (13.5)	2 (5.7)	$11.961_{(4)}$ (p<0.018)*	11.404
Medium	21 (51.3)	56 (75.7)	27 (77.1)		
High	14 (34.1)	8 (10.8)	6 (17.1)		

[a] Pearson's Chi-square (χ^2)
* Significant at 5%
** Significant at 10%

Family composition and number of offspring found to be associated with the school choice. Children from small households were more likely enrolled in private schools compared to extended families (p<0.004), because families with fewer members have more money at disposal to spend for expensive private institutions. Similarly, families with two children were more likely to select private schools compared to families with more than three children (p<0.060).

Children's level of education was also found to be strongly related with parental choice of school (p<0.000). Parents of primary school-goers are preferring private schools over government and semi-government schools, and such priority is reflecting their negative perceptions about the education system of government sponsored primary schools. On the

contrary, for junior secondary and secondary school-goers, parents turned their attention to government and semi-government schools, largely because private schools are not encouraged by government bodies to enroll students in junior secondary and secondary education levels.

When parents were asked about the factors they considered first to select a school for their children, they often emphasized on the academic credibility of the schools, followed by psychological and economic issues. In this study, parents who stressed on academic issues were found to prefer private schools more than the government institutions (p<0.065). Similar findings were also observed in case of financial issues (p<0.040) as parents selected private and semi-government schools instead of government schools. However, those who prefer social prestige and give priority on prior experience of sending children in well-known schools, they often enroll their kids in government sponsored institutions (p<0.000).

Discussion

Preference of school differs when the participants of the study classified on the basis of their education, income, family composition, and number of children as well as the level of children's education. Additionally, academic, psychological and financial issues evidently have substantial influence on parental selection of schools.

Among the socio-economic factors, parental education as well as their income plays the most crucial role. Because, educated parents know that selecting schools for children is an important decision to make as these institutions would be the caterer for the children's future roles and successes. Studies suggest that parents, of high income families in particular, pay more attention to their children's education. They often scrutinize the best institution out of all schools and are more inclined to communicate with the teachers to be well-informed about the quality of education as well the progress and performance of their children in both academic and co-curricular activities (Ambler, 1994; Vassallo, 2000). Findings of this study suggest that parents, with tertiary education and from well-off families, preferred private schools over public ones, though the former is more expensive than the latter. These findings complement previous studies as Gemello and Osman (1984) and Witte (2000) observed that parents from educated and rich families prefer private schools over public schools, because the former offers more resources to extend learning opportunities for the children than the underfunded public schools.

Households' demographic composition also plays a decisive role with regard to school choice. Le and Miller (2003), for example, found that the size of family, especially, the number of offspring, influences the selection of school. An increase in family composition immediately follows a sharp change between costly private schools to inexpensive government owned and sponsored schools. In this study, it is evident that children from families with fewer members and having not more than one sibling attended the private schools as the smaller families have more financial mobility than the extended families.

Besides, children's level of education is also an important catalyst while selecting schools. Witte (2000) observed that parents' preference of school differ on the basis of child's grade level as they are less concerned for the moral guidance and safety of an older child than the younger one as the latter require more attention and care. Findings of this study show that parents in KCC area preferred private schools instead of government

schools, specifically for their younger kids, as the private schools offer more congenial educational environment than the hectic conditions in the government schools.

Among the other factors that greatly regulate parental decisions of school choice are the quality of education and the teaching staffs. Parents in KCC area appreciated the academic, administrative and infrastructural aspects of private schools over the government institutions and they often preferred the privatized schools for their kids. The positive attitude of parents toward private schools over the public schools is common across the world as Anemone (2008) reported that public schools in both developed and developing countries monopolize the education sector, therefore, operate inefficiently. In contrast, private schools are highly competitive that attract educands and their parents by offering more educational opportunities and resources, both human and capital. Parents often consider the academic environment when selecting a school, however, they do not ignore the importance of logistical issues for school choice (Bell, 2009).

Apart from academic credentials, parents also opted for psycho-social issues as well as financial considerations when selecting schools, preferably private schools, as suggested in this study. Studies, in other parts of the world, observed that psycho-social issues, such as admitting children in schools for security reasons, or positive educational experiences of the older offspring, determine the school choice by parents, largely due to loyalty and if the parents do not see significant difference between schools about what they want (Bell, 2009; Bulman, 2004; Cooper, 2005). Additionally, the social connections among friends and neighbors and their communities, influenced largely by economic class, could push parents to select schools regardless of the type (Ambler, 1994; Coleman & Hoffa, 1987; Gemello & Osman, 1984).

The decision to choose schools for children is not taken lightly by any family. Parents highly value their children's development and selection of the environment better suited for their child is one of the most important parts in the process of a child's educational and social development. The decisions of parents at Ward # 24, *Nirala* Residential Area of KCC may not explain school choices across the country. Because, this study is carried out on only 150 parents of KCC area, therefore, a complete generalization would be exaggerated. However, studying this community highlights some of the key determinants that motivate parents to choose between schools, therefore, strongly suggest the researchers and policy makers concerning education to pay attention to improve the current state of primary, junior secondary and secondary education in Bangladesh.

Conclusion

Parental selection of schools is not merely based on academic success stories and economic ability, but it is also based on where the parents feel like a part of relationship. Children are expected to be learned and socially integrated through structured education, where parents need to feel that the schools support their feelings and values. Thus, schools, particularly government affiliated schools, across the nation may learn from these findings and may integrate parents and community to enhance their academic success and social responsiveness.

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