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Future Voices: Who is Listening

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Author FNM designed the study, performed the statistical analysis, wrote the protocol and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Author SNA managed the literature searches and edited the manuscript. Finally, both authors read the manuscript together and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Currently, for the Kenyan youth, the future seems further away than it used to be. "The journey to success feels a lot longer." The familiar goals of a job, a home and a family now feel like a big ambition, and many are afraid that they will not achieve what their parents did. The conceptualisation of the issues facing the youth aspirations in Kenya formed the basis of this study. The study established the young people's aspirations, what they think and feel is their hindrances to these aspirations and their suggestions on the way forward towards their dreams. The study was qualitative in nature, and the research design was phenomenological. The target population was the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) Candidates 2017. The study used a sample of 52 students drawn from two secondary schools in Eldoret municipality. Of the two schools, one was a public school meaning that it was government financed and the other was privately financed. The instruments used were Interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGD's). Collected data were coded into themes as follows; aspirations, hindrances and way forward. The findings established that the young people have great aspirations like being Chief executive officers of Blue Chip Companies, great performing Artist, Leaders, professionals in different fields and sports.

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Hindrances to their aspirations were: self-doubt, fear, laziness, personal abilities, procrastination, negative attitude, no recognition, financial resources and less available opportunities. The suggestions given by the participants on the way forward were majorly based on the self as the basis for achievement. Majority of the participants (98%) agreed that there is a great need for psychosocial support for the youth to achieve their aspirations. Based on these findings, it is recommended that teachers, parents and significant others be available as role models and mentors to the aspirations of the youth. Schools should also promote self-awareness as they prepare holistic individuals to provide human capital for sustainable development.

Keywords: Aspirations; dreams; hindrances; self-awareness; way forward.

ABBREVIATIONS

KCSE : Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education

ROK : Republic of Kenya

FGD : Focus Group Discussion

NCBI : National Centre for Biotechnology Information

1. INTRODUCTION

When children are young and are asked what they would wish to have in life the most likely answers are 'I would wish to have all the sweets in the world' or 'lots of toys' but as they grow older, these simple hopes and dreams grow and change with age. When children are in kindergarten and primary school, they are encouraged to dream big. Teachers and parents often ask them, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" The children at this stage of development are applauded for their brave imaginations and optimistic enthusiasm when they say, "I want to be president!" "I want to win an Olympic medal ..." ... until they enter junior high school. Then the same teachers and parents start to warn them telling the same children that they have to be sensible and practical when they select their subjects and classes. "A dream doesn't come true through magic; it takes sweat, determination, and work" This seems to concur with Donald Super self-concept theory [1] which states that individual preferences are presumed to change over time, and the making of a career choice is a continuous process. Parents and teachers encourage resilience among the children but do they take time to listen to the same children concerning their dreams? The adults especially parents believe they know what is best for their children [2]. Resilience is viewed not as a fixed and stable trait over time, but as a trait in adolescents that is liable to change. It is a dynamic process that develops from

the relationships established with the physical and social environment throughout a child's life.

In Kenya, one of the key tasks of secondary school students was cited as exploring and planning for the post-secondary career options. The role of career counsellors in schools in general has been found to include facilitation of career decision-making process through provision of careers' information, enhancing clarity of personal values, interests, skills and abilities, facilitating confidence in decision-making all of which boosts self-confidence and ability to make sound career decisions [3]. For most young adults, students, in particular, this has been found to be a daunting process. Vocational counsellors invest enormous amounts of time, energy and expertise in dispelling the mystery of career decision-making and assisting young people in career discovery [4]. The counsellors should also continue to affirm and help students to identify potential role models, with whom they can develop supportively and value-adding relationships.

The progress in career development tends to be blocked when there is a lack of information about self, the world of work (occupational information) and ways of obtaining information. Students who lack career information enter colleges, only to quickly find out that their career goals were unobtainable or unsuitable [5]. Students with an adequate amount of self-formation and occupational knowledge tend to make better decisions, whereas, those without this information by default, make poor decisions. Lack of information generally predispose one to four categories of difficulties; these include lack of knowledge about the steps involved in the decision-making process, lack of information about self, the various occupational alternatives and lack of information about the ways of obtaining additional information.

