# Original Paper

# Mapping the Trends of Educational Policy Implementation and

# its Impact on Quality Education in Ghana

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## Abstract

It is observed that over the years, every new government, whether civilian or military mostly comes with new policies of education, hence a discontinuity of the previous policy no matter how brilliant it was. In this paper we argue that Ghana's educational system has faced challenges due to lack of continuity in policies and irreconcilable relationship between policy formulators and policy implementers. We further argue that the educational system could be better if policy formulators and policy implementers find a common playing ground. The irreconcilable relationship between stakeholders of education has led to the current decline in quality of education. It is the belief of the authors that if policies are maintained devoid of partisan politics, and if implementers of educational policies are made partners in policy formulation, the result would be quality education. Data for this study was collected from secondary sources using the desk review approach. Educational policies from independence has shown inconsistencies from one political administration to the other. The trend shows persistent adjustment of educational reforms whenever there is a change in government. This phenomenon emanated from the quest to meet the developmental needs of the country. These adjustments have achieved some positive results in terms of increasing enrolment in schools. However, these reforms have brought numerous problems such as finance, inadequate teaching and learning materials, inadequate teachers, and food crisis in schools among others. The study concludes that the implementation of some of these educational policies has affected quality education in Ghana.

#### Keywords

education policy, implementation, quality, government, politics, free senior high school

## 1. Introduction

Atuahene (2009, p. 33), holds the view that following Ghana's independence, various governments, particularly Dr. Kwame Nkrumah's administration, considered education as a tool for socio-economic engineering and national development. Governments have concentrated considerably large budgetary allocations to expanding education, especially at primary and secondary levels (MoE, 1996). This initiative has remained on government's policy agenda with several educational reforms. The persistent adjustment of educational policies in Ghana dates back to the 1950s when Ghana became independent (self-governed) under the leadership of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah. In his attempt to inculcate African studies into the British inherited system of education, the Accelerated Development Plan (ADP), the first major educational reform was introduced to bring changes to the existing educational system in Ghana.

Since then, a lot of reforms have been introduced and implemented but the question is, are these reforms able to change the structure, goal or content of the educational system? Are they able to identify and provide remedies to societal problems impeding the progress of education? Many years after independence, the political structure in the country still appears to be a major setback, causing inconsistencies towards the implementation and realisation of these reforms. Adu-Gyamfi et al. (2016) hold the view that the inconsistency of the structure of Ghanaian educational system is as a result of "over politicizations". Political parties after gaining power seek to provide reforms that they deem fit especially regarding their quest to provide quality education for Ghanaians. The problem that this study seeks to interrogate is to ascertain the general impacts of the educational policies that were implemented by various governments since 1951. On the basis of this, the first objective of this study is to investigate the success stories of the various educational policies implemented by successive governments from 1951 to 2017. The second and last objective is to chronicle the challenges that emerged from the implementation of the various educational policies from 1951 to 2017 and how these governments have tried to resolve them. In the quest to do that, this paper looks at the various reforms (Accelerated Development Plan and Education Act (1951 and 1961), the National Liberation Council reforms (1966), the New Structure and Content of Education (1974), the 1987 Education Reforms, and the Educational Reforms of 2007, taking into consideration their implementation, changes and lack of continuity. The study finally looks at the Free Senior High School Policy introduced by the New Patriotic Party (NPP), its success stories and the challenges confronting the policy.

## 2. Research Design and Methodology

Data for this study was collected from secondary sources using the desk review approach (Johnston, 1982). This approach is also known as the documentary analysis research design. The desk review approach is a method which relies on existing secondary literature to elicit data for research. The method is very useful and important as it allows for flexibility in data collection and also enables researchers who have limited resources and time to conduct research (Johnston, 1982). Indeed,

Tamanja, and Pajibo (2019, p. 7837) argued that the documentary analysis research design is justified based on the assumption that understanding can also emerge most meaningfully from inductive analysis of already existing data. With the desk review approach, the researchers conducted systematic and rigorous internet searches to find secondary sources to elicit the needed data. With this search, a number of resources were found on the subject matter in journal articles and online newspaper publications. These secondary sources were critically analysed using content analysis as propounded by Weber (1990).

