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The Intended Objective of the EFL Teacher Education Curriculum in Iran: A Case Study of Flipped Instruction Literacy

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Abstract

Flipped instruction is an innovative approach to teaching different subjects including English as a foreign language that has been welcomed by many teachers, institutions and material developed around the world. Due to the educational crisis in the world imposed by COVID-19 pandemic, this method of instruction has been at the cannon of educators' attention even more than before. It is undeniable that there have been a plethora of research on the positive effects of flipped instruction in education. However, this research was inspired by a question that has been left unanswered in previous studies. That is, considering the fact that flipped instruction is a useful method, to what extent teachers are ready or have been familiarized with this method of instruction. This study was a preliminary study to answer this question and in order to do so, the researcher focused on the intended curriculum of educational technology courses in Farhangian University which is mainly responsible for preparing future EFL teachers. The results showed that there are only three units of educational technology courses. Moreover, the courses did not cover the related concepts of flipped instruction.

Introduction

At present, traditional educational methods are more common, and the educational system needs an ideology that supports the need for change and has the ability to adapt to the changes in society, and by creating information and communication technology (ICT) changes in its system, it can provide many opportunities for teaching and education in all fields. Today, one of the revolutions in the field of education is the use of new ICT products that have provided the possibility of exchanging information and communication for the distance education system remotely and constantly changing teaching and learning. So educational systems that used to use only an independent approach (using face-to-face education or distance education system) have been encouraged to approach different educational opportunities. To make the teaching-learning process effective, a media balance must be struck so that the information and communication technology element can play an effective role in more than 50% of the whole process. Because virtual technologies can provide more opportunity for different independent activities than face-to-face teaching, they can be used as a tool to develop learners' thinking exercises (Akrami, 2014).

Recently, the methods and approaches of education in the world, including our country, have undergone changes and transformations. The educational environment of many classrooms in our country is significantly different from the atmosphere which was common a few decades ago. Today, teachers are looking for new methods and approaches for better and more effective teaching. Quality education is one of the concerns of teachers in our country. Uniformity and lack of initiative of teachers in the teaching method can be considered as one of the reasons for students' academic failure. Most students like to learn a variety of enjoyable issues in a variety of learning environments. Perhaps it can be said that one of the weaknesses of traditional teaching methods is their teacher-centered nature; moreover, students are passive and lack attention to active teaching methods, especially new teaching methods that are able to lead students to attractive learning in a variety of learning environments. The learning process is too complex to be confined to the classroom (Garrison, 2004).

Today, society needs new and creative educational models to prepare students to face life crises and take advantage of their opportunities, abilities and creativity. Therefore, instead of memorizing, students should learn how to learn scientifically through thinking and dealing with problems regularly. To achieve such goals, by engaging in active teaching methods, students engage in life issues and learn issues that relate to their real lives, as innovative life-style approaches make learning reality more attractive and learners tend to strive for it (Myers 2005).

A flipped classroom is a teaching-learning approach that changes the traditional classroom in the first place. In other words, in this way, the teacher provides the content that is to be taught to the learners in a previous session. They should learn the desired educational content individually at home or outside the classroom by watching videos or experiments, text and audio files, or whatever the teacher has given them to better learn the subject of the class session, and attend class. The classroom is a place to talk about knowledge. When students attend class sessions, what is normally considered a homework assignment can include working with a tutor or a group of classmates to solve problems, review the issues that have arisen and apply what has been learned in new fields (Maleki, 2015).

This approach can be useful for teachers who want to be aware of the extent to which their students have control over their own learning. There is no single pattern for the flipped classroom. The time spent in class is spent lecturing on the film and then the content is rehearsed in class.

In addition to integrating with other areas of learning, ICT can be presented independently. Each educational module can be considered as an independent part of the course, the content of which can be learned independently of any other course. However, sometimes modules are a prerequisite for each other. On the other hand, educational module is a plan or behavioral plan in which learning activities are organized based on the abilities of individual learners (Bethany, 2010).

In modular education, the entire curriculum is divided into sections or units and small steps, which, despite the fact that module is introduced as part of the curriculum and at the same time, it is in a relationship with a particular skill which is also considered independent. The principles of modular education include the principle of independence, the principle of relationship with needs, the principle of attention to individual, and individual differences. Students who learn through active learning not only learn better, but also enjoy learning more, because instead of just listening, they actively participate in learning and feel responsible for their own learning. (Ranjbari et al, 2013).

