



RESEARCH PAPER

Exploring Career Guidance in Pakistan's Educational Landscape: A Comparative Analysis of Different Counselling Approaches

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore the existence of career counselling in Pakistan's educational landscape. It also aimed identify the impact of different career counseling approaches on the career decision making of the students. Furthermore, it intended to find which career counseling approach, general guidance or counselling through psychometric testing has a better impact on Pakistani students. Amongst 3275 participants, 1831 participants were never exposed to any kind of career counselling whereas 1444 participants identified that they have experienced some kind of career counselling. Of these 643 acquired it through psychometric testing while 801 acquired it through general guidance and counselling and hence the Career Decision Self Efficacy-Short Form (CDSE-SF) questionnaire was filled which measured the students' level of self-confidence in their own ability to take necessary steps for making career decisions. According to this quantitative research, after applying the regression analysis and the t-tests, the findings clearly revealed that whichever method is used, the career related decision-making ability of the students will improve, but the students who achieved counselling through psychometric testing had more confidence in career decision making ability compared to those who acquired counselling through general counselling and guidance.

Keywords: Career guidance, career choice, decision making, psychometric testing, self-efficacy

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Introduction

Career counseling helps individuals make informed decisions about their education, training, and career choices, and develop a plan to achieve those goals (Lent & Brown, 2019). It is a process

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of helping individuals in exploring their career-related goals, interests, values, and innate abilities (Otu, 2024). Career counselling is essential for students in shaping their career trajectory (Saya & Habib, 2023). Research has shown that career counseling can help individuals to make more satisfying career choices, improve their job satisfaction and reduce work-related stress, develop greater resilience and adaptability in the face of career challenges and transitions (Chen et al., 2019; González-Morales et al., 2018; Lent et al., 2018).

There are different approaches to career counseling, including psychometric testing and general counseling and guidance (Saya et al., 2025). However, there is limited research on the comparative effectiveness of these approaches on student outcomes (Metttert et al., 2020). In developed countries career counseling is an essential tool in today's rapidly changing world, providing individuals with the knowledge, skills, and resources needed to make informed career decisions and pursue fulfilling and successful careers (Brown & Lent 2019; McWhirter et al., 2020).

In developing countries career counseling plays an important role to resolve unemployment of working population, aligning skills with job opportunities, and reducing job dissatisfaction (Ntholeng, 2024). Career counselling and guidance in such countries is a combination of teachers' guidance, workshops, general information session and in few cases one on one counselling (Bowlsbey & Sampson, 2018; Herr, 2017).

Pakistan has problems similar to other developing countries such as lack of trained counsellors, lack of counselling practices, peer pressures and career selection by parents and other family members, thus students being unable to take informed career decisions (Asad & Dawood, 2024; Yakoob et. al, 2017; Keshf & Khanum, 2021).

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to identify the exposure of career counselling in Pakistani educational Landscape. Although there is awareness of career counselling but its practical implementation is almost negligible. The main objective of the study is to conduct a comparative analysis of the effectiveness of career counseling approaches using psychometric testing and general counseling and guidance

Research Objectives

To investigate the impact of general counseling and guidance on the career decision-making ability of the students?

To investigate the impact of career counseling through psychometric testing on the career decision-making ability of the students?

To assess the effectiveness of career counseling through psychometric testing versus general counseling and guidance?

Literature review

Career counseling is a collaborative, ongoing process that helps individuals understand and manage their career development and achieve their goals through self-exploration, decision making, and action planning (Savickas & Porfeli, 2021; Walsh & Osipow, 2015). Career counseling is an interpersonal process in which a career professional helps an individual or group of

individuals clarify, specify, implement, and adjust career goals and plans based on career development theory, assessment, information, and resources (Niles & Bowlsbey, 2021). Choosing a particular path can both be a source or a result of career counselling because contextual and personal changes will lead to vastly different shapes of careers (Baruch, 2004; Keshf & Khanum, 2021; Malik & Kiran, 2012).

