

Original Paper

Factors Affecting Palestinian High School Students' Career Choice after Covid-19 Pandemic Outbreak

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic outbreak has created a new complicated reality and brought diverse challenges to education systems and students as well. The present study aimed at examining the factors that students have used in identifying career choices among Palestinian high school in Israel in the new era. Career choice questionnaire was used to assess the factors affecting career choice. 455 Palestinian high school students took part in this study. A convenient sampling technique was implied to collect the data. Descriptive statistics, t-test, one-way ANOVA were used to analyze the data. Findings revealed that the student's interests and hobbies, and student's personality and tendencies attained the highest value among the internal factors of career choice. Furthermore, the future progress and advancement opportunities, job security were the prominent external factors. Findings showed that the internal factors were significantly associated with economic situation. The findings will assist school counselors to raise the self-awareness to the importance of the internal and external factors, thus students may make better future career decisions.

Keywords

Palestinian high school students, career choice, COVID-19, Israel

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused considerable changes in all fields of life and turned into a global economic crisis, putting at risk the health, jobs and incomes of millions of people around the world. Young people have experienced crucial changes to their daily routines in both their psychosocial and academic lives, with those who are currently engaged in the career planning and decision-making process being especially impressionable (Schwartz & Cymrot, 2020). Although data exploring this topic is limited, studies conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic have shown that young people are

experiencing certain difficulties and challenges in their career planning and decision-making processes. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased their uncertainty with respect to their career opportunities (Georgievska & Uragichi, 2020).

Career choice is not a single decision made at one point in time and it is a series of decisions taken by a person during the course of life about a career (Samarakoon & Weerasinghe, 2021). Higher education is considered a critical phase of identity building and career exploration (Shin et al., 2018). Thus, it plays a remarkable role in determining students' future careers. The choice of education is perhaps the first highly important decision that young people have to make for themselves in the developed world. Each education paves the way for certain vocational paths, and the choice has a lasting influence on the young adult's life. After high school, students attempt to find academic majors that suit their abilities, interests, and future vocational goals in order to maximize the possibility of getting a degree (Vedel, 2016). Higher education is of great interest among Palestinian society within Israel, and this is noted by the increasing number of enrolments in higher education institutions inside and outside Israel, as well as through the diversity of subjects taught by Palestinian students.

The choice of university majors in many societies is considered a critical decision in a student's life, which affects the individual's personal, social and professional future. The choice of university major is based mainly on economic factors related to the future profession and labor market trends. Social and family factors and the social status of the future profession, academic factors related to the nature of the subjects, the type of specialization and the conditions of admission. Furthermore, personal factors are related to the student's achievements and mental abilities. Finally, psychological factors are related to motivation, desires, tendencies, interests, personal values and decision-making styles (Ali & Da'as, 2018).

The selection of a major in university is part of a career choice, and this is an important topic that has been studied by many researchers before entering a university (Afful, 2019 & Suryadi et al., 2020). The selection of a university major is an important aspect of students' career development. Selecting a major according to interest and talent positively contributes to someone's success during university study and after graduating. The selection of a university major is not only influenced by interest aspects but also by many other factors, such as family, gender, financial reasons, quality of education, academic achievement, peers, culture, and job opportunity (Aryani & Umar, 2020). Each university offers a large variety of majors or study programs. Mistakes in selecting a major at university level can negatively affect students' future careers (Aryani et al., 2016). Many students encounter discomfort with the majors they choose, resulting in drop outs from university. The ability to choose a major is fundamental to be offered to students when they are in senior high school. The majority of high school graduates face difficulty in selecting a suitable and promising specialty which qualifies them for the future career. The choice of an inappropriate major will cause dissatisfaction with the future career (Zhang, 2007).

Career choice is a complicated process in which numerous factors interact and affect decision-making. There are three major factors: firstly, clear understanding of self, attitudes, skills, interests, values, resources. Secondly, knowledge of requirements, conditions of success, priorities, and disadvantages, opportunities and prospects in different lines of work; thirdly, true reasoning for the relationship of these two sets of facts (Mulhall, 2014). Factors influencing this process are numerous. All of these factors, intertwined, influence adolescents' career planning and decision-making. The career planning process consists of the ongoing iterative process of understanding oneself, setting career goals, skills, and searching for appropriate career options (Mckay, 2019). While, Lent et al. (2000) points out to two significant factors influencing university majors: internal and external. Internal factors include families, interest, skills, values, culture, self-efficacy, outcome expectations, academic achievement, and gender, while external factors refer to the quality of education, financial payment, professional prestige, job security, job opportunity, professional development opportunities, and financial constraints.

