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The Role of Cultural Literacy on Elementary School Students' Attitudes of Tolerance: A Case in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aims to analyze the impact of cultural literacy on the tolerance attitude of elementary students in Indonesia. **Method:** The method used is a quantitative approach with a correlational research design. The research sample consisted of 90 randomly selected students. Data were collected using questionnaires that measured cultural literacy and attitudes toward tolerance. **Results:** This study demonstrates a significant positive relationship between cultural literacy and tolerance attitudes among primary school students. As students' cultural literacy levels increase, so does their tolerance toward cultural, social, and religious differences within the school environment. The correlation result ($r = 0.564$, $p < 0.01$) indicates that cultural literacy is pivotal in early adopting a tolerant character. Therefore, integrating cultural literacy into the primary school curriculum represents a relevant educational strategy for strengthening multicultural character education. **Novelty:** This study is the first study to empirically and quantitatively measure the role of cultural literacy in shaping the tolerance attitude of Indonesian elementary school students by using instruments tested for their validity and reliability, non-parametric correlation analysis, and scatter plot visualisation that confirms the contribution of cultural literacy to 56.4% tolerance variability. Thus, this study closes the empirical study gap at the elementary level while offering contextual and measurable curricular recommendations for integrating cultural literacy in multicultural character education.

INTRODUCTION

Amid the increasingly rapid flow of globalisation, character education aims to cultivate a set of core values and competencies in students, equipping them to navigate complex social realities. Within this framework, cultural literacy emerges as a foundational pillar: by understanding and appreciating Indonesia's diverse traditions, languages, and belief systems, students develop the empathy, inclusive mindset, and critical awareness that underpin all other character virtues. Early integration of cultural literacy reinforces respect, responsibility, and social empathy and creates a clear pathway for translating abstract character goals into concrete learning experiences.

One of the most essential character values to be instilled from an early age is tolerance—an attitude of respecting and accepting differences as part of life together (Nurasiah et al., 2022). In the Indonesian context of rich pluralism, tolerance cannot flourish in isolation; it requires the scaffold of cultural literacy to guide students toward meaningful engagement with diversity. By situating cultural literacy at the heart of character education, elementary schools can move beyond general appeals to “respect” and instead provide structured, contextual learning that nurtures tolerant attitudes toward cultural, social, and religious differences. Tolerance is increasingly crucial, considering Indonesia's pluralistic reality regarding culture, religion, language, and social background (Badrun et al., 2024). Furthermore, Utami (2022) also stated that tolerance is an essential competency for individuals in a heterogeneous society. In



41 addition, tolerance also includes an attitude of being willing to accept differences in physical form, status, and socioeconomic status (Nurasiah et al., 2022). In this context, elementary schools play a strategic role as agents of socialisation for multicultural values, which can shape students' perspectives on diversity (Aningsih et al., 2022; Syahbudin et al., 2023). This is because the cultivation of tolerance is an integral part of education, including in elementary schools (Weis et al., 2023). Students' perspectives on diversity must be formed appropriately and measurably (Nurasiah et al., 2022).

However, the diversity in the elementary school environment often poses challenges. Differences that should be wealth can become a source of conflict if not managed properly (Rachmadtullah et al., 2020). Students who lack adequate understanding and social skills have the potential to exhibit exclusive, stereotypical, and even discriminatory attitudes toward their peers (Jiang & Altinyelken, 2022).

