



Optimizing parental involvement in Kurikulum Merdeka implementation in rural early childhood education

Silmi Indah Fakhira¹, Zainal Arifin², Mario Emilzoli³

^{1,2,3} Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Kota Bandung, Indonesia
silmiindah@upi.edu¹, zainalarifin.tp@upi.edu², emilzoli@upi.edu³

ABSTRACT

This study was motivated by the limited parental involvement in supporting the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka in Early Childhood Education, particularly in rural areas, where the curriculum emphasizes collaboration between schools and families for children's holistic development. This study aims to analyze strategies for optimizing parental involvement in supporting the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka in rural Early Childhood Education. It employed a literature review method, collecting data from journal articles, reports, and other relevant documents. The findings indicate that parental involvement in rural areas continues to face challenges, including limited understanding of early childhood education and the Kurikulum Merdeka, the perception that education is solely the school's responsibility, and time constraints resulting from work and economic conditions. To address these challenges, strategies such as establishing communication early, strengthening open and continuous communication, utilizing accessible digital media, implementing ongoing parenting programs, and involving parents in school activities can strengthen collaboration between schools and families in rural Early Childhood Education settings.

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh masih terbatasnya keterlibatan orang tua dalam mendukung implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka pada Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini (PAUD), khususnya di wilayah pedesaan, di mana kurikulum ini menekankan kolaborasi antara sekolah dan keluarga untuk mendukung perkembangan anak secara holistik. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis strategi optimalisasi keterlibatan orang tua dalam mendukung implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka di PAUD di wilayah pedesaan. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode studi literatur dengan mengumpulkan data dari jurnal, laporan, dan dokumen relevan lainnya. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa keterlibatan orang tua di wilayah pedesaan masih menghadapi berbagai tantangan, antara lain rendahnya pemahaman mengenai pendidikan anak usia dini dan Kurikulum Merdeka, persepsi bahwa pendidikan merupakan tanggung jawab sekolah, serta keterbatasan waktu akibat tuntutan pekerjaan dan kondisi ekonomi. Untuk mengatasi tantangan tersebut, strategi seperti membangun komunikasi sejak awal, memperkuat komunikasi yang terbuka dan berkelanjutan, memanfaatkan media digital yang mudah diakses, melaksanakan program parenting yang berkelanjutan, serta melibatkan orang tua dalam kegiatan sekolah dapat memperkuat kolaborasi antara sekolah dan keluarga di wilayah pedesaan.

Kata Kunci: keterlibatan orang tua; Kurikulum Merdeka; pendidikan anak usia dini di pedesaan

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*Corresponding author: silmiindah@upi.edu

INTRODUCTION

Curriculum implementation is an important aspect in determining the success of achieving educational goals. A curriculum is not merely designed as a set of instructional plans, but it must also be implemented effectively within the educational process to achieve the intended objectives. According to Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, a curriculum is defined as a set of plans and arrangements regarding educational objectives, content, learning materials, and methods used as guidelines for organizing learning activities to achieve specific educational goals. Therefore, the curriculum functions not only as an administrative document but also as the primary guideline for educational practice. According to Rusman in the book "Pengantar Kurikulum," a curriculum becomes meaningful when it is carefully implemented by teachers in the learning process. Therefore, curriculum implementation plays a crucial role in determining the success of a curriculum in achieving the educational goals that have been established.

In the current Indonesian educational context, curriculum implementation is reflected through the adoption of the Kurikulum Merdeka, which emphasizes student-centered, flexible, and contextual learning in accordance with students' developmental needs (Liani et al., 2025). The Kurikulum Merdeka focuses on strengthening competencies and character development through deeper learning of essential materials (Nafi'ah et al., 2023). The successful implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka depends not only on the roles of teachers and schools, but also on the active involvement of various stakeholders, including parents. Active parental involvement plays an important role in supporting children's learning and improving their academic achievement. At the Early Childhood Education level, parental involvement is one of the key aspects supporting curriculum implementation. Parents play a significant role in supporting children's learning and development through communication with teachers, creating a conducive learning environment at home, and actively accompanying children throughout the learning process (Anjani & Mashudi, 2024).

