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Implementing Translanguaging: Teachers' Lived Experiences Under an Implicit English-Only Policy

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Abstract: *This study explores how senior high school English teachers in the Philippines implement translanguaging within classrooms governed by implicit English-Only Policies (EOPs). Using a qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological approach, in-depth interviews were conducted with five purposively selected teachers to understand how they negotiate their roles, respond to institutional constraints, and perceive translanguaging as a pedagogical tool. Findings reveal that implicit EOPs operate as a hidden curriculum reinforced by peer influence and professional identity, creating emotional conflicts and internalized policy norms for teachers. Despite these challenges, translanguaging is widely employed to clarify complex concepts, enhance engagement, and differentiate instruction through adaptive strategies like incremental English use and strategic code-switching. However, a lack of institutional support leaves teachers isolated in their decision-making. The study concludes that while translanguaging holds significant pedagogical value, implicit EOPs generate tensions requiring teachers to exercise agency and ethical judgment to balance policy compliance with effective teaching. Institutional recognition and support for translanguaging are essential to align policy with classroom realities.*

Keywords— : Translanguaging, English-Only Policy, Senior High School, Multilingual Education, Teacher Agency, Implicit English Only Policy, language teaching, English Language Teaching in the Philippines

1. INTRODUCTION

Language plays a central role in shaping classroom instruction, learner engagement, and teachers' pedagogical decisions. In multilingual contexts such as the Philippines, English is widely used as the medium of instruction, especially in senior high schools, as part of broader efforts to enhance students' English proficiency and prepare them for global opportunities (Tupas & Rubdy, 2015; Bernardo, 2004). Many schools support this goal through English-Only Policies (EOPs), which may be explicitly documented or exist implicitly as unwritten yet widely understood expectations reinforced by school culture, peer discourse, and professional routines like Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions (Tupas & Rubdy, 2015; Tupas & Tabiola, 2017; Hornberger & Johnson, 2007). These implicit EOPs, sustained by collective expectations, shape classroom language practices and often create tension for teachers, who must balance institutional compliance with the diverse linguistic needs of their students (Kani & Iğsen, 2022; Pradia & Bawa, 2023; Chen, Fang, & Zhang, 2024).

While EOPs aim to maximize English exposure, they can also lead to classroom anxiety and reduced participation, especially among students with limited English proficiency (Macawile & Plata, 2022; Chen, Fang, & Zhang, 2024). In response, teachers in multilingual classrooms often navigate dual roles as policy enforcers and adaptive practitioners. While striving to model English use, many recognize the limitations of strict EOPs and employ translanguaging, drawing on students' full linguistic repertoires, including Filipino or Bisaya, to clarify concepts, scaffold learning, and foster engagement (García & Kleifgen, 2019; Belvis & Gutierrez, 2019; Macawile & Plata, 2022). Unlike simple code-switching, translanguaging is a dynamic process that supports deeper learning and classroom participation, even in English-dominant environments (Kani & Iğsen, 2022; Pradia & Bawa, 2023). Despite the pedagogical benefits of translanguaging, teachers often face dilemmas when institutional expectations conflict with students' linguistic realities, leading them to develop adaptive strategies such as incremental increases in English use, selective code-switching, and allowing the mother tongue during specific activities (Pradia & Bawa, 2023; Tupas & Tabiola, 2017). These pragmatic responses underscore the importance of teacher agency and context-sensitive policy implementation (Levinson & Sutton, 2001).

However, most research has focused on explicit policies or early education, with limited exploration of how implicit policies shape senior high school teachers' decision-making and classroom discourse (Macawile & Plata, 2022; Tupas & Tabiola, 2017). There is a clear need for more nuanced investigations into how unwritten expectations and institutional culture influence teacher practices, and how peer collaboration, as through LAC sessions, affects the enactment of language policies in practice (Chen, Fang, & Zhang, 2024). This study is grounded in Translanguaging Theory, which emphasizes the fluid and dynamic use of language for learning (García, 2009); the Policy Appropriation Framework, which explores how teachers actively interpret and reshape policies in local contexts (Levinson & Sutton, 2001); and Sociocultural Theory, which highlights the impact of language policies on cognitive development through social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978).