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4 Therefore, an educational approach that is informative and transformative is needed to shape students' social attitudes. Cultural literacy is a relevant and practical approach in this context (Shliakhovchuk, 2021). Cultural literacy involves understanding and appreciating Indonesian culture as a national identity, as well as having a positive attitude towards it. Garcia-Mila et al. (2021) state that cultural literacy includes fundamental attitudes in daily life, namely inclusive, tolerant, and empathetic attitudes. Cultural literacy refers to a person's ability to understand and apply cultural concepts in daily life (García Ochoa & McDonald, 2019). Then, Iasha (2022) also stated that cultural literacy is the ability to understand and act in accordance with the culture of the Indonesian nation. Amid the complexity of global cultural diversity, applying cultural literacy is a strategic tool to bridge differences and build harmonious coexistence in society (Garcia-Mila et al., 2021). Some scholars have emphasised that, alongside the increasingly connected world, cultural literacy has become an essential need that must continue to be developed and disseminated (Shliakhovchuk, 2021). Cultural literacy teaches students to become familiar with diverse cultures and fosters empathy, respect, and the ability to interact positively with differences. The cultivation and strengthening of cultural literacy must be undertaken by all parties to support and enhance one another (Hume, 2024). Through cultural literacy, students are encouraged to recognise that diversity is an integral part of a collective identity that must be respected, not avoided. Thus, cultural literacy can be an essential strategy in character education to form tolerant attitudes from an early age (Lipiäinen et al., 2020).

In Indonesia's pluralistic elementary classrooms, the absence of a structured cultural literacy component has tangible repercussions: students without a reference framework for interpreting diverse traditions often gravitate toward familiar social groups, perpetuating stereotypes and exclusionary play patterns that erode peer collaboration and empathy (Martin & Fisher-Ari, 2021). This curricular void hampers the practical realisation of tolerance, leaving character education initiatives untethered from students' lived experiences and undermining national goals of Pancasila-based unity and social harmony (Aderibigbe et al., 2023). Teachers, lacking clear guidelines for embedding cultural content, struggle to facilitate meaningful intercultural dialogue, limiting opportunities for children to challenge biases or develop critical thinking about difference (Iasha et al., 2022) by not addressing this gap at the foundational level, basic education risks producing graduates who are academically competent but ill-prepared for constructive engagement in Indonesia's diverse society.



Although the literature on multicultural education has developed extensively, most studies still focus on a general approach that emphasises the importance of diversity without specifically elaborating on the role of cultural literacy as a learning strategy. Cultural literacy, as a structured and contextual pedagogical approach, is rarely used as the primary focus in research, especially when forming student tolerance attitudes (Cook et al., 2022). Furthermore, research conducted at the elementary school level, particularly in the context of cultural literacy in Indonesia, remains minimal (Abidin et al., 2023). This level is crucial in forming children's character and social values. Furthermore, the lack of empirical data directly linking the application of cultural literacy to increased student tolerance highlights an urgent need to fill this gap through studies based on local contexts and applicable approaches (Setemen et al., 2023).

This research aims to explain how cultural literacy can be effectively applied in the elementary school learning process as part of character education strategies. In particular, this study aims to measure the influence of cultural literacy on increasing student tolerance attitudes in the context of cultural diversity in the school environment. In addition, this research also aims to formulate practical recommendations for teachers, curriculum developers, and education policymakers in integrating cultural literacy into contextual and transformative thematic learning.

RESEARCH METHOD

Approaches and Types of Research

This study employs a quantitative approach, utilising a correlational research design. The primary goal is to investigate the relationship between cultural literacy and tolerance attitudes of elementary school students. The questionnaire underwent content validation by three independent experts—a social studies educator, a specialist in multicultural education, and a linguistics expert—who assessed each item for relevance, clarity, and cultural appropriateness. Their feedback informed critical refinements, bolstering the instrument's validity and ensuring it aligns with the Indonesian primary school context.

Population and Sample

The study population comprised all Grade V students at Al Zahra Elementary School (N = 90). Because this total falls below the 100-student threshold recommended by Suharsimi Arikunto (2021) for population research, we adopted a census-based sampling approach and included every Grade V student. This strategy eliminates ambiguity about representativeness and ensures that our results can be generalised confidently to the entire Grade V cohort at the school.