However, limited parental and community involvement remains one of the major challenges in implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka in early childhood education settings (Nirwana et al., 2025). Furthermore, the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka in a kindergarten located in a rural area is still in the transitional phase. It has not yet been carried out optimally due to teachers' limited understanding of the curriculum, as well as inadequate facilities and infrastructure (Ratih et al., 2026). These conditions suggest that parental involvement and strong collaboration between schools and families are essential factors in supporting effective curriculum implementation. Parents who actively participate in their children's education tend to have a better understanding of their children's development, provide more meaningful support at home, and establish effective communication with teachers, thereby strengthening the partnership needed to support children's overall development (Anjani & Mashudi, 2024).

Parental participation in rural areas is generally limited to enrolling children in the nearest Early Childhood Education institution, with little involvement beyond this stage in the learning process. Factors such as geographical distance, time constraints, socioeconomic status, parental educational background, and parents' perceptions of the importance of education are among the main barriers to increasing parental participation (Mulia & Kurniati, 2023).

These findings are consistent with preliminary field observations conducted through tutoring activities and informal discussions with volunteers from Odesa Indonesia, who actively provide educational assistance in rural communities. The observations indicated that many parents primarily focus on their children's ability to read and perform basic arithmetic. They often have a limited understanding of the fundamental purpose of early childhood education and tend to delegate educational responsibilities entirely to educational institutions without providing adequate support and guidance at home. This phenomenon further reinforces the view that parental involvement in rural areas remains limited.

Numerous studies have examined the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka at the Early Childhood Education level, as well as the importance of parental involvement in supporting children's learning processes. However, most of these studies have focused on challenges in curriculum implementation, teachers' perceptions of the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka, forms of parental participation in urban areas, and factors that hinder parental involvement in rural settings. Studies that systematically examine strategies for optimizing parental involvement in rural Early Childhood Education settings to support the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka remain limited. The novelty of this study lies in its solution-oriented approach, namely providing a synthesis of contextual strategies for optimizing parental involvement in rural areas as a means of supporting the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka, which emphasizes collaboration between schools and families. Therefore, this study aims to analyze strategies for optimizing parental involvement in supporting the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka in Early Childhood Education institutions located in rural areas.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Parental Involvement in Curriculum Implementation

Parents constitute the first educational environment for children, particularly within the family context. Parents serve as educators, motivators, facilitators, and guides for their children. Parents not only act as the primary individuals responsible for their children's education but also play a crucial role in shaping their development and prospects. Active parental involvement can foster a supportive educational environment, provide emotional support, and serve as a source of motivation that helps children achieve optimal academic performance and enhances their motivation to learn (Wahyudi et al., 2026). The significant role of parents in supporting children's development and education indicates that parental involvement is also essential in curriculum implementation at schools (Khaira et al., 2023). Parental involvement in curriculum implementation contributes to various aspects of students' development and educational achievement. Such involvement is reflected in more regular school attendance, better social development, more positive behavior, and stronger adaptability to the school environment.

Parental participation can also enhance students' self-confidence in learning, encourage more active engagement in academic activities, and strengthen their understanding of the importance of education. Parents should be given opportunities to express their views and expectations regarding their children's education, and parental support is also crucial to students' academic success. The successful implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* is

highly dependent on the involvement of various educational stakeholders, including parents, communities, and schools, in supporting the achievement of educational goals (Purba & Yonggom, 2024). Therefore, institutions or bodies responsible for curriculum development need to provide structures or mechanisms that guide parents in supporting curriculum implementation. In this regard, parents play a strategic role in providing learning assistance at home, support, and motivation throughout the learning process, all of which have been shown to influence children's learning outcomes positively. Therefore, parental involvement should not be viewed merely as a complementary element in the educational process but rather as a critical component that contributes to the successful implementation of the curriculum.

