

AN INVESTIGATION ON THE MOTIVATION LEVEL OF EFL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Motivation in the realm of education is concerned as one of the most important factors to support learning process and provide high-quality learning since it enhances personal growth and adjustment. Motivation is also an important factor in foreign language education and achievement. It was also emphasized in the literature that motivation and students' language proficiency are positively internally related. So, the issue of motivation is thought to be analyzed carefully in understanding the determinants of language achievement in any EFL setting. For this purpose this study has been designed to examine the likely effect of the motivational factors on the foreign language achievement of the students learning English as a foreign language. The study was conducted at the School of Foreign Languages at a state university in 2009-2010 academic year. The data have been collected through the questionnaire (AMTB) developed by Gardner and analyzed through SPSS 11.5 for windows.

The research highlighted that students in the school study English with low motivational intensity and desire to learn English. It has also been seen that gender, compulsory or optional states of the students, importance of English, high school type and achievement in foreign language studies are important factors in determining students' motivational level while students' previous preparatory school education and home background characteristics are not. Finally, some practical recommendations were noted.

Keywords: Teaching English as a foreign language, motivation, autonomy in EFL.

INTRODUCTION

Considering the growth of international relations of all the societies with each other today and the extended interest towards today's huge technology and science throughout the world, being an autonomous or motivated language learner has found a greater importance compared to previous years. Despite great efforts put into language studies, it is still a big problem that the English proficiency level of the majority of the students is not satisfactory enough in the schools in Turkey. There are certainly different reasons for this problem but one of the reasons which are the primary concern of this study is motivation. Motivation research has received much attention in the past decade and it has been widely studied and defined by the researchers as it is accepted one of the key factors influencing success in foreign language learning.

A great deal of research performed on the motivation and foreign language education was heavily affected by the Canadian researcher R. C. Gardner. Gardner described motivation as a "complex of factors" including the desire to achieve a goal, effort expended in that direction and reinforcement or satisfaction associated with the act of learning. According to Gardner, a highly motivated individual will want to learn the language, enjoy learning the language, and strive to learn the language. (Gardner 1985). Gardner even identifies motivation as the single most influential factor in learning a new language. Another comprehensive definition was made by

Dönyei and Otto (1998) prominent researchers of language studies. According to them, “in a general sense, motivation can be defined as the dynamically changing cumulative arousal in a person that initiates, directs, coordinates, amplifies, terminates, and evaluates the cognitive and motor processes whereby initial wishes and desires are selected, prioritized, operationalized and (successfully or unsuccessfully) acted out”. As it can be understood from the definition, motivation is a temporal and dynamic state which involves desire and willingness to do something. A similar definition was stated that “to be motivated means to be moved to do something” (Deci and Ryan, 2000).

In general, explanations regarding the source(s) of motivation can be categorized as either extrinsic (outside the person) or intrinsic (internal to the person). Intrinsically motivated activities are ones for which there is no apparent reward except the activity itself. People seem to engage in the activities for their own sake and not because they lead to an extrinsic reward. Intrinsically motivated behaviors are aimed at bringing about certain internally rewarding consequences, namely, feelings of competence and self-determination. Extrinsically motivated behaviors, on the other hand, are carried out in anticipation of a reward from outside and beyond the self. Behaviors initiated solely to avoid punishment are also extrinsically motivated, even though numerous intrinsic benefits can ultimately accrue to those who, instead, view punishment avoidance as a challenge that can build their sense of competence and self-determination (Deci, 1975). Maslow (1970) claimed that intrinsic motivation is clearly superior to extrinsic. According to his hierarchy of needs one is ultimately motivated to achieve “self-actualization” once his basic physical, safety, and community needs are met. Regardless of the presence or absence of extrinsic rewards, one will strive for self-esteem and fulfillment. Bruner (1966), praising the “autonomy of self-reward”, claimed that one of the most effective ways to help both children and adults think and learn is to free them from the control of rewards and punishments. The intrinsic-extrinsic continuum in motivation is applicable to foreign language classrooms around the world. Regardless of the cultural beliefs and attitudes of learners and teachers, intrinsic and extrinsic factors can be easily identified. Dörnyei and Csizer (1998), for example, in a survey of Hungarian teachers of English, proposed taxonomy of factors by which teachers could motivate their learners. They cited factors such as developing a relationship with learners, building learners’ self-confidence and autonomy, personalizing the learning process, and increasing learners’ goal-orientation. These all fall into the intrinsic side of motivation. Our ultimate quest in this language teaching business is, of course, to see to it that our pedagogical tools can harness the power of intrinsically motivated learners who are striving for excellence, autonomy, and self-actualization.

