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Full Length Research Paper

Classroom teachers' views on professional development and cooperation: A Turkish profile

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The purpose of this study was to determine the views of teachers who are employed in the primary education (grades 1, 2, 3, 4, 5) on professional development and professional cooperation and whether there are significant differences among these views in terms of gender, level of education and length of service variables. The population of the research consists of classroom teachers who are employed in 153 primary education schools in the city of Konya. According to the findings obtained from the data, classroom teachers' views about professional development and professional cooperation, there was not a significant difference among the teachers' views in terms of gender, education and length of service variables. This situation was interpreted as a result of the efforts to orient teachers towards professional development in order to ensure success in the implementation of the new primary education programmes that took effect in Turkey in 2005 to 2006.

Key words: Professional development, professional cooperation, classroom teachers, teachers' views.

INTRODUCTION

Teachers are the people in the community who come next after the family in assuming the important role of raising children and young people who are the future of the society (Bayrak, 2004:78). Teachers' quality and proficiency are the most important factors for educational activities to attain success. Quality teachers are the single greatest determinant of student achievement. Teacher education, ability and experience account for more variation in student achievement than all other factors. Studies have found that 40 to 90% of the difference in student test scores can be attributed to teacher quality (Hammond and Ball, 1997). Therefore, teachers need to be well-educated and equipped. Teachers should attach importance to their development both in the pre-service and in-service periods.

Teachers have to update their knowledge continuously in order to ensure social and economic progress in the future world. Educational institutions need to improve the content of education while teachers need to convey this. The qualities teaching requires and what is provided to the teachers have an important effect on the strength of education and the quality of teaching (OECD, 2001:11).

Teachers, with whom students have constantly face to face interaction in institutions of education, need to be powerful, proficient, enthusiastic, industrious and they need to develop themselves continuously and value quality (Cafoğlu, 1996:136).

Teachers' being of high quality are depended upon as individuals who follow the developments related to their field, read and investigate, recognize humans and their characteristics, are sensitive to events that happen around them, can perceive others' expectations from them and respond to them, are not discouraged by failure, evaluate educational opportunities offered to them and use technology (Özdemir and Sönmez, 1997:3).

Teachers need continuous education in order to update themselves, acquire and accumulate information about their field, make use of the new technological devices in the educational process, follow contemporary educational approaches and acquire new perspectives in this regard, and use new contemporary teaching methods and techniques (Yıldırım, 2001:104). In other words, teachers need to make lifelong learning a necessity for them.

Teachers should be equipped to respond to the evolving challenges of the society, but also to participate actively in it and to prepare learners to be autonomous in lifelong learning. They should, therefore, be able to reflect on the processes of learning and teaching through an ongoing engagement with subject knowledge, programme content, pedagogy, innovation, research, and

the social and cultural dimensions of education (European Commission, 2010).

Professional development is not about workshops and courses; rather, it is at its heart the development of habits of learning that are far more likely to be powerful if they present themselves day after day (Fullan, 2001:253).

Learning is at the heart of teacher development. Teacher development, including the ongoing learning about how to teach and to support student learning, is seen as the key to being a successful teacher (Bell and Gilbert, 1996:1).

Change, which is one of the most important reasons for professional development, is not only a continuous and difficult process but also a necessary process. It is not possible for living creatures to exist and develop without change. Therefore, change and development are two intermingled phenomena in professional life. It is a difficult but necessary procedure for teachers to plan changes for their working environments. The educational system of institutions, their administrative mechanisms, and their political and cultural life have influence on these changes or innovations. However, the source of professional development and of renewing experiences and working environments is the teachers themselves (Atay, 2003:111). Professional development is a requirement for teachers at all levels (Guskay, 2002).

The traditional approach in teacher training focuses on the educational dimension of teacher training and ignores the importance of professional development. According to the constructivist view, which advocates the opposite of this view, professional development is part of teachers' teaching environment and practices. Teachers never consider their existing knowledge about theory and application and resort to different methods in order to develop themselves (Atay, 2003:51). The curricula according to the behaviouristic approach were dominant until 2005 in the Turkish educational system. The main characteristics of these curricula were that they were teacher centered, based on knowledge transfer, the teacher as absolute figure at school and in class. From 2005 to 2006 onwards, the constructivism was accepted as the main approach in the new curricula studies. According to this approach, the system changed from being teacher centered to student centered. The professional development of the teachers was stressed in the new approach.