History of career counselling

Many societies across the world have utilized counselors' services since time immemorial. Among ancient Greek and Roman philosophers- Plato and Aristotle were known to use this practice extensively for self-inquiry and as means of developing their own philosophies through introspection (Ali & Graham, 1996; Hiebert & Borgen, 2002; Nasir et al., 2017). One of the most influential people in developing and establishing career services, has been Frank Parsons (1854-1908). He is often referred to as the father of career guidance (Aubrey, 1977; O'Brian, 2001; DeBelle, 2001; Wanjohi, 2010; Zunker, 2002). Early career planning emphasized the importance of an individual's interests, aptitudes and personalities in shortlisting a profession (Keshf & Khanum 2021; Mitts, 2020). This approach was enhanced with included consideration for skills acquired or completed qualifications and skills in the career guidance process (Gong et al., 2020; Keshf & Khanum 2021).

Methods of career counselling

Psychometric testing and general guidance and counseling are two distinct approaches to helping individuals with their personal and career development. Psychometric testing in career counseling refers to the use of standardized tests and assessments to measure a person's abilities, interests, values, and personality traits as they relate to career choice and development (Savickas & Baker, 2005). Guidance and counselling are a process of helping individuals discover and develop their educational, vocational, and psychological potentialities and thereby to achieve an optimal level of personal happiness and social usefulness (Krumboltz & Thoresen, 1969).

Psychometric testing primarily focuses on assessing an individual's abilities, interests, values, and personality traits in order to provide insight into career choice and development (Savickas & Baker, 2005). In contrast, general guidance and counseling focuses on providing emotional support, advice, and guidance to individuals facing personal, educational, or career-related challenges (Gelatt, 1989). Similarly, while Psychometric testing relies on standardized tests and assessments to measure various psychological variables where as general guidance and counseling may use a variety of methods, such as one-on-one conversations, group sessions, and experiential activities (Cohen 2014). Moreover, the goal of psychometric testing is to provide objective information that can help individuals make informed decisions about their careers while the goal of general guidance and counseling is to help individuals address personal or emotional challenges and develop the skills and strategies needed to overcome them (Gelatt, 1989; Krumboltz, 1996). It has been found that learning experiences impact the way a young person understands what interests them and what careers they might be interested in pursuing. For every child, this means embarking on an individualized journey of awareness where self-discovery is essential for success (Chiaradonna 2017). Thus, psychometric testing is very important in career related decision making.

General counselling and guidance are more commonly used because, most people consider indecision due to lack of information when they're faced with too many options. But what they don't realize is that there are plenty of professionals who can help them make their decision, they should not rely on luck or fate alone (Malik & Kiran 2012). Too much indecision can come from insufficient career counseling. It may also come from not receiving any, or having received inappropriate or excessive parental involvement. Peer pressure and personal problems while in school can lead to such indecisions as well (Maree, 2016). Although career counselors are an important resource for getting answers about professional and career advice, many students turn to their relatives or parents when they're unsure of what they want to do (Yaqoob, 2017).

Personality plays an important role in what careers someone is interested in because those aspects fit well with the environment they are looking at. Self-knowledge and career information need to come before making decisions about what careers are right for you (Holland, 1992). Personal interests ultimately lead up to understanding how we differ from others on many levels including personality, interest, values - everything in reality. But as long as our interests line up well with that of the work place; performance increases manyfold (Akhtar et al., 2021; Yakoob et al., 2017; Keshf & Khanum 2021; Zahid et al., 2020).

Importance of career counselling

Career counseling is important for several reasons. Research has shown that career counseling can help individuals to; Make more satisfying career choices (González-Morales et al., 2018). Improve their job satisfaction and reduce work-related stress (Chen et al., 2019). Develop greater resilience and adaptability in the face of career challenges and transitions (Lent et al., 2018). However, some of the challenges facing career counseling in developing countries include limited access to counseling services, insufficient resources and infrastructure, and cultural barriers (Arya et al., 2021).

Moreover, it can assist individuals in setting realistic and achievable career goals and developing a plan to achieve those goals (Whiston, 2017). Furthermore, it can help individuals to manage career transitions and make informed decisions about further education, training, or job changes (Gati et al., 2014). Schools need to ensure that all students know about every possible option so they can make an informed decision when it comes to their futures. One way, schools can help them make these decisions is through the completion of career counselling; this key intervention leads to successful college transitions (Brown, 2015; Folsom et al., 2005).

