

Advancing Pronunciation Accuracy through the Use of an AI-Powered Learning Application “HelloTalk”

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the optimization of English pronunciation skill through the use of HelloTalk, an AI-powered learning app. The research employed a quasi-experimental design, involving 17 English Department students of Universitas Serambi Mekkah as the research sample. Data were collected through pretest and posttest, assessing the aspect of pronunciation accuracy. After the pretest, a four-week intervention was given to the students through the use of HelloTalk to see if their English pronunciation competence could improve. The data was analyzed statistically using SPSS 16.0, and the statistical analysis showed a significant improvement in their pronunciation skill before and after the intervention, indicated by the mean scores of the pre-test and post-test (49.71 and 79.12, respectively). The findings also showed a strong correlation between the use of HelloTalk and students' pronunciation skills, particularly after the use of HelloTalk features, such as Partner Matching, Text Chat, Voice Messages, Voice and Video Calls, Moments Feed, and Community Interaction that enable students to engage in direct verbal communication and exchange messages with native speakers of English. Pronunciation Help with voice recognition and Correction Feature also AI-driven features that also contribute to the considerable improvement. This research is expected to contribute to the existing body of literature by providing insight that HelloTalk can be an effective learning tool to increase articulation accuracy in English. Future research could explore the effect of HelloTalk on other pronunciation aspects, such as intonation, stress, rhythm, and pitch.

Keywords: *AI, English, HelloTalk, learning app, pronunciation.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Pronunciation plays an important part of foreign language learning because it directly affects the learner's ability to communicate. Difficulties in pronunciation skills can reduce self-confidence, limit social interactions, and affect the speaker's credibility and ability. In the communicative approach that is now the focus of English as a foreign language (EFL) learning, increasing attention is being paid to pronunciation because of its role in supporting overall communicative competence. In a study conducted by [Fraser \(2000\)](#), it was found that many ESL students face significant pronunciation difficulties, despite years of study. These difficulties often have a negative impact on various aspects of their lives, especially in professional settings where the ability to communicate well is instrumental. This problem highlights the need to pay more attention to the English pronunciation challenges faced by EFL students.

The issues that emerged as a result of pronunciation inaccuracies are numerous. [Hunt-Gómez and Navarro-Pablo \(2020\)](#), for example, reported that the use of a short vowel instead of a long vowel (e.g., 'ship' pronounced as 'sheep') has confused listeners and created a different interpretation. Another research by [Darcy \(2018\)](#) also revealed that pronunciation errors tend to receive negative social perceptions and further hinder career advancement. Intelligible and accurate speech, otherwise, is associated with good social acceptance and professional development. [Derwing and Rossiter \(2002\)](#) and [Nguyen et al. \(2021\)](#) discovered that EFL learners who frequently repeat themselves due to hesitation or an attempt to correct their pronunciation have led to communication breakdowns during their social interactions.

According to [Mora and Levkina \(2017\)](#), poor pronunciation can be improved with good learning strategies and tools for speech analysis. There have been numerous online platforms available nowadays to improve pronunciation, such as TikTok, Instagram, Kahoot, Duolingo, Elsa Speak, Hello English, and HelloTalk. Empirical studies have also been carried out to evaluate the effectiveness of the first six mentioned apps in terms of their capability in pronunciation advancement, as described in the Literature Review section. Yet, there is still very limited research investigating the effectiveness of HelloTalk, an AI-powered tool, in developing EFL learners' pronunciation accuracy. Therefore, this study specifically seeks to answer the following question:

1. Does using an AI-powered language exchange app like HelloTalk significantly improve students' pronunciation skills?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Pronunciation

Pronunciation is the very basis of oral communication, especially in comprehension and interaction. The ability to pronounce words correctly is fundamental for intelligibility and for any confidence that a speaker can enjoy. Pronunciation is considered the foundation of language acquisition and hence is part of the main component of second language acquisition. This literature review discusses the role of pronunciation in language learning and highlights factors affecting its development.

