

Teachers' and students' attitudes towards enhancing foreign languages learners' intercultural communicative competence through mobile-assisted learning

مواقف الأساتذة والطلاب تجاه تعزيز الكفاءة التواصلية بين الثقافات لمتعلمي اللغات

الأجنبية من خلال التعلم بمساعدة الهاتف المحمول

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Abstract :

The present study investigates foreign language teachers' and students' attitudes towards the effectiveness of mobile-assisted learning in the development of foreign language learners' intercultural communicative competence in the Algerian society. It urges the teachers to rely on mobile-assisted learning as a supplementary material to foster their learners' intercultural communication. Consequently, two questionnaires have been administered in order to gather data about this issue. The first questionnaire has been administered to forty teachers of English at the department of letters and English language, in the University of 8 Mai 1945-Guelma; Algeria. The second one, has been directed to sixty third year students from the same department. The gained results have shown that the participants believe that using smartphones in learning has a significant impact on enhancing learners' intercultural communication.

Keywords: Intercultural Communication-Mobile assisted learning-Technology

ملخص البحث

الدراسة الحالية تبحث في مواقف أساتذة وطلاب اللغات الأجنبية تجاه فعالية التعلم، بمساعدة الهاتف المحمول في تطوير الكفاءة التواصلية بين الثقافات لمتعلمي اللغة الأجنبية في المجتمع الجزائري. علاوة على ذلك، فإن الدراسة تحت الأساتذة والطلاب على الاستعانة بالهاتف المحمول كوسيلة تكميلية في

مجالى التعللىم والدراسة على حد سواء، لتعزىز التواصل بىن الثقافات لدى المتعلمىن. بغرض تحقىق أهداف البحت السالفة الذكر، تم إجراء استببىانىن من أجل جمع الببانات حول آراء الأساتذة والطلاب بشأن هذه المسألة. تم إرسال الاستببىان الأول إلى أربعىن معلماً للغة الإنجلىزىة فى قسم الآداب واللغة الإنجلىزىة بجامعة 8 مائى 1945-قالمة؛ الجزائر. أما الاستببىان الثانى فقد تم توجىهه إلى ستن طالبا فى السنة الثالثة من نفس القسم. أظهرت النتائج المكتسبة أن كلاً من الأساتذة والطلاب يعتقدون أن استخدام الهواتف الذكىة فى التعللم له تأثر إىجابى وكبىر على تعزىز التواصل بىن المتعلمىن بىن مآتلف الثقافات.



I.Introduction:

In the speedy changing and highly developed world of the twenty-first century, people from different cultural backgrounds are coming into contact on a certain basis in various contexts and situations. Consequently, pedagogues show a growing interest in the cultural dimension of foreign language education, and urge teachers to promote the acquisition of intercultural competence in their learners. Indeed, effective foreign language learning requires learners to be interculturally competent in their communications. Correspondingly, foreign language teachers are expected to prepare their learners for the challenges of an adult life in the twenty-first century with an increasing emphasis on developing their intercultural communicative competence. Nevertheless, it must be recognized that learners face multiple challenges to acquire the knowledge and the skills of intercultural communication. Relatively, numerous instructional techniques and strategies have been developed to foster learners' intercultural communicative competence; among which the mobile-assisted learning. Therefore, the present study aims to probe teachers' and students' attitudes towards the effectiveness of mobile-assisted learning in the development of learners' intercultural communicative competence. Correspondingly, two questionnaires have been administered in order to gather data about teachers' and students' views concerning this issue. The first questionnaire has been administered to forty teachers of English at the department of letters and English language, in the University of 8 Mai 1945-Guelma;

Algeria. The second questionnaire has been directed to sixty third year students from the same department

II.Literature Review:

1.Mobile-Assisted Learning:

