

## The Role of Self-Compassion on Muslim Students' Altruistic Behavior during COVID-19 Pandemic

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**Abstract.** Large-Scale Social Restrictions in Indonesia during the COVID-19 pandemic caused a lack of social contact, thereby limiting individuals from providing direct assistance to others. Conversely, someone who has self-compassion is indicated to have good altruistic behavior. The present study aims to investigate the correlation between self-compassion and altruistic behavior among students during the Large-Scale Social Restrictions in Indonesia caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This research employed an incidental sampling technique, with 400 college students. The participants comprised 76 men and 324 women, aged between 18 and 25 years. The study utilized the altruism scale (20 items;  $\alpha = 0.867$ ) and the self-compassion scale (23 items;  $\alpha = 0.892$ ) to measure self-compassion and altruistic behavior, respectively. The Spearman rank correlation technique was employed to test the hypothesis, which resulted in a correlation coefficient of 0.254 with  $p = 0.001$  ( $p < 0.05$ ). The research findings indicate a positive and significant relationship between self-compassion and altruism among students during the pandemic. Specifically, the higher the level of self-compassion, the higher the altruistic behavior. These results suggest that fostering self-compassion in individuals may lead to greater social benefits, such as encouraging positive social habits.

**Keywords:** Altruism, College students, Pandemic, Self-compassion

**Abstrak.** Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar di Indonesia pada masa pandemi COVID-19 menyebabkan kurangnya kontak sosial sehingga membatasi individu untuk memberikan bantuan langsung kepada orang lain. Di sisi lain, seseorang yang memiliki *self-compassion* digambarkan dapat memiliki perilaku altruisme yang baik. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui hubungan antara *self-compassion* dengan perilaku altruisme pada mahasiswa di masa pandemi COVID-19. Penelitian ini menggunakan insidental sampling dengan responden sejumlah 400 mahasiswa. Instrumen yang digunakan adalah skala altruisme ( $\alpha = 0,867$ ) dan skala *self-compassion* ( $\alpha = 0,892$ ). Uji hipotesis menggunakan teknik korelasi rank spearman menunjukkan koefisien korelasi sebesar 0,254 dengan  $p = 0,000$  ( $p < 0,05$ ). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa terdapat hubungan yang positif dan signifikan antara *self-compassion* dengan perilaku altruisme pada mahasiswa di masa pandemi COVID-19. Semakin tinggi *self-compassion* maka semakin tinggi pula perilaku altruisme. Implikasi dari penelitian ini adalah individu dapat memiliki kesadaran *self-compassion* yang baik sehingga dapat bermanfaat lebih luas bagi masyarakat mengenai kebiasaan sosial yang positif.

**Kata kunci:** Altruisme, Mahasiswa, Pandemi, *Self-compassion*

The global community was shocked by the COVID-19 pandemic, which began at the end of 2019. COVID-19 is an infectious disease that affects the human respiratory system and is caused by a type of coronavirus, a new virus discovered in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. Approximately one in five people infected with COVID-19 is seriously ill and has difficulty breathing (World Health Organization, 2019). The implementation of government regulations aimed at curtailing the spread of COVID-19 has led to a restriction of all community activities, and all activities are currently being carried out from home, such as studying, working, and worshipping. This affects not only the general population but also students and college students who are now required to pursue online distance learning. The absence of human-environment interaction leads to a dearth of social interaction between individuals, and it is inconceivable to isolate human behavior from the practice of assisting one another. By nature, humans tend to connect with others and engage in social activities, including assisting those experiencing disasters or difficulties. This reflects the principles of altruism and sense of social care in human interactions (Aronson et al., 2018).

Data from the World Giving Index 2021 shows that Indonesia is ranked as the most generous country in the world. This significant increase occurred despite the COVID-19 pandemic compared to 2018. These results illustrate that around eight out of ten Indonesian citizens are active in donation activities, and volunteerism in Indonesia was found to be three times higher than the global average (Charities Aid Foundation 2021). The data prove that Indonesia is a country that upholds a culture of helping behaviours. Masitoh and Fitriyana (2021) revealed that the attitude of empathy-altruism is quite strong in Indonesian society.