Concept of the Kurikulum Merdeka in Early Childhood Education

The Kurikulum Merdeka is currently implemented as the national curriculum in Indonesia. It represents a transformation of the 2013 Curriculum and has been gradually implemented across Indonesia since 2022. According to Badan Standar, Kurikulum, dan Asesmen Pendidikan Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi Republik Indonesia in the book "Kajian Akademik Kurikulum Merdeka," Kurikulum Merdeka is designed based on several key principles, including a focus on essential content, flexibility, and the development of competencies and character. The emphasis on essential content means that the curriculum prioritizes competencies considered important for students to achieve, thereby requiring the curriculum to be designed more simply. Flexibility refers to the autonomy granted to educational institutions in developing learning activities according to their contexts and needs.

The curriculum emphasizes the strengthening of Pancasila values as part of character development. Furthermore, the Kurikulum Merdeka promotes learning processes that support students' holistic development in order to shape them into Pancasila learners who are prepared to face future challenges (Lestari et al., 2023). There are four main characteristics of learning in the Kurikulum Merdeka: 1) utilizing initial, process, and final assessments to understand students' learning needs and learning development; 2) adjusting learning processes based on students' needs and learning positions; 3) prioritizing students' learning progress over the completion of curriculum content; 4) conducting reflections on students' learning progress collaboratively with other educators (Anggraini et al., 2022). At the Early Childhood Education level, the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka emphasizes learning that supports children's holistic development.

In the PAUD Kurikulum Merdeka, learning implementation is designed based on the learning outcomes of the foundational phase developed by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, which serves as the basis for developing children's initial competencies until they complete the PAUD level. According to Badan Standar, Kurikulum dan Asesmen Pendidikan Kemendikdasmen in the book "Panduan Capaian Pembelajaran Fase Fondasi Edisi Revisi 2025" The scope of learning outcomes in PAUD is structured based on three integrated stimulation elements derived from various aspects of child development, including religious and moral values, physical and motor development, cognitive development, social-emotional development, language development, and Pancasila values. In addition, this scope also includes other relevant domains to support the optimization of

children's growth and development in accordance with the demands of 21st-century education in Indonesia. The concept of Merdeka Belajar in early childhood education aims to help develop children's problem-solving abilities and encourage critical thinking, enabling children to gain a broader understanding and develop themselves in various areas beyond cognitive development alone (Fadillah & Hibana, 2022; Prasetya et al., 2025).

In implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka, the cultivation of positive character and social relationship skills is one of the primary aspects that teachers need to develop in children. Children are also encouraged to become creative and innovative in various fields according to their respective interests (Anggraini et al., 2022). According to Direktorat Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini in the book *"Buklet Memahami Kurikulum Merdeka PAUD: Alur Belajar IKM Bagi Pendidik PAUD"* The characteristics of learning in PAUD include support for children's well-being, respect for children as individuals, and encouragement of children's curiosity. Furthermore, learning should be adjusted to children's age, developmental stage, interests, and needs, while also providing holistic and integrative stimulation. Learning should also offer challenges, guidance, and support through meaningful interactions, as well as involve families as partners in supporting children's learning processes.

METHODS

This study employed a literature review method using a qualitative approach. A literature review is a process of identifying, reading, and analyzing various sources of information relevant to a particular research topic. The research data were obtained from journal articles identified through the Google Scholar database, as well as books and policy documents sourced from various openly accessible academic resources. The literature search was conducted using the keywords *"parental involvement," "implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka,"* and *"early childhood education in rural areas."* The primary literature analyzed consisted of publications published between 2019 and 2026, written in either Indonesian or English, and relevant to the focus of the study. Sources that were not relevant to the research focus, duplicate publications, and sources that did not provide information regarding parental involvement or the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka were excluded from the analysis.