The unceasing development of information communication technology (ICT) affects the learning teaching process, and contributes in integrating various technological innovations and tools that reshape the instructional methods and techniques. Technology has changed the learning teaching environment so that learning can occur everywhere and at any time. Moreover, it allows teachers to grow into the roles of advisers, content experts, and coaches rather than the information holders and exposers. Modern technology is a powerful learning tool. In this respect, Hariss, Al Boutainah, and Alboutainah (2016) assert that technology allows the dissemination of knowledge to be dispersed instantly and enhances learners' communications. Moreover, it enables learners to be engaged in new learning contexts. Similarly, Blurton (1999) claims that information communication technology (ICT) represents a diverse set of technological tools and resources used to communicate, create, disseminate, store, and manage information (p. 46). As a matter of fact, plenty of mobile applications are now available to initiate learners into the learning environment through providing them with multiple digital aids. Wang et al. (2011) asserts that the use of educational podcasts on portable electronic devices has given rise to the notion of mobile learning. The latter allows students to use learning materials on different portable electronic devices and represents a new dimension in anytime, anywhere learning (p. 7). According to Kukulska-Hulme (2009), mobile-assisted learning is the reliance on smartphones and other mobile technologies in learning, especially in situations where portability and situated learning offer specific advantages. Given the high levels of smartphone ownership and use among learners, universities have been slow to leverage mobile device ownership to facilitate learning (Alrasheedi&Capretz, 2015). Following the same line of thought, Huang and Sun (2010) claim that the use of mobile technology in education offers new learning experiences and flexibility in learning with increased opportunities for decisions to be made by the learners. In addition, mobile technology offers immediate access to information as well as saving resources. Along with the fast-technological advancements, mobile learning offers incredible opportunities, especially in the field of higher education

(Alrasheedi&Capretz, 2015: 41). Relatively, multiple studies have been conducted about how higher educational institutions can make efficient use of the mobile-learning platform to support teaching and learning. Dukic et al. (2015) have conducted a research about mobile-learning in Japan, and they figure out that students at different universities regularly use smartphones for communication, socializing, entertainment, and other daily information needs. The findings show that students commonly use smartphones for learning and consider smartphones to be very useful for their academic work. They use smartphones to access course materials, search library catalog, discuss course assignments with peers, take notes, etc. Put it in a nutshell, mobile devices have been used by learners for basic functions such as making calls, sending messages, and even for studying. The potentiality of smartphones to handle activities that have a relationship with language learning and teaching has raised the curiosity of researchers in the educational field to investigate to what extent mobile devices can be interrelated with contemporary youth popular culture to enhance the quality of learning in general, and language learning in particular.

2. Intercultural Communication:

Every society has ways of doing things with respect to its culture and traditions. Thus, individuals should not assume that the way they communicate is universal and fits all the communities that they interact with. Correspondingly, a growing interest has been devoted into the cultural dimension of foreign language education, and teachers today are required to enhance the acquisition of intercultural communicative competence in their learners. In the literature on the subject, the intercultural experience tends to be described as an uncomfortable one, requiring the revision of beliefs, concepts and attitudes that one has taken for granted (Byram & Phipps, 2005). This indicates that the process of intercultural communication includes changes in the individual's attitudes, beliefs, identity, and values. Correspondingly, intercultural communicative competence is defined by Chen and Starosta (1996) as the ability to negotiate cultural meanings and to execute appropriately effective communication behaviors that recognize the interactants' multiple identities in a specific environment (as cited in Oatey & Franklin, 2009: 52). This definition emphasizes that competent persons must know not only how to interact effectively and appropriately with people, but also how to fulfil their own communication goals by respecting and affirming the multilevel cultural identities of those with whom they interact.

Deardorff (2006) acknowledges that intercultural competence is the ability to develop targeted knowledge, skills, and attitudes that lead to visible behavior and communication that are both effective and appropriate in intercultural interactions (p. 31). Furthermore, Fantini (2000) defines intercultural communicative competence as being a set of abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself (As cited in Atamna, 2008, p. 47). Otherwise stated, intercultural communicative competence involves a foreign language user's ability to cope with others in the process of interaction with foreign cultures. Similarly, Byram (1997) defines intercultural communicative competence as the ability to carry out an effective communication with people from different cultural backgrounds. Baker (2011) claims that intercultural competence has been identified as one approach to systematically conceptualizing and investigating the knowledge, attitudes and behavior associated with successful intercultural communication. Otherwise stated, intercultural communicative competence requires learners to develop relevant knowledge and skills regarding the target culture, and to be reflective and transferable among different cultures. Following the same line of thought, Jourdan (2006) points out that learning about new languages and cultures allows people to be competent intercultural communicators, and to negotiate meanings in intercultural communication. Intercultural communication is widely regarded as being much more challenging than the normal communication, since it occurs between two or more people with different cultural backgrounds. Therefore, skillful intercultural communicators behave adequately and in a flexible manner in various cultural contexts. They are able to develop critical cultural awareness and cultural tolerance while communicating with the other cultures. According to Byram and Phipps (2005), the development of learners' intercultural skills, attitudes and knowledge requires a revision of professionalism in foreign language teaching. Teachers need an adequate sociocultural knowledge of the target language community, frequent and varied contacts with it, and a command of the pragmatic rules of use of the foreign language in contexts. They can help pupils relate their own culture to foreign cultures, to compare cultures and to empathize with foreign cultures' points of view. They are knowledgeable about their pupils' perceptions of and attitudes towards the foreign peoples and cultures associated with the foreign language they teach. They are willing to start