Gardner (1959) highlighted two different types of motivation specific to language study as instrumental and integrative motivation. Instrumental motivation is the desire to learn a language because it would fulfill certain utilitarian goals, such as getting a job and passing an examination. Integrative motivation, on the other hand, is the desire to learn a language in order to communicate with people from another culture that speak the target language.

In the related literature, motivation in foreign language education has been explained in terms of five theories: Gardner’s theory of motivation, expectancy value theory, attribution theory, self-determination theory and Dörnyei and Otto’s theory of motivation. According to Gardner’s theory of motivation, The Gardnerian theory of L2 learning, motivation is based on the definition of motivation as “the extent to which the individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in this activity”. As it can be concluded from the definition, motivation is seen as goal-directed and learner’s immediate goal is to learn the language. Gardner proposes that understanding the learner’s ultimate goal helps understanding why learners are motivated (Gardner, 1985). It should be kept in mind that Gardner approached the research as social psychologist. He offers little explanation of how the learning situation can be organized to promote learner’s motivation. He was more concerned with the effect of social variables on learner’s motivation.

Expectancy value theories assume that motivation to perform various tasks is the product of two key factors: the individual’s expectancy of success in a given task and the value the individual attaches to success in that

task (Dörnyei & Otto, 1998). That is, if an individual doesn't believe he or she can be successful at a task, or the individual does not see a connection between his or her activity and success, or the individual does not value the results of success, then the probability is lowered that the individual will engage in the required learning activity. From the perspective of this theory, these two variables must be high in order for motivation and the resulting behavior to be high.

In attribution theory, learners' perceptions of the causes of their success or failure influence their future performance. The perceived causes can be either external or internal to the learner. External causes are those outside the learner's control, such as luck, ability and task difficulty. However, effort is an internal cause and is within the learner's control (Dickinson, 1995).

The self-determination theory was introduced by Deci and Ryan as an elaboration of the intrinsic/extrinsic construct. Self-determination (i.e., autonomy) is seen as a prerequisite for any behavior to be intrinsically rewarding. It addresses the energization issue as well as the direction issue, and it does so by postulating about basic psychological needs that are inherent in human life. The theory focuses primarily on three such innate needs: the needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy (or self-determination). Competence involves understanding how to attain various external and internal outcomes and being efficacious in performing the requisite actions; relatedness involves developing secure and satisfying connections with others in one's social milieu; and autonomy refers to being self-initiating and self-regulating of one's own actions. Intrinsically motivated behaviors are engaged in for their own sake- for the pleasure and satisfaction derived from their performance. When intrinsically motivated, people engage in activities that interest them, and they do so freely, with a full sense of volition and without the necessity of material rewards or constraints (Deci & Ryan, 1985). However, extrinsically motivated behaviors are instrumental in nature. They are performed not out of interest but because they are believed to be instrumental to some separable consequence (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier & Ryan, 1991).

Dörnyei is one of the most active researchers on L2 motivation in recent years. He conceptualizes a tripartite L2 motivation framework that consists of three levels: (1) the language level, as integrative and instrumental motivation subsystems; (2) the learner level, as need for achievement and Self-Confidence (Language Use Anxiety, Perceived L2 Competence, Causal Attributions, Self-Efficacy) and (3) the learning situation level. Dörnyei also claimed that L2 motivation is an eclectic, multifaceted construct and he proposed three sets of motivational components belonging learning situation level: (1) course-specific motivational components; such as interest, relevance and satisfaction; (2) teacher-specific motivational components; such as affiliative drive and authority type; (3) group-specific motivational components such as goal-orientedness, norm and reward system, group cohesion and classroom goal structure (Dörnyei, 1994).

