

Improving EFL students' speaking proficiency and self-confidence using drama technique: An action research

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Abstract

The current study used a drama technique to teach a speaking course to second-level English Department students. The primary goal of language learning is to be able to communicate effectively in the target language with excellent self-confidence. The research was conducted using an action research methodology within a qualitative research framework. A total of 30 second-year undergraduate students at the proposed institution participated in the research as sample. Observation, interview, audio-video recordings, and researcher diary were used to collect data. Content analysis was used to examine the information gathered. Results of the study revealed that using drama technique to teach English as a foreign language has a substantial impact on the acquisition of fluent speaking abilities and results in beneficial improvements in the target audience's communication skills.

Keywords: drama technique; English language; EFL classroom; self-confidence; speaking proficiency

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1. Introduction

Speaking is among one of the four language skills that are most important in foreign language situations, and it is one of the most difficult to master. It is critical for effective communication in any language, but it is even more critical when speakers do not speak their native tongue. Because English is a global language, English speaking skills should be integrated with other skills to facilitate communication with native English speakers as well as people from around the world (Kumar, 2020).

Speaking skill is more practical and more effective than writing skill, which is one of the expressive skills, because there is face-to-face interaction in this skill. The speaking skill, which is gained with the effect of listening skill, is the only expressing skill that a person can express himself until school age. Speaking skill is one of the most decisive factors that make a human being human. A person shapes this innate ability according to the language of the society he lives in and uses it for a lifetime (Kumar et al., 2021; Mahmood et al., 2020; Dogan, 2009). Although speaking ability is acquired later with the effect of listening skill, speaking correctly and effectively is a process that requires training. For this reason, individuals are taught to speak. According to Kumar (2021) speaking, which is a means of conveying thoughts and dreams to the interlocutor, is one of the language skills that are used the most, yet the most difficult one to learn. When one looks at the foreign language dimension, the development of speaking skills is seen as one of the important problems.

Effectively communicate emotions and thoughts in an understandable manner in a language go beyond grammatical principles in language instruction. It requires linguistic competence, competence in adapting to the environment, competence in addressing, and sociolinguistic competence (Ghahderijani et al., 2021). This can be achieved by developing speaking skills. It is considered important for a foreign language learner to be able to express himself orally. The way to do this is to practice. If a person who learns a foreign language and does not have the opportunity to practice, the development of speaking skills becomes difficult.

Benyo and Kumar (2020) and Shabani (2013) stated that reading a text by seeing, listening to the spoken texts or speeches, or writing a few sentences on the paper in the language desired to be learned is not as difficult as putting the learned language into words by filtering it through the brain and language.

Teaching English as a foreign language necessitates the ability to effectively communicate with students of the language. One of the prerequisites for learning a language is the ability to express one's ideas and thoughts in that language accurately and fluently. As a result, one of the key purposes of language instruction is to help students develop their speaking talents so that they can do just that (Glover, 2011; Boylu & Cangal, 2015; Ajmal & Kumar; 2020). In other words, if the person cannot speak English he has learned correctly and fluently in his daily life, he may encounter problems. Because the language learner is far from an artificial environment, unlike the classroom environment in normal life, he needs to reach a normal speaking pace in order to be able to express himself effectively to the people he communicates with (Bacha et al., 2021). As Amma (2005) and Juvova et al. (2015) stated that the aforementioned fluent speaking is the ability of the student to produce verbally appropriate to the subject at a certain pace, without pausing, without giving long thought intervals in a foreign language. In order to provide this fluent speaking, it is necessary to apply different methods and techniques to the student. While classical methods and techniques develop the grammatical dimension of the student, they are lacking in the practical dimension.

Researcher such as Thornbury (2005) and Çakmak et al., (2021) pointed out the inadequacy of vocabulary along with different techniques while talking about the obstacles in front of fluent speaking. In other words, in order to be able to speak fluently, it is necessary to have both a lot of practice and a

sufficient amount of vocabulary. However, according to Ajmal et al., (2020), Ellis (2003) and Brown (2001), since traditional techniques that are teacher-centered and grammar-oriented are generally used in teaching English as a foreign language and the communicative dimension, which is one of the most important functions of the language, are being ignored. Therefore, the person learning the target language may continue to have difficulties in putting this grammatical knowledge into practice, even though he or she has reached higher levels in grammar. For this, different methods and techniques may be needed to achieve fluent speaking by increasing communicative skills. It is thought that the drama method has an important place in realizing the mentioned situations due to its structure.