from them when designing the learning process and know how to choose the appropriate input materials with a view to modify any wrongful perceptions learners may have (p.5). Therefore, foreign language teachers should use the suitable instructional techniques that promote cultural understanding rather than just supporting students with merely foreign cultural knowledge. Indeed, intercultural communication requires an individual to understand that different cultures have different customs, standards, and social mores. Successful intercultural communication is considered as a pivotal skill for foreign languages learners and teachers. It is also important for anyone working with people from other cultures to avoid misunderstandings and even offence

III. Research Methodology:

1. The Research Method:

The research followed the quantitative descriptive method. Therefore, two questionnaires had been administered for the teachers and the students. The main aim of these two research tools is to obtain teachers' and students views in relation to the effectiveness of mobile-assisted learning in the development of foreign language learners' intercultural communicative competence.

2. Population and Sampling:

The current study is concerned with two samples; teachers and students of English at the department of letters and English language, in the University of 8 Mai 1945-Guelma. The participants of the first sample are sixty third year students of English; while the second sample consists of forty teachers. Third year students have been selected to be the sample of the current research, since they are expected to be critical thinkers and evaluators.

3. The Research Tools:

Data collection tools used in the current study are two questionnaires. The main purpose of these data gathering tools is to probe teachers' and students' opinions concerning the relevance between the two variables of the study.

4. Data Description and Analysis

a. The Questionnaire for the Teachers

The questionnaire that has been administered for the teachers seeks to explore teachers' views about the effectiveness of mobile-assisted learning in the development of foreign language learners' intercultural communicative competence. It aims at investigating teachers' awareness

about the effectiveness of using smartphones to encourage learners' intercultural communicative competence. The questionnaire is organized into three sections and consists of eighteen questions:

Section One: Background Information

This section consists of four questions. In the first question (Q1), teachers are required to identify their gender along with their age in the second question (Q2). Then, teachers are asked to specify the number of their teaching years at the university in the third question (Q3). This question is designed to gain information about teachers' experiences in teaching English. The last question in this section is designed to know teachers' areas of expertise (Q4).

Table 1: Teachers' Background Information

	Number of the question	Answers	Number of teachers	percentage
Section One	Q1. Gender	Males	03	7.5 %
		Females	37	92.5 %
	Q2. Age	From twenty-five to thirty years old	18	45%
		From thirty-one to thirty-eight years old	22	55%
	Q3. Teaching Experience	Less than five years	16	40%
		More than five years	24	60%
	Q4. Areas of Expertise	Literary fields	04	6.66%
		Field of didactics	05	8.33%
		Civilization	04	6.66%
		General Linguistics	22	55%
		Culture and EFL	05	12.5%
		Total		40

According to the obtained results from (Q1), the majority of the teachers (92.5%) who have responded are females. That is, the gained answers are mainly from a feminist point of view. Furthermore, the collected results

from (Q2) indicate that the respondents' ages range between twenty-five to thirty-eight years old. This means that most of the participants belong to the youth generation. The answers of (Q3) show that the majority of the participants (60%) are practicing the teaching profession for more than five years, which indicates that they are experienced teachers. Finally, the collected information from (Q4) points out that most of the respondents are experienced in the field of linguistics (55%); while (12%) of them have more experience in teaching culture. This suggests that the results are mainly concerned with teaching and learning general linguistics and culture.

