

PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION ABILITY: SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstrak. The goal of research is to use the systematic literature review (SLR) method to conduct a systematic investigation. "A scientific strategy that limits bias to the systematic collection, critical appraisal, and synthesis of all relevant research studies on a particular topic" is what systematic reviews aim to do. A systematic literature review's main objective is to decrease bias and facilitate improved decision-making by presenting pooled evidence using reliable, pre-established methodologies. in order to compile a thorough understanding of the evaluation of elementary school pupils' reading comprehension abilities. The research topic employed in the study "reading comprehension ability, reading comprehension ability in schools, reading comprehension ability of elementary school students" was determined by the year of publication, education level, class level, and indexing by the international journal Scopus. This study uses a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) design. "A scientific strategy that limits bias to the systematic collection, critical appraisal, and synthesis of all relevant research studies on a particular topic" is what systematic reviews aim to implement. PRISMA is the methodology used in this investigation. PRISMA techniques for meta-analyses and systematic reviews. Meta-analysis use statistical tools to examine combinations of various research items relevant to the same research issue, whereas systematic literature reviews focus on the identification, selection, and critical evaluation of research items. Three steps make up the selection process: inclusion, screening, and identification. Publication statistics over the last five years, from 2019 to 2023, show an annual growth in reading comprehension studies. There was no discernible rise between 2021 and 2022. There were 764 articles about reading comprehension skills in 2023, which is the most study on the subject. Numerous studies have emphasised how crucial it is to start building reading comprehension abilities early on in life as a means of ensuring academic achievement in elementary school. The application of cutting-edge teaching strategies and techniques that can help elementary school-aged children become more proficient readers is also receiving a lot of attention. In order to improve reading comprehension skills, the study suggests conducting more research on expectancy-value theory, including experimental investigations and in-depth qualitative studies involving culturally varied groups

Keywords: ability; elementary school students; reading comprehension, SLR

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Reading comprehension is widely acknowledged as a foundational literacy skill that underpins students' academic achievement, lifelong learning capacity, and social participation. In primary education, reading comprehension enables learners to construct meaning from texts, integrate prior knowledge, and engage in higher-order cognitive processes such as analysis, evaluation, and inference (Dong et al., 2021; Seifert & Paleczek, 2022). Consequently, the development of reading comprehension at the elementary level has become a critical concern in educational research and policy worldwide.

Recent international assessments, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), consistently report that students in many developing countries, including Indonesia, perform below the OECD average in reading literacy (Nie & Epp, 2022). These findings indicate persistent challenges in fostering effective reading comprehension skills, particularly during the formative years of schooling. Empirical evidence further demonstrates that early deficiencies in reading comprehension tend to accumulate over time, negatively affecting students' academic trajectories and widening learning gaps (Müller et al., 2020). In the Indonesian context, several studies have reported that primary school students experience difficulties in understanding informational and expository texts, identifying main ideas, and making logical connections within reading materials (Puspita, 2020). Research published in national

peer-reviewed journals, highlights that instructional practices, teacher assessment bias, and limited pedagogical innovation remain key obstacles to improving reading comprehension outcomes in elementary schools (Kızıltas et al., 2023; Yatri & Alpian, 2022).

Problem of the Study

Despite the growing body of research on reading comprehension, findings remain fragmented across diverse instructional models, assessment approaches, and contextual variables. Many studies focus on isolated interventions—such as digital media use, phonological training, or fluency based programs without providing an integrated synthesis of trends, effectiveness, and methodological rigor (van der Weel & Mangen, 2022; Hofmann, 2021). As a result, educators and policymakers face difficulties in identifying evidence-based strategies that are consistently effective across contexts.

Moreover, while international literature increasingly explores digital and technology-enhanced reading environments, there is limited consensus regarding their impact on comprehension compared to traditional print-based reading, especially for younger learners (Brüggemann et al., 2023). In Indonesia, systematic mapping of empirical findings related to elementary students' reading comprehension is still scarce, and many studies are reported in isolation rather than being synthesized through rigorous review methodologies (Puspita, 2020; Kızıltas et al., 2023).

