Moroccan ESP Instructors’ Perceptions of an Effective ESP Teacher

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ABSTRACT
The changes in the linguistic and socio-economic spheres in Morocco have brought about new perspectives to teaching English for specific purposes (ESP). The challenge has long been to ascertain the implementation of well-informed teaching practices to meet the volatile needs of learners and those of the local and global job market. Within this context, guided by the aim to promote quality in ESP teaching in Morocco, this paper investigated Moroccan ESP teachers’ perceptions of effective ESP teaching and teachers’ roles, hoping to offer a hands-on profile of an effective ESP practitioner. This study sought to answer two main research questions: 1). What roles do Moroccan ESP teachers play in their ESP teaching settings? 2). What are Moroccan ESP teachers’ perceptions of an effective ESP instructor? To answer these questions, a mixed-method research design was adopted where 32 teachers from different ESP settings were surveyed. The study offered illuminating data about effective ESP roles and practices and suggested a model for effective ESP teaching.

KEYWORDS
ESP in Morocco, perception, roles of ESP teachers, effective ESP teaching.

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Introduction
The study of ESP literature reveals a methodological problem in the ESP teaching practice. For many years, much of the ESP course design’s preoccupation has been with what learners have to learn and not how they should learn. As Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p.6) explained:

ESP, like any form of language teaching, is primarily concerned with learning. But it is our view that in its development up to now, ESP has paid scant attention to the question of how people learn, focusing instead on the question of what people learn. It has, in other words, been language-centered in its approach. We would not wish to dismiss this language-centered approach. It has provided some very important insights into the nature of specific language needs. However, we feel that, if it is to have any real and lasting value, ESP must be founded in the first instance on sound principles of learning, and it is with this purpose in view that we have proposed a learning-centered approach to

Similarly, Widdowson (1983, p. 87) observed that “Indeed, methodology has been generally neglected in ESP: the emphasis has been on ‘what’ ought to be taught (the content) rather than on ‘how’ it should be taught (Widdowson, 1983, p. 87, cited in Larouz and Keroual,2016)

In line with this, Basturkmen (2020, p.9) highlighted the absence of a “robust discussion of ideas and theories concerning [the] teaching and learning” of ESP and calls for more investigations into how ESP is taught and learnt to gain more nuanced understandings about classroom processes.

The current study is theoretically framed within the borders of this problematic issue. It seeks to address this problem by tackling the question of how to teach ESP by investigating Moroccan ESP practitioners’ perceptions of effective teaching practices and
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teachers’ roles. Hence, this study has a wide range of benefits for both ESP practitioners and researchers. Primarily, it enables novice ESP teachers to make decisions by accumulating well-informed data about effective ESP teaching practices and effective teachers’ roles to adopt in an ESP teaching environment. More importantly, the study enriches ESP research development by putting forward a proposal for effectiveness in ESP teaching. This proposal assumes that teachers’ roles and teaching practices are substantial factors of effective performance in ESP settings.

In this study, ESP teacher’s effectiveness is viewed in terms of first, course design ability and English language teaching (ELT); second, the measures taken to overcome ESP challenges and assess the ESP learning/teaching performance; third, the personality traits ESP teachers possess. These three components together are viewed as a springboard to boost effectiveness in the ESP teaching environment and lay fundamental grounds for an ideal ESP instructor.

A further significance of this study lies in its focus on perception. The concern with perception is motivated by a set of factors. Either bad or good, perceptions have an impact on teaching and learning. According to Golombek (2009), teachers bring their knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and visions consciously or subconsciously. Teachers develop their own solutions based on their personal perceptions of the circumstances. Additionally, the teacher’s perception is linked to belief, attitude, and knowledge. Besides, as Farrell & Bennis (2013) argued, exploring language teachers’ perceptions is significant to clarify how teachers implement their perception in classroom practices and, on the basis of that perception, choose which instructional practices and methods they use. Furthermore, Mansour (2006) advocated that in the area of ESP, a lot of factors interfere with shaping teachers’ perceptions and views, mainly the nature of the content field, students’ motivation and their apathy, working conditions and resources, and relationships with other colleagues and subject specialists.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Overview of ESP

Many historical factors contributed to the rise of ESP. As elucidated by Hutchison and Waters (1987, p.6), there was an “expansion in scientific, technical and economic activity on an international scale” towards the end of World War II. Such expansion was invented by the incessant progress in both technology and trade, which required the search for an international language. In parallel, “as English became the accepted international language of technology and commerce”, Hutchison and Waters (1987, p.6) added, a large population of this language learners emerged with specific needs: “businessmen and women who wanted to sell their products, mechanics who had to read manuals, doctors who needed to keep up with developments in their field and a whole range of students whose course of study included textbooks and journals only available in English” (p.6).