The role of mentors in career development is an important professional resource that helps mentees in filling the gaps- regarding knowledge and skills in a very practical manner. A mentor provides to a young person a pool of knowledge that could be tapped to help polish some particular key skills that are pertinent in career development [6]. The teachers and parents need to identify mentors which should involve searching or seeking out for good performers and requesting them to be mentors in given careers for the students. The mentors should have good communication skills that will be helpful in sending and receiving messages for those being mentored.

In a study conducted by Yonker et al. [7] posits that teens who require the presence of a significant adult in their lives are vulnerable to bullying more than peers who have strong adult support. Many teens who require adult support find support they crave for through participation in gangs. The teens who lack the adult support are 80 % more likely to struggle with depression and six times more likely to attempt suicide. In 2015, Harvard researchers found that every child who does well in the face of adversity has had at least one stable and committed relationship with a supportive adult. A secure attachment, the experience of positive emotions and life purpose are important in the development of resilience and in overcoming adversities to keep one's dream [8]. However, there are individual differences in sensitivity to stress, with some studies on resilience underlining the factors involved in the type of response that overcomes adversity and life problems [9]. Secondary school education in Kenya has been crowned as the final transition into adulthood, and the world of work as students begin separating from parents and exploring and defining their independence [10]. Parental aspirations and expectations can be channelled to children via strong social relationships that would play a key role in determining the children's aspirations and achievements.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Methodology

The study was guided by constructivism philosophical paradigm. Honebein [11] Describes the constructivism philosophical paradigm as an approach that asserts that people to construct their understanding and knowledge of the world through experiencing things and reflecting on

those experiences. It is based on the analogy or basis that people form or construct much of what they learn through experiences [12]. Thus, to the researchers, the youths construct meaning from the environment they belong and learning takes place. Constructivist researchers believe and propose that adults need to fully engage the student in the teaching and learning processes so that his engagement would enable the youth to individually discover knowledge and/or truth. The constructivism philosophical paradigm is associated with the qualitative research approach which was adopted by this study. The purpose of adopting the constructivism paradigm was to help in understanding the study phenomenon from the experiences of the participants using different data collecting agents as established by De Witt and Ploeg [13]. Also, the researchers constructed meanings from the phenomena under study through their own experiences and that of the participants in the study.

The target population for this qualitative study were the 2017 KCSE youths who were on the verge of completing high school and starting a new world of career development. Qualitative research was especially effective in obtaining specific information about the values, opinions, behaviours, and social contexts of the youth as far as their dreams are concerned within a modern society. Phenomenological design made an inquiry into what the youth are experiencing regarding their dreams and how they interpret those experiences. Essentially, looking for the universal nature of the youth experience as far as their dreams or aspirations was concerned.

2.2 Study Location

The study was conducted in Eldoret municipality in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya. The Eldoret municipality has a cosmopolitan population of 289 380 peoples [14]. This is due to many educational and health institutions that have attracted people across the country and even beyond the borders of Kenya. It is the second most important city in western Kenya after Kisumu and also serves as the capital of Uasin Gishu County. Lying south of the Cherangani Hills, the local elevation varies from about 2100 metres above sea level at the airport to more than 2700 metres in nearby areas (7000–9000 feet). The Eldoret town lies within Latitudes: 0°31' 13.30"N and Longitudes 35°16' 11.75" E.

2.3 Sampling Techniques

Purposive sampling technique was used to identify the form four students who were preparing for the 2017 Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education Examination (KCSE) from two different types of schools. The schools sampled were one government financed, and one privately financed and both were co-educational institutions. This group of students was found to be appropriate because they had filled in admission forms to universities training programmes which determine the career a student will pursue in life. This is a very important decision-making exercise for the form four students and the researchers wanted to establish what influenced their decisions. The students have been in high school for the longest period made the researchers believe that they would be the best to provide information as far as dreams of the young people are concerned. The purposive sample size was determined by information saturation since at that point in data collection no, and new data was seen to bring in additional insights to the study.