Research State of the Art

Recent studies (2019–2024) indicate a substantial increase in scholarly attention to reading comprehension at the primary level. International research has examined the effectiveness of word semantic knowledge training (Dong et al., 2021), fluency to comprehension programs (Cockerill et al., 2023), application-based learning environments (Hofmann, 2021), and classroom-based physical activity interventions (Müller et al., 2021). Additionally, comparative studies have investigated differences between digital and print reading modes, revealing mixed results depending on text length, cognitive load, and learner characteristics (Seifert & Paleczek, 2022; van der Weel & Mangen, 2022). Within the Indonesian literature, JMP publications emphasize the importance of instructional quality, assessment fairness, and teacher professional competence in supporting students' reading comprehension development (Kızıltas et al., 2023; Yatri & Alpian, 2022). However, these studies often adopt descriptive or quasi-experimental designs, leaving limited cumulative evidence regarding dominant research trends and conceptual frameworks.

Gap Study & Objective

Although numerous empirical studies have examined reading comprehension interventions, there is a notable lack of systematic literature reviews (SLR) that comprehensively synthesize publication trends, methodological approaches, and thematic focuses specifically related to elementary school students' reading comprehension. Existing reviews tend to address broader literacy skills or mixed educational levels, thereby overlooking the unique cognitive and pedagogical characteristics of primary learners (Steffen et al., 2024). Furthermore, few studies integrate international Scopus-indexed research with reputable national journals such as JMP to provide a contextualized yet globally informed understanding. This gap limits the transferability of research findings into evidence-based educational practices and policy formulation, particularly in developing-country contexts. In response to these gaps, this study aims to conduct a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of empirical research on reading comprehension abilities among elementary school students published between 2019 and 2024. Specifically, the objectives of this study are to: identify publication trends and research growth related to elementary students' reading comprehension; analyze dominant themes, instructional strategies, and assessment approaches discussed in the literature; and synthesize evidence-based implications for improving reading comprehension practices in primary education. Through this systematic synthesis, the study seeks to provide a robust evidence base to inform future research directions, instructional innovation, and educational policy development.

METHOD

Type and Design

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) design to synthesize empirical evidence on reading comprehension abilities of elementary school students. The SLR approach was selected because it enables a transparent, replicable, and bias-reducing synthesis of existing research by following predefined protocols and rigorous analytical procedures. Compared to traditional narrative reviews, SLR provides stronger methodological

control and enhances the reliability of conclusions drawn from diverse empirical studies (Page et al., 2021). The review process was guided by the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta Analyses) framework to ensure methodological rigor in identifying, screening, and selecting relevant studies. This design is particularly appropriate for mapping research trends, identifying dominant themes, and evaluating methodological patterns in educational research (Steffen et al., 2024).

Data and Data Sources

The data used in this study consisted of secondary data in the form of peer-reviewed journal articles. Primary sources were retrieved from internationally recognized academic databases, including Scopus-indexed journals and reputable open-access publishers. To ensure contextual relevance, selected articles from nationally accredited journals specifically *Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan* were also included. The inclusion criteria were as follows: articles published between 2019 and 2024; studies focusing on reading comprehension abilities of elementary or primary school students; articles written in English or Indonesian; empirical research articles or systematic literature reviews published in peer-reviewed journals. Articles such as conference proceedings, book chapters, editorials, and non-peer-reviewed publications were excluded to maintain data quality and academic credibility.

Data Collection Technique

Data collection was conducted through a structured and systematic search strategy. Keywords such as “*reading comprehension*,” “*elementary school students*,” “*primary education*,” and “*reading comprehension ability*” were used in various combinations to retrieve relevant studies. Boolean operators (AND, OR) were applied to refine search results and increase retrieval precision. The selection process followed three main stages: identification, screening, and eligibility. During the identification stage, all potentially relevant articles were collected. In the screening stage, duplicate records and studies that did not meet the inclusion criteria were removed based on titles and abstracts. Finally, full-text screening was conducted to determine eligibility for inclusion in the final analysis set. This multi-stage process aligns with best practices for minimizing selection bias in systematic reviews (Page et al., 2021).