Some problems were found related to the selection of majors in university. Aryani et al. (2016) found that many senior high school students experience difficulties in choosing a major or department in university. The lack of information and guidance from teachers and parents are the primary factors behind this situation. Therefore, career guidance from educational counselors can be very helpful for students. There are many students who end in majors not right for them, causing them to feel uncomfortable and stressed during university learning (James, 2018). In Israeli universities, students have to sit for the Psychometric entrance exam, but many have been facing difficulties in deciding a major based on their interests.

Palestinian society in Israel is seen as a collective society on an individualism collectivism continuum (Dwairy, 2004). In recent years, Palestinian society in Israel has been undergoing changes in areas such as the changing status of the father as head of family, the weakening of the status of the clan and the extended family, the strengthening of education and of higher education, and budding changes in the status of women (Al-Haj, 1996). It is noticeable that the advances in technology and the increase in knowledge have caused massive changes in Palestinian community in Israel. With these changes, individuals require 21st century skills to join the labour market successfully.

The main objective of the current study is to investigate main factors influencing Palestinian high school students most when thinking about choosing a future career. The next goal is to find any differences in terms of gender and socioeconomic situation when it comes to career choice factors. Thus, the first research hypothesis stated that internal and external factors differently influence students in choosing their careers. The second research hypothesis stated that there are differences in internal and external factors according to gender and socioeconomic situation.

1.1 Theoretical Background

Making a career choice is a defining phase in every student's life. Students have to consider several factors before arriving at a decision (Kazi & Akhlaq, 2017). Many students face difficulties when selecting a university major. School educational counselors are charge of guiding students in selecting a major, according to their interests and academic achievements. However, many high school students are confused about deciding on a major. It usually happens because the major they choose becomes the first gate to their future career (Aryani & Umar, 2020).

The decision of selecting an academic major is one of the most important decisions made in one's life as it determines his future. High school students choose the major that fulfils the future life requirements and keep in line with the social, economic, and technological developments. The career choice is considered as an individual as well as a social issue. At the individual level, it determines basic issues in one's life, and at the social level, it helps the person to get a secured job and progress to a higher position. The success of the students depends on their right selection of the specialty appropriate to their interests and competencies. This success is closely connected to their success in the future career (Alsalkhi, 2018). The major selection becomes a complicated task since the decision is influenced by various factors that are categorized into extrinsic and intrinsic groups, or a combination of both (Ahmed et al., 2017; Janiec et al., 2019; Montgomery et al., 2019; Wati et al., 2019). These factors can be either inhibitors or supporters for a student's choice of career in the future. Earlier studies focused on comparing between variables of parents, peers, finances, academic achievement, gender equality, quality of education, interest and the career selected by the student. Other variables investigated in developing the research instrument were culture and job opportunity, based on studies conducted by (Maree, 2020, Ray et al., 2019, Ulas & Yildirim, 2019), which reveal that both variables also potentially influence students in selecting their university major.

Some studies have pointed out some internal factors influencing students' major selection for the future, such as personal interests, talents, academic achievement (Van Overschelde & Piatt, 2020). Interests, talents, and personality are individual variables that correlate with factors that might influence students in selecting majors (Adams, 2014). Personal interest was highlighted as the major factor that influenced career choice in individualistic settings, and the youth were more independent in their career decision making (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018; Al-Abri & Kooli 2018) indicate that financial benefits and personal interests have significant influence on students' career decision. Some earlier studies have suggested that personal interests and academic achievements influence students' career choices (Kazi & Akhlaq, 2017). Interest can be defined as the tendency directing students to choosing a major, since they are happy and interested in their choice (Atitsogbe et al., 2018). Besides interest, this study also proves that academic achievement is also a consideration when a student is deciding a major.

