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Improving Speaking Proficiency Via Role-Play: An Investigation from Indonesian Secondary Schools

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Abstract

Speaking remains one of the most challenging skills for EFL students in Indonesia. Many students face anxiety and lack of opportunities to practice speaking English in authentic contexts. This Classroom Action Research was carried out to develop the speaking abilities of 6B2 students at SMP Negeri 5 Malang by applying the role-play method. The research was implemented in two cycles, involving 33 students, and utilized a mixed method of quantitative and qualitative approaches. Data were collected through classroom observations, pre-test, post-test, and students' questionnaires. The results showed that students' ability in speaking had greatly improved. After the first cycle, the average score rose from 48 on the pre-test to 73, and it further increased to 82 on the second cycle of the post-test. Moreover, in the final post-test, 91% of students received the minimum passing grade (≥ 75), up from 6% on the pre-test. The qualitative data supported these results, indicating increased student motivation, reduced anxiety, and enhanced self-assurance when speaking English. The findings suggest that the role-play method is effective in developing students' speaking ability, motivation, and confidence in EFL classrooms.

Keywords: *classroom action research, EFL, english speaking skill, junior high school level, role-play method*

1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout industrial revolution 4.0, communication and foreign language skills, especially English, have become essential for everyone. This era emphasizes global connectivity, digital communication, and cross-border collaboration, which all demand a high level of English proficiency (Ertug et al., 2024; Lifintsev & Wellbrock, 2019; Simões & Sangiamchit, 2023). English is not only the most widely used international language in the

fields of science, technology, and business (Simões & Sangiamchit, 2023), but also holds a significant importance in education and daily life interactions in many parts of the world.

In Indonesia, English is considered a foreign language rather than a second language. However, English is taught in schools from an early age because it is mandatory in the national education curriculum. Like other foreign languages, English is learned through listening, speaking, reading, and writing sessions. Of these four skills, speaking seems to be one of the most important to master because it allows users to verbally communicate their thoughts and opinions during conversations or dialogues fluently. As Ghafar and Raheem (2023) notes that speaking is generally considered the most difficult but important part of learning a new language.

On the other hand, many Indonesian students continue to struggle with speaking skill and still face difficulties in mastering speaking skill. One contributing factor is that most English learning in the classroom tends to focus more on reading and grammar, rather than speaking. In addition, since students in Indonesia learn English in an environment where it is considered a foreign language, they rarely use it in their daily lives. Chin et al. (2024) argues that living in such an environment leads to limited language development due to not having enough of chances to practice speaking in the target language. In an EFL setting, students depend heavily on classroom activities to improve their speaking skills, but they often do not fully utilize these opportunities because they feel hesitant or anxious about speaking in front of others. Aisah et al. (2024) found that students frequently evoke anxiety in speaking situation, particularly when speaking in front of their peers or teachers, which causes them to feel nervous and under pressure. These emotional and psychological barriers are further reinforced by a lack of motivation and confidence. Pasaribu (2022) also notes that students often exhibit limited enthusiasm and low motivation in English learning. Similarly, When invited to participate in speaking exercises, students frequently show signs of shyness and fear, according to Grieve et al. (2021). These challenges may arise because students rarely have the opportunity to practice speaking in English and they tend to have a limited vocabulary, which lead to confusion and difficulty in expressing themselves (Puspasari & Kamaruddin, 2025) .

Based on preliminary observations in class 6B2 at SMP Negeri 5 Malang, it became evident that students are often reluctant in using English to communicate during lessons. Many of them tend to remain silent or respond minimally, showing low confidence and limited vocabulary usage. Furthermore, results from diagnostic assessment confirmed that speaking was perceived by most students as their biggest challenge in learning English. This suggests a need for more engaging and students-centered teaching strategies that emphasize active participation and real-life communication.

To address this issue, innovative teaching strategies are needed to enhance students' speaking skills. Wahab and Aisyah (2024) emphasizes that the facilitatory role of the teacher is crucial in selecting and applying techniques that can motivate students to speak actively. One such effective technique is the Role-Play method, enabling students to act out real-life situation in a fun and meaningful way. This method not only helps reduce anxiety and increase students' participation, but also provides a safe environment for students to develop their speaking fluency, and confidence. In line with this, Dwiyanti and Lolita (2023) states that role-playing is an interactive method that helps students develop fluency, improves classroom interaction, and increases students' willingness to speak.