In light of these gaps, this study aims to explore how senior high school English teachers implement translanguaging within classrooms governed by an implicit English-Only Policy, specifically addressing the following research questions:

1. How do senior high school English language teachers negotiate their classroom roles while implementing translanguaging and the implicit English-Only Policy?
2. How do teachers respond to institutional constraints when using translanguaging under the implicit English-Only Policy?
3. How do teachers perceive translanguaging as a pedagogical tool under the implicit English-Only Policy?

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed a qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of senior high school English teachers regarding translanguaging practices under implicit English-Only Policies (EOPs). Five purposively selected teachers from a public senior high school in the Philippines participated, each with at least three years of teaching experience and direct exposure to an environment with implicit EOPs. Data was gathered through in-depth, face-to-face interviews using a rigorously validated protocol, reviewed by three language education experts, and pilot tested for clarity and relevance. All interviews were audio-recorded with informed consent and transcribed verbatim to ensure data accuracy and richness.

Thematic analysis guided data interpretation, beginning with multiple readings and coding of significant statements, followed by the development of broader themes. A code guide ensured consistency, and findings were validated through expert review and member checking to enhance credibility. Ethical standards were strictly observed, including informed consent, pseudonym confidentiality, secure data storage, and administrative approval from school authorities. These methodological choices, grounded in Translanguaging Theory (García, 2009), the Policy Appropriation Framework (Levinson & Sutton, 2001), and Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978), enabled a comprehensive understanding of how translanguaging operates as both a cognitive and sociopolitical practice within implicit EOP environments.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents five major themes and corresponding subthemes from the thematic analysis of interview transcripts with five senior high school English teachers implementing translanguaging within an implicit English-Only Policy (EOP). These themes were derived from significant participant statements systematically coded, categorized, and validated using a developed code guide.

3.1 Navigating Implicit English-Only Policy (EOP)

The Power of Unspoken Rules

Unwritten expectations about English use dominate the school's language environment, shaping behavior through routines and informal interactions rather than explicit directives (Tupas & Tabiola, 2017; Kani & Iğsen, 2022). As P1 shared, *"There is no official memo, but everyone knows that English is the language to use in class. It is like a silent agreement."* P3 added, *"Even new teachers quickly pick up that English is expected, even if no one says it outright."* These statements highlight how teachers internalize and act on these invisible norms (Chen, Fang, & Zhang, 2024).

EOP as a Hidden Curriculum

The implicit EOP acts as a hidden curriculum, subtly shaping teacher and student behavior through institutional routines and shared beliefs about effective teaching (Tupas & Rubdy, 2015; Macawile & Plata, 2022). P2 noted, *"During LAC sessions, the focus is always on improving students' English, and it is understood that we should speak English ourselves."* P4 echoed, *"Even if it is not written, the expectation is there, especially during school programs or when supervisors are around."* This hidden curriculum powerfully influences attitudes and behaviors (Belvis & Gutierrez, 2019).

Peer Influence and Professional Pressure

Peer dynamics and professional expectations reinforce the EOP, with teachers feeling pressure to conform to colleagues' language practices (Tupas & Tabiola, 2017; Kani & Iğsen, 2022). P5 explained, *"If you use Filipino in class, some colleagues might comment or joke about it later. It makes you conscious of how you speak."* P2 shared, *"There is a feeling that you have to prove you are a good English teacher by always using English, especially when other teachers are around."* This pressure can prioritize compliance over pedagogical flexibility (Pradia & Bawa, 2023; Macawile & Plata, 2022).

Language Ideologies and Professional Identity

Teachers link English proficiency to professional identity, internalizing the idea that using English signals competence and authority (Tupas & Rubdy, 2015; Chen, Fang, & Zhang, 2024). P3 stated, *"Being able to speak English well is part of being a good English teacher. It is something we take pride in."* P1 admitted, *"Sometimes I feel that if I use Filipino too much, I am not doing my job properly."* This ideology can create internal conflict for teachers who want to support students through translanguaging (Macawile & Plata, 2022).