On the other hand, external factors influencing students include the relationship between parents and

children. Interpersonal factors such as family and peers also play an essential role (Kumara et al., 2019). A survey conducted by the University of California Davis, The United States in 2004, on 3187 students showed that 60% of students stated that their family was involved in their education (Park, 2004). In this case, they also consider their children when choosing a major in university. According to Humayon et al. (2018), the selection of a career is also influenced by the parents' ability to provide funding for their children's education. The parents, as single financiers, have significant power in selecting major and future careers for their children. However, this is contrary to a study by Peel et al. (2018), which states that the student's career decision coordinate significantly with their necessities, such as personal interests and talents as well as academic achievement.

The opportunity for professional development is considered a major career influential factor (Guan et al., 2015). Youth are attracted by jobs that offer them future opportunities to develop and get other prestigious and advanced positions. Consequently, this will open new horizons for them to make their dreams come true. In addition, the importance of job security is a remarkable component in career choice. Employees who feel secure on the job will have a sense of job stability and effectively contribute to the organization's growth. Where workers are effective and mentally stable to do their jobs, managers can rest assured of quality work and attaining organizational objectives faster (Achim et al., 2019). However, job insecurity can significantly affect employees' physical health and mental well-being. Job insecurity can lead to anxiety and burnout. What is more, working condition is an influential factor that plays a key role in career decision process. It can be characterized in tremendous classifications, such as the physical settings in an association, attributes of employment, organization features and settings (Chai et al., 2013). Some study findings showed that individuals placed greater importance on working setting in selecting their career (Achim et al., 2019). Finally, Akosah-Twumasi et al. (2018) found out that financial remuneration was identified as the most influential extrinsic factor in career choice decision, and income was considered as an important component of life. Al-Abri and Kooli (2018) also asserts that financial benefits have significant influence on students' career decision. Moreover, many students choose a university major based on their friends' suggestions, and even some of them follow their friends to choose the same major. This condition is referred to as a conformity attitude. Studies above show that the factors influencing students to choose a major are varied, because they also depend on the development of knowledge and technology. These two aspects are very influential on students' attitudes. Other factors that can influence students career choice are financial support, gender, and job opportunities (Aguado et al., 2015). Many students choose a major considering whether it can truly prepare them for a good job and train them in social skills. Furthermore, high school students also consider the estimated cost of the major. For example, the medical science program is quite expensive compared to other programs. Students from the lower economic families choose a program according to the family's financial abilities. This condition is assumed to influence

students being more selective in choosing a study program at university. One of the studies conducted to examine the influence of several factors such as parental education, profession and income on the career decisions of 432 students from two public sector universities in Lahore city. The results show the parents influence as most significant, followed by influence from peers, gender, print media, financial reasons, interest and others (Kazi & Akhlaq, 2017).

Based on the results of previous research, the current study is the first of its kind to reveal how Palestinian high school students in Israel perceive the influence of internal and external factors on career choice process after the COVID -19 crisis. In addition, gender differences research has also proven to be controversial. Thus, there is a need for this research to become useful for researchers and educational leaders. The literature also reflects a lack of studies investigating the factors affecting career choice and its relation to choosing the academic majors among Palestinian high school students in Israel especially after COVID-19 outbreak. There are, however, few existing studies discussing the factors affecting career choice focusing on Palestinian high school students.

2. Method

2.1 The Study Design

The researcher used the descriptive approach to collect and analyse data. This is due to its relevance to the nature of the study, as the descriptive approach studies the reality and describes it accurately.

2.2 Participants

A total of 455 Palestinian high school students took part in the study; the researcher used a convenience sample.

Table 1. Sample Distribution according to Demographic Variables

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
Sex	Male	118	25.9
	female	337	74.1
Math level	3-point level	104	22.9
	4-point level	131	28.6
	5-point level	220	48.4
English Level	3-point level	44	9.7
	4-point level	120	26.4
	5-point level	291	64.0
Economic situation	difficult	21	4.6
	average	110	24.2
	good	171	37.6

	excellent	153	33.6
Parents work	Both work	252	55.4
	Don't work	19	4.2
	One works	184	40.4
Total		455	100

2.3 Measure

Two tools were used to test the study variables:

Demographic variables questionnaire: This instrument was created by the researcher and included self-reported questions for gender, English and math levels, and socio-economic status.