Teaching methods are not at the same level in terms of function and advantage during education. Flipped education is one of the most central and effective teaching and classroom methods due to its compatibility with the natural life process. In the methods used in the classroom today, little attention is paid to the principle of thinking and intellectual independence, self-reliance, and the application of information and information learned. These problems are greatly reduced in flipped learning. Since the present study is designed and compiled based on flipped education, it is necessary to provide the characteristics of this method in comparison with other educational methods, especially the traditional teaching method (Fazlali, 2020). The flipped learning method causes the materials to develop the thinking power in the person through thinking and reading and using the appropriate time, and also increases his social and self-confidence. The reverse learning method ensures that the teacher does not face a shortage of time and organizes class time properly (Sharifi & Karani, 2013).

The significant rise in flipped teaching and learning in education (Bergmann & Sams, 2012) has not only changed the traditional learning patterns and teacher-centered learning modes, but also improved students' learning achievement and increased the interaction among learners and teachers (Hwang & Lai, 2017). Flipped learning has been recognized as a pedagogical approach to integrating instructional videos for students to self-learn outside of class by watching and reviewing the learning content or pre-class assignments before class (DeLozier & Rhodes, 2017). This learning mode may engage students in meaningful learner-to-learner or learner-to-teacher interactions in the community (Schultz, Duffield, Rasmussen, & Wageman, 2014). In flipped learning environments, there is more time to help students better prepare for and engage in learning activities or participate

in classroom lectures (Bergmann & Sams, 2012; Cockrum, 2013), such as group project-based learning, in-depth discussion, or mobile technology-enhanced learning (Hwang, Lai, & Wang, 2015; Hwang & Lai, 2017).

Consequently, investigating factors affecting students' language learning in flipped classrooms is a critical task for higher education institutions. In the past few years, various studies have been conducted to engage students in the flipped classroom approach in English language learning (Asoodar, Atai, Vaezi, & Marandi, 2014). Flipped teaching and learning involve regular and systematic use of interactive technologies in the learning process.

This is an area that is of interest to researchers, teachers, material writers, and application developers in the digital world. Researchers have indicated that the improvement in students' English learning performance, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, is related to their preparation, participation, attitudes, learner autonomy, sense of community, collaboration, or different learning experiences (Asoodar et al., 2014). In addition, some researchers have attempted to improve students' English speaking skills through video blogging, blogs or multimodal video technology as a learning instrument for improving English-speaking performance (Hung, 2016).

Considering the potentials of flipped instruction method in language teaching, little, if any, research has been done so far to explore the teachers' literacy in terms their knowledge about this method and their ability in implementing this method in language teaching. This study is going to fill this gap by probing the current curriculum of the EFL teacher education in Iran at graduate level to see if there is any room for supplying the knowledge of flipped instruction. This study is a preliminary step in analyzing the current curriculum of teacher education in Iran in terms of their intended curricular goals paving the way for their familiarity with flipped instruction.

Literature Review

The flipped class is a pedagogical strategy that was first used in higher education and then grew significantly in high school and middle school (junior high, usually from fifth to eighth grade) (Estes et al., 2015). This training method was developed by Novak and Peterson in 1998 and included combining a collaborative classroom with online learning materials and activities to help teachers understand learners' needs, provide timely feedback, and plan lessons to meet their needs (Estes et al., 2015).

The flipped class was developed in a variety of ways, but the preferred and unified model was presented by two expert teachers, John Bergman and Aaron Sems (Chua, & Lateef, 2014). The teachers, who were chemistry teachers at Woodland Park High School in Colorado in 2008, realized that they were having difficulty re-teaching absentee students, so they began recording their classrooms using software. They later found that even absent students watched their recordings, as this helped them reinforce their classroom lessons (Findlay-Thompson, & Mombourquette, 2014).