2.4 The Sample

The study was done within Eldoret town where two high schools were purposively sampled. The form four students were the respondents. The total number of the respondents was 52. There was equal representation of both males and females in the public and private schools. There were a total of 26 males and 26 females who made the sample. The number of participants was determined by the data saturation. The age range was between 17-21 years who are mainly youth and are in the exploring stage of their career as stated by Super [1].

2.5 Data Collection Instruments

The interview schedule was made of open-ended questions to yield as much information about the study phenomenon as possible and also be able to address the aims and objectives of the research. The interview questions were neutral, sensitive and understandable. The main purpose of focus group research was to draw upon respondents' attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences and reactions in a way in which can only be possible through the use of Focus Groups. The researchers used interview and Focus Discussion Groups (FGD's) because they were effective in eliciting data on the youth group

and were able to generate broad overviews of issues concerning the youth dreams.

2.6 Research Questions

The study was guided by three research questions which were stated as

- In your own words indicate what is your ultimate dream/aspirations in life?
- According to you what do you think are the hindrances to the achievement of your ultimate dream?
- Can you suggest ways through which the hindrances you have mentioned above can be resolved to help you as a young person achieve your dreams/aspirations?

2.7 Reliability and Validity of the Instruments

A pilot study was conducted with form four students from a different municipality and ten students, five from private and five from public schools were purposively selected for the exercise. The pilot study was used to validate the instruments and estimate their reliability. The study used a combination of interviews and focus group discussions to collect data to ensure validity and reliability of the collected information. The data collection from the interviews was confirmed by using focus discussion groups. The triangulation of data collection instruments was to increase the credibility and validity of the results as noted by O'Donoghue and Punch [15]. It was also used to cross-validate data and capture different views and opinions of the respondents. According to Altrichter [16] triangulation gives a more detailed and balanced picture of the situation. The pilot study established the content validity of the instrument by ensuring that they were appropriate, complete, concise and clear to the respondents. After piloting, the research tools were revised by deleting or adding items where necessary.

2.8 Limitations

The problem of teachers, parents and policymakers not listening to the students has been going on unnoticed, therefore creating awareness was necessary. The study was time-consuming as data was collected based on appointment dates fixed by the school principals. The participants also had the control over the collected data. The limitations were over come

through thoughtful planning and judgment was used based on results to ensure the obtained results were accurate as Baxter [17] posits.

2.9 Data Analysis

The analysis was the basis for explication of the data which involved translation of the emergent themes into a narrative account of the respondents. The responses obtained during the interview and focus group discussion was coded according to the themes as guided by the research questions. Tables, graphs, narratives especially for the suggestions given by the respondents and excerpts were used to present data. The report made from the participants' responses was confirmed by the members to establish the truthfulness of what was recorded.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Dreams of the Youth

The participants were asked to write on a piece of paper without indicating their names what they hold as their ultimate dream in life. The participants were assured that there was no right or wrong answers. This method was used to ensure as many responses as possible. The responses were summarised in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Young people's dreams

Dreams	Frequency
Great sportsmen/women	2
Doctor	3
Professor	2
Engineer	2
Architect	1
Journalist	1
Travel and work outside Kenya	3
Politician	1
Lawyer	1
Nurse	1
Performing Artist	1
Chief Executive Officer (CEO)	1
Criminologist	1
Hotel Manager	1
Zoologist	1
Fashion Design	2
Air hostess/Cabin crew	2
Successful /Super rich	17
No response	3

Looking at the responses the return rate was 94 %, three respondents did not write anything. During the FGD the study was able to establish

that all the participants who did not respond to the first item were males from a public secondary school. The researchers' prodded further to find out from the three who had not responded to the item and one had this to say " *I had nothing to put on the piece of paper because I don't know what to write, no one has ever asked me this kind of question before.*" he admitted, tears welling up in his eyes. The participant was in form four third term with a few weeks to sit for his Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) examination and no one ever asked him about his dream? This makes this study very relevant to Kenyan situation today.