Silence as Enforcement

Nonverbal cues and silence often enforce the EOP, with teachers and students interpreting these as reminders to use English (Belvis & Gutierrez, 2019; Kani & Iğsen, 2022). P4 described, *"If someone suddenly speaks Filipino during a meeting or class, sometimes there is just silence or a look from others. You get the message without anyone saying anything."* P5 added, *"It is uncomfortable when you break the rule, even if no one says anything. The silence is enough*

to remind you." Such tacit enforcement further entrenches the policy (Chen, Fang, & Zhang, 2024).

3.2 Translanguaging as Pedagogical Practice

Clarification of Complex Ideas through the L1

Teachers found translanguaging essential for explaining abstract or technical content, using Filipino or Bisaya to scaffold understanding when English alone was insufficient. P2 explained, *"Sometimes I explain in Filipino so they really understand the lesson. If I use English, they get confused and do not ask questions."* P5 added, *"If I sense they are not getting it, I say it in Bisaya. Then you see their faces change-they finally get it."* This practice serves as a cognitive bridge, supporting comprehension without lowering standards (Chen, Fang, & Zhang, 2024; Macawile & Plata, 2022).

Translanguaging as a Classroom Engagement Tool

Translanguaging was described as vital for boosting participation and reducing anxiety. Students were more likely to contribute when allowed to use their L1, especially during interactive activities. P1 observed, *"They raise their hands more when they know they can use Filipino or Bisaya. It is like a door opens."* P3 noted, *"If I strictly use English, they just stay quiet. However, if I start with their language, they start asking and answering questions."* This validates students' identities and leverages their full linguistic repertoire (García & Kleifgen, 2019; Pradia & Bawa, 2023).

Instructional Flexibility and Differentiation

Teachers exercised agency by intentionally using translanguaging to differentiate instruction based on students' proficiency. P4 shared, *"There are times I stay in English. However, if I see they are struggling, I explain in Bisaya for a moment, then go back."* P2 said, *"I always start with English, but I am ready to switch if they need more help, especially for technical terms."* This flexible, context-specific approach challenges rigid language boundaries (Kani & Iğsen, 2022; Macawile & Plata, 2022).

Translation as Strategy, Not Simplification

Translation was used as a temporary, strategic scaffold rather than a sign of deficiency. P5 noted, *"At the start, I translated more. However, after two or three weeks, they can follow without it. It is just for their jumpstart."* P1 clarified, *"I do not spoon-feed. I translate to make sure they are not lost. Then I go back to English once they are on track."* This aligns with research showing L1 skills support L2 development (Cummins, 2021; Chen, Fang, & Zhang, 2024).

Reframing the Role of the Teacher

Translanguaging prompted teachers to see themselves as facilitators rather than strict enforcers of English-only policy. P3 reflected, *"If I insist on English, I follow the rules. However, if I use Filipino or Bisaya, I ensure they learn. That is my job."* P4 added, *"It is not being lenient. It is being practical. It is being human."* This shift emphasizes the teacher's role as a mediator for equity and understanding (Macawile & Plata, 2022; Pradia & Bawa, 2023).

Unacknowledged Yet Widespread

Despite its prevalence, translanguaging remains unrecognized mainly in formal settings. Teachers noted a lack of open discussion or institutional support. P1 said, *"We all do it, but no one talks about it in meetings. Maybe because we are afraid it is not allowed."* P5 described it as *"a teaching hack, you do it to survive, to ensure they learn. However, it is not officially discussed."* This disconnect highlights the need for institutional recognition (Tupas & Tabiola, 2017; Kani & Iğsen, 2022).

3.3 Dilemmas and Adaptive Strategies

Emotional Conflict and Internalized Policy Norms

Teachers frequently reported guilt or hesitation when using Filipino or Bisaya, reflecting deeply internalized norms that equate English-only instruction with professionalism. P4 shared, *"I feel guilty when I allow Filipino, but sometimes it is necessary."* P3 echoed, *"There is always that thought- am I doing the right thing? I want to follow the policy, but I also want my students to understand."* These emotional conflicts highlight how implicit EOPs become internalized and emotionally charged (Kani & Iğsen, 2022; Macawile & Plata, 2022; Pradia & Bawa, 2023).