In addition to the above factors, as stated by Hutchison and Waters (1987), a revolution in linguistics, namely in its shift from a focus on language usage to language use, culminating in the view of language teaching that placed the learner at the center of any course design.

The scrutiny of this brief history of ESP reveals that these factors are similar to those that have given birth to ESP in other places in the world. In Morocco, for instance, the expansion of ELT in general and ESP in particular is attributed to multi-faceted changes in Moroccan society. At the economic level, the rapid growth in new industries - aviation, cars, robotics- and the emergence of several sensitive jobs have accelerated the need for an education that matches the demands of the job market. In line with this, due to linguistic, social and political reasons, English in Morocco has obtained a special status, and this factor has laid the foundation for its pervasiveness in different vocational and academic settings. It is then unsurprising that a wide range of Moroccan users of English have consequently emerged with various expectations and needs in this language. To this end, ESP institutions have been engaged to consider the particular needs of Moroccan users of English in medicine, civil and industrial engineering, agriculture and law, to name but some. Generally, a set of factors accelerated the mobility of ESP as a main branch of ELT in different parts of the globe.

The growth of different job-related needs for using the English language puts more pressure on researchers in the field to explore the nature of teaching on ESP grounds and the ideal roles teachers are expected to assume.

3. Basics of ESP

3.1 Teaching is structured around the learner and needs analysis.

While this trend seems to apply to many different teaching and learning settings, boosting the learner’s place in the whole process of teaching is an idiiosyncratic feature of ESP pedagogy. Teaching heavily relies on the learner’s needs and expectations in ESP. It is for this reason that ESP is viewed as a branch of English teaching whose main concern is to respond to a variety of specific learning needs. As has been defined by Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p19), ESP is “an approach to language learning which is based on learner need”. This implies that teachers working in such contexts have to devote enough time to identify learners’ needs and diagnose their learners’ performance abilities. The process of material development for the ESP course is then guided by what the learner needs and expects. This is the main basis for starting the ESP course. Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p.19) explained that “the foundation of all ESP is the simple question: why does this learner need to learn the foreign language?"
Accordingly, the ESP teaching method is extremely dependent on the needs analysis technique. In teaching ESP, resorting to this procedure is mandatory for many reasons. As Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p16) explained, “building a course on the basis of what serves learners has an influence on students’ ‘motivation to learn and therefore on the effectiveness of their learning’.

The identification of needs in ESP contexts takes various forms. Teachers may use focus groups, interviews, questionnaires, quizzes and other reliable and valid techniques to elicit data about what the learner needs and expects. For Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p55), needs analysis involves the discovery of 1) Necessities, which stand for “the type of need determined by the demands of the target situation; that is, what the learner has to know in order to function effectively in the target situation. 2) Lacks, which refer to “what the learner knows already”. Identifying lacks helps to discover “which of the necessities the learner lacks” (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987, p. 56). 3) Wants, which are viewed as subjective in that they stand for what the learner wants from a course. As such, they represent a view that, as Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p.56) indicated, “will conflict with the perceptions of other interested parties: course designers, sponsors, and teachers.”

In short, it is worth reminding that actual engagement in the ESP course is preceded by a prior focus on the learner whose needs and expectations constitute the building blocks of the course.

3.2 The Teacher’s role is determined by the context.
The context here refers to all influential factors surrounding the teaching environment. Using well the context component requires the understanding of learners and the relevance of the material developed to their language proficiency, major of study, psychological and attitudinal propensities1.

