



Tourism Students' Views and Thoughts on Undergraduate Education: A Research in State Universities

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to reveal the opinions of undergraduate students about tourism education in the field of tourism in public universities in Turkey. The research was conducted in 23 out of 59 public universities providing tourism education at the undergraduate level, and a total of 2,074 people were reached. The analysis results showed that the students found the quality of the instructor, the suitability of the curriculum, and the dimensions of the student services to be sufficient and the implementation opportunities, the obstacles, and the institutional financial support to be insufficient. Furthermore, significant differences were found between the dimensions and the gender, sector experience, and classes/years of the students as a result of variance analysis.

Keywords: Education; Tourism education; Undergraduate education; Turkey tourism education



Introduction

As a result of economic, technological, and strategic developments, tourism has become a rapidly growing industry worldwide. According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), in 2018, 1.4 billion tourists traveled around the world, spending 1.7 trillion dollars. In the same year, 46 million people visited Turkey, including 39.5 million foreign tourists and 6.5 million Turkish nationals (citizens residing abroad) (TR Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2019). According to the 2018 data of the Turkey Statistical Institute (TSI), a revenue of \$29.5 billion was generated from tourists coming to Turkey. According to the World Tourism and Travel Council (WTTC), the number of employees in the tourism sector in Turkey was 532,100 in 2018. According to the 2018 report published by the Union of Mediterranean Touristic Hoteliers and Operators (AKTOB), the number of direct employments in food and beverage services, accommodation, sport/leisure/recreation activities, airlines, and travel agencies/tour operators was 1,083,695. One can thus assert that globally, the rise of the tourism industry promotes the development of hospitality and tourism education (Oktadiana and Chon, 2017: 15). In addition to all these economic impacts, because of the sociocultural, environmental, and political effects of tourism, deficiencies and disruptions related to education provided in this field are constantly being identified and eliminated.

Tourism undergraduate education began in Turkey in 1974. Tourism education, employment, and guidance, created by the Tourism Council in 2002, started to become widespread and came to the fore through the work of the commission. As a result, universities have entered a hectic period to meet the increasing demand for qualified personnel today.

The growth of the tourism industry necessitates higher education in said industry (Amisshah et al., 2020: 1). The current tourism education programs in Turkey differ depending on their duration and content. Depending on their duration, such programs are classified under certain groups: associate degree programs, which provide education in vocational schools; undergraduate departments, which provide education in colleges and faculties; and graduate and doctoral programs, which provide education in institutes (Demirkol, 2002: 87). In Article 3 of Higher Education Law No. 2547 (1981), the faculty is defined as “a higher education institution that carries out [a] high level of education, scientific research, and publications and to which units can be connected.” The college is defined as “a higher education institution that focuses on education and training for a particular profession.” Undergraduate education is defined as “a higher education based on secondary education, covering a program of at least eight semesters.”

Teaching and learning methods and tools play an important role in education (Hsu and Li, 2017: 101) as well as aid in developing a person’s behavior and skills (Erturk, 2014: 12). Vocational education provides training and practical skills for a particular trade or profession (Dredge et al., 2012: 2156). In this respect, education increases the efficiency of the labor factor in qualified labor and production (Unluonen, 2000: 219). Hsu (2018) stated that tourism education has mostly been class based and that internships grant students practical experience to work in the sector. Tourism education affects society in not only providing support to but also developing the tourism industry itself (Velempini and Martin, 2019: 8).

Universities are complex organizations that undergo major change, including the development of vocational subjects (Trowler et al., 2012) involved in the higher education sector (Collini, 2012). Educational institutions should equip students with the necessary intercultural skills, competencies, and awareness as well as prepare them for the industry so as to provide a good



start to the new graduates' careers (Min et al., 2020: 17). Sahin (2012: 56) emphasized that although theory and practice in the institutions providing education for the tourism industry work together to train candidates for the top management, due care should be given to the applied education itself. The qualified labor force can be provided with effective and quality tourism education and training (Unluonen, 2000: 218).