Pronunciation, according to [Celce-Murcia et al. \(1996\)](#), comprises five key parts, where each part complements each other. The parts are sounds (segmental), stress,

intonation, rhythm, and connected speech features (suprasegmental). Pronunciation is key to effective intelligibility. [Derwing and Munro \(2015\)](#) state that pronunciation errors can reduce understanding, even when grammatical and lexical accuracy has been achieved. Thus, in language learning, pronunciation needs to receive special attention. According to [Morley \(1991\)](#), good pronunciation strengthens a speaker's confidence to enable smooth communication interpersonally, especially in a multilingual environment. The findings mentioned above view pronunciation as an indispensable skill for attaining communicative competence. Exposure to native-like pronunciation enhances auditory processing, enabling learners to differentiate subtle phonemic distinctions ([Thornbury, 2006](#)). This interplay emphasizes the integrative nature of pronunciation in overall language proficiency.

Pronunciation acquisition is influenced by many different factors. For example, [Lenneberg's Critical Period Hypothesis \(1967\)](#) suggests that neuroplasticity allows younger learners to more easily acquire native-like pronunciation. Adult learners, on the other hand, may experience difficulties caused by fossilized phonological patterns ([Selinker, 1972](#)). A learner's first language also plays an important role in pronunciation. Contrastive analysis research, such as that conducted by [Flege \(1995\)](#), has shown that phonemic differences between the L1 and the target language can lead to persistent mispronunciations.

Exposure is an important factor in pronunciation development. Those who gain more opportunities to be exposed to an authentic language environment tend to achieve better pronunciation performance ([Dörnyei, 2001](#)). In addition, sociolinguistic factors, such as issues of identity and the desire to associate with a target language community, influence learners' willingness to use native-like pronunciation ([Piske et al., 2001](#)).

Various instruments have been developed to improve English pronunciation in this digital age. Tools such as speech recognition software and mobile applications offer learners individualized feedback, thus improving their phonological accuracy ([Neri et al., 2008](#)). These technological innovations provide solutions for addressing pronunciation challenges in diverse learning contexts.

2.2 Various Online Platforms for Learning English Pronunciation

In the current era of globalization and modern technological developments, foreign language learning is increasingly easy to access with the existence of various online platforms for English language learning. One of them is TikTok which allows users to access English through English content made in the form of short videos accompanied by catchy music, filter stickers, and some other creative features. Research by [Bahri et al. \(2022\)](#) found that TikTok has a high number of users, especially young people utilizing this platform to obtain information presented in an interesting way. The easily accessible and creatively delivered contents have contributed to the increased understanding of English ([Ariantini et al., 2021](#)). They do not only focus on the entertainment aspect, but also the educational aspect. TikTok is also an interactive and collaborative platform engaging users with the same interests, thereby creating an effective and solid learning community. Learning content on TikTok can be accessed anytime and anywhere via mobile devices, making it easy to use for students who want to improve their speaking skills flexibly. The TikTok application also has duet and comment features, making it easier for users to interact directly about learning with other users. Apart from that,

TikTok can also be a source of inspiration for users to provide their own English learning content, which facilitates the understanding of the material being studied.

Another popular platform used for learning English is Instagram. [Sinaga et al. \(2023\)](#) reported that socializing on Instagram can improve students' English pronunciation. Through a variety of educational content available on this platform, ranging from learning videos, language podcasts, to learning communities, students can interact with English more naturally and consistently. Apart from that, Instagram has interactive features, such as reels and stories. By using this feature, students can interact with English naturally and consistently. Instagram has not only been a means of entertainment but also a valuable tool for developing English language skills, especially in terms of pronunciation.

Kahoot is another popular app that can be used for developing EFL learners' pronunciation. Research conducted by [Yürük \(2020\)](#) on second-year students at an advanced level from Translation and Interpretation in the Department at Selçuk University Turkey revealed that the EFL pronunciation skills of the experimental group were developed as a result of using Kahoot. The authors further stated that the Kahoot application can be used in various stages of English learning to develop English pronunciation skills.

