



Cultivating Intercultural Attitudes among EIL learners: A Case Study of Undergraduates

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ABSTRACT

Teaching of English as an international language (EIL) necessitates promoting intercultural communicative competence (ICC) to enable the individual to survive and progress in multicultural societies. It thereby requires them to develop intercultural attitudes—one of the essential components of ICC. The current paper strives to fathom their intercultural attitudes before and after the intervention, and to measure the impact of the treatment on their intercultural attitudes. Based on the material designed for promoting intercultural competence, a semester-long course was carried out as the intervention. Unlike the control group, the treatment group was exposed to the treatment. A self-report survey was administered to both groups before and after the treatment. Though both groups reported improvement in their attitudes, the mean differences and effect size values for the cumulative scale and subscales indicate a substantial difference between the attitudes of the two groups; it thereby may be inferred that the treatment proved to be effective in cultivating intercultural attitudes. Furthermore, female participants slightly surpassed the male participants in certain attitudes, but the difference infinitesimal.

Introduction

The modern definition of citizenship implies adherence to the global community as opposed to just a nation or state. This makes it necessary for them to comprehend and address the problems facing the planet. People must acquire information, learn new skills, use them in fresh circumstances, and adopt specific attitudes in order to be eligible for such global citizenship and to continue with socioeconomic changes in the contemporary knowledge-based world.

The obligation of educating young people for the demands of such a linked society lies on higher education institutions due to the increasing intercultural reliance in today's globally interconnected world. Learning has transcended borders; according to Velten and Dodd (2016), there are three million students studying overseas. According to Rosbrook (2017), the globalisation initiative has changed higher education institutions into mingling grounds for cultures, ideas, and communities. Students are now exposed to extremely varied cultural academic contexts as a result of the globalisation of education, giving them the opportunity to interact both in person and virtually with peers from other cultures. Similar to this, a more global perspective is required in the contemporary workplace. Universities must thus internationalise their curricula and courses in order to help students strengthen their limited global competencies.

Due to the growing intercultural dependence in today's globally networked world, higher education institutions are responsible for preparing youth for the needs of such a linked society. Learning has transcended

borders: according to Choudbury (2013), the number of overseas students is on advance every year. According to Chen (2017), the higher education institutions have grown into emergent sites of (inter/multi)culturalism in the current wave of globalisation. Students are now exposed to extremely varied cultural academic contexts as a result of the globalisation of education, giving them the opportunity to interact both in person and virtually with peers from other cultures. Similar to this, a more global perspective is required in the contemporary workplace. Consequently, numerous studies have acknowledged the importance of teaching culture and language simultaneously (Byram 1997; Buttjes, 1991; Kramsch, 1998; Sercu, 2004; 2010).

The said phenomenon is referred to as intercultural competence (IC). IC not only contributes to effective communication but also enables the individual to progress efficaciously in a multicultural setting. With a comparative and reflective approach to cultural variety, several scholars and educationists therefore advocate for integrating IC with language training (Byram, 1997; Fantini, 2007; Leggett, 2014; Yu 2014). This will improve students' tolerance, sensitivity, and flexibility towards cultural diversity as well as assist them better understand the social, economic, historical, political geographic, and educational contexts and cultural standards of Anglophone peoples.

IC has been dimensionalised in different ways; however, the most practised classification divides the construct into three dimensions: attitude(s), knowledge, and skills. The article intends to gauge the level of the learners' intercultural attitude(s) before and after the treatment and measure how far the intervention proved effective in cultivating intercultural attitude in them. Attitude is a "a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor" (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993, p. 1). It has been defined as a judgement (Springer, 2013), a motivation (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2011).

Though a plethora of intercultural attitudes have been identified in the discourse (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009), the current study is limited to the ones enlisted by Byram (1997), Deardorff (2015) and Bennett (2014). The intercultural attitudes include curiosity, empathy, openness, ethnorelativity (deferral of one's belief about one's and disbelief about others' cultures), tolerance, and respect. Curiosity, defined as unrestrained keenness, requires suspension of judgemental outlook. Likewise, openness necessitates recognising otherness without any disparity. Next, ethnocentricity is a hindrance in developing IC; hence, it is imperative to develop ethnorelativity in the individual. It requires one to 'defer or cease one's belief' about one's own culture and incredulity about other cultures (Byram, 1997, 2002). This promotes recognition of the marginalised perspectives in the social hierarchy. That said, intercultural empathy requires the individual to consider the interlocutor's communicative patterns and understand the world from others' perspective. Finally, the speaker respects other cultures, without prioritising any one to another, and tolerates cultural diversity.

