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QUALITY ASSURANCE IN NIGERIAN FAITH-BASED UNIVERSITIES: THE CASE OF AL-HIKMAH UNIVERSITY, ILORIN, NIGERIA

Dr. AbdulWahab Danladi Shittu
Department of Religions,
University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria.
shittudanladi@gmail.com
+234 8055062992 / +234 8061235260

&

Prof. Yahya Oyewole Imam
Department of Religions, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria.
obadaraalamu@gmail.com
+234 8057909937 / +234 8023587359

Abstract

Quality of education in the universities becomes an issue of concern to educators and administrators in Nigeria because of the failure of the public universities to achieve the national educational goal of producing graduates that would have acquired the skills necessary for the development of individuals and the nation. Private universities were consequently licensed to operate to collaborate the effort of public universities in meeting up with the aspiration of the country. Al-Hikmah University, one of the fast growing Faith-Based Private universities in Nigeria was licensed to operate with the objective of producing youths that are morally upright and intellectually excellent. Even though, having an Islamic university in its true meaning is not the mission of these Muslims owned universities, Conscious Muslims hope that the universities be subjected to transformation in the interest of the religion. This work examined the strategic plans of the University for the attainment of quality education using historical research method. The work acknowledged the reliability of the strategies but then, identified some hindrances to the attainment of both the university and the national educational goals among which is the inability of the curriculum to impart morals in the students and the incompetence of the university to provide what it deserves to be an Islamic university. Therefore, the need for a review of curriculum becomes imperative.

Key Words: Strategy; Sustainable; Public/Private universities; Quality Assurance; Faith-Based Universities

Introduction

The educational system bequeathed to Nigerians by the colonial masters was criticised for being too theoretical to be able to make meaningful impact on the life of Nigerians (Akinlua, 2007). This situation made the education acquired by the citizen devoid of value and Nigeria in the recent time is much concerned about the quality of the education imparted on the citizen of the country and the relevance of such education to the life demand of individuals in the country and the nation as a whole. This situation informed the action of Nigeria to develop its own education policy to reflect the needs and aspirations of its citizens. The objectives of this policy as outlined by the National Policy on Education (2004) section 8 (59) are:

1. Contribution to national development through high level manpower training.
2. Development and inculcation of proper values for the survival of the individual and the society.
3. Development of the intellectual capabilities of the individual to understand and appreciate their local and external environment.

4. Acquisition of both physical and intellectual skills which will enable the individual to be self-reliant and useful member of the society.
5. Promotion and encouragement of scholarship and community services.
6. For national unity and the promotion of national and international understanding and interaction. (National policy on education, 4th edition, 2004)

The outlined objectives imply that the country has a high expectation from the education of the country and so, citizens constantly evaluate the quality of the institutions and meeting up with the challenge. In Nigeria that is multi-religious in nature, the need to have Islamic knowledge oriented universities was felt and the available Muslims owned universities are considered for experimentation.

Consequent upon the non-attainment of the goals, Nigeria developed three categories of the university system; the Federal, the State and the Private . Federal Universities started with the University College, Ibadan which was established in 1948. The state universities commenced with Rivers State University of Science and Technology, Port Harcourt which was founded in 1979 while Private Universities commenced with a trio of Babcock University, Ilisha Remo, Madonna University, Okija and Igbinedion University, Okada all in 1999. With these three categories, the prospect for a productive educational system in Nigeria is high provided the developmental strategies are sustained and quality control measures are placed in the universities. It is against this background, that this paper seeks to identify and discuss strategies needed for the sustainability of quality assurance adopted by the Nigeria University System using Al-Hikmah University, one of the Nigerian fast growing Faith-Based private universities established in the ancient city of Ilorin in Nigeria as a model

Conceptual Clarification

Quality refers to the standard of a phenomenon when it is compared to similar other things. It is a term used in classifying an item into good or bad, of high or low standard e.t.c. Quality, in the opinion of Artzt (1992), is that which best satisfies and exceeds customers needs and wants. In the context of Education, quality is associated with the evaluation of the component of education with the objective of establishing its standard. Quality education is measured by the extent to which the training received from an institution enables the recipient to think clearly, independently and analytically to solve relevant societal problems in any given environment (Mosha 1986). Quality assurance is the ability of educational institutions to meet the need for the use of manpower in relation to the quality of skills acquired by their products (Oladepo et.al, 2017)