Data Analysis

The selected articles were analyzed using a qualitative thematic analysis approach. Each study was examined to extract key information related to research objectives, methodological design, instructional strategies, assessment approaches, and reported outcomes. The extracted data were then categorized into thematic clusters to identify recurring patterns, dominant research focuses, and emerging trends. In addition, a descriptive analytical technique was applied to examine publication trends over time, research methodologies employed, and geographical distribution of studies. This dual analytical strategy combining thematic synthesis and descriptive analysis allowed for a comprehensive understanding of both the substantive content and the structural characteristics of research on elementary students’ reading comprehension (Steffen et al., 2024).

RESULTS

The contributions of higher education to national development are substantial and multifaceted. Universities act as hubs for advancing science and technology, driving innovation, and enhancing national competitiveness. Through research and development, they provide solutions to pressing societal challenges while fostering economic progress. Higher education institutions also play a pivotal role in developing human resources equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to meet labour market demands. This leads to increased productivity and efficiency in various economic sectors. Community service is another essential aspect of higher education’s contribution. Universities engage in programs that address local community issues, such as health initiatives, educational campaigns, and development projects, creating a positive impact on societal welfare. Additionally, higher education institutions emphasize the development of soft skills and character, ensuring graduates are not only technically proficient but also possess ethical and leadership qualities. Collaboration with government and industry further enhances universities’ role in shaping policies and creating employment opportunities, particularly through entrepreneurship initiatives. These collective efforts highlight the significance of higher education as a driver of economic, social, and technological advancement. Researchers will present the results of the research based on the research questions that have been created, namely: (1) what are the publication trends in the last 5 years regarding reading comprehension abilities based on publication years 2019-2023? (2) What are the trends in discussion of reading comprehension skills

in elementary school students in scientific literature in the last 5 years?. In this review, studies were first classified according to year of publication. The highest number of studies will be conducted in 2023. The figure below presents the number of publications on reading comprehension skills in basic education published each year. The researchers describe these results in the graph below:

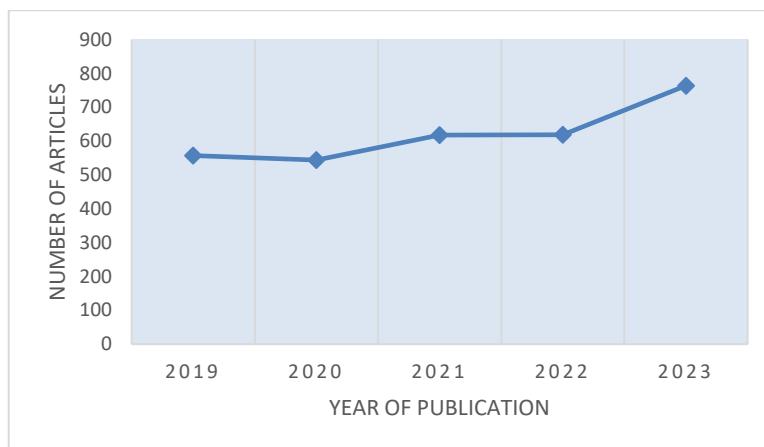


Figure 1. Article Publication Trends in the Last 5 Years

The graph above depicts publication trends in the last 5 years from 2019-2023, research related to reading comprehension increases every year. No significant increase was found between 2021-2022. The most research related to reading comprehension skills in 2023 is 764 articles discussing reading comprehension skills.

Based on analysis conducted from 12,340 articles discussing reading comprehension skills. All articles were sorted, and 17 articles remained relevant and met the criteria for inclusion and review. The researcher analyzed the trends being discussed in the last 5 years regarding reading comprehension ability from the 17 articles.