In ESP settings, each teaching encounter is usually a new situation that dictates a specific teacher’s role. The ESP literature puts forward a set of roles to be performed by ESP instructors. Hutchinson and Water (1987) suggested that the main role of the ESP teacher is to be a problem solver, which requires knowledge of fundamental principles of teaching. For Ghaftorina and Sabet (2014, p.1), an ESP teacher needs, first, to have “a close collaboration with content teachers” because this “provides ESP teachers with useful information on the most effective syllabuses and instructional approaches to meet the learners’ needs”, and second, to enhance learning independence. As they see it, “ESP teachers should equip language learners with appropriate linguistic and strategic competencies, which enable them to improve their academic competence independently”. They add that an ESP instructor has to be a practitioner. For them, “in such a complex setting, ESP teachers cannot take on traditional language delivering roles. Instead, they have to act as teachers, course designers, collaborators, researchers, and evaluators simultaneously”. Furthermore, the ESP teacher is urged to identify clearly learners’ needs”. To this end, “detailed needs analysis should be conducted to reach a complete profile about the participants’ needs” (Ghaftorina and Sabet, 2014, p.3)

Equally, to perform well in ESP classrooms, some scholars pointed to the importance of obtaining “English language knowledge”, a “thorough command of course design and an “expert knowledge of the related field of science” (Sadeghi (2005) in Maleki, 2008, p8). Others have stressed the necessity of ESP teacher to possess “strong knowledge on teaching, needs analysis, syllabus design, material writing or adaptation and evaluation (Venkatraman and P. Prema,2007, p.1). Further views observed that ESP teachers should get professional competence through “the convenience of attending seminars and conferences....individual group reflection and interaction with colleagues” (de Arechaga,2001,p2)

Throughout this brief review of some aspects of the ESP literature, it seems worthy to mention that ESP, as an important branch of ELT, has evolved as a response to the incessant demands of users in different vocational domains. The particular mission of ESP has dictated special teaching manners and the consideration of various factors while teaching in ESP settings.

4. Methodology
This study is exploratory in nature. It seeks to find out the roles Moroccan ESP teachers play in ESP classrooms. Also, it intends to discover these practitioners’ perceptions of effective ESP teaching.

Meanwhile, this study adopts a mixed-method research design. It is qualitative in its attempt to gather numerical data to allow the researcher to construct pieces of evidence or facts based on frequencies and percentages. Equally, though it is not concerned with probing into the reasons behind holding particular perceptions, the study provided qualitative data, especially by providing a space for participants to elaborate on their own views and perceptions apart from the ones suggested by the researcher(question 9 in the questionnaire as a case in point)

Generally, this study is guided by two main research questions:

1). What roles do Moroccan ESP teachers play in their ESP teaching settings?

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1 Further insights on this issue can be obtained from Stufflbeam(1983) whose famous CIP model to program evaluation recommends the use of context analysis as the primary stage of program design and evaluation.
2. What are Moroccan ESP teachers’ perceptions of an effective ESP instructor?

To elicit data, this quantitative study used the questionnaire as its main research instrument.

5. Results and discussion

This study investigated Moroccan ESP teachers’ perceptions of effective ESP teaching and explored the roles an ESP teacher is expected to play in such environments. Before tackling the parts devoted to answering these questions, the first part of the questionnaire in this study offered a description of the participants. Questions (1), (2) and (3) in the questionnaire were used to achieve this purpose. As figures (1), (2) and (3) display, 32 Moroccan ESP instructors took part in the study. They were both males (84.4%) and females (15.6%) (see Fig. 1) who had already taught or were currently teaching ESP in different ESP higher education settings (see Fig. 2) and whose ESP teaching experience ranged from one year to three, -three to five and five to ten and over 10 years (see fig.3).

![Figure 1: Participants’ gender](image1)

![Figure 2: Participants’ ESP work institution](image2)
As can be deduced, the study incorporated participants with differences in gender, diversity in ESP work settings and years of experience. This is ultimately done with the purpose of offering a representative sample of the Moroccan ESP instructor on one side and to maximize chances for generalizing the findings of the study on the other.

Simultaneously, question (4) provided further information about the participants. It explored whether or not ESP Moroccan instructors had training on ELT before their ESP teaching experience. As Fig. 4 indicates, the majority (59.4%) confirmed that they had such training before their ESP teaching experience.

