

The Level of Self-Perceived Stress among International School Teachers During Post-Pandemic Period

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Abstract

This study aimed to identify the level of self-perceived stress among teachers in international schools. A total of 146 from three international school teachers participated in this study. The teachers were selected to collect the data through the online interview session via google form and disseminated to participants to evaluate the perceived stress level of international schoolteachers in their day-to-day 1. during the post-pandemic period. In addition, the researcher showed a significant difference in self-perceived stress between male and female teachers in international schools. This study used a quantitative approach design to explore the teachers' self-perceived stress levels during the post-pandemic period. The data collected had also been analysed using the SPSS as it can answer the research questions. The findings indicate that teachers' self-perceived stress is at a moderate level. The result was also found to be statistically non-significant of self-perceived stress for males ($M=2.54$, $SD=1.11$) and females ($M=2.73$, $SD=0.93$) in the personal domain; $t(144) = -1.069$, $p = 0.287$. Using the Pearson correlation, there is a positive relationship between the dependent variable "factors that contribute to stress," and the independent variable, "self-perceived stress." Hopefully, this research will help the stress symptoms that school teachers experience to be better understood.

Keywords: Self-Perceives Stress, Teachers' Perspectives, Post-Pandemic, Covid -19

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken many schools and higher educational institutions around the world by surprise, and it has also had an influence on educational opportunities. Shared by most pupils, the pandemic has already caused them to lose knowledge, abilities, and topic courses that they had previously learned. In addition, a significant number of students drop out of school, and the prevalence of student withdrawal has already increased in various nations. The effect of this is extremely obvious in groups with fewer capable students, which ultimately leads to an upraise in educational disparity across the country. The effect of this can also be seen in Malaysia, where it has contributed to a rise in disparity among student groups.

The educators will suffer a significant impact due to this loss of education. The abrupt need of newly inaugurate methods of teaching and learning, teachers reported feeling overworked and under supported due to various issues faced with technology and a fall in levels of student's involvement during online distance learning (ODL) (Hanushek and Woessman, 2020). Teachers are the most essential school-based component in students' success, as their influence can be seen in every aspect of students' achievements as well as their overall growth. Teachers are responsible for not only conducting academic related programs but also creating a conducive environment in which students may engage with one another, work together, and form meaningful relationships.

According to Yazdani et al (2010), stress is "the response of an individual to the stimuli and the interaction between the individual and the environment." In addition to being a phenomenon with multiple dimensions, stress is primarily concerned with the dynamic relationship that exists between an individual and their surrounding environment. Therefore, changes in the educational system environment of teaching and learning in Malaysia as a result of COVID-19 can potentially generate stress among teachers. The concern regarding the shift of teaching and learning among the students is that if the stress is poorly managed, it may potentially lead to frustrations, nervous breakdowns, or other mental health issues. This raises a concern because the shift could potentially affect the students' ability to learn (Acharya & Chalise, 2015). This is due to the fact that stress is linked to the onset of mental illnesses such as burnout, anxiety and depression, and it is well-established that there is a positive relationship between anxiety and depression, as well as stress and both of those conditions (Manpreet & Maheshwari, 2015). Thus, these mental illnesses can jeopardize the duty of a teacher. As a result, it is essential to evaluate the levels of stress experienced by teachers, given that this workforce will eventually earn their credentials and in consequence, become an asset to Malaysia in terms of ensuring the quality of education provided in the country.

Problem Statement

a) Stress Related to Chronic Mental Health Issues

Recent research has shown that when schools are closed, teachers experience increased levels of stress as they are required to make rapid adjustments in order to continue to provide lessons through different platform (Besser et al., 2020). As a consequence of the increased amount of workload brought on by online distance learning (ODL), this stress is frequently accompanied by symptoms of worry, sadness, and disrupted sleep. This is a direct effect of the increased workload. As stated in The Star news on 14th July 2019, Dr.Maszlee Malik, the former Education Minister of Malaysia said that teachers are experiencing increased mental health issues from various factors such as financial difficulties, uncertainties in jobs, living away from families and other domestic issues during the launch of Raising Teachers Psychological Wellbeing Awareness programme. According to The Malaysian Reserve dated 12th March 2022, it was reported that due to pandemic burnout, employees begin to seek mental health support where a report from Employment Hero publish that more than 50% of Malaysian concur that the pandemic has made their careers less important to them. Added that 58% of Malaysian workers claimed they experience burnout, and 51% indicated they have a bad or average work-life balance.