Some researchers stated that undergraduate students who are fluent in foreign languages, knowledgeable, resourceful, and capable of direction and management and who have the power to synthesize and make decisions against events (Pehlivan, 2008; La Lopa, 2011) should also be educated on tourism management. Avcikurt and Karaman (2002), on the other hand, emphasized that students who have graduated from the tourism management departments of tourism schools should receive a good foreign language education, be informed of technical issues in managerial terms, develop communication and interpersonal relations, and be provided with practical business information in the field of tourism management.

In 1991, only 6 universities provided undergraduate tourism education in Turkey (Hacıoglu, 1992: 91); this number grew to 22 faculties and colleges in 2002 (Avcikurt and Karaman, 2002: 54). According to the *Higher Education Programs and Quotas Guide* published by the Directorate of Assessment Selection and Placement Center (OSYM) in 2010, 45 universities offered undergraduate-level tourism education. Tables 1 and 2 show in detail the distribution of the number of faculties, colleges, and students according to the data published on November 26, 2018, by the Higher Education Information System (YBS). As shown in Table 1, 94 universities in Turkey (including the TRNC) provided undergraduate tourism education in 2018, 59 of which are public universities. In the same year, 37 faculties of tourism, 26 colleges, 2 faculties of business administration, 1 faculty of fine arts, and 1 faculty of economics and administrative sciences provided such education in these public universities (some universities have both a faculty of tourism and a college).

Table 1. Total number of undergraduate departments and students in tourism faculties in 2018

	Number	Tourism Management	Gastronomy and Culinary Arts	Tourism Guidance	Travel Management and Tourism Guidance	Recreation Management	Accommodation Management	Food and Beverage Management	Travel Management	Tourism and Hotel Management
Faculty of Tourism	37	31	23	19	4	5	4	2	2	1
Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences	1	1	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Faculty of Economics	1	1	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Faculty of Management	2	2	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Fine Arts	1	--	1	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Number Of Students	--	9,482	4,395	4,042	1,088	912	786	478	388	196

Table 2 shows that the faculties and colleges consist of the tourism management, gastronomy and culinary arts, tourism guidance, travel management, recreation management, accommodation management, food and beverage management, hotel management, and travel management departments.



Table 2. Total number of undergraduate departments and students in tourism faculties in 2018

	Number	Tourism Management	Tourism and Hotel Management	Tourism Guidance	Tourism and Hotel Management	Gastronomy And Culinary Arts	Accommodation Management	Food and Beverage Management	Travel Management and Tourism Guidance	Travel Management
College	26	4	9	5	3	6	7	2	1	1
Number of Students	--	640	3,108	842	1,093	1,014	2,412	357	346	293

Source: OSYM, 2018; YÖK, 2018

Methodology

The population of the research consists of students of 59 public universities in Turkey who receive education at the faculty and college levels in the field of tourism. In the 2018–2019 academic year, 31,872 (active and passive) students were enrolled, including 21,767 students in tourism faculties and 10,105 students in colleges. The questionnaire was prepared using the 5-point Likert-type scale (Likert, 1932) used by Bayraktaroglu (2013) and Eivazi Gharamaleki (2011); 34 expressions were rated as “5 = Strongly Agree” to “1 = Strongly Disagree” (Nakip and Yaras, 2016: 173–174).

All the universities in the population of research were contacted via email or telephone. Universities that could not be reached or that did not return calls/emails were emailed or phoned again. As a result, data was collected with the support of the academic staff of 29 contacted universities or with the one-to-one convenience sampling method (McDaniel and Gates, 1998; Nakip and Yaras, 2016: 240). Out of the 2,500 surveys distributed, 23 universities returned a total of 2,074. The number of valid answered questionnaires used in the research was 1,944.

Validity and reliability: The degree to which any scale or test consistently and steadily measures what it intends to measure is called “reliability.” The most commonly used method to understand the reliability coefficients of the scales is to look at the alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1951; Coskun, et al., 2015: 125; Kozak, 2019). As shown in Table 3, the overall reliability coefficient of the study consisting of 34 statements was 0.930. Alpha values of 0.81 and above are highly reliable (Nakip and Yaras, 2017: 196; Kozak, 2019: 132).

Results

The data obtained in the study was subjected to statistical analysis after undergoing normality tests (Can, 2014: 88; Salkind, 2015: 142). In the parametric analysis techniques, analyses related to the research questions were made and reported. Table 3 shows that the gender distributions of the participants are very close to each other. The majority of the participants received training in tourism management (42.7%), had sector experience (61.8%), and were 21 years of age or older.

