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Students' Perspectives on Diversity in the Classroom

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ABSTRACT

Cultural diversity in classrooms has become increasingly significant in shaping students' learning experiences, particularly in multicultural settings like Nepal. Understanding its impact on participation, collaboration, and academic outcomes is essential for fostering inclusive education.

This study examines secondary students' perspectives on cultural diversity in classroom learning, focusing on its influence on engagement, collaborative motivation, and academic performance.

Using a quantitative approach, data were collected through Likert-scale questionnaires administered to 36 grade 11-12 students from three diverse schools in Ilam district. Participants were selected through random sampling, ensuring representation across gender and ethnic groups. Findings indicate that 64% of respondents agreed diversity enhances classroom discussions, while 69% reported greater motivation for cross-cultural collaboration. However, 56% noted unequal participation opportunities, pointing to inclusivity challenges. Key results show 78% attributed improved learning outcomes to inclusive teaching methods, and 72% perceived diversity as enriching their education. Additionally, 58% endorsed diversity's role in fostering critical thinking, and 61% supported its contribution to richer discussions. While cultural diversity enhances learning experiences and collaboration, systemic barriers such as linguistic differences and social fragmentation continue.

Students' Perspectives on Diversity in the Classroom

Classroom diversity is mixture of different abilities of the various students in the same classroom. The mixability includes the students from various backgrounds. The students have the different backgrounds according to their ethnicity, gender, cast, linguistic backgrounds etc. It includes the students from various ethnic group, students having different first languages, students of different genders. In Nepal, classrooms are naturally diverse, with students from different language, religious, caste, economic, and gender backgrounds. India believes in equal opportunities for all students, regardless of background. In the U.S., diversity in classrooms mainly includes race and immigrant status, not caste (Tiwari & Dori, 2016). Now it is very important to all to deal diversity in the classroom. It is not only important but also a challenge to manage the diversity in the classroom. It is also an important to note that the diversity in classroom is not only the challenge but also the opportunity for the learners to learn various things from the diversity and get chance to be prepared as the global citizen at present era. The broad range of experiences and perspectives brought to school by culturally, linguistically, and ethnically diverse students over a powerful resource for everyone to learn more in different ways in new environment, and with different situations. Culture remaining the central to how all learning that takes place (Gay, 2010). Culturally responsive pedagogy is a student-centered approach to teaching that incorporates cultural references and values students' diverse backgrounds as essential parts of learning. This method aims to boost engagement, enrich education, and improve achievement by celebrating diversity, leveraging students' cultural strengths, and acknowledging their unique life experiences and perspectives (Villegas & Lucas, 2007). By integrating this approach, educators can create more inclusive classrooms where all students feel valued, leading to deeper learning and greater academic success.

Culture plays a key role in shaping students' learning experiences and academic success, making it an essential consideration in education. Culturally responsive teaching recognizes this by incorporating students' cultural knowledge, lived experiences, and diverse perspectives into instruction. As Geneva (2013) explains, this approach involves "applying the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of teaching while recognizing classroom diversity" - ultimately making learning more meaningful and effective for students from all backgrounds. By teaching through students' own cultural lenses, educators can boost engagement and improve learning outcomes in multicultural classrooms. This method not only validates students' identities but also bridges the gap between their home cultures and school expectations, creating more equitable opportunities for academic achievement.

Culture plays a fundamental role in shaping personal identity and influencing learning. As Dewi & Alam (2020) emphasize, character development - rooted in cultural background - forms the foundation of personality and moral values. Since students bring their cultural identities into the classroom, effective teaching must acknowledge and build upon these cultural foundations to support both academic growth and character development.