Consequently, teachers are prone to be lack in excitement and attention, and the chances of teachers not to be as hardworking and striving as they should be to carry out their obligations and responsibilities by themselves at school are high.

b) Impact in Educational System

Due to the changes that are taking place in educational system as a direct result of COVID-19, work related pressure has become a phenomenon in the field of education, and this is true not just in Malaysia but everywhere else in the world as well (Kamarudin & Taat, 2020). It is an undeniable fact that stress is a source of encouragement as well as a great source of motivation and improving the quality of their work. According to Jumahat et al (2017) and De Nobile & McCormick (2010), if teachers are unable to manage their stress effectively, it will leave a negative effect on the spirit of their students too. It will also influence the quality of the work, as well as their mental health and physical health. Such issues need to be resolved to preserve the wellbeing of the schools, which is one of the most essential institutions for ensuring the birth of a prosperous and empowered society.

Additionally, students without internet connection will struggle to complete tests and evaluations (Sahu, 2020). According to (Osman, 2020), it is challenging for both the students and teachers to evaluate and analyse students' performance in virtual learning, particularly when it comes to teaching practicum, technical competence, and the assessment of practical skills.

c) Health Issues

The recent changes might lead us to believe that the pandemic is ending, but that is not the case. Our attention has been drawn to something new. According to data, one in five persons who had a prior Covid-19 infection are now having symptoms including chronic coughing, breathing problems, exhaustion, sleeplessness, memory loss, depression, and more variants of Covid-19 virus is emerging. These symptoms are all indicative of Long Covid. When an individual who has recovered from Covid-19 infection, new or persistent symptoms that might endure for weeks or months after recovery, this is known as long Covid. The length of Long Covid is an issue for many sectors. Its symptoms might make it challenging for people to concentrate on their work and to be effective. Long Covid may also cause depression and other mental health issues, which lowers productivity even more. These side effects might be moderate and short-lived for some people. However, for other people, they could be more severe and last longer (Nazlin, 2022).

Long Covid can significantly affect productivity levels in either scenario. Although Covid-19's long-term consequences are yet unknown, preliminary research indicates that the virus may have a sizable influence on productivity. Long-term Covid sufferers must take time out of work to heal or to take care of sick or infected family members. Employees may lose earnings as a result, and enterprises may become less productive. There is evidence that Covid-19 may have long-term health effects that impair how well people function at work.

Research Objective

- i. To identify the level of self-perceived stress among teachers in international schools
- ii. To find the significant difference of self-perceived stress between male and female teachers in international schools
- iii. To identify the correlation between factors that contribute to self-perceived stress and the level of stress among international schoolteachers.

Research Questions

- i. What is the level of self-perceived stress among teachers in international schools?
- ii. Is there any significant difference of self-perceived stress between male and female teachers in international schools?
- iii. What is the correlation between factors that contribute to self-perceived stress among international school teachers?

Literature Review

According to Flint (2012), the term "stress" refers to a state of sustained physical and psychological strain over an extended length of time, which might impair a person's ability to deal with a given circumstance. According to Sunyoto (2015), stress is the result of any activity or environmental circumstance that places an individual under an excessive amount of mental and physical strain. According to the findings of Rivai (2006), job stress is a state of pressure that generates a physical and psychological imbalance in an employee, which in turn influences the person's feelings, cognitive processes, and environment.

There has been a lot of research done on how stress affects the performance of educators on the job. This also can be demonstrated by previous research that indicated that stress has significant negative impacts, such as low motivation, absenteeism among teachers, low teaching quality, low learning satisfaction in students, and changes in educators' overall performance (Akhlaq et al., 2010; Bakker et al. al., 2004; Tahir, 2011). According to the findings of Nurmalarasi's (2015) research, stress at work has an effect on the level of work performance exhibited by the teachers that is approximately 39.8 percent when the entire nation was affected by the Covid-19 pandemic from 2019 through 2022.