Such attitudes, together with critical thinking, may aid individuals in attaining levels of cognitive complexity (Delia & O'Keefe, 1982), encouraging them to comprehend and discern variations in spoken and nonverbal behaviours. Higher cognitive complexity has been linked to greater social awareness (Burlison, 2007).

Methods

Participants

A quasi-experimental study was conducted at a well-reputed institution of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Selected through cluster sampling (Johnson & Christenson, 2020), the participants comprised two sections of non-Major English undergraduates of Islamia College Peshawar. The sample included both male and female students, aged 19-23. The experiment group (n = 53) comprised 26 male and 27 female learners; whereas the control group (n = 50) consisted 31 male and 19 female students. Demographically, the partakers represented numerous areas of the province. Ethnically, all, save nine, students were Pashtuns. Other ethnicities included Chitrali, Hindkowan, Baloch, and Hazara. A majority of them (97%) had not been to any foreign country.

Intervention

Based on the social constructivist principles and postmethod pedagogy, a semester-long treatment was extended to the target group participants only to develop intercultural attitude. The other group was not offered the treatment. *Mirror and Window*, a course book designed for teaching intercultural competence, was adapted for the study. Some other readings about the source culture of the learners were also included since the aforesaid book focused

only on the foreign cultures. The contents of the course were woven around different cultural themes like time and punctuality, cuisine, communication patterns, gender roles, parenting patterns, and other social values and practices.

The contents were taught with intention to develop a comparative and analytical approach across cultures among the learners. The learners would be provided with small readings on a certain theme along with the discussion questions. Having discussed the readings and the notions therein, the learners would relate the same to their own cultural values and practices. That done, the learners were assigned some independent tasks to be practiced in the field. The tasks included interviewing people in their social circle, observing people at various social places and gatherings, practising contrastive analysis of their behaviour.

Instrument

Though the intervention intended to develop the intercultural competence, comprising three components: attitude, knowledge, and skills, the current article focuses on intercultural attitudes. Accordingly, the data on intercultural attitudes was collected through a close-ended questionnaire—Attitude Measurement Scale (AMS). The scale was administered before and after the intervention to both groups to compare the difference between the learners' pre- and post-experiment attitude. The questionnaire consisted two parts: demographic information and statements for fathoming learners' intercultural attitudes. The attitude scale further employed six constructs (i.e. intercultural attitudes): curiosity, empathy, openness, tolerance, ethno-relativity, and respect. Each attitude comprised 4-5 assertive statements. For inspiration of the statements, the questionnaire relied on Byram's (1997, 2009), Bennett's (2017) and Dearsodff's (2006) models of IC. 10-point Likert scale was employed with numerical value (Pimentel, 2019) to compare the pre- and post-intervention intercultural attitude(s).

Concerning data analysis, the normality analysis revealed normal distribution of all data sets for the questionnaire (Table 1). The Chronbach's Alpha value ($\alpha = .894$) establishes internal consistency of the questionnaire. Concerning validity, the Pearson r (51) with $p < .05$ was found to be greater than the critical value .270 for the tool. It thereby indicates that all statements are valid.

Table 1 Normality Statistics for Scores of the Questionnaire

	Skewness	Standard Error	Kurtosis	Standard Error	Sig.	Z
CG Pre-T	-0.030	0.337	-0.504	0.662	0.818	-0.127
CG Post-T	-0.058	0.337	-0.648	0.662	0.535	0.887
TG Pre-T	0.003	0.717	0.089	0.644	0.779	-0.828
TG Post-T	0.019	0.327	0.841	0.644	0.476	-0.904

Furthermore, independent sample and paired sample t-tests were conducted to assess the difference between the two groups' intercultural attitudes before and after the treatment. In addition, Cohen's (1988) d was calculated to measure the degree of the impact of the treatment on the learners' attitude and to further substantiate and strengthen the findings of t-tests (Kline, 2004).