Table 3. Findings on demographic variables

Gender	N	%	Sector experience	N	%
Female	986	50,7	Yes	1.200	61,8
Male	958	49,3	No	743	38,2
Age			Sector experience distribution		
18	84	4,3	Less than 3 months	251	21,0



19	182	9,4	3-6 months	331	27,5
20	322	16,6	6-12 months	180	15,1
21	442	22,7	More than 1 year	438	36,4
22 and over	913	47,0	What year are you in?		
Department studied			1. Year	408	21,0
Tourism Management	831	42,7	2. Year	465	24,2
Tourism Guidance	336	17,3	3. Year	521	26,8
Gastronomy and Culinary Arts	312	16	4. Year	545	28,0
Tourism and Hotel Management	258	13,3	Opportunity to examine other schools		
Accommodation Management	140	7,2	Yes	766	39,4
Food and Beverage Management	56	2,9	No	1.175	60,6
Travel Management	11	0,6			

As a result of factor analysis, questions about the variables related to education were classified into 6 dimensions: the qualifications of the instructor, application opportunities, institutional financial support, curriculum suitability, student services, and obstacles. In terms of statistical consistency, the arithmetic mean, standard deviation, variance, and factor load values for each dimension are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Factor analysis of variables related to education

Instructor Qualification	Mean	There is deficiency.	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation	Factor Load
The instructor/lecturer who conducts the courses attends training courses and/or seminars during certain periods.	3,53	11.957	3.64	1.025	0,756
The lecturers who conduct the courses have continuous cooperation with the sector representatives.			3.49	1.003	0,747
The instructors who conduct the courses receive individual training when they do not have sufficient qualifications (courses, certificates, etc.).			3.26	0.993	0,649
The lecturers who conduct the courses have the practical application skills in the related field.			3.56	1.072	0,642
The lecturers who have attended the courses have sufficient sector experience.			3.68	1.109	0,630
Application Opportunities	Mean	There is deficiency.	Arithmetic Avg.	Std. Deviation	Factor Load
Facilities/laboratories are sufficient for practical courses given in our school.	2,73	11.952	2.32	1.233	0,825
The necessary infrastructure (tools, equipment and materials, etc.) is available for the courses.			2.68	1.179	0,820
There are automation systems for the sector which are necessary for applied courses.			2.72	1.193	0,763
Classrooms and laboratories are sufficient.			2.77	1.290	0,549
Practical vocational courses are suitable for the purpose of the program.			3.17	1.163	0,514
Institutional Financial Support	Mean	There is deficiency.	Arithmetic Avg.	Std. Deviation	Factor Load
The school administration provides financial support for the certification of students through courses.	2,77	10.650	2.59	1.167	0,731
Social and cultural activities are sufficient.			2.67	1.249	0,625
The school administration provides financial support for the certification of educators for applied courses.			2.79	1.090	0,600
Resources are allocated for the investments to be made in order to increase teaching opportunities.			2.96	1.049	0,598
A strategy has been developed to increase the possibilities of practice in our school.			2.83	1.149	0,556
Curriculum	Mean	There is deficiency.	Arithmetic	Std.	Factor



Suitability	3,38	10.055	Avg.	Deviation	Load
Foreign language courses are suitable for the purpose of the program.			3.22	1.273	0,740
The qualification of the instructors teaching foreign language is sufficient.			3.48	1.199	0,702
Current requirements are taken into account in the preparation of the curriculum for the courses.			3.41	1.111	0,498
Weekly hours of lessons given at our school are sufficient.			3.57	1.105	0,472
Theoretical vocational courses are suitable for the purpose of the program.			3.32	1.059	0,459
The qualifications of the instructors who give applied vocational courses are sufficient.			3.28	1.170	0,431
Student Services	Mean	There is deficiency.	Arithmetic	Std.	Factor
	3,12	7.955	Avg.	Deviation	Load
Student affairs services are sufficient.			3.00	1.277	0,715
Consulting services are sufficient.			3.20	1.191	0,679
Activities such as panels, conferences, symposiums and seminars are sufficient.			3.17	1.216	0,456
Obstacles	Mean	There is deficiency.	Arithmetic	Std.	Factor
	3,27	4.922	Avg.	Deviation	Load
Our educational institution may face some bureaucratic obstacles in making new investments.			3.21	1.023	0,712
Technical or personnel problems may arise in increasing the weekly hours of the lessons.			3.33	1.049	0,702