As Wessels (1987) stated that 'Drama is to act'. Action and practice are critical components of language learning because they help learners develop their body language, improve their confidence, and remain engaged in the learning process. Thus using drama technique can be one of the effective techniques for developing speaking skills. Action is an important component of language learning approaches, and drama techniques incorporate action as an essential component of language learning (Gorjian, Moosavinia, & Jabripour, 2010). It may give them the chance to better understand the language used in context and improve their fluency.

Drama technique is a method that gets rid of the traditional education style and has its own characteristics. In fact, drama has been used since ancient times and plays an important role both in learning a language and in recognizing the culture to which the language belongs. Because drama not only enables students to produce language by posing as a different identity, but also helps students' social, mental and linguistic development, but also increases their sensory awareness of language and culture by improving their responsibility to act (O'Neill and Lambert, 1982). Thus, the student not only has the opportunity to act comfortably by impersonating someone else, but also grasps the subtleties of the target language.

Drama has played a minor but consistent role in language teaching in the United Kingdom and the United States since the 1970s (Dodson, 2000). Bolton (1984), one of the earliest and most well-known proponents of theatre in the L1 classroom, pushed instructors to incorporate drama into every aspect of their instruction. Bolton pushed for the inclusion of theatre in all courses, referring to it as the 'centre of the curriculum'. As L2 practitioners embraced drama in their practices, it gained popularity in foreign language education. Thus today drama technique is a powerful and effective method for language learning throughout the world including Saudi Arabia.

1.1 Review of Literature

Understanding Speaking Skills and Drama Techniques

Byrne (1986) describes oral communication as "a two-way process between the speaker and the listener". Such oral communication skills are considered useful in improving the learning of English. Chaney and Burk (1998) stated that speaking is defined as "the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols into a variety of context" (p. 13). Speaking skills, according to Murphy (1991), involve two basic skills of learning a language, namely speaking and listening with the goal of using correct pronunciation. Speech is inextricably linked to listening, and vice versa. As a result, there is a speaker for each listener to whom he listens and responds.

According to Shraiber and Yaroslavova (2016), drama techniques in foreign language instruction are a set of processes that organize learners' role-related behaviour in specially created circumstances, enhancing both communicative competence and the development of the student's entire character. The use of drama in the context of foreign language teaching, according to Schejbal (2006), does not necessarily imply the presentation of a classical play or the staging of a theatrical production. The use of drama ensures that students participate actively. The result is that learners who

practice speaking a language in the classroom gains hands-on experience that is comparable to that gained in real-world situations. Dramatic interpretation in the context of foreign language instruction is not a new concept in the field.

Application of Drama Technique in language classroom

Several studies have been undertaken to support the use of drama in foreign language learning, including those by Brumfit (1991), Maley and Duff (2001), Philips (2003), Aldavero (2008) and others. A wide range of emotions, problem solving, decision making, and socialising can all be facilitated through the use of drama activities. In addition to improving one's ability to speak, reading and writing can also be honed via the practice of drama. Students, particularly those with limited vocabulary, benefit from drama activities that help them communicate in a foreign language.

Phillips (2003) suggests in his research that one advantage of drama techniques is that shy students can disguise themselves as another character while still expressing themselves, allowing them to get more involved in these types of activities. As a result of this personalization, rather than drilling or mechanical repetition, language becomes more meaningful and memorable. According to Aldavero (2008), drama is loaded with purposes such as developing aesthetic vision and creativity, developing critical thinking, providing social development, improving decision-making skills, and language and communication. Because of these mentioned situations, the drama method should be used in the language learning. Because drama is a kind of action-oriented method, it provides the opportunity to adapt daily life to the classroom environment.

The use of drama method in foreign language learning has benefits such as helping students understand complex events very easily and improving their communication skills such as attention, perception and interpretation (Kara, 2010; Koda, 2005). Naturally, drama as a whole is one of the methods that can be used to improve students' speaking skills. Because both providing a comfortable communication environment and giving students self-confidence are important for speaking skills. The individual who feels comfortable and restricted will experience pauses and shyness while speaking. In order to avoid these problems, drama method is a method that can be used easily in speaking education (Kara, 2009).