In addition to Kahoot, there is the Duolingo application used to enhance students' English pronunciation skills. [Rusli et al. \(2023\)](#) found that Duolingo effectively improved students' pronunciation. Prior to its use, the average pronunciation test score for the experimental class using Duolingo was higher than the control class. This is shown by the average pretest score for the experimental class of 15.694 and the control class of 14.417. After receiving treatment with the Duolingo application, the average score of the experimental class increased to 18.944. Meanwhile, the average score for the control class that did not receive treatment increased to 16.305. This indicates that the use of the Duolingo application makes a positive contribution to improving students' pronunciation abilities. This research shows that the interactive features and fast feedback provided by Duolingo provide an excellent contribution to facilitating effective pronunciation learning.

Besides, we also have the Elsa Speak application which is a suitable tool to improve pronunciation skills in learning English on your own. The research by [Laepasa \(2024\)](#) on students' perception of the use of the Elsa Speak app for independent English language learning, specifically in improving pronunciation skills showed a good perception of the application, with 98.6% responding positively to the use of this application. It is concluded that students' perceptions of the use of the Elsa Speak application in improving pronunciation skills in learning English independently are very good.

Hello English is a different English learning application, which allows users to learn English through interactive modules. The research by [Agustiana \(2021\)](#) investigated the effectiveness of the Hello English app in improving the pronunciation skills of eighth-grade students at SMPN 1 Sumarorong. A pre-experimental design with a pre-test and post-test was employed. The study involved 30 students from class VIII-D. The mean score improved from 42.33 in the pre-test to 82.16 in the post-test. The result of the research shows that Hello English application significantly increased students' pronunciation ability after treatment. This research proves that using the Hello English application significantly improves students' pronunciation skills after carrying out pre-test and post-tests. Data research shows that the use of Hello English has a good effect on improving students' pronunciation skills.

Another app that recently gained popularity among EFL learners is HelloTalk, an AI-driven learning tool offering the opportunity to develop English skills, including pronunciation. However, there is still limited research about the effect of this app on pronunciation skills, thereby driving us to investigate it empirically.

2.3 HelloTalk Application

HelloTalk is an online application developed by [Ngai \(2012\)](#) that facilitates foreign language learners via devices. It is downloadable for free and provides users access to communicate directly with native speakers and language experts from various countries ([Widiastuti & Citta, 2024](#)). This app supports more than 150 languages and has more than 50 million members worldwide, connecting language learners with native speakers from various countries and allowing for pronunciation practice in a more authentic context. It has features such as Partner Matching, Text Chat, Voice Messages, Voice and Video Calls, Moments Feed, and Community Interaction that enable students to broaden their network and get an enjoyable and interactive learning experience directly with native speakers of English. There is another feature driven by AI called Pronunciation Help with voice recognition that can assist students in increasing their articulation accuracy of English vocabulary. The Voice Message feature, in particular, allows users to record and listen back to their own pronunciation directly, then compare it with those of the native speakers, as well as ask for their direct input regarding the pronunciation. The Real-Time Correction Feature is another AI-power feature providing the opportunity for the users to correct mistakes and enrich vocabulary. Meanwhile, the Community Interaction feature offers the chance to be part of the English learning community, providing support and motivation for users to continue learning and developing their English. With consistent practice using this app, it is not impossible for learners to reach native-like pronunciation.

However, as mentioned earlier, research investigating the effects of using HelloTalk on students' pronunciation is still scarce, hence encouraging the researchers to carry out an empirical research to investigate its effectiveness in enhancing students' English articulations.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

This research used a quasi-experimental method. Participants involved were 17 English language students at Universitas Serambi Mekkah who had never learned pronunciation with HelloTalk previously. Data were collected using pretest and posttest. Pretest was carried out to measure their initial pronunciation accuracy while posttest was administered after they received treatment using HelloTalk for four weeks. In the pretest, they were asked to pronounce 20 English words without the help of HelloTalk, whereas in the posttest, they were required to pronounce the same words after learning using HelloTalk. The pronunciation would be assessed based on the aspect of accuracy. The data gained from the pretest and posttest were analyzed quantitatively using SPSS 16.0.