The collected data were analyzed descriptively through critical reading, comparison of findings across studies, categorization of information based on similar themes, and synthesis of findings to develop a comprehensive understanding of the research focus. The study was conducted in two stages. The first stage involved identifying various challenges related to parental involvement in the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka in rural early childhood education settings. These challenges were identified through a review of previous studies reporting barriers, constraints, and factors influencing parental participation in children's education. The second stage involved analyzing strategies that could be employed to optimize parental involvement in supporting the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka. The strategies identified in the literature were then compared, categorized according to similar themes, and synthesized to develop a comprehensive understanding of strategies that are relevant to the characteristics of rural areas.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Challenges of Parental Involvement in the Implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka in Rural PAUD

Parental involvement in curriculum implementation is a crucial aspect of supporting the successful implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka. However, various challenges continue to hinder optimal parental participation in curriculum implementation. One factor limiting parental involvement is work-related commitments and occupational demands (Putri et al., 2023). In addition, many parents still perceive that educational responsibility lies entirely with schools. Such conditions are commonly found in rural areas. As a result, many parents are not fully aware of their children's educational development and are unable to provide optimal support at home. The implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka in rural areas faces various challenges, such as limited infrastructure, inadequate internet access, insufficient teacher training, and low levels of community support (Stenly et al., 2024). These challenges differ significantly from educational conditions in urban areas, which generally have better educational quality and access than suburban or rural regions.

Urban areas tend to have more complete facilities, better-qualified teachers, and greater parental attention toward children's education (Nurlaily et al., 2021). On the other hand, many parents in rural areas face difficulties in allocating time to assist their children's learning due to work-related commitments and occupational demands (Amalia et al., 2021). In addition, low levels of educational attainment prevent some parents from providing adequate academic support to their children. Economic constraints also present a significant barrier, as some families are unable to provide sufficient learning resources and facilities at home. These findings suggest that barriers to parental involvement in rural areas are influenced not only by economic and educational factors but also by cultural factors, such as the belief that education is solely the responsibility of schools. This mindset becomes a major obstacle to aligning the values and learning experiences promoted at school with those reinforced in the home environment.

Strategies for Optimizing Parental Involvement in the Implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka

To address the various challenges identified, appropriate strategies are required to optimize parental involvement in the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka in PAUD institutions. Communication between teachers and parents should be conducted openly while also considering appropriate communication timing based on parents' availability (Aushofia & Tejaningsih, 2025). Teachers should also use language that is easy to understand and establish a positive communication atmosphere so that parents feel comfortable participating in children's educational processes. These strategies can strengthen parental involvement in meaningful and sustainable ways. Furthermore, communication between schools and parents can be facilitated through digital media to support children's education (Amilia et al., 2026). Digital platforms, such as WhatsApp, simplify information exchange and help foster active parental involvement (Hadiapurwa et al., 2023). Institutions or agencies responsible for

curriculum development should provide structures or mechanisms that guide parents in the curriculum development process (Aushofia & Tejaningsih, 2025).

Mass media may also be utilized to create programs that encourage parental involvement in curriculum development. Through meetings between schools and parents, socialization and education regarding the content and objectives of the Kurikulum Merdeka can be conducted regularly to improve parents' understanding of the curriculum implemented in schools. Schools may also organize parenting seminars and focused discussions between teachers and parents. In addition, schools can conduct collaborative activities such as inspiration classes and outing classes involving parents to strengthen direct parental participation. According to Direktorat PAUD Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan "*Membangun Komunikasi Positif Antara Guru PAUD dengan Orang Tua Murid Pada Saat Penerapan Kebijakan Belajar dari Rumah*" there are three important elements in establishing positive communication between teachers and parents, namely clarity, consistency, and care.

Clarity refers to delivering messages that are easy to understand, consistency refers to maintaining continuous communication, and care refers to teachers demonstrating concern for children's development at home. Positive communication can build strong relationships between teachers and parents while encouraging collaboration in optimizing children's potential both at school and at home. These strategies may serve as important references for optimizing parental involvement in implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka in PAUD institutions, particularly in addressing challenges in rural areas. Providing opportunities for parents to understand the Kurikulum Merdeka and establishing open communication in supporting children's learning processes can contribute to more effective curriculum implementation.