How is this young man expected to face the world when he has no idea what he wants to do with himself? This makes the youth to lack focus, and this is not only a tragedy to the individual but also to the family, community and the nation. The question that was left in the researcher's minds was how many of the young people in Kenyan high schools do not know their ultimate dreams. This means there is a gap existing in high schools as far as career guidance and counselling is concerned. Mistakes like this can be very expensive, both economically and socially. At the same time it can open doors to new opportunities if only proper mentoring is done.

During the Focus group discussion, there was a consensus on what the youth are dreaming about and the groups agreed on this: "*I dream of one day getting married, own a house, have my dream career and have the most intelligent and beautiful children in the world*". However, it also went deeper than this as one male participant had this to say: "*I dream of being able to travel all over the world. I want to experience different cultures and see life through other people's eyes instead of through a classroom textbook.*" One female respondent still from a private school had this to say; "*I wish to enjoy good health, not only physically but mentally too, and I really fear not succeeding in my ambitions as well as fulfilling my happiness in life*". From these responses, it is clear that the young people have valid dreams, but are they being provided with an enabling environment to achieve these dreams? An enabling environment is a holistic environment that does not only deal with academic qualifications but how one can be able to link the qualifications to his/her personality and the world of work.

The dream of being successful and super- rich was indicated by seventeen participants (Table

1) but it's not clear to the participants how one is to be successful (the path to success) or even the meaning they accord to success. Again it was not clear to be successful in what? Life? Career? The participants are dreaming of being successful or super rich but they seem to shun professional careers, and this concurs with Njonjo [18]. For example, there are many people who feel society values of wealthy people who own a lot of material possessions, like land, cars and houses but no one questions the acquisition. Given this kind of environment, the youth dreams of making lots of money so they can buy these things and achieve certain social status. Unfortunately, many people, both old and young find that once they have attained these things, they still don't feel fulfilled or satisfied, and haven't found the meaningful state of well-being.

3.2 Hindrances

The participants were asked to indicate what they think are the hindrances to the achievement of their dreams. The responses are summarised in Fig. 1.

From Fig. 1 self-doubt, fear, laziness and negative attitude were identified as the major dream killers among the youth. The self- seems to be a major hindrance to young people's dreams. The primary objective of setting and achieving goals is to give youths lives meaning and contribute to their well-being, but this doesn't necessarily mean that all adults' goals are meaningful. In a broad sense, there are two types of motivations that drive young people in pursuance of their goals. Students with an adequate amount of self-information and occupational knowledge tend to make better decisions, and these were mainly from private schools, whereas, those without this information, by default, made poor decisions. Lack of information was found to generally predispose students to four categories of difficulties: These include: - lack of knowledge about the steps involved in the decision- making process, lack of information about self, and the various alternatives (i.e.) occupations and lack of information about the ways of obtaining additional information. Confidence in decision-making was seen to emanate from having made successful decisions in the past. This is now where decision making experiences came in with the help of adults who were teachers, parents, role models or mentors. The clear communication needs to be enhanced between youth and adults who will help them to deal with

self-doubt, fear, laziness, negative attitude and giving up (Fig. 1) which negatively affects the intrinsic motivation of the youth. Other hindrances were finances, opportunities, corruption, and parents who were identified by the youth and they form the extrinsic motivations. Though poor grades and procrastination were identified by the participants they are related to intrinsic motivations of the youth in high schools. So how do they step out of that negative self-talk groove? The youth must start to feel their way out. The youth secret is to start listening to how they feel, and to begin following what feels good as far as their dreams are concerned given majority of the youth do not have any mentors but relied on peers for career advice and choice.

This then leads to the next research question.

3.3 Way Forward to the Dreams of the Youth

The students were asked to suggest ways through which they can achieve their dreams and their responses are summarised in Table 2.

From tabulations in Table 2 youth seem to be crying for help. Are the relevant stakeholders listening? They need to believe in themselves, they need role models, mentorship, and parents to listen to them as well as adults in their lives. Many youths fear to make career choices that their parents object to. They wish that their parents would allow and support them to pursue their career passions. It is interesting to note however that 56% agreed that they need to push themselves to overcome laziness. Laziness is as a result of having no career goals. Respondents also indicated that they needed an enabling environment to be able to understand them and make informed career decisions. The youth need listening ear from the adults to learn about their lives, feelings, fears, hopes and dreams to boost the self-confidence and ability to make sound career decisions towards their dreams.