Concerning their view about the importance of ELT background knowledge in dealing with ESP teaching, the majority (71.9%) maintained that they found knowledge of ELT to be essential to handling their ESP courses (fig. 5).
In parallel, question (6) in the questionnaire elicited information about whether or not the participants had training on ESP before their ESP teaching experience. As Fig. 6, the majority of Moroccan ESP teachers (62.5%) did not have any ESP training.

In relation to this finding, given the distinguished value, ESP has started to gain in the Moroccan EFL circles, putting into practice measures to offer more opportunities for ESP training is highly recommended. The data gathered through question 7 confirms this point. The majority (81.3%) admitted that they really needed specific skills and ESP knowledge to handle their ESP teaching experience. This finding provides evidence for the mutual relationship between ELT and ESP. To teach ESP, knowledge of ELT is needed (findings of question 6), and even with ELT knowledge, special knowledge and skills in ESP are required (findings of question 7).
Furthermore, question (8) elicited data on how participants evaluated their ESP experience. As Figure 8 displays, the majority of Moroccan ESP teachers (68.8%) found the ESP experience challenging.

Based on my experience as an ESP teacher, the challenge in ESP is mainly attributed to the nature of specialized content, the learner’s low language proficiency, the lack of motivation among learners, the difficulty to find appropriate material, and often, the failure to determine exactly ESP target or learning needs. Still, to overcome ESP teaching challenges, the teacher is required to adopt a set of pertinent roles and practices.

With the purpose of offering insights into the roles to play in an ESP context, question 9 explored the roles Moroccan ESP teachers perceived as mandatory. It was found that ESP teaching roles change according to the nature of the subject matter taught. The data obtained revealed that the majority of Moroccan ESP teachers played the role of a subject/technical content instructor. This role was played by those who teach English for the purposes of engineering, medicine, business and translation, intellectual property rights, business and science, business and computer sciences, scientific publishing, international conferences and international communication, and law.

The second role participants played was a facilitator, moderator and counselor. This role was performed by instructors teaching subjects such as business, computer engineering, business and computer sciences, English for tourism, English for social work, English for renewable energy, and professional English.

In the third place, Moroccan ESP teachers played the role of course designers, needs analysts, and curriculum developers. This role was played by teachers of English for the purposes of electronic/electrical and mechanical engineering, tourism, social work, renewable energy, professional English, business, engineering, and international communication.
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Equally, the results showed that few of the participants mentioned the role of the ESP teacher as an evaluator, innovator, project supervisor, researcher and learner, critical thinking builder, motivator, or learner. While this finding might be understood as a failure to consider the role of the ESP teacher in its totality, it emphasizes the fact that these participants do not neglect this aspect in compiling the ideal role of the ESP teacher, but they instead prioritize other urgent roles to consider in teaching ESP in their immediate context.

More importantly, these roles reflect the practices and roles recommended in the available related literature (see the review part above). This reflects Moroccan ESP teachers’ awareness of the roles to play in an ESP teaching environment.

Therefore, to answer the first research question, the data obtained revealed that ESP courses in Morocco covered different fields: business, medicine, law, tourism engineering, and so forth. Besides, the recurrent roles Moroccan ESP teachers played were subject content instructors, facilitators and course designers.

To answer the second research question, items (10), (11) and (12) in the questionnaire were included. The features suggested intended to capture Moroccan ESP teachers’ perceptions of the effective ESP teacher based on two aspects: the teacher’s ELT and ESP background knowledge and course design ability. The data obtained showed that effective ESP teachers were perceived as those who:

- know about the ESP context (93.8%)
- have significant knowledge of ELT (90.6%)
- select content which helps learners perform specific tasks (81.3%)
- have significant knowledge in ESP (78.1%)
- cooperate with subject teachers during material development (78.1%)
- adopt needs analysis as a primordial primary step in course design (71.9%) (see Figure 10)

As displayed above, the effective ESP teacher is expected to possess a deep understanding of the ESP teaching environment to know about the ESP context (93.8%). This feature includes an analysis of the general environment in which the course takes place and a diagnosis of students’ potential competencies as well as their needs and attitudes. It also incorporates the understanding of stakeholders’ expectations, the nature of the subject taught, the time allotted to the course, the available teaching resources, etc.). This step is highly significant because it influences subsequent stages of ESP course design. Analyzing the ESP context guides ESP instructors during teaching material development, providing them with the lens to consider the challenges surrounding their ESP course and prepare ahead to cope with them.