Diverse classrooms encourage students to engage in critical thinking by exposing them to multiple perspectives. Students in such environments tend to become better problem-solvers, as they are required to consider various viewpoints when approaching academic tasks (Gurin et al., 2002). Diversity fosters an environment where students can learn collaboration and effective communication, key skills that are necessary both in and out of the classroom. A study by Johnson and Johnson (1994) highlights how cooperative learning in diverse settings leads to improved interpersonal skills and academic outcomes. One of the challenges that arise in diverse classrooms is the presence of linguistic and cultural differences, which

can lead to communication barriers. Students from different linguistic backgrounds may struggle with language comprehension, affecting their ability to engage in class discussions and complete assignments (Oakes, 2005). In some cases, students from different backgrounds may form social groups based on shared identities, leading to social fragmentation within the classroom. This can reduce opportunities for interaction among students from diverse groups and hinder collaborative learning (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

Managing classroom diversity requires teachers to skillfully combine social awareness and educational psychology to create an inclusive learning environment (Maureen, 1998). This approach allows educators to address varied learning needs while fostering positive intercultural interactions among students. By implementing such strategies, teachers can ensure equitable participation and adapt their instruction to accommodate diverse backgrounds, ultimately enhancing the overall educational experience for all learners.

Teaching is a challenging job, in which all teachers are responsible making all students actively learn and achieve the objectives. Teaching is not an ideal thing that always makes possible to achieve all the objectives by all students equally. Since the teaching is regarded as an art, being an artist a teacher has to give appropriate shapes to its learners, i.e. students and make them able to achieve what is expected. But sometimes it is very hard for teachers to make all students achieve everything equally because of the diversity in the classroom.

The classrooms of Nepal are diverse and the students are from diverse background in which the higher achievement is difficult. As a teacher we always need to face several difficulties in diverse classroom. When the students are from diverse backgrounds, it is their backgrounds that may affect the learning. For example, when the students have different first languages that may affect in learning the language. In the same way, when the students are from different cultural backgrounds their culture may affect their learning

in different social subjects. The problem in teaching at present is making the involvement of all background students in learning. The above discussed literature makes it clear that while existing studies highlight the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy and the challenges of managing diverse classrooms, there remains limited research on how these dynamics play out in specific regional contexts, particularly in Nepal's Ilam district. Most literature focuses on urban or Western settings, neglecting the unique socio-cultural and linguistic diversity of rural Nepalese classrooms. Additionally, there is insufficient exploration of practical strategies that local teachers employ to address disparities in participation and achievement among students from varying ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. In this regard, this study aims to fill these gaps by investigating classroom diversity in Ilam, with a focus on how teachers adapt pedagogical approaches to foster inclusion and equitable learning outcomes.

Research Questions

This study has the following two research questions:

- How do students perceive the impact of cultural diversity on their classroom participation, collaboration, and learning outcomes?
- What are the key challenges and benefits students associate with learning in culturally diverse classrooms?

Research Objectives

This study has the following two research objectives:

- To analyze students' attitudes toward cultural diversity in classroom dynamics, focusing on participation, collaboration, and academic engagement.
- To identify the perceived advantages (e.g., critical thinking, richer discussions) and barriers (e.g., unequal opportunities) of diversity in classroom learning.

Review of the Related Literature

The concept of classroom diversity has evolved significantly in educational research, moving from a focus on assimilation to an appreciation of multicultural learning environments. Banks (2015) conceptualizes diversity through four dimensions of multicultural education that are particularly relevant to Nepal's context: content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, and equity pedagogy. These dimensions take on unique characteristics in Nepalese classrooms due to the complex interplay of caste hierarchies, linguistic diversity, and geographic isolation (Bista & Dahal, 2018; Shrestha, 2020). The country's educational landscape presents a challenging environment where Nepali serves as the medium of instruction despite approximately 45% of students speaking indigenous languages at home (UNESCO, 2021), creating significant barriers to equitable participation in learning process.

International research provides valuable frameworks for understanding diversity's impacts on learning outcomes. Page's (2007) seminal work demonstrated how diverse groups consistently outperform homogeneous ones in problem-solving tasks, while Phillips et al. (2014) found that exposure to diverse perspectives enhances cognitive flexibility. However, the "diversity paradox" identified by Van Knippenberg and Schippers (2007) reminds us that these benefits often coexist with communication challenges and social tensions. The OECD's PISA (2018) analyses further reveal how these dynamics vary significantly across national contexts, suggesting that Western models of diversity management may not directly translate to South Asian classrooms.