Section Two: Mobile-Assisted Learning

The second section includes eight questions (from Q5 to Q12). The respondents are asked to express their views about using technology while teaching in (Q5). Then, they are questioned if they use technology while doing a research or planning a lesson in (Q6). Thereafter, the informants are asked about the technological tool that they use the most, and to justify their answers in (Q7). In the following question (Q8), the teachers have been questioned about the frequency of encouraging their students to use smartphones inside and outside the classroom for language learning. In the three subsequent questions (Q9, Q10, Q11), the participants asked about their students' attitudes and interests towards using their smartphones while studying; besides, students' abilities in using smartphones devices to learn. Finally, the informants are required to express their views about the effectiveness of mobile-assisted learning in the educational settings (Q12).

The collected answers from (Q5) reveal that all the participants (100%) believe on the effectiveness and the usefulness of technology use in the various educational settings. They agree that teachers are obliged to use technology in the classroom since it is the best way to motivate the new generation to learn languages; besides, facilitating the process of lesson planning and communication with students. This indicates that most of the teachers assume that relying on technology while teaching can create a comfortable atmosphere for learners and it is a funny way for learning. Therefore, all the respondents (100%) declare that they use technology in the classroom while answering (Q6). Correspondingly, the majority of the participants (60%) claim in their response to (Q7) that they use smartphones as a teaching medium; while others (25%) use both smartphones and computers. However, only (15%) of the respondents opts for computers. Concerning the frequency of teachers' encouragement for their students to

use smartphones in (Q8), (50%) of the participants reveal that they usually encourage students to use their smartphones as a learning medium inside the classroom. However, (35%) of them always support the students' use of smartphones to learn; while (15%) of the participants reveal that they usually allow the students to use smartphones inside the classroom only if they cannot use computers. The analysis of the collected data from (Q9, Q10, & Q11) implies that all the participants (100%) observe that their learners like using their mobiles while learning (Q9). Similarly, (100%) of the informants declare that their students are very interested in using smartphones inside the classroom (Q10). Finally, most of the participants (95%) believe that their students have high abilities in using smartphones to learn (Q11). The gained results from (Q12) show that the majority of the informants (90%) believe that mobile-assisted learning is highly beneficial and effective in the educational settings; while, only (10%) of them claim that is not of that importance. Indeed, the obtained results from (Q5, Q6, Q7, Q8, Q9, Q10, Q11, & Q12) indicate that almost all the respondents consider technology to be a very useful tool for effective teaching and learning to take place. Furthermore, the gained results points out that most of the teachers rely in various technological devices to deliver their lectures. Moreover, the present data reveals that mobile-assisted learning is frequently used among learners and students in the educational settings. Besides, almost all the students are competent users of smartphones, since they are perceived to be the digital generation.

Section Three: Intercultural Communicative Competence

The last section consists of six questions (from Q13 to Q18). The informants in (Q13) are asked about the source from which they think it has been beneficial for them to learn the most about intercultural communication. In the subsequent question (Q14), the participants are questioned if teaching and learning a foreign language requires teaching the target culture, and they are requested to justify their answers. Then, the teachers are required to explain if their previous teacher training programs help them to become familiar with theories and models for developing students' abilities to communicate well with people from other cultures in their training (Q15). Thereafter, the respondents are requested to evaluate their learners' intercultural communicative competence (Q16); and to explain the instructional methods and techniques they rely on to enhance students' intercultural communicative competence (Q17). Finally, the informants are

asked to express their attitudes and opinions towards developing foreign language learners' intercultural communicative competence through mobile-assisted learning (Q18). The gained data from (Q13) reveal that (85%) of the participants learn about intercultural communication from social media and informative web pages. However, (15%) of the respondents claim that they learn about intercultural communication from travels and from conversations with people from other cultures; while none of the informants learn about intercultural communication at the university. This indicates that the internet is the dominant source from which most of the teachers learn about intercultural communication. The obtained data from (Q14) shows that all the participants (100%) agree that teaching and learning a foreign language requires teaching the culture. This indicates that foreign language teachers are aware of the fundamental role that culture plays for effective intercultural communication to occur. Also, it implies that acquiring a language and neglecting its sociocultural aspects or cultural inferences can cause a lot of miscommunications and problems. Informants' answers for (Q15) reveal that most of the teachers (75%) have received basic training when it comes to the approaches of teaching culture and developing students' intercultural communicative competence. While (25%) of the participants claim they have developed their knowledge about intercultural communication from web pages and from self-research and curiosity. Therefore, the answers of (Q16) show that almost all the participants believe that learners' levels in intercultural communication differ from one student to another. Nevertheless, most of students lack the necessary skills of intercultural communication. The gained data implies that there is a huge shortage in integrating the intercultural aspects of communication in the national teacher training programs. Moreover, teachers are relying on their own research to develop their intercultural communication. With regard to the obtained results from (Q17), most of the informants agree that they encourage their students to watch movies and documentaries in the target language. Moreover, they claim that they teach English in meaningful and culturally sensitive context through exposing them to native speakers' content and pushing them to use technology and social media to get familiar with the various aspects of the target culture. This implies that most of the participants are aware about the necessity of integrating the target culture into their instructional plans. Furthermore, the collected answers indicate that most of the teachers opt for technology as the exclusive source of the