Findings

The study aimed at enquiring whether the learners' intercultural attitudes improved during the course of the intervention or not. The comparability of the two groups (i.e. TG and CG) was assessed through pre-intervention administration of AMS. The findings of the independent samples t-test led to the conclusion that the two groups did not share the same level of intercultural attitude(s). The results indicated a substantial dissimilarity between the pre-intervention intercultural attitudes of the CG ($M = 110.78$, $SD = 8.972$) and the TG ($M = 120.89$, $SD = 11.396$) ($t(101) = 4.981$, $p < .001$). The mean difference of 10 points revealed that the TG was an edge above the CG on AMS (Table 2). A plausible reason for the difference could be presence of the learners with experience of visiting foreign

lands. Some of the TG participants had had exposure to the foreign countries such as UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Afghanistan.

On contrary, the gender-based analysis did not highlight any important difference ($t(51) = -.456, p = 0.65$) between the TG females' ($M = 121.59, SD = 10.761$) and the TG males' pre-intervention attitude ($M = 120.15, SD = 12.191$). The mean difference between the groups was minimal (Table 2). Likewise, the difference between the CG females' ($M = 109.47, SD = 7.516$) and the CG males' intercultural attitudes prior to treatment male ($M = 111.58, SD = 9.79$) was not statistically salient ($t(48) = .803, p = 0.426$). However, the mean difference of the CG exceeded that of the TG (Table 2); it thereby indicated that the TG male and female participants shared a closer range of attitude on AMS than the CG male and female learners.

Table 2 Pre-treatment Intercultural Attitude of TG and CG

Group	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	df	<i>p</i>	Mean Difference	95% Confidence of the Difference		<i>D</i>
							Lower	Upper	
Treatment	120.89	11.396	4.981	101	0	10.107	6.082	14.132	0.09
<i>a. Male</i>	120.15	12.191	-0.456	51	0.65	-1.439	-7.774	4.896	0.01
<i>b. Female</i>	121.59	10.761							
Control	110.78	8.972							
<i>a. Male</i>	111.58	9.79	0.803	48	0.426	2.107	-3.168	7.382	0.02
<i>b. Female</i>	109.47	7.516							

The post-intervention statistic exhibited a significant disparity ($t(68.838) = 43.413, p < .001$) between the CG ($M = 127.48, SD = 6.982$) and the TG ($M = 240.62, SD = 17.559$). The magnitude of the mean difference also minimised the possibility of coincidence (Table 3). Though female participants of both groups recorded higher response on AMS, no statistically significant difference was observed between the TG male and female as well as the CG male and female participants (Table 3).

Table 3 Difference in the Post-treatment Attitude of TG and CG

Group	Mean	SD	T	df	P	Mean Difference	95% Confidence of the Difference		<i>D</i>
							Lower	Upper	
Treatment	240.62	17.559	43.413	68.838	0.000	113.143	107.943	118.342	0.5
<i>Male</i>	238.96	19.583	-0.698	51	0.488	3.383	-13.117	6.351	
<i>Female</i>	242.35	15.375							0.01
Control	127.48	6.982							
<i>Male</i>	127.16	7.207	-0.409	48	0.685	0.839	-4.964	3.287	0.01
<i>Female</i>	128	6.758							

Furthermore, the cumulative AMS statistic for the CG showed a noteworthy variation ($t(49) = 11.176, p < .001$) in attitude before ($M = 110.78, SD = 8.972$) and after intervention period ($M = 127.48, SD = 10.566$), with a substantial mean difference, but a small effect size ($d = .25$).

Subsequently, the mean scores for each of the six sub-themes were computed individually in order to assess the difference and its corresponding impact. There was no difference in the tolerance mean values ($M = 16.38, SD =$

3.036). A substantial dissimilarity between the CG participants' pre- and post-intervention intercultural attitudes—save tolerance—was observed, the mean difference for any construct did not surpass 4 points (Table 4). The impact size for three constructs—curiosity, openness, and tolerance—was quite minor ($d \leq .25$). However, the impact sizes for ethnorelativity ($d = .64$), empathy ($d = .75$), and respect ($d = .64$) were moderate. This shows that the CG learners' apparent gain in attitude was negligibly small.