While designing a language course, teachers must take into consideration that each learners' interests, expectations and needs are different. Language teachers may need to understand the source of a student's motivation in order to meet particular and special needs of the students and to enhance language learning performance of the students. The School of Foreign Languages studied in this research has struggled for years with the problem of demotivated students, as both the students' and the teachers' informal reports indicate. Furthermore, voluntary students who intentionally choose to receive one year English preparatory course become demotivated after a few months of study, as their interest and willingness to learn fade away. This fading is clearly observable in their behaviors in the classroom and their attention to learning English, and Gardner also points out that though students are initially very enthusiastic about learning English, their enthusiasm wanes before the end of the first year. This situation creates problems in the classrooms in terms of both instruction and classroom management. When asked, informally, about the fading motivation, the teachers confirmed that some students are demotivated, and the existing student motivation fades as time passes.

Therefore, this study tried to turn the above theoretical considerations into an investigation of the relationships between, motivation, and some related factors concerning the students studying English as a foreign language. Thus, the present paper was guided by following research questions:

1. What are the levels of students' "Motivational Intensity" and "Desire to Learn the Language" as a foreign language?
2. Do the levels of "Motivational Intensity" and "Desire to Learn the Language" differ significantly according to the demographic characteristics, educational backgrounds and home background characteristics of the students studying English?

METHOD

This is a descriptive, quantitative study in which a survey technique was implemented. The participants in the study include 141 students, of whom 59 (35, 7%) are females and 82 (64, 3%) are males. They are all freshmen aged from 18-24. In the university where the research was performed English preparatory education is compulsory for the students of Medical Faculty and ELT Department of Educational Faculty whereas it is optional for the students of some other faculties (Faculty of Administration, Faculty of Science and Letters, Faculty of Pharmacy and Faculty of Engineering. In the school, all the students were spread over 8 different classes, 3 of these classes consisted of volunteer students whereas 5 of them were compulsory and one of those five compulsory classes was composed of prospective English teachers. In none of these faculties the medium of instruction is English. But preparatory school offers an intensive English learning program during a preparatory year.

The questionnaire was administered to all the students of the school. The research indicates that 90 (63,8%) of the participants are compulsory and 51 (36,1%) of them are optional preparatory school students. Thirty five (24,8%) students reported that they attended English preparatory school of their high school and are receiving the second preparatory school education this year but 105 (74,4%) of them are receiving an English preparatory school education for the first time. The subjects' responses reveal that 89 (63,1%) of the students think that English is important for them while 52 (36,8%) of the students think that it is not important for them. With regard to high school type that they graduated from, 53 (37,5%) of the students graduated from Anatolian High Schools, 57 (40,4) of the students graduated from General High Schools and Vocational High Schools, 9 (6,3%) of the students are graduate of Private High Schools and finally 22 (15,6%) of the students are graduate of Science High Schools.

The subjects were administered a questionnaire (AMTB–Attitude and Motivation Test Battery) developed by Gardner (1985). In the questionnaire, only the foreign language "French" was replaced by "English" and it was presented in the subjects' mother tongue. The questionnaire contained two parts. Part one covered demographic variables such as gender, grades and questions related to the general background information and parental information of the participants. Part two covered 20 multiple-choice items with three options, investigating the motivational aspects of the subjects. The Motivation part of AMTB used in this study was comprised of two subscales: Motivational Intensity (MI) and Desire to Learn the Language (DLL). The response format was a three-point degree of rating scale with total possible scores ranging from 20 to 60 where low scores are associated with low motivation toward learning a foreign language and higher scores are associated with higher motivation toward learning a second language. The data collected by means of questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics through SPSS 11.5 software in the computer. Calculated Cronbach's Alpha for the Motivational Intensity subscale was 0.8036 and for the Desire to Learn the Language subscale was 0.7751. The Cronbach-alpha coefficient value for the overall reliability analysis of the Motivational Construct was found as 0.8656 which shows a satisfying level of reliability beyond the minimum desirable level of reliability as stated by Pallant (2005): "Ideally, the Cronbach alpha coefficient of a scale should be above .7"

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the study is presented in two sections based on the research questions: The level of motivation and the correlations between motivational construct and independent variables such as gender, compulsory and optional states, English grades, high school type, parents' educational background and the degree of importance of learning English.