4. DISCUSSION

The young have great aspirations and dreams but have no idea how to achieve them as noted [18] and this study established that having aspirations or dreams which they are not able to achieve negatively influences students. When students realise that they cannot achieve their dreams in life leads to disappointment, frustration, arguably social withdrawal or loss of talents. Life is meant to be filled with joy, yet so

many youth feel stagnant, dreaming about what they wish their lives would be like. Dreaming of the opportunities that are just out of reach. The youth drown in their sorrows, feeling bad for themselves because of what they feel and think is absent in their lives. The students' aspirations and dreams can help them to improve educational achievements instead of dropping out of college when they discover their dreams are unattainable [5].

The hindrances to youth realisation of their dreams were established to be the self. This was evidenced by self-doubt, fear, laziness and negative attitude. The self is the main adversary that youth have to overcome [8]. The youth need to realise that their lives are the way they are because they are holding themselves back. The youth tell themselves that they are "stuck", but in reality, they are not stuck at all, they are just repeating the same defeating self-talk over

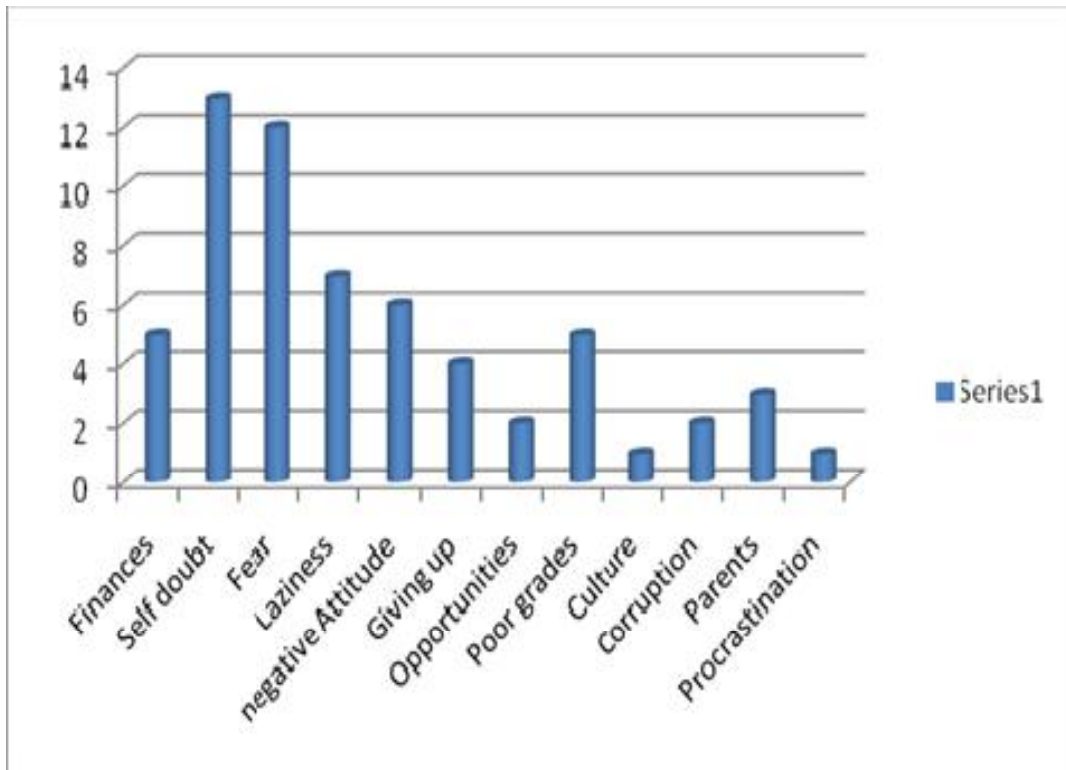


Fig. 1. The hindrances

Table 2.