Discussion

Parental involvement is an important factor in supporting the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka at the early childhood education level, including in rural areas. This finding indicates that the successful implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka depends not only on teachers' readiness to carry out learning activities but also on the support provided by families in facilitating children's development. This is in line with the characteristics of the Kurikulum Merdeka, which requires genuine synergy between schools and families to achieve holistic and contextual learning. In rural contexts, the role of the family becomes increasingly crucial because the family environment serves as the primary learning space for children outside of school. When support at home remains limited, the objective of the Kurikulum Merdeka to foster children's holistic development may not be achieved optimally.

Parental or family involvement in the educational process has been shown to improve children's academic achievement and promote positive behavioral outcomes (Jatmika et al., 2020). Furthermore, active parental involvement in early childhood education contributes positively to children's development across academic, social, and emotional domains. The findings indicate that some parents in rural areas still perceive education as entirely the responsibility of schools. This perception suggests a gap in understanding regarding the role of the family in children's education. As a result, parents tend to entrust the educational process entirely to teachers and become less involved in supporting their children's learning

activities at home and in school programs. This condition demonstrates that the successful implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka is determined not only by the quality of instruction provided by teachers but also by the extent to which parents understand and fulfill their roles as educational partners.

Parents' responses and participation play a crucial role in determining the success of co-curricular programs in schools, such as the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5), as the synergy between school and home can reinforce the consistency of values acquired by children across both environments (Daulat et al., 2025). In line with this, the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka requires the active involvement of parents in supporting various school activities and calls for a paradigm shift in which schools are no longer viewed merely as places where children are entrusted for education, but rather as collaborative spaces where teachers and parents work together to support children's learning success (Wijayanto et al., 2024). These findings indicate that parental involvement plays an important role not only in supporting academic activities but also in fostering character development and the cultivation of positive values, which are central to the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka.

Therefore, continuous communication and socialization activities are essential to ensure that parents understand educational goals and the forms of support they can provide to their children. Parents' limited understanding of the nature of early childhood education also constitutes a challenge that cannot be overlooked. Many parents in rural areas tend to measure the success of early childhood education solely through academic abilities such as reading, writing, and arithmetic. However, the Kurikulum Merdeka at the early childhood education level emphasizes children's holistic development, including social-emotional development, character formation, creativity, and independence. Parents' level of understanding of early childhood education remains moderate. This finding is further supported by evidence that participation in early childhood education in Indonesia is still dominated by urban areas, accounting for 55.4%.

Participation in rural areas reaches only 44.6%, attributed to limited access and parental involvement in rural communities, particularly in terms of geographical distance, educational facilities, and parents' understanding of the importance of early childhood education (Aini et al., 2025). These findings indicate a gap between the objectives of the curriculum and the understanding held by some parents. This gap between curriculum objectives and parental understanding suggests that parental education should be conducted intensively, contextually, and continuously, rather than through one-way formal socialization that fails to address the actual needs of local communities. The findings also indicate that occupational demands and economic constraints constitute major barriers to parental involvement. This condition suggests that low parental involvement is not always caused by a lack of concern for children's education but is often related to limited time and resources available to families.

Many parents in rural areas must prioritize work in order to meet their families' needs, thereby limiting their opportunities to support their children's learning processes (Chophel & Choeda, 2021). When faced with the choice between supporting children's learning and meeting family needs, most parents tend to prioritize employment as a primary necessity (Sadewa & Zahroh, 2026). This finding indicates that efforts to enhance parental involvement should take into account the socioeconomic conditions of rural communities. Therefore,

strategies aimed at increasing parental involvement should not only focus on raising educational awareness but should also be designed flexibly to accommodate the realities of local community life. Communication between schools and parents becomes a highly important strategy for enhancing parental involvement to address these challenges.