Flipped class is primarily a learner-centered activity that is recommended for teacher-centered lectures. The flipped classroom learning model has emerged as a promising alternative to traditional lecture-based teaching, proposing a network of combining online learning technologies with collaborative and active learning. In this way, content and educational materials are presented before the classroom and during the classroom, activities on advanced issues and concepts and collaborative learning are discussed. This model allows learners to engage independently with instructional materials based on their own time and speed, and the focus of this transition is from instructor to learner and promoting active learning and problem solving. Of course, the flipped class definition is more than just transferring content out of the classroom and looking at how we think about the learning process (Little, 2015; Fautch, 2015; Galway et al., 2014).

The rationale behind the flipped classroom approach is that it increases learners' engagement with content, improves teacher-learner interaction, and enhances learning. In this approach, providing content in the classroom is excluded, and instructors can provide classroom activities by teaching learners how to access problems and apply information in real life (Rotellar & Cain, 2016; Chen et al., 2016).

The aim of this approach is to focus on application and discussion in the classroom, while the acquisition of basic principles and concepts is done by learners before the classroom (McLean et al., 2016). He et al. (2016) also believe that the purpose of flipped education is to eliminate lectures in the classroom and argue that flipped education should have three characteristics: 1) compulsory learning before the classroom through new teaching materials, 2) through explanation, practice and application of knowledge in the classroom using active learning techniques, 3) mandatory classroom attendance (He et al., 2016).

Experts also enumerate the steps of flipped classroom implementation as follows: 1) designing flipped education to plan learning activities, 2) creating opportunities for pre-study (such as short films or educational materials), 3) diagnostic and supplementary evaluation to determine learning needs and (4) the use of active learning and technology strategies to meet learning needs and competency development (Haurtubise et al., 2015).

In addition, the flipped class is applicable to a variety of disciplines and educational backgrounds. Based on the results of a meta-analysis, the inverse class can be adapted to a variety of disciplines, including mathematics, science, engineering, technology, and sociology. The flipped class is also suitable for performance in schools and higher education institutions (Rahman et al., 2014).

Finally, there is no unique pattern for performing the flipped class. A review of the flipped classroom literature shows that this approach is a stage of innovation (Love et al., 2014). However, there are some misconceptions about the flipped class, including the fact that the flipped class is an online course. It is not for learners to work on unstructured subjects. Also, videos designed in the flipped classroom are not a substitute for the teacher. In the flipped classroom, learners should not study the concepts on their computer during class time; instead, they are expected to increase interactions with other learners and teachers. They should take responsibility for their own learning (Sengel, 2016). In this regard, Bishop and Verlager (2013) believe that the importance of learner-centered learning theories in the

flipped class is underestimated, without these factors the flipped class seems very simple. The definition of a flipped class is based on the presence or absence of computer technology or video lectures; because this educational method makes most of the activities in the classroom (Bishop & Verlager, 2013).

Therefore, in a general view, the flipped class includes two basic parts, learning activities inside the classroom and individual training outside the classroom. According to the issues raised, the component of teaching in the classroom includes theories of learner-centered learning and interactive activities and the component of teaching outside the classroom includes theories of teacher-centered learning and direct teaching.

One of the advantages of the flipped class is the creation of opportunities for individual training. If lessons are provided to learners online, they can access that information anytime, anywhere. In this way, by using recorded lectures, learners can act based on the speed of their reading based on the pause and repetition of observation (Moffett & Mill, 2014). In the flipped classroom, learners have opportunities to control their learning. They can adjust the speed of their study according to their access to the required materials. In addition, learners can choose the time and place of their study. Continuous access to online curriculum allows them to maintain their speed of study in the curriculum if they miss class for any reason (Albert & Beatty, 2014; Evseeva & Solozhenko, 2015). Absent learners can also easily access the permanent archive of content, enabling them to engage constructively in their learning (Sengel, 2016). They have the opportunity to engage constructively in their learning (Sengel, 2016).

Therefore, the flipped classroom pattern is considered as a fundamental change in the pattern of lecturing as a reward-oriented pattern. This means that the learner before the classroom draws attention to the pre-prepared materials and completes the homework, and the teacher uses the classroom time to improve learners' understanding and learning activities to more deeply understand the concepts of the lesson and solve problems. And this kind of flipped class responds to the challenge of time management in the classroom. But in this regard, due to the learner-centeredness of this approach, it should be seen to what extent the flipped class is consistent with the theories of learner-centered learning and its activities, so then while reviewing theories of learner-centered learning, the degree of adaptation of the flipped class model is examined with those theories.

