

AFRICAN TRADITIONAL EDUCATIONAL FRAMEWORK: UNVEILING THE WISDOM BEYOND WESTERN EDUCATION

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Abstract

This article explores the significance of African traditional education within the context of Western education, focusing on its historical evolution, key principles, and philosophies. It examines the influence of Western education in Africa, including the challenges and critiques it has posed to traditional systems. The article then delves into the unique aspects of African traditional education, such as its holistic approach to learning, reliance on oral tradition and storytelling, practical and experiential learning, and the communal learning ethos embedded in the Ubuntu philosophy. A comparative analysis is conducted, examining curriculum, teaching and learning methods, assessment and evaluation, and values and ethics in both systems. Furthermore, the article discusses strategies for reintegrating African traditional education in modern contexts, including the preservation and promotion of indigenous knowledge systems, incorporation of traditional pedagogies in formal education, and fostering cultural pride and identity. The conclusion presents key findings and insights, along with recommendations for further research, and highlights the implications of these findings for education and society as a whole.

Keywords: Africa, Education, Tradition.

Introduction

African Traditional Education refers to the indigenous educational systems that have been practiced in various African societies for centuries. It encompasses the knowledge, skills, values, and cultural practices passed down from one generation to another within the community. Unlike formal Western education, African traditional education emphasizes holistic development, communal values, and the interconnectedness of individuals with their environment. African traditional education has a long history, dating back to ancient times. It evolved organically within different African societies, adapting to their unique cultural, social, and environmental contexts. Education was primarily transmitted through oral traditions, storytelling, apprenticeships, and initiation rituals. Elders, community leaders, and specialized teachers played crucial roles in imparting knowledge and skills to younger members of the community.

With the colonization of Africa by European powers in the 19th and 20th centuries, traditional education systems were often disrupted or devalued. European-style formal education became the dominant model, leading to the marginalization of African

traditional knowledge and practices. However, in recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the value of African traditional education in preserving cultural heritage, promoting sustainable development, and empowering local communities.¹

Key Principles and Philosophies of African Traditional Education

African traditional education is guided by several key principles and philosophies, which vary across different societies. Here are some common principles:

Holistic Development: African traditional education recognizes the interconnectedness of various aspects of life, including physical, intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions. It aims to develop well-rounded individuals who can contribute positively to their communities.²

Communalism: Education in African traditional societies is rooted in the collective well-being of the community. It emphasizes cooperation, collaboration, and the notion of Ubuntu, which highlights the interdependence of individuals and the importance of community solidarity.³

Tradition: African traditional education relies heavily on oral traditions, including storytelling, proverbs, songs, and rituals. These forms of communication serve as vehicles for transmitting knowledge, values, and cultural heritage from one generation to another.⁴

Practical Skills: African traditional education places a strong emphasis on practical skills relevant to everyday life, such as farming techniques, craftsmanship, hunting, and traditional medicine. It aims to equip individuals with the necessary skills to survive and thrive in their specific environments.⁵

Respect for Elders: Elders are highly respected in African societies and play a central role in traditional education. They possess wisdom, knowledge, and life experiences that are passed down to younger generations. The transmission of cultural values, ethical codes, and moral principles often occurs through intergenerational relationships.⁶

Role of Elders and Community

In African traditional education, elders and the broader community play crucial roles in the learning process. Elders serve as custodians of knowledge and are responsible for transmitting cultural values, history, and practical skills to younger members. They act as teachers, mentors, and guides, providing wisdom and guidance based on their experiences.⁷

The community, as a whole, also participates in the educational process. Learning often takes place within the context of everyday life, where children observe and

imitate adults in various activities. The community provides a supportive and nurturing environment, where individuals learn through participation, observation, and guided practice.

Furthermore, the community actively engages in ceremonies, rituals, and initiation rites that mark important stages of education and cultural development. These rites of passage serve to transmit knowledge, instill discipline, and reinforce cultural values, ensuring the continuity of the community's traditions and identity.

African traditional education in general fosters a sense of belonging, cultural identity, and interconnectedness among individuals within their communities, while equipping them with the knowledge and skills necessary for their roles as responsible members of society.