Table 4 Pre- and Post-treatment Attitude of the CG

Variable	N	Before		After		Paired Differences				95% Confidence of the Difference		
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t	df	p	Lower	Upper
Attitude	50	110.78	8.972	127.48	6.982	16.700	10.566	11.176	49	0.000	19.703	13.697
1. Curiosity		22.26	3.68	23.78	2.526	1.520	4.446	2.418	49	0.019	2.783	0.257
2. Openness		17.48	3.183	19.440	2.149	1.960	4.115	3.368	49	0.001	3.130	0.790
3. Ethnorelativity		19.96	2.338	22.62	1.497	2.660	2.847	6.606	49	0.000	3.469	1.851
4. Empathy		19.08	2.562	22.84	1.658	3.760	2.818	9.435	49	0.000	4.561	2.959
5. Tolerance		16.38 ^a	3.036	16.38 ^a	3.036							
6. Respect		15.62	2.732	19.20	1.591	3.580	3.078	8.225	49	0.000	4.455	2.705

^a The correlation and t cannot be computed because the standard error of the difference is 0.

On contrary, a statistically salient difference ($t(52) = 79, p < .001$) was discerned between the pre- ($M = 120.89, SD = 11.40$) and post-treatment period intercultural attitudes of the TG ($M = 240.62, SD = 17.56$) with a huge mean difference (Table 5) and a large effect size ($d = 8.1$). The magnitude of the mean difference manifested that the TG female participants (mean difference = 121.07, 95% $CI = 117.24-124.91$) developed their intercultural attitude more than the TG male undergraduates (mean difference = 118.35, 95% $CI = 113.38-123.32$).

Subsequent to the cumulative analysis of the TG's attitude, all the six intercultural attitudes were measures and analysed separately too. A significant difference was observed in learners' curiosity before and after treatment on attitude on AMS, with the highest mean difference of 22.57 among all sub-themes and with a high effect size was ($d = 4.8$). Female participants showed marginally higher curiosity scores (mean difference = 22.59, 95% $CI = 23.56-21.62$) than male students (mean difference = 22.54, 95% $CI = 23.78-21.30$). Similarly, the effect size of the female participants' curiosity marginally surpassed that of the male students. Conversely, both groups—male and female—presented significant improvements in their curiosity levels (Table 5).

Second, it was also observed that the learners' attitude of openness was significantly different before ($M = 19.09, SD = 2.96$) and after the experiment duration ($M = 34.09, SD = 4.89$), with a high mean difference (mean difference = 17, 95% $CI = 17.85-16.15$) and effect size ($d = 0.8$). Besides, the study found a noteworthy variation ($t(25) = 32.51, p < .001$) in pre-treatment and post-treatment openness of male and female students. Male students showed more openness during treatment (mean difference = 17.23, 95% $CI = 18.32-16.34$) than the female students (mean difference = 16.78, 95% $CI = 18.14-15.41$). However, the difference between the effect size for male ($d = 4.3$) and female participants ($d = 4.1$) was infinitesimal.

