

**INFLUENCE OF SIGNS AND SYMBOLS ON PRESERVATION OF
TRADITIONAL COMMUNICATION PRACTICES IN NIGERIA (CASE STUDY
OHAFIA LGA ABIA STATE**

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ABSTRACT

Due to its many functions, including providing rural residents with information, education, and entertainment as well as enhancing and promoting their culture and identity, traditional communication is extremely important. However, specific signals and symbols are required to foster this kind of communication. Establishing the signs and symbols in Ohafia that have kept their traditional communication system alive is the study's main challenge. 281,540 people made up the research population, and 400 members of the Ohafia community were selected as a sample for the survey research design. The research article discovered that despite the advancement of technology, civilization, and other contemporary communication techniques, signs and symbols like Omu, Nzu, Ikoro, Akwantankwa, and others remained effective in disseminating information. As a result, the researcher suggests that these signs and symbols be used consistently and that they be embraced as effective ways to inform the rural population.

Keywords: Signs, Symbols, Traditional and Communication

INTRODUCTION

According to Mcquail (2005), communication can imply different things to different people, but the main idea is that it's a process where people become more common or share information based on communicating and receiving messages. He goes on to add that there is theoretical controversy regarding whether the transmission or expression of some messages on its own, without proof of receipt or sequence effect, should be considered communication. The degree to which a communication relationship is also a social relationship is the second most significant aspect of communication. Modern technologies generally make it more likely and possible for communication to become detached from

any social grounding, and I believe that older media like signs and symbols aim to close this gap.

Man is a sentient entity or animal. Hence, he converses in one way or another very constantly, practically constantly, even when he is sleeping (Nwosu 2007, p2). Conventional means of communication reveal a people's cultural background. Unlike the mass media, they were not presented to the public; rather, they are a part of it (Nwosu and Nwanmuo 2006). Messages can be packaged and conveyed through traditional communication in regionally popular creative forms. There are instances where music, theater, dance, and other forms of entertainment are utilized to support campaigns against societal ills including child and women trafficking, drunkenness, outdated taboos, etc. (Vinmartin 2011).

As a result, it is clear from the foregoing that traditional communication is undeniably a useful instrument for informing the rural population. The ancient African communication system's beauty and power were disregarded. However, it is encouraging that the diverse communication systems are receiving more attention and that the efforts of communication academics like Abigail Ogwezzy and Ansu Kyeremah are paying off. Ansu-Kyeremah (1998) defines an indigenous communication system as any endogenous communication system that, by virtue of its formation, integration, and channelization, functions as a conduit for messages in a way that necessitates the application of the institution, values, symbolism, and ethos of the host culture through its distinct features and attributes.

When an encoder employs a graphic representation to deliver a message that is comprehended in the context of a recognized social event and a corresponding spoken message, communication using symbols takes place. It is a method of expressing meaning through descriptive representation. Akpabio (year). The Ohafia people utilize a variety of symbols, one of which is the phrase "out of bounds," which is represented by palm fronds tied in a plot of land. When palm fronds, or "omu," are attached to a plot of land, it indicates that the land is under dispute. Therefore, nobody ought to trespass.

Thus, in rural populations, signs and symbols are important for encapsulating and conveying messages. Thus, the stage is now prepared for an investigation of the communication-related functions of signs and symbols.

Statement of the problem

Almost any endeavor will include communication at some point. All aspects of human life, including communication, have remained under the influence of westernization and civilization. In light of this, the researcher believes it is important to recognize our native form of communication and ensure its survival among the many contemporary forms of communication.

The challenge of this study is to identify the signs and symbols used by the Ohafia people to maintain their ancient forms of communication. Thus, what role do the recognized signs and symbols play in maintaining Ohafian communication?

Objectives of the study

- I. To ascertain the degree of traditional communication in Ohafia.
- II. To recognize the Ohafian signs and symbols used in traditional communication
- III. To ascertain the methods by which Ohafia's rural population is reached through signs and symbols.
- IV. To ascertain the degree of Ohafia sign and symbol application.
- V. To identify the obstacles that Ohafia faces in using signs and symbols effectively.