Quality assurance is a key component of successful internationalization; a mechanism for building institutional reputation in the competitive local and global arena and a necessary foundation for consumer protection. Quality in education is the relevance and appropriateness of the education programme to the needs of the community for which it is provided. It is the ability of institutions of learning to meet certain criteria relating to academic matters, staff-student ratios, staff mix by rank, staff development, physical facilities, funding and adequate library facilities. This position is substantiated by Alele-Williams (2004) in her view of quality assurance in any educational institution as that which indicates the pre-eminence and special features that make the institution distinct from other forms of institutions. Quality assurance in education therefore, means the adequacy of various inputs in an institution of learning. It implies the ability or degree at which an educational system conforms with the established standard and appropriateness of the inputs available for the delivery of the system (Fadipe 1999). Two aspects of quality in education which are of immense significance are the ability of the tools on ground to achieve the school and the national objectives. The scope of quality assurance as described by Middlehurst (2001) and

which could be used to evaluate the extent at which an institution is able to maintain its education quality are the adequacy of the regulations governing the school, its educational process, its curriculum design and content and its learning experience and outcomes. UNICEF (2000) submits that quality education is identified through:

1. Healthy and well-nourished learners who are willing to learn and are supported by their families and their communities;
2. An environment that is conducive for learning;
3. An efficient curriculum of study and adequate learning materials;
4. An adequate teaching and learning techniques;
5. Desired outcomes in the form of knowledge and skills acquisition that are linked with the national and individual goals.

It is therefore imperative that the above outlined five points agenda form what could be considered quality in education. A good educational system, and of course, the university education of any given country must work towards meeting up with the identified issues because a university is not founded for itself but for what it is set to provide. Universities take no pride in the number of students it graduates in a year but in the productive capacity of the graduates. It is in the bid to achieve and maintain quality in Nigerian Universities that the Federal Government of Nigeria in 2004 empowers the National Universities Commission (NUC) to identify minimum standard for the universities in the federation and to accredit their degree and other academic awards. This made the NUC produced the Benchmark Minimum Academic Standard (BMAS) which is the basis for the accreditation of all university programmes in the country and issues accredited include:

1. Philosophy and objectives of the programme
2. Curriculum of the programme
3. Teaching staff; Quality and quantity
4. Students admission, retention and graduation requirements
5. Standard of degree examination
6. Financial support
7. Physical facilities
8. Administration of the department and
9. Employers' rating of graduates

Development of University Education in Nigeria

The history of University Education in Nigeria started with the Elliot Commission of 1943 which led to the establishment of the University College, Ibadan. The University College in Ibadan which had its first entrance examination in November, 1947 for the 1948-49 academic years was an affiliate of the University of London and the first institution of higher learning in Nigeria (Fafunwa, 2010). Consequent upon the formation of the Ashby Commission to conduct an investigation into Nigerian needs in the field of post school certificate and higher education in Nigeria over the next twenty years in 1959, the Federal Government established six universities which are; The University of Nigeria, Nsukka (1960), the University of Ibadan, Ibadan (1962), the University of Lagos, Akoka (1962), Ahmadu Bello University Zaria (1962), the University of Ife now Obafemi Awolowo University O.A.U (1962) and the University of Benin (1970).

These universities are considered the first generation universities of Nigeria and they dominated the academic horizon between 1960 and 1970. Babalola et-al (2007) remarked that these universities were under the close surveillance of the government and the appointment of vice-chancellors and council members were politically motivated. Between 1970 and 1982, the military government established seven new universities. These are Bayero University, Kano, University of Calabar, Calabar; University of Jos, Jos; University of Ilorin, Ilorin;

University of Maiduguri, Maiduguri; University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt and the University of Sokoto, Sokoto now Usman Danfodiyo University, Sokoto. These universities formed the Nigeria second generation universities. Between 1980 and 1982, five federal universities were established and they are Federal University of Technology, Owerri, (1980), Federal University of Technology, Akure (1981), Federal University of Technology, Minna (1982), Federal University of Technology, Yola (1982) now called Modibo Adama University of Technology, Yola and University of Technology, Abeokuta (1982). Within the year frame of 1980-1990, some state Universities were founded, these are the universities of Imo, Ondo, Lagos, Akwa-Ibon, Uyo and Cross Rivers states all among the third generation universities. Between 1991 and the present day, additional universities were established and these universities form the fourth generation universities. In November 2016, the federal government licensed eight universities and that gave Nigerian a total of 151 universities out of which 69 are privately owned.