Data Collection Techniques

Data on cultural literacy and tolerance attitudes of elementary school students were collected using a questionnaire on a Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). According to Garcia-Mila et al. (2021), cultural literacy indicators include tolerance, inclusion, and empathy. Tolerance attitudes were also assessed using a questionnaire that measured students' tolerance attitudes, including indicators such as respecting the rights of others, obeying rules, showing respect for others, having a caring attitude, and being kind (Nurasiah et al., 2022). The data in this study was collected by filling out a questionnaire consisting of 15 statements for cultural literacy and 20 for



tolerance. The questionnaire was compiled using the Likert scale to determine students' responses to cultural literacy questionnaires and tolerance attitudes. This research instrument was validated through a content validity test by experts and an empirical validity test (item-total correlation), and its reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Indicators of cultural literacy and tolerance of elementary school students can be seen in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Indicators of Cultural Literacy and Tolerance

Variables	Indicators
Cultural Literacy	Tolerance Inclusion Empathy
Tolerance	Respect for the rights of others Obey the rules Respect for others Have a good attitude

Data Analysis Techniques

The data on elementary school students' cultural literacy and tolerance attitudes in this article are analysed using normality test stages, including the Kolmogorov-Smirnov or Shapiro-Wilk formula. Then, a linearity test is conducted to verify the linear relationship between the variables. After determining the normality and linearity of the data, the next stage is to conduct a correlation test using the Pearson Product Moment formula (if the data is normal) or the Spearman Rank correlation (if the data is non-normal).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Reliability Validity Test

The data reliability test compared Cronbach's alpha value with the significant level used (Taber, 2018). The normality test results for the data in this study are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Test Reliability data

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.848	.842	20

Based on the data processing results in Table 2 above, a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.848 was obtained for 20 statement items. This value indicates that the instrument has an excellent level of reliability. According to Hair et al. (2021), Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.70 are considered adequate, while values above 0.80 indicate high reliability and strong internal consistency. Additionally, Cronbach's Alpha value based on standardised items is 0.842, indicating stable consistency between items after standardisation. This



indicates that each item in the instrument contributes consistently to measuring the construct in question. Thus, it can be concluded that the instruments used in this study possess a high level of reliability and are suitable for consistently measuring research variables. This good reliability is the basis for ensuring the validity of further analysis results.

Data Normality Test

Before conducting Pearson correlation analysis, a data normality test was performed. Normality tests are performed to ensure that the data on each variable meet the assumption of normal distribution, which is a prerequisite in parametric statistical analysis (Tsagris & Pandis, 2021). In this study, the normality test was conducted using two methods: the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests, on two main variables: *Tolerance and Cultural Literacy*. This test is essential because one of the basic assumptions of correlation analysis is that the data (especially residues) must follow a normal distribution for the test results to be validly interpreted. The test for data normality in this study is presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Data Normality Test

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Tolerance Attitude	.122	90	.002	.956	90	.004
Cultural Literacy	.088	90	.081	.965	90	.015

Lilliefors Significance Correction

Based on Table 3 above, it can be seen that the results of the data normality tests show that for the Tolerance Attitude variable, the significance values in the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and the Shapiro-Wilk test are 0.002 and 0.004, respectively. Both values are below the significance threshold of 0.05, which indicates that the data is not normally distributed. Meanwhile, for the Cultural Literacy variable, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test yielded a significance value of 0.081 (> 0.05), which technically indicates a normal distribution. However, the Shapiro-Wilk test showed a significance value of 0.015 (< 0.05), suggesting a mismatch with the normal distribution. Given that the Shapiro-Wilk test is more sensitive to data distribution in small to medium sample sizes ($n < 200$), the results of this test are used as the primary reference.

Thus, it can be concluded that the two variables do not meet the assumption of normality; therefore, the follow-up analysis in this study was carried out using a non-parametric approach to maintain the validity of the results.

Correlation Test of Cultural Literacy and Tolerance Attitudes of Elementary School Students

The results of the correlation between cultural literacy and student tolerance are presented in Table 4 below. Based on Table 4 above, the results of the Spearman's Rank correlation test show a significant positive relationship between cultural literacy and tolerance attitudes of elementary school students ($r = 0.564, p < 0.01$), which indicates that the higher the cultural literacy of students, the higher their tolerance attitudes. These findings align with the study by Dervin (2021), which emphasises that cross-cultural



understanding from an early age can foster mutual respect and reduce stereotypes between groups.