## 3. Educational Policies and Reforms in Ghana, 1951 to 2017

#### 3.1 The Accelerated Development Plan of 1951 and Education Act 1961

On attainment of independence from the British, Nkrumah's vision was to use education as a tool for producing a scientifically literate population, to tackle environmental causes of low productivity and produce knowledge to harness Ghana's economic potential (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2016). To achieve this, the Accelerated Development Plan (ADP) was introduced in 1951 and backed by the Education Act 1961. It was a seven-year developmental plan which was to create a highly literate society to meet the challenges of a young independent country. The ADP aimed at expanding the educational sector of the country and sought to improve infrastructure and recruitment of pupils into the primary and secondary schools. This aim led to the Free Universal and Compulsory Basic Education (FCUBE) policy. By this policy, parents who did not allow their children to attend school were liable to a fine (Oduro, 2000, p. 5). Government also provided free text books and supplementary materials for the pupils. About fifteen (15) secondary schools were built and more vocational and technical institutes created to enhance productivity. Subjects pertaining to the African cultural identity, values and practices were introduced and vernacular was used as a mode of instruction to educate children in the lower primary until they were of age to receive English as their mode of instruction in the upper primary (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2006).

The ADP introduced a structural process which comprised six (6) years of primary education. As a result of the free primary education, there was an increase in the enrolment process. Due to this, infrastructure became inadequate to accommodate the pupils. In effect, a two-shift system was introduced, where pupils were grouped for morning and afternoon shifts. The shortcoming of this system was that, it effectively placed an upper limit on the number of contact hours in a day between pupil and teacher (Oduro, 2000, p. 8). In addition to these problems, text books were not enough because the pupils far exceeded the number of free text books that each pupil was entitled to; hence the quality of education was compromised. This led to the discontinuation of the policy.

3.2 The Reforms of the National Liberation Council (NLC)

Following Nkrumah's overthrow (coup d'état) in 1966, the country was governed under the leadership of Major A. A. Afrifa and General E. A. Kotoka. Nkrumah's plan was criticised by the National Liberation Council (NLC) for making education accessible to all which led to the deterioration of the

standard of education. This led to the formulation of a new educational reform by the education review committee. This committee was appointed to conduct an extensive study on the formal education system and make realistic changes that could safe the country from its economic crisis leading to the discontinuation of the Accelerated Development Plan. In 1967, the reforms of the National Liberation Council were implemented. The free text book plan was subsidised, demanding that parents paid some amount for their wards to receive the books. The NLC structured the educational system such that the ten (10) years of elementary education by Nkrumah was structured to an eight-year basic course to prepare students for secondary schools' entry and a further two-year continuation course of middle school. The basic requirement of entry into secondary school rested on the common entrance examination by students in final eighth year. The secondary school lasted for five (5) years to prepare students for school certificate of the West African examinations and the university education was three (3) years (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2016, p. 167).

Students who did not meet the requirement for secondary education were to remain in the middle school and complete their elementary education by attending two (2) years prevocational continuation classes where it was available, otherwise the students were to continue the study of the ordinary school subjects for the remaining two (2) years.

#### 3.3 The Educational Reforms of 1987

In December 1981, a second successful coup d'état was organised by Flight Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings to overthrow President Hilla Liman and his government. During this period, Rawlings observed that the quality and effectiveness of the educational system in the country was still questionable. In an attempt to provide an effective and efficient educational system, the Dzobo Committee was formed to review and restructure the system. According to a UNESCO (2008) report:

The 1987 reform became necessary as a result of a virtual collapse of the system. This was due to reasons which included insufficient supply of trained and qualified teachers. Other reasons were inadequate funding of the education sector, which led to the lack of textbooks and other needed curriculum materials, lack of adequate supply of furniture and equipment and the deterioration of school buildings. The ultimate effect of all these deficiencies was poor quality of teaching system by children of school-going age (Chapter 2).

