



Recontextualizing *Birr Al-Walidayn*: Parents' Ethical Responsibility in the Face of Children's Character Crises in the Digital Age

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Abstract

The rapid advancement of digital technology has had a significant impact on children's behavior and character development. This phenomenon is marked by a decline in social awareness, increased dependence on digital devices, and a reduction in the quality of social interactions in daily life. These conditions present new challenges for parents in fulfilling their responsibilities regarding their children's education and character development. This study aims to reexamine the concept of *birr al-walidayn* as an ethical foundation for understanding parental responsibilities in addressing the crisis of children's character in the digital age. This study employs a qualitative approach using content analysis, based on a review of primary sources namely the Quran and hadith and supported by relevant scholarly literature on parenting and character education. The results indicate that *birr al-walidayn* is not only understood as a child's obligation toward parents but also encompasses parents' ethical responsibility to educate, guide, and shape their children's character. This study offers a conceptual contribution by providing a broader interpretation of *birr al-walidayn*, emphasizing the importance of integrating Islamic values and digital literacy into contemporary parenting practices. Therefore, parents play a crucial role in raising children who are responsible, possess moral integrity, and are able to navigate technological advancements wisely. A reinterpretation of *birr al-walidayn* can serve as a relevant ethical framework for strengthening children's character education in the digital age.

INTRODUCTION

Advances in digital technology have transformed various aspects of human life, including patterns of social interaction, the educational process, and children's character development. The advent of the internet, social media, and various digital devices has made it easier to access information and communicate without the constraints of time and space. Children are the group most closely affected by these developments because, from an early age, they have become accustomed to using smartphones, tablets, and various digital applications (Kalyani, 2024; Rifai et al., 2025).

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On the one hand, technology offers benefits such as increased access to learning resources, the development of creativity, and the broadening of horizons. On the other hand, uncontrolled use of technology also raises various issues related to children's moral and character development. Phenomena such as a decline in social awareness, a reduction in the frequency of face-to-face interactions, increasing dependence on electronic devices, and weakened self-control have become challenges that are increasingly common in children's lives in the digital age (Fatmawati & Sholikin, 2019).

The impact of digital technology on children's character development cannot be separated from the family environment as the first and primary setting for education. Various studies show that excessive use of digital media can affect children's communication skills, empathy, and social-emotional development. Children tend to spend more time interacting with digital devices than with their immediate social environment, which has the potential to hinder their ability to build healthy social relationships. This situation becomes even more complex when some parents lack sufficient digital literacy to keep up with the rapid pace of technological advancement. As a result, supervision of children's digital activities becomes less effective, opening the door to various negative behaviors that can hinder the development of positive character traits (Hatiah & Muslimah, 2024; Santoso et al., 2025).

In response to this situation, various parenting approaches have been proposed as solutions. The concept of "smart parenting" emphasizes the importance of parents' active involvement in guiding their children's use of technology through open communication, appropriate supervision, and fostering positive behaviors within the family environment (Parwis et al., 2023). Other research on digital parenting also indicates that parents' digital literacy plays a significant role in helping children use technology in a healthy and responsible manner (Salwa & Aini, 2023). Furthermore, studies on character education based on Islamic values affirm that setting a good example, fostering noble moral character, and engaging in wise communication are crucial factors in shaping children's character amid the rapid advancement of technology (Pratiwi et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, these various studies generally still focus on the technical and practical aspects of parenting. Research linking the issue of a crisis of character among children in the digital age to the concept of Islamic ethics particularly *birr al-walidayn* remains relatively limited. Until now, *birr al-walidayn* has mostly been understood as a child's obligation to respect and be dutiful to their parents. In fact, substantively, this concept also encompasses the moral responsibility of parents to provide education, protection, affection, and a positive example to their children. Thus, there is an area of study that has not been extensively explored: how *birr al-walidayn* can be recontextualized as an ethical foundation for understanding parents' responsibilities in shaping their children's character in the digital age (Ilmi & Siregar, 2024).