There were two hypotheses made to be tested quantitatively in this research, as follows:

1. Null Hypothesis (H_0): There is no significant difference in students' pronunciation skill before and after learning using HelloTalk; and

2. Alternative Hypothesis (H_a): There is a significant difference in the score of students' pronunciation skill before and after learning using HelloTalk.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Results

4.1.1 Scoring Categorization

Prior to data calculation, a scoring categorization was established to categorize students' pretest and posttest scores as follows.

Table 1. The scoring categorization.

<i>Intervals</i>	<i>Categorization</i>
81-100	Excellent
71-80	Good
61-70	Sufficient
41-60	Poor
1-40	Very Poor

From Table 1, it can be seen that "Excellent" scores range from 81-100. Those who received scores 71-80 belonged to the "Good" category, and below this category is "Sufficient", with scores ranging from 61-70. The students getting 41-60 were considered to have "Poor" pronunciation skill, while the lowest category is "Very Poor", with scores spanning from 0-40.

4.1.2 Pretest and Posttest Scores of the Students

The pretest and posttest scores of the students are illustrated in the following table:

Table 2. Pretest and posttest scores of the students.

<i>No</i>	<i>Students' Initials</i>	<i>Pretest Scores (X)</i>	<i>Posttest Scores (Y)</i>	<i>Difference (D = X-Y)</i>
1.	AA	55	85	30
2.	MR	45	80	35
3.	CAN	55	90	35
4.	NL	50	80	30
5.	NA	45	75	20
6.	GT	60	85	25
7.	TWF	65	90	25
8.	A	50	70	20
9.	I	40	65	25
10.	MF	60	85	25
11.	FOC	60	85	25
12.	AT	55	85	30
13.	M	40	80	40
14.	HH	35	70	35
15.	RA	45	75	30
16.	LJ	45	70	25
17.	NB	40	75	35

Table 2 reveals the pretest and posttest results of the students in terms of pronunciation skills. The highest score was 65 obtained by only a single student, which fell into the “Sufficient” category, whereas the rest received scores belonging to the “Poor” (41-60) and “Very Poor” category (0-40).

However, there was some change reflected in posttest results after treatment. The frequency of “Sufficient” scores increased four times, which interestingly occurred only once previously in the pretest. These “Sufficient” scores were obtained by four students who formerly got “Poor” and “Very Poor” scores in the initial test. Six students obtained “Good” scores in the posttest, whereas in the pretest, they had “Poor” scores and even lower. Surprisingly, seven students who previously achieved “Sufficient” and “Poor” scores can boost their scores to “Excellent” category after learning pronunciation using HelloTalk, showing a significant effect of the treatment.

4.1.3 Students’ Pronunciation Ability before Learning with HelloTalk

Pretest was administered to find out students’ initial capability in pronunciation. As shown in Table 2, the students had limited ability in English sound production with a number of inaccuracies.

Ninety four percent of the students received “Poor” and “Very Poor” scores in the pretest, implying that there is an urgent need to solve this problem through an intervention. Only a single student received a “Sufficient” score, and none of them obtained “Good” scores. The descriptive statistics, frequency as well as interval categories of the students’ pretest scores were carried out using SPSS 16.0 version, and the results are presented as follows:

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of students’ pretest scores.

<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>Mode</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Minimum Score</i>	<i>Maximum Score</i>	<i>Valid Missing</i>
17	49.71	50	45	8.74	35	65	0

Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics of 17 students were tested in terms of their pronunciation accuracy. It reveals the mean score achieved by the students was 49.71, while the median and mode were 50 and 45, respectively. The minimum score achieved was 35 whereas the maximum score was 65. The majority of the scores were around the “Poor” and “Very Poor” categories. Meanwhile, the standard deviation was 8.74, indicating moderate consistency with scores somewhat spreading out around the mean.

Table 4. Frequencies of the pretest scores.

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Valid Percent</i>	<i>Cumulative Percent</i>
Valid 35	1	5.9	5.9	5.9
40	3	17.6	17.6	23.5
45	4	23.6	23.6	47.1
50	2	11.8	11.8	58.9
55	3	17.6	17.6	76.5
60	3	17.6	17.6	94.1
65	1	5.9	5.9	100
Total	17	100.0	100.0	

From Table 4, it can be seen that the frequency of pretest scores. There were 1 student (5.9%) who received the score of 35; 3 students (17.6%) achieved 40; 4 of them got 45 (23.6%), 2 obtained 50 (11.8%), 3 acquired 55 (17.6%), 3 others received 60 (17,6%), and only 1 of them got 65 (5.9%).