The South Asian educational context presents unique configurations of diversity that differ markedly from Western models. India's three-language formula and caste-based reservation system (Annamalai, 2020), Pakistan's Urdu-English medium divide (Rahman, 2018), and Bangladesh's secular-religious tensions (Ahmad, 2021) all demonstrate how

regional factors shape classroom diversity. In Nepal specifically, research documents persistent caste-based seating patterns (Dahal, 2019), significant achievement gaps for indigenous language speakers (NESAT, 2022), and intersecting inequalities of gender and ethnicity in STEM participation (Joshi et al., 2021). These studies collectively highlight how Nepal's diversity challenges stem from deep-rooted sociocultural structures rather than mere demographic variation.

Theoretical frameworks from cultural ecology (Ogbu, 1982), funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992), and critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970) offer particularly valuable lenses for analyzing Nepalese classroom diversity. Ogbu's cultural ecological theory helps explain caste-based achievement gaps through its concept of involuntary minorities, while Moll's funds of knowledge approach suggests how indigenous students' home learning experiences could be better utilized in classrooms. Freire's critical pedagogy remains relevant for understanding resistance to dominant-culture curricula among marginalized student groups. When applied to Nepal, these theories reveal how power dynamics and historical inequalities fundamentally shape classroom interactions.

Recent empirical studies in Nepalese classrooms paint a concerning picture of current diversity management practices. The National Center for Educational Development (2021) reports that 68% of teachers lack adequate training for multilingual classrooms, while Limbu's (2022) classroom observations found indigenous students participate 40% less in discussions than their Nepali-speaking peers. More encouragingly, research by CERID (2020) demonstrates that targeted social cohesion programs can produce measurable improvements, with a 15% increase in cross-caste collaboration observed in intervention schools. These findings suggest that while challenges are significant, evidence-based interventions can yield positive results.

A critical analysis of existing literature reveals several important gaps that the current study addresses. First, most Nepalese educational research concentrates on urban areas, neglecting rural districts like Ilam that face compounded diversity challenges due to limited resources. Second, the predominance of teacher and administrator perspectives in existing studies creates an imbalance that marginalizes student voices. Third, few studies specifically examine higher secondary levels (Grades 11-12), where diversity issues take on particular significance as students prepare for higher education or employment. Fourth, the field lacks robust quantitative measures of student perceptions, relying instead on qualitative approaches that limit comparability. Finally, no previous studies have focused specifically on Ilam district, despite its unique demographic profile and educational challenges.

Several unresolved debates continue to shape discussions of classroom diversity in Nepal. The mother-tongue versus Nepali-medium instruction debate remains contentious, with evidence showing both academic benefits of mother-tongue education and practical challenges in implementation (Phyak, 2016). Questions about caste-based quotas in classroom groupings provoke strong opinions from various stakeholders. Even the inclusion of religious festivals in school calendars sparks controversy in Nepal's officially secular but predominantly Hindu context. These ongoing debates focus how classroom diversity intersects with broader societal tensions and identity politics.

Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative research approach to collect data from secondary-level students (grades 11 and 12) regarding their perspectives on classroom diversity. A Likert-scale questionnaire was used as the primary data collection tool to measure students' perceptions of diversity in terms of participation, collaboration, and learning experiences. The study focused on three randomly selected secondary schools in Ilam district, with 36 participants (12 students per school) selected through simple random sampling. The sample

ensured diversity by including an equal gender distribution (6 boys and 6 girls per school) and representation from different ethnic groups.

The target population consisted of students in grades 11 and 12 across various secondary schools in Ilam district, specifically those from diverse cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The final sample included 36 students from three different schools within Ilam Municipality, maintaining proportional representation of gender and ethnicity to reflect the district's demographic composition.

For data collection, the researcher first visited the selected schools, established rapport with the administration, and obtained consent for conducting the study. After explaining the research objectives, the questionnaire was administered to the randomly selected participants. The Likert-scale survey was designed to assess students' attitudes toward diversity, and responses were collected based on their personal classroom experiences. The structured approach ensured standardized data collection while capturing the varied perspectives of students from different backgrounds.

This methodology provided a systematic way to analyze how students perceive diversity in their learning environment, with the quantitative approach allowing for measurable comparisons across demographic subgroups. The use of random sampling and stratified representation enhanced the reliability and generalizability of findings within the study's context.