Research question

- I. To what extent does traditional communication still exist in Ohafia?
- II. What are the signs and symbols of traditional communication in Ohafia?
- III. How are signs and symbols used to reach the rural populace in Ohafia?
- IV. To what extent are signs and symbols applied in Ohafia to preserve traditional communication?
- V. What are the hindrances to the effectiveness use of signs and symbols?

Scope of the study

The study was restricted to signs and symbols as native forms of communication and was carried out within the framework of traditional communication systems. Hence, it is related to the Abia State local government area of Ohafia community. The twenty-six (26) villages that make up the community are each led by an Ezeogo, and authority is centralized in the office of the "Udumeze," who is in charge of all 26 villages.

The group is well-known for both its renowned "iri agha" dance and its military capabilities.

Significance of the study

The current investigation will be important from a theoretical and practical standpoint. The study should theoretically contribute to the corpus of information and literature already available about Ohafia's traditional forms of communication. Additionally, it will clarify the pattern of symbolic communication among its people. The study will highlight the value of conventional communication, and people will have a better understanding of the role signs and symbols play in preserving their identity and in the spread of information.

Social scientists and policymakers that are interested in comparing various traditional communication systems will find practical applications for this study.

The study was designed to explore traditional communication signs and symbols in light of the rise of information technology in a globalized and civilized society. The goal was to spark an idea that would embody African consciousness and solidarity in traditional communication. In our social and traditional communities, what some have labeled as uncivilized has given rise to a new interest. In an effort to build on the successes of our conventional communication patterns and to resurrect those distorted, concealed, and suppressed ways of communication through research, there is a resurgence of interest in indigenous signs and symbols.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Traditional communication

It is important to first define communication. It can be summed up as the sharing of concepts, knowledge, and attitudes between individuals. However, over time, communication also came to refer to a line or channel that traveled from one location to another. From the industrial revolution to the internet revolution, there has been such advancements in communication that when we talk about communication, we frequently mean these modes of transportation (Okugo, Onwukwe, and Ihechu 2012). Communication relates to exchange of facts, opinions or emotions by two or more persons and in organization, it could be words, letters symbols or messages in a way that one organization member shares meaning and understanding with another (Akpala, 1990).

The term "traaditional" is sometimes used as a qualification when describing communication systems in general, which can lead to some semantic and conceptual ambiguity about what traditional communication actually is. Many times, this confusion and misinterpretation give rise to the widespread belief that most third-world countries still rely on antiquated or even primitive communication technology. This same viewpoint frequently sees conventional systems as mutually exclusive with what are commonly referred to be modern communication systems. But the fact remains that, despite their age and differing philosophies from the more recent systems imported from overseas, these systems continue to be the lifeblood of the information demands of rural populations, which account for more than 70% of the total population in most third-world nations.

Such thinking's fundamental flaws stem from presumptions about what is old and what is new. Here, the fundamental premise is that "existing institutions and values which are the content of traditional as impediment to changes and obstacles to modernization," as noted by Gusfield (1973). Other similar, if rather fantastical, views hold that traditional and modern forms of culture are constantly at odds with one another and that new developments typically replace old customs. It is a common misconception among scholars on both sides of the debate that modernity and tradition are mutually exclusive in their content. However, in social contexts, conflicts arise not so much because one form is new and the other is old, but rather because people are generally resistant to change. In actuality, these social tensions will never go away, regardless of the historical ideas at play. Therefore, the perspective of this paper is that traditional communication is a system that can be seen within a communication continuum of the kind proposed by Ray Browne and reported by Michael Rael (1997), rather than something that is inherently tied to issues of "age," "civilization," or "technology" at odds with change.

Taxonomy of traditional communication

Traditional media systems have just recently been the subject of studies and investigation. Previous discussions of these systems were cursory and had a narrow focus. L.W. Pyes' "Modes of Traditional, Transitional and Modern Communication System" (1963) is considered the most influential early work on traditional communication systems. Euro-American scholars such as Hatchen (1970), Anslie (1966), Head (1974), Wilcox (1975), and Doob (1966) acknowledged the existence and use of traditional systems in most third-world societies, despite their lack of interest in the subject other than its anthropological significance. These scholars were not the only ones to make references to this significant but neglected aspect of communication. However, significant academic efforts did not

begin to take effect until the early 1970s when Ugboajah (1972) started drawing attention to this underutilized but potent communication system that the western media barons had refused to acknowledge, despite the fact that undergraduate project reports in some Nigerian universities demonstrated this. Wilson's description of the customary communication pattern in Igbo country did not appear until 1987.