Open, flexible, and continuous communication enables the development of a shared understanding regarding learning objectives and children's development. These findings indicate that parental involvement cannot be improved solely through formal information dissemination but requires relationships built on trust and collaboration. Establishing parental commitment from the outset is a key factor in children's education (Triwardhani et al, 2020). Such commitment needs to be developed through consistent communication from the beginning of the relationship between schools and families. In line with this, communication between parents and teachers actually begins when parents first enroll their children in an educational institution (Thahir et al., 2025). Therefore, communication established from the outset functions not only as a means of conveying information but also as a mechanism for building parents' awareness of the importance of their role in the educational process (Major, 2023).

The findings also indicate that the use of digital media, such as WhatsApp, can serve as an alternative strategy for fostering communication between schools and parents. These findings suggest that technology can be utilized to address some communication barriers arising from parents' limited time and busy schedules (Oke et al., 2021). In rural contexts, the use of simple and easily accessible communication media is more feasible than relying on more complex digital platforms. In addition to facilitating the dissemination of information regarding children's development, digital media also enables faster and more continuous communication between schools and families. Thus, the use of technology functions not only as a communication tool but also as a means of strengthening educational collaboration that is more flexible and adaptive to the conditions of rural communities.

This study also found that socialization and parenting programs are important strategies for improving parents' understanding of the Kurikulum Merdeka. These findings indicate that optimizing parental involvement cannot be achieved instantly but requires a continuous educational process. Through parenting programs, parents have opportunities to understand learning objectives, child development characteristics, and forms of support that can be provided at home. Parenting programs can increase parents' awareness that children's education is a shared responsibility between schools and families (Thahir et al., 2025). Parental involvement tends to be more effective when early childhood education institutions provide programs that encourage parents' active participation in educational activities.

These findings indicate that enhancing parental involvement requires approaches that are not only informative but also participatory, enabling parents to become directly involved in various educational activities. In addition to parenting programs, activities such as inspirational classes involving parents also have the potential to strengthen relationships between schools and families. Such activities not only provide opportunities for parents to participate in school programs but also allow children to directly observe the experiences, skills, and professions of their parents. Through this type of involvement, parents are no longer positioned merely as recipients of information but as active participants in the learning

process taking place at school. This condition can strengthen parents' sense of ownership of school programs and ultimately encourage more sustainable involvement.

Therefore, optimizing parental involvement in the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka in early childhood education settings in rural areas should be strengthened through effective communication that is adapted to the conditions of rural communities, the simple utilization of digital media, and the continuous implementation of parenting and socialization programs in order to establish optimal collaboration between schools and families in supporting children's holistic development. Furthermore, consistent parental involvement can help strengthen the continuity of learning and reinforce positive habits between school and home environments. Through strong synergy between schools and families, the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka in rural early childhood education settings is expected to be carried out more effectively.

CONCLUSION

Parental involvement plays an important role in supporting the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka in early childhood education settings in rural areas. However, such involvement continues to face various challenges, including parents' limited understanding of early childhood education and the Kurikulum Merdeka, the perception that education is solely the responsibility of schools, as well as time constraints resulting from work demands and family economic conditions. These challenges indicate that parental involvement is influenced not only by individual factors but also by the social, economic, and educational conditions within rural communities. The optimization of parental involvement can be achieved through the establishment of communication from the very beginning of the relationship between schools and families, the strengthening of open, flexible, and continuous communication, the utilization of accessible digital media to support communication, the implementation of ongoing parenting programs, and the involvement of parents in various school activities, such as inspirational classes. These strategies can help enhance parents' understanding of their roles in their children's education while simultaneously strengthening collaboration between schools and families. The successful implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka in early childhood education settings in rural areas requires sustained synergy between schools and families. Therefore, efforts to enhance parental involvement should become an integral part of the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka to ensure that the goal of promoting children's holistic development can be achieved optimally.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest related to the publication of this article. The author also confirms that the data and content of the article are free from plagiarism.

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