There is a plethora of studies that employ role-playing as a pedagogical technique for teaching English, particularly within the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Pinatih (2021) study found that using role-play in speaking classes helped students to improve their classroom speaking skills. Likewise, Puspita et al. (2023) confirmed the positive impact of role-play on vocational high school students' speaking skills, particular with regard to grammar and vocabulary usage. Coupled with this, research conducted by Rakasiwi et al. (2024) underlined that role-play has proved to be an effective method in enhancing students' speaking fluency and vocabulary mastery. Nonetheless, there is still a gap in research focusing on the influence of role-play on critical aspects of speaking such as pronunciation, fluency, confidence, and especially among junior high school students. Thus, this study seeks to investigate how role-play can serve as an effective strategy for helping junior high school learners improve their proficiency in spoken English. At the conclusion of the research, it is anticipated that students will be more expressive and confident, with increased post-test scores in relation to pre-test findings alongside student reflections suggesting enhanced fluency and pronunciation. In addition, this research posits the hypothesis: "Does the application of role-play methods enhance speaking skills for 6B2 students?"

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The struggle to cultivate speaking skills among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in countries like Indonesia has been well studied. In the case of Indonesian secondary school students, anxiety, limited vocabulary, and lack of authentic practice opportunities are persistent and overwhelming challenges (Sabilla & Kaniadewi, 2025). These findings support prior work by Juhana (2023) who emphasized psychological problems along with environmental factors as primary barriers toward speaking fluency. Moreover, motivation and confidence which fall under affective factors, as noted by Pasaribu (2022), are critical to explaining why students tend to absent themselves or display fearful reluctance during speaking activities.

To overcome these obstacles, innovative instructional methods such as role-play are becoming more popular in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes. According to Lim et al. (2024), role-play not only boosts speaking skills but also positively correlates with the self-reported confidence levels and improved test scores of students. This supports the observations made by Puspita et al. (2023) and Rakasiwi et al. (2024) regarding the broad-based benefits of role play, which include improvement in vocabulary and fluency alongside nurturing a positive climate for learning. Role-play, as noted by Dwiyanti and Lolita (2023), is highly effective for communicative language teaching because it actively engages learners while alleviating anxiety.

Furthermore, Anwar et al. (2024) traces the foundations of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory to role play practice, while Kolb's experiential learning research from 2025 (Cherry, 2025) suggests how learning occurs when participants actively apply learned content. Reflective components within Kolb's frameworks show that learners benefit from applying their knowledge through role-play, which enhances authentic interactions and communication needed in real-world settings. Vygotsky's ZPD rationale justifies collaboration as part of a role-play where pupils through peer-teacher engagement are reasonably guided toward language skill development relevant to their stage of proficiency provided ample intelligent oversimplifications to complex tasks beyond their

abilities). These theoretical constructs affirm justification alongside persuasive rationales towards providing instruction deliberately drawing upon learners' linguistic needs along with dual emotion regulation frameworks underpinning role-play pedagogy

Then, Fu and Li (2025) illustrates comparative studies reinforcing the effectiveness of role-play in contrast to traditional methods. Their experimental findings showed that students who learned through role-play markedly outperformed those who did not in speaking tasks, emphasizing the approach's effectiveness in promoting fluency and participation. As highlighted by Sari and Hamzah (2023), these findings also support motivational gains associated with role-play teaching methods, especially considering qualitative feedback from Li et al. (2024), which highlighted students' enjoyment and empowerment when engaging with role-play activities.

While these benefits are validated, there is still a lack of understanding around the use of role-play over an extended period with regard to specific aspects of speaking such as pronunciation and grammatical accuracy. These aspects could be examined empirically in more varied educational contexts and among different learner profiles as per the recommendations made by Abu-Rasheed et al. (2023). Moreover, new possibilities for interactivity and response mechanisms in EFL teaching might emerge through combining technology and role-plays as suggested by Sun et al. (2022).

