A Comparison between Highly Motivated Learners and Unmotivated Learners' Learning Achievement: A Case Study of Business English Majors at Southeast Bangkok College

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Abstract

This study aimed to 1) analyze some crucial factors that impacted learners' achievement and failure in English language learning among 2nd year Business English majors at the faculty of Liberal Arts, Southeast Bangkok College, and 2) improve the quality of teaching and learning English for Thai students. The samples consisted of 16 English students aged between 19-21.There were 15 Thais and 1 Filipino. The research methodology comprised both descriptive analysis, and basic statistics. Data for analysis included students' journal writing after class, their participation and engagement in class activities, final grades, and the questionnaire. The findings revealed that their age did not make any significant learning outcomes, but their attitudes ,and motivation mattered. It was found that cognitive learning strategies, self-disciplines, positive attitudes and self-confidence were important factors among high achievers amounted to 12.50%,which was contrary to poorly achieved learners with low self-esteem amounted to 50% of the class. The results confirm Dornyei's claim (1998) that motivation is a key factor that influences the rate of success of second/foreign language (L2) learning.

Introduction

It is the fact that the knowledge of English can enhance students' communication skills either in speaking, listening, reading or writing. It is also believed that with English competence, students will be motivated to further acquire knowledge on their own outside class, especially in this speedy IT highway, in which abundance of free information in English is available online, encouraging access of unlimited useful sources of knowledge for further study as well as professional and personal development. Griva & Chostelidou (2011, p. 213) point out that " the impact of English as an International Language and the growing demand for EFL courses have highlighted the need for higher level of language sensitivity among EFL teachers and have established language awareness (LA)as an essential component in teacher education." In addition, Gene & Bada (2010, p. 145) explain the important role of English both in the academia and professional as follows:

> In its role as a global language, English has become
> one of the most important academic and professional
> tools. English is increasingly recognized as , undoubtedly,
> the most important language to learn by the international
> community . This is the fact that seems to be irreversible.

> English has become the official language of the business and scientific world, although the academic and scientific communities, formal English usage is prevalent. With creative and flowery use of the language at a minimum, the development of International English often centers on academic and scientific communities.

Viewed in light of the global importance of English, it is necessary for English teachers to be aware of how much knowledge they have about teaching English, and how much they know about their students' learning styles. This study aimed to enable English teachers to teach effectively as well as make their students achieve their goal in learning. As there is a shift from the teacher-centered to student-centered approach, scholars have undertaken research on students' learning strategies to improve their teaching strategies as well as to gain insight into how students learn English to better understand their problems in learning the language. There are a lot of advantages for teachers who strive to understand how their students learn, and what their learning styles are so as to adjust their teaching styles to make a balance in the teaching and learning situation. If the balance is achieved, not only that all students will be taught the way that they prefer, but they will also feel more comfortable and willing to learn. Therefore, it will be useful to find out what most students' learning styles are.

Review of Related Studies

English language teaching in Thailand is still considered very traditional and, in fact, the students' learning achievement is far behind those of our neighboring countries, especially Singapore, and Korea. This problem is challenging among keen scholars who want to find solution to improve the teaching quality in Thailand. Confronted with 2nd year Business English majors whose language competence was varied, the researcher wanted to make an investigation by encouraging the students in the Reading Skills class to be engaged in the course syllabus designed for 5 weeks starting from January20-February17,2016 to find out how students learned, what key factors for their learning achievements ,and failures , including their common learning styles . During the 5 week experiment, the participants were assigned to select their own topics related to business English for oral presentations. The researcher made note of the errors, and later gave them remedial work on grammar. The participants consisted of 16 students:15 Thais and 1 Filipino ,who aged between 19 and 21.They were encouraged to read extensively and made a group presentation in class on their selected topics: Fast Food, Culture, and Famous Tourist Attractions. Then they were required to evaluate their learning in a personal journal reflecting what they had learned: vocabulary, grammar, speaking, listening and writing, and their learning styles or strategies.

> Ellis (1994) has defined 'language learning strategies as follows:
> Language strategies are; 1) general approaches
> or particular techniques 2) behavioral or mental,
> or both,3) conscious and intentional or subconscious,
> and 4) direct or indirect on inter-language development.