Tension Between Policy Ideals and Classroom Realities

Teachers described a persistent gap between institutional expectations and the linguistic realities of their students. P5 explained, *"If I strictly use English, some students are left behind. If I use Filipino, I feel I am not doing my job. It is always a balancing act."* P2 asked, *"You want to stick to English, but how can you teach math terms, science concepts, or literature themes when they do not even understand the question?"* This tension is well documented in research on restrictive EOPs in multilingual classrooms (Chen, Fang, & Zhang, 2024; Tupas & Tabiola, 2017; Macawile & Plata, 2022).

Adaptive Strategies: Reconciling Expectations and Effectiveness

Rather than openly defying policy, teachers adopted adaptive strategies such as incremental English use, structured code-switching, and context-specific L1 use. P1 said, *"At the beginning of the school year, I allow more Filipinos. However, I explained that later we will use more English. That way, they do not feel overwhelmed."* P3 added, *"I set rules-like, 'Give me 10 words in English, then you can explain the rest in Bisaya.' It helps them try without feeling stuck."* These strategies reflect teacher agency and flexible policy negotiation (Pradia & Bawa, 2023; García &

Kleifgen, 2019).

Professional Judgment and Ethical Teaching

Teachers viewed their adaptive practices as ethical and student-centered, guided by care and professional judgment. P2 stated, *"I am not doing this to break rules. I am doing this because they will not learn if I do not."* P5 remarked, *"It is not about being lax. It is about being realistic. Our job is to help them understand, not just to speak English."* This aligns with scholarship on teachers as policy mediators who adapt policies to fit classroom realities (Macawile & Plata, 2022; Kani & Iğsen, 2022; Pradia & Bawa, 2023; Tupas & Rubdy, 2015).

Lack of Institutional Support for Decision-Making

Despite their efforts, teachers felt isolated, with little institutional guidance or validation for their translanguaging practices. P4 noted, *"We never talk about these things in LAC. You do what you think is right."* P1 added, *"It would be nice to share strategies without feeling judged. Everyone is doing it, but no one admits it."* This lack of support perpetuates the disconnect between policy and practice, leaving teachers to navigate dilemmas alone (Chen, Fang, & Zhang, 2024; Tupas & Tabiola, 2017; Macawile & Plata, 2022).

3.4 Outcomes and Student Response

Participation as a Direct Result of Translanguaging

Teachers consistently observed increased student participation when learners could first express themselves in Filipino or Bisaya before transitioning to English. Previously hesitant students became more active and vocal. As P1 noted, *"Participation increases when I let them express themselves in their language first."* P2 added, *"When they start in Filipino or Bisaya, they become more confident. Then, when asked to share in English, they try. It is like a warm-up."* These findings support research showing that translanguaging lowers anxiety and fosters inclusion (Kani & Iğsen, 2022; Pradia & Bawa, 2023; Chen, Fang, & Zhang, 2024).

Enhanced Comprehension and Learning Retention

Translanguaging was key to improving comprehension and retention, especially for complex concepts. Teachers reported that explaining lessons in students' L1 deepened understanding and made it easier for students to engage with English texts. P3 explained, *"They understand better when I explained using their language. Then, when we review it in English, it sticks."* P5 said, *"They need the Filipino or Bisaya version first. Once they get it, they can confidently engage with the English text."* This aligns with sociocultural theories emphasizing scaffolding and connecting new knowledge to existing linguistic resources (García & Kleifgen, 2019; Macawile & Plata, 2022; Chen, Fang, & Zhang, 2024).

Building Confidence Through Linguistic Validation

Teachers highlighted that validating students' home languages boosted their confidence and willingness to participate in English. P4 remarked, *"When allowed to use Bisaya, they feel smarter. It is like, 'I can explain this. I just need to use my language.' That confidence carries over to English."* P2 observed, *"They bloom when their voices are heard. Even if they start in Filipino, they eventually try English because they feel more comfortable."* Research confirms that linguistic validation enhances self-esteem and engagement, especially for students marginalized by monolingual policies (Pradia & Bawa, 2023; García & Kleifgen, 2019).

Gradual Increase in English Use

Contrary to fears of L1 dependency, teachers found that translanguaging facilitated a gradual increase in English use. As students gained confidence and mastery, they began using English more without being forced to do so. P5 shared, *"At the start, they will talk a lot in Filipino. However, they try to learn more English each week. I do not even have to force it."* P3 added, *"Once they feel secure in the topic, they switch to English independently. Translanguaging prepares them, not replaces English."* This supports Cummins' (2021) Interdependence Hypothesis and recent studies showing that translanguaging can serve as a bridge to English proficiency (Macawile & Plata, 2022; Kani & Iğsen, 2022).