As can be concluded from reviewed literature, role-play remains a robust method for enhancing learners' fluency skills through systematic processes both cognitively and in terms of feelings thus making it appropriate within modern communicative and experiential paradigms grounded on flexible approaches to learning. Its implementation is particularly beneficial within classroom environments where language anxiety is prevalent, as it has the potential to develop confident competent speakers of English, even in Indonesia.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

This research employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design. As explained by Arikunto (2010), CAR refers to research performed within the classroom to observe the effects of certain actions applied to the subjects within that class. The main objective of Classroom Action Research is improving or enhancing the quality of instruction through systematic interventions. This aligns with the opinion of Sari and Zuraya (2025), who stated that Classroom Action Research is implemented with the aim of enhancing the learning quality through planned actions and to evaluate the impact of those actions. The treatments applied in the learning process have a significant impact in determining achievement of learning outcomes.

Table: 1 The cycle of classroom action research

No	Activity	Details
1.	Preliminary Research	Before intervention
2.	Cycle 1	Meeting 1 Meeting 2
3.	Cycle 2	Meeting 3
4.	Analyzing the result	After cycle 2

3.2. Participants of the Study

The investigation utilized a sample of 33 students from class 6B2 at SMP (junior high school) Negeri 5 Malang during the second semester of the academic year 2024/2025. This class was chosen given the prior insights gained from sitting in on classes which suggested that learners encountered numerous obstacles in progressing with their English speaking skills. The observations showed such problems like low self-esteem when engaging verbally, poor retention of words mastered, alongside problematic articulation clearly and fluently. Furthermore, most students showcased reluctance towards actively participating in oral activities, preferring to use their first language for communication in class interactions. Such hurdles greatly impeded their ability to communicate effectively in English and therefore require appropriate adjustments teaching methods tailored to that level. In this regard, this study sought to improve speaking skills while increasing overall engagement through active innovative techniques, thereby stimulating positive attitudes toward English language learning.

3.3. Instruments

The research utilized a two-cycle action research model, as proposed by Latifa and Safrida (2025), which in each cycle observed the stages of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting.

In the planning stage, the researchers undertook some preliminary studies to analyse English learners' problems. Results showed that many learners had challenges with speaking skills such as fluency, pronunciation, and oral confidence. These findings led to formulating a detailed five-session lesson plan that was administered in three class meetings: two sessions during Cycle I and one session in Cycle II. The lesson aimed at achieving both student engagement and speaking proficiency through interactive and goal-oriented teaching strategies.

During the acting phase, researchers stepped into the role of instructors by facilitating activities based on real-life situations in order for students to utilize the target language meaningfully. Students were arranged into small groups where they collaboratively prepared and acted out dialogues. This activity enabled them to engage with spoken English dynamically. Moreover, word construction, grammar, and conversation were reinforced with PowerPoint lessons and animated educational games. Moreover, social-emotional learning (SEL) goals were woven into the sessions via prayers and reflection periods, which helped to maintain a calm and restorative atmosphere in the classroom (Wicaksono & Saraswati, 2024).

The objectives of the observing stage were focused on gathering data to determine how well the interventions applied were successful, even though the school's main focus was to improve student engagement. The researchers conducted classroom observations and administered speaking tests aimed at measuring learners' oral interaction skills, fluency, and speaking proficiency. These evaluations captured both quantitative and qualitative dimensions of student progress toward predefined milestones, allowing for strengths and developmental areas to be identified (Kumar, 2024).

To collect the data, the researchers utilized classroom observation, pre-tests, post-tests, and questionnaire. The data were examined using a mixed method of quantitative and qualitative methods (Taherdoost, 2022). The quantitative data originated from the scores obtained by students during assessment, while the qualitative data is analysed to observe the growth of the confidence owned by students in their speaking abilities. The instrument used were a list of criteria in the form of a speaking scoring rubric in order to observe the development of students' capability in speaking. Meanwhile, the qualitative data were driven from observation during class and a questionnaire in the last cycle to identify their confidence.