authentic content. Finally, the collected data from the last question (Q18) shows that huge majority of the participants (92%) believe in the effectiveness of mobile-assisted learning to enhance learners' intercultural communicative competence. Indeed, it is noticeable that the use of smartphones in foreign language learning is strongly highlighted to be crucial and highly important learning medium for developing intercultural communication.

b. The Questionnaire for the Students

The questionnaire that has been administered for the students seeks to explore students' views about the effectiveness of mobile-assisted learning in the development of foreign language learners' intercultural communicative competence. It aims at investigating students' awareness about the effectiveness of using smartphones to encourage learners' intercultural communicative competence. The questionnaire is organized into three sections and consists of sixteen questions:

Section One: Background Information:

This section consists of two questions. In the first question (Q1) the students are required to identify their gender; while the second question (Q2) is designed to gain information about the participants' age.

Table 2: Students' Background Information

	Number of the question	Answers	Number of the students	Percentage
Section One	Q1. Gender	Males	16	26.66%
		Females	44	73.33%
	Q2. Age	Less than twenty-five years old	28	46.66
		More than twenty-five years old	32	53.33%
	Total		60	100%

According to the collected answers from (Q1), the majority of the students (73.33%) who have responded are females. This indicates that the gained answers are mainly from a feminist point of view. Furthermore, the gained results from (Q2) indicate that the respondents' ages range between twenty-one to twenty-six years old. This means that most of the participants belong to the very young generation.

Section Two: Mobile-Assisted Learning

The second section includes seven questions (from Q3 to Q9). The respondents are asked to express their attitudes towards using technology while learning in (Q3). Then, they are questioned about the frequency of their teachers' use of technology while teaching in (Q4). Thereafter, the informants are asked about the technological tool that they prefer to use as a learning medium, and to justify their answers in (Q5). In the following question (Q6), the students are questioned about the frequency of their teachers' encouragements for them to use smartphones inside and outside the classroom for language learning. In the three subsequent questions (Q7, Q8, Q9), the participants asked about their attitudes towards using smartphones to study in classroom and to justify their answers. Then, the informants are requested to evaluate their abilities in using smartphones to learn; besides explaining how smartphones can help them for effective learning. The collected answers from (Q3) show that all the participants (100%) believe on the effectiveness and the usefulness of technology use in the classroom. They argue that technology is truly helpful, as it provides interactions between teachers and learners, provides comprehensible input and output, helps learners to develop thinking skills, makes learning and teaching becomes more student-centered, and promotes learners' autonomy. This indicates that most of the students agree that relying on technology in the learning process is highly motivational. Relatively, all the respondents (100%) reveal that their teachers always use technology in the classroom while reacting to (Q4). Responding to (Q5, & Q6), the majority of the students (91.66%) declare that they prefer to use smartphones as a learning medium, since it is easy to use and more comfortable. Yet, only (8.33%) of them prefer computers. Students' reactions to (Q7, Q8, & Q9) reveal that most of the participants (91.66%) claim that they have high abilities in using smartphones to learn. Furthermore, they believe that smartphones are highly needed for them for conducting researches, preparing lessons, and for fast access for online dictionaries. Therefore, almost all the informants stress the great effectiveness and usefulness of smartphones in the educational settings.