Among the recommendations and resolutions that need to be considered regarding stress among teachers are as follows:

The issue of teachers' workload has become the focus following the results of a recent study by the Ministry of Education found that teachers in Selangor, Melaka, Johor and Kuala Lumpur bear work overload, for instance, working 74 hours a week compared to the 48 hours limited by the International Labour Organization (ILO). Given that among the causes of stress for teachers is the workload that may be burdensome, then the ministry need to conduct follow-up studies from time to time to identify the issues and implement effective strategies as a way to solve issues faced by teachers. Based on the proposed resolution, the Ministry of Education has made several related studies and the implementation of the results of the study to overcome the issue of stress faced by teachers will be carried out in the Twelve Malaysia Plan, 2021 - 2025 (Harian, 2021).

The Ministry will study and improve through a strategy to restore the essential task of teachers, which is to teach in imparting knowledge to students in the classroom without focusing too much on non-essential tasks. Among the measures to be taken are the addition of teachers, the reduction of students in a classroom and hiring more clerical staff so that teachers can focus more on their core task of teaching. The burden of discipline teachers should also be handed over to specially appointed counsellors and the field of sports should be handed over to professional expert teachers (Harian, 2021).

Young (1978) suggested management support is needed to reduce teachers' stress that increased levels of anxiety. Dunham (1977) explains that teachers who are forced to deal with disruptive students need the support of management. Lortie (1975) reported that better facilities were seen as changes that could increase teacher effectiveness, and higher remuneration and promotion were seen as changes that could increase job satisfaction. On

the other hand, Abdel Halim's (1978) study, suggested that in order to reduce the adverse effects associated with stress, an organization could adapt job restructuring strategies to enrich the role of teachers. To reduce stress, management can use crisis-intervention counselling and social support systems. In the management of employee reactions to stress, management can apply mental health well-being training, health programs and time management (West & West, 1989).

The work environment of teachers such as the school environment and teachers' rooms also need to be given attention so that the work environment of teachers can be created in a more conducive environment. Education is a form of communication between the teachers and students in which both parties must actively participate in order for the two groups to feel at ease together. A teacher in Sarawak (Harian, 2005) who spoke about his work environment in one of the schools proved that in this era of educational modernization there is still an uncomfortable atmosphere in the teacher's workplace. What is illustrated is, the issue of teacher density in the teachers' room, the problem of table sharing and the provision of inadequate furniture. The subject of work performance and the workplace environment are two factors that are interrelated and influence each other. The work environment should be comfortable and appropriate to their status as teachers in management and professional groups. This problem needs to be addressed as we often talk and plan about five-star education, smart schools and many others, but those who will succeed in such noble aspirations should not be ignored. The party should look at the welfare aspect of teachers to improve this situation in line with the goal of further elevating the field of education.

Johnston (1996) says that there should be more stimulating in terms of leadership, support, motivation, and efficiency in the workplace in order to minimize stress levels. He believes that the best way to maintain the high quality of the work and reduce the level of stress that employees are under is to provide them with a well-maintained place of employment, communication that are both clear and comprehensive, support for them in times of difficulty, and, last but not least, celebrations of the good days that teachers have had. According to the findings of a study that was done by Schonfeld (2001), the deterioration of the work environment is contributing to the mental exhaustion that is experienced by teachers. The profession of teaching is in and of itself self-motivated, and the internal locus control of teachers motivates them to re-remind themselves to better the quality of teaching, which, in turn, causes an extremely high amount of stress for teachers.

Theory of Stress

Lazarus Theory

Psychological stress, according to Lazarus, is "a specific interaction between the person and environment that is seen by the individual as exhausting or surpassing his or her resources and harming his or her wellness." Cognitive appraisals and coping are the two significant stages that this connection goes through.