The mean of the students' Motivational Intensity was found to be 16.60 ± 3.66 (range: 10-30) whereas the mean of the students' Desire to Learn the Language was found to be 15.62 ± 3.45 (range 10-28). The highest score that could be obtained from both subscales was 30 while the lowest one was 10. Thus, when those scores are taken into account, for Motivational Intensity (MI) and Desire to Learn the Language (DLL) subscales, low level of motivation can be defined as a score between 10,0-16,6; moderate level between 16,7-23,3; and high level between 23,4-30,0. When the scores of the students are handled on the basis of this classification, it is quite clear that students in English Preparatory School have a low level of motivational intensity and desire to learn the language. As the first finding of the research it can be seen as the evidence of fading motivation of the students which was observed and reported by the instructors informally. It seems that lack of motivation is perhaps the biggest obstacle faced by the instructors in the school and this result causes the researchers to think about the role of the teachers and instructional material in motivating the students. Although they are beyond the scope of this research, the role of teachers and instructional material should not be ignored and they should also be considered as one of the probable factors of low motivation of the students at school. As Jesuiono (1996) pointed out that one thing with which everybody would agree is that teachers are powerful motivational socializers. Being the officially designated leaders within the classroom, they embody group conscience and serve as a model. So, it should be noted that when the students are motivated, teachers can perform their jobs best. Furthermore, a teacher can certainly do a lot to improve the students' motivation.

In order to look into male and female students' difference in motivational intensity and desire to learn English subscales, an independent-measures t-test was applied to data and the results indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between male and female with respect to their motivational intensity at 0,023 level. As it is indicated in Table 1, girls' motivational intensity is higher than that of boys. Unlike motivational intensity, there isn't any significant relation between the subscale "desire to learn the language" and gender at 0,055. It is clear that males differed from females in their level of motivational intensity as a Foreign Language, in favor of males. Some drives increase their motivational intensity since mastering a foreign language which is a communication tool all over the world provides them to gain prestige in the community by getting a better paying job, become successful in business and make friends. But it seems that male students care it more. However, this finding is contrasting with the results of many researches in the literature. According to the results of Rahman's (2005), Dörnyei & Clement's (2001), Özkut's (1991), Kızıltepe's (2003) and Gökçe's (2008) researches, motivational levels of girls are higher than those of boys. This discrepancy can be explained in a cultural context in Turkey. A broader look at the cultural context of the region where the research was performed can help to clarify certain facts concerning the different roles males and females have been given in the society and as a consequence, the different opportunities each gender has for higher education and a future career. In general it is expected that men acquire status through their knowledge and through the jobs they get. In other words, Turkish society expects males to acquire status through their knowledge, their influence and their standing in the community. However, very little expectations are placed on women in this respect and so this result is not surprising.

As for optional and compulsory status of the students is concerned, it has been revealed that a statistically significant difference was determined between voluntary and compulsory students in terms of both "motivational intensity" and "desire to learn English" subscales (Table 1). In other words, the students of ELT preparatory class and faculty of medicine, namely compulsory students, have higher motivational intensity and

desire to learn English in comparison to voluntary students. It is worth noting here that, contrary to the findings of the study, optional English preparatory school students were expected to have higher motivation level in both subscales since they intentionally chose to receive one year English preparatory education. But on the other hand, this difference may stem from the fact that one year English education is required for only compulsory students and they have to get minimum passing grade of the school at the end of the year in order to be able to continue their education in the faculties and this fact may cause them to have higher motivation level. So, it can be claimed that compulsory students are more motivated since they have more pragmatic reasons. Similarly, the results of a research performed by Sözer (1984) indicated that for 82% of the students the main purpose of learning a foreign language was to be successful in their own profession and fulfill the requirements of the school.

When the relation between students' previous preparatory school education and motivational intensity and desire to learn English is considered, it was found that there is not any significant difference. That is, the results of t-tests demonstrate that significance levels are 0,994 for "motivational intensity" and 0,747 for "desire to learn English" subscales (Table 1).

Regarding the importance of English a statistically significant difference was found between the groups of learners with respect to both subscales (Table 1). Results for statistical tests in order to determine the relationship between the importance of English for the participants and "motivational intensity" and "desire to learn the language" suggest that the students perceiving English as important are more motivated than the participants perceiving English "not important". It is thought that those 52 (36,8%) students are most probably compulsory preparatory school students and don't acknowledge the significance of learning English. The result clearly points out that the students who aren't aware of the importance of learning English in today's world shouldn't be anticipated to be motivated.