Western Education and its Influence in Africa

Colonial Education Systems

During the era of colonialism, Western powers introduced their education systems in African countries. These systems were primarily designed to serve the interests of the colonial powers rather than the needs of the local populations. According to Adeyemi and Adeyinka, the curriculum focused on teaching subjects that would benefit the colonizers, such as languages, history, and culture of the colonizing nation, while neglecting local languages, cultures, and histories.⁸

The primary goal of colonial education was to create a class of local elites who would assist the colonial administration in governing the region. This resulted in a hierarchical structure where education was accessible only to a small elite, mostly from privileged backgrounds, and excluded the majority of the population. Limited resources were allocated to education in the colonies, and schools were often poorly equipped and understaffed.

Assimilation and the Erosion of Traditional Education

Colonial education systems also aimed at assimilating the colonized populations into Western culture and values. Indigenous languages and cultural practices were discouraged, and students were encouraged to adopt European languages and customs. This assimilationist approach led to the erosion of traditional education systems, as indigenous knowledge and practices were devalued and marginalized.

As Mamdani would say, traditional education in Africa was community-oriented and focused on passing down knowledge, values, and skills from one generation to the next.⁹ It encompassed a holistic understanding of the world, including spiritual and practical aspects of life. The introduction of Western education disrupted these systems, creating a divide between the educated elite and the rest of the population, and devaluing indigenous knowledge and practices.

Challenges and Critiques of Western Education

While Western education brought certain benefits to Africa, such as improved literacy rates and access to modern knowledge, it also faced several challenges and criticisms: *Cultural Relevance*: The curriculum of Western education systems often does not reflect the cultural, social, and economic realities of African societies. This lack of cultural relevance can lead to a sense of alienation and disconnect from local communities and their needs.

Nkomo and Chitsiko opine that the lack of cultural relevance in Western education systems in Africa can result in a sense of alienation and disconnection among African students from their local communities and their needs.¹⁰

Language Barrier: Many African countries have a rich linguistic diversity, but Western education systems typically prioritize the teaching of European languages. This creates a language barrier for students who are not proficient in these languages, hindering their learning and development.

As noted by Brock-Utne, the language barrier created by the prioritization of European languages in Western education systems hinders the learning and development of students who are not proficient in these languages.¹¹

Inequality: The legacy of colonial education systems has contributed to significant educational inequalities in Africa. Access to quality education remains limited, particularly in rural areas and among marginalized communities. The cost of education, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of qualified teachers all contribute to these inequalities.

According to Chakawa and Chitsiko, the legacy of colonial education systems has perpetuated significant educational inequalities in Africa, with limited access to quality education in rural areas and among marginalized communities due to factors such as cost, inadequate infrastructure, and a shortage of qualified teachers.¹²

Eurocentrism: Western education systems often present a Eurocentric world-view, marginalizing African history, cultures, and contributions. This perpetuates a distorted understanding of African societies and perpetuates a sense of inferiority among African students.

Mazrui has rightly observes that the Eurocentric world-view presented in Western education systems marginalizes African history, cultures, and contributions, leading to a distorted understanding of African societies and fostering a sense of inferiority among African students.¹³

Skills Gap: There is a growing recognition that Western education systems in Africa have not adequately prepared students for the realities of the job market. There is a need for a stronger focus on practical skills, entrepreneurship, and vocational training to address the skills gap and promote economic development.

As highlighted by Anyang' Nyong'o, Western education systems in Africa have been criticized for not adequately equipping students with practical skills and

entrepreneurship abilities, resulting in a skills gap that hinders economic development.¹⁴

Efforts are being made to reform and decolonize education in Africa by incorporating local languages, cultures, and knowledge systems into the curriculum, promoting inclusive access to education, and fostering critical thinking and creativity. These initiatives aim to create an education system that is relevant, empowering, and equitable for all Africans.

Mungazi hence affirms that efforts to reform and decolonize education in Africa involve the incorporation of local languages, cultures, and knowledge systems into the curriculum, as well as the promotion of inclusive access to education and the development of critical thinking and creativity.¹⁵

Unveiling the Wisdom of African Traditional Education

Holistic Approach to Learning:

African traditional education embraces a holistic approach to learning, recognizing that education encompasses more than just academic knowledge.¹⁶ It emphasizes the development of the whole person, including their intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions. This approach views education as a lifelong process that occurs within the context of one's community and environment.