The constructivist approach being the base, today, views teachers as those who are striving to attain professional development through ways that are much different from traditional in-service training applications (Avalos, 2011). Apart from in-service training, educationists also suggest different methods in order to ensure professional development (Adey, 2006). In the study by White et al. (2011), a postgraduate degree program with regards to teachers' professional learning was analysed and the topic about what to do for the professional learning of the experienced teachers was examined. They concluded that the content and structure of the program at postgraduate level should be designed and evaluated based on teachers.

Another way of improving oneself professionally is to work in cooperation with colleagues (Clement and Vandenberghe, 2000; Fullan and Hargreaves, 1992; Hargreaves, 1994; Haymore, 2002; Hofstein and Lunetto, 2003; Van den Akker, 1998). For example, Gove and Kennedy-Calloway (1992) observed in a cooperation study project that teachers both carried their existing level of education to a more advanced state and gained strength. In studies conducted by Park et al. (2007), Erickson et al. (2005) and Akar (2006), it was emphasized that working in collaboration with their colleagues contribute to teachers quality. Attaching importance to professional development and being open to Professional cooperation are among the qualities that teachers must possess.

There have been international researches into the professional development of the teachers. TALIS (Teaching and Learning International Survey) is a comprehensive study realized in 23 OECD countries focusing on the working conditions of teachers and studying the learning environments at schools. The main purpose of TALIS is to help the related countries to review the current policies and state to create efficient schools. The primary school directors and teachers were included in TALIS. In the study, the dimensions like professional development activities, teaching practices, evaluation and school leadership (http://abdigm.meb.gov.tr).

In TALIS, the professional development term includes the activities that improve the teachers' qualities, skills, knowledge, expertise etc. In more than half of the countries in EU, teachers are supposed to participate into the activities for continuous professional development. This task is compulsory in some of the countries and in some others; it is a voluntary participation (http://www.f2e2-ogretmen.com).

Therefore, making an effort towards professional development and being open to Professional cooperation are important processes that enable teachers to adapt to change and development and develop themselves. Its necessity and the contribution to teachers is a fact beyond dispute. However, determination of students' views in this regard is important in terms of determining how much importance teachers attach to this subject. Accordingly, determination of classroom teachers' views about professional development and professional cooperation was chosen as the subject of this study.

Problem statement

What are the views of classroom teachers who are employed in the primary education first level schools about professional development and professional

cooperation?

Sub-problems

1. What are the views of classroom teachers who are employed in the primary education first level schools about professional development?
2. What are the views of classroom teachers who are employed in the primary education first level schools about professional cooperation?
3. Is there a significant difference between the views of classroom teachers who are employed in primary education first level schools about professional development and professional cooperation?
4. Is there a significant difference between the views of classroom teachers who are employed in primary education first level schools about professional development and professional cooperation in terms of the variable of their educational level?
5. Is there a significant difference between the views of classroom teachers who are employed in primary education first level schools about professional development and professional cooperation in terms of the variable of teaching experience?

METHODS

Research model

This is a descriptive study in which survey model was used. Survey models are research approaches that aim at describing a past or present state as it is (Karasar, 1991).

Population and sample

The population of this research consists of classroom teachers who are employed in 153 primary education first level schools in the city of Konya. However, due to the difficulty of reaching the whole population, cluster sampling was performed in the study. The classroom teachers who are employed in the first level at 50% of the primary education schools in the city of Konya constitute the research population, which should form the sample cluster. Therefore, 414 classroom teachers who are in the first level of 76 primary education schools, which makes up 50% of the 153 primary education schools in the city of Konya, constitute the sample of the study. These 76 schools were determined randomly.