Due to this, there was a need to discontinue some of the policies that were implemented by the National Liberation Council (NLC). The new policy's focus was on the need to implement a Junior Secondary School (JSS) programme. It highlighted a free and compulsory nine (9) years of basic education; that is, six (6) years of primary education and three (3) years of JSS education. Accordingly, Senior Secondary School (SSS) education was pushed to three (3) years and a minimum of four (4) years of tertiary education. The academic year was made up of three (3) terms for both JSS and SSS students. Also, terminal exams were conducted at the end of the term. It was mandatory for students in their final year of the Junior Secondary School and Senior Secondary School education to write the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) and the Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSSCE)

(Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2016, p. 168). The main focus of the 1987 Reform was to shift the theoretical academic system into a more practical, technological and hands-on learning system, hence the introduction of vocational and technical courses into the curriculum. The middle School, Ordinary and Advance level certificates were taken out of the system in 1994 and 1996 respectively.

#### 3.4 Educational Reforms of 2007

Following the election of John Agyekum Kuffuor and the New Patriotic Party (NPP) in the 2000 general elections in Ghana, he inaugurated a new committee to review the existing educational system in the country. This initiative was embarked upon with the aim of providing an excellent educational system for the country. This review was done under the chairmanship of Professor Josephus Anamuah-Mensah, the then Vice Chancellor of University of Education, Winneba. Adu-Gyamfi et al. (2016, p. 168) pointed out that the John Agyekum Kuffour led administration introduced a new education system which did not only review the content of the system but also extended the duration of Senior High School (SHS) from three (3) to four (4) years. Interestingly, all first year SHS students were to study core subjects such as English Language, Integrated Science, Mathematics and Information and Communication Technology as well as Social Studies. Again, other major reforms included the medium of instruction in kindergarten and lower primary in Ghanaian Language where emphasis was placed on the creative arts, literacy and numeracy (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2016, p. 169).

However, following the 2008 general elections which brought the National Democratic Congress (NDC) to power, the four (4) year Senior High School policy was reversed to three (3) years. One interesting thing to note about all these reforms is that Ghanaian governments whether civilian or military have realised that education is the fulcrum around which the development of the country can revolve. For this reason, all these successive governments have prioritised education in Ghana which has led to the numerous reforms we have witnessed. The next major policy in Ghana's education history is the Free Senior High School (FSHS) Policy, implemented by President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo Addo and the NPP in 2017.

## 3.5 The Free Senior High School Policy (FSHS)

On February 13, 2017, President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo Addo announced the determination of his government to begin the implementation of its campaign promise to provide free public Senior High Secondary School (SHS) education. This announcement coincided with the 2017/2018 academic year for Senior High School (SHS) which saw an initial 362,775 students who began the programme. The FSHS package came with tuition, no admission fees, no library fees, no examination fees and no utility fees. The policy also covered free meals, free text books and free boarding. This package further covered agricultural, vocational and technical schools (Daily Graphic, August, 2020). According to Kwegyiriba and Mensah (2021, p. 75), "The government of Ghana introduced free secondary education and free technical and vocational education and training in 2017. From 2017, the policy allowed over 1.2 million students to attend senior high school absolutely free of charge."

Prior to its implementation, 461,009 Junior High School (JHS) students registered and wrote the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) of which 420,135 representing 91.13% qualified to enter the various senior high schools in Ghana. Out of this, only 308,799 students got the opportunity to enrol, while the remaining 111,336 representing 26.50% remained at home (Free SHS Ghana, 2020). In 2017 when the FSHS policy was rolled out, 468,060 JHS wrote the BECE and out of that 361,771 students enrolled while the remaining 62,453 did not enrol in SHS. In addition, in 2018, 521,811 JHS students registered and wrote the BECE of which 486,641 students representing 93.26% qualified to enter the various senior high schools in Ghana. Out of this, 433,819 students enrolled whiles the remaining 52,822 representing 10.90% did not enrol. In 2019, 512,083 JHS students wrote the BECE and out of this, 459,912 students representing 89.81% qualified to enter senior high schools in Ghana. Accordingly, 404,856 students enrolled whiles the remaining 55,056 representing 11.90% did not enrol in SHS (Free SHS Ghana, 2020). From these statistics, it is observed that since 2017 following the implementation of the free senior high school policy, there has been a drastic decline annually in the number of students who did not enrol in Senior High Schools. This is due to increasing enrolment opportunity that the FSHS offered. In effect, more students who qualified to enter SHS got the opportunity to enrol freely.