The "process of classifying an encounter and its many aspects with relation to its relevance for well-being" is known as cognitive appraisal (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 31). In fact, this scenario must be cognitively assessed as potentially stressful before one can truly cope with it. Primary and secondary appraisals are the two cognitive processes that this appraisal goes through. In primary evaluation, the question "Am I in stress or being benefitted by the stress, now or in the future, and in what ways?" is assessed as well as the stakes. People classify the scenario as a threat, a challenge, or a loss if the response to this question is yes. Threat and challenge assessments might make reference to recent or upcoming occurrences,

whereas loss relates to injuries or damages that have already occurred. Challenge implies that one concentrates on the achievement, the social benefits, and the personal progress that the circumstance might provide, whereas threat denotes possible risk to one's wellbeing or self-esteem. However, it's crucial to remember that assessments of threats and challenges aren't always incompatible. Threat and challenge assessments are not the two extremes of a continuum, as claimed by Lazarus and Folkman in 1984. Threat and challenge assessments can happen at the same time, despite the fact that they are negatively connected (Skinner & Brewer, 2002; Berjot & Girault-Lidvan, 2009). For instance, Folkman and Lazarus (1985) demonstrated that students anticipating an exam perceived the event to be unusually challenging and threatening.

Methodology

Research Design

The research design of this study is quantitative research methodology in order to look deeper into the constraints that teachers are required to conform to new standards following the COVID-19 pandemic phase. The fundamental idea is that quantitative research can assist in the collection of clearer data on the perceived stress that teachers endure after the pandemic phase of the COVID-19. According to Tay and Wong (2016), quantitative is an appropriate methodology since the research can control the scope, duration, participants, and place of the research, which enables the study to be carried out in detail and in a thorough manner. A questionnaire in the form of a survey was used to obtain information for this study.

Location of Study

For this analysis, the quantitative research involved a distribution of questionnaire at three international schools in Kuala Lumpur which are. The quantitative study also took place among the teachers of the respective schools in Kuala Lumpur. These schools were selected by considering the effect of the sudden swift in education system which also leave an impact on the teachers' level of stress. The chosen international schools in Kuala Lumpur are Garden International School, Taylor's International School and Cempaka International School. The objective of choosing international schools in Kuala Lumpur is obtain accurate data as those are the schools which are well-established and many teachers have been attached to the schools for a long period of time.

Sample of Study

A total of 146 international school teachers were participated were in this study. A sample is a group of people that have been taken from a larger population. It is composed of few individuals chosen from the population, and a subject is a single member of the sample, just as an element is a single person in the population (Cavana et al., 2001). The same size were chosen according to (Morgan & Krejcie, 1970). Three international schools in Kuala Lumpur were chosen by random for this research. The list of international schools was obtained from Sistem Maklumat Institusi Pendidikan Swasta (SMIPS) under Ministry of Education (MOE) website and was used to choose the schools. Thus, three international schools were chosen as a sample, and teachers of those schools are the subject for this study.

Sampling Technique

This study employed a random sampling technique to select participants. According to Bernard (2006), the type of data the researcher is seeking for will determine the sample strategies used. He believes that there are two types of data: discrete data and continuous data. This research requires information from the sample size who represents the population they are studying and who were chosen at random. Thus, a random sampling technique were used to select participants of this study.

Data Gathering Procedure

To serve as a guide, the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) and the Covid Stress Scale (CSS) were utilised to develop a set of questionnaires consisting of 20 items. These questions were then segmented into three distinct domains: personal, job, and family. To maintain uniformity across the board, all of the items are constructed in negative statements. A psychometric test that consists of 20 questions was developed in Google form and disseminated to participants to evaluate the perceived stress level of international school teachers on their day-to-day lives during the post-pandemic period. The data that is collected will be evaluated in SPSS.

Instrument of Study

As the questionnaire of this research can be easily comprehensible, questionnaire research is a type of investigation that researchers frequently and effortlessly employ because it is so versatile in terms of the themes it may cover and how easily it can be designed. Two pre-existing tests which are Perceived Self-Stress (PSS) and Covid Stress Scale (CSS) were adopted and adapted to generate its own items for the study. These resources were used to develop resources pertinent to the creation of high-quality questions were used to guide the modification and development of each questionnaire. Researchers like Frary (1996) and Salkind advocated using these resources 1997. This questionnaire is broken up into three sections, each of which requires an answer from the respondent: the first section collects data of participant's background, the second section gathers data of international school teacher's stress level, and the third section compile data of managing stress practice among international school teachers.