Based on the above discussion, this study offers a novel approach in the form of a reinterpretation of the concept of *birr al-walidayn* as an ethical framework that positions parents not only as those entitled to receive respect from their children, but also as those who bear a moral responsibility to comprehensively shape their children's character. This approach seeks to integrate Islamic values with the challenges of contemporary parenting so that the concept of *birr al-walidayn* is not only understood in its normative dimension but can also be applied contextually in addressing various issues arising from the development of digital technology.

Based on this background, this study aims to answer several key questions: What is the concept of *birr al-walidayn* from an Islamic perspective? What forms does the crisis of character among children take in the digital age? What are the ethical

responsibilities of parents in addressing this situation? And how can the recontextualization of *birr al-walidayn* be applied to parenting practices in the digital age? This study is based on the argument that the crisis in children's character is not only caused by technological development itself but is also related to the weak internalization of ethical values within the family. Therefore, the better parents' understanding and implementation of the values of *birr al-walidayn*, the greater the likelihood of children developing a responsible character, integrity, and the ability to use technology wisely.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach using content analysis. The choice of this method is based on the study's objective to explore in depth the concept of *birr al-walidayn* as an ethical responsibility of parents in addressing their children's character crises in the digital age. Content analysis is considered relevant because it can connect normative texts from the Quran and hadith with contemporary social phenomena, specifically the challenges of parenting amid the development of digital technology.

The research data sources consist of two categories. Primary data was obtained from texts of the Quran and hadith that directly discuss the values of *birr al-walidayn*. Meanwhile, secondary data came from books, scholarly articles, and research findings that examine parenting, character education, and the dynamics of digital technology development. Thus, the data used is comprehensive, covering both normative foundations and empirical studies (Anidar et al., 2026; Baroud et al., 2025; Efendi et al., 2026; Engkizar et al., 2024; 2026; Tadöl et al., 2025; Utami, 2017).

The data analysis was conducted using a descriptive-analytical approach. The stages of analysis include: i) data collection from primary and secondary sources, ii) data reduction by selecting relevant information according to categories, iii) data coding using a coding sheet, iv) interpretation of the analysis results to identify conceptual relationships between *birr al-walidayn* and parental responsibility, and v) synthesis of the analysis results into recommendations for strengthening the role of parents in addressing children's character crises in the digital age.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Concept of *Birr al-Walidayn* from an Islamic Perspective

The concept of *birr al-walidayn* is one of the fundamental teachings of Islam that governs the relationship between children and parents. Linguistically, the word *birr* means kindness, virtue, and obedience performed with complete sincerity, while *al-walidayn* refers to both parents. Thus, *birr al-walidayn* can be understood as all forms of kindness shown to both parents whether through words, deeds, or attitudes that demonstrate respect, love, and obedience. In Islamic teachings, being dutiful to one's parents holds a very high status because it is one of the most important acts of worship after faith in Allah (Ibnu Katsir, 1999).

The importance of *birr al-walidayn* is emphasized in the words of Allah SWT in Surah Al-Isra', verse 23:

وَقَضَىٰ رَبُّكَ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا إِيَّاهُ وَبِالْوَالِدَيْنِ إِحْسَانًا ۖ إِنَّمَا يُبَلِّغُنَّ عَنْكَ الْكِبَرُ أَخَذَهُمَا أَوْ كِلَهُمَا فَلَا تَقُلْ لَهُمَا أُفٍّ وَلَا تَنْهَرْهُمَا وَقُلْ لَهُمَا قَوْلًا كَرِيمًا

Meaning: *And your Lord has decreed that you not worship except Him, and to parents, good treatment. Whether one or both of them reach old age [while] with you, say not to them [so much as], "uff," and do not repel them but speak to them a noble word.* (QS. Al-Isra': 23)

This verse indicates that the obligation to be kind to one's parents is placed after the command to affirm the Oneness of Allah, the Exalted. According to Ibn

Kathir, the juxtaposition of the command to worship Allah and the command to be kind to one's parents demonstrates just how significant the status of parents is in Islam, as they are the means by which a child comes into this world and the ones who make the greatest sacrifices in the child's upbringing and development (Ibnu Katsir, 1999). The prohibition against uttering the word “uff” in this verse also demonstrates that Islam places great emphasis on respect for parents, even regarding the slightest form of speech that might hurt their feelings. Therefore, *birr al-walidayn* is not only manifested through material support but is also reflected in one's words, respectful attitude, and loving treatment.