In overcoming various challenges, such as a pandemic, tolerance and empathy have a positive impact on a country's progress. This is an important step in creating good citizens who support each other and foster unity and oneness when facing difficult times, such as a pandemic, to ensure the continuity of life together in society, nation, and state (Izzati, 2021). Taylor refers to the behavior of helping others without demanding anything in return as altruistic behavior, in which the helper helps others without expecting profit (Sa'adah & Rahman, 2015). According to Byrne (1996), altruism is a special form of behavioral adjustment that aims to benefit others, usually to the detriment of oneself, and is motivated primarily by the desire to increase the welfare of others without expecting anything in return.

According to Cohen (In Sampson, 1976), there are three aspects of altruism: empathy, willingness to give, and volunteerism. Empathy is a person's ability to feel the feelings experienced by others, the desire to give is to sincerely provide treatment to help others, and volunteering is an action taken only for the benefit of others without expecting anything in return. A person is said to have altruistic behavior if he meets criteria such as helping others, which comes from empathy and creates a desire to give. Actions taken when giving help are voluntary, without coercion, and can benefit the person being helped (Taufik 2012).

Low levels of altruistic behavior during a pandemic are complex and can be influenced by various factors including social and mental health. Dong and Bouey (2020) explained that the COVID-19 pandemic poses a global health risk. Most people perceive the threat of this virus, giving rise to widespread fear and fear-fueled behavior. Additionally, people at high risk are more likely to show symptoms of anxiety and depression. This is related to the results of Feng et al. (2020) on students in China, proving that the pandemic has influenced behavioural altruism in exposure altruism associated with enhanced anxiety and symptoms of depression. Individuals with high altruism have greater negative effects than those with low altruism, thereby indirectly increasing their anxiety and depressive symptoms.

Altruistic behavior can be carried out at all levels of society, including college students. College students are individuals studying at tertiary institutions between the ages of 18 and 25 and are in the early adulthood phase. The emerging adulthood stage represents a transitory period, characterized by the shift from adolescence to adulthood, during which individuals are no longer considered as teenagers but are yet to be classified as early adults (Al Kahfi & Hamidah, 2017). High altruism in students during the pandemic is important because it contributes to mental and emotional well-being and can help the wider community. Hanum and Thamrin (2023) explained that altruistic behavior has a significant influence on happiness. The study by Naímah and Septiningsih (2017) has further validated the notion that happiness encompasses the general scope of positive emotional experiences in an individual's life. It has been observed that when an individual experiences such positive emotions, they are more likely to engage in virtuous conduct, such as altruism.

Altruistic behavior in students can be influenced by self-compassion. This is evidenced by research conducted by Rahma Dewi et al. (2015), who proved that self-compassion makes an effective contribution of 9.7% to altruism. In line with Dewi and Hidayati (2015), self-

compassion can be interpreted as an individual's ability to understand and realize that he can survive the difficulties he faces and then make these difficulties positive.

Longe et al. (2010) discovered that encouraging individuals to cultivate self-compassion elicits neural activity akin to empathy toward others. This research indicates that the inclination to show concern in response to affliction is a shared process applied both to oneself and others, thereby underscoring the interdependence of self-compassion and other-oriented concern. There was a study conducted by K. D. Neff & Pommier (2013) which showed that there is a different group found *self-compassion* correlated with humanity, empathy, and altruism. Thus, *self-compassion* and behavioral altruism have proven their attachment.

According to Neff (2011), self-compassion can provide kindness and understanding to oneself when experiencing failure or making mistakes, but not judging by excessive self-criticism of the weaknesses and failures experienced by oneself. Having a compassionate attitude towards oneself (self-compassion) can be a starting point in increasing positive relationships with others. Neff (2003) also argues that self-compassion is a useful emotion regulation strategy when feelings of sadness or pain cannot be avoided; instead, they are maintained in awareness by self-kindness, common humanity, and concern.

Improving student self-compassion is very important because it can affect the dimensions of individual quality of life, one of which is helping each other. Research by Kawitri et al., (2020) shows that there is an effect of self-compassion on improving various domains of quality of life in the health sector, indicating the importance of developing a self-compassion attitude in orphanage youth to improve their quality of life. Self-compassion had a significant effect on the quality of life of orphanage adolescents.