The Growth of Private Universities in Nigeria

The 1979 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria empowered private individuals to establish universities; some Nigerians took this advantage to establish mostly, in the language of Akinlua (2007) non-reputable institutions within their private homes, flats and garages as their places of learning majorly because the civilian government in power failed to set up a minimum standard for the establishment of such private universities. These universities were closed down in 1983 and in November 1, 1990, the then Minister of Education, Babs Fafunwa, sets up a committee on the review of higher education in Nigeria in the nineties and beyond. This committee was called Longe Commission. Fafunwa (2010) confirmed that the Longe Report of 1991 which include the establishment of private owned universities was approved by the federal government and marked the corner stone on which the Nigerian Private Universities were built.

However, because of the stringent conditions laid by the committee and approved by the federal government, no private university was given license to take off until 1999 when the story of decadence and insufficiency of our public universities became well pronounced and some qualified students were denied admission due to lack of vacancy. Okebukola (2014) observed that the past three decades had witnessed significant changes within the University system in Nigeria among which are increase in the number of universities and programmes offered in these institutions. He confirmed that by the end of 2014, there were over three thousand programmes across the entire universities in Nigeria with a staff strength of about 33,000. There has equally been an explosion in student population and the number of applicants seeking university admission. The total student enrolment in all Nigerian Universities grew from just over 2000 in 1962 to over 1, 431, 312 in 2014. Okebukola stressed that data from JAMB and the universities confirmed that over 1 million students sat for the UTME in 2014 and as at then, the entire 129 universities in the country could only admit about 500,000 candidates. The report compiled by Kanyip (2013) as shown below testifies to this fact.

Year	No. of Universities	Total No. of Applicants	Total Admitted	Percentage Admitted	Total No. Admitted	Percentage not Admitted
2002/2003	53	994,381	51,845	5.2%	942,535	94.8%
2003/2004	54	1,046,950	105,157	10.0%	941,793	90.0%
2004/2005	56	841,878	122,492	14.5%	719,386	85.4%
2005/2006	75	916,371	76,984	8.4%	839,387	91.6%
2006/2007	76	806,089	123,626	15.3%	679,846	89.0%
2007/2008	104	911,653	107,370	11.8%	802,283	88.2%
2008/2009	104	1,054,060	200,000	18.9%	854,06	81.1%

As against the concern of Kanyib that the need for more universities was consequent upon the fact that many qualified students were denied the opportunity to study in the universities because of absence of vacancy, the truth is that the impact of the few that got the opportunity is not felt in the society and this is an indication that the curriculum produced is either sick or poorly managed. We strongly align with Okojie (2013) who maintained that the quality of graduates is perceived to be lacking in skills that are required for the work of life and their relevance to overall national and regional development

The manner of student enrolment into private universities in the country is also of concern. While more private universities are being licensed, more than 80% of prospective students in the country still prefer enrolment into the public (federal and state) universities due to financial constraints of their parents and sponsors. In 2016, 1,579,027 candidates sat for the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) organised by the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB). Out of this population, 1,099,124 (70%) candidates applied to federal universities, 434,959 (28%) applied to state universities, and 9,656 (<1%) applied to private universities. (www.jamb.org.ng) This is likely because the carrying capacity of all Nigerian universities is 389,631, which is 24.7% of the total number of applicants seeking admission into higher institution in the country. Only 60.7% of the applicants can possibly gain admission into higher institutions while 39.3% will have to wait till subsequent year, seek admission to institutions outside the country or drop out of the system.