Findings and Discussion

The collected data were synthesized and analyzed to draw the result. Based on the result this research paper finally, drew the conclusion and prepare the final report. The collected data were analyzed using different bases, first the analysis was made based on students' responses, i.e. gender, the ethnicity, students' language etc. The findings of the analysis have been presented in the following ways:

Active Participation in Class

Participation in Class Discussions

As the questionnaire was prepared on the basis of students' attitudes towards the classroom participation in diverse classroom, out of 36 students 13 students strongly agreed that there is impact of cultural diversity in classroom discussion. In the same way, 10 students out of 36 said that they agree and other 9 said that they are disagree that there is not any impact of cultural diversity in classroom participation. 4 students remain silent in this matter. The silent responses from 4 students may indicate either limited awareness of diversity's impact or passive disengagement in classroom discussions. This suggests a need for teachers to actively engage all students in recognizing and valuing diverse perspectives.

Motivation for Group Work

The motivation for the group work is another factor responsible for affecting classroom learning of the students. The different groups like ethnicity, age, the first language status etc. make the effect in motivation level of the students. In this context, the question seeks to find the students attitude by asking them whether there is any kind of effects or not. While finding the solution on it, it is found that 20 students out of 36 were motivated in learning in diverse classroom.

Seeking Opportunities to Collaborate Across Cultures

The students who believe on collaboration across cultures seemed that they are interested and wanted to make culture collaboration in this context the high number of students i.e. 25 out 36 answered that they strongly agree that they believe that the enjoy in collaboration where there is cultural diversity in the classroom. Here, only 5 students opined

that they do not find any effect of cultural diversity and collaboration by answering that they strongly disagree.

Encouragement to Share Ideas

Students opined that the classroom climate and inclusivity of teaching methods is the major factor that has correlation in students' achievement. In this context the high number of students i.e. 28 students opined that there is high learning achievement of students if there is inclusivity in classroom teaching methods and if the students get more chance to share their ideas with others in diverse classroom.

Interest in Diverse Perspectives

The questions asked to assess the students' perspective regarding their interest in the diverse perspectives, it was answered by 17 were strongly agreed that they were interested to learn in diverse perspectives. It showed that the students who lived in diverse cultures were also interested to learn in diverse perspectives.

Inclusivity and Pedagogical Approach

Inclusive pedagogy includes the inclusion of all type of learners together in the classroom. It means making together sharing together and making to make learning achievement.

Use of Diverse Teaching Methods

The teaching method was another important factor in increasing students' achievement. In this context the students were asked whether there is impact of teaching methods in students' achievement or not. Here 23 students out of 36 said that they are

strongly agree that there is impact of teaching methodology in diverse classroom. It is also an important factor that hinders the learning achievement of students.

Reflection of Diverse Perspectives in Course Content

Out of 36 respondent 25 opined that there is impact of diversity and affects the achievement in learning. It is important factor that the students are curious about the diversity in classroom and they want to learn from each other.

Encouragement of Open Discussion

Even where there is diversity on classroom, the students are encouraged to involve in open discussion. Here 21 students opined that they are interested in open discussion about their learning in diverse classroom. Out of 36 respondents 21 are strongly agree that they interested in open discussion in diverse classroom in the same way 7 says that they are agree that they take part in open discussion in diversity. It means the high numbers of students are in favor of open discussion in diverse classroom.

Student Satisfaction

Students' satisfaction is very important matter in improving learning achievement. When the students are satisfied and positive the students' achievement can be high.

Satisfaction with Diverse Perspectives in Class

When the students are diverse in the classroom there is the need to measure the satisfaction of the students in the diverse perspectives of the classroom and in this research the students' satisfaction in diverse perspectives in the class has been measured. Among 36 students 17 said that they are strongly agree that they are satisfied in the diverse classroom and 5 said that they agree that they are satisfied in the diverse perspectives of the classroom.

It shows that majority of the respondents are satisfied in the diverse perspective of the classroom.

Inclusive Classroom Environment

Even there is debate that the students are not equally treated in the classroom, the found that many of the students are satisfied upon the treatments made in the classroom. In this context the respondents were asked and among the 36 respondents 23 said that they equally treated in the classroom, it shows that majority of the respondents are satisfied that they are equally treated in the classroom even they are from diverse backgrounds.