Table 1. The presented the results of the analysis

No	Author	Years	Result
1	Susanne Seifert , Lisa Paleczek	2022	assessment results are carried out in a mixed form, for example in digital and printed form, the results produced by each assessment method must be sufficiently comparable so that any conclusions drawn can be considered valid. the variables of gender and student language background have no influence on the test mode effect. However, our study shows that when examining test mode effects, the order of presentation of test modes plays an important role.
2	Anna Eva Hallin, Henrik Danielsson , Thomas Nordstrom, Linda Falth	2022	The results of the study were that there was no evidence of learning loss regarding early reading skills in Swedish elementary school students. We are of course not claiming that the COVID-19 pandemic has not had a negative impact on the reading ability of every elementary school student in Sweden. However, considering that the overall level of student inclusion is very similar between years. In Sweden Primary school students' reading skills remained stable during the pandemic.
3	María C. Cort' es-Albornoz , Sofía Ramírez-Guerrero , Danna P. García-Guaqueta ' , Alberto V'elez-Van-Meerbeke , Claudia Talero-Guti' errez	2023	Results of analysis of reading performance and understanding of factual and literary subjects among 350,000 elementary school students in national exams before and after the 8-week lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results show a decline in post-pandemic reading performance of more than 3% compared to pre-pandemic test results.
4	Adriaan van der Weel a , Anne Mangen	2022	The results showed that book (paper) reading specifically predicted better reading comprehension, whereas digital reading correlated

No	Author	Years	Result
5	Minahil Asim	2020	negatively with reading skills. Paper supports comprehension better than screens, especially when reading longer and more complex texts.
6	Yusuf Kızıltاش ¹ , Mehmet Şata & Fuat Elkonca ³	2023	Specifically, the distribution of school-, home-, and community-based interventions to impact students' higher-level reading outcomes: Kinyarwanda fluency and text comprehension, measures created for students with basic literacy skills. The findings in this study highlight that students who have a certain level of reading skill, are able to improve their reading ability much more quickly compared to children who initially did not read well
7	Engin lmaz	2022	The reading comprehension abilities of 48 students, 13 of whom were disadvantaged and 35 were disadvantaged, were assessed by three class teachers (raters) using an analytical rubric. Data were analyzed using the Many-facet Rasch measurement model. It was found that classroom teachers were biased in evaluating the reading comprehension skills of disadvantaged students. Likewise, the reading comprehension levels of disadvantaged students are higher than those of disadvantaged students.
8	Gülşah Mete	2020	The results of this research are that reading skills are the most common problem in SLD. Reading comprehension skills are one of the most important components of reading skills. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers and analyzed descriptively in this research to develop a program to improve the reading comprehension skills of elementary school students with SLD
9	Bettina Müllera,b, , Tobias Richtera , Panagiotis Karageorgos	2020	The Reading Engagement Model has a tremendous influence on students' reading comprehension achievement. It was found that students' scores on the REI posttest showed significant differences in the experimental group relative to the control group.
10	Christian Müller, Barbara Otto, Viktoria Sawitzki, Priyanga Kanagalingam, Jens-Steffen Scherer e , Sven Lindberg	2021	The results show that syllable-based reading training can enable poor readers with inefficient word recognition processes to recognize words more accurately and with less cognitive effort. An important finding of this study was that the effects of transfer on text-based reading comprehension were fully mediated by improvements in word reading skills.
11	Thomas Brüggemann , Ulrich Ludewig, Ramona Lorenz, Nele McElvany	2023	Classroom-based physical activity and mindfulness breaks revealed specific effects on attention and reading comprehension, which are known to support learning. Generalizations of the results need to be drawn with caution as learning and academic success depend on many more factors. Additionally, classroom-based physical activity and mindfulness interventions will also have desirable side effects on children's motivation as well as mental health.
12	Verena Hofmann	2021	we looked at differences between three different test formats (PPT, CBT, CAT) in the cognitive load experienced during and after a reading comprehension test among fourth grade students. There is no difference in cognitive load between reading on a screen and reading on paper. using computers to assess fourth grade students' reading comprehension via short texts had no detrimental effect on the cognitive load or performance experienced.
13	Maria Cockerill , Allen Thurston , Joanne O'Keeffe	2023	These results provide evidence that low-achieving students may benefit from application-based learning under certain conditions for reading comprehension. However, the results showed no general superiority of application-based learning compared to traditional teacher-directed instruction,
			The study found that the Fluency into Comprehension program was universally well received by 100% of staff who used it. Additionally, positive effect sizes on overall reading scores were observed across the board for Grades 2 and 3 students on two