Based on the interval scores of pretest or scoring categorization, their scores can be categorized as follows:

Table 5. Pretest interval scores.

<i>Intervals</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Categorization</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
81 – 100	0	Excellent	0%
71 – 80	0	Good	0%
61 – 70	1	Sufficient	5.8%
41 – 60	12	Poor	70.5%
0 – 40	4	Very Poor	23.5%

Table 5 shows the frequencies, percentage, and categorization of students' pretest scores. There is a significantly high percentage of students (70.5%) who received "Poor" scores, followed by 23.5% in the "Very Poor" category. This reflects their limited competence in pronouncing English words accurately, which may lead to communication breakdowns.

4.1.4 Students' Pronunciation Ability after Learning with HelloTalk

Posttest was administered after the intervention to find out the effect of HelloTalk on students' pronunciation development. Below is the table presenting descriptive statistics of students' posttest scores:

Table 6. Descriptive statistics of students' posttest scores.

<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>Mode</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Minimum Score</i>	<i>Maximum Score</i>	<i>Valid Missing</i>
17	79.12	80	85	7.32	65	90	0

Table 6 shows the descriptive statistics of 17 students' posttest scores after learning English pronunciation using HelloTalk. It was found that the mean score of the students in the posttest was 79.12. The median was 80 and mode was 85. Unlike in the pretest, the minimum score in the posttest was 65 while the maximum one was 90. The standard deviation found was 7.32, suggesting that the scores were mostly reasonably close to the mean. In other words, there was moderate consistency among the students' results even though there was some spread.

The following is the table of frequencies of the posttest scores:

Table 7. Frequencies of the posttest scores.

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Valid Percent</i>	<i>Cumulative Percent</i>
Valid 65	1	5.9	5.9	5.9
70	3	17.6	17.6	23.5
75	3	17.6	17.6	41.1
80	3	17.6	17.6	58.7
85	5	29.5	29.5	88.2
90	2	11.8	11.8	100
Total	17	100.0	100.0	

Table 7 presents the frequency of posttest scores. Contrary to the pretest, 65 became the minimum score in the posttest. There were only 1 student (5.9%) obtaining a score of 65. Three students (17.6%) got 70, followed by another three receiving 75 (17.6%). There were 3 others who obtained 80 (17.6%). Meanwhile, five of them acquired 85 (29.5%), and two got 90 (11.8%). Surprisingly, no one achieved a score below 65 in the posttest after learning pronunciation using HelloTalk.

Based on the interval scores or scoring categorization, the students' posttest scores can be categorized as follows:

Table 8. Posttest interval scores.

<i>Intervals</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Categorization</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
81 – 100	7	Excellent	41.2%
71 – 80	6	Good	35.3%
61 – 70	4	Sufficient	23.5%
41 – 60	0	Poor	0%
0 – 40	0	Very Poor	0%

Table 8 presents the frequencies, percentage, and categorization of students' posttest scores. After receiving treatment involving HelloTalk application, there is a significant change in the students' pronunciation scores. In the pretest, seven students (41.2%) got "Excellent" scores. Six students (35.3%) obtained "Good" scores, while the remaining 4 students (23.5%) acquired "Sufficient" scores. While most of them got "Poor" and "Very Poor" scores in the pretest, no one scored below 65 ("Sufficient" Category) in the posttest after the utilization of HelloTalk for learning English word articulation. These posttest results indicate the effectiveness of HelloTalk in boosting students' competence in English speech production.

4.1.5 Comparison of Descriptive Statistics between Pretest and Posttest

Having determined the descriptive statistics of pretest and posttest, we can compare them as follows:

Table 9. Comparison of descriptive statistics between pretest and posttest.