In addition to all these, according to Dougill (1987), Baldwin & Fleming (2003), and Adiguzel (2017), since drama is to live presentation, reviving the mutual conversations that can take place in daily life in the classroom environment will contribute to both expanding the student's vocabulary and speaking fluently. In addition, drama helps students solve problems by themselves and develops the ability to communicate. Drama, which also increases self-confidence, can also be used to strengthen expression. As a means of transferring knowledge and culture, drama is one of the most important methods that the teacher will apply. The most important is undoubtedly that it develops language practice. It provides fluent speaking and correct pronunciation (Anton, 2006; Davies, 1990).

Currently, there are few studies in the Saudi Arabian context to look at the effects of using drama techniques for speaking, and so this study looks at the impact of using a drama techniques on English speaking skills among undergraduate students has wide importance.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The current study used drama techniques to evaluate the efficacy of a programme for developing English as a foreign language (EFL) speaking abilities among undergraduate students at Saudi Arabia's Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University. The participants were undergraduate students who were enrolled in the programme.

2. Method and Materials

2.1 Research Model

This research was carried out with the action research design, which is an interactive design within the framework of qualitative research. In determining the action research as a research design, an effort to determine the role of drama technique has been applied on developing fluent speaking in English as a foreign language.

2.2 Participants

The participants of the study consist of 30 undergraduate students of English Department at Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University in Saudi Arabia. The participants are students have been randomly chosen from 'Listening and Speaking' course, course code ENGL 1290 Participants were selected for the study using one of the research's deliberate sampling approaches, easily available case sampling, which was one of the techniques used in the research.

2.3 Data Collection Tools

The current study is action qualitative research. Action research can be carried out by the practitioner himself. Researchers don't analyze through questionnaires or try to collect data without being involved in the process. Various data collection tools were used to collect data in this study. The reason for using various data collection tools is to increase the validity and reliability of the research. Because, according to, acquiring the right data is important for the healthy conduct of the research. Both determining the right data collection tool and ensuring the correct use of this data collection tool will prevent possible errors (Gürbüz and Şahin, 2015). Accordingly following data collection tools used in the research: classroom observation, audio and video recordings, interview, and researcher's diary.

As the study is action based research, the researchers are actively involved throughout the data collection and data interpretation process. They also used various advanced data collection tools to maintain validity and reliability of the research outcome. The most significant among them is audio and video recordings. It is significant because there may be details that the researcher may miss during an action research. It is not possible for the researcher to record everything through observation as it is difficult for the researcher to pay attention to the activity during action research.

2.4 Data Collection Process

The current study is action research process, which starts with the identification of a problem and then to solve this problem. Yildirim & Simsek (2011) list the steps in which the action research process takes place as follows: deciding on the research problem; determining the action research questions; data collection; literature review; data analysis and interpretation; action/ implementation plan development; monitoring plan development; action plan implementation; implementation monitoring; implementation analysis and evaluation; and new action plan preparation.

The researchers, in this study, followed the mentioned action steps. It was observed that the students had difficulties in speaking English fluently. In the step of determining the action research questions, for determining the role of drama technique on fluent speaking, the following questions were kept in mind: which level language class should be selected for the research?; what should be considered when planning drama activities?; and what type of questions should be asked? In order to increase the quality of the collected data, various data collection tools were used at the data collection stage. Before starting to collect data, a literature review was carried out at the stage of literature reviews. Then, in the data analysis and interpretation part, the data collected by observation, interview

and researcher diary methods were analyzed and interpreted. While making these, attention was paid to the categories and themes that emerged.

Prior to the starting the research process, permission was obtained from both the participants and the authorized units. The camera to be recorded was introduced to the participants and they were informed that the camera would be recorded throughout the activities. Thus, ethical rules were not violated. During the implementation plan development phase, various drama activities were planned and placed in a systematic plan, and six drama activities were put into practice. In the monitoring plan development step, video recordings were made to record the research and notes were taken through the researcher's diary. During the implementation of the action plan, the participants memorized the dialogues in the drama activities given to them and displayed them at predetermined dates. In the next step, monitoring the implementation, some instructors in the institution were also involved in the implementation process, apart from the researchers. In the analysis and evaluation part of the application, the application process was analyzed separately each week and new steps that could be taken according to the problems experienced by the participants in the activities were determined.