3.4. Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative data from the tests were examined to assess the students' speaking abilities improvement. The average scores of the pre-test and post-test were determined using the following formula:

$$X = \frac{\Sigma x}{N}$$

X = average score

∑x = Total score

N = Total data

While, to identify the percentage of students who reached the established minimum score criterion, which was set at a (≥ 75), was calculated using:

$$P = \frac{F}{N} x100\%$$

P = Number of percentages

F = Frequency

N = Number of students

Meanwhile, qualitative data from observations, and questionnaires were analysed descriptively to interpret patterns, behaviours, and feedback relevant to the learning process. The findings from both types of data were then triangulated to present a thorough understanding of how students' speaking abilities were affected by the role-play method.

The success indicators of this research are based on the minimum score criterion for the English subject at SMP Negeri 5 Malang. If the learning outcomes in cycle I do not meet the criteria, improvements was made in cycle II, and so on, until the applied method achieves the predetermined indicators. This research, which applies the role-play method to enhance the speaking skill of class 6B2 students at SMP Negeri 5 Malang, is considered successful if the following conditions are met; (i) If learning activities achieve more than or equal to 80%, with an implementation value of ≥ 75 (Tobón et al., 2021); (ii) If the results of students' speaking skill reach >80% of all students in the class and each students achieves the minimum score criterion of (≥ 75) (Futihah & Romdani, 2023).

4. RESULTS

According to the researchers' findings through observation, the application of speaking skill learning activities using the role-play method was successfully carried out in cycle II. In this cycle, the measures of successful research included the effectiveness of the learning process, the percentage of students' mastery, and the average class score, all of which met the expected targets. In addition, any obstacles that arose at the time of the learning process were successfully addressed.

Cycle 1

During Cycle I, all planned learning activities were implemented successfully. The participation rate was 100%, with all 33 students engaged in the teaching and learning activities. This indicates a strong level of engagement and an effective implementation of the role-play method from the outset.

Pre-test result

A pre-test was conducted at the beginning of Cycle I to assess the students' baseline speaking skill. The results are presented in Table 2 below:

Table: 2 Speaking pre-test result

No	Standard Setting	Number of Students	Percentage	Explanation
1	≥ 75	2	6%	Pass
2	≤ 75	31	94%	Failure
Total		33	100%	
Average		48		

It is evident from the above table that 31 students did not succeed in achieving the minimum score criterion in the pre-test. This indicates that 94% of the students have not yet mastered speaking skills. Meanwhile, only 2 students, or 6% of the class, met the minimum score criterion during the pre-test activity.

Furthermore, the learning implementation in cycle I pre-test had not yet reached the success indicator, which was set at ≥ 75. This is evident from the data showing that the average score in pre-test cycle I was 48, which is categorized as failure. Therefore, further improvement was needed and implemented in the post-test cycle I.

After conducted a reflection at the end of cycle I pre-test. It was determined that several aspects needed to be improved to increase the percentage of learning mastery and to ensure that the learning process met the expected indicators of success. The findings from this reflection served as a foundation for planning enhancements to be implemented in post-test cycle I.

Post-test Result

Following the revised implementation, a post-test was administered to evaluate students' progress. The results are shown in Table 3:

Table: 3 Speaking post-test result

No.	Standard Setting	Number of Students	Percentage	Explanation
1	≥ 75	17	52%	Pass
2	≤ 75	16	48%	Failure
Total		33	100%	
Average		73		

Based on the data presented in Table 3, a significant positive advancement was evident in the speaking performance among students. The number of students achieving the minimum score criterion increased from 2 (6%) to 17 (52%). Likewise, the average class score roose from 48 in the pre-test to 73 in the post-test. Although these results indicated considerable progress, the class average had not yet reached the minimum success standard of ≥ 75, and 48% of students remained below the threshold. Therefore, it was concluded that a second cycle was necessary to further enhance students' speaking skill and fulfil the research success indicators.

Cycle 2

Cycle 2 was conducted as a continuation of the implementation of the role-play method in speaking instruction, with adjustments made to the learning process based on the reflection of Cycle I. These adjustments focused on optimizing classroom management, providing clearer instructions, and encouraging more active participation from all students. However, the core learning method, role-play, remained the same throughout the research.