The 4 definitions given above show that students' learning strategies vary and involve their participation and engagement in language learning activities both consciously and unconsciously. In this way, it is challenging for the teacher to not only observe, but examine the earners' learning styles in order to find out the differences between good and poor learners' learning achievement.

Xiang Yang (2008, p. 20)explores the role of attitude and motivation in L 2 learning among non-English major graduate students at the University of Malaysia. The findings revealed that learners with positive attitude and high level of motivation were successful in developing proficiency in the language provided with the strong set of verbal aptitude and intelligence. He also concluded that if the learners have positive attitude toward the target language and its culture, they are greatly motivated to learn and they are grateful to their friends and the teacher who have encouraged them to learn well, and even are likely to become experts in the field in the future. Good teachers have an important role to help the L2 learners to be positive learners. It is also important to create a pleasant environment where everyone plays as well as learns the language and is inspired that nothing is impossible to a willing heart and that attitude is important. Therefore, the teacher should encourage the students to think that every mistake will be the path to one's success.

Luu Trong Tuan(2012, p. 430)states that motivation plays a very important role in enhancing the students in enhancing the students' English performance and that students have positive attitude toward English learning and motivational activities. They were both extrinsically and intrinsically motivated in the English subject. However, they had many difficulties in succeeding in the English subject and their learning was influenced by various elements, among which two main factors influencing their English learning most were their personal ways of studying, and the heavy learning curriculum with difficult textbooks.

Tuan's findings were interesting as different students have different learning strategies to cope with their learning. Therefore, if the teacher is not aware of this problem, it may lead to undesirable outcomes. The teacher may stuff the class with a lot of teaching contents that were too difficult for the students. Shmais, Wafa Abu (2003, p. 16) remarks that language learning strategies facilitate the learning of the target language by the language learner. Language learners in general use language learning strategies in the learning process. Since the factors like age, gender, personality, motivation, self-concept, life experience, and learning styles affect the way in which language learners learn the target language, it is not reasonable to assume that all language learners use the same good language learning strategies or should be trained in using and developing the same strategies to become successful learners.

Oxford (1990) suggests that strategy training can be achieved after familiarizing the students with language learning strategies (LLSs) and providing them with opportunities for practicing these strategies through integrating them into classroom instructional plan and embedding them into regular class activities. In this way, it can reinforce student-centered and task-based activities to enhance lifelong learning as well.

Rubin and Thompson (1994) make interesting remarks that both learners and teachers need to become aware of the learning styles and strategies through strategy instruction. Attempts to teach students to use learning strategies have produced good

results and allow students to become more aware of their preferred learning strategies and to help them become more responsible for meeting their own objectives, which can only be achieved when students are trained in strategy use so that they become more independent and effective. In addition, they both believe that good language learners have the following characteristics:

1. Find their own way, taking responsibility for their own learning,
2. Organize information about language,
3. Are creative, and try to feel the language by experimenting its grammar and words,
4. Create opportunities for practice in using the language inside and outside the classroom,
5. Learn to live with uncertainty by not getting confused and by continuing to talk or listen without understanding every word,
6. Use memory strategies to bring back what have been learned,
7. Make errors work for them and not against them,
8. Use linguistic knowledge, including knowledge of the first language, in learning a second language,
9. Use contextual clues to help them in comprehension,
10. Learn to make intelligent guesses,
11. Learn chunks of language as wholes and formalized routines to help them perform "beyond their competence",
12. Learn to use tricks to keep conversation going,
13. Learn certain production strategies to fill in gaps in their own competence,
14. Learn different styles of speech and writing and learn to vary their language regarding the formality of the situation.

The above characteristics reveal that good language learners are intrinsically motivated to learn the target language to achieve their goal in life.