2.5 Analysis of Data

Content analysis was used in the analysis of the data, since the data set was analyzed without subjecting it to any title, new titles were created as a result of this analysis, and these titles could not be predicted in the previous process. With content analysis, it is aimed to interpret the data obtained during the research through concepts and various themes. Content analysis is therefore primarily concerned with organizing related data within the framework of specific concepts and topics, and then interpreting those facts in a way that the reader can comprehend. (Yildirim & Simsek, 2011). In this analysis process, the data set was read many times and its important dimensions were determined. As a result of this, certain codes were produced according to the meaning that emerged and the meaningful sections among the data were named.

3. Results

3.1 Analysis of Interview

First of all, when the interview data were examined, it was determined that the students felt more comfortable after the drama activities and that there was a decrease in the pauses and thinking timing they experienced while speaking. The students expressed how far they have come by comparing their situations before and after the process. This situation was also observed during the interviews with the students. In the video recordings kept during the interview process, it was determined that the students exhibited more relaxed attitudes at the point of fluent speaking and experienced a decrease in snagging compared to the pre-process. Thus, the students were able to speak faster.

Regarding this issue, student number 1, in interview said: 'it helped us to form sentences by bringing together what we were going to say in a regular and fast manner'. He stated that he could speak faster than before, by contributing to the progress of the drama activities performed by expressing her opinion in the form of a sentence for herself. Regarding the subject, student number 3 said: 'it helped our speech improve. In fact, thanks to these activities, I started to speak more fluently'. He supported the aforementioned situation. Student number 5 expressed his opinion in the same direction. He said: 'I used to be afraid to talk in English with strangers. But now I'm going out, specifically for shopping and I can talk to them'. He talked about the effect of drama activities on his daily life and pointed out that the activities were instrumental in his speaking fast. The interview data reveals the following statement student number 2: 'the dramas activities encouraged me. I practiced speaking by talking to friends. So these conversations also accelerated and helped me'. He stated that the drama method gave him self-confidence in speaking, and the practices he made with his colleagues enabled

him to speak rapidly. On the other hand, student number 8, who shares similar views, says: 'We write, but we do not speak. I tried to talk at home but it was too slow. These theaters like practice sent me forward today. So I used a lot of sentences in one day. I did that fast too'. He stated that his ability to write by expressing his sentences is not in the same proportion with his speaking, that he practiced speaking with his own work, but that he could not reach the speed he wanted. It is crystal clear that there was an increase in the number of sentences he used with his drama works, he emphasized that he could also say these sentences fluently. Student number 7, 9, 10, 12, 13, 16, and 20 also accepted that drama activities accelerated their speech. They compared his current situation with his situation when they were newbie in English language. They affirm that after getting acquainted with drama techniques, they can now express their wishes quickly without the need of any help when they go to a store for shopping. The student number 4, who expressed the same views as them added some more ideas. According to him: 'There is no doubt that drama accelerated us. But we need to do more. The more drama, the more fast-talking'. In his statements, he stated that at the end of the process, there was a fluency in his speech, but this should be accelerated, and the number of activities should be increased. The opinion of student number 6 is 'These theaters were very good for us to talk about because I couldn't speak English well. Since I couldn't talk, it was easy to talk after practicing drama activities'. In other words, he stated that he was able to speak more comfortably and fluently by overcoming his pre-existing distress with the activities. Student number 14, 18, and 25 share similar views with student number 6. One of them said: 'I can't talk like friends. They were ahead of me. Now I'm fine like them. Because after acting dramas, I can talk and I'm fluent, so I'm fast'. He compared his own situation with the situation of his friends with his sentences. He emphasized that while he had seen herself as unsuccessful before, now she can speak as well and fluently as they do. Student number 21 also said: 'I speak faster and more meaningfully now'. At the end of the activities, he stated that his speaking skill improved and he could speak in a more understandable way. Student 22 said: 'I have memorized many long or simple sentences to fit the roles in the theatre. Why I am happier about is that I understood them and then I was able to quickly construct these sentences in daily life'. He emphasized that she could speak more fluently, stating that, with his viewpoint, the drama activities affected her daily life as well as contributing to her sentence formation. A remarkable view here belongs to students 11, 14, 15, 23 and 24. Number 14 of these students said: 'We had a lot of fun with our friends, especially while memorizing these theater roles. I was able to speak faster. I even made jokes about each other in English'. He stated that the activities gave them the ability to speak quickly, as well as to make jokes in the target language, which is difficult to acquire. Thus, there was a fusion between the students thanks to the activities, and this contributed positively to the acceleration of their speaking skills. Student 15 said: 'I loved the role of the cook while memorizing the theater script. I joked about him, the cook brother in the dormitory, I made him angry. Now that I have learned those sentences very well, I will say them quickly'. Student number 11 and 24 shared the same views with student number 15. They stated that he could say it fluently in his daily life because he also understood the dialogues in the drama. The last of these remarkable views is the student number 23: 'My father said very nice things when he was speaking me to English. When I saw the same sentences in the drama, I got emotional. When I remembered these, I became stronger and worked. The slow speech I mentioned earlier is no more. I am learning English and I speak fluently'. He stated that the sentences in the drama text are compatible with his real life, and that realization gave him dedication to work, and thanks to this, he can speak more fluently.