The Career Choice Questionnaire (CCQ) (Chai et al., 2013) has been modified by the researcher. The developer presented the questionnaire to five experts who confirmed it and reported internal reliability of $\alpha = .72$ on the Cronbach Index. The questionnaire consists of 14 items on a 5-point Likert-type scale: 1(never) to 5(always). The questionnaire has been divided into two major dimensions: internal career choice and external career choice. Internal Career Choice Questionnaire (ICCQ) was constructed using six items including family influence, interest, academic reasons, personal skills, values, competences, the overall scale of the Cronbach's alpha coefficients was ($\alpha = .73$). External Career Choice Questionnaire (ECCQ) included eight items including the place of academic institution, financial reasons, work condition, and job opportunity, salary, occupation prestige, with the Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = .70$).

2.4 Research Process

The study included Palestinian high school seniors studying at some Palestinian prestigious schools in Israel during the academic year 2022-2023. Data collection was done through filling an anonymous online questionnaire. All participants were aware of the purpose of the study and its relation to COVID-19 pandemic. The participants gave their prior informed consent. Participation in this study was voluntary and no incentive was given to the participants.

2.5 Statistical Analysis

Means, standard deviations, and maximum and minimum values for factors affecting internal and external career choice were calculated first. Alpha of Cronbach calculated for the research tools. To test the research hypotheses, a t-test and one-way ANOVA analyses were performed to test the study hypothesis. Statistical analyses were performed by SPSS version 26.

3. Results

In order to examine the levels of the study variables, means and standard deviations were calculated first, along with minimum and maximum values for the factors affecting career choice as detailed in Table 2.

Table 2. Mean, Standard Deviation, Minimum and Maximum Values for Internal Factors

Dimensions	Factors	N	Min	Max	M	SD
Internal career choice	Student's interests and hobbies	455	1	5	4.60	.66
	Student's personality and tendencies	455	1	5	4.55	.73
	Student's values and beliefs	455	1	5	4.48	.76
	Student's Abilities, competences and skills	455	1	5	4.29	.81
	Parents' desire	455	1	5	2.75	.12
	A career similar to parents' one	455	1	5	1.46	.96
	Total	455	1.17	5	3.68	.47

Table 2 shows that internal choice factor "Student's interests and hobbies" value comes first, and is relatively very high (M=4.60, SD=.66), Whereas the items "Parents' desire" and "A career similar to parents'" attained the lowest score. (M=2.75, SD=.12), (M=1.46, SD=.96), respectively.

Table 3. Mean, Standard Deviation, Minimum and Maximum Values for External Factors

Dimensions	Factors	N	Min	Max	M	SD
External Career Choice	Future Promotion and Advancement opportunities	455	1	5	4.62	.65
	Job security	455	1	5	4.44	.75
	Working conditions	455	1	5	4.37	.77
	Occupation salary & income	455	1	5	4.35	.81
	Job opportunities & availability	455	1	5	4.22	.94
	Social prestige & reputation	455	1	5	3.97	1.1
	Study period	455	1	5	2.68	1.20
	location of academic institution	455	1	5	2.38	1.31
	Total	455	1.63	.53	3.88	.53

Table 3 shows that "future progress and advancement opportunities" attained the first place among the external career choice factors (M=4.68, SD=.65). However, the "location of academic institution" comes last (M=2.38, SD=1.31).

Table 4. Means, Standard Deviation, Independent Samples T-test Values according to Gender

Variable	Dimensions	Male (118)		Female (337)		t	p
		M	SD	M	SD		
df = 453							
Career Choice	Internal Career Choice	3.63	.52	3.71	.45	-1.317	.190
	External Career Choice	3.83	.49	3.90	.55	-1.100	.272

*p<.05

Table 4 shows that there is no statistically significant difference in internal career choice values between male and female Palestinian high school students. Although female students' values ((M=3.71, SD=.45) were higher than male students (M=3.63, SD=.52). The results indicate no significant effect for gender (t (453) =-1.317, p=.190).

Furthermore, Table 4 indicates that there is no statistically significant difference in external career choice values between male and female Palestinian high school students, (t (453) =-1.100, p=.272).