Reduced Anxiety and Improved Classroom Climate

Teachers noted that translanguaging contributed to a relaxed, supportive classroom environment. Students were less anxious, more willing to ask questions, and more engaged in group work. P1 described, *"You can feel it. When they know they can use Filipino or Bisaya, they relax. They are more open, more willing to learn."* P4 explained, *"If they know they will not be judged, they are not afraid to speak. Then, little by little, they take the risk with English."* This reflects a student-centered approach that affirms linguistic diversity and supports both academic and emotional well-being (García & Kleifgen, 2019; Chen, Fang, & Zhang, 2024).

3.5 Institutional Constraints

Reinforcement Through Meetings and LAC Sessions

Teachers reported that expectations for English use were regularly reiterated in professional spaces such as LAC sessions and staff meetings, often framed as suggestions but repeated enough to become perceived obligations. As P3 described, *"In every meeting, we are told: 'Let us use English as much as possible.' It is hard to push back against that."* P1 added, *"Even if it is not in writing, the reminders are constant-use English, speak English, encourage English."* This informal but persistent reinforcement reflects institutional norms' "hidden curriculum" (Tupas & Tabiola,

2017; Macawile & Plata, 2022).

Evaluation Metrics and Classroom Observations

Though not always explicitly focused on language use, classroom observations and evaluations subtly reinforced English-only expectations. P4 noted, *"When we get observed, we feel the need to use more English. It is not in the checklist, but you know."* P5 explained, *"It is safer to stick to English when someone is observing. Even if you think it is better to explain in Bisaya, you hold back."* This leads teachers to self-monitor and practice translanguaging cautiously (Kani & Iğsen, 2022; Chen, Fang, & Zhang, 2024).

Peer Pressure and Collegial Discourse

Peer dynamics also reinforced monolingual norms, with some teachers feeling scrutinized or subtly corrected by colleagues for using Filipino or Bisaya. P2 shared, *"Other teachers will sometimes comment if you use too much Filipino, like, 'isn't this supposed to be English class?' It makes you doubt yourself."* P3 added, *"You hear stories like, 'She got questioned for using Bisaya.' That kind of thing travels fast."* Peer surveillance can be as powerful as top-down enforcement (Pradia & Bawa, 2023; Macawile & Plata, 2022).

Policy Ambiguity and Conflicted Autonomy

The implicit nature of the EOP created flexibility and uncertainty, leaving teachers vulnerable to inconsistent interpretations. P1 reflected, *"There is freedom, yes, but also fear. You are free to use Filipino if you want, but you do not know if that will be seen as 'bad practice.'"* P5 remarked, *"I wish the school would just say clearly what is allowed and what is not. Right now, it depends on who is watching."* This ambiguity undermines teacher confidence and discourages innovation (Chen, Fang, & Zhang, 2024; Pradia & Bawa, 2023).

Implicit Ideologies Behind the Policy

Underlying the expectation to use English were broader ideologies associating English with professionalism and academic rigor. P2 observed, *"English is seen as professional. If you speak Bisaya, it is like you are too relaxed, not serious."* P4 added, *"There is a belief that good teaching means good English. So even if Filipino helps, you hesitate."* These ideologies privilege English for its perceived status rather than pedagogical effectiveness (García & Kleifgen, 2019; Tupas & Rubdy, 2015).