Wilson (1987) asserts that traditional communication patterns in Nigeria take several different forms. Idiophones, membranophonic sounds, symbology, signals, and signs are a few of them.

Idiophones: Wilson claims that they are mechanical goods or self-sounding instruments that generate music without the need for an intermediary medium or addiction. The materials used to make the instruments give forth the sound or message, and they can be pricked, struck, shook, or crushed with the foot. The gong, woodblock, wooden drum, rattle, and bell are among them.

Membranophones: These are the mediums on which membrane vibrations generate sound. These comprise all kinds of kin and leather drums, which are, if not the most widely used form of communication in our society now, a borrowed instrument of communication due to their production in Yoruba territory. This is due to the fact that its artistry is the most intricate and apparent. In Yoruba region, the drum is known as the "talking drum," and in Igbo land, it is referred to as "dundun."

Aerophones: Aerophones are devices that use a column of air's vibration to make sound. They include trumpets, horns, reed pipes, whistles, and the flute family, among others.

Symbology: this is just symbolic writing or representation; encoders employ graphic representation to transmit a message that is understood in relation to a known social occurrence and a spoken message that goes along with it. There are many different methods of using descriptive representation to express meaning, but the most well-known one in Igbo country is called "uri," which refers to writings on walls, paintings, and even human bodies.

Signs: Signs are significant marks, objects, or symbols that are used to symbolize something. It is a concept by which organisms influence one another's actions or states during communication; whereas signs are more frequently symbolic in specific situations, symbols are not signs.

Signals: These are a message's tangible representations. There are still a lot of antiquated signals in use in certain areas of our nation. They fall under this category together with things like fire, gunfire, cannonfire, and drums.

Objectives: These are a message's material manifestations. There are a lot of historic signals that are still in use in some areas of our nation. Fire, gunfire, cannon shots, drums, and other sounds are included in this category.

Color scheme: Color leverages the benefits of pictorial communication by combining its speed of impact and freedom from language restrictions to create instantaneous and effective communication. This is the basic thought and usage of color combination in a design to convey certain messages.

Music: Itinerant musical entertainment ensembles, such as itemebe, kokoma, ekpe-ekong, and age-grade choral groups, sing satirical songs and often condemn the wrongdoings of individuals in society.

Extra-mundane communication: This method of communication is used by supernatural or deceased entities to communicate with the living. This ritual performance evokes intense emotion that may result in a modern spiritual transmigration of the participants as in religious or spiritual ceremonies conveying the elements of a cultural celebration, dedication and consecration as often witnessed in marriage and funeral rites. Here, communication is accomplished through incantations, spiritual chants, ritual prayers, sacrifice, invocation, and libation. Current examples of this departure include obituaries and memorial notices in print media, radio and television.

Symbolic displays: Some of these traits—such as smiling, expressing rage or disgust, making facial expressions, etc.—are shared even with primates, but others are culturally specific or may have universal importance.

Furthermore, a lot of established organizations, groups, and societies are also utilized to spread information, including rumors, gossip, and occasionally extremely private information. These include of age groups, market women associations, and conventional cults. Only in the impersonal context of national security and development can the merits and demerits of these societies be properly evaluated. Only then, if the group's actions do not pose a threat to the existence of larger society, may the personal interests of the group be recognized as rational.

Functions of traditional communication

The functions of the intricate traditional communication system go beyond the cryptic theories put out by western theorists. Because the system is a component of a larger socio-political organization, it reports and criticizes its own organs, issues directives from legitimate authorities—or, in certain cases, the head of society—and shines a light on innovations while also promoting and aiding in their diffusion. Its uses are significantly more varied and extensive than is frequently acknowledged. The true issue is that academics are unable to recognize traditional communication as a distinct system in need of more investigation and comprehension.

However, a few essential features and capabilities of the system are readily apparent:

First, it encourages grassroots community development and national consciousness; without the active participation of system practitioners, no significant mass-oriented initiative will ever be successful. The fact that national policy makers do not make use of this effective and reliable method accounts for a large portion of the failure that befalls government mass-oriented programs.