Analysis of Basic Components with Varimax Rotation: Total Variance Explained: 57.462%; Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Sample Size: 93.5%; Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (0.00): $p < 0.05$; df. 351; Chi-square: 14395.505; Rating Range (For All Dimensions [1] Strongly Disagree - [5] Strongly Agree)

In the dimension related to the qualifications of the instructor, the highest factor loading was the expression “The instructor who conducts the courses attends training courses and/or seminars during certain periods,” with a value of 0.756. In terms of application possibilities, the highest factor loading was the expression “Facilities/laboratories are sufficient for practical courses given in our school,” with a value of 0.825. In the dimension of institutional financial support, the highest factor loading was the expression “The school management provides financial support for the certification of students through courses,” with a value of 0.731. In the dimension of curriculum suitability, the highest factor loading was the expression “Foreign language courses are suitable for the purpose of the program,” with a value of 0.740. In terms of student services, the highest factor loading was the expression “Student affairs services are sufficient,” with a value of 0.715. In the last dimension, the obstacles, the highest factor loading was the expression “Our institution may face some bureaucratic obstacles in making new investments,” with a value of 0.712.

Four expressions were included in the student services dimension in line with statistical predictions. However, as the statistical consistency in social sciences is as important as the logical consistency, the expression “There are legislative problems related to faculty members to follow the sector and improve themselves” (factor load: 0.562) has not been included in the student services dimension and therefore has been excluded from factor analysis.

As shown in Table 5, correlation analysis was performed to determine the relationships among the dimensions of the scales used in the research. Correlation analysis is the examination of the relationship between at least two variables. The correlation coefficient can be between -1 and $+1$ and can also yield negative and positive directional results (Cil, 1994: 275). The closer the correlation coefficient is to $+1$ or -1 , the stronger or greater the relationship is between the two variables. If the coefficient is positive, the direction of change is the same. If a negative relationship exists, the variables can be expressed as one of the



variables decreases while the other increases and vice versa (Can, 2014: 347–348; Kozak, 2019: 134).

Table 5. Interdimensional correlation analysis

Expression	A.M.	S.D.	Instructor Qualification	Application Opportunities	Institutional Financial Support	Curriculum Suitability	Student Services	Obstacles
Instructor Qualification	3.524	0.782	1					
Application Opportunities	2.725	0.949	0,362**	1				
Institutional Financial Support	2.770	0.844	0,410**	0,610**	1			
Curriculum Suitability	3.379	0.792	0,636**	0,529**	0,528**	1		
Student Services	3.122	0.942	0,438**	0,484**	0,559**	0,520**	1	
Obstacles	3.272	0.799	0,235**	0,174**	0,193**	0,257**	0,158**	1

** Significant correlation at 0.01 level

Correlation analysis showed generally moderate and low-level positive relationships among the studied dimensions. When the correlation coefficients were examined, the lowest relationship was found between the “student services” and “obstacles” dimensions (0.158), while the highest relationship was found between the “instructor qualification” and “curriculum suitability” dimensions (0.636). In general, moderate linear relationships existed among the dimensions. Although many variables were included in the variance analysis, it was based on the gender, sector experience, and class/year (time spent in school) of the students as these elements were foreseen to be more functional in the selection of departments and the evaluation of education.

Table 6 shows that the dimension of instructor qualification varied according to gender. The arithmetic means reveal that females ($\bar{X} = 3.56$) had more positive expressions than males ($\bar{X} = 3.47$), while no difference according to gender was observed in the other dimensions.