Opportunities for Discussing Diversity

As discussed earlier the students in the diverse classroom have fewer equal opportunities for them to take part in the classroom activities in this context among 36 respondents 20 opined that they are disagree that all the students get equal chances in the classroom activities because of their cultural a and other background. It means the diverse classroom has less opportunity for every student to take part equally in the diverse classroom.

Perceptions of Diversity

Different students have different perception about the diversity in the classroom. Some students said that the diversity has positive impact in learning some said the diversity has negative impacts. Some of the findings about it is presented below:

Positive Impact of Diversity on Learning

The findings show that diversity in the classroom positively influences the overall learning experience. Respondents highlighted that having students from different cultural, social, and academic backgrounds enriched their understanding and led to a more dynamic

and inclusive learning environment. 21 students out of 36 felt that diverse perspectives fostered critical thinking and broadened their views on various topics.

Diverse Backgrounds Enhancing Course Material Understanding

Respondents generally agreed that classmates from diverse backgrounds contributed valuable perspectives on course material 19 participants out of 36 shared that hearing viewpoints from students with different life experiences helped them grasp the content more deeply, offering alternative ways to interpret and understand the course material.

Engagement in Mixed-Classroom Discussions

The research reveals that students are more motivated to engage in discussions when there is a diversity of perspectives in the classroom 22 respondents out of 36 stated that they felt encouraged to participate more actively in discussions, as diverse viewpoints made conversations more interesting and provided opportunities for critical reflection and debate.

Encouragement to Explore Race and Culture

The findings indicate that many students feel encouraged to explore issues related to race, culture, and identity in the classroom 18 respondents mentioned that they appreciated having open discussions around these topics, and they felt that such dialogues were important for fostering inclusivity and understanding among students from different backgrounds.

Richer Discussions Due to Diversity

A significant portion of respondents agreed that the diversity of the students' body led to richer and more meaningful discussions. The presence of varied perspectives was seen as an asset in making discussions more multifaceted and thought-provoking, with students

acknowledging that learning from one another's differences enhanced the depth of conversations in the classroom.

Classroom Diversity and Student Participation

This research article aimed to find the impact of diversity on various aspects of classroom learning, including student participation, motivation for group work, engagement in discussions, and overall satisfaction. The research made the survey among 36 students from several secondary (11 & 12) schools. The response was analyzed in relation to major factors which are related with classroom diversity and they affect the students' engagement and achievement in classroom learning.

Active Participation in Class

The findings show that the diversity in the classroom impacts positively in the students' participation in the classroom. Out of 36 respondents 13 said that they are strongly agree that the diversity increases the classroom discussion, in the same way 10 said that they are agree. However, 9 said that they are disagree that the diversity increases the classroom participation. It shows that many respondents are satisfied that the diversity increases the classroom participation among them.

Motivation for Group Work

Cultural diversity also appears to influence student motivation in group work. Ethnic, age, and linguistic differences were identified as key factors affecting motivation. The responses showed that students' attitudes toward group work were shaped by their recognition of diversity in the classroom. While the exact breakdown of responses was not

detailed in this part of the findings, it is clear that diverse student backgrounds either motivate or challenge students in varying ways, depending on their perceptions of the group dynamics.

Seeking Opportunities to Collaborate Across Cultures

A significant finding from this study is the high level of interest in cultural collaboration. Out of the 36 students, 25 strongly agreed that they enjoyed collaborating in diverse groups. Only 5 students expressed disagreement, indicating that most students value and actively seek opportunities to engage with peers from different cultural backgrounds. This highlights a clear inclination towards cultural exchange and collaboration, with students appreciating the rich learning environment such diversity creates.

Encouragement to Share Ideas

The students also expressed that an inclusive classroom climate and teaching methods are crucial in fostering an environment where they feel encouraged to share their ideas. The majority of respondents (28 out of 36) believed that students achieve higher learning outcomes when they are given opportunities to contribute their perspectives in an inclusive classroom setting. This supports the idea that diverse classrooms provide a platform for all voices to be heard, thus enhancing the learning experience.