Table 5. One-way ANOVA Test Results for the Significant Differences of Internal and External Career Choice Means according to Economic Situation

		Sum of Squares		df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Internal Career Choice	Between Groups	2.280	4	.570	2.605	.035*	
	Within Groups	98.480	450	.219			
	Total	100.760	454				
External Career Choice	Between Groups	1.772	4	.443	1.560	.184	
	Within Groups	127.794	450	.284			
	Total	129.566	454				

*p<.05

Table 5 displays one-way ANOVA test results which reveal that there is a statistically significant differences in internal career choice in the economic situation, (F (4, 450) = [2.605], p = .035*). However, the table shows no statistically significant differences in external career choice in the economic situation (F (4, 450) = [1.560], p=.184).

4. Discussion

The purpose of this study is to identify the factors that high school students have used in examining career choices among Palestinian high school in Israel.

The first research hypothesis stated that internal and external factors differently influence students in choosing their careers. Regarding the internal factors, student's interests, personality and tendencies were ranked in the first places. It is notable that identifying and understanding individual's interests, values and personality is considered as a foundation for career decision making. The first step in identifying a career path is by assessing and understanding the interests and skills. Interest can explain the difference between getting a job and pursuing a career an individual love. Individuals who choose majors and careers that are closely aligned with their interests, skills, values and personality tend to be more satisfied in their careers and enjoy greater career success are more productive and happier. The current findings are consistent with previous studies, which assert that personal interests have significant influence on students' career decision (Ahmed et al, 2017; Al-Abri & Kooli, 2018; Assanbayeva, 2020; Humayon, et al., 2018; Kazi, & Akhlaq 2017; Van Overschelde & Piatt, 2020). Aligning one's work environments with his or her interests and personality traits will not only increase satisfaction at work but also enhance the potential for achieving career success (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018). When a career is aligned with one's interests and values, there may have more motivation to devote effort into developing relevant knowledge and skills, set higher career-related goals, and take actions to achieve those goals. All of these behaviors could help individuals improve their performance at work and enhance their career potential. Employees whose career interests are congruent with their jobs are more likely to be satisfied with work and find intrinsic motivation to stay in the work environment longer. Interest is a key motivating factor for work. If employees are interested in their work, they will find it more enjoyable, be more motivated to learn about it, develop relevant skills, work hard, and persist through hard challenges. The opportunity to use one's skills in a meaningful way is one of the most significant components in career choice process and in job satisfaction as well. Skills are learned abilities. Students often have far more skills than they realize, since they tend to take many of their skills for granted. Skills such as self-management skills, transferable skills. Lastly, very often, career interests align closely with one's strengths. Thus, choosing a career that uses one's best skills prevents a situation where hard work only leads to frustration.

The findings of this study regarding family influence show low values. These findings are not consistent with previous studies which show the significant influence of parents and family members on career choice process such as (Aryani & Umar, 2020; Humayon, et al. 2018; Jemini-Gashi & Kadriu, 2022; Kazi, & Akhlaq, 2017). It is obvious that Palestinian high school students are now aware of the complexity of new reality which make them think deeply about their future career, preferring personal interests and values on family's desire. And that the high school students' career choice decision

coordinate significantly with their necessities, such as personal interests, talents and academic achievements.

Regarding the external factors, the findings of the current study showed that future progress and advancement opportunities were ranked first, as security of employment comes second. Whereas, study period and the location of academic institution got low values. The finding of this study has highlighted the personal and professional growth as an important external factor. Many high school students look for meaningful work that matters. They enjoy jobs that offer attractive opportunities for personal and professional development. When employees are allowed to develop an array of skills and advance, they tend to be more satisfied with their jobs than those who don't have such opportunities. The finding of this study is not consistent with Ahmed et al., (2017). The findings of the current study shed light on job security as a vital factor when choosing a career. The economic and social crisis that many people experienced during the global pandemic such as increasing unemployment and job loss has caused high unemployment rates among many employees in several sectors. This period was characterized by stress, anxiety, ambiguity and uncertainty. This fact makes many high schools perceive the significance of job security and think twice before making any decision. In addition, job security comes with a feeling of protection against things like layoffs, economic downfalls, changing employers, and other factors that could impact employment. What is more, career opportunities are a remarkable factor. Besides, considering the plentifulness of relevant career opportunities available in individual's chosen field is a wise idea. Highly competitive career fields or restrictive positions could leave people searching for long periods of time.