Need of Career counselling

Making academic and life decisions for oneself can contribute to college students' ability to effectively transition through college, increase their effective decision-making skills and positively impact mental health factors (Hinkelman & Luzzo, 2007; Walker & Peterson, 2012). Learning how to make successful career decisions and set realistic goals are crucial life skills that all students need to learn. Career guidance and other career related interventions play an important role in preparing people for the difficult choices they'll need to make over time throughout their life (Reardon et al., 2017).

Numerous factors have contributed to an increase in mental distress among those who work hard

and dedicate themselves to pursue career goals (Ibrahim & Hussein, 2024). Individuals usually have difficulty in understanding what they want from their careers or even making up their minds about what kind of careers they would want for themselves (Ma & Fang, 2024). In past, individuals were responsible for their own careers but now society expects more from everyone, hence professional advice before taking the professional decision is advisable (Maree, 2018). An improper examination of the needs can result in making poor decisions, and hence a need assessment or a psychometric test is imperative before offering career advice (Einhorn, 2024; Kavale, 2012). One must also take into account the problems faced by those living in less developed countries when it comes to conducting research pertaining specifically to how they can improve career counseling programs (Keshf & Khanum, 2021).

There has been little research done concerning the state of career counseling within Pakistani educational institutions. Some studies have explored needs at the school level directly or indirectly. (Dogar et al., 2011; Khan, 2010; Qurrat-ul-Ain & Khattak, 2012; Yaqoob et al., 2017). A study conducted by Bilal and Malik (2014), with both students and employees examined the importance, accessibility, and effectiveness of career counseling. High value was found among respondents, though availability of these services was very low.

Psychometric testing; an integral part of counselling

Psychometric testing has been an integral part of career counseling and guidance for several decades, with the aim of providing individuals with insights into their personality, interests, and strengths to help them make informed career decisions. Two of the most widely used psychometric tests in career counseling are the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) and the Holland Code (RIASEC) Test. Additionally, some studies have suggested that the MBTI may not have a strong predictive value for career success (Harvey, 1996). However, despite these criticisms, the MBTI continues to be widely used in career counseling, with proponents arguing that it can provide individuals with valuable insights into their personality preferences and potential career paths (Furnham & Crump, 2005).

The Holland Code (RIASEC) Test is based on the theory of vocational choice proposed by John Holland, which posits that individuals are most satisfied and productive in careers that match their personality types. The test categorizes individuals into six personality types: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional, and matches them with occupational themes. The Holland Code Test has been found to be a reliable and valid tool for assessing vocational interests in a variety of cultural contexts. Moreover, research has suggested that the Holland Code Test can be effective in helping individuals make career decisions, especially when combined with career counseling and guidance (Gati, Krausz, & Osipow, 1996; Lenz, Schmidt, & Ertl, 2017).

Concerns regarding Psychometric testing

Despite the potential benefits of psychometric testing in career counseling, there are also some concerns about its use. For example, some critics argue that these tests may oversimplify complex issues related to career decision-making, and may not take into account important contextual factors such as cultural and social norms. Furthermore, there is also concern about the potential misuse of psychometric testing results, and the need for trained professionals to interpret and use

the results appropriately.

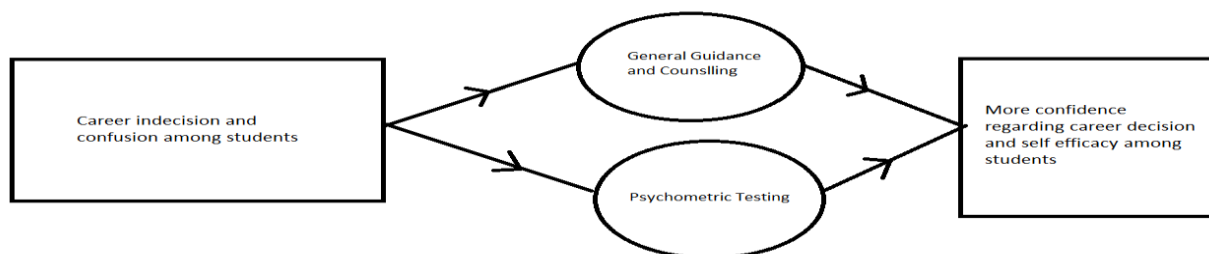
The MBTI is based on Carl Jung's theory of psychological types, which proposes that individuals have innate preferences for certain ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving (Jung, 1971). The MBTI has been found to be a reliable and valid tool for assessing personality preferences (Pittenger, 2005), and has been used in various cultural contexts, including Pakistan (Kazmi, Naqvi, & Naqvi, 2012).