Section Three: Intercultural Communicative Competence

The third section consists of seven questions (from Q 10 to Q16). The informants in (Q10) are asked to share their perceptions about intercultural communicative competence. The subsequent question (Q11) is designed to

check if the participants' teachers plan lessons that promote intercultural communicative skills. In (Q12), the students are questioned about the source from which they have learned the most about intercultural communication. Then, the informants are asked about their opinions towards the importance of integrating the target culture in foreign language classrooms (Q13). Subsequently, the respondents are requested to evaluate their level in intercultural communication (Q14); and to state the instructional methods and techniques followed by the teachers to enhance their intercultural communicative competence (Q15). Finally, the students are asked to express their attitudes and opinions towards developing foreign language learners' intercultural communicative competence through mobile-assisted learning (Q16). The analysis of the collected data from (Q10) reveals that (90%) of the participants lack the basic skills of intercultural communication. Nevertheless, the obtained data from (Q11) totally contradicts the previous answers. That is, most of the participants (82%) declare that their teachers plan and present lessons that promote intercultural communicative skills. This indicates that teachers are aware of the paramount importance of integrating intercultural communication while teaching foreign languages, and that they aim to enhance it within their students. Yet, most of the teachers fail to select the appropriate instructional materials to achieve the previously mentioned goal. Correspondingly, participants' answers for (Q12) is compatible with their previous answers; most of them (80%) declare that have learned the most about intercultural communication from social media and web pages. The gained data from (Q13) reveal that all the participants (100%) believe that integration of the target culture in foreign language classrooms is of paramount importance and crucial. That is because the purpose of learning a foreign language is appropriately communicate in the target language; and to develop the learners' intercultural communicative competence. In their reactions to (Q14), most of the students (91%) declare that they are not skillful in intercultural communication, and that they need to enhance this crucial competence as twenty-first century foreign language learners. Subsequently, (87%) of the respondents point out that most of their teachers rely more on computers and data shows as instructional methods to expose the students to the target culture; while they sometimes use smartphones as an alternative learning medium (Q15). Finally, the collected data from the last question (Q16) reveals that all the participants (100%) assume that mobile-assisted learning

is highly effective to enhance learners' intercultural communicative competence. Thus, it must be recognized that the use of smartphones in foreign languages educational settings is believed to be a significant learning medium for developing intercultural communication.

5. Data Interpretation

In the light of the collected results in the current study, it is evident that most of the teachers and the students have positive attitudes towards the significance of mobile-assisted learning in enhancing learners' intercultural communication. Given the fact that almost all the respondents of the teachers' questionnaire are from the youth generation, a huge majority of them consider smartphones as the most interesting device that learners prefer to use while learning. This indicates that the respondents were realistic in their answers, since it is beyond the bounds of possibility to convince learners not to use the phones; so, making use of it to meet the learning goals is highly recommended. Therefore, the reliance on smartphones as accompanying learning material to foster learners' intercultural communication is perceived by the participants to be tremendously effective. By the same token, the respondents of the students' questionnaire strongly support the use of smartphones as a crucial learning medium. This implies that the twenty-first century learners are attracted to such technological device due to its flexibility and mobility. Indeed, the informants' answers concerning the needfulness for effective intercultural communication for foreign languages learners lead them to consider mobile-assisted learning highly authentic and motivational for learners to foster their intercultural communicative competence. Accordingly, teachers are required to come up with a given plan to teach the cultural aspects of the target language through creating a room of freedom for their learners to use their smartphones to visualize the different aspects of the target culture for developing the necessary skills of intercultural communication.

IV. Conclusion

According to the interpretation of the findings, it has been clearly shown that a considerable number of the teachers opt for mobiles as an instructional medium to raise learners' awareness of the cultural connotations of words and phrases in the target language through exposing them to native speakers content; so that they become more aware of the conventional behaviors in common situations in the target culture to avoid cultural misunderstandings. Similarly, most of the students who have

participated in the research reveal that the reliance on mobile-assisted learning creates empathetic learning environments for them. They believe it to be an effective instructional strategy to foster their intercultural communication in an enthusiastic and authentic learning atmosphere. Thus, foreign language teachers are urged to help their learners in developing the needed intercultural communicative skills. The latter can be achieved through supporting learners to use their mobiles to explore native speakers' lifestyles and to interact with people from various cultures paving the way for them to be global citizens and competent intercultural communicators.

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