Furthermore, M. Quraish Shihab explains that the use of the word *ihsān* in this verse implies doing good to the utmost and with sincerity, without expecting anything in return. The concept of *ihsān* indicates that the relationship between children and parents is not based solely on formal obligations but is also grounded in a deep moral and spiritual awareness (Shihab, 2016). Thus, *birr al-walidayn* is a manifestation of the values of love, respect, and responsibility that form the cornerstone of family life in Islam.

In addition to Surah Al-Isra', verse 23, the concept of *birr al-walidayn* is also explained in Surah Luqman, verse 14:

وَوَصَّيْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ بِوَالِدَيْهِ حَمَلَتْهُ أُمُّهُ وَهْنًا عَلَى وَهْنٍ وَفِصْلُہُ فِي عَامَيْنِ أَنْ اشْكُرْ لِي وَلِوَالِدَيْكَ إِلَيَّ الْمَصِيرُ

Meaning: *And We have enjoined upon man [care] for his parents. His mother carried him, [increasing her] in weakness upon weakness, and his weaning is in two years. Be grateful to Me and to your parents; to Me is the [final] destination (QS. Luqman: 14)*

This verse emphasizes that the duty to honor one's parents is inseparable from the immense sacrifices they have made, particularly a mother who carries, gives birth to, and raises a child with great patience. According to Al-Maraghi, the specific mention of a mother's struggles in this verse aims to foster a child's moral awareness so that they will always appreciate the contributions of both parents and reciprocate them with respect and love (Al-Maraghi, 1946). Therefore, *birr al-walidayn* is not only viewed as a social obligation but also as a form of gratitude to Allah the Almighty for the blessing of life bestowed through one's parents.

Nevertheless, the understanding of *birr al-walidayn* has thus far tended to focus on a child's obligations toward their parents. In fact, upon a more comprehensive examination, this concept also encompasses a reciprocal ethical dimension. Islam not only commands children to be dutiful to their parents but also obligates parents to provide their children with education, protection, and character development. This can be understood through the words of Allah SWT in Surah At-Tahrim, verse 6:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا قُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَأَهْلِيكُمْ نَارًا

Meaning: *O you who have believed, protect yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is people and stones (QS. At-Tahrim: 6)*

According to exegetes, this verse contains a command for every parent to educate, guide, and care for their family members so that they may always remain on the path pleasing to Allah SWT. This responsibility encompasses education in faith, worship, moral character, and all aspects of life that can lead children to salvation in this world and the hereafter. Thus, parents are not merely objects of respect in the concept of *birr al-walidayn*, but also agents of education who bear a great responsibility in shaping their children's character and personality (Ulwan, 2024).

A broader understanding of *birr al-walidayn* has become increasingly relevant in the context of modern life, marked by the rapid development of digital technology. In Islamic tradition, *birr al-walidayn* is not only interpreted as a child's formal obligation to be devoted to parents, but also as a value system that regulates reciprocal relationships filled with love, responsibility, and respect within the family. However, when this concept is placed in the context of today's digital society, its meaning becomes more

complex due to changes in patterns of social interaction, communication patterns, and the way families carry out their educational functions. The presence of digital technology has changed many aspects of family life, including how parents educate their children and how children respond to parental authority in everyday life. Therefore, the understanding of *birr al-walidayn* needs to be expanded so that it is not only normative but also adaptive to the dynamics of the times.

Today's parenting challenges are no longer limited to meeting children's physical needs, such as clothing, food, and formal education, but also encompass moral development, monitoring digital media use, and instilling religious values amidst the rapid flow of information. Children in the digital age grow up in a highly open environment, where access to the internet, social media, and various digital platforms can have both positive and negative impacts. While technology facilitates the acquisition of knowledge and broadens horizons, it also presents risks such as exposure to negative content, moral degradation, a culture of instant gratification, and reduced emotional interaction within the family. In this context, the role of parents is crucial, not only as providers of material needs but also as primary educators, guiding children to use technology wisely and responsibly.