Thus, there is a need for comparative analysis of career counselling approaches, whether general guidance and counselling is more helpful in building confidence and self-efficacy among students regarding their career decisions or are the results of psychometric tests give students a better insight as to what career path way they should select and is more helpful in building confidence and self-efficacy among students regarding their career decisions

Hypotheses

1. H_0 : There is no significant impact of general guidance and counselling on the confidence students on their career decision making ability.
2. H_0 : There is no significant impact of psychometric testing on the confidence of the students on their career decision making ability.
3. H_0 : There is no significant difference in the effectiveness of career counseling approaches between students who receive counselling through psychometric testing and those who receive general counseling and guidance.

Conceptual Framework



Methodology

This study used a quantitative research design to investigate the comparative effectiveness of career counseling approaches using psychometric testing and general counseling and guidance. Thus, the research design is a comparative research study and hence t tests were applied using SPSS. The entire population, comprising of all Pakistani high school, college and university students was sent the CDSE – SF survey, of which 3275 responded. Amongst these, 1831 (56%) responded that they have never been exposed to career counselling and were eliminated from the study, while 1444 (44%) responded that they had acquired career counselling. Of these, 643 (45%) acquired counselling through psychometric testing and 801 (55%) acquired counselling through general guidance and counselling. Among them, 818 (57%) were male and 626 (43%) were female

Data collection tool

Data was collected through survey questionnaires, which is referred to as The Career Decision Self Efficacy-Short Form (CDSE-SF). The survey consisted of 5-point Likert scale questions ranging from 0 (No confidence) – 5 (High confidence) from the students related to the confidence in career decision-making. Thus, Google forms were sent to entire population via and those who were exposed to career counselling were asked whether it was through psychometric testing or general counseling and guidance. These forms focused on two types of data, the demographics and CDSE. The CDSE-SF instrument measures the students' level of belief or self-confidence in their own ability to successfully complete the tasks necessary for making career decisions across five subscales (Taylor & Betz, 1983).

Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive and inferential statistics. Demographics will be assessed through descriptive statistics. The impact of general guidance and counselling on students' confidence in selecting their career was measured through regression analysis. Similarly, the impact of psychometric testing on students' confidence in selecting their career was also measured through regression analysis, whereas, the impact of career counseling approaches on career decision-making, was assessed through t tests, as to which of the two approaches have a better impact on students' confidence.

Reliability and Validity

The reliability of CDSE - SF was checked through Cronbach alpha and it is found as 0.965 which shows that the tool is reliable. The survey form was validated by the expert.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical considerations were fulfilled. The identity of the respondents, their affiliations, their experience and other sensitive information were all kept confidential. Prior permission was taken before sending them the questionnaire.

Findings

The findings clearly revealed that both career counselling approaches had a positive impact on career decision-making among students, indicating that whenever the students go through the process of career guidance and counselling, their career decision self-efficacy and self confidence in their future prospects improves significantly. It has been observed that counselling done through psychometric testing is more effective in facilitating career decision-making compared to general counselling and guidance.