Suggestion	Frequency	%
Help us believe in ourselves	32	62
Role models	21	40
Mentorship Programmes in schools	17	33
Parents allowing us to follow our hearts (Passion)	43	83
Good sport facilities	12	23
Scholarships	9	17
Encouragements	36	69
Positive criticism (constructive criticism)	27	52
Pushing oneself	29	56
Creating an equal opportunity environment	16	31
Information on opportunities available	22	42
Adults listening to us	39	75

*The respondents gave more than one response

and over again. The youth must acknowledge that where they are now is not where they want to be, and the next step is that they need to stop making excuses believe in themselves and push themselves forward and effectively deal with fear, doubt, negative attitude and laziness. The push forward will lead to better educational outcomes which will lead to more opportunities for training. As Super [1] noted that career decision is a lifespan process and the youth need to realise that wrong decisions taken in the past can be corrected by making new and continuously changing self-concept.

The youth are looking up to the adults to listen to them, to allow them to follow their hearts, with encouragements or information, to be their role models and mentors. The adults will be instrumental in helping the youth to start getting their priorities straight and reconnect with who they are. The youth need to be helped to believe in themselves instead of just following along the path that other people lay before them, losing themselves in the process, and they finally find themselves on a road in which they have no idea how they got there. Parents, teachers and the society need to encourage high aspirations among the youth by listening carefully which will address their needs and giving them information which will lead to self-efficacy. When the youth believe in themselves they will be able to identify role models and mentors who are supportive and add value to their life aspirations [2]. The youth will not just got along following the "rules", doing what they are told but take the first step in defining who they are, not in resentment, depression, anger, or fear, but in excitement because the time has come for a new start on a new path, to live the life they are meant to live with the support of the adults. The youth are the creators of their own experience. They are in the driver's seat, so it's time to start steering in the direction that they want to go and the study concurs with O'Donoghue and Punch¹⁵. The adults have provided instrumental support but failed to provide the emotional support to the youth as Harvard researchers established in 2015. This study established that supportive relationship with adults is essential in young people's aspirations, career choices and propensity to pursue additional education. The study establishes that the gap is existing between the youth and the adults in mentorship and modelling in the journey of life to their dreams.

5. CONCLUSION

There is a potential hero, a future difference maker and a bundle of untapped energy in every youth from whatever background [19]. The youth are dreaming, and they need to be helped to make these dreams a reality. The help can only be given by adults who are listening and able to understand the needs of the youth. The major obstacle to the youths achieving their dreams is self-doubt, which leads to fear and this means that the youth need to be involved in programmes that will enhance self-confidence. From the respondents' suggestions they need adults to listen to them which had 39 responses (75%) and the parents to allow the youth to follow their heart with 43 responses (83%). The "Dream It. Do It." campaign was launched by a community that cares about its growth, its future and the future of its young people in the USA. A programme of this nature needs to be initiated in Kenya where the growth and the future of the Kenyan youth can be nurtured. The youth need to be provided with space and a welcoming place where they can feel safe to voice their thoughts; autonomy to air their dreams, and freedom to grow intellectually. The youth need to be empowered today through encouragement and nurturing their passion, courage and the dreams they carry inside so that in their tomorrow they will experience the freedom to share their voices and know they will be heard. The Psychological well-being is paramount to achievement of dreams by the youth. They must start thinking about what inspires them at the individual level. What inspires the youth collectively makes them be well- focused individuals, therefore, be a resource not only to themselves, family, and community but also to the nation.

6. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The study established that self-doubt, fear, negative attitude and laziness as major hindrances to the achievement of dreams by the youth. The study recommends the following area for further research.

Causes of self-doubt, fear, negative attitude and laziness among youths.

What makes adults especially parents and teachers not to listen to the youth?

Indicators used by young people as parameters for success.

A similar study needs to be conducted in the whole county, and the whole nation among all high school students irrespective of the students' academic level and type of school.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

The researchers sought permission from the Principals in the two schools selected for the study. The researcher obtained an informed consent from the respondents, and a briefing was done before the study began. The respondents remained anonymous to ensure their confidentiality. A debriefing session was conducted to ensure the participants did not suffer any physical or psychological injury.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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