No	Author	Years	Result
14	Sophie Gruhna , Eliane Segersa, , Jos Keuningc , Ludo Verhoevena,	2020	independently designed standardized tests in Reading. It can be concluded from the RCT reported here that the results in terms of increased reading resulting from this program are promising and detectable.
15	Suthasinee Thanutpitinun	2022	We found that global text comprehension improved by each correctly answered question on componential abilities on the first attempt and by each correctly answered sentence integration question after feedback.
16	Yang Dong , Bonnie Wing-Yin Chow , Sammy Xiao-ying Wu , Jian-Dong Zhou & Ya Man Zhao	2020	The results showed that when teachers implemented Akita's action guidelines to improve reading skills and social media literacy. Akita's action guide inspires students to be interested in learning, collaborate in groups to enhance mutual knowledge exchange, and promote the ability to read comprehension and social media literacy.
17	Tayebe Razeghizade, Esmaeel Nourmohammadi, & Mehri Izadi	2022	This research also confirms that the main difficulty in reading activities for RCD students is the semantic identification of characters at the initial reading stage. Finally, self-agency learning mode is an effective approach for semantic intervention design.
			The results of this study imply that the more students think critically, are intelligent, and are gifted with language aptitude, the better they are at EFL reading comprehension. This also implies that learners' personal characteristics may have an important role in EFL reading comprehension ability and, therefore,

From a literature review conducted over the last five years, there is a trend that shows increasing interest and attention to reading comprehension skills in elementary school students. Various studies have highlighted the importance of developing reading comprehension skills from an early age as an important foundation for academic success at the elementary school level. In addition, there is significant attention to the use of innovative learning methods and approaches that can improve reading comprehension skills in elementary school-aged children. However, several studies indicate challenges and difficulties in measuring and improving reading comprehension skills at this level, highlighting the need for a more holistic and integrated approach to reading instruction in elementary schools. Of the 17 studies conducted, several (7) articles discussed how important reading comprehension is for elementary school students. The research also explained the impact when a student does not have the ability to comprehend reading, so of the 17 studies many conducted tests on the reading comprehension ability of school students. basis as done by (Cockerill et al., 2023); van der Weel & Mangen, 2022; Müller et al., 2021 ; Kızıltı et al., 2023 ; Seifert & Paleczek, 2022). To find out how school students' reading comprehension abilities are so that they can provide treatment according to the students' conditions. Various methods or strategies are also applied to improve reading comprehension skills for elementary school students who experience difficulties or who have low reading ability test scores.

DISCUSSIONS

One of the primary issues is the perception that higher education lacks relevance to the workforce. Many graduates struggle to find jobs aligned with their fields of study, fostering the opinion that tertiary education is pursued solely to obtain academic degrees. However, beyond this perception, higher education provides students with opportunities to explore their identities and pursue academic development. Reading comprehension skills are important for a student to have or master. This is explained by (Seifert & Paleczek, 2022) that students' ability to read is not only an important prerequisite for obtaining further competencies in school, but is also important for the development of a person's broader knowledge and skills and the ability to participate adequately in life. cultural and social outside the institutional context. Reading comprehension is defined as the ability to understand the meaning of words, sentences, or written text. This process is hierarchical, meaning that understanding words is necessary for understanding sentences, and understanding sentences is a prerequisite for understanding texts. According to (B. Müller et al., 2020) explains the impact on poor readers in elementary school who usually have difficulty reading words. They often fail to specifically make the transition from letter-by-letter phonological decoding to recognizing

words directly with lexical access. So much research effort has been made directed at better understanding how to improve reading comprehension skills for students. After explaining the importance of reading comprehension skills, the next trend of discussion is related to tests carried out to determine students' reading comprehension abilities. This test is carried out to measure how well students can understand and interpret the texts they read. The results of these tests provide important information about a student's reading comprehension level, which can be used for several purposes. It seems that what the researchers did was provide an innovation to improve the ability to read and understand. These innovations are in the form of methods, models, media, strategies or programs carried out to improve reading comprehension skills in elementary school students. The researcher describes several strategies reviewed in the article, namely (1) Word Semantic Knowledge Training, according to (Dong et al., 2021) Word semantic knowledge (WSK) is very important for developing a person's reading comprehension ability. The current study confirms the self-learning mode. agency is an effective approach for the design of semantic interventions on semantic network construction for elementary school students. (2) Akita's action strategy according to (Thanutpitinun, 2022). Akita's actions to improve reading ability and social media literacy. Akita's action guide inspires students to be interested in learning, collaborate in groups to enhance mutual knowledge exchange, and promote the ability to read, understand and social media literacy. (3) the Fluency into Comprehension program according to (Cockerill et al., 2023) the Fluency into Comprehension program is universally well received by 100% of the staff who use it. Additionally, positive effect sizes on overall reading scores were observed across the board for Grades 2 and 3 students on two independently designed standardized tests in Reading. (4) Short break programs in schools according to (C. Müller et al., 2021) Classroom-based physical activity and mindfulness breaks revealed specific effects on attention and reading comprehension, which are known to support learning. Generalizations of the results need to be drawn with caution as learning and academic success depend on many more factors. Additionally, classroom-based physical activity and mindfulness interventions will also have desirable side effects on children's motivation as well as mental health.