Table 4. Correlation Results of Cultural Literacy and Student Tolerance Attitudes

			Tolerance Attitude	Cultural Literacy
Spearman's rho	Tolerance Attitude	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.564**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	90	90
	Cultural Literacy	Correlation Coefficient	.564**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	90	90

The correlation data on elementary school students' cultural literacy and tolerance attitudes are also illustrated in Figure 1, a scatter plot diagram that shows the relationship between cultural literacy variables and tolerance attitudes among elementary school students, along with regression lines.

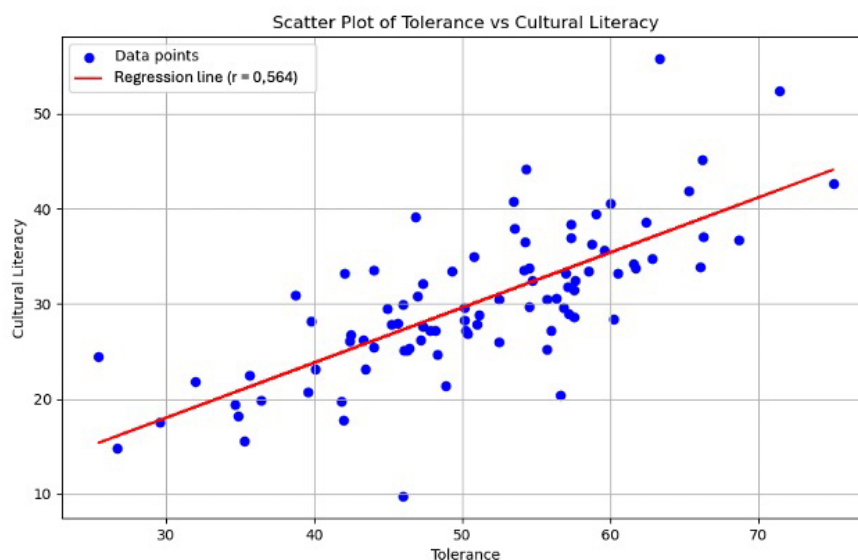


Figure 1. Scatter Diagram of the Correlation of Cultural Literacy and Tolerance Attitudes of Elementary School Students

Explanation:

- The blue dots indicate the distribution of data between the two variables.
- The red line indicates the direction of the linear relationship (regression), which supports a positive correlation with a coefficient of $r = 0.564$.
- This visualization reinforces the evidence of a strong and significant relationship between cultural literacy and tolerance attitudes of elementary school students.

The scatter plot image above illustrates the relationship between the two main variables in this study, namely Tolerance Attitudes and Cultural Literacy of Elementary School Students. Each point on the graph represents one respondent (student), with the score on the X-axis indicating Cultural Literacy and the Y-axis indicating the Student Tolerance Attitude score. The distribution of data points exhibits a pattern that tends to rise from the bottom left to the top right, indicating a positive relationship between the



two variables. This data is reinforced by a red linear regression line that shows a consistent relationship direction. The Spearman's Rank correlation coefficient, $r = 0.564$, indicated that this relationship fell into the moderate to strong category and was statistically significant ($p < 0.01$).

These findings align with the results of research by Abidin (2023), which suggests that it is crucial to strengthen students' cultural literacy from an early age, as it will impact their tolerance attitudes. In this context, cultural literacy serves as a knowledge base and a tool to shape social values and attitudes. Furthermore, research by Zamroni et al. (2024) emphasised that cultural literacy, integrated into the elementary school curriculum through multicultural education, can foster the character of inclusive students who respect differences. This shows that increasing cultural literacy directly contributes to strengthening tolerance.

The regression lines in the scatter plots also indicate that, despite individual variations, the general trend suggests that students with higher levels of cultural literacy tend to have more positive attitudes towards tolerance. This supports the theory that understanding cultural diversity can reduce prejudice and increase social empathy from an early age (Chi-Kin Lee et al., 2021). It is essential to note that these relationships are not causal; however, scatter plots provide a powerful visualisation of the relationship between the two variables. In the context of basic education, this visualisation can serve as a reflection tool for educators and policymakers to assess the effectiveness of cultural literacy programs that have been implemented.