Data collection tool and application

A teacher questionnaire that was developed by the researcher in order to obtain classroom teachers' views about professional development and professional cooperation was used. The questionnaire was developed based on the field literature and the questionnaire applied to this end (Kulavuz, 2006; Atay 2003; MEB, 2007). A draft that contained 23 items was prepared. The 23-item-questionnaire consists of two parts. The first part includes three questions about gender, educational level and teaching experience whereas, the second part includes 20 questions about professional development and professional cooperation. The questionnaire was prepared using a four-point rating scale. The rating was in the form of quite often (4), often (3), sometimes (2), never (1). The most unfavorable statement was assigned 1 point whereas the most favorable statement was assigned 4 points. Then, face and content validity of the questionnaire was ensured by consulting expert view. A pre-test was administered in order to ensure the reliability of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was administered to the 123 classroom teachers who were employed in the 27 primary education schools that were left out of the sample. Cronbach Alpha coefficient of the 23-item testing scale was found to be 0.82 in accordance with the responses that were given. Then, the questionnaire was given its final form and administered to the 414 teachers who were employed in 76 schools. Of these 414 teachers, only 342 classroom teachers completed the questionnaire voluntarily. 72 primary education schools teachers were left out as they were not willing to complete the questionnaire.

Data analysis

SPSS 10 package software program was used in the data analysis after the administration of the questionnaire was completed. Frequency and percentage were used in determining teachers' views concerning the dimensions of professional development and professional cooperation. Whether there was a significant difference between teachers' views about professional development and professional cooperation in terms of the gender variable was tested using the t-test analysis for the independent groups whereas, whether there was a significant difference in terms of the educational level and teaching experience variables was tested using one-way analysis of variance.

FINDINGS

In Table 1 it is observed that the number of female teachers (n=193) is higher than male teachers. On the other hand, when the teachers' educational level is examined, it is understood that the number of those who graduated from the education faculty (n=184) is higher than the others. An examination of teaching experience reveals that the number of those who were in the profession for 11 to 15 years (n=158) is higher than the others.

In Table 2 when teachers' views concerning professional development were examined, it was observed that they mostly marked the choice "often" for items 1(n=174% 50.9), 2(n=155% examined, it was observed that the most frequently marked choice for items 11(n=170% 49.7), 16(n=145% 42.4) and 19(n=167% 48.8) was "often" whereas the most frequently marked choice for items 12(n=177% 51.8), 13(n=148% 43.3) and 15(n=154% 45) was "quite often". The most frequently marked choice for items14(n=141% 41.2), 17(n=142% 41.5) and 45.3), 4(n=146% 42.7), 5(n=189% 55.3), 7(n=151% 44.2), 9(n=143% 41.8), 10(n=168% 49.1) and marked only the choice "quite often" for item 6(n=160% 46.8). The choice that they preferred most for items 3(n=152% 44.4) and 8(n=153% 44.7) was "sometimes".

On the other hand, when the teachers' views concerning professional cooperation were 18(n=167% 48.8) was "sometimes". The most striking point was that

Table 1. Personal information of the teachers.

Parameter		N	%
Gender			
	Female	193	56.4
	Male	149	43.6
Educational level			
	Education institute	12	3.5
	Education college	35	10.2
	Education faculty	184	53.8
	Master's	22	6.4
	Doctorate		
	Other	89	26
Teaching experience			
	0 to 5 years	11	3.2
	6 to 10 years	89	26
	11 to 15 years	158	46.2
	16 to 20 years	40	11.7
	21 to 25 years	29	8.5
	26 to 30 years	11	3.2
	30 and more	4	1.2

In Table 1, it is observed that the number of female teachers (n=193) is higher than male teachers. On the other hand, when the teachers' educational level is examined, it is understood that the number of those who graduated from the education faculty (n=184) is higher than the others. An examination of seniority reveals that the number of those who were in the profession for 11-15 years (n=158) is higher than the others.

64.6% (n=221) of the teachers marked the choice "never" for item 20.

In Table 4 there is no significant difference in the views of the teachers about professional development based on gender variable [t (340) =0. 013, p>0.5]. In the same way, there is no significant difference in the views of the teachers about cooperation based on gender variable [t (340) =1.79, p>0.5).

In Table 5, In the professional development, [F (4-337) =1.235, p>0.5] and professional cooperation [F (4-337) =1.158, p>0.5], there is no significant difference in the views of the teachers in terms of the educational level variable. In Table 6, in the professional development dimension, [F (6-335) = 0.943, p>0.5] and professional cooperation [F (6-335) = 1.151, p>0.5] the views have no significant difference.