Data Analysis

In general, Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) will be utilised to conduct the analysis on the findings of the study. In order to provide an answer to the first study question, an investigation was carried out to determine the level of job-related stress experienced by teachers working at International Schools. The amount of stress that teachers experience on the job was determined by adding up the mean scores of respondents across all 10 questions. According to the overall mean score, the following is a classification of the different levels of stress caused by work: 1.00 - 2.33 (Low), 2.34 - 3.67 (Medium). 3.68 - 5.00 (High).

The second research question was to investigate the disparities in the degrees of stress experienced by individuals based on their gender. To provide an answer to the second study question, descriptive and inferential statistics were utilised to examine the variations in mean scores. A T-test will be carried out to assess whether there is a significant difference in the amount of stress experienced by teachers based on their gender. An additional study, known

as the Levene test, was carried out to further detail the disparities that existed between the groups that were being compared.

The Pearson Correlation test was employed for the third study question, which aimed to determine whether there is a connection between the factors of self-perceived stress and the levels of stress experienced by teachers working at international schools. The level of stress was utilised as the dependent variable, and the determinant coefficient, R², was employed to analyse the link between the independent variable and the variance in the degree of the stress experienced by teachers.

Results and Findings

RO1: To identify the level of self-perceived stress among teachers in international schools

The level of self-perceived stress experienced by teachers at the international schools in Kuala Lumpur is outlined in Table 4.9, which provides mean score for the variable. The mean score for the overall level of self-perceived stress experienced by teachers is 2.73 (SD = .9164), which indicates that it is at a moderate level. As displayed in Table 4.10, it shows that 32.9% experienced low stress, 38.4% had moderate stress, and 28.8% had high COVID-19 perceived stress from personal domain. For work domain as shown in Table 9.11, 32.9% experienced low stress, 38.4% had moderate stress, and 28.8% had high COVID-19 perceived stress.

Table 4.1

Total mean score for all domain

N	Valid	146
	Missing	0
Mean		2.73
Std. Deviation		.9164

Table 4.2

Level of self-perceived stress among international school teachers.

Personal Domain		Frequency	Percent	Mean	Standard Deviation
Valid	Low	48	32.9	1.96	0.7868
	Moderate	56	38.4		
	High	42	28.8		
	Total	146	100.0		

Based on the finding, the result shown that the level of self-perceived stress among international school teachers are moderate. This result is supported by Belinda Agyapong et.al under their search entitled Stress, Burnout, Anxiety and Depression among Teachers: A Scoping Review in 2022 also shown that the stress among teachers are in moderate level.

RO2: To find the significant difference of self-perceived stress between male and female teachers in international schools.

F	Personal Domain	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	Sig.	t	df	t-test for Equality of Means	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
										Lower	Upper
	Equal variances assumed	1.623	.205	-1.069	144	.287	-.18788	.17580	-.53537	.15960	
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.010	80.975	.316	-.18788	.18609	-.55815	.18239	

Work Domain	Equal variances assumed	.021	.884	.253	144	.801	.05017	.19863	- .34244	.44278
	Equal variances not assumed			.248	89.008	.805	.05017	.20242	- .35203	.45237
Family Domain	Equal variances assumed	8.041	.005	-1.547	144	.124	-.28767	.18597	- .65525	.07991
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.415	75.047	.161	-.28767	.20333	- .69271	.11737

In order to compare the difference of the self-perceived stress level between male and female for each domain, an independent samples t-test was conducted. T-test assesses whether the means of two group are statistically different from each other of every independent variable in this study. The result in Table 4.12 was found to be statistically non-significant of self- perceived stress for male (M=2.54, SD=1.11) and female (M=2.73, SD=0.93) in personal domain; $t(144)=-1.069$, $p = 0.287$. The level of self-perceived stress in work domain also indicate non-significant difference among male (M=2.76, SD=1.17) and female teachers (M=2.71, SD=1.11); $t(144)=0.253$, $p = 0.801$. This result also similar for family domain where the level of stress between male (M=2.60, SD=1.24) and female (M=2.89, SD=0.95) teacher are not statistically significant as well; $t(144)=-1.547$, $p = 0.124$. These result suggest that gender does not have an effect to the level of self-perceived stress that are experienced by teachers who are currently working in international schools in Kuala Lumpur Malaysia during post pandemic phase.

RO3: To identify the correlation between factors that contribute to self-perceived stress and the level of stress among international school teachers.