Again, it is a source of programs for the general public that educate and enlighten them and guide them toward self-actualization and national growth in the cultural, political, health, and other areas. As previously mentioned, without this communication infrastructure in place, no true success comes from such programs.

In addition, it offers entertainment in the form of musicals, dance dramas, and dramatic performances by choral and masquerade groups, such as Ohafia's Ekpe Masquerade Group, which offers musical entertainment. shrines and oracles, which serve as both entertainment venues and educational institutions.

Along with promoting group and national unity, it is also used for intra- and intercultural communication. Large-scale traditional communication setups include the yam festivals in southern Nigeria, the Oshun festival in Oshogbo, and the Argungu fishing festival in

Sokoto. In Ohafia, traditional retirement celebrations known as "igba-out-omu" also foster inter- and even mass communication.

The various cultural practices and other activities of a nation are expressed through traditional communication. Through festivals, many facets of the cultural system are exposed to diverse cultures, leading to a greater understanding and appreciation of differences. Cross-cultural pollination occurs as a result, improving humanity and society. The information presented above demonstrates that the traditional system is not competitive in the sense that people or organizations do not try to gain custom by whatever means necessary. This suggests that traditional communication is focused on issues deeper than the pursuit of financial gain.

scurry for business using all methods necessary. This suggests that traditional communication is focused on issues deeper than the pursuit of financial gain.

Signs, Symbols and Meaning Sharing

A sign typically has a single meaning because the signifier and signified are intimately related and frequently originate from the same context, and the signification is typically metonymic (i.e., some element or quality that stands in for the whole). For instance, a "omu" (palm frond) tied across a path causes an Ohafia native to turn back and avoid going any more; this indicates that the area is dangerous and should not be entered. When signs are employed as codes because their signification is exact and the relationship between the signifier and signified is conventional rather than intrinsic.

Symbols are only items that the performer uses to communicate and express ideas (Charon 1998). Anything that meaningfully depicts another item could be a symbol (Kendal, 1996). Symbols are social constructs with a common meaning that all members of a given community can understand. Through symbols, people convey their values and ideas to individuals in their immediate vicinity (Schafer 2008). Symbols have meaning and are employed consciously, not accidentally. Individuals that employ symbols do so with the intention of imparting meanings that they think others will understand, liberating people from experiencing life's limitations (Duneier 2000).

There is undoubtedly a connection between meaning sharing and communication symbols and signals. Paying attention to signs and symbols will make it necessary to share meaning, and when that happens, we can call such communication to be productive. It is believed that communication is ineffective and may result in conflict that needs to be resolved when meanings are not broken down. This raises the question of how symbols function in communication.

According to Ritzer (1998), symbols are social items that are used to symbolize whatever it is that people agree such objects should represent. It is added that not all social objects are stated to be symbols; rather, individuals frequently use symbols to communicate about themselves.

According to Ansu- Kyeremah (1998), symbolographic communication is necessary for members of a closed group so that they can only discuss information among themselves that they do not want others to know. The ekpe society in Ohafia and its peculiar means of communication—a pseudowriting known as "Nsibidi" that members use to converse with one another—fit this description.

Reuben (1998) interestingly agrees that sign, symbolism, and communication are inextricably linked, with humans having the ability to start conversations and exchange meaning through symbols, language, knowledge, meanings, norms, values, and rituals. According to him, this in turn provides a definition, form, or shape to the outgoing relationship, which enables the transmission of some of the finer aspects of a people's culture from one civilization to the next and from one generation to the next.

But according to Crowley (2000), symbols can be complicated, allowing the meaning to change as a society does. This implies that symbols are culturally defined and that various cultures may interpret the same symbol in different ways. In a similar vein, William (1989) expressed similar views, stating that as every culture uses symbols in a different way, it is necessary to use them correctly in order for meanings to be exchanged and successful communication to occur.

Accordingly, Eneobong (2007) notes that traditional communication within the Nigerian Annag ethnic group was beneficial for maintaining peace and order, promoting unity, harmony, and morals, enforcing the law and regulating social activities, deterring heinous acts, and encouraging good behavior. It also acted as a megaphone for the dissemination of information.