DISCUSSION

In Table 3 when the views of the teachers who participated in the study were examined in terms of the professional development, it was observed that they marked the choice of "often" for 7 items in this dimension (1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10), "quite often" for 1 item (6) and "sometimes for 2 items (3,8). It can be said, on the basis of these results that the views of the teachers who participated in the study in terms of professional development are positive. There may be a few reasons for this. One of them is that new education and training programmes have been prepared as part of Turkey's membership and adaptation process to European Union. Moreover, rapid developments in science and technology, impacts of globalization and increase in international competition have led to a reviewing of the education system and efforts aimed at raising the quality of education. Therefore, a need has arisen to improve educational programmes continuously and bring them in conformity with the day's conditions.

"The New Primary Education Programme", which has been in effect in our country since the 2005 to 2006 academic year, was prepared in accordance with these needs. Moreover, it became necessary to reflect the changes in the world and in information technologies in education and training programme. Therefore, the enforcement of "The New Education Programme" began in the 2005 to 2006 academic year. Teachers were offered in-service training by the Ministry of National Education about the new education programme. The Ministry also prepared a Guide for Professional Development Based on School in 2007. Besides, teachers began to make an effort to improve themselves as they did not find themselves adequately informed about the new education programme. In studies conducted by Gömleksiz (2007), Bal (2008), Dilci and Gürol (2009) and Altun and Şahin (2009), teachers did not find themselves competent about the new education programme. The results of a study conducted by Ünsal (2010) are also in the same line. The fact that teachers did not find themselves competent concerning the new education programme may have played a role in the importance that they attach to professional development. Changing conditions and obligations may have directed teachers towards professional development.

A second reason is that the number of teachers who graduated from an education faculty and participated in the study were, presented in personal information section, high (n=184). When the number of teachers who did their master's degree (n=22) were taken into consideration, it was assumed that the education that they received may have played a role on the views of teachers who graduated from an education faculty or did their master's degree concerning professional development. As the level of education increases, it may be expected that professional achievement and the importance attached to professional education may rise. The findings of Ünal and Akman (2006), Balay and Sağlam (2008) and Aktan (2009) were in support of this. Apart from this, the number of teachers who marked the choice "other" were quite high (n=89). The teachers who marked this choice graduated from a faculty other than the education faculty but they were employed as teachers due to the need for teachers in the first level of primary

Table 2. Teachers' views about professional development.

Items	Professional development	Quite often(4)		often(3)		sometimes(2)		never(1)	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1	I follow scientific developments related to my field closely.	76	22.2	174	50.9	90	26.3	2	0.6
2	I make use of information and communication technologies in order to support my professional development	110	32.2	155	45.3	74	21.6	3	0.9
3	I participate in in-service training, meeting and seminars in order to improve my professional knowledge, skills and proficiencies	63	18.4	116	33.9	152	44.4	11	3.2
4	I follow publications related to my professional development	60	17.5	146	42.7	130	38.0	6	1.8
5	I implement and try new teaching methods	114	33.3	189	55.3	38	11.1	1	0.3
6	I search for and examine supplementary books and supplementary materials related to the course that I teach	160	46.8	148	43.3	32	9.4	2	0.6
7	I prepare a professional development plan and I spend constant effort to develop myself accordingly	59	17.3	151	44.2	116	33.9	16	4.7
8	When necessary, I cooperate, in accordance with the Professional rules, with the Professional association to which I am a member concerning my own development plan	34	9.9	96	28.1	153	44.7	59	17.3
9	I make use information and communication technologies (On-line journals, package software, e-mail, etc.) for the purpose of sharing information	94	27.5	143	41.8	93	27.2	12	3.5
10	I always assess myself after class	121	35.4	168	49.1	49	14.3	4	1.2

In Table 2, when teachers' views concerning Professional development are examined, it is observed that they mostly marked the choice "often" for items 1(n=174 %50.9), 2(n=155 %45.3), 4(n=146 %42.7), 5(n=189 %55.3), 7(n=151 %44.2), 9(n=143 %41.8),10(n=168 %49.1) and marked only the choice "quite often" for item 6(n=160 %46.8). The choice that they preferred most for items 3(n=152 %44.4) and 8(n=153 %44.7) was "sometimes".

education. These people are graduates of a faculty, in other words an institution of higher education. However, the institution where they graduated from is not an education faculty. These people may have engaged in more efforts to improve themselves as they are not graduates of an education faculty.