Muslims Faith-Based Universities in Nigeria

Even though we may disagree with Adebayo (2010) where he maintained that the impact of colonization was a reason why Muslims could not attempt having a private university when the Christians commenced the establishment of private universities in 1999 because Islam itself encourages the search for knowledge and even with colonization, Muslims are not. The lateness of the Muslims in having one at the early period despite their percentage in the country, indicates that Muslims actually showed less concern for the need. More so, at the time Muslim individuals and organizations consider establishing universities, the fear for patronage made some of the universities to run away from adopting a pure Islamic education curriculum hence, most of these universities are better called Muslim owned universities than Islamic universities. Be that as it may, in January 2005, Al-Hikmah University in Ilorin founded by AbdulRaheem Oladimeji Islamic foundation and Al Qalam University owned by Katsina Islamic Foundation were both licensed. In June of the same year, Crescent University, Abeokuta, Ogun State, founded by Islamic Movement of Africa under the leadership of Prince Bola Ajibola was licensed by the federal government to operate. In may 2007, Fountain University, Osogbo founded by Nasrul-lahi'l Fātih Society of Nigeria, (NASFAT) was licensed and Summit University in Offa owned by Ansar ud deen

Society of Nigeria was licensed on 25th February 2015 to make a total of five Muslim Faith-Based universities in the country.

The expectation of an average Muslim is for the Muslims Faith- Based Universities to achieve the stated goal of an Islamic university which include:

1. To produce scholars and practitioners who are imbued with Islamic ideology, and whose character and personality conform to Islamic teachings
2. To realize the hope and aspirations of the Muslim Ummah for an Islamic renaissance
3. To facilitate the balance growth of the total personality of human being through the training of human spirit, intellect rational self, feeling and bodily self.
4. To develop and disseminate knowledge in the manner that is recognized by Allah (SWT) as the Creator of universe and man vicegerent on earth
5. To revive traditional Islamic pedagogy by rooting it in Qur'an and Sunnah
6. To preserve Muslim identity and discourage indecency, uphold morality and enshrine good behavior
7. To produce Muslim graduates who can compete with their counterparts in any academic discipline beside their background in Islamic education and play influential roles in their societies. (www.iiit.org/news/three-day-international-conference-on-islamic-universities)

Al-Hikmah University and Quality Assurance

Al-Hikmah University, like any other private universities in Nigeria, sets out to establish its feet to corroborate the effort of existing universities in the provision of moral and academic excellence. The university which was funded by Abdur-Raheem Oladimeji Islamic Foundation in Nigeria was licensed by the federal government on 7th January, 2005 and it took off with only three colleges; the Humanities, Management sciences and Natural sciences and in 2011/2012 session, the university commenced its degree programme in the College of Education. The university matriculated its first set on 5th April, 2006. In June, 2011, the University established an outreach unit, the College of Education, Igbaja Campus as an extension of the university with the objective of producing qualified and competent primary and secondary school teachers (Academic programme of Al-Hikmah University, 2011)

The objective of Al-Hikmah University as contained in its Academic programme is to promote academic excellence and ensure moral uprightness of the youths and the curriculum of the university is designed to achieve the stated objectives. In the manner of UNICEF (2000) which posited that Continuous assessment and improvement can focus on any or all dimensions of system quality: learners, learning environments, content, process and outcomes. The educational quality of Al Hikmah will be assessed using the identified system quality because the quality of education provided by any university is better determined by its teaching and academic programme, research and scholarship such university is exposed to, staffing and student quality, the quality of the physical structures and other necessary facilities . It is for the purpose of ensuring that the quality of these universities is not compromised that the National Universities Commission sets a Benchmark Minimum Academic Standard (BMAS) for all programmes taught and on constant basis, accredits the programmes.

(a) Regulation/Learners

Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin took off with 350 foundation undergraduate students. Eight colleges are identified in the university's academic programme (2011) to be established and these are; Colleges of Natural Sciences; Engineering & Technology; Humanities, Management Sciences, Law, Health Science, Agriculture and Education. However, during an

interaction with the school, only five out of the eight colleges are on ground. Colleges of Engineering & Technology, Health Science and Agriculture are only on paper. The duration for the programme in the university is four years for UTME students and three years for Direct Entry students for Humanities, Management Sciences, Natural Sciences and Education. For Law, The duration is five years for UTME students and four years for direct entry students. And the entry requirements for all the programmes include the General Certificate Examination (GCE) Ordinary Level or any other approved equivalence. The programme requirement and the entry requirement all agree with the provision of the BMAS.