	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
Pretest	35	65	49,71	8.74
Posttest	65	90	79,12	7.32

Table 9 shows that posttest scores' mean were significantly higher (79.12) than the pretest scores' mean (49.71). The standard deviation of the pretest was also higher (8.72), indicating greater variability or differences in their initial performances. In other words, there was an unequal prior knowledge of English pronunciation. However, the standard deviation decreased to 7.32, implying that the intervention effectively reduces the gaps or differences among them. It also indicates that the students achieved better scores after the intervention was administered for four weeks.

4.2 Discussion

Statistical analysis of the pretest and posttest scores reveal several important findings. From the pretest scores (see Table 2), it was found that not a single student got "Good" scores. The majority of the scores fell into the "Poor" and "Very Poor" categories, and only one student received a "Sufficient" score. During the pretest, the students made many errors in pronouncing English words. For example, the word 'welcome' was pronounced as /'welkōm/ instead of /'welkəm/, 'comfortable' as /'kōmfōrtēb(ə)l/ instead of /'kəmfərdəb(ə)l/, and 'purse' as /pu:rs/ instead of /pərs/ prior to the intervention, indicating a serious issue regarding their incompetence in articulating English lexicon accurately and intelligibly. This is undeniably a major issue that requires a solution as it can lead to confusion and misunderstanding when the students communicate with others in English. As reported by Gilakjani (2016, as cited in [Nugraha et al., 2022](#)), pronunciation errors are one of the factors that contribute to communication barriers.

After four-week intervention involving learning pronunciation using HelloTalk, however, there were some significant changes. When "Sufficient" became the highest score category reached in the pretest, it turned out to be the lowest score category obtained in the posttest by four students. The majority of them (13 students), interestingly, received scores that fell into the "Good" and "Excellent" categories (See Table 8). This is surprising because no one had reached the latter two score categories previously. The reason behind this notable development seems to be the utilization of the HelloTalk's features involving Chat, Voice Messages, Video Messages, Partner Matching, Moments Feed, Error Correction, and Community Interaction during the intervention that exposed the students to accurate English pronunciation directly with the native speakers of English. In other words, HelloTalk provides a focused-practice environment that allows students to practice pronunciation with native speakers, receive feedback, and correct errors, resulting in minimal pronunciation inaccuracies. This is in line with [Mora and Levkina \(2017\)](#) statement that tools with task-based pronunciation can engage students to learn in a focused and practical manner.

The considerable effect of the HelloTalk treatment was shown when they were tested to pronounce the same words that appeared in the pretest. The accuracy increased when they pronounced the words, such as 'welcome' as /'welkəm/, 'comfortable' as /'kəmfərdəb(ə)l/, and 'purse' as /pərs/. Based on these results, we can conclude that the Null Hypothesis (H_0) was rejected and the Alternative Hypothesis (H_a) was accepted. The students' pronunciation accuracy increased substantially with the help of HelloTalk, enhancing the intelligibility and comprehensibility which play a role in communication ([Beatrice, 2020](#)).

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This research focused on evaluating the effectiveness of the HelloTalk application on the English pronunciation abilities of EFL learners at Universitas Serambi Mekkah. Through the statistical analysis of pretest and posttest scores, it was discovered that HelloTalk has the capability to improve students' competence in articulating English vocabulary in an accurate manner, indicated by the comparison of pretest mean (49.71) and posttest mean (79.12); hence, the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_a) was accepted. This research can be a valuable reference for academics and educational practitioners to consider involving the HelloTalk application in teaching pronunciation to students as it has interactive and useful features, such as Partner Matching, Text Chat, Voice Messages, Voice and Video Calls, Moments Feed, and Community Interaction that enable students to engage in direct verbal communication and exchange messages with their language counterparts who are native speakers of English. Pronunciation Help with voice recognition and Real-Time Correction Feature are AI-enabled features that can also contribute to the improvement. Pronunciation accuracy rates can increase as the students are exposed to native-like pronunciation.

This research, however, only focused on the accuracy aspect in pronunciation. There are other aspects that have not yet been explored, such as intonation, stress, rhythm, and pitch. Future research is thus suggested to explore the effectiveness of HelloTalk in improving these aspects.

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