With regard to the type of high school that they graduated from, as can be seen in the table, statistically significant differences were found between the groups in terms of both "motivational intensity" at 0,037 level and "desire to learn the language" at 0,005 level. Descriptive statistics were applied to data in order to compare group means and LSD test was used to understand which group creates this difference. It was recorded that it is Science High School that causes the difference. To this finding, the graduates of Science High School have higher "motivational intensity" and "desire to learn the language" in comparison to Public and Vocational High Schools, Anatolian High School and Private High School (Table 1). Contrary to this finding, Ertan (2008) found that type of high school is not an important factor in determining the motivation level of the students. As researchers we were expecting that Anatolian high school students would get the highest motivational level since in those schools the medium of instruction once heavily used to depend on a foreign language and extensive English courses are still offered in those schools. But graduates of Science high school seem to get the highest motivational level. This result can be best explained from aspect of educational system. The students to Science High Schools in our country are selected through a national aptitude test and those who are entitled to attend a science high school are high achievers. They are strongly motivated towards all the school subjects. Like the other Asian students the students perceive English just as an ordinary school subject. That's why the motivation level of SHS students was found to be higher than the others.

The participants were divided into high and low categories based on their final grades of 2009-2010 academic year. Seventy-seven students having an average of 70 which is minimum passing grade of the school or above would be the high proficient learners, and 64 students having a grade of 69 or below would be the low proficient learners. After carrying out the statistical analysis in order to find out whether there is a significant relationship between students' achievement and motivation construct it has been seen that the relation between the students' grades and motivational intensity is statistically significant at 0,014 level whereas the relationship between the grades and "desire to learn English" is not sufficient to suggest a statistically meaningful difference at 0,117 level.

Students of preparatory school seem to study English just to be able to get the passing grade since the students having grades under the minimum passing grade have slightly higher motivational intensity levels. But they don't seem to be motivated to learn the language. As Lanara (1999), in her study on Japanese students, indicates that some students who were not strongly motivated were taking English because it was a required course, were expecting good grades and they were looking forward to attending the classes.

Table 1
 The relationship between some independent variables and Motivation Subscales

	N	Mean±Std Dev	t/F Value	P			
	141						
		Motivation al Intensity	Desire to Learn English	Motivational Intensity	Desire to Learn English	Motivational Intensity	Desire to Learn English
Gender				2,3	1,9	0,023	0,055
Male	82	1,7±0,4	1,5±0,3				
Female	59	1,5±0,3	1,6±0,3				
Status				3,3	3,6	0,001	0,0001
Compulsory	90	1,7±0,4	1,6±0,3				
optional	51	1,5±0,3	1,4±0,2				
Previous Prep Education				0,02	-0,3	0,994	0,747
Yes	35	1,6±0,3	1,5±0,3				
No	105	1,6±0,3	1,5±0,3				
Importance of English				5,9	6,0	0,0001	0,0001
Important	89	1,5±0,3	1,4±0,2				
Not Important	52	1,8±0,3	1,7±0,3				
High School Type				2,9	4,4	0,037	0,005
Anatolian	53	1,6±0,3	1,5±0,2				
Public- Vocational	57	1,6±0,2	1,5±0,3				
Private	9	1,6±0,3	1,5±0,3				
Science *	22	1,8±0,4	1,8±0,4				
Grades				2,5	1,5	0,014	0,117
0-69	64	1,5±0,3	1,6±0,3				
70 +	77	1,6±0,4	1,7±0,3				

Mean +Sd *Causes the difference

Lastly the relation between the students' home background characteristics such as parents' educational background and motivational construct was examined. As for their parents' educational states are concerned, 26 (18,4%) students' mothers and 2 (1,4%) students' fathers seem to be illiterate. 69 (48,9%) of the students' mothers and 63 (44,6%) of the students' fathers are just graduate of primary school. 26 (18,4%) of the

students' mothers and 34 (24,1%) of the students' fathers are graduate of high school. 16 (11,3%) of the students' mothers and 32 (23,8%) of the students' fathers have a university degree whereas 4 (2,8%) of the students' mothers and 9 (6,3%) of the students' fathers hold an MA or PhD.