Table 6. Variance analysis of application possibilities by gender

Dimensions	Variable	Number (N)	\bar{X}	t Value	P Value
Instructor Qualification	Female	986	3.56	2.549	.011
	Male	958	3.47		
Application Opportunities	Female	986	2.69	-1.481	.139
	Male	958	2.75		
Institutional Financial Support	Female	986	2.76	-.371	.711
	Male	958	2.77		
Curriculum Suitability	Female	986	3.38	.057	0.954
	Male	958	3.37		
Student Services	Female	986	3.13	.469	.639
	Male	958	3.11		
Obstacles	Female	986	3.29	1.275	.202
	Male	958	3.24		

Table 7 reveals differences between the qualifications of the instructor, application opportunities, institutional financial support, curriculum suitability and student services dimensions and the sector experience. The arithmetic means of the instructor qualification dimension show that students with no sector experience ($\bar{X} = 3.58$) are more positive in their



views toward the survey statements than students with sector experience ($\bar{X} = 3.48$). Meanwhile, the arithmetic means of the application opportunities dimension show that students with no sector experience ($\bar{X} = 2.91$) are more positive in their views toward these statements than students with sector experience ($\bar{X} = 2.60$). The obstacles dimension did not differ significantly according to the students' sector experience.

Table 7. Variance analysis of application possibilities by industry experience

Dimensions	Variable	Number (N)	\bar{X}	t Value	P Value
Instructor Qualification	Yes	1,200	3.48	-2.856	,004
	No	741	3.58		
Application Opportunities	Yes	1,200	2.60	-7.130	,000
	No	741	2.91		
Institutional Financial Support	Yes	1,200	2.69	-4.874	,000
	No	741	2.88		
Curriculum Suitability	Yes	1,200	3.31	-4.877	,000
	No	741	3.48		
Student Services	Yes	1,200	3.06	-3.463	,001
	No	741	3.21		
Obstacles	Yes	1,200	3.28	1.132	,258
	No	741	3.24		

*Significant at $p < 0.05$ level.

Table 8 shows a significant difference between the year of the students (first and fourth years) and the qualifications of the instructor. Their attitudes toward the expressions were more positive than those of the first- and fourth-year students. Differences were observed between the first years and the second, third, and fourth years as well as between the fourth years and the first, second, and third years in terms of application opportunities, institutional financial support, and curriculum suitability. Differences were also found between the first and second years and between the third and fourth years in the student services dimension. The obstacles dimension did not differ significantly according to the years of the students.

Table 8. Variance analysis of application opportunities by years

Dimensions	F	P	1st Year	2nd Year	3rd Year	4th Year	Scheffe
			\bar{X}	\bar{X}	\bar{X}	\bar{X}	
Instructor Qualification	5.719	,001	3.64	3.52	3.51	3.43	1st Year-4thYear
Application Opportunities	37.649	,000	3.04	2.82	2.68	2.43	1st Year - Others
							4th Year- Others
Institutional Financial Support	16.055	,000	2.97	2.79	2.76	2.59	1st Year - Others
							4th Year- Others
Curriculum Suitability	18.098	,000	3.57	3.41	3.37	3.20	1st Year - Others
							4th Year- Others
Student Services	12.577	,000	3.33	3.16	3.06	2.96	1st Year - 2ndYear
							1stYear - 4thYear
Obstacles	0.121	,948	3.28	3.28	3.26	3.22	3rdYear - 4thYear
							None

Conclusion and Discussion

The tourism industry has an important place in developing countries as it plays a significant role in many elements, such as gross national product, regional development, and employment. One of the most important features that distinguishes it from other sectors is that



it is labor intensive (Amoah and Baaum, 1997; Akis Roney, 2011; Lee et al., 2015; Cook et al., 2016; Rahimi et al., 2019). As such, training for qualified tourism personnel in educational institutions comes to the fore (Haw, 2018: 135). However, studies have shown that tourism students make their department choices willingly or depending on various reasons. Baltacı et al. (2012) determined that the students preferred the profession they had studied because they liked it and that they preferred tourism because it was a valid profession today, whereas Ulama et al. (2015) determined that these students willingly chose tourism education. Students should make choices according to their personal skills and abilities, not the scores they receive during (success order) the department choice periods (not because the success ranking is sufficient for this department). According to the ranking of the last student eligible to enter a public university that has provided tourism education for more than 25 years, this figure decreased from 384.985 in 2015 to 735.704 in 2018 (YÖK, 2018).