Table 1

Demographics			
		f	%
Acquired Career Counselling	Yes	1,444	44.1
	NO	1,831	55.9
Gender	Males	818	56.4
	Females	626	43.4
Counselling Method	General guidance and counselling	801	55.5
	Psychometric testing	643	44.5

Grade Level	Matric	1	0.07
	Intermediates	18	1.2
	O level	379	26.2
	A level	883	61.1
	Undergrad	142	9.8
	Postgrad	21	1.5
	Karachi	1424	98.6
City	Lahore	4	0.28
	Islamabad	6	0.42
	Peshawar	1	0.07
	Sukkur	1	0.07
	Quetta	2	0.14
	Khairpur	1	0.07
	TandoAllahYar	1	0.07
	Mirpur Khaas	1	0.07
	Hyderabad	1	0.07
	Abbottabad	1	0.07
Age (years)	Gujranwala	1	0.07
	12 – 17	577	40
	18 – 25	846	58.6
	25 – 35	11	0.76
	36 and above	10	0.69
Parents income per month PKR	15000 – 25000	34	2.4
	26,000 – 50,000	46	3.2
	51,000 – 100,000	157	10.9
	10,1000 – 200,000	281	19.5
	Above 200,000	926	64.1

Table 1 above shows that the entire population of students was sent the questionnaire of which 3275 students responded; of these 1831 had no exposure to career counselling, while 1444 did get the opportunity to avail career counselling. Those who managed to get exposure to career counselling, of these 801 got general counselling and guidance, while 643 got the opportunity to get counselling through psychometric testing. Of those who acquired counselling majority did A-levels i.e. 61.1%. Majority of the respondents were from Karachi; 98.6%, but there were a few respondents from other cities as well making data as diverse as possible. Majority of the respondents were from 12 to 25 years old; 40% were 12 – 17 years old and 58.6% were 18 to 25 years old. 56.5 % males acquired career counselling and 43.5% females acquired career counselling.

Table 2 Regression Analysis for the impact of General Counselling and Guidance

Descriptive Statistics			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Confidence	3.4219	.74986	800
GCG	1.00	.000	800
Correlations			
	confidence		GCG

Pearson Correlation	confidence	1.000	.
	GCG	.	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	confidence	.	.000
	GCG	.000	.
N	confidence	800	800
	GCG	800	800

The above table 2 for Regression Analysis for the impact of General Counselling and Guidance on Confidence of students' decision-making ability regarding career shows a positive impact of general counselling and guidance on students' confidence in their decision-making ability regarding careers. Thus, we will reject the first null hypothesis that there is no impact of general guidance and counselling on students' confidence in their decision-making ability and accept alternative hypothesis as there is definitely a positive impact of general counseling and guidance on students' confidence to take decisions regarding their careers.

Descriptive Statistics			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Confidence	4.4099	.48542	643
Psychometric Testing	2.00	.000	643

Correlations			
		confidence	Psychometric Testing
Pearson Correlation	Confidence	1.000	.
	Psychometric Testing	.	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	Confidence	.	.000
	Psychometric Testing	.000	.
N	Confidence	643	643
	Psychometric Testing	643	643

The above table 3 for Regression Analysis for the impact of Psychometric testing on Confidence of students' decision-making ability regarding career shows a positive impact of psychometric testing on students' confidence in their decision-making ability regarding careers. Thus, the second null hypothesis that there is no impact of Psychometric testing on students' confidence in their decision-making ability, had been rejected. Therefore, alternative hypothesis that there is definitely a positive impact of Psychometric Testing on students' confidence to take decisions regarding their careers, has been accepted.

Group Statistics					
	Method	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Confidence	Psychometric	645	4.4051	.48926	.01926
	General guidance	800	3.4233	.74892	.02648

Independent Samples Test	
Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	t-test for Equality of Means

		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference
									Lower Upper
Confidence	Equal variances not assumed	153.512	.000	29.9	1386.7	.000	.98190	.03274	.91766 1.04613

An independent sample t-test was used to examine difference in students' confidence on career decision making ability when they were counseled through general guidance and counselling and through psychometric testing. The result shows that the confidence of students who were counseled through psychometric testing was higher ($M=4.4051$, $SD=0.48926$) than those who got general guidance and counselling ($M=3.4233$, $SD=0.74892$); $t=29.986$, $p=0.000$. Thus, the null hypothesis has been rejected. Hence, alternative hypothesis been upheld. The results clearly state that the students who acquired counselling through psychometric testing had more confidence in their career related decision-making ability.