In various religions, teachings about acts of altruism are always conveyed; thus, so that when viewed from a theological perspective, altruistic behavior is an action influenced by a divine call (Rohmah & Fanani, 2021). In Islam, behavior altruism is recommended: In Surah Al Maidah verse 2, "*Help you all in virtue and piety, do not help in sin and enmity*" (QS. Al-Maidah: 2). This verse teaches the importance of action altruism in Islam, especially in the context of virtue and piety. An action sort can help reduce the burden and suffering of others. Rasulullah SAW also provided an example of altruistic behavior. One of the relevant hadiths is the Hadith narrated by al-Bukhari and Muslim, "*Whoever does not love others, Allah will*

*not love him.*" (HR. al-Bukhari and Muslim). This hadith emphasizes the importance of giving love, caring, and assistance to others as part of the principle of altruism in Islam.

Understanding altruism in an Islamic context is highly relevant for State Islamic University (UIN) students. Students play an important role as drivers of social change in society. Fuadah (2021) shows that the value of altruism in Indonesian society is still well maintained and explored through the existence of several philanthropic programs and practices carried out by a group of UIN students who are members of an organization. By understanding and applying the principles of altruism in everyday life, they have the potential to become role models and pioneers in their efforts to build a better society in accordance with Islamic values. Altruism can also strengthen social relations among students, encourage cooperation, and create a harmonious campus environment in accordance with Islamic principles. Therefore, understanding the concept of altruism from an Islamic perspective, which is supported by verses and hadith, can provide a solid moral foundation for UIN students to form their Islamic personality and make positive contributions to society.

This study aims to empirically determine the relationship between self-compassion and altruistic behavior in students during the COVID-19 pandemic. During difficult period such as the pandemic COVID-19, it is necessary to develop a caring attitude towards others to assist others in reducing some of the burdens of their lives, which can then strengthen social relations between those who give and those who receive and increase the level of happiness (Salasiah et al., 2020). The central hypothesis of this research is that there a positive correlation between self-compassion and altruistic action in students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, individuals who exhibit higher levels of self-compassion tend to demonstrate more altruistic behavior, whereas those with lower levels of self-compassion are less likely to engage in altruistic actions.

## Method

### *Variable Identification*

This study examines the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The dependent variable was altruism, and the independent variable was *self-compassion*. Altruism is an act performed voluntarily to help others without expecting anything in return. According to Cohen (In Sampson, 1976), altruism encompasses empathy,

a desire to give, and volunteering. The empathy aspect refers to the capacity to comprehend the feelings of others. The desire aspect pertains to individuals who genuinely offer aid to fulfil the needs of others. Temporary volunteering is characterized by an action performed solely for the benefit of others, with no expectation of reward.

Self-compassion can be defined as a disposition towards self-kindness and empathy when encountering difficulties or challenges, such as sadness, disappointment, and distress. According to Neff (2003), self-compassion encompasses aspects of self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. Aspect self-kindness is shown by an attitude friendly, gentle, understanding, and full of support towards oneself. Common humanity is demonstrated through the realized experience of a universal man, which includes suffering, failure, and error. The art of temporary mindfulness involves maintaining a centered state of mind in circumstances that elicit stress or distress.

### ***Research Instruments***

The Scale of Altruism is utilized to measure altruism, which is a modified version of Holivah (2020). Additionally, the Self-compassion Scale (SCS) is used to assess aspects of self-compassion, referring to the work of K. D. Neff (2003). The scale is subjected to validity testing before trials take place, and subsequently undergoes item selection and reliability testing. Content validity was tested using Aiken's *V* with five *expert judgments* and five categories of assessment. Aiken's *V* calculation results indicate that the value of *V* on the Altruism Scale item is the lowest at 0.65 and the highest at 0.90, while the temporary value of *V* on the Self-Compassion Scale item is the lowest at 0.80 and the highest at 0.90, suggesting that all items are suitable for research purposes.