Almost all of the interviewed students stated that the drama technique helped them in speaking fluently. They emphasized that they were able to get rid of the shyness they experienced because they spoke hesitantly in certain environments before. In this way, they stated that they could construct sentences more easily and construct more neat sentence structures.

3.2 Analysis of video recordings and researchers' diary

The thoughts expressed by the students during the interviews are also in harmony with the researcher's diary and video recordings. When the video recordings were examined, it was observed that the students had a speaking speed close to the normal speaking tempo as time progressed. It has been determined that they have succeeded in conveying a problem or a situation to the other party more fluently. Thanks to this increase in tempo, it was observed that they performed the next activities faster and more meaningfully. It was understood from the video recordings that they progressed both in terms of vocabulary and fluency during their conversations with their classmates and other people they had a dialogue with in the process. It was determined that the students' expressions were understandable and fluent both during the activities and during the rest of the activities. Especially between the activities, the naturalness and fluency in their conversations with each other were observed. Regarding this subject, the following statements are included in the researcher's diary: 'students started to express themselves better. Even the most difficult to understand among them can now tell their wishes more clearly. There is a noticeable improvement in speaking capacity. This situation looks promising so that they can form more regular sentences and speak more fluently with the next activities'.

It is understood from the statements in the researcher's diary that the drama activities carried out to determine its role on fluent speaking both enabled the students to express themselves better and had a positive effect on the participants' speaking fluency. Even those who are behind in speaking fluently have made progress with the drama activities. As can be seen from the diary note, their speaking speed has increased noticeably. This led to the formation of positive expectations for the future in the researcher's notes.

5. Discussion

When the findings were examined, it was understood from the student opinions, the video recordings and the researcher's diary that the drama technique is effective on the fluent speaking of the students. Thanks to the drama activities, the students were able to get rid of their shyness and thus they were able to form sentences with higher self-confidence. For this reason, it is thought that the application of drama technique to the process and applying it as much as possible will be beneficial for students to have more self-confidence.

In the action phase, the students were given their roles and exhibited by preferring formal drama. These applications were applied to ensure fluent speaking to make learning more enjoyable and provide a communication environment between students by minimizing the problems they experienced in fluent speaking. Thus, the students were able to speak more fluently in a communication environment by reducing their speaking anxiety.

Again, when the findings were examined, the students stated that they were able to develop their ability to form sentences, which is a prerequisite for speaking fluently. Some students stated that the drama activities performed by expressing his opinion contributed in forming sentences. The activities also helped immensely a lot to form sentences. On the other hand, some other students stated that drama activities improved his vocabulary and thus he was able to form sentences. Thus, the students stated that there was an upsurge in their ability to form sentences in order to speak fluently with drama activities.

For this reason, while applying the drama technique, attention should be paid to the sentence structures in the drama texts so that the students can form correct sentences, and structures and concepts that may cause incorrect sentences during daily dialogue should be avoided.