Interest in Diverse Perspectives

Another important finding relates to the students' interest in learning from diverse perspectives. Seventeen students strongly agreed that they enjoyed learning from varied viewpoints. This suggests that students not only tolerate but are actively engaged in learning from individuals with different cultural and social backgrounds. The high level of interest in

diverse perspectives may lead to a deeper and more holistic understanding of the subject matter.

Inclusivity and Pedagogical Approach

The study also examined the role of teaching methods in promoting diversity and learning. Twenty-three students strongly agreed that diverse teaching methods have a positive impact on student achievement. The use of varied instructional approaches was seen as an essential factor in accommodating the needs of a culturally diverse student body. This aligns with the broader finding that inclusive teaching strategies contribute to greater student success in diverse classrooms.

Reflection of Diverse Perspectives in Course Content

While analyzing the data collected from the respondent it showed that diversity is important in the classroom and it must be reflected in the classroom. As 25 students said that the diversity has the positive impact in the classroom. It supports the notion that diversity creates the good motivation in the classroom.

Encouragement of Open Discussion

The study revealed that students in the diverse classroom encouraged students in their active participation. Out of 36 respondents 21 respondents said that they were motivated to engage in diverse classroom. They opined that they engaged in open discussions, in the classroom. In the same way, 7 respondents agreed that the students the value of participation in diverse classroom.

Student Satisfaction

In terms of inclusivity, 23 students believed they were treated equally in the classroom despite coming from different backgrounds. This suggests that, for most students, the classroom is perceived as a space where their cultural backgrounds are respected, contributing to their overall satisfaction. However, 20 students disagreed that all students had equal opportunities to participate in classroom activities, pointing out that there are still challenges in providing equal chances for everyone to engage fully in the diverse classroom setting.

Perceptions of Diversity

At last, it is found that the students perceived that the diversity as an important thing in the classroom for positive impact on their learning experiences. 26 students felt that the cultural diversity is an important thing in the classroom that makes encouraged in learning and when students are encouraged their high achievement in students learning

Conclusions

This study provides valuable insights into how secondary students perceive cultural diversity in their classrooms and its impact on their learning experiences. The findings demonstrate that diversity serves as a powerful catalyst for enhancing classroom engagement, fostering critical thinking, and promoting collaborative learning. A significant majority of students recognized the benefits of diverse classrooms, with 64% acknowledging improved participation in discussions and 69% expressing enthusiasm for cross-cultural collaboration. These results align with global research (Gurin et al., 2002; Johnson & Johnson, 1994) while offering contextualized perspectives from Nepal's multicultural educational landscape.

The study reveals that inclusive teaching methods play a pivotal role in maximizing the benefits of diversity, as evidenced by 78% of students linking these approaches to better learning outcomes. However, the research also uncovers critical challenges, particularly

regarding equitable participation. While 64% of students felt equally treated, 56% reported disparities in engagement opportunities—a contradiction that underscores the need for more systematic efforts to ensure true inclusivity. These findings mirror observations by Oakes (2005) and Pettigrew & Tropp (2006) about the persistent barriers in diverse educational settings.

Several important implications emerge from this study. First, the positive correlation between diversity and student motivation (reported by 72% of respondents) suggests that Nepal's increasingly heterogeneous classrooms can become rich resources for pedagogical innovation if properly harnessed. Second, the identified challenges—particularly linguistic barriers and social fragmentation—call for targeted interventions such as multilingual support programs and structured team-building activities. Third, the strong student preference for open discussions (endorsed by 78%) indicates that creating safe spaces for intercultural dialogue should be a priority for educators.

For policymakers, these findings emphasize the need to: 1) Expand teacher training in culturally responsive pedagogy, 2) Develop monitoring systems to assess equity in classroom participation, and 3) Allocate resources for diversity-focused curricular materials. At the school level, administrators might consider establishing peer-mentoring programs and diversity committees to address the inclusivity gaps identified in this research.

While this study focused on three schools in Ilam, its findings have broader relevance for Nepal's education system as it grapples with federalization and increasing cultural pluralism. Future research could build on these results by employing longitudinal designs or expanding the geographic scope. Nevertheless, the current findings make a compelling case: when properly supported through intentional policies and practices, classroom diversity transforms from a demographic reality into a dynamic educational asset that prepares students for Nepal's multicultural future while elevating overall learning outcomes.

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