The FSHS policy has both positive and negative effects on senior high school education in Ghana. The programme has brought relief to parents who would otherwise have borne the cost of secondary education of their wards (Zindzi, 2018). In addition, the programme serves as a barrier broker for those who could not afford senior high school education due to poverty (Nsiah, 2018). Tamanja and Pajibo (2019, p. 7838) noted that with the Free Senior High School Policy, vocational and technical schools are accessible to all students including none payment of tuition fees, library books, admission, utility, science centre, examination, meals, free textbooks, and free boarding facilities. The Ministry of Education (2018) noted that the introduction of the FSHS policy has led to substantial increase in enrolment since the main barrier has been absorbed by the government. Accordingly, data from the ministry shows that there has been an increase of 17% in 2017 and by 31% in 2018 which shows increase in enrolment by about 90,000.

Kwegyiriba and Mensah (2021, p. 76) asserted that the FSHS policy has really increased enrolment in secondary school attendance which justifies the continuing higher budget investment in the policy for human capital development in Ghana. They further pointed out that the financial burden associated with secondary education has been swallowed by the government, from tuition, to admission, text books, library, science centres, computer, examination, utilities, boarding and meals. They concluded that the FSHS policy has made education in secondary school equitable and that it has been one of the impactful policies, a social intervention policy that is significant and impactful.

Evidence from data shows that as of August 2020, the government had spent a total of Gh¢ 1,591,743,169.75 on the first cohort who began the programme in 2017. The amount covered general fees for Senior High School (SHS) /Technical Vocational Education Training (TVET), teaching and

learning materials, feeding fee for boarding and day students, one-time fees for first year SHS/TVET students only and one-time TVET instruments for first year students only. Statistically, the government had paid Gh¢ 5,026.00 as school fees for each boarding student and Gh¢ 2,272.00 on each day student. Between 2017 and 2020, a total fee for a TVET day student was 2,632.00 and Gh¢ 5,386.00 for each boarding student. Additionally, a total of Gh¢ 1,093,277,941.94 had been paid to the Buffer Stock Company Limited for the supply of food items to schools since the inception of the FSHS policy (Daily Graphic, August 2020).

The FSHS policy has received some endorsements from various stakeholders in the country. Apart from students, many other stakeholders in the education sector, including parents and teachers have spoken highly of the policy. According to the Headmaster (Mr. Jacob Afful) of Ghana Senior High School located in Koforidua in the Eastern Region of Ghana, he noted: "the long battle of chasing students for school fees had ended with the implementation of the FSHS policy." He observed that prior to the implementation of the FSHS policy, teachers often chased students for non-payment of fees, especially during examination periods. Similarly, the Headmistress of Manya Krobo Senior High School in the Eastern Region, Ms. Agnes Nartey stated: "the FSHS policy was a saviour." The General Overseer of the Makers House Chapel, Dr. Boadi Nyamekye added his voice by commending the government for implementing the FSHS because it had relieved the burden on the church's scholarship portfolio. He said the church believed in using education to bridge the gap between the rich and poor, adding that education demystifies every myth of greatness (Daily Graphic, August 2020). Finally, Rev. Dr. Yaw Owusu Ansah, the Regional Overseer of Living Power Resurrection Ministry International said he would have been a professor if the FSHS was operational at the time he was schooling and pledged to promote the FSHS policy. Clearly, the free senior high school policy has helped needy families to enrol their wards in school and hence, reducing financial pressures on parents since they do not pay anything (Abdul-Rahaman, et al. 2018, p. 32). This finding is in line with other studies conducted by scholars such as Akyeampong (2009), and Olwande et al. (2010). The comments above point clearly to the success of the FSHS policy by the government. However, challenges to this policy abound.

Tamanja and Pajibo (2019, p. 7839) asserted that although the FSHS programme has been implemented, studies show that it is accompanied by numerous predicaments that impede quality education. They argued that the increasing enrolment and retention in secondary schools is still threatened by many socio-economic factors that contribute to students dropping out of school, heavy teaching loads on teachers, teacher shortages and inadequate instructional materials (Tamanja & Pajibo, 2019, p. 7839). Similarly, they noted that infrastructure has been the major setback to the FSHS programme which consequently introduced the double-track system with its attendant problems. The key effect as noted by these scholars is that the year-round schooling has no impact on academic achievement and that selecting students into tracks without an awareness of their observed abilities or basing their selection

on non-academic criteria can severely limit the expected positive effects of tracking (Tamanja & Pajibo, 2019).