Discussion

The first hypothesis that there is no significant impact of general guidance and counselling on the confidence students on their career decision making ability, is rejected because it has been proved by regression analysis that there is a significant impact of general guidance on students' confidence and on their decision-making ability. A study conducted by Bilal and Malik (2014), with both students and employees examined the importance, accessibility, and effectiveness of career counseling. High value was found among respondents who had acquired career counselling. The study emphasizes the importance of individualized career guidance, career exploration activities, and career information dissemination.

The second hypothesis that there is no significant impact of psychometric testing on the confidence of the students on their career decision making ability is rejected because it has been proved by regression analysis that there is a significant impact of psychometric testing on students' confidence and on their decision-making ability. Research has shown that psychometric testing can help individuals make more satisfying career choices, improve their job satisfaction and reduce work-related stress, develop greater resilience and adaptability in the face of career challenges and transitions (Chen et al., 2019; González-Morales et al., 2018; Lent et al., 2018).

The third hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the effectiveness of career counseling approaches between students who receive counselling through psychometric testing and those who receive general counseling and guidance is also rejected because by applying t-test it is very clear that psychometric testing has a more significant impact on students' confidence and career decision making ability compared to general guidance on counselling. In developed countries like the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, career counseling is often provided by trained professionals such as career counselors or career coaches who use a variety of methods including assessments, one-on-one counseling, and group sessions to help individuals make

informed career decisions (Akhtar et al, 2021; Brown & Lent, 2013; Ryan & Jurich, 2016; Zubair, 2012). In developed countries, the purpose of the career counselling curriculum is to provide students with career-related insights such as self-awareness (recognizing their own particular strengths and aptitudes), investigation of prospective study and job options, making sound career decisions, and personal goal planning (Abubakar, 2018; Maree, 2016; Wong, 2017; Zahid et al., 2020). Personal interests ultimately lead up to understanding how we differ from others on many levels including personality, interest, values - everything in reality. But as long as our interests line up well with that of the work place; performance increases manyfold (Akhtar et al., 2021; Yakooob et al., 2017; Keshf & Khanum 2021; Zahid et al., 2020).

Conclusion

This study will contribute to enforce the significance of career guidance and counselling in Pakistani landscape, clearly identifying that although career guidance and counselling is important, it is not being paid attention to. This study will also contribute to the limited research on the comparative effectiveness of career counseling approaches using psychometric testing and general counseling and guidance. The findings of this study can inform the development of more effective career counseling interventions for students. It is clear from the study that all kind of counselling will add to students' confidence and improve their decision-making ability regarding career choices, hence it is very important that career counselling should become mandatory part of school's curriculum so that everyone can be exposed to it. Pakistan is one of those countries which have highest youth to total population ratio and most students are not exposed to career counselling and hence take uninformed career decisions. Thus, they are unable to find job-interest fit and their work environment is stressful.

Those schools and colleges where efforts are being made to implement career counselling in school curriculum it is advisable that trained counsellors are hired and psychometric testing should be used. This will enhance students' confidence in choosing the right career path. Psychometric testing will help align students' strengths, weaknesses, inclinations and abilities with the right career choices available and hence students will be more satisfied and less stressful in their careers. It will positively align students' careers with their personalities and eventually results in successful individuals contributing positively towards the overall growth of the economy.

Recommendation

Despite the criticisms, psychometric testing remains a valuable tool in career counseling and guidance. When used appropriately, it can provide individuals with valuable insights into their personality traits, interests, and potential career paths. Further research is needed to explore the effectiveness of different psychometric tests in different cultural contexts and to address concerns related to their use in career counseling and guidance. Furthermore, career counselling, in which ever form, must become mandatory part of school's curriculum. Currently, neither National Education Policy (2009), curriculum, nor textbooks of the educational boards in Pakistan have career guidance and counselling embedded into it, thus creating a massive gap between the skills and abilities the students possess compared to knowledge they have acquired in their academic years. When career guidance and counselling will become a mandatory part of Pakistan's

educational landscape, the overall confidence, satisfaction, motivation and self-esteem of the workforce will improve significantly. This is because their innate abilities will align with their skills and knowledge, which in turn will be positively reflected in their work performance.

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