The Pearson correlation coefficient is used to measure the strength, direction and the importance of relationship between two variables which are independent variable and dependent variable. It has been differentiating into 3 parts which are +1, 0 and -1, each of them represents a different meaning of linear correlation. +1 is a total positive linear correlation, 0 is no linear correlation and -1 is total negative correlation.

Table 4.13: The relationship between factors that contribute to self-perceived stress and the level of stress among international school teachers

Correlation	Dependent Variable (Self-perceived stress)	
Independent Variable (Factors that contribute stress)	Pearson correlation	.615**
	Sig (2-tailed)	.000

Pearson correlation coefficient “R” test was conducted to measure the relationship between the dependent variable “factors that contribute stress” and independent variable “self- perceived stress”. As shown in table 4.9 above, there’s a positive linear relationship between the two variables; “factors that contribute stress” and independent variable “self-perceived stress”. Furthermore, the relationship between the two variables is considered to be a moderate correlation as the result shows a coefficient score of +0.615. A positive linear relationship between the variables indicates that when the independent variable “self-perceived stress” affects the results in the dependent variable “factors that contribute stress” to increase as well.

Limitation and Recommendation

The findings of this study should be viewed considering some limitations and potential biases; hence, the researchers advocate exercising caution when applying and interpreting the findings. The effects of stress brought by COVID-19 were the subject of this study; nevertheless, it is possible that other aspects connected to stress brought on by COVID-19 should be taken into consideration by other researchers. Since the information for the study was obtained through an online medium from self-reports, thus other potential restriction is possibly the biasness in reporting.

In addition, the cross-sectional form of this study makes it impossible to draw any inferences regarding cause and effect. In conclusion, due to the small size of the study sample population, it is imperative that any conclusions drawn about the teaching profession, both domestically and internationally, be approached with extreme caution. Considering these limitations, the researchers recommend conducting additional research to extend and verify the results of this study.

Despite the conclusions that have been presented, there are still other potential factors that could be significant. Among these factors are the number of teaching hours per week, the number of subjects taught in a term, the academic position the individual holds, and marital status. To conduct a more credible investigation, researchers in the future should take into account the aforementioned elements as potential major predictors of the occupational stress experienced by teachers. In addition, the study sample might not be the best representation of the teachers who work in international schools. The sample size was relatively small, and the researcher chose teachers from the Kuala Lumpur region only to

participate in the study. In the future, research should involve a larger population, perhaps by recruiting teachers from other states to provide a more holistic perspective.

Finally, it is essential to keep in mind that the environment and culture of the school can have a significant impact on the level of stress experienced by the faculty members. It is required to do additional study to investigate the characteristics of the school environment and culture that may be responsible for the stress that teachers deal with. In addition, a teacher's level of expertise in information and communications technology was found to be a strong predictor of the amount of stress they experienced when leading online teaching and learning activities. Teachers may have less stress if they have a higher level of expertise, which would allow them to better utilize modern technology in their lessons and classroom activities.

Conclusion

As a conclusion, this research will contribute and motivate all teachers including the private or public schools. Based on the findings, the level of self-perceived stress among them can give them an awareness and motivate them to deliver their teaching effectively. This research also benefits for people who are new to the teaching profession, those who are in the process of designing training and ongoing professional development programs for teachers, as well as trainees and novice teachers, not to underestimate the stressful nature of the job. According to the literature study that serves as the foundation for this chapter, stress in the teaching profession is a real phenomenon that permeates each facet of the personal and professional lives of educators. Despite this, not much has been done to equip teachers with the skills and information they need to not only survive but also succeed in this challenging sector of work. It is imperative that this be done if the high rate of turnover among new school teachers is to be reduced.

A moderate amount of stress results in optimal professional performance, enhanced well-being, and ultimately, in job satisfaction. Although there is clear evidence that a moderate amount of stress results in these positive outcomes, stress continues to be a mysterious process, with a historical emphasis on the negative nature of stress. There is not much that can be done to alleviate the stress that teachers experience given that it is an inherently stressful profession and that this fact has been acknowledged across cultural lines. However, the stressful nature of the job should be properly communicated to potential trainees before they commit to a career path that may turn out to be more demanding than they initially imagined. This is crucial so that they may make an informed decision about their career path.

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