Post-test result

Table: 4 Speaking post-test result

No.	Standard Setting	Number of Students	Percentage	Explanation
1	≥ 75	30	91%	Pass
2	≤ 75	3	9%	Failure
Total		33	100%	
Average		82		

Using the information in Table 4, the Cycle II results indicate a significant improvement in students' speaking performance. A total of 30 students (91%) achieved or exceeded the minimum score criterion of ≥ 75, while only 3 students (9%) did not meet the standard. The class average increased to 82, clearly surpassing the expected target. In addition, the observation and test results, the qualitative data were collected through a student survey

to gain insights into their learning experiences. The survey responses revealed generally positive feedback regarding the implementation of the role-play method.

A majority of the students expressed that they enjoyed the learning process, describing the lessons as "*fun*," "*very enjoyable,*" or "*exciting*." Several students mentioned that participating in role-play activities helped them become more engaged and motivated to speak in English. One student stated, *"Ya karena kita telah berlatih untuk melakukan percakapan Bahasa Inggris, jadi saya merasa lebih siap dan tidak terlalu gugup."* This indicates that role-play created a safe and supportive environment for practicing speaking.

When asked about their confidence in speaking English compared to before, many students reported improvement. One student reflected, *"Iya karena dapat lebih percaya diri,"* while another commented, *"saya dilatih untuk mengetahui berbicara dengan benar, jadi sekarang lebih bisa."* These responses suggest that the speaking practice embedded in role-play scenarios significantly contributed to increasing students' self-confidence. On a 5-point scale, students rated their improvement in English speaking skills mostly between 3 and 4, indicating moderate to high perceived progress. Similarly, their self-confidence in speaking English also averaged between 3 and 4, showing noticeable growth compared to their previous ability.

In terms of speaking in public, many students reported that the activities helped reduce their fear. One noted, *"Ya sangat membantu berkomunikasi dengan orang lain,"* while another explained, *"Ya, karena bisa latihan ngomong depan teman-teman, jadi lebih berani."* These responses confirm that role-play activities not only improved their speaking fluency but also helped overcome speaking anxiety. However, a few students mentioned challenges, particularly with grammar. One student simply noted "Grammar" as the most confusing aspect of the lesson, suggesting that while fluency improved, accuracy still needed attention in future instruction. In addition, the students' qualitative feedback supports the quantitative findings. The role-play method was perceived as engaging, confidence-boosting, and effective in developing their speaking skills.

5. DISCUSSION

The research's findings unequivocally show that by integrating the role-playing technique in the classroom, students' speaking abilities are effectively enhanced. The progressive improvement observed from the pre-test in Cycle I to the post-test in Cycle II indicates that role-play provides meaningful opportunities for students to practice speaking in a communicative and interactive context.

In Cycle I, the pre-test and post-test results for speaking scores showed a significant increase from 48 to 73, reflecting an increase of 25 points. Despite the observed progress, only 52% of students met the minimum mastery requirements. This indicates that although progress was made, the intended overall learning target was not achieved. Reflecting on these results highlights the need for more effective delivery of instruction, a coherent framework of practice, better support for student participation, and improved all strategies aimed at increasing student engagement (Widiarti & Astuti, 2023).

These improvements addressed the areas of concern identified during the Cycle I evaluation. Teachers began utilizing more well-defined instructional techniques, adding interactive collaborative speaking exercises as well as real-time formative assessments to measure ongoing improvement. The implementation of these strategies in addition to those implemented in Cycle I was effective as average speaking performance increased further to 82, surpassing the initial improvement recorded in Cycle I. Perhaps more crucially, the rate of exceeding or meeting established benchmarks increased to an impressive 91%. Students not only made progress but also constructively validated the effectiveness of the instruction designed after the cycle review as progress was made without persistent improvements being overlooked (Phoeun & Sengsri, 2021). Further evaluation confirmed that the changes made from cycle to cycle successfully addressed identified issues while achieving the learning objectives set through adjusted goal setting throughout the cycle while relying on a flexible structure that encapsulated boundary-spanning testing (Sarifudin & Setyawan, 2025).

These results align with earlier research that highlighted how effective the role-play technique is at improving speaking skills. For instance, Lady et al. (2024), who reported that students' average speaking score increased from 72.67 in Cycle I to 79.33 in Cycle II as a result of integrating role-play technique in their CAR.