This study demonstrates that senior high school English teachers in the Philippines operate within a complex environment shaped by an implicit English-Only Policy (EOP), where the absence of formal documentation is offset by pervasive institutional messaging, peer discourse, and evaluation practices that reinforce English as the default medium of instruction (Tupas & Tabiola, 2017; Macawile & Plata, 2022). Despite these constraints, teachers act as both policy enforcers and adaptive practitioners, exercising agency by employing translanguaging strategies-such as code-switching and the deliberate use of Filipino or Bisaya-to clarify concepts, scaffold learning, and foster student engagement, in line with García's (2009) Translanguaging Theory and supported by recent studies highlighting the pedagogical value of such practices in English-dominant contexts (Kani & Iğsen, 2022; Chen, Fang, & Zhang, 2024). Teachers' use of translanguaging was not indiscriminate but contextually guided, often structured to transition students toward English proficiency gradually, and was associated with increased participation, comprehension, and confidence among learners. However, this flexibility came with emotional and professional dilemmas, as teachers navigated feelings of guilt and uncertainty when balancing policy ideals with learner needs, echoing the adaptive strategies and ethical negotiations documented by Pradia and Bawa (2023). These findings underscore the urgent need for schools to move beyond implicit enforcement and toward explicit, inclusive language policies that recognize translanguaging as a legitimate pedagogical practice, empower teacher agency, and provide structured opportunities for professional dialogue and development. While limited by its small, single-site sample and reliance on teacher self-report, the study highlights the importance of context-responsive policy and positions teachers as key agents of equitable and effective language education in multilingual classrooms, calling for future research to include broader perspectives and examine the long-term impact of translanguaging on student outcomes.

4. Conclusion

This study explores how senior high school English teachers in the Philippines implement translanguaging within classrooms governed by implicit English-Only Policies (EOPs). Anchored in Translanguaging Theory, the Policy Appropriation Framework, and Sociocultural Theory, the findings reveal a nuanced reality: while implicit EOPs are not formally codified, they are deeply internalized through institutional culture, peer influence, and professional routines. This "hidden curriculum" creates emotional and ethical dilemmas for teachers, who must navigate the tension between policy compliance and the diverse linguistic needs of their students.

Despite these constraints, the teachers' lived experiences demonstrate that translanguaging is not merely a workaround but a deliberate, student-centered pedagogical strategy. Teachers employ adaptive approaches, such as incremental English use, structured code-switching, and context-specific use of students' home languages, to clarify complex concepts, scaffold learning, and foster classroom participation. These practices enhance comprehension and retention, build students' confidence, and gradually increase their willingness to use English.

Crucially, the study highlights a disconnect between

institutional expectations and classroom realities. Teachers exercise agency and professional judgment to reconcile these tensions, yet they often do so in isolation, without explicit institutional support or open professional dialogue. The evidence suggests that translanguaging, far from undermining English proficiency, is a bridge to deeper learning and more inclusive participation, especially in multilingual contexts like the Philippines.

The research underscores the urgent need to move beyond monolingual policy ideals and recognize translanguaging as a legitimate, effective pedagogical tool. Aligning policy with classroom realities is essential for fostering both academic success and linguistic equity.

5. Recommendation

In light of the study's findings, several key recommendations are proposed to support teachers better and enhance student learning in multilingual classrooms governed by implicit English-Only Policies. First, it is essential that school leaders and policymakers formally recognize translanguaging as a valid and effective instructional strategy, especially in linguistically diverse contexts like the Philippines. By developing explicit guidelines that support flexible language use, institutions can help bridge the gap between policy and classroom practice, reducing teacher anxiety and fostering a more inclusive and responsive learning environment. Additionally, regular professional development sessions and Learning Action Cell (LAC) meetings should actively incorporate open discussions on translanguaging practices. Providing safe and supportive spaces for teachers to share strategies, reflect on challenges, and learn from one another will strengthen collective expertise and mitigate the sense of isolation many teachers currently experience.

Moreover, it is recommended that classroom observations and teacher evaluations be revised to prioritize pedagogical effectiveness and student engagement, rather than rigid adherence to English-only norms. Assessment tools should be contextually grounded, reflecting the realities of multilingual classrooms and recognizing the positive impact that translanguaging can have on student comprehension and participation. It is equally important to empower teachers to exercise informed professional judgment in their language use. Institutional support for context-sensitive decision-making, ongoing mentorship, and access to research-based resources can further enhance teachers' capacity to implement translanguaging effectively and ethically. Finally, future research should broaden its scope to include a broader range of school settings, incorporate student perspectives, and investigate the long-term effects of translanguaging on English proficiency and academic achievement. Comparative studies across different policy environments also deepen understanding of best practices in multilingual education. By embracing these recommendations, educational institutions can move toward a more equitable and practical approach to language teaching that values student learning and linguistic diversity.

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