Also, 33 (23,4%) of the participants reported that their fathers have competency in the English language and 105 (74,4%) of the participants however reported that they do not have English competent fathers. Similarly, 19 (13,4%) of the participants reported that their mothers have competency in the English language and 122 (86,5%) of the participants however reported that they do not have English competent mothers.

Students' responses were analyzed according to parents' educational states and competency in English through one way analysis of variance and t-test to compare the means of dimensions to find out whether the difference was significant or not. It has been interestingly found out that none of the home background characteristics of the students significantly correlated with motivational intensity and desire to learn English subscales. The findings are displayed in Table 2. This was an unexpected case. Generally speaking, students with foreign language competent or high educated parents are expected to have higher motivation towards learning a foreign language.

Table 2
 The relationship between home background characteristics and Motivation Subscales

	N	Mean±Std		t/F Value		P	
		Dev					
		Motivational Intensity	Desire to Learn English	Motivational Intensity	Desire to Learn English	Motivational Intensity	Desire to Learn English
Father's Foreign Language						0,409	
Yes	33	1,6±0,4	1,6±0,4	0,6	0,4		0,202
No	105	1,6±0,3	1,5±0,2				
Mother's Foreign Language				0,7	0,9	0,483	0,324
Yes	19	1,6±0,3	1,4±0,3				
No	122	1,6±0,3	1,5±0,3				
Father's Education Level				0,2	0,6	0,931	0,652
Illiterate	2	1,5±0,2	1,6±0,1				
Primary and Secondary School	63	1,6±0,4	1,5±0,3				
High School	34	1,7±0,3	1,5±0,3				
University	32	1,6±0,3	1,5±0,3				
Post Graduate	9	1,6±0,3	1,7±0,3				

Mother's Education Level			2,1	1,4	0,083	0,213
Illiterate	26	1,7±0,5	1,7±0,5			
Primary and Secondary School	69	1,6±0,3	1,5±0,2			
High School	26	1,5±0,2	1,4±0,3			
University	16	1,6±0,2	1,6±0,3			
Post Graduate	4	1,9±0,3	1,5±0,5			

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study primarily attempted to examine the level of students' motivational intensity and desire to learn English. It was also aimed to find out whether there was a relationship between certain variables of gender, grades, compulsory and optional states, high school type, parents' educational background and the degree of importance of learning English and motivational. Gardner's socio-economic model (1985) was the beginning of language research in motivation area. Later, Dörnyei (1994) specifically devised a model of motivation. But in the present study, Gardner's model of motivation was taken as the basis for the research at English preparatory school since it was thought to be systematic and comprehensive enough to determine the motivational factors in EFL settings. A background questionnaire and a scale aiming at measuring the level of motivation towards EFL learning were used to provide a descriptive and correlational analysis.

Three main results were obtained from the study. Firstly, EFL learners mainly have a low level of motivational intensity and desire to learn English. The research highlighted that students in the school study English with low motivational intensity and desire to learn English. In other words, it seems that they weren't motivated properly to study English and they study English since they simply have to. Secondly, student motivation is affected by a cluster of factors associated with language learning. Gender, compulsory or optional states of the students, importance of English, high school type and achievement in foreign language studies are important factors in determining students' motivational intensity and desire to learn English. Lastly, students', previous preparatory school education and home background characteristics have no effects on their motivational levels.

In conclusion, it should always be borne in mind that motivational factors play a big role in foreign language learning, and further researches need to be performed to suggest appropriate strategies that would help teachers to motivate their students and to train them to use strategies that would facilitate students' language learning. Also, further researches should be considered to determine the reasons of low motivation and fading motivation of the students towards learning English in the School of Foreign Languages to realize effective language teaching.

As a note on the limitations of the study, the subjects were limited to 126 EFL learners who were enrolled in the School of Foreign Languages at a State University, Turkey. Moreover, the scope of the study was confined to the data collected using the motivation scale and some selected variables. Given that the study investigates the level of motivation and the relationship between motivation and certain variables, further studies should focus on some other issues such as attitudes, beliefs, and anxiety levels.

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