Similarly, Pahamzah et al. (2020) conducted an experimental study comparing students taught with and without the role-play method. Their findings indicated that students who were taught using role-play techniques showed significant improvements in speaking skills compared to those who were not, emphasizing the method's effectiveness in fostering students' confidence and fluency. Furthermore, the use of role-play activities to teach speaking not only contributed to the improvement of students' speaking abilities but also increased their enthusiasm and motivation throughout the course of learning (E. R. Sari & Hamzah, 2023).

Role-playing approaches to language learning are effective because they combine principles from experiential learning and communicative language teaching (CLT) that encourage active participation and engagement in the real world. Kolb's experiential learning theory states that knowledge must be created from experience, reflection, and experimentation (Cherry, 2025). In role-playing, students place themselves in semi-realistic scenarios where they must linguistically construct spoken and written words in contextually relevant ways rather than memorizing lists of words (Jim et al., 2025). This engagement enhances retention along with deep cognitive processing as learners need to negotiate meaning, respond to complex social interactions, or even go beyond textbook discussions (Ahmada & Munawaroh, 2022).

In addition, with the communicative approach focusing on interaction as the core of a second language learner's acquisition of a new language, there are much better opportunities for practical use than traditional tests designed for textbook output. Role-playing makes learners feel more at ease as low-stakes dialogues become spontaneous windows of intersection where fluency is deepened sometimes along with the acquisition of new vocabulary (Goram & Subekti, 2022). Students gain pragmatic competence through non-synonymous negotiated conversational contracts such as problem solving or narrative exchanges that improve their grammatical accuracy along with sociocultural

understanding including register and body language that can be interpreted as avoidant tone (Negara, 2021).

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory provides additional support for the value of role-play in teaching by emphasizing its interactional dimension. According to Vygotsky, learning occurs in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where students are helped by more skilled peers or instructors to improve their skills. In role-play scenarios, the teacher's and peers' motivational comments serve as buffers that help learners refine their language output and correct errors along the way (Anwar et al., 2024). This form of collaborative dialogue fosters linguistic mastery and also develops aspects of higher-order thinking as students incorporate unexpected changes into their speech.

Furthermore, role-playing follows task-based language teaching (TBLT) which proposes that language is learned through meaningful tasks performed with specific goals. Through simulations of real-life interactions such as job interviews, casual conversations, customer service dialogues, etc., students hone the functions needed for authentic communication outside the classroom (Lady et al., 2024b). Role-playing offers instant feedback through peer assessment or from the instructor which encourages faster mastery as correct implementation is reinforced while misunderstandings are clarified (Mukhbita et al., 2025).

The accomplishment of the role-play method, which is being used in this research, is attributed to its ability to create an interactive, low-anxiety environment that promotes active learning. It facilitates a holistic development of speaking skills, including fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary use, and most importantly, learner confidence. The combined results from both the quantitative and qualitative data affirm that role-play is a powerful and practical strategy for junior high school students in enhancing their abilities to speak English.

6. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings from both cycles of this Classroom Action Research, it can therefore be inferred that applying role-play as a learning method has significantly improved the speaking abilities of 6B2 students at SMP Negeri 5 Malang. This improvement is evident from the increase in the average class score, which increased from 48 in the pre-test of Cycle I to 82 in the Cycle II post-test. Furthermore, the percentage of students achieving the minimum score of 75 increased dramatically from only 6% in the pre-test of Cycle I to 91% in the post-test of Cycle II. Then, qualitative data collected through student reflections also confirmed the effectiveness of the utilization of the role-play approach. Students reported increased confidence, greater enjoyment in learning, and a more supportive learning environment. They felt more motivated to speak and found the activities engaging and beneficial in improving their fluency, vocabulary, and pronunciation. These results are consistent with previous studies, which support the utilization of role-play as the best method for students in enhancing their speaking performance due to its effectiveness. Therefore, it can be concluded that the role-play method is a useful and practical strategy for students in enhancing their speaking abilities in English language learning, particularly in junior high school settings. Future studies are suggested to explore the long-term impact of role-play on students' speaking fluency and

grammatical accuracy, as well as to compare its effectiveness across different grade levels and learning styles.

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