The results of International Teaching and Learning Research (TALIS 2009), under OECD, support the claim that Turkish teachers are in an effort to develop themselves. This first international research into the learning environments at schools and teachers' teaching conditions, aims at a comparative research on educational systems. The research that covers the teachers and school administrators aims to support the roles and functions of school leadership, evaluation of the work by the teachers, the professional development chances of the teachers and the teaching and learning approaches in the classroom.

Table 3. Teachers' views about professional cooperation.

Items	Professional cooperation	Quite often(4)		Often (3)		Sometimes (2)		Never(1)	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
11	I work with my colleagues productively in order to improve the school's learning environment	123	36	170	49.7	44	12.9	5	1.5
12	I engage in Exchange of views with my colleagues on issues related to education	177	51.8	136	39.8	27	7.9	2	0.6
13	I share my teaching methods with my colleagues	148	43.3	141	41.2	49	14.3	4	1.2
14	I develop course materials with my colleagues	62	18.1	127	37.1	141	41.2	12	3.5
15	I discuss with my colleagues the problems that I experience in classroom practices	154	45	141	41.2	42	12.3	5	1.5
16	I use the course materials that my colleagues prepared in my classes	77	22.5	145	42.4	104	30.4	16	4.7
17	I prepare for courses with my colleagues	55	16.1	107	31.3	142	41.5	38	11.1
18	I and my colleagues watch each other's classes	25	7.3	50	14.6	167	48.8	100	29.2
19	I provide support to my colleagues about problems that they experience in teaching	83	24.3	167	48.8	85	24.9	7	2
20	I and my colleagues keep a joint journal	16	4.7	27	7.9	78	22.8	221	64.6

In Table 3, when the teachers' views concerning professional cooperation are examined, it is observed that the most frequently marked choice for items 11(n=170 %49.7), 16(n=145 %42.4) and 19(n=167 548.8) was "often" whereas the most frequently marked choice for items 12(n=177 %51.8), 13(n=148 %43.3) and 15(n=154 %45) was "quite often". The most frequently marked choice for items 14(n=141 %41.2), 17(n=142 %41.5) and 18(n=167 %48.8) was "sometimes". The most striking point was that 64.6 % (n=221) of the teachers marked the choice "never" for item 20.

(http://digm.meb.gov.tr/uaorgutler/)

According to the results of the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS-2009), 75% of the teachers in Turkey attended professional development activities during the main implementation period of the TALIS study (18 months) and 48% of the teachers demanded more professional development than they received.

When the views of the teachers who participated in the study are examined in terms of the dimension of professional cooperation, it is observed that they marked the choice "often" for 3 items in this dimensions (11, 16, 19), "quite often" for 3 items (12, 13, 15), "sometimes" for 3 items (14, 17, 18), and "never" for 1 item (20). According to these results, it can be said that, the teachers who participated in the study have a favourable view of professional cooperation though not as much as professional development. However, when the responses that were given to the items in the professional cooperation dimension were analyzed, the striking point is that the teachers tend to engage in an exchange of views rather than acting and working together. The results of OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS, 2009), in which Turkey also participated, are in support of this situation. It was emphasized in the general evaluation of Turkey conducted by the Ministry of National Education that teachers in Turkey do not generally employ the direct professional cooperation method such as cooperation and team learning and that they turned to the approach of information gathering, consulting for ideas and exchange of ideas instead (http://digm.meb.gov.tr/uaorgutler). However, in related literature, the practices based on the cooperation of teachers, students and administrators increases the effectiveness of both teachers and students. "Professional learning community" is the best sample of this case. Then, What Is a "Professional Learning Community"? To create a professional learning community, focus on learning rather than teaching, work collaboratively, and hold yourself accountable for results (Dufour, 2004). The term "learning community" is being used to mean any number of things, such as extending classroom practice into the community; bringing community personnel into the school to enhance the curriculum and learning tasks for students; or engaging students, teachers, and administrators simultaneously in learning; to suggest just a few (Hord, 1997). Review of a teacher's behaviour by colleagues is the norm in the professional learning community (Louis and Kruse, 1995). This practice is not evaluative but is part of the "peers helping peers" process. Such review is conducted regularly by

Table 4. Differences among the teachers' views in terms of the gender variable.