Birr al-walidayn in a modern context, it can be understood as a two-way concept of family ethics. This means that not only are children required to be devoted to their parents, but parents also have a moral obligation to provide appropriate examples, guidance, and protection for their children. From this perspective, children's devotion cannot be separated from the quality of parenting provided by parents. When parents are able to create a warm, communicative family environment based on religious values, children will more easily develop attitudes of respect, obedience, and love for their parents. Conversely, parenting patterns that pay little attention to emotional and spiritual aspects can contribute to the weakening of the value of *birr al-walidayn* in children's lives.

Furthermore, the development of digital technology also demands a more thoughtful role of parental control, without being authoritarian. Supervision of gadget, social media, and digital content use must be carried out with an educational approach, not simply prohibition. Parents need to understand that today's generation of children lives in a digital ecosystem that cannot be completely avoided, so the approach used must be more focused on mentoring and fostering awareness. In this regard, open communication between parents and children is key to maintaining harmonious family relationships and strengthening the values of *birr al-walidayn*.

On the other hand, the character crisis emerging among some of today's younger generation also indicates a gap in the internalization of family values. The lack of direct interaction between parents and children due to their respective busy schedules, coupled with the dominance of technology in daily life, can weaken emotional bonds within the family. This has the potential to diminish children's respect for their parents if not balanced with strong character education from an early age. Therefore, *birr al-walidayn* must be understood as the primary foundation for building noble character in children, not only within family relationships but also in broader social life.

Furthermore, the recontextualization of *birr al-walidayn* also points to the importance of integrating religious values into family education in the digital age. Parents need to be role models in the use of technology, demonstrate wisdom in digital media, and teach ethical communication in virtual spaces. This way, children are not only taught traditional devotion but also guided to understand that devotion in the modern era can be demonstrated through respect, maintaining the family's good name on social media, and not misusing technology for things that are detrimental to themselves or others.

Recontextualization *Birr al-Walidayn* Parenting in the Digital Age

Recontextualization of the concept of *birr al-walidayn* in the digital era: it is

necessary to ensure that the values contained within remain relevant to the development of modern life. So far, *birr al-walidayn* is more commonly understood as a child's obligation to respect, obey, and be devoted to their parents. However, from an Islamic educational perspective, this concept also encompasses the responsibility of parents to provide optimal care, education, protection, and character development to their children. This responsibility is becoming increasingly important amidst the rapid development of digital technology, which impacts almost every aspect of children's lives. Therefore, parents play a role not only as providers but also as primary educators, tasked with guiding children to use technology wisely and adhere to moral values and religious teachings (Sari & Nugraha, 2023).

One of the main values that needs to be put forward in implementation *birr al-walidayn* is love (mercy). Affection is the main foundation for building a harmonious relationship between parents and children. A warm and caring relationship will create a sense of security, comfort, and trust in children. In the digital era, emotional closeness between parents and children is crucial because various digital platforms often become a place for children to escape when they feel they are not receiving enough attention in the family. Therefore, parents need to provide sufficient time to interact, listen to their children's concerns, and show concern for their children's daily activities. Through a loving relationship, children will more easily accept the direction and positive values provided by their parents (Ramadhani & Fauziah, 2022).

Besides affection, the value of responsibility (trust) is also an important element in childcare. In Islam, children are seen as a trust that must be properly cared for and educated by parents. This responsibility extends not only to meeting physical needs but also to the child's psychological, social, intellectual, and spiritual needs. Amidst the rapid flow of digital information, parents have a responsibility to ensure that their children receive a proper education and are protected from various negative influences that can hinder their character development. Therefore, parents need to be actively involved in their children's education process, including understanding their children's digital activities and providing guidance appropriate to their developmental needs (Hyoscyamina, 2011).

The next value is exemplary behavior (good deeds), which plays a significant role in shaping children's character. Children essentially learn by imitating the behavior they observe in their immediate environment, especially their parents. Therefore, parents' behavior in using digital technology will be a highly influential example for their children. When parents demonstrate a wise attitude in using social media, limit device use proportionally, and prioritize direct interaction within the family, children will tend to imitate these behaviors. Conversely, if parents themselves demonstrate an over-reliance on technology, children have the potential to develop the same habits. Thus, role modeling is one of the most effective forms of character education within the family environment (Nurhayati & Rahman, 2023).