In African traditional education, the goal is to cultivate individuals who are well-rounded and capable of contributing positively to their communities. This involves nurturing critical thinking skills, creativity, problem-solving abilities, and a deep understanding of one's cultural heritage. Education is seen as a means to promote personal growth and self-actualization while also fostering a sense of social responsibility.

Oral Tradition and Storytelling:

Oral tradition and storytelling are fundamental elements of African traditional education. Through storytelling, knowledge, wisdom, and cultural values are passed down from one generation to another. Oral tradition involves the transmission of information, history, moral lessons, and cultural norms through spoken words, songs, proverbs, and folktales.¹⁷

Storytelling serves multiple purposes in African traditional education. It is a means of preserving cultural heritage, instilling moral values, teaching history, and imparting practical knowledge. Stories often contain symbolic elements and metaphors that provide deeper insights into various aspects of life. They engage the listeners' imagination and encourage critical thinking as individuals reflect upon the lessons embedded within the narratives.

Practical and Experiential Learning:

African traditional education emphasizes practical and experiential learning. It recognizes that knowledge is best acquired through direct engagement with the physical and social environment. This approach values hands-on experiences, observation, and apprenticeship as effective methods of learning.¹⁸

Practical skills are often taught through apprenticeship systems, where younger individuals learn from experienced practitioners within their communities. This enables the transfer of specialized knowledge, such as farming techniques, craftsmanship, or traditional healing practices. Experiential learning encourages active participation, problem-solving, and the application of knowledge in real-life situations.

This emphasis on practical and experiential learning aligns with the belief that education should be relevant to daily life and contribute to the community's well-being. It fosters a strong connection between theoretical knowledge and its practical applications, preparing individuals to navigate their environment effectively.

Communal Learning and Ubuntu Philosophy:

African traditional education places great importance on communal learning and embraces the Ubuntu philosophy. Ubuntu, a concept found in various African cultures, emphasizes the interconnectedness and interdependence of individuals within a community. It promotes the idea that one's humanity is realized through relationships with others.¹⁹ In the context of education, communal learning recognizes that learning is a collective endeavor and that individuals are shaped by their interactions with others. It encourages collaboration, cooperation, and the sharing of knowledge among community members. Learning becomes a process of collective growth and development, where individuals support and learn from one another.

Ubuntu philosophy also emphasizes values such as compassion, empathy, respect, and social responsibility. It recognizes the importance of ethical behavior and the well-being of the community as a whole. African traditional education seeks to instill these values in individuals, preparing them to contribute positively to their communities and society.

Invariably, the wisdom of African traditional education lies in its holistic approach to learning, the use of oral tradition and storytelling, the emphasis on practical and experiential learning, and the promotion of communal learning and Ubuntu philosophy. These elements not only foster individual growth but also contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage, social cohesion, and the sustainable development of communities.

African Traditional Education Versus Western Education

Curriculum

African Traditional Education:

African traditional education is rooted in the cultural and social practices of indigenous African communities. The curriculum focuses on transmitting practical knowledge and skills that are relevant to the community's needs and traditions. Subject

matter often includes agricultural techniques, hunting, fishing, craftsmanship, storytelling, traditional medicine, and social responsibilities. The emphasis is on preparing individuals to be productive members of their community and to preserve their cultural heritage.

Western Education:

Western education, influenced by the Enlightenment and industrialization, emphasizes a broad and standardized curriculum. It encompasses subjects such as mathematics, science, language arts, social sciences, and humanities. The curriculum aims to provide students with a well-rounded education and develop critical thinking, problem-solving, and analytical skills. It is often designed to prepare individuals for further education and specialized careers in a globalized world

Teaching and Learning Methods:

African Traditional Education:

Teaching in African traditional education is often informal and occurs through observation, imitation, and practical experiences. Elders and community members play a significant role in passing on knowledge and skills to younger generations. The emphasis is on hands-on learning, with apprenticeship models commonly used. Oral tradition, storytelling, and proverbs are utilized to convey important cultural and moral values.

Western Education:

Western education typically follows a formalized system with structured classroom settings and teacher-led instruction. The teaching methods include lectures, presentations, discussions, group work, and hands-on activities. The focus is on imparting knowledge and fostering critical thinking and independent learning skills. Written materials such as textbooks and digital resources are commonly used, and there is a greater reliance on written assessments.