When the data obtained from the data collection tools used in the research were examined, it was seen that there is a consistency between these data. For example, the prominent point in the interview data is that the drama activities are beneficial and these activities provide a meaningful difference on the fluent speaking skills of the participants. Observation data collected through video camera recording is also similar to the view that drama activities are beneficial, as stated by the students. In the video recordings made during the application process, it was observed that the students continued these activities patiently and devotedly. It has been determined that they exchange ideas among themselves in places they do not understand, especially in order to learn the language fully. When the video recordings kept in the process were analyzed, it was observed that the students were more comfortable at the end of the process than at the beginning of the process and did not hesitate to talk. It was determined that similar data were also found in the researcher's diary and showed great similarities with other data collection tools.

Numerous national and international studies have been undertaken on drama techniques. The majority of these research examined drama's unidirectional influence. Many researchers including Iamsaard & Kerdpol (2015), Sutjiati, Ningsih, & Budiawaty (2018), Ahmed (2019), Bshara & Barahmeh (2020) and others researched on the use of drama techniques in enhancing speaking skills, self-confidence, motivation, and managing speaking anxiety of EFL learners. These researchers come out with the positive influence of drama technique.

It was revealed by Ahmed (2019) that the employment of drama techniques to increase EFL speaking abilities and reduce speaking anxiety among Egyptian secondary school students was quasi-experimental in nature, with one group undergoing pre-post tests and a post-test. Sutjiati, Ningsih, & Budiawaty (2018) did action research on improving speaking competence in English language through roles in a drama. They did research in Indonesian context on the same pattern as the researchers did in this research. The qualitative finding of the study is that students can improve their public speaking skills by engaging in drama roles, which is a promising result. Students' confidence in learning English can be boosted by using applications or learning methods that are tailored to their unique requirements.

Also researchers such Toivanen et al. (2011), Duban & Düzgün (2013), Kholmakova (2013) and others explored the negative effects of drama techniques.

Teacher participation in theatrical events, according to Duban and Düzgün (2013), becomes passive. In contrast to the findings of Toivanen et al. (2011), who found that instructors had an active role to play during theatrical events, this study finds that teachers do not have an active role to play during theatrical events. Kholmakova (2013) determined that some classes and teaching circumstances may have various practical drawbacks, which are hard to implement.

5. Conclusion

The current study found that drama technique has a significant effect on EFL students' speaking ability and emotional quality. It is understood from the data that an efficient teaching cannot be realized with only plain lecture and question-answer techniques. It is proved fact here that the more different techniques are used, the more permanence in language learning will increase. There is a Chinese proverb, "If I hear, I forget, if I see, I remember, if I do, I learn". Drama technique thus seems to be a right choice for the students in EFL classroom. The research shows encouraging positive impact on developing speaking proficiency and self-confidence. Therefore, the more student-centered practices and activities are carried out, the more effective the language teaching can be.

The researchers used teacher centered action research to explore the intended ideas. Based on the observation, student opinions, video recordings and diary notes, it is obvious to note that drama

technique has positive impact on speaking ability. According to the outcomes of the study, students tend to be more engaged in class when using drama techniques. Students who learn English as a second language benefit from the ways. Preconceptions regarding English classes were dispelled, and students had a newfound enthusiasm for foreign language study as a result of the experience (FL classes). Furthermore, theatre helped people overcome their fear of speaking in front of others. Because they weren't afraid of making a mistake, the children were able to speak freely. Participation in English-speaking situations piqued their interest.

These results cannot be generalized outside of the current study's parameters, but they have major ramifications and insights for drama and its impact on speaking proficiency not only in Saudi Arabia, but in other countries as well. Needless to say that it would be beneficial to use the drama technique in in-class speaking activities since it is effective in the development and progress of fluent speaking. Because the drama method does not only contain simple repetitions but also gives importance to the action dimension, it is seen that it will make a very important contribution to fluent speaking.

6. Recommendations

It is suggested that a large number of research in methodological pluralism be done, depending on the selection of suitable techniques appropriate for the nature of the topic under investigation, within the scope of this study's methodology and conclusions. The reason for this is that studies has shown that drama can aid in the development of communication skills, it is recommended that drama classes be regarded as an essential aspect of preparation for a career as a classroom teacher.

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