Lastly, the findings of the current study assert that financial benefits have significant influence on students' career decision. These findings are in line with Al-Abri and Kooli (2018), Humayon et al. (2018), and Kazi and Akhlaq (2017). It is remarkable that employees' salary and benefits compensation package remains an objective indicator of how well the company appreciates them. This characteristic of a career is important to overall happiness. Employee's morale is directly related to compensation packages and whether workers feel they are being paid fairly. When employees work hard but still struggle to pay bills, they are more likely to look around for better opportunities. Similarly, employees feeling disposable or exploited aren't appropriate to stick around. These findings are in line with those of previous studies indicating a link between salary and benefits, working environment and job security were correlated with the career decision making (Achim et al., 2019).

The second research stated that there are differences in internal and external factors according to gender and socio-economic status. Regarding gender, the findings showed no statistically significant difference in internal and external factors. Previous studies showed mixed trends. It was claimed that that gender does not have such effects on their choice (Chukwu et al., 2022; Osi, 2018; Sarwar et al., 2015; Siddiky & Akter, 2021). While Korkmaz (2015) shows that gender, school type, parents' educational level has

significant effects on students' career choices. One could assume that Palestinian high school students, boys and girls alike, are aware enough to the importance of internal and external factors while choosing the future career. What is more, one can conclude that the family support, the counselling guidance and self-awareness make both have similar values.

However, it is notable that there are significant differences regarding socio-economic status. The present findings showed statistically significant differences in internal factors only. Osi (2018) claims that socio-economic status has significant effect on students' career choice. Korkmaz (2015) shows that educational level, and family income have significant effects on students' career choices. While Famolu (2020) found out that socio-economic status has not have significant effect on students' career choice. The present results could be explained in a way that students belonging to low socio-economic status think that internal factors such as personal interests and skills are more influential and decisive. In other words, these high school students consider more the internal locus of control as a central variable that may affect their career choice process.

4.1 Conclusion

The results of this study are believed to contribute to practice related to career decision-making especially after the COVID-19 global crisis. It would be effective for psychological counsellors working in the field to consider these factors as a variable that may affect students' experience in career decision-making. This study shows that career decision-making will be influenced by the fact that students have both internal or external factors as well. In addition, this present study will contribute to the literature in case it is performed on a larger sample. In addition, the study was limited to the students in general high school education. A study of the vocational high school could be more useful in that it may provide comparative information.

The main contribution of the present study is its approach to investigate the which factors are influential the most among Palestinian high school students in Israel and its unique contribution is to examine the most influential factors on career choice. This study also provides a valuable contribution to the counselors in Palestinian high schools in their work in academic guidance and thus help high school students with different decision-making styles and different personal traits in selecting appropriate university majors. This study may also be a valuable tool for high school management working to improve students' decision-making skills. Thus, school counselors would find it beneficial for their working field to give high school student the suitable guidance.

Beyond that, it contributes to deepen the knowledge about the importance of numerous factors in career choice process, thus it could contribute to decrease the dropout rates among undergraduate students. This is the first study conducted among this population and the findings align with some studies in different societies. This contribution is likely to have positive implications for their students. This study can be used as a starting point providing school counselors profound understanding and professional

career guidance services. Therefore, the first practical contribution is to establish workshops for school counsellors in order to raise the significance of these factors while guiding high school students.

4.2 Research Limitations

The current study has some significant limitations. First, the sample is a convenience one and has not been conducted randomly. As a result, generalization of the results is questionable. Thus, there is a need for more research based on random sampling to increase the validity of the current findings. Second, this study only depends on Palestinian high school students living in one geographical area in Israel. What is more, one of the restrictions of this study is the fact that only few selective high school students took part. Increasing the diversity of students and academic institutions would provide a comprehensive picture of the present reality. Also, some data was obtained through self-administered questionnaires, which could introduce response bias. Hence, there is a need for future studies to test the research variables, to take other internal and external variables into considerations, and to deeply investigate the relations taking into considerations of these limitations. The findings should be confirmed by prospective cohort studies in the future. More research should be conducted in other academic institutions and majors in these variables.

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