In addition, these results also support a pedagogical approach that emphasizes intercultural understanding and character education, as suggested by various international studies in the last decade. Education that explicitly instills the values of diversity is more effective in forming positive social attitudes (Aningsih et al., 2022). Thus, this scatter plot not only illustrates statistical relationships but also represents the real impact of applying cultural literacy on the formation of tolerance attitudes of elementary school students. This visualisation provides strong empirical evidence in support of developing a diversity-based curriculum at the elementary school level.

Cultural literacy encompasses understanding, appreciating, and responding to cultural diversity in a reflective and critical manner (Dervin & Simpson, 2021). In elementary education, cultural literacy can be strengthened by integrating multicultural content into the curriculum and contextual learning activities (Dervin & Chen, 2023). This strengthening of literacy is essential because elementary school students are in a stage of social development that is heavily influenced by their learning environment. Tolerance, defined as the ability to accept and appreciate differences, is one of the essential indicators of the success of character education in elementary schools (Golubeva, 2025). Research indicates that students with a solid understanding of culture tend to be more open to differences and better equipped to establish healthy social relationships (Dervin & Chen, 2023).

Discussion

Analysis of the Correlation of Cultural Literacy and Tolerance Attitudes of Elementary School Students

As described above, a significant relationship exists between cultural literacy and tolerance attitudes among elementary school students. These findings can reinforce the



notion that enhancing cultural literacy is crucial in schools. Lipiäinen et al. (2020) also emphasise the importance of designing cultural literacy programs that are more effective in promoting the values of diversity and inclusivity in schools. Rapanta (2020) also recommends strengthening cultural literacy to promote tolerance values in heterogeneous societies.

Practically, the correlation coefficient of $r = 0.564$ ($R^2 = 56.4\%$) suggests that more than half of the variability of students' tolerant attitudes can be explained by their level of cultural literacy. This emphasizes the importance of designing a thematic curriculum incorporating cultural literacy modules—e.g. local cultural projects, folklore, and intergroup dialogue—as an integral part of learning. In the context of teacher training, these outcomes demand professional workshops that equip educators with methods to facilitate immersive cultural experiences and critical discussions about diversity. By integrating these findings into learning practices in Indonesian elementary schools, Pancasila values can be concretely realized through classroom activities that strengthen empathy, reduce stereotypes, and build inclusive attitudes according to national education standards.

Ajayi (2025) stated that teachers must integrate cultural values into the learning process to make it more meaningful. The importance of integrating and instilling cultural literacy in students will strengthen their identity, behaviour, and loyalty to their country (Hodgson & Harris, 2022; Abdallah & Alkaabi, 2023; Maulana et al., 2024). Therefore, strengthening cultural literacy must be carried out thoughtfully and sustainably by involving all components of schools, families, and communities with different socio-religious backgrounds (Iasha et al., 2022).

The concept of cultural literacy is considered value-based knowledge, which responds to the requirements of sustainable societal coexistence (Kobakhidze, 2021). In the Indonesian context, understanding cultural literacy is expected to strengthen the values of Pancasila and foster the spirit of nationalism among the younger generation. A good understanding of cultural literacy can influence the attitude of nationalism in elementary school students (Setemen et al., 2023).

The Strategies to Strengthen Cultural Literacy in Learning in Elementary Schools

Cultural literacy can be strengthened in various ways, including the effective use of learning media (Maulana et al., 2024). Then, Setemen (2023) implemented a blended multicultural learning approach to improve cultural literacy and positively impact elementary school students' tolerance attitudes.

In addition, according to Shliakhovchuk (2021), schools need to respond to the urgent need for a cultural literacy model that is relevant to students' lives in a world of VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity). Teachers must also continually improve their cultural skills and literacy, as this will impact their students' knowledge and attitudes (Hodgson & Harris, 2022). In line with Hodgson and Harris, Tran and Bui (2023) stated that schools must provide learning experiences to students in three key areas: curriculum-specific knowledge and skills, soft skills, and cultural literacy.