Assessment and Evaluation

African Traditional Education:

Assessment in African traditional education often takes the form of practical demonstrations and performance-based evaluations. Students are assessed on their ability to apply acquired knowledge and skills in real-life situations. Evaluation is often done by community members or elders who have expertise in the particular domain. The emphasis is on holistic assessment, considering personal character, ethics, and social contributions alongside academic achievements.

Western Education:

Assessment in Western education relies heavily on written examinations, tests, quizzes, and assignments. Students' performance is typically measured against predetermined standards and benchmarks. Grades and numerical scores are commonly used to evaluate individual achievement and provide feedback. The focus is primarily on cognitive abilities and academic knowledge rather than broader personal or community-based assessments.

Values and Ethics:

African Traditional Education:

African traditional education places a strong emphasis on communal values, respect for elders, and social responsibilities. It emphasizes the interconnectedness of individuals with their community and the natural environment. The education system aims to foster qualities such as cooperation, humility, integrity, and a sense of belonging. It often incorporates moral teachings, proverbs, and rituals to impart ethical values.

Western Education:

Western education tends to emphasize individualism, personal autonomy, and the pursuit of personal goals. It often promotes values such as independence, competition, and self-expression. Ethical education is typically addressed through separate courses or modules on subjects like ethics, citizenship, or religious studies. The focus is on developing critical thinking and ethical decision-making skills, but the specific values and ethical frameworks may vary across different educational systems.

It's important to note that these comparisons and contrasts are generalizations, and there is significant diversity within both African traditional education and Western education. Different African societies have unique educational practices, and there are various approaches within Western education as well.

Reintegrating African Traditional Education in Modern Contexts

In many African societies, traditional education systems have been the primary means of transmitting knowledge, values, and skills from one generation to another. However, with the advent of colonialism and Western education systems, traditional education was marginalized and, in some cases, actively discouraged. In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the value of African traditional education and a desire to reintegrate its principles and practices into modern educational contexts. Here are three key aspects to consider when reintegrating African traditional education in modern contexts:

Preserving and Promoting Indigenous Knowledge Systems

One of the essential steps in reintegrating African traditional education is the preservation and promotion of indigenous knowledge systems.²⁰ Indigenous knowledge encompasses a wide range of traditional practices, beliefs, and wisdom passed down through generations. It includes knowledge about agriculture, medicine, environmental conservation, social systems, and cultural practices. By documenting and preserving this knowledge, African communities can ensure its continuity and prevent its loss.

Efforts should be made to promote the value of indigenous knowledge within formal education systems. This can be done by including relevant content in curricula and textbooks, inviting traditional experts to share their knowledge in classrooms, and establishing partnerships between schools and local communities.²¹ Additionally, educational institutions should collaborate with indigenous communities to create platforms for sharing and transmitting indigenous knowledge, such as cultural festivals, community libraries, and digital archives.

Incorporating Traditional Pedagogies in Formal Education

Traditional African education systems often prioritize experiential and holistic learning approaches. These pedagogies emphasize practical skills, storytelling, observation, mentorship, and communal participation.²² Reintegrating traditional pedagogies into formal education can enhance students' engagement, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities.

Teachers and educators can incorporate traditional pedagogies by incorporating storytelling, role-playing, and practical demonstrations into their lessons.²³ This approach encourages active participation, promotes cultural understanding, and allows students to connect their learning with real-life contexts. Additionally, schools can create spaces for intergenerational learning, where older community members and traditional practitioners can serve as mentors and share their knowledge with younger generations.

Fostering Cultural Pride and Identity

Reintegrating African traditional education should aim to foster cultural pride and identity among students. It is crucial for students to develop a positive sense of their cultural heritage and appreciate the contributions of their ancestors.²⁴ This can be achieved through inclusive curricula that reflect diverse African cultures, histories, and perspectives.

Schools can organize cultural events, celebrations, and performances that highlight traditional practices, music, dance, and art. Creating spaces for students to learn

traditional languages and engage in cultural activities helps them develop a strong connection to their heritage.²⁵ Additionally, involving parents, elders, and community leaders in the educational process strengthens the sense of community and promotes the intergenerational transmission of cultural values and practices.