Besides, the majority of the participants (90.6%) considered effective ESP teachers to be those with significant knowledge of ELT. Though evident, this finding emphasizes the effect of ELT prior knowledge on teaching ESP. Teachers with basic knowledge of ELT perform their teaching tasks more easily than those without. Both theory and practice in ELT provide the ESP teacher with a range of options to choose from and alternatives to adopt to achieve this goal. Still, in an ESP context, as realized by this study, ELT knowledge is necessary but not sufficient. This is why many participants (78.1%) perceived the effective teacher as the one who gets a significant knowledge in ESP too. As any ESP practitioner can observe, ESP has certain specificities that distinguish it from ELT (see the features identifying ESP in the review part).
One more aspect of effective ESP teachers is their ability to select content that helps learners perform specific tasks (81.3% chose this feature). The importance of this feature lies in the fact that it allows ESP teachers to choose pertinent material and help learners see the link between what they learn and their job’s demands. In other words, owning this quality allows us to keep the teaching content relevant and meaningful to the learner. Besides, this feature makes teaching in ESP practical as it enables learners to do different tasks outside the classroom with the content selected.

The participants prioritized other features as the main indicators of effective ESP instruction. These features include cooperating with subject teachers during material development (78.1% opted for this) and adopting needs analysis as a primary step in course design (71.9% selected this). These two features are highly significant. First, course design is considered the corner stone of ESP teaching practice and the process that guarantees success in this endeavor to a large extent. Second, cooperation, as explained in the review part, is often inevitable, namely when exposed to technical subjects where the instructor lacks detailed knowledge about the issues of interest for the learner. Usually, ESP teachers do not teach in isolation but work within an institutional structure through programs or modules. Cooperation with the expert partner contributes to bringing added value to this structure by offering students opportunities to transfer technical knowledge into the ESP classroom using different learning channels.

Question (11) seeks to get teachers’ perceptions of an effective teacher based on the following criteria: the pedagogical measures taken both to overcome ESP challenges and to assess the learning/teaching process. In this respect, effective ESP teachers were described as those who:

- Motivate learners 84.4%
- Involve students in tasks related to the technical content 81.3%
- Develop autonomous learning 78.1%
- Respond to different learning styles and strategies 75%
- Make extensive readings about the technical content to teach 68.8%
- Use tasks with varied levels of difficulty 65.8%
- Encourage feedback from students to evaluate their teaching 65.8%
- Use effective evaluation tools to assess learning and teaching 65.8%
- Integrate ICT in teaching 65.8% (see Fig. 11)

As explained, motivating learners and involving them in tasks related to the technical content were perceived by the majority (84.4%) as the most important feature characterizing effective ESP teachers. Motivating learners is a mandatory pedagogical practice to pursue in an ESP context for different reasons. In such settings, learners usually come with short term objectives— to get a certificate necessary for work promotion or to pass a study course. Yet, if insufficient motivation is offered to the learner, reaching
such goals might be braked by overwhelming difficulties. The point is that the learning experience in ESP might become frustrating unless the instructor intervenes to inspire learners. Since the impact of motivation has been acknowledged by ELT theoretical and empirical research, within ESP, the teacher’s role in igniting learners’ zeal for long-term learning and engagement is multiplied.

Equally, involving the learner in tasks is a genuine indicator of the ESP instructor’s ability to use pedagogical knowledge in the classroom. Prioritizing these features by participants highlights the significance of task-based activities as an effective tool to keep learners involved and engaged.

Furthermore, the results indicated that effective ESP teachers develop autonomous learning (78.1%) and respond to different learning styles and strategies (75%). While these skills again represent basic pedagogical procedures to sustain a healthy learning environment, they constitute a significant springboard for long-term learning. Besides, given the limited time allotted to ESP courses, students with more inclination and skills to learn will be able to solve the problems they face and deal with them even after the course. Developing autonomy among ESP learners is a substantial pedagogical procedure that ESP teachers need to think about because the main purpose is to help the learner solve their own problems in the absence of the teacher. ESP instructors are invited to learn from the related literature in this concern to reach such goals.