The results of trials ( $n = 60$ ) demonstrated the effectiveness of 20 of the 24 items on the Altruism scale, while four items were deemed invalid and were subsequently removed from further data collection. The discrimination power coefficient of altruism ranged from 0.197 to 0.616. On the Self-Compassion Scale (SCS), 3 items were removed due to their low discrimination coefficient (0.190-0.642). On the altruism scale, there were 20 valid items ( $\alpha = 0.867$ ), and on the self-compassion scale, there were 23 valid items ( $\alpha = 0.892$ ). The responses to the scale were categorized into five classifications: Very Appropriate (SS), Appropriate (S), Neutral (N), Not Appropriate (TS), and Very Inappropriate (STS).

### ***Research Subjects***

Population in this research is students in Faculty of Ushuluddin and Dakwah, UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta, comprising a total of 3,551 actively enrolled students. The sample was collected through incidental sampling by means of an online survey distributed via Google Forms. This study involved 400 active students, ranging in age from 18 to 25 years. The determination of the sample size was undertaken in accordance with the Slovin formula, with a significance level of 5%, resulting in a minimum required sample size of 360 respondents. Therefore, the number of respondents in the study reached the minimum required standard.

### ***Research Method***

This study used a quantitative correlational design to identify the correlation between self-compassion and altruism.

### ***Research Procedure***

The data for this research was obtained through an online survey conducted via Google Forms, which was disseminated via various social media platforms. The research survey, which was provided to participants, comprised informed consent, willingness to participate in research, identity information, and research instruments. Participation in this research was entirely voluntary, and each respondent had the option to refrain from participating or to withdraw at any time. In order to proceed with the survey, the informed consent of participants was requested, as well as their agreement to provide information about their identity and to participate in the research instrument portion of the survey.

### ***Analysis Techniques***

The analysis of the data was conducted through a series of assumption tests, including normality and linearity tests, as well as hypothesis testing using Spearman's rank correlation test. The data was analyzed utilizing Statistical Packages for Social Science (SPSS) 26.0 for Windows.

## Results

### *Description Research Respondents*

Table 1.  
*Demographic Respondents*

Demographics		Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>	Man	76	19
	Woman	324	81
<b>Study program</b>	Islamic Aqidah and Philosophy	10	2,5
	Science of the Qur'an and its Tafsir	6	1.5
	Da'wah Management	6	1.5
	Sufism and Psychotherapy	33	8,2
	Islamic Guidance and Counseling	49	12,3
	Islamic Communication and Broadcasting	17	4,2
	Islamic Psychology	279	69.8
	<b>Age</b>	18 years	28
	19 years old	94	23.5
	20 years	107	26,8
	21 years	95	23,7
	22 years	60	15
	23 years	10	2,5
	24 years old	4	1
	25 years	2	0.5

Based on Table 1, the findings of this study show the demographic distribution of each respondent, such as gender, study program origin, and age. All respondents were students from the Faculty of Ushuluddin and Da'wah (FUD) UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta who came from various study programs. Based on the results of the data obtained, it can be seen that the majority of respondents who filled out the questionnaire came from the Islamic Psychology study program (69.8%) and respondents who filled out the questionnaire at least came from the Al-Qur'an and Tafsir study program (1.5%) and Da'wah Management (1.5%). The research results indicate that the majority of respondents were between the ages of 21 and 20 (26.8%), while only a small percentage of respondents were aged 25 and above (0.5%).

Table 2.  
*Description of Research Variable Data*

	N	Mean	Min	Max	SD
<b>Altruism</b>	400	60	20	100	13,33
<b>Self-compassion</b>	400	69	23	115	15,33



Table 3.  
*Categorization Variable Study*

	<b>Category</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Altruism</b>	High	245	61.3
	Moderate	152	38
	Low	3	8
<b>Self-compassion</b>	High	97	24.3
	Moderate	291	72.8
	Low	12	3

#### *Research Variable Categorization*

Based on the data obtained from the altruism scale and the self-compassion scale, used to describe the research results, as presented in Table 2, the foundation for the categorization of research data. As depicted in Table 3, the majority of respondents, 245 students, representing 61.3%, displayed high altruism behavior. Furthermore, 152 students, constituting 38% of the respondents, demonstrated moderate altruism, while only 3 students, corresponding to 8%, exhibited low altruism. In terms of self-compassion, the results revealed that the majority of responded have moderate self-compassion, with 291 students, constituting 72.8% of the respondents, demonstrating such trait. Additionally, 97 students, accounting for 24.3% of the respondents, displayed high self-compassion, while 12 students, corresponding to 3%, exhibited low self-compassion.