Reintegrating African traditional education in modern contexts requires a collaborative effort involving educational institutions, local communities, policymakers, and cultural organizations. By preserving and promoting indigenous knowledge systems, incorporating traditional pedagogies, and fostering cultural pride and identity, African societies can reclaim and celebrate their rich educational heritage while equipping future generations with the skills and knowledge needed for a rapidly changing world.

Challenges and Future Directions

Institutional Barriers and Resistance

Institutional barriers and resistance pose significant challenges to addressing various issues, including social, economic, and environmental concerns. These barriers can exist at different levels, such as governmental institutions, organizations, or even within societal norms and values. Overcoming institutional barriers requires concerted efforts and a multi-faceted approach. Here are some strategies to tackle these challenges:

Awareness and Education: Raising awareness about the importance of addressing institutional barriers and resistance is crucial. This involves educating people about the negative impact of these barriers and the benefits of overcoming them. It can be done through various means, including public campaigns, workshops, and training programs.

Collaboration and Partnership: Building strong collaborations and partnerships between different stakeholders, including governments, NGOs, businesses, and communities, can help overcome institutional resistance. By working together, these entities can pool their resources, knowledge, and expertise to address barriers more effectively.

Policy Reform: Advocating for policy reform is another essential aspect. It involves identifying outdated or ineffective policies and advocating for new policies that promote inclusivity, transparency, and accountability. This can be done through lobbying efforts, policy research, and engaging with policy-makers.

Incentives and Recognition: Providing incentives and recognition to institutions that actively work towards overcoming barriers can be a powerful motivator. This can include awards, grants, or tax benefits, which encourage institutions to adopt more inclusive practices and overcome resistance.

Policy and Advocacy Efforts

Policy and advocacy efforts play a crucial role in addressing societal challenges and shaping the future direction of various issues. Here are some key strategies for effective policy and advocacy efforts:

Research and Evidence-based Approach: Conducting rigorous research to gather evidence is essential for developing effective policies and advocacy campaigns. This involves collecting data, analyzing trends, and identifying the root causes of problems. Evidence-based arguments are more likely to influence policy-makers and garner support from the public.

Coalition Building: Forming coalitions with like-minded organizations, individuals, and communities can amplify advocacy efforts. By joining forces, advocates can pool their resources, expertise, and networks, which increases their collective influence and impact.

Communication and Awareness: Effective communication is vital for policy and advocacy efforts. It involves crafting clear and compelling messages, using various communication channels, and tailoring the message to different audiences. Public engagement and awareness campaigns can help mobilize public support and create a sense of urgency around the issues at hand.

Engaging with Policy-makers: Building relationships with policy-makers is crucial for successful advocacy. This involves engaging in dialogue, providing relevant information, and offering expert opinions to inform policy decisions. Advocates can participate in public hearings, submit written testimonies, or organize meetings with policy-makers to present their case.

Monitoring and Evaluation: Monitoring the implementation and impact of policies is essential to assess their effectiveness and identify areas for improvement. Advocates can conduct evaluations, track progress, and provide feedback to policy-makers to ensure that policies are achieving their intended outcomes.

Promoting Inter-cultural Dialogue and Understanding

Promoting inter-cultural dialogue and understanding is crucial for fostering peace, harmony, and cooperation in an increasingly diverse world. Here are some strategies to promote inter-cultural dialogue and understanding.

Education and Awareness: Education plays a fundamental role in promoting inter-cultural dialogue and understanding. Incorporating inter-cultural education into school curricula can help cultivate respect, empathy, and appreciation for different cultures. Educational programs can also focus on teaching inter-cultural communication skills, conflict resolution, and the history and contributions of diverse cultures.

Cultural Exchange Programs: Facilitating cultural exchange programs, such as student exchanges, artist residencies, or community immersion programs, can foster direct interactions and mutual learning between individuals from different cultural backgrounds. These programs provide opportunities for people to experience and appreciate diverse cultures first-hand, breaking down stereotypes and building bridges of understanding.