(b) Educational Process

The school's programme that courses offered in the university are to be completed within an eighteen weeks semester and students are to be examined at the end of each semester. The university programme states that students shall offer a minimum of sixteen credits and a maximum of eighteen credits in each semester. The implication is that students have limited number of elective courses to offer. Even though this could be seen as narrowing their exposure to other courses, it gives them the opportunity of offering more courses in their field. The university, in addition to the staff on ground, accepts academic staff on sabbatical and employs professors as adjourn staff to supplement the available lecturers in the various departments. Except for these adjourn lecturers and few others, there is a shortage of staff at the professorial cadre in each of the departments

(c) Curriculum Design/Content

Considering the institution as a faith-based institution, one of its major objectives is the teaching of religion and morals. The school curriculum reflects this objective as every student must mandatorily pass a course in Islamic studies in each semester. The provision of the school programme is that student must pass a two credits course in Arabic and a one credit course in Islamic studies in every semester irrespective of the student's area of specialization. This is an aspect of knowledge islamisation introduced to the university. Another aspect is the introduction of an Islamic biased dress code for the female students. The school succeeded in making the use of *Hijāb* (Muslim female dress) mandatory for all female Muslims irrespective of their religion and their course. The relevance of this feature is in its ability to inculcate decency in the mind of some students.

(d) Learning Environment

The main campus of Al-Hikmah University is situated along Adewole housing estate of Ilorin. Even though the university is already surrounded by residential buildings, the security given to the boundary of the school still made it conducive for study and notwithstanding the small land mass, structures were built to manage the limited land resources. The Igbaja Campus and the College of Law at Ateere are however, exempted of the land impediment. As a Faith-Based University, a gigantic mosque was erected right in the heart of the university and this stands as another university's unique feature. It must be reflected in this paper that the size of the land does not permit for some relevant extra-curricular activities such as game.

Data, Theories and Analysis

Forty questionnaires were administered to the teaching and non teaching staff members of five departments of Al-hikmah University. Out of these forty, thirty six were retrieved back and analysed. Respondents to the questionnaire were male and female staff of different cadre from the respective departments. The questionnaire contains seven interview to which respondents are to express their view. The questions and the response are as highlighted below

Question One: Do you agree that Al-Hikmah University is an Islamic University?
Sixteen (16) respondents are of the opinion that Al-Hikmah University is an Islamic University considering the fact that it takes the colour of Islam in totality. The remaining twenty one (21) respondents maintained that the university is a Muslim owned institution and not an Islamic University. This second group are majorly academic staff who maintain that the physical outlook of a university is not enough to qualify such university as an Islamic university. The group, even though agreed that in the context of Nigeria, Al-Hikmah University is one of the fore runners among the faith-based universities in Nigeria, argued that the curriculum of such university needs to be tailored along with the objective of an Islamic university.

Is the major programme focus of Al-Hikmah University capable of producing graduates who will be self-reliant?

Question Two: Can the academic curriculum of the university produce quality graduates that can compete with graduates in other universities in the labour market?

Thirty (30) respondents said yes. They argued that record has shown that graduates of the university are performing well in the labour market. One of the respondents who is in the department of Islamic studies substantiate his position with the fact that the curriculum content for Islamic studies in the university is richer than what is obtainable in some public universities. The remaining six (6) respondents confirmed that in some of the science subjects, necessary facilities that could facilitate learning are not put in place and this would affect the efficiency of products of such departments in the labour market.

Question Three: Do you think that the staffing of the university is adequate enough for quality education?

Twenty (20) respondents agree that the staffing of the school is adequate enough for quality education. Majority of these people are the non academic staff of the sampled departments. The remaining sixteen (16) respondents who are mostly the academic staff argued that work load on the academic staff of the university is too much and if not for the extra commitment of the academic staff, the number of courses taught by each lecturer might affect their preparation for class and eventually, affect the quality of education in the university.

Question Four: In your assessment of the state of existing facilities in Al-Hikmah University, can the University meet up with challenges of the contemporary world?

In responding to this question, thirty (30) respondents considered the available facilities good enough to facilitate learning and give the desired learning outcome. These people, who are a combination of academic and non academic staff of the department, argued that the university is moving with time. They further argued that the infrastructures in the university are not obtainable in many other private and public universities. The remaining six (6) respondents that argued against the adequacy of the existing facilities emphasized on inadequacy of some necessary learning materials in the school.