Baltacı et al. (2012) found that students in the tourism management department have the lowest level of education and course satisfaction and the highest level of concern about the future compared to other departments (travel agency, accommodation management, and tourist guidance). Students who willingly choose their departments have lower levels of concern about the future and higher educational satisfaction and are more willing to pursue a career in these departments. Koc (2019), in a study of tourism students on social anxiety and social avoidance, revealed that 54% of the students were mildly, 38.4% were moderately, 3.4% were highly, and 5% were not socially anxious. Uzumcu et al. (2015) revealed that wage and career opportunities were among the most prominent expectations of the students and that they thought they could advance rapidly in the tourism sector (Cavus and Kaya, 2015: 115), become managers, and work in this field for many years with the tourism education they received.

Students in institutions providing undergraduate tourism education in public universities in Turkey were evaluated, and the results are given below:

- Students in public universities providing undergraduate-level tourism education in Turkey constitute 0.45% of the total students in these universities (7,138,674).
- The majority of the students have sector experience. Given the duration of the interim internship (2 months in total) and on-the-job training (1 semester), the participants have experience outside the compulsory sector internship. Emir et al. (2008: 287) showed that students who undergo internships achieve significant gains in many areas, such as getting to know the sector, learning current practices in the sector on the job, developing their human relations, improving their foreign languages, and getting to know the business life.
- The factor analysis results show that the participants gave more positive answers to questions about the dimensions of the qualifications of the instructor, curriculum suitability, and student services.
- Negative answers were given to the statements regarding the application opportunities, obstacles, and institutional financial support dimensions. These results can be found in similar studies in the literature. In the study of Bayraktaroğlu (2013), the participants were asked to determine whether they had facilities for application within the academic unit they were working in, and they stated that there were no computers and no food and beverage and accommodation laboratories within the academic units they were working in. Karaca (2018) asked 109 lecturers, “Where is the area used for the gastronomy applied class hours in your school?” They answered, “Private sector



enterprises within the institution.” These studies show that state institutions providing tourism education have insufficient or incomplete practice opportunities.

- In the correlation analysis among the dimensions, an above-average relationship between instructor qualification and curriculum suitability was found.
- An above-average relationship was found between the dimensions of institutional financial support and application possibilities. Pirnar (2014) listed the weaknesses of tourism faculties as being very new (as of 2012), having fewer management-based courses in the curriculum, having limited resources given their being new, and having a limited number of qualified, specialized instructors. As a result, the process is prolonged or not carried out between institutions and financial resources in public universities given problems in correspondence, permits, etc. The limited budget provided to universities often leads to a process of funding through local governments, sponsors, or donations. While low-budget activities can be met through these means, application opportunities with a high-cost element remain incomplete, or the facilities of private institutions and organizations are utilized.
- Regarding the relationship between the years of the students and the dimensions, positive attitudes toward these dimensions decrease gradually. The highest differences were found between the first and fourth years in terms of application possibilities. This is caused by the increase in tourism education departments in universities and the lack of effective use of their limited budgets by opening new departments instead of increasing the quality of education in many universities. The lack of practical courses and the majority of courses being theoretical courses have an impact on the students’ attitudes after their sector experience.
- A difference has been determined between the qualifications of the instructor, application opportunities, institutional financial support, curriculum suitability, and student services dimensions and whether or not the students have sector experience; students with no sector experience gave more positive answers to these dimensions. Akış Roney and Oztin (2007: 13) mentioned that new students are more optimistic about the industry and develop less positive perceptions after internship or after part-time work experience (for some students). As a result of the students’ sector experience, universities have more deficiencies in these issues, especially with the students’ negative responses to statements related to application opportunities and institutional financial support.
- Significant differences were found between the instructor’s qualifications and the student’s gender. The fact that the majority of the students with sector experience are male may also be connected to their attitudes toward expressions in this dimension.

Based on these results, the following recommendations can be proposed:

- To improve the quality of teaching, instead of employing qualified instructors, the existing instructors should be qualified.
- Practice opportunities and sector practices should be expanded.
- More financial support should be provided for application areas such as laboratories and equipment.
- The curricula of the courses should be constantly updated by taking into account the current technologies.
- A service network that can respond quickly to students should be established.
- Systems to educate students with self-confidence should be established.



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