Furthermore, the principle of fairness also needs to be applied in childcare in the digital age. Fairness, in this context, means parents' ability to balance rules and freedoms according to the child's age and maturity level. Overly lax supervision can increase a child's risk of exposure to negative content, while overly strict supervision can cause psychological stress and hinder the development of a child's independence. Therefore, parents need to implement a democratic parenting style by involving children in the process of developing rules regarding technology use. This approach will help children understand the rationale behind each rule, thus encouraging them to comply consciously and responsibly (Handayani, 2020).

Implementing these values in daily life can be done through various strategies relevant to today's digital society. One important strategy is building open communication between parents and children. Good communication allows for a more effective exchange of information, feelings, and experiences, enabling parents to

understand their children's needs and challenges. In the context of technology use, open communication also helps parents provide guidance on healthy and productive use of digital media. Furthermore, intensive communication can strengthen emotional bonds within the family, preventing children from feeling the need to seek excessive attention or recognition online (Ependi et al., 2023).

Another equally important strategy is improving parents' digital literacy. Understanding technology and digital media will help parents monitor, guide, and protect their children from the various risks inherent in the digital space. Digital literacy enables parents to recognize various forms of threats, such as cyberbullying, the spread of false information, social media addiction, and exposure to age-inappropriate content. With this knowledge, parents can carry out their parenting role more effectively and create a family environment that supports children's character development. Therefore, recontextualization *birr al-walidayn* in the digital era, not only does it emphasize moral and spiritual obligations, but it also encourages increased parental competence to be able to face the increasingly complex challenges of parenting today (Putri & Siregar, 2024).

This study also highlights the importance of combining Islamic principles with contemporary parenting techniques. Parents should explain the rationale behind each rule, rather than simply issuing commands or prohibitions. This ensures that children understand the rules (Shihab, 2016), not only outwardly but also internally. Children will use this understanding as their primary defense against the challenges of the digital age.

Table 1. Table of Implementation of Values *Birr al-Walidayn* in Parenting in the Digital Age

<i>Birr al-Walidayn</i> Value	Forms of Implementation in Parenting	Impact on Children's Character
Love (Mercy)	Love (Mercy)	Increases feelings of security, empathy, and self-confidence
Trust	Monitoring technology use and accompanying children's digital activities	Cultivating responsibility and discipline
Exemplary (<i>Uswah Hasanah</i>)	Demonstrate the wise and proportional use of technology	Forming positive habits in using digital media
Justice	Establish rules for technology use that are appropriate to the child's age and needs.	Developing an independent and responsible attitude
Deliberation	Involving children in developing rules for using technology	Increase awareness and compliance with regulations
Digital Literacy	Providing education on digital security and ethics	Helping children filter information and avoid negative influences

In addition to improving parents' digital literacy, character building for children in the digital age also requires strengthening a family culture based on Islamic values. It is the primary educational environment that has a significant influence on a child's moral development. Various studies have shown that children who grow up in families with positive communication patterns, good religious habits, and harmonious emotional relationships tend to have higher self-control abilities than children who receive less family attention. In this context, recontextualization *birr al-walidayn* is not only oriented towards vertical relationships between children and parents, but also towards creating a family environment that is capable of becoming a means of internalizing religious values in a sustainable manner.

A religious family culture can be realized through various simple activities carried

out consistently, such as performing congregational prayers, reading the Quran together, discussing moral values in daily life, and cultivating mutual respect among family members. These activities play a crucial role in character building because children learn directly through the experiences they gain within the family environment. When these values are repeatedly instilled, children will develop a stronger moral awareness, enabling them to distinguish between good and bad behavior, both in real life and in their digital activities.

Furthermore, strengthening children's character in the digital age requires a parenting approach that adapts to changing times. Traditional parenting styles that emphasize control and obedience are no longer sufficient for parents. Children of the digital generation have vast access to information, necessitating a more dialogical and participatory approach. From an Islamic perspective, this approach is exemplified in the story of Luqman, who advised his son through a wise dialogue. This educational model demonstrates that character formation is not achieved through coercion, but through continuous explanation, understanding, and habituation.