Table 5 Pre- and Post-Intervention Attitude of the TG

	Before		After		Paired Differences	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t	df	p	95% Confidence of the Difference	
											Lower	Upper
Attitude	53	120.89	11.40	240.62	17.56	119.74	11.03	79.00	52.00	0.000	122.78	116.69
A. Male	26	120.04	12.07	238.38	19.73	118.35	12.30	49.05	25.00	0.000	113.38	123.32
B. Female	27	121.70	10.88	242.78	15.24	121.07	9.70	64.84	26.00	0.000	117.24	124.91
1. Curiosity	53	23.34	3.79	45.91	5.24	22.57	2.75	59.76	52.00	0.000	23.32	21.81
a. Male	26	22.62	4.03	45.15	5.79	22.54	3.08	37.37	25.00	0.000	23.78	21.30
b. Female	27	24.04	3.47	46.63	4.64	22.59	2.45	47.85	26.00	0.000	23.56	21.62
2. Openness	53	17.09	2.96	34.09	4.89	17.00	3.08	40.15	52.00	0.000	17.85	16.15
a. Male	26	17.58	3.15	34.81	4.70	17.23	2.70	32.51	25.00	0.000	18.32	16.14
b. Female	27	16.63	2.73	33.41	5.06	16.78	3.45	25.30	26.00	0.000	18.14	15.41
3. Ethnorelativity	53	20.89	3.12	42.19	5.34	21.30	4.08	37.98	52.00	0.000	22.43	20.18
a. Male	26	20.88	3.34	42.12	5.61	21.23	4.43	24.44	25.00	0.000	23.02	19.44
b. Female	27	20.89	2.97	42.26	5.17	21.37	3.80	29.19	26.00	0.000	22.88	19.87
4. Empathy	53	22.43	3.26	44.72	4.64	22.28	2.90	55.85	52.00	0.000	23.08	21.48
a. Male	26	22.31	3.30	44.12	4.93	21.81	3.42	32.53	25.00	0.000	23.19	20.43
b. Female	27	22.56	3.27	45.30	4.36	22.74	2.28	51.82	26.00	0.000	23.64	21.84
5. Tolerance	53	18.02	2.62	36.02	4.15	18.13	2.50	52.71	52.00	0.000	18.82	17.44
a. Male	26	18.23	2.50	35.88	4.68	17.65	2.70	33.37	25.00	0.000	18.74	16.56
b. Female	27	17.81	2.76	36.41	3.64	18.59	2.26	42.79	26.00	0.000	19.49	17.70
6. Respect	53	19.11	3.34	37.57	4.92	18.45	2.46	54.57	52.00	0.000	19.13	17.77
a. Male	26	18.42	4.12	36.31	5.92	17.88	2.79	32.68	25.00	0.000	16.76	19.01
b. Female	27	19.78	2.24	38.78	3.41	19.00	2.00	49.36	26.00	0.000	18.21	19.79

Third, the ethnorelativity of participant varied significantly ($t(52) = 37.98, p < .001$) between pre- ($M = 20.89, SD = 3.12$) and post-intervention ($M = 42.19, SD = 5.34$). The mean difference was 21.30, which was greater than the attitude sub-themes but lower than curiosity and empathy. It had a 4.9 effect size. Comparing pre- and post-treatment ethnorelativity of male and female subjects, a significant difference ($t(26) = 29.19, p < .001$) was seen. Although both groups significantly improved, female partakers (mean difference = 21.37, 95% $CI = 22.88-19.87$) manifested better improvement in their ethnorelativity compared to male participants (mean difference = 21.23, 95% $CI = 23.02-19.44$), with a larger impact size for the female sub-group ($d = 5.1$) than the male group ($d = 4.6$).

Empathy, the fourth intercultural attitude, showed significant improvement ($t(52) = 55.85, p < .001$) during treatment, with a significant difference in pre-treatment and post-treatment levels (Table 5). It was the second highest attitude construct ($d = 5.6$). Both male and female pupils showed a considerable increase in empathy. Male students (mean difference = 21.81, 95% $CI = 23.19-20.43$) displayed strong improvement in their empathy, but female students (mean difference = 22.74, 95% $CI = 23.64-21.84$) manifested a better improvement. Accordingly, compared to females ($d = 5.9$), the male group exhibited a smaller impact size of empathy ($d = 5.2$).

Subsequent to empathy, the TG participants showed substantial advance ($t(52) = 52.71, p < .001$) in tolerance during treatment, with a high mean difference of 18.13 between pre- and post-treatment scores (Table 5). Treatment's effect ($d = 5.2$) on tolerance improvement was significant. Furthermore, both male and female participants improved their tolerance significantly; however, the male students' tolerance (mean difference = 18.59, 95% $CI = 19.49-17.70$) did not surpass the female participants' (mean difference = 17.65, 95% $CI = 18.74-16.56$).

Last, learners showed improvement in respect, with a significant difference ($t(52) = 54.57, p < .001$) between their attitudes before and after treatment (Table 5). Respect showed a slightly higher mean difference (mean difference = 18.13, 95% CI = 18.82-17.44) than tolerance, with a significant effect size ($d = 4.4$). In addition, the findings indicate that both males and females' attitude of respect enhanced substantially after the intervention. However, female participants (mean difference = 19.00, 95% CI = 18.21-19.79) outsmarted their counterparts mean difference = 17.88, 95% CI = 16.76-19.01) on this attitude, with a higher effect size ($d = 6.6$) compared to the male students ($d = 3.5$).