Archibald (2006, p. 1) comments that:
> Students in time-intensive content-based language teaching (CBLT)programs, such as French immersion, are typically able to master complex content material effectively, despite less than native-like proficiency in the language of instruction….The development of second -language learning, the concrete and highly contextual content found in content-based teaching programs makes them the most effective….Ultimately, one of the main benefits of content-based language teaching is its ability to encourage students to make connections between second-language study and the outside world. This, in turn, can increase motivation and reinforce learning across the curriculum

The remarks above were similar to the situation of language teaching in Thailand, where content-based approach is used the most to enhance students' language skills and develop their understanding of grammar and structures. However, unfortunately, most Thai teachers prefer to use text books, rather than making their own teaching materials to suit the students' interests. Moreover, teachers were more concerned about finishing the contents for the students to be tested to evaluate their learning achievement. This approach ,not only created stress and tension among poor English language learners, but also discouraged those with high marks in the test because they were unable to use English to communicate with people in the real world. In this aspect, a lot of time and money investigated in English learning were considered wasted. It is therefore, challenging for the researcher to underpin the poor learners' learning styles, in comparison to those who have achieved highly. As discussed earlier, attitude and motivation are two key factors among others for learners' learning achievement. The researcher; therefore, wanted to create a positive learning atmosphere in this experiment by allowing the 2nd year participants, consisting of 16 Business English majors (15 Thais, and one Filipino)to take part in the curriculum design in English Reading Skills. This study took place in the 2nd Semester, and lasted for 5 weeks starting from January 20, 2015 to February 17, 2015. At the beginning, all the participants were assigned to write their journals keeping the record of what they had learned in class, and how they felt about learning. The researcher wanted to develop the participants' language proficiency through authentic task-based teaching materials in the classroom, encouraging the participants to select the topic and materials that interested them and made presentation as a group in class. They were assigned to integrate the four language skills: reading, speaking, listening, and writing.

The researcher took a role as a facilitator, a role model, and an evaluator to inspire the participants to do their best in a cooperative learning environment. The researcher did not expect all the participants to become native-like proficient, but be able to communicate effectively. They were encouraged to use media and visual aids to arouse the audience to engage in their presentation. Their peers were to give feedbacks and comments after each presentation. Each of the participants wrote in their diaries what they had learned.

Objectives of the Study
This study aims to find out:
1. Different learning strategies among good and poor learners
2. The impacts of attitudes and motivation towards the learners' learning achievement.

Definition of Terms
1. Learners or participants in this study refer to 2nd year Business English majors at The Faculty of Liberal Arts, Southeast Bangkok College
2. Highly motivated learners were those who had positive attitudes towards learning and were able to solve problems regarding their own learning

3. Poor learners or unmotivated learners were those who had negative attitudes towards English. They were passive or reactive and dependent on others for help.

Methodology

The methodologies included both descriptive analysis and basic statistics .The data for analysis comprised the participants' journal writing, their final grades, and the questionnaire.

Research Questions

There are two research questions:
1. What are different learning strategies among highly motivated learners and unmotivated learners?
2. What are impacting factors for learning achievement and failures?

Description of the Participants and Research Procedures

This research looked for changes in different aspects of each individual student's language improvement as follows: changes in the use of language and discourse, changes in activities and practices, and changes in attitudes toward English language learning after four weeks. It involved all the second year Business English majors who were used as the participants as it was a small group. There were 4 males and 12 females, aged between 19 and 21.The course they studied was Reading Skills. The participants were assigned to read their own selected materials on the Internet outside the classroom. In this case, they all agreed to keep records which described what they were doing as accurately as possible to reflect their ideas about what they had learned from their materials. Generally ,they were recommended to choose the topics relevant to the nature of the program in Business English. The topics they selected were: Fast Food, Tourism, Sports and Leisure, and Cross Cultural Conflicts. They were required to make their oral group presentation of the selected material using visual aids, and power-point. The content of their presentation covered a summary of their selection, vocabulary, idioms, grammar, and structures used .The participants were also required to ask questions and give feedbacks to each presentation. Then all the participants gave their reflection on the lesson learned what they had learned in their journal and submitted it to the researcher every week. The project started on Tuesday January20 to February17,2015.At the beginning of each lesson ,the students formed groups of 4 exchanging ideas on their selected materials and came up with a conclusion on their discussion to make an oral presentation in front of the class. The activities took about 90minutes. Then there were remedial work on grammar and writing with recommendations for further reading. The researcher would converse with each group of the participants in class to explore their reaction toward their learning progress and class activities as well as find out what they enjoyed learning the most. The questionnaire was distributed on the last week of the activity. All the participants completed the questionnaire with both closed and open-ended questions. The questionnaire was collected, and then analyzed.