#### *Test Assumptions*

Before hypothesis testing, the test assumptions were made. In this study, the assumptions consisted of a normality test and a linearity test. The results showed that the data were not normally distributed for both altruism ( $p < 0.05$ ) and self-compassion ( $p=0.033$ ). As a result, the Spearman rank test was employed for the correlation analysis.

#### *Hypothesis Test*

Table 4.  
*Hypothesis test result*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Correlation coefficient</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
<i>Self-compassion</i> Altruism	0.254	0.000

Table 4 displays the results of the Spearman Rank correlation analysis, which indicates a correlation coefficient of 0.254 and a significance level of  $p=0.000$  ( $p<0.05$ ). These findings suggest that there exists a positive and statistically significant relationship between self-compassion and altruistic behavior. As the level of self-compassion increases, the level of altruistic behavior also increases. Conversely, as the level of self-compassion decreases, the level of altruistic behavior decreases. These findings support the hypothesis that there is an association between self-compassion and altruistic behavior in students.

### **Discussion**

This study found a positive and significant relationship between self-compassion and altruistic behavior during the COVID-19 pandemic. This indicates that self-compassion has the potential to be a key factor in triggering altruistic behavior. Those possessing high degrees of self-compassion are more inclined to display solidarity by offering support, aiding others, and engaging in altruistic actions that aim to mitigate the effects of the pandemic.

Self-compassion includes a deep understanding of one's feelings and difficulties. When people have self-compassion, they tend to have greater sensitivity to others' feelings and a better ability to understand the suffering of others. This can reinforce empathy, which is an important component of altruistic behavior. During a pandemic, strong empathy for the suffering of others can encourage altruistic actions such as assisting those affected.

The results of this study support the research conducted by Dewi et al. (2015) with different subjects. This research suggests that there is a positive and significant relationship between *self-compassion* and altruistic behavior among inpatient nurses at the Salatiga City Regional Hospital. Rahayu et al. (2019) found that low self-compassion is associated with low altruism, indicating that individuals with a lack of self-compassion may be less likely to exhibit prosocial behavior and may instead engage in negative and aggressive actions.

The outbreak of the pandemic has brought various physical and mental challenges. People with high levels of self-compassion may be better able to understand their limitations, including the levels of stress and fatigue they experience. They can also better understand the limitations of others, such as those experienced by individuals who have been economically or health-impacted by the pandemic. This can motivate them to offer help or support to those in need.

In general, altruism can be interpreted as an individual who helps voluntarily without expecting anything in return and solely for the good of the person being helped. Sarwono & Meinarno (2009) suggested that the factors that influence altruistic behavior include two factors, namely internal factors and external factors. Regarding this research, the researcher chose one element of internal factors, nature, with an emphasis on self-compassion. According to Neff (2003), the components of self-compassion include self-kindness, common humanity, and concern.

Self-kindness is an individual's ability to understand and accept himself as he is, provide tenderness, and not hurt or judge himself or herself. This can be seen when the subject is facing difficult times, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic, and when individuals can understand themselves well. Baron and Byrne (2005) suggested that someone with a positive mood tends to help others easily. The act of helping others is part of altruism.

Common humanity is a component of how much a person can appreciate differences in other people's thoughts, feelings, and behavior. Neff (2003) states that with the same humanity, a person can realize himself as a human being who is very limited and far from perfection, so that a person will admit that every experience has failures as well as successes. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the lives of individuals across the globe, and its effects are not limited to one's own experience. In fact, it is a phenomenon that is shared by the vast majority of the population, and its ramifications are a fundamental aspect of human life. This study involved assisting individuals who were in need, and the subject was motivated by the understanding that they, too, shared the same experiences as those they were helping, even though they may not have known them personally.

Mindfulness is the ability to balance the mind in stressful situations. When something painful happens, the subject tries to see the situation in a balanced manner. This shows that the subject can see things as they are, and the individual is fully aware of the current pandemic situation. In this study, the subject could prioritize helping others, even though the subject had other interests.