Discussion

In the modern world, success in language acquisition depends on keeping an open mind to diverse cultures. Nevertheless, it may not necessitate acceptance of the same (Widdowson, 1994). It requires a willingness to deal with otherness as well as curiosity, openness, tolerance, and tolerance (Khokhar, Pathan, Niaz & Mushtaq, 2020). It is easier to comprehend and value diversity when we cultivate inquiry, openness, and tolerance. Stronger connections and a more peaceful society are fostered by having a favourable attitude towards various cultures (Morgan, 1993). The study found that TG learners had a more positive attitude towards cultures than CG learners, possibly due to exposure to intercultural experiences. Overseas immersion was found to be a better intervention for cultivating intercultural competence (IC) than other forms (Zhang & Zhou, 2019). Real-life intercultural encounters also impacted attitudes, enhancing IC. This aligns with Byram's (1997, 2009) suggested locations for fostering intercultural learning.

Although there were only slight changes in the pre-intervention opinions of the two groups, post-treatment assessments revealed a considerable increase in the positive attitudes of TG students. In their post-intervention views, both groups shown a considerable change, though highlighting a major disparity between them. To determine the real difference and impact, mean differences and effect sizes were calculated. High effect size of pre- and post-treatment attitude difference minimizes randomness, suggesting treatment-related changes in TG learners' attitudes and attitudinal changes.

CG students' attitude improvement can be attributed to extraneous factors like exposure to the world outside the classroom, intercultural interactions, and social media usage. Resonating with Byram's (2009) three locations for cultivating IC, unintentional exposure to independent learning situations may have influenced their attitude unconsciously. TG students were encouraged to use all three locations, leading to attitudinal accretion outstripping CG students.

The study found that certain constituents were more vital for attitudinal progress in learners in the TG and CG. The CG students showed statistically significant improvement in empathy, ethnorelativity, and respect, while tolerance showed no increase. On contrary, TG participants improved in attitude sub-constructs, with openness, respect being least developed, followed by curiosity and ethnorelativity. Empathy and tolerance were the most significant. According to Morgan (2006) tolerating and accepting cultural diversity is an essential attitude for promoting IC. It is imperative to note that tolerance is the second highest attitude that the learners cultivated. It thereby implies that the intervention proved to be effective in increasing learners' attitudes, which is consistent with Li's (2017) findings.

To assess the impact of gender on attitude, a comparison of the attitudes of the male and female participants in CG and TG was carried out. The pre-treatment attitudes of the male and female learners were not significantly different in either group. Quantitative post-intervention data revealed a similar finding. The post-treatment attitudes of the CG male and female undergraduates were more or less perceived similarly. Despite TG girls having marginally higher attitudinal statistics across all six variables than their male counterparts, the variation was not statistically important. In addition, all attitudes, with the exception of empathy and ethnorelativity, are supported by the qualitative findings in comparison to the quantitative findings. Some female students found it difficult to grasp some problems or issues from the viewpoint of their male classmates. They could comprehend, for instance, the conflicting views on sexual harassment that are widespread in their community. They disputed the idea that harassment of men occurs there as well. They were discovered to be too stubborn to let go of their LC.

Conclusion

The results of the present research about the learners' attitudes towards their source and other cultures are significant since the literature on IC attitude typically elucidates the same. Moreover, it may be established that gender plays a little role in the perception and cultivation of intercultural attitudes, as the findings suggest. Theoretically, it is also noteworthy that the present study breaks the construct down into sub-constructs and conducts a thorough analysis of each. In wake of internationalism and interculturalism, lack of intercultural attitude may place the individual at a venerable position. The study thereby suggests salient implication for recruiters and policy-makers to train their employees to facilitate their culturally diverse clientele. Conversely, research on this issue does not completely exhaust: the construct may further be investigated with regard to interrelationship of the sub-constructs. Furthermore, intercultural attitudes are not a fixed phenomenon; it increases and/or decreases with the course of time. Besides causal studies, we can conduct longitudinal studies for the said purpose.

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