Apart from the challenges of double track, overcrowding, inadequate infrastructure and challenges with teaching and learning materials, there is also a challenge of food supplies to the schools. In an online newspaper publication on Monday May 9 2022, the article stated that President Nana Akufo Addo's flagship programme, the Free Senior High School policy, is faced with a major challenge of feeding the beneficiaries, especially those in boarding schools as food suppliers get ready to withdraw services over a Gh¢ 500 million debt owed them. This debt emerged as a result of government's inability to pay suppliers (National Food Buffer Stock Company) since 2021 and thus, the suppliers became cash trapped and unable to pay loans they took from banks to purchase their food suppliers (Ghana Web, May 2022). This situation is worrisome as head-teachers have expressed their frustrations over food shortages and argued that this could create a violent environment within the various schools through agitations and demonstrations from students. The resultant effect is school closure which will be the last resort to solve the problem of food shortage if no solution is professed from the government immediately.

Though no concrete study has been done to measure the impact of free education on quality education, this study argues that the FSHS policy has some negative implications on quality education. This assertion is informed by observations made by the researchers in some senior high schools across Greater Accra, Volta, Eastern and Oti regions of the country which show reduction in contact hours, the challenges of the double track system, heavy teaching loads, overcrowded classrooms, inadequate teaching and learning materials as well as poor infrastructure in terms of classrooms and dormitories. All these challenges have the potential to affect quality education.

The FSHS policy has received many reactions from individuals, civil society organisations and some major stakeholders including the opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC) who have issues with its implementation. The NDC pledged during the 2020 general election to review the FSHS policy to address its challenges if it came into power. However, this was seen as an intention to cancel the policy. Meanwhile, the Catholic Archbishop for Cape Coast, Most Reverend Charles Palmer-Buckle called for immediate steps to review the FSHS policy. Speaking at the launch of a book titled, "Accra ACA, Bleoo, The History of the Accra Academy from James Town to Bubuashie", he said even though he supported the policy 100%, the time had come for the policy to be streamlined to enhance better education. He added that the FSHS policy has offered relief to parents, but it was important for the government to reconsider reviewing it in order to remove all bottlenecks. Speaking at the same event, the Deputy Education Minister and Member of Parliament for the Assin South Constituency, Rev. Ntim Fordjour, noted that, the implementation of the FSHS policy required collaboration from all stakeholders to overcome present challenges (Anokye, 2020).

#### 4. The General Impacts of the Education Reforms on Quality Education

The reforms implemented by the various governments over the period (1951 to 2017) have yielded both positive and negative results. Throughout the period of reforms, the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS) anticipated an increase in enrolment from 146,000 to 195,000 from 1987-1988 and 1997-1998 academic years and by 2000-2001, it was 204,000 for the age group of 16-18. Also, the number of public secondary schools increased from forty (40) to four hundred and seventy-four (474) (Republic of Ghana, 2004). This achievement indicated the progressive nature of these educational reforms in meeting the demand and target for free compulsory basic education in Ghana. It clearly shows that as more people were getting enrolled in school, government expenditure would increase in order to sustain this achievement. However, the situation rather generated a downward trend in terms of quality education.

Indeed, Abdallah (1986, p. 1), in a speech as the Secretary for Education pointed out that:

Over the past decade, there has been a sharp deterioration in the quality of education at all levels. There has been a virtual collapse of physical infrastructure in the provision of buildings, equipment, materials, teaching aids, etc., arising from the economic constraints that faced the country in the late 1970s and early 1980s, as well as the bureaucratic bottlenecks and sheer lack of interest and commitment from administrators, education in Ghana was in a mess.