Methods of Data Collection

The research instruments were based on the participants' assignments' scores, midterm, final results, and the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

Descriptive analysis was used to analyze the data with basic statistics, and percentage. Data from the questionnaire reflecting their motivation, attitudes and learning strategies were presented with discussion with citations from relevant previous research findings.

Findings

Details of the findings were derived from three sources: the participants' assignments scores, midterm and final results, including the questionnaire were presented in Tables 1, 2 &3 below:

In Table1.the researcher provided the scores in each category to show the total scores of each participant. This was considered important data to reflect each individual participant's achievement in their study.

Table 1: Scores from Assignments & Tests

No.	Participant's Code	Assignments 60%	Midterm & Final 40%	Total 100%
1.	5611311400007	43%	22%	65%
2.	5711311400001	49%	21%	70%
3.	5711311400004	44%	18%	62%
4.	5711311400006	40%	15%	54%
5.	5711311400008	38%	12%	50%
6.	5711311400009	41%	8%	49%
7.	5711311400010	43%	22%	65%
8.	5711311400014	40%	2%	42%
9.	5711311400018	35%	5%	40%
10.	5711311400019	39%	12%	51%
11.	5711311400020	48%	12%	61%
12.	5711311400021	39%	11%	50%
13.	5711311400022	48%	12%	60%
14.	5711311400025	52%	29%	81%
15.	5711311400030	38%	8%	46%
16.	5711311400032	45%	13%	58%

The above data revealed that there was one participant who had achieved highly both in doing assignments and midterm and final with 81%. The next one was no.2.got 70% whereas the participants no.8&9 got lower scores at 42% ,and 40% respectively due to their lack of motivation in studying. There learning strategies were mainly based on their peers' assistance and the help from the instructor.

Discussion of the Participants' written Impressions on Their Own Learning and Class Activities

All the participants revealed that they enjoyed learning in a group of friends who had common interests, and they enjoyed studying outside class, choosing their own learning materials. It took them more time to discuss their selected materials, and prepare their presentations. They all enjoyed autonomous learning and were happy to work with their peers. In this way they learned more new words, and hence enlarged their vocabulary. They were encouraged to read more to improve their English. However, weaker participants amounted to 50% of the class complained that it was time consuming to do the project and make presentation. However, they agreed that they enjoyed having freedom to choose what they wanted to learn. On the contrary,18 75% of the participants revealed that they had difficulties learning outside class, and had to depend on their friends for help.

Data from the Questionnaire

Data from Part II of the questionnaire reflecting their attitudes towards learning English appear in Table 2.

Table2. Participants' Attitudes Towards Learning English

No.	Question	No of "Yes" Responses	%	No of "No" Responses	%
1	Do you like to study English?	16	100	0	0
2	Do you generally like reading in English?	2	12.50%	14	87.5
3	Do you think reading in English is difficult and boring?	8	50%	8	50
4	Do you think by reading you can increase your knowledge on vocabulary and grammar?	13	81.25	3	18.75
5	Do you think your English competence can make you achieve your goal in life?	16	100	0	0
6	Do you think it is important for you to plan your own study?	14	87.5	2	12.5
7	Do you think the best way to learn English is to Learn from your mistakes?	2	12.5	14	87.5
8	Do you depend on your teacher to help you improve' your English?	15	93.75	1	6.25
9	Do you think the learning environment is important to make you interested in learning?	16	100	0	0
10	Do you think the teacher's positive feedbacks inspire you to put more effort to learning English?	16	100	0	0

Discussion

From the participants' responses to the questionnaire as shown in Table 2. questions 1 & 5 showed that all the participants had positive attitudes toward learning English and it had some impact on their success in life, but since all of them did not have the same background their learning strategies differed. As reflected in questions 2, 3, 4 ,6,7,8,9,& 10 most students were influenced by external factors to learn English. Their learning strategies varied. With reference to their final grades, only 2 students, equivalent to 12.50% of the class were high achievers. They enjoyed learning English and had positive attitudes toward learning both on their own and with the help of the teacher. This is relevant to Baker's (1993) remarks that students with positive attitudes will spend more effort to learn the language. Attitudes affect the rate of success of development and final proficiency achieved in the target language. Whereas low achievers amounted to 50.00% of the class could get by with their friends' and the teacher's assistance. On the contrary, only 3 students amounted to 18.75% of the class, failed as they had no incentives to learn and did not even try to help themselves as they had poor self-esteem and felt that English was too difficult for them. Question no.8.reflected an exceptional student, a Filipino who got the highest marks did not rely on the teacher for help as she uses English at home as her second language.