According to the theoretical framework of the research, the learner-centered learning literature, using flipped teaching-learning activities is a new pedagogical approach that focuses on learner-centered learning (Gilboy et al., 2015). Learner-centered learning is a set of theories and methods behind the concept of the flipped class, which emphasizes the transfer of learning responsibility from teacher to learner.

Learners actively learn, do and emphasize the growth of their independent learning, and the role of teachers is to facilitate this process. Learner-centered learning is based on the theory of constructivist learning and its indisputable principle is that learning is a constructive process. From a constructive point of view, knowledge is made by the learner, they try to understand experiences, and knowledge is acquired when new information is connected by previous knowledge. In other words, learning is an active conceptualization process of knowledge construction. Thus, constructivism is a learning approach that emphasizes the learner's activity in constructing knowledge and understanding (Slavin & Davis, 2006).

The founders and followers of the theory of constructivism include Dewey, Piaget, Bruner, Vygotsky, and Ausobel. Constructivists believe that learners construct their own world, or at least interpret it based on their perception of experience. Thus, a person's knowledge is a function of his or her previous experiences, thought structures, and critiques that he or she uses to interpret objects and events (Jonassen, 1991). Constructivism is considered as an important source for problem solving theory and active learning (Goodsell, 1999). Part of the learner-centered learning literature explains that learner-centered learning includes active learning, constructivism, and peer learning.

Peer-Assisted Instruction

Peer-assisted learning means gaining skills and knowledge through active support in the same situation or with the same peers. Active learning also includes any type of learning that engages the learner during the learning process; in other words, active learning requires learners to perform learning activities meaningfully and think about them (Sohrabi & Iraj, 2016).

There is another part of learner-centered learning in Foot and Howse (1998) theory that has provided the basis for drawing communication in peer learning. In particular, they refer to constructivism and participatory learning in Piaget's theory of cognitive heterogeneity and collaborative learning of Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development (Foot & Howse, 1998).

In fact, these theories are the basis of Kolb's learning styles (Bishop & Verleger, 2013). Learner-cantered learning activities, according to the topics raised in the learner-centered learning literature, are compatible with the theoretical foundations of the flipped class. It should be noted that the connection between these theories is due to their growth over time. Learner-centered learning activities derived from the learner-centered learning literature include peer-to-peer learning activities, collaborative learning, problem-solving learning, and interactive learning, and all of these activities fall under the umbrella of active learning. It should be noted that learning styles justify learning activity variety, but do not necessarily provide a framework for how these activities are organized (Bishop & Verleger, 2013).

Active Learning

Prince (2004) considers active learning to include any teaching method that engages learners in the learning process. The scope of this definition includes many traditional classroom activities, including lecturing. Activities such as feedback, taking notes, asking questions. Thus, active learning acts in a supportive role through peer-to-peer learning and problem-based learning.

As noted, the flipped classroom model also seeks to engage learners in the learning process and adopt active learning practices (Prince, 2004). Chen et al. (2016) believe

that the flipped classroom environment should provide an active and interactive learning environment in which the instructor guides learners to apply concepts and creative engagement to the subject matter. In the flipped classroom, lectures and assignments can be done outside the classroom, while in the classroom, active learning activities take place (Chen et al., 2016).

Flipped classroom model as an educational approach recommends using classroom time to convey simple information and other goals such as small group formation and active learning exercises (Liebert, et al., 2015; Moffett 2014). McNally et al. (2017) also consider flipped classroom activities to include in-classroom activities that focus on high-level cognitive activities such as active learning, reading, and problem solving. McNally, et al. (2017) also believe that teachers in the flipped classroom should be responsible for preparing pre-classroom materials, assignments, recorded lectures, and active learning activities in the classroom.

Flipped classroom training requires learners to master basic pre-classroom knowledge and be able to develop high-level learning exercises during the classroom. In-classroom-based active learning activities are designed to enhance learners' discussion of complex lessons and to develop collaborative and interactive learning skills through peers and instructors, enabling instructors to advance learners' learning (White, et al., 2015). In the flipped class, learners make use of active learning strategies such as debating current topics, case studies, concept map development, problem solving, and lectures. Using short and small group discussions are common during class. This approach provides instructors with the ability to engage learners at high levels of Bloom's cognitive classification such as application, analysis, and composition (Lento, 2016; Gilboy et al., 2015).