Question Five: Is the curriculum content of Al-Hikmah University capable of producing youths that will be morally upright and religiously conscious?

This question is central to the thesis of this paper because Faith-Based Institutions are considered unique only when they are capable of positively influencing the attitude of the youths morally and religiously. Twenty eight (28) out of the respondents agree that products of this university are better of morally and religiously when compared to how they were when they were admitted into the university, four of the respondents could not decide while

four are of the view that the youths are not changed by the moral and religious training they were exposed to in their course of training

Question Six: Can you consider the relationship between the staff/management and the students to be cordial?

Thirty (32) out of the respondents agree that the relationship between the staff and the students is cordial. In the view of these respondents, this is the more reason why there has been no record of any serious protest on any issue by the students. It is equally viewed by this group that the relationship is cordial because students pay for the service rendered to them and as a result, the staff or the management has no reason to deprive them of any of their necessities. Four (4) out of the respondents contend a true cordial relationship between the staff/management and the students.

Question Seven: In your own assessment, can you consider Al-Hikmah University to be a For-Profit Organisation or a Not for-profit Organisation?

The contention of this paper is the ability of Al-Hikmah University to meet up with stated objectives of a Faith Based Institution. Only twelve (12) of the respondents agree that Al-Hikmah University is a Not for –Profit Organisation. The remaining thirty one respondents see the university as one of the many other private universities that are of profit based. Some of the respondents argued that even though the proprietor initially had the intention of promoting Islam with the establishment of the university especially when it was initially operated in collaboration with the World Assembly of Muslim Youth(WAMY) , evidences show that the proprietor later realized the profit in sole management of the university and therefore, works towards breaking out of the collaboration and solely managing the institution to maximise profit.

On the 30th of September, 2017, the University produced the 7th set of its graduating students from the various colleges. The students produced are not only academically excellent but morally worthy. The adoption of the use of *hijab* as a dress code made the university out stand other Muslim owned universities in the country. The National Universities Commission (NUC) announced the 100 % results of accreditation exercise carried out at the University in June 2016 . Thirteen out of the fifteen programmes offered in the university were granted full accreditation while two secured interim accreditation. The accredited courses as contained in the NUC letter of accreditation and Congratulations which was presented to the university are:

1. Physics – Full Accreditation
 2. Mathematics Education – Full
 3. Statistics Education – Full
 4. Chemistry Education – Full
 5. Islamic Studies Education – Full
 6. Arabic Education – Full
 7. Economics Education – Full
 8. Political Science Education – Full
 9. Education Management – Full
 10. Social Studies/Arts Edu. – Full
 11. Mathematics -Interim Accreditation
 12. Statistics – Interim Accreditation
 13. Education Guidance and Counseling – Full Accreditation
- This report is an indication that the university passed the standard laid out by the Federal Government for quality education in the nation.

Conclusion

This paper has succeeded in establishing that Al-Hikmah University is a model Faith-Based University in Nigeria. Despite the difficult terrain under which it operates, the institution is representing, to a large extent, the model Islamic institution of higher learning however; there is a room for improvement. It is to this extent that authors of this paper wish to suggest that the offering of one credit course in Islamic studies by all students is not enough to make the university an Islamic University. The need to integrate Islamic education into the courses offered by students in different departments is imperative. The modality for this integration is for Islamic scholars to study the contributions of early Muslim scholars to various fields of education and add them to the existing ideas of the western scholars. In the area of history for example, students should be made to know that Islamic history of the prophets and the companions is part of their syllabus.

Equally, more staff at the professorial cadre needs to be employed to meet the BMAS requirements for staff mix. The environment acquired by the university is too small to accommodate development in the like of expanding its departments. Accommodation for most of the students is located outside the campus. It is the opinion of the authors of this paper that the present location of the university should not be considered its permanent site. A better place that will be more spacious for sports and other extra-curricular activities should be sought. It is the belief of the authors that if these observations are adopted for consideration, the available Muslims owned universities could be a good testing ground for the desired Islamic university or at least a better environment for the islamisation of knowledge being quested for by Muslims the world over.

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