The data from the findings also revealed that 65.50 % of the participants passed the course, and 18.75% of the participants failed. Among the 65.50% who passed the course, there were only 12.50% of the participants who were considered highly motivated learners, with positive attitudes toward learning. As reflected from their journals, they were industrious, self-disciplined and always submitted all their assignments on time, corrected their mistakes as recommended, and were attentive and creative in class. They always asked questions, and showed enthusiasm in learning. They also had leadership caliber and were willing to help their peers. 50.00 % of the class also had positive attitudes towards learning English, but they were quite slow and had low self-esteem. They usually felt that English was difficult for them and always depended on their peers and the teacher for help. The learning strategies of these students were mainly based on memories, and affective learning strategies. In conclusion ,they were passive learners. However, they could get through although they lacked self-confidence in using English. There were all together 3 students amounted to 18.75 % who failed the course. They were considered helpless due to their laziness, lack of disciplines and always came to class late with no incentive to improve themselves.

**The findings answered the two research questions as in the following:**
Research Question 1: What were differences among highly motivated learners and unmotivated learners' learning strategies?

As earlier presented in the definition of terms, the highly motivated learners amounted to 12.50% of the class had the characteristics of good language learners, who had outstanding achievement in their learning. They were disciplined and took responsibility for their own learning. They also created their opportunities for practice outside class, and learned from their errors. Moreover, they used contextual clues to

get through. They are also inspired to do better to advance their communication skills. These students used Meta-cognitive learning strategies, which are indirect learning strategies. That meant they had concrete plan for their study, and they were willing to learn intensively, trying to push themselves to use English. Another obvious strategy employed by these students were cognitive learning strategies, which is a direct learning to enrich their knowledge. They practiced a lot in and outside class, and tried to improve their learning, reflected in the progress they made in their assignments.

Unmotivated learners or poorly motivated learners' learning strategies varied depending on their motivation and attitudes toward learning .There were 50.00% of these students, whose learning strategies varied. 12.50 % of these students used to stay overseas for a period of time. However, their English were still poor, due to poor self-esteem and the fear of making mistakes, but they were interested in improving their English. Among the unmotivated learners there was no statistically significant difference in their use of learning strategies. Mostly, they used memory, communication, and social strategies. That means they were inactive in their learning, and depending on others for help. However, they strived hard to learn by borrowing some expressions from the text to communicate in their writing. Although ,they still made mistakes, their writing was understandable Among the unmotivated learners, diary writing was a very useful learning strategy to communicate their feelings with others. Therefore, the learners' diaries were very useful pedagogical tool for the researcher to discover the participants' perception of classroom activities, their learning difficulties, and their interaction with their peers. Consequently, diary writing can also be used as a tool for learners' autonomy to improve their English.

In sum, all the participants made use of only some learning strategies they were comfortable with. However, it will be more practical for language teachers to inspire their students to make use of some other learning strategies following Oxford's (2002) models of learning strategies as follows:
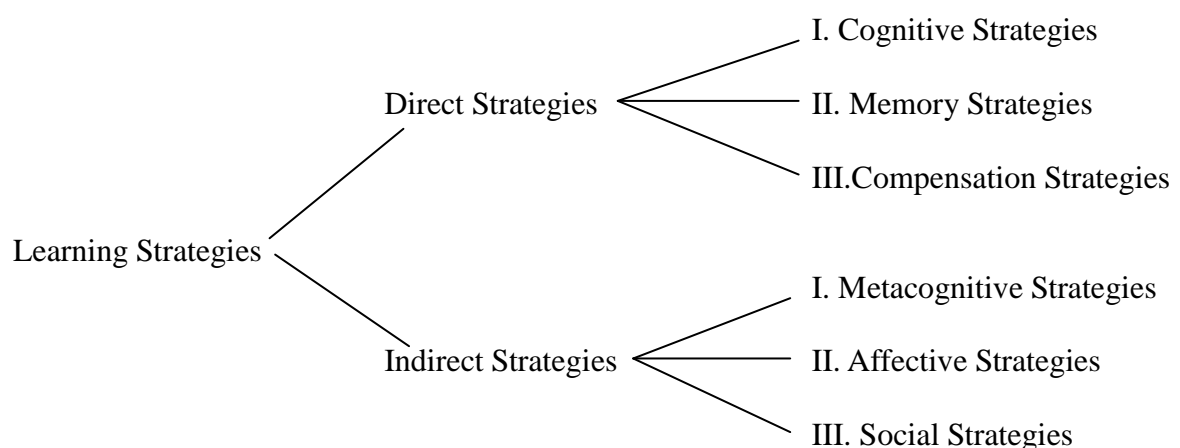
Research Question 2: What are impacting factors for learning achievement and failures?