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning refers to a set of processes that involve people interacting with each other to achieve a specific goal or develop an end product (Foot & Howe 1998). In cooperative learning, learners participate in group work and play an equal role with others, and the instructor oversees the proper performance of tasks and responsibilities assigned to each group member (Zainuddin & Attaran, 2016). Cooperative learning consists of three key parts: 1) learners' teamwork to achieve lofty goals 2) division of labor among learners so that everyone takes responsibility for achieving a goal; and 3) individual collaborations to ensure the achievement of the goal.

Doolittle (1995) points out that the combination of different views and theories shows that there is no consensus on collaborative learning, but considers five factors important in this regard: 1) interdependence, 2) face-to-face interactions, and 3) individual accountability, 4) small group and individual skills, and 5) group self-assessment. So what is important in cooperative learning is the commitment to learn with others and the part of learning community that seeks to make sense of the subject (Doolittle, 1995).

Learners should also be involved in the learning process and take responsibility for achieving their learning goals (Bergmann & Sams, 2014). Hence, the theoretical evidence of the flipped class considers the principles of involvement and responsibility in learning to be important and necessary for success in classroom activities. The underlying logic of the flipped class approach is that it increases learners' engagement with the content, improves teacher-learner interaction, and enhances learning (Rotellar & Cain, 2016). In the reverse classroom, the transfer of ownership and responsibility of learning from instructor to learner is done through participation in interactive activities.

Thus, some of the factors that may improve learner participation include: comprehensive interaction with pre-classroom learning materials, formative assessment during the classroom, and interactive activities in the classroom (Pierce & Fox, 2012). Therefore, aspects of the flipped class that are perceived by the learner include case studies, interaction with classmates, application of knowledge, self-directed learning, and small group learning (Tan et al., 2017). This model is used to transfer the content of educational materials out of the classroom and classroom time for the cooperative application of concepts with the support of classmates and teachers (Galway et al., 2014).

Therefore, according to the theoretical evidence, what constitutes the indisputable and necessary principle of classroom activities in the flipped classroom approach is the emphasis on accepting responsibility for learning and engaging the learners in the learning process, which facilitates the transfer of learning in individual and group interactions under teacher supervision.

Problem-based Learning

Problem-based learning is the way in which the learning process takes place as a result of trying to solve or solve a problem. In this type of learning, the learner is the center of the learning process and learners work together in small groups to solve a problem or case. They retrieve their previous knowledge, seek new knowledge to solve problems, argue with each other, and hypothesize, research, and combine possible solutions to solve problems based on the topics discussed (Torp & Sage, 1998).

Hmelo-Silver (2004) outlines five goal-oriented learning goals: helping learners grow in flexible knowledge, effective problem-solving skills, self-directed learning skills, and effective participatory skills and intrinsic motivation. Barrows (1996) also characterizes problem-solving by inclusive learning, group learning, facilitating and mentoring, motivated learning, and directional learning.

In this regard, various studies emphasize problem-based learning activities in the reverse classroom. For example, DeLozier and Rhodes (2017) state that the flipped class is known through characteristics such as lesson plan, instructional content (pre-recorded lectures, and assignments before entering the classroom. Arnold-Garza (2014) identifies some of the features of the reverse pattern, including focusing on the effective use of classroom time, adapting to learners' differences, engaging with problem-based learning, and increasing inclusive learning. Also, this approach allows learners to take responsibility for their own learning so that they can transfer these skills to textbooks (Arnold-Garza, 2014).

McNally et al. (2017) also consider flipped classroom learning activities to focus on high-level cognitive activities such as pre-reading and problem solving. McNally, et al. (2017) as well as Abeysekera and Dawson (2015) equate flipped class activities with active learning, peer-assisted learning and problem solving. Therefore, in the flipped classroom model, by creating challenging situations and activities, learners are confronted with problems, and then their thinking and efforts are directed towards solving that problem. Therefore, the design of problem-based learning activities in this model is the basis of learner-centered and active learning activities.