The Ohafia community in Abia State

In the Nigerian state of Abia, Ohafia is a town and local government area. It is an area where Igbo is spoken. The village of "Elu" is home to Ohafia's ancestral capital. Nkporo and Abriba are also a part of the local administration. Twenty-six (26) villages make up Ohafia; these eze-ogoes unite to create the "eze ogo-in- council," which collaborates with the "Amala" to determine how the community is to be run.

Only when there is a dispute between a "eze-ogo" and the subject does the general traditional ruler, known as the "Udmeze," who resides in "Elu Ohafia," get involved. The twenty-six villages and their founders include: Abia (Onu Arunsi), Akanu (Nna uka), Amaekpu (Ofali Agwu), Amangwu (Uduma Nnagu), Amankwu (Essien Aru), Amuke (Ama Ezeama), Amuma (Uka Etim), Asaga (Ukpai Ezeama), Ebem (Kpoke), Elu (Uduma Ezema), Ezi Afor(Afor Okwara), Ihenta (Eke Uma), Isi-Ugwu (Uduma Ali), Nde Anyaorie (Anyaorie Uka), Nde Anuku (Iroha Ogwu), Nde Amogu (Amogu Egbuta), Nde IBe (Ibe OKwara), Nde Okala (Okala Iro), Nde Orieke (Orieke OKwara), Nde Uduma Awoke (Uduma Mbila), Nde Uduma Ukwu (Uduma Ukwu), Nkwebi (Ibe), Oboro (Awa OKoro), OKagwe (Dibia Ete), Okon (Uma Elem), Ufiele(Ukpai Uma).

The tourist attractions in Ohafis include; 'Obu-Nkwa' in Asaga, 'Ezie-Ofri- cave' in Amaekpu, 'Nkpogolo-forest-reserve' in Ebem, the 'achichi square' in Elu. 'ifutiti water fall' also in Amaekpu, 'ugwu Aaba' in Asaga and 'Mmori river' in Ebem.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of "symbolic interactionism," which corresponds with the communication value of the signs and symbols under discussion, serves as the foundation for this study. The symbol under discussion is a social representation with interpretable

meaning. Consequently, signs and symbols have symbolic importance for the Ohafia people throughout their civilization.

In contrast to conflict and functionalist methods, symbolic interactionists focus primarily on the small-scale facets of human culture. The main focus of symbolic interactionism theorists is on how culture is created, maintained, and altered within a society. This is done by individuals interacting with one another during daily activities, rather than by social institutions. Symbolic interactionism theorists examine the fundamental components of culture, such as symbols, values, norms, signs, ideas, and, of course, objects, as these are the tools that people use to construct and maintain social reality (Curran and Renzaetti 1998).

The interactionist viewpoint, according to Kendall (1996), views society as the culmination of the interactions between individuals and groups. The method focuses on the meaning that individuals derive from their interactions. According to Stoner (1980), the fundamental tenet of symbolic interactionism is the belief that members' perceptions of society are more significant to its reality than the goals of its existence in space and time. Understanding how people interpret their own and other people's conduct is essential to understanding society and helping people form mutually beneficial perceptions of it that facilitate productive interactions.

Stoner goes on to say that since symbolic interactions entail people coordinating their actions through symbols, shared presumptions about intentions, expectations, and goals are necessary. Symbols have a significant role in human communication, according to interactionists (Schafer 2008).

Symbolic interactionism is a useful method because it highlights the ways in which everyday actions and things we take for granted contribute to the establishment of social order. It focuses our attention on the finer points of interpersonal relationships, which is crucial for understanding what other people say and do. In order to maintain their traditional communication, the Ohafia use signs and symbols that require exchanges between the sender and the recipient. Since communication is essential to maintaining international order, these signs and symbols have continued to elicit shared meanings among the Ohafia people, which fits in with the symbolic interactionists' view of a stable society.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, survey research methodology will be employed. In survey research, as it is often understood, a group or objects are examined by gathering and evaluating data from a group of individuals or items that are thought to be representative of the entire group. The methodology for gathering and evaluating such data is laid forth in the survey design. Survey research was deemed the most effective technique of data collecting for this study due to its abundance of data and the interpretation it can offer.

The Ohafia community is the study's population. The community's projected population in 2011 was 281,540, based on Abia's population development figures. It is imperative to emphasize once more that the community consists of twenty-six (26) settlements. Consequently, the population is the primary focus of this research..