Not only strategies, several media have also been developed to improve students' reading comprehension skills, such as the media used by (Hofmann, 2021) which is an application for teaching reading learning. Low-achieving students may benefit from application-based learning in certain circumstances for reading comprehension, as digital learning games can serve as a useful addition to regular school lessons for several reasons. Elaboration of their enjoyable learning content can increase students' learning motivation. learning media is also used by (van der Weel & Mangen, 2022) he compared the use of digital media with paper media. The results of research show that reading books (paper) specifically predicts better reading comprehension, while reading digital reading is negatively correlated with reading skills. read. Paper supports comprehension better than screens, especially when reading longer and more complex texts.

Novelty and Contribution

The novelty of this study lies in its integrative and systematic synthesis of international Scopus-indexed research alongside reputable national scholarship, offering a contextualized yet globally informed perspective on elementary reading comprehension. Unlike previous studies that focus on isolated interventions or single methodologies, this review consolidates thematic trends, methodological patterns, and theoretical interpretations within a unified analytical framework. The study contributes theoretically by reinforcing integrated models of reading comprehension that align cognitive, linguistic, and contextual dimensions of learning. Practically, it provides educators and school leaders with evidence-based insights into effective instructional strategies and assessment practices. Methodologically, the use of a PRISMA-guided SLR strengthens the reliability and transferability of conclusions, offering a replicable model for future literacy reviews.

Implication and suggestions

From a policy perspective, the findings suggest that early literacy development should be positioned as a strategic priority within national education systems. Policymakers are encouraged to: support professional development programs that strengthen teachers' competencies in evidence-based reading instruction; promote balanced integration of digital technologies without marginalizing print-based reading practices; and implement fair and formative assessment systems that minimize bias and accommodate learner diversity. At the school level, instructional decisions should emphasize explicit comprehension instruction, differentiated support for disadvantaged learners, and intentional use of digital tools aligned with students' cognitive readiness.

Directions for Future Research

Future research should move beyond short-term intervention studies toward longitudinal and mixed-methods designs that capture sustained impacts of reading comprehension instruction. Further investigation is also needed into culturally responsive literacy practices and the pedagogical conditions under which digital reading environments can effectively support deep comprehension. Expanding comparative studies across educational contexts will be essential to inform scalable and inclusive literacy policies.

CONCLUSION

The ability to read comprehension is a critical aspect in the education of elementary school students. Research emphasizes that reading ability is not only important for academic success, but also for the development of broader knowledge and skills as well as social and cultural participation. The impact of reading difficulties, especially at the elementary stages, including difficulties in reading words directly, has been of interest to researchers. This shows the importance of research in understanding how to improve elementary school students' reading comprehension skills. The reading comprehension test is carried out to measure students' level of understanding of the texts they read. Data from these tests are used for a variety of purposes, including educational evaluation, identification of student needs, and development of effective learning programs. From the results of the literature review, researchers have developed various innovations to improve students' reading comprehension skills, such as learning strategies, intervention programs, and the development of learning media. Various strategies described in the text, such as semantic word knowledge training, Akita actions, the Fluency into Comprehension program, and short break programs in schools, have been proven to be effective in improving students' reading comprehension abilities. Apart from that, the development of learning media is also a focus, with learning applications and comparisons between digital and paper media. Although there is variation in results, research shows that the use of paper media in particular can support better reading comprehension than digital media.

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