Collaborative Learning

The basis of the collaborative method is the opinions of people like Piaget and Vygotsky. Collaborative learning is a type of learning in which learners learn in small groups with the help of each other. Features of this method are forming heterogeneous small groups, having clear and achievable goals for all members, offering rewards for group success, dependence of members on each other, teacher as a leader, individual responsibility of learners, and evaluation of the individual (Dillenbourg, 1999). In this regard, various researches and experts have emphasized the collaborative learning activities in the flipped classroom. The flipped class is more described as an inverted learning model and aims to create a collaborative learning environment in which learners participate in issues with the help of the teacher and classmates (Shimamoto, 2014; Findlay-Thompson & Mombourquette, 2014).

The flipped classroom is an educational model for improving inclusive engagement in a variety of subjects and fields, including language teaching. In this method, learners outside the classroom take responsibility for understanding the basic concepts of the lessons and classroom time to effective high-level active activities such as collaborative and problem-oriented learning with the instructor guiding the teaching materials transferred out of the classroom (Rossi, 2015).

In a flipped classroom, learners can access learning content related to new topics, they can learn through instructional materials such as lecture videos outside the classroom, and instead they can absorb new instructional material within the classroom. Moreover, through collaborative learning methods in the classroom, work project and group discussions they can enhance their learning outcomes (Yilmaz, 2017). This educational method promotes learning through collaborative and interactive learning activities, stimulates high-level thinking such as high levels of Bloom's cognitive classification of learning and enhances long-term memory and learning.

Thus, in a general sense, the flipped classroom is a blended learning model that provides learners with online access to course content prior to the classroom and allows the teacher to engage learners through discussion, engage them in purposeful and collaborative group activities and interactive learning activities in the class. This approach tries to create challenging situations and activities in the classroom, confront learners with the problem, then engage their thinking and efforts to solve the problem.

The indisputable and essential principle is to acknowledge the responsibility of learners and learners' involvement in the learning process, which by identifying and strengthening learning strategies helps learners to improve their performance in learning by relying on their abilities. Therefore, this educational method uses any method to engage and activate learners in the process of teaching and learning.

Analysis

This research is a content analysis based on qualitative analysis. In addition, the nature of this research should be considered practical because the results of qualitative data analysis can help English language curriculum planners and policy makers to identify the current status of the approved curriculum in terms of providing a background to teachers' competence in flipped instruction. The field focus of this research is on the curriculum approved in 2016 for English language teaching at Farhangian University.

Based on this, the entire approved curriculum of English language teaching at Farhangian University in 2016 was reviewed sentence by sentence. All units related for flipped instruction were extracted and coded. Then sub-categories and indicators related to flipped instruction were extracted to answer the research question.

A look at the courses offered in the curriculum approved in 2016 for the undergraduate course of English language teaching shows that student-teachers are required to pass 24 general courses, 37 educational units (19 units of Islamic education and 18 units of educational knowledge), 58 units of language related courses, 24 units of TEFL courses and 3 units of educational-technology. Thus, the present study focused on 3 units of courses that these students are required to take at Farhangian University.

A closer look at the content of the intended course for these educational technology courses at Farhangian University shows that none of the included goals are related to flipped instruction implementation. None of the goals include a direct reference to this method and none of the items included in the lesson plans directly contribute to the flipped instruction courses. It has to be mentioned that the most sorrowful part of the intended educational technology curriculum is the fact that the mastery of student teachers in basic computer skills is assumed to be taken for granted. That is, it is expected that the students attending the curses had already mastered basic computer skills beforehand.

Conclusion

This report was a preliminary step toward analyzing the status of flipped instruction in the intended curriculum of teacher education at the bachelor's level in Iran with special focus on the curriculum offered in Farhangian University. In order to achieve this goal, first a review of studies on flipped instruction in Iran is done and the gap was identified. The second step was to review the basic concepts behind flipped instruction. The third and final step was to analyze the current intended curriculum of EFL teacher education at Farhangian University, the official center for teacher education in Iran.

The results of the analysis were based on the content analysis of the lesson plans offered for teaching educational technology for the would be teachers of Iranian high schools around the country. First and foremost, it has

to be mentioned that there are three units covering the issues related to educational technology practically. An analysis of the content of the lesson plans for these courses showed that the status of flipped instruction is totally ignored in EFL teacher education.

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