Research on self-compassion in Indonesia shows that individuals with self-compassion produce personalities that are psychologically more qualified. Listiyandini and Febrinabilah (2016) found that self-compassion is positively correlated with resilience in former drug addicts. Rananto and Hidayati (2017) showed a negative and significant relationship between

self-compassion and procrastination among high school students. Setyawan (2018) found that self-compassion with resilience has a positive and significant correlation with students working on their thesis. The study conducted by Satwika et al., (2021) revealed a significant correlation between family emotional support and peer emotional support, and the level of self-compassion demonstrated by students who were writing their thesis during the pandemic.

Based on the results of the categorization of altruistic behavior data on students, the percentage of students who had high altruistic behavior was 61.3%, the moderate category was 38%, and the low category was 8%. From these data, it can be concluded that in this study, the dominant subjects were those with high altruism categories. Even though a high number of students fall into the high altruism category, researchers cannot rule out some student subjects with medium and low categorization. Approximately 8% of the students demonstrated low levels of altruistic behavior. These data indicate that there may still be some students who have not achieved all aspects of altruistic behavior, such as empathy, willingness to give, and volunteerism.

Meanwhile, for the categorization of self-compassion data, of all research subjects, 24.3% of students had high scores, 72.8% of students had medium scores, and 3% of students had low self-compassion scores. The subject's level of self-compassion can be influenced by various factors, including gender, personality, culture, age, and family conditions (KD Neff, 2003).

The Quran covers every aspect of human life as a perfect source of guidance for Muslims. Altruism in Islam is defined as *alt-tsar*, which means placing others first, including noble characters. Allah SWT likes servants, who always try to help their brothers in need. Allah will help everyone who helps his brother, even in a precarious and narrow situation. As in the holy book of the Qur'an, Allah's command regarding altruistic behavior is mentioned in QS Al-Ma'idah verse 2 which commands man to always do deeds to help in matters of virtue and piety. Apart from that, there is a hadith narrated by Imam Ath-Thabrani that Rasulullah SAW said, '*The best people are those who are most beneficial to others.*' The holy verses of the Qur'an and hadith explain how important altruistic behavior encourages every human being to engage in it. The priority for someone who has *alt-tsar* as a noble character in his life is that he will always be loved by Allah, and Allah will help when his servants face difficulties,

apart from that he will also be loved by fellow humans and their affairs, and he will be facilitated and free from difficulties in the future.

The implication of this research is that each individual should aware that altruistic behavior must be carried out to ease the burden on others in need. This can be done by conducting student training program activities to increase students 'self-compassion and altruistic behavior. The more experience and knowledge students have, the more each individual will understand the important values contained in altruistic behavior. In addition, individuals can have good self-compassion awareness, so that they can provide wider benefits to society regarding positive social habits.

The limitation of this research is that the distribution of the number of subjects is less than proportional, so the generalization of the research results is less broad. On the other hand, the presentation of the scale of research conducted using the *Google application form* for the reason that it is more practical and efficient in a pandemic situation, but there is a possibility that the research sample did not fill out the measuring instrument properly, which has the potential to give rise to measurement bias. This study demonstrated that the data were not normally distributed. Researchers have assumed that this occurs because of *outliers*. *Outliers* are data with extreme scores, both high and low. This is likely due to the lack of full involvement of the subjects in filling out the research scale.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that there is a positive and significant relationship between self-compassion and altruistic behavior among students during the COVID-19 pandemic. The higher the self-compassion, the higher the student's altruistic behavior. The results of this study strengthen those of previous research on self-compassion related to altruistic behavior.

### *Suggestion*

Suggestions for students are expected to increase self-compassion, which has the potential to give rise to altruistic behavior so that students can achieve optimal self-quality. Future researchers should be able to expand and increase research subjects and develop research on altruism by using other factors that influence altruistic behavior, such as situational factors, bystanders, attractiveness, attribution to victims, modeling, time pressure,

mood and the nature of needs, as well as demographic factors that were not involved in this research, namely gender, place of residence, and education. This study aimed to add references related to psychological research in the context of social psychology.

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