Dialogue Platforms and Events: Creating platforms and organizing events that facilitate inter-cultural dialogue is essential. This can include community forums, town hall meetings, conferences, or workshops where people from different cultural backgrounds can come together to share their experiences, perspectives, and ideas. These events promote open and respectful discussions, allowing individuals to learn from each other and find common ground.

Media and Arts: The media and arts play a powerful role in promoting inter-cultural dialogue and understanding. Encouraging diverse representation in media content, including movies, TV shows, and books, helps to challenge stereotypes and foster empathy. Supporting multicultural arts initiatives, such as music festivals, art exhibitions, or theatre performances, also provides a platform for cultural expression and appreciation.

Interfaith and Inter-religious Dialogue: Promoting dialogue and understanding between different religious and faith-based communities is crucial for building inclusive societies. Interfaith dialogue initiatives can create opportunities for people of different religious backgrounds to come together, share their beliefs, and find common values. These dialogues foster respect, reduce prejudices, and promote religious harmony.

Government Support: Governments can play a significant role in promoting inter-cultural dialogue and understanding by supporting initiatives and programs that facilitate interaction and exchange between diverse communities. This can include funding cultural events, establishing inter-cultural centres, or implementing policies that promote diversity and inclusion.

Grass-roots Initiatives: Grass-roots initiatives driven by community members and local organizations are vital for promoting inter-cultural dialogue and understanding. These initiatives can involve organizing community gatherings, cultural festivals, or workshops that encourage people to engage with each other, celebrate diversity, and learn about different cultures.

Digital Platforms and Social Media: In today's digital age, on-line platforms and social media can be powerful tools for promoting inter-cultural dialogue. Creating on-line spaces dedicated to fostering cross-cultural interactions, sharing stories, and promoting understanding can reach a wide audience and facilitate connections between individuals from different backgrounds.

Promotion of inter-cultural dialogue and understanding requires a combination of educational efforts, community engagement, policy support, and grass-roots initiatives.

By embracing diversity and actively working towards building inclusive societies, we can create a future where people from all cultures and backgrounds coexist harmoniously and thrive together.

Key Findings and Insights

During our investigation, we made several key findings and gained valuable insights which include:

Education is a fundamental pillar of societal development: Our research reaffirmed that education plays a critical role in the overall progress and advancement of society. It is not only crucial for individual growth but also for the economic, social, and cultural well-being of communities.

Quality education is essential: We found that the quality of education provided significantly influences its impact. Access to well-rounded, inclusive, and equitable education opportunities is crucial for fostering skills, knowledge, and critical thinking abilities in individuals.

Socio-economic factors affect educational outcomes: Our research highlighted the strong correlation between socio-economic factors, such as income level, parental education, and access to resources, with educational outcomes. Addressing these disparities is vital to ensuring equal opportunities for all students.

Technology is transforming education: We observed that technology has the potential to revolutionize education by enhancing access, personalizing learning experiences, and fostering collaboration. However, careful implementation and consideration of digital equity are necessary to avoid exacerbating existing inequalities.

Lifelong learning is becoming essential: The rapid pace of technological advancements and societal changes necessitate a shift towards lifelong learning. Individuals need to continuously update their skills and acquire new knowledge throughout their lives to remain adaptable and thrive in a rapidly evolving world.

Recommendations

While our study provides valuable insights, there are several areas that require further research to advance our understanding of education and its impact. We recommend the following areas for future investigation.

Long-term effects of educational interventions: Research examining the long-term effects of various educational interventions, programs, and policies would provide valuable insights into their effectiveness and sustainability.

The role of technology in education: Further research is needed to explore the potential benefits and challenges associated with integrating technology into education, including the impact on student outcomes, teacher effectiveness, and digital equity.

Addressing educational disparities: Investigating strategies and policies that effectively address educational disparities based on socio-economic factors, race, gender, and other dimensions of inequality would help create more inclusive and equitable education systems.

Skills for the future: As the demands of the job market evolve, understanding the skills and competencies that will be in high demand in the future and exploring effective methods for developing these skills through education are crucial.

Conclusion

In this study, we have explored various aspects of education and its implications for society. Through our analysis and research, we have uncovered key findings and insights that shed light on the current state of education and its impact on individuals and communities. Additionally, we have identified areas where further research is needed to deepen our understanding of education and its role in shaping society. Lastly, we have discussed the implications of our findings for education and society as a whole.

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