Consequently, there was stagnation and near demise of the experimental Junior Secondary School (JSS) system. By 1983, the education system was in major crisis through lack of educational materials, deterioration of school structures, low enrolment levels, high drop-out rates, poor educational administration and management, drastic reductions in government's educational financing and the lack of data and statistics on which to base any planning. This situation arose primarily due to lack of funds to meet the increasing demand for quality education. Bewiadzi and Ismaila (2016, p. 16) pointed out that funding of education all over the world is a crucial challenge for governments, policy makers, and school administrators. Considering the seriousness of the problem, a World Bank/UNESCO report (2000, p. 55) concluded that: "the lack of sustainable financing therefore continues to limit enrolment growth and to skew education toward low-cost, low-quality programmes."

To ameliorate this problem, President Jerry John Rawlings, in 1999 incorporated the proposal into his annual address to Parliament, and a technical committee was formed to develop a policy framework with some specific terms of reference. Debates over the policy framework led to the establishment of the Ghana Education Trust Fund (GET Fund) in the year 2000 under the Ghana Education Trust Fund Act 2000, Act 581 (Harsch, 2000; Effah, 2003). The establishment of the GET Fund was aimed at bringing some relief to the educational sector in Ghana in terms of infrastructure and other related developments (Bewiadzi & Ismaila, 2016, p. 17).

Regarding the FSHS policy, issues of food crisis, inadequate infrastructure, inadequate teaching and learning materials, overcrowded classrooms, and heavy teaching loads due to inadequate teachers have

been highlighted earlier. It is important to note that this policy is funded by the oil revenue generated from the country's oilfields in Takoradi in the Western Region of Ghana. However, this revenue has proven to be inadequate to meet the growing demands of the policy, hence, the numerous challenges that have confronted the policy.

### 5. Conclusion

This paper has discussed the major educational reforms in Ghana taking into consideration their policies, changes and adjustments made and the reasons for their discontinuities, with the major cause of this being the different political systems in this country. Every political party in a quest to provide quality and accessible education to the people in its regime, tries to draw and implement policies regarding education, which are later seen as unrealistic and discontinued by the next government.

The Accelerated Development Plan of 1951 and Education Act 1961 had certain commonalities with the Free Senior High School policy of 2017. While the policies came at different eras, the attendant problems in terms of inadequate infrastructure which led to the shift system, inadequate textbooks, limited contact hours for teaching and learning which compromised quality are virtually the same. While the reforms of the National Liberation Council were to equip students to fit into the world of work even after middle school, the Educational Reform of 1987 also identified challenges in terms of lack of investment in infrastructure and teaching and other logistics as reasons for the reform.

The Free Senior High School policy has proved to be important in terms of expanding access to senior high school education. The statistics show drastic decline in qualified candidates who were unable to enrol into senior high school due to financial problems. With the introduction of the Free Senior High School policy, more people are getting enrolled into senior high school. This policy has received massive endorsement from the general public. But the fact still remains that it is bedevilled with many challenges which tend to compromise quality education. The major question to ask is with these current challenges of Free Senior High School (FSHS), what will happen if a new government takes over the mantle of leadership in the next government (January 2025)? Will the policy be reviewed or be totally scrapped off as it happened with the previous governments? Obviously, if the New Patriotic Party retains power, it means the FSHS policy in the near future. With this politicisation, the future of a better and quality educational system in Ghana looks very blurred. Accordingly, this study concludes that the various education sector of the country. However, the negative impacts have compromised quality education in Ghana.

### 6. Recommendations

First of all, this study recommends that Ghana must have a National Education Policy, especially regarding basic and senior high schools in Ghana. This national policy must be devoid of partisan

politics. This policy document must be implemented by any government which assumes office in the Fourth Republic. The government as well as other stakeholders of education must hold firm onto this National Education Policy and implement its tenets to the latter. This policy must have a clear roadmap to ensure continuity in the education sector of Ghana. The study also recommends that there should be a common playing ground for policy formulators and policy implementers in the education sector of Ghana. This will enhance collaborative work between all the stakeholders to ensure that the policy covers all sectors of education in Ghana. Finally, the design, development, formulation and implementation of the National Education Policy must be a bottom-up approach rather than the top-down approach which has characterised numerous educational policies in Ghana. The bottom-up approach is relevant as it will ensure inclusiveness in the development and implementation of education of education will have the opportunity to make inputs into the design of these policies. If all these are done, there will be continuity in the educational system of Ghana which will subsequently promote quality education.

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