Meanwhile, using content that addresses different learning styles is a substantial pedagogical procedure for the ESP teacher to consider. This feature allows learners to engage with the content and interact with it.

Further features of effective ESP teachers are prioritized by Moroccan ESP practitioners. These features include doing extensive readings about the technical content to teach (68.8%), using tasks with varied levels of difficulty (65.8%), encouraging feedback from students to evaluate their teaching (65.8%), using effective evaluation tools to assess learning and teaching (65.8%) and integrating ICT in teaching (65.8%).

While these features represent useful pedagogical procedures—largely supported by ELT literature—to enhance effective learning, they gain more value for use in ESP settings. Usually, the encounter in ESP is mechanical since the teaching process is guided and controlled by the act of working towards achieving a goal for using the language. As teachers stick to this particular goal, instruction might create a monotonous learning atmosphere. However, using the above pedagogical techniques renders such an atmosphere more productive and boredom-free. In this case, the integration of information communication technology promotes the active transfer of knowledge and helps display this latter in a more engaging way.

Question (12) explores the third level that characterizes effective ESP teachers. As Figure 12 displays, the majority prioritized three features. In the first place, these features include having a positive attitude toward students (84.4%), applying innovative ways in teaching (84.4%), and being curious and interested in the student’s study subject (81.3%). In the second place, participants considered effective ESP teachers to be those who have a strong desire for self-training and professional development (75%) and those who cooperate with colleagues (75%). In the last place, effective teachers are viewed as practitioners who insist on achieving success despite the hard conditions and challenges (68.8%) and comply with the ESP workplace rules and regulations (62.5%)

Viewing effectiveness from this angle brings to the surface the role of personality traits or what is commonly known as soft skills in the workplace. As indicated, effective ESP teachers are perceived as being positive, innovative, and eager to learn and improve. They are also perseverant and resilient, able to work in teams, and respectful of work ethics.

This last perspective to view effectiveness, which is supported by the results of the current study, highlights the significance of soft skills and interpersonal traits in teaching ESP. This leads us to think about the necessity of introducing training on soft skills as a key element to qualify instructors’ performance in ESP settings.
6. Conclusion
This study outlined several features of the effective ESP teacher. These aspects lay the ground for a modal to effective ESP instruction. As already mentioned, this modal views effective ESP teachers from three main dimensions: First, the teacher’s ELT and ESP knowledge and course design ability. This dimension includes the ESP teacher’s ability to:

✓ know about the ESP context
✓ have significant knowledge of ELT
✓ select content which helps learners perform specific tasks
✓ have significant knowledge of ESP
✓ cooperate with subject teachers during material development
✓ adopt needs analysis as a primordial primary step in course design

Second, the measures taken both to overcome ESP challenges and to assess the ESP learning/teaching performance. This involves the ESP instructor’s ability to:

✓ motivate learners
✓ involve students in tasks related to the technical content
✓ develop autonomous learning
✓ respond to different learning styles and strategies
✓ make extensive readings about the technical content to teach
✓ use tasks with varied levels of difficulty
✓ encourage feedback from students to evaluate their teaching
✓ use effective evaluation tools to assess learning and teaching
✓ integrate ICT into teaching

Third, owning employability soft skills. This incorporates ESP teacher’s abilities of:

✓ having a positive attitude to students
✓ applying innovative ways in teaching
✓ being curious and interested in the subject matter taught
✓ having strong desire of self-training and professional development
✓ cooperating with colleagues
✓ insisting on achieving success despite the hard conditions and challenges
✓ complying with the ESP workplace rules and regulations

In fact, the present study’s findings do not claim generalization regarding the short number of participants. However, the suggested modal of effective ESP teaching is a new and original proposal. It can be testified by further research in different settings. Equally,
the aspects of effective ESP teaching achieved by this study are of paramount importance to illuminate ESP teaching practice in Morocco and abroad.

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