Items	Gender	n	X	S	sd	t	P
Professional development	Female	93	2.63	0.73	340	0.013	0.55
	Male	149	2.92	0.76			
Professional cooperation	Female	93	2.83	0.75	340	1.79	0.47
	Male	149	2.68	0.80			

P>0.05. In Table 4, there is no significant difference in the views of the teachers about professional development based on gender variable [t(340)=0.013, p>0.5]. In the same way, there is no there is no significant difference in the views of the teachers about cooperation based on gender variable [t(340)=1.79, p>0.5).

Table 5. Differences among the teachers' views in terms of the educational level variable.

Items	Source of variance	Total squares	Sd	Mean squares	F	P
Professional development	Inter-groups	2.8622	4	0.715	1.235	0.512
	Intra-groups	193.2219	337	0.573		
	Total	196.084	341			
Professional cooperation	Inter-groups	2.9887	4	0.747	1.158	0.525
	Intra-groups	207.386	337	0.615		
	Total	210.374	341			

P>0.05 In Table 5, In the professional development, [F(4-337)=1.235, p>0.5] and professional cooperation [F(4-337)=1.158, p>0.5], there is no significant difference in the views of the teachers in terms of the educational level variable.

Table 6. Differences among teachers' views in terms of the teaching experience variable.

Items	Source of variance	Total squares	Sd	Mean squares	F	P
Professional development	Inter-groups	3.1624	6	0.527	0.943	0.522
	Intra -groups	192.9217	33	0.575		
	Total	196.0841	341			
Professional cooperation	Inter-groups	4.3626	6	0.726	1.151	0.541
	Intra-groups	206.0118	335	0.614		
	Total	210.3747	341			

P>0.05 In Table 6, In the professional development dimension, [F(6-335)=0.943,p>0.5] and professional cooperation [F(6-335)=1.151, p>0.5] the views have no significant difference.

teachers, who visit each other's classrooms to observe, script notes, and discuss their observations with the visited peer. The process is based on the desire for individual and community improvement and is enabled by the mutual respect and trustworthiness of staff members (Hord, 1997).

When their teaching experience level is examined, it can be said that a large majority of the teachers who participated in the study were young teachers. Those with 0 to 5 years of experience are (n=11), those with 6 to 10 years of experience are (n=89), and those with 11 to15 years of experience are (n=158). Young and faculty graduate teachers may be expected to exhibit a more favourable attitude concerning professional development and professional cooperation. As a matter of fact, the results of the study that was conducted by TALIS (2009) seem to be in support of the results of this study. According to the results of the TALIS study, there was no statistically significant difference between the number of teachers' participation in the professional development activities and durations of their participation in the 24 countries that participated in the study. Turkey has a young population of teachers. Three-fourths of the teachers (75%) are below the age of forty. It was

observed that in the countries that participated in the study, as the ages of the teachers increased, the durations of their participation in professional development activities decreased. It was determined that as the teachers' educational level increased, they attended more professional development activities. In many countries, teachers with lower levels of education attend fewer professional development activities. It is observed that these findings also hold true for Turkish teachers (http:www.f2e2-ogretmen.com). Budak and Demirel (2003) found in their study that young teachers participate in more in-service programmes. In a study conducted by Özer and Beycioğlu (2010), it was observed that older teachers with longer teaching experience displayed a more negative attitude towards professional development.

Conclusion

A significant difference did not emerge among the views of the teachers in terms of the variables of gender, educational level and teaching experience. When the teachers' education levels are examined, it is observed that the number of teachers who graduated from faculty is high (184). Moreover, when the number of the teachers who did a Master's degree is taken into consideration, it can be said that the educational levels of the teachers who participated in the study are high. Their views on the professional development are positive. There has been a significant difference in terms of gender, education level and teaching experience variable.

However, the findings indicate that each teacher needs to develop him or herself in order to adjust to the existing changes. Implementation of New Primary Education programmes and attachment of importance by the Ministry of National Education to the issue may have encouraged the teachers concerning professional development and professional cooperation.

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