The findings also revealed that attitudes and motivation towards learning had great impact on learning achievement and failures. As obviously presented in Table 2.those who passed the course amounted to 81.25% of the whole population had good motivation and positive attitudes to learn English. No matter whether they were poor or smart, all these students managed to get through and passed the course. On the contrary, there were three students amounted to 18.75% of the participants failed ,not only because they were poor in English, but they had negative attitudes about their own ability to learn, and did not put enough effort to make their own improvement in English. They totally relied on their friends for help and did not make any contribution in a group work assignments. They were also lazy and lack disciplines. These students were enrolled for the course because they wanted to get a degree in Business English major. These failed students may have a pressure to learn English due to its significant role as an International language. Sanchez (2004,40) remarks that *the need for communication among people of different cultures and languages, triggered by travelling and globalization, puts pressure on people to learn languages more quickly and efficiently. More and more people across the globe strive to learn English so as to communicate with others.* That is why there is a great demand among Thais to learn English out side class.

Implications from the findings

It can be concluded that both motivation and attitudes played a significant role in the participants' learning achievement. In addition, they still need to understand different kinds of learning strategies to help them achieve their goal in learning English. The participant who had the high achievement had positive attitude and was very much motivated to learn both inside and outside class. They tried to use English to improve themselves, especially writing diaries. Therefore, the teacher shoiuld provide the student with some useful learning strategies and motivate them to learn and use English as much as they can.

Yang(2012, pp. 13-22) undertook a study entitled " Attitude and Motivation in L2 Learning among University of Malaya Master Students" to find out with the same amount of time, learning opportunity and environment factor, what makes some people acquire and learn the language better than others. The results showed that attitude and motivation are crucial factors as two third of the participants had a very solid foundation of English knowledge ever since they began to learn it. Moreover, they had good attitude of English and they learn it because English is a kind of hobby to them rather than a task required by the teachers and parents, so their motivation is intrinsic, not extrinsic. Their IELTS score is also high. On the other hand 13% of the participants learn English because they believe the language is a tool for them to get a good job, and it is a quite important tool in the modern society ,but they don't show much appreciation of the language itself, their motivation towards the language is instrumental. The rest of the participants amounted to 20% do not like English at all, but they are forced to learn English. As a consequence, they have negative attitude to the language. Yang concluded that motivation is crucial to learning achievement.

Teachers have an important role in creating a pleasant environment where everyone plays as well as learns the language and inspiring them that nothing is impossible to a willing heart, and attitude is also important. This conclusion really corresponds to students' responses to the questionnaire in Table 2, questions no. 7,8,9,& 10.Therefore, teachers should encourage students to learn and make them think that every mistake will be the path to their success.

Limitations and Recommendation for Further Studies

Due to the fact that the second year business English majors at the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Southeast Bangkok College was small in size, the researcher could closely monitor the participants' learning outcomes in details. However, findings of the study could not be generalized for a large class learners. Therefore, for those interested in exploring in depth the effect of learners' attitudes and motivation toward their learning achievement, a large class size is recommended in order to make a comparison if class size matters regarding students' motivation, and attitudes. In addition, learners' learning strategies should also be explored in detail as they are part of the learners' learning outcomes. Oxford's theories of learning strategies are popularly applied among ELT teachers. It will be beneficial to investigate how her theories help improve English teaching and learning in Thailand.

About the Author

Amporn Srisermbhok holds a Ph.D. in English and American Literature. She has extensive experience in teaching English to both graduate and under graduate students in Thailand and overseas. Her research interests include literary criticism, gender and equity issues, and critical teaching pedagogy.

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