Meanwhile, Hume (2024) argues that improving cultural literacy can be achieved through an arts approach. According to Hume, everyone has an equal interest in understanding each other, and one of the mediums is done with art. Maine et al. (2019) used a dialogical model to develop students' cultural literacy. Through the dialogical



model, individuals can actively interact and understand each other's cultural identities, acknowledging cultural differences with others. In line with Maine et al., Rapanta and Trovão (2020) also argue that cultural literacy is not only about the knowledge aspect, but rather a much broader dynamic process involving students in constructive dialogue with others from different cultural backgrounds. Still related to the dialogical approach, Kobakhidze (2021) also stated that cultural literacy is formed by combining the competencies of individuals from diverse cultures to create their identities through social interaction, prioritising respect for others. García Ochoa & McDonald (2019) also stated that the primary goal of cultural literacy is to teach students how to understand differences and adapt to new situations that may be unfamiliar or different from those they have experienced before.

Cultural literacy refers to the knowledge, contributions, and perspectives of a group of people from diverse cultures. Cultural literacy can be developed through reading, writing, and other relevant activities (Shliakhovchuk, 2021). Shliakhovchuk further added that, on an individual level, researchers say that cultural literacy can enhance one's communication with people from diverse backgrounds.

Apart from the approaches conveyed by several researchers above, Dervin (2023) also stated that the pedagogical approach used by teachers influences the relationship between cultural literacy and tolerance attitudes. Teachers who apply an intercultural approach to learning tend to foster a tolerant attitude among students more successfully. Dervin's view shows the importance of teacher training in multicultural and intercultural education. In addition, an inclusive and diverse school social environment also strengthens the relationship between cultural literacy and tolerance (Hanik et al., 2025). Schools that encourage interaction between students from different backgrounds can create a safe learning environment and support students' social-emotional development, including the development of tolerant attitudes (Cook et al., 2022).

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding : The results of the correlation test, which was complemented by a scatter plot image on the relationship between the two main variables in this study, namely the Attitude of Tolerance and Cultural Literacy of Elementary School Students, showed a pattern that tended to rise from the bottom left to the upper right, which indicated a positive relationship between the two variables. This is reinforced by a red linear regression line that indicates a consistent direction of the relationship. The Spearman's Rank correlation coefficient of $r = 0.564$ suggested that this relationship fell into the moderate to strong category and was statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). The results of this correlation show that increasing cultural literacy directly contributes to strengthening the tolerance attitude of elementary schools. In light of our moderate-to-strong correlation ($r = 0.564$) demonstrating that cultural literacy significantly enhances tolerance attitudes among elementary students, we recommend embedding structured cultural literacy modules into the core curriculum – incorporating local folklore analysis, intercultural dialogues, and contextual case studies – while simultaneously investing in targeted professional development in critical cultural pedagogy to equip teachers with the skills to design, facilitate, and assess these interventions. Complementing this, schools should implement dialogical learning experiences, such as teacher-guided discussions and role-plays, that prompt students to reflect on and challenge cultural stereotypes



actively. By integrating these empirically grounded strategies, Indonesian elementary schools can operationalize the link between cultural literacy and tolerance, fostering more profound empathy and inclusive behaviours in their learners. **Implications:** Systematic integration of cultural literacy into the thematic curriculum of elementary schools can effectively foster students' empathy and appreciation for diversity. Creating dialogue spaces and cross-cultural activities in elementary schools is needed to strengthen students' attitudes of tolerance and inclusivity in a real way. **Research Limitations:** The respondents in this article only included 90 students from one primary school, so the results could not be generalized widely. In addition, closed questionnaire instruments and quantitative approaches do not capture the nuances of students' experiences and motivations. **Further Research:** (1) Apply qualitative or mixed methods to investigate students' perspectives. (2) The application of cultural literacy in a diverse sample of schools and regions will be tested to strengthen external validity. (3) Employ experimental or quasi-experimental designs—such as randomized controlled trials or matched-group studies—to assess the causal impact of specific cultural literacy interventions (e.g., culture-based modules, storytelling workshops) on developing students' tolerance over time. (4) Conduct longitudinal Research to track how sustained exposure to cultural literacy activities influences tolerance trajectories from lower to upper elementary grades.

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