The importance of a dialogical approach is also related to children's psychological development. When children are given the opportunity to express their opinions and discuss family rules, they will feel valued and responsible for the decisions that have been mutually agreed upon. Conversely, overly authoritarian parenting styles often create resistance and encourage children to seek freedom outside parental supervision, including through the digital world. Therefore, two-way communication is one way to implement the values of justice and compassion embodied in the concept of parenting *birr al-walidayn*.

Another challenge that needs to be considered is the increasing phenomenon of the digital parenting gap, namely the gap in technological understanding between parents and children. Many parents struggle to understand the various applications, social media, and digital trends used by their children. This condition makes the supervision process less effective because parents do not fully understand their children's digital activities. Therefore, improving digital literacy is not only important for children, but also for parents as part of their parenting responsibilities. Parents need to continuously update their knowledge of technological developments to be able to provide guidance that is appropriate to their children's needs in the digital age.

Furthermore, recontextualization *birr al-walidayn* it also demands a balance between technological mastery and spiritual development. Technological advancements are inevitable and have even become a crucial part of modern life. However, technology should not be the sole source of a child's values and life orientation. Spiritual values derived from Islamic teachings must remain the primary foundation in character formation. Through a strong religious education, children will develop a moral compass that will help them make wise choices when faced with the various information and influences emanating from the digital world.

In this context, the role of parents as role models becomes increasingly important. Children not only listen to their parents' advice but also observe their behavior in daily life. Parents who balance technology use with religious activities, social interactions, and family responsibilities will provide a concrete example of how technology should be used. This kind of role model has a far greater impact than simply giving rules or prohibitions to children.

Apart from functioning as a means of character formation, recontextualization *birr al-walidayn* it can also be a preventative measure against various social problems arising from the misuse of technology. Phenomena such as gadget addiction, declining social awareness, aggressive behavior on social media, and the spread of irresponsible information can essentially be minimized if children have a strong moral foundation from an early age. Therefore, strengthening these values is crucial; *birr al-walidayn* not only provides benefits for individuals and families, but also contributes to the creation

of a more ethical society in utilizing technology.

Thus, the implementation of *birr al-walidayn* in the digital era, family education cannot be understood solely as a child's normative obligation to their parents, but rather as a comprehensive family education system. This system emphasizes the importance of compassion, responsibility, role modeling, justice, communication, and digital literacy as a complementary unit in the process of character formation in children. Through the integration of Islamic values and adequate digital competency, families can become the primary bulwark in facing the various moral challenges emerging in the digital era while preparing a generation with noble character, responsibility, and adaptability to changing times.

Overall, the results of this study indicate that recontextualization *birr al-walidayn*, as an ethical parental responsibility, is a relevant and effective approach to addressing children's character crisis in the digital age. This concept not only strengthens the spiritual dimension of parenting but also offers a useful foundation that can be applied in everyday life. Parents are expected to shape a generation that is not only intellectually intelligent but also morally and spiritually strong by combining Islamic principles with technological knowledge.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the concept *birr al-walidayn* is not only interpreted as a child's obligation to respect and be devoted to their parents, but also contains a reciprocal ethical dimension, namely the moral responsibility of parents in educating, guiding, and shaping the character of their children. In the context of the digital era, recontextualization of *birr al-walidayn*. This becomes crucial because the challenges children face are no longer limited to the physical environment but also encompass the digital space, which is rife with both positive and negative influences. Research shows that the character crisis in children in the digital era is not solely caused by technological developments, but is more influenced by weak family support, a lack of effective communication, low parental digital literacy, and the suboptimal internalization of moral and spiritual values within the family environment.

This study also found that the implementation of Islamic values such as compassion (mercy), responsibility (trust), exemplary behavior (good deeds), and fairness in parenting patterns can be an effective foundation for shaping children's character amidst the development of digital technology. The integration of Islamic values and digital literacy enables parents to play the role of primary educators, not only providing rules but also building children's moral awareness so they can use technology responsibly and wisely. The contribution of this research lies in its effort to provide a new perspective in understanding *birr al-walidayn*, namely by placing it as an ethical foundation for parenting that emphasizes the responsibility of parents in the formation of children's character. This perspective broadens the study *birr al-walidayn* which has so far focused more on children's obligations towards their parents, thus providing a conceptual contribution to the development of Islamic education studies, character education, and childcare in the digital era.

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