Sampling size and Sampling Technique

Large populations that cannot be investigated in the same way as the one being discussed may be included in a study. Thus, the sample refers to the subset of the population that is being researched. As it is impossible to analyze the full population in any scientific study, Okeke (2005, p. 73) states that under complete enumeration, it is expected that more trust will be placed in the findings of the sample rather than the population.

The sample of this research is calculated using the Taro Yamane's formula with 95% confidence level. Hence

$N = N$

$$\frac{1 + N(e)^2}{}$$

Where 1 = constant

e = the degree of error expected

N = sample size

Therefore, substituting the population which is 281,540 in Yamane's formula:

$$n = 281540$$

$$\frac{1 + 281540(0.05)^2}{}$$

$$n = 399.4$$

$$n = 400 \text{ (rounded)}$$

The study adopted the cluster sampling technique since the community is already in twenty six clusters namely; Asaga, Amuma, Amankkwu, Amuke,, Amangwu, Akanu, Abia, Amaekpu, Okon, Okagwe, Oboro, Nkwebi, Uduma ukwu, Uduma awoke, Nde Orieki, Nde OKala, Nde Ibe, Nde Amogu, Nde Arnku, Nde anyaorie, Isi –Ugwu, Ihenta Eziafor, Elu, Ebem Ufiele. The random sampling method will be used to select five villages purposively and through the ballot method, five villages selected are Elu, Ufiele, Okagwe, Asaga and Amaekpu. Hence 80 questionnaires will be distributed in each of the five villages selected to make up 400 respondents which is the sample using the accidental method.

Method of data analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to assess the data that was gathered for this study. The research findings were succinctly summarized using tables of interpretation, and my findings were expressed using a simple percentage and frequency count to improve understanding. But the respondent's answer to the research questions was the main focus of my investigation.

Discussion of findings

Positive results have been obtained from the study paper that was submitted to examine the impact of sign and symbols on the maintenance of traditional communication in Ohafia. The continuation of traditional communication in Ohafia is positively correlated with the usage of signs and symbols, according to the research. Signs and symbols have played a

major role in maintaining ancient forms of communication. Keep in mind that a place's identity and meaning sharing depend heavily on its signs and symbols. According to Garling's (1978) claim that symbols are conventional signs, ideas, objects, and gestures used to express a meaning, signs and symbols are crucial to the survival of people's traditional systems of communication.

The result is consistent with symbolic interactionism, the theoretical framework. Interactionist viewpoints, according to Kendall (1996), regard society as the culmination of the interactions between individuals and groups. The method focuses on the meaning that individuals derive from their interactions. The idea holds that a society's reality is determined by how its members perceive it, not by the fact that it exists objectively in space and time. The employment of these signs and symbols has a significant impact on how members are perceived and interact with one another.

Symbolic interactionism is a useful method because it highlights the ways in which everyday actions and things we take for granted contribute to the establishment of social order. The purpose of using Signs and symbols is to assist us understand how other people perceive us by using signs and symbols to draw our attention to the specifics of interpersonal relationships. Therefore, in Ohafia, signs and symbols play a crucial role in maintaining ancient forms of communication.

CONCLUSION

More technical gadgets for information transmission have been introduced recently due to the rise of technology, modernization, and advances in media for disseminating information. However, we have to admit that any communication intended for a certain population that does not share the frame of reference with the bulk of the population that makes up the intended audience would undoubtedly fail to achieve its goal.

As a result, the traditional communication system—which includes the use of Ikoro, palm fronds, nzu, and other techniques—is essential to the enlightenment, mobilization, and development of a society. As such, we must continue to use signs and symbols in order to maintain this system.

RECOMMEDATION

Taking into account the different discoveries in this study report. Therefore, it is essential to follow these recommendations.

- To prevent cultural alienation, which might result in a lack of knowledge about the usage of these signs and symbols, the teaching of the African communication system must continue in schools.
- The active involvement of guardians of the traditional system in panels of inquiry and projects pertaining to rural communities.
- Encouraging rural residents to keep using these symbols and indicators in spite of obstacles.
- Using traditional signs and symbols as a powerful medium for awareness campaigns, demonstrations, and other events in rural regions.
- Using a more advanced, contemporary communication mechanism

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