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## The perils of bureaucratic complexity

### Education for all in Nigeria

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*Full Length Research Paper*

# The perils of bureaucratic complexity: Education for all in Nigeria

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This paper reports research which investigated the issue of access in the Universal Basic Education (UBE) and sought to know why access to education remains the biggest challenge with over 10.5 million school-aged children out of school in Nigeria (NUT, 2004; UBEC, 2004; UNICEF Report, 2015). Data for this study were collected through document analysis and interviews with 30 bureaucrats responsible for implementing UBE in two geo-political zones and the federal capital territory. According to the analysed data, the challenge of access in UBE implementation was attributable to bureaucratic complexity. Recommendations have been developed for UBE implementation that seeks to enable enhanced access to education among Nigerian children.

**Key words:** Universal basic education (UBE), Bureaucracy, policy implementation, Education agencies (UBEC), State Universal Basic Education BOARD (SUBEB) and Local Government Education Authority (LGEA), Nigeria.

## INTRODUCTION

The free and compulsory education policy known as Universal Basic Education (UBE) was introduced in Nigeria since the return of democratic rule in 1999. The policy purpose of this major reform was to address, in part, issues related to student access to schooling. Nigeria, a country of 168 million people, whose national statistics show that up to forty percent of primary school aged children do not attend school (UNICEF, 2015). More than a decade after the UBE introduction, there has been little evidence that its objectives have been met (UNICEF, 2015; USAID Mission Report, 2015). This paper explored the bureaucratic implementation process of UBE and its effect on access - enrolment, attendance and progress of Nigerian children. It draws on data from a

research study on a decade implementation of universal basic education policy in Nigeria (Bolaji, Gray and Evan-Campbell, 2015) to explain why in spite of effort to implement UBE, access rate has not increased as expected over the decade. The research sought to understand the efficacy of the bureaucrats' actions and how these affected the UBE programme, and provided an opportunity to explore why access for school-aged has remained a challenge in Nigeria.

### Educational access

Access is a word with many different meanings and

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**Table 1.** Trends of Boys and Girls 1995-1998.

Year	Boys (%)	Girls (%)	Total (%)
1990	76.4	59.1	67.7
1991	86.6	69.1	77.1
1992	90.3	71.9	81.1
1993	93.6	74.7	84.1
1994	89.4	83.2	86.5
1995	85.5	76.0	74.9
1996-1998	66.0	80.6	71.0

Source: Adapted from the statistics of primary and post-primary education in Nigeria, Lagos Federal Ministry of Education (1994/1995) and Lawal (2007).

applications. In this study, 'access' refers to the ability of all people to have equal opportunity to a service or product from which they can benefit, regardless of their social class, ethnicity, ancestry or physical disabilities. Education is a service and a basic utility. Several authors have also explained access in education as equitability (Akinpelu, 1981; Glenester, 1979; Bereday, 1960). The theory of equity by Mann (1975) and upheld by Sheppard (1992) in interpretation is fairness. The African Union Commission and its International Centre for Girls and Women's Education in Africa (CIEFFA, 2009), explains access in education as attendance, progression and successful completion of school. Also, CIEFFA/AUC identified five types of access to education: economic access, physical access, sociological access, physiological access and cultural access. Lewin (2007), defined access equitable opportunities to learn, especially for children from poorer households, children with disabilities, children of different ethnicities, and children of both genders with less variation in quality between schools. This understanding guides interpretations of 'access' as referring to secure enrolment and regular attendance, progression through the grades at proper ages, learning that has utility and reasonable chances of transitioning to senior secondary school. Achieving this objective has been a herculean task in Nigerian education experience (Isichei and Bolaji, 2009).

### Context/Background

The brief history in this section informs why education remains a tool for effective nation's development in Nigeria (NPE, 2008). Prior to UBE in 1999, issues of access to education, equity, student retention and quality assurance were noticeable in the education sector. Also, student absenteeism and dropout, especially, in primary schools, were serious problems. Evidence of poor performance of students as they moved up through the classes was noticeable. This study was significant because of the decline in trends in education access-enrolment, attendance and progression-in Nigeria, as

shown in Table 1. This study researched the bureaucracy in the UBE policy implementation in Nigeria towards achieving 'Education for All'. The purpose of this study stands on the government decision to wipe out illiteracy and improve education access for Nigerian children of school aged. How has bureaucracy affected access in the UBE implementation in Nigeria was the question explored in this study.

Table 1 shows enrolment trends of a decade (1990 to 1998). There were increases in access to schooling by both genders until 1995, and a sign of decline in the following years.

The dropout rate of Nigerian children from school before UBE provoked national, state and community advocacy. The government tried to encourage more girls to complete primary school, economic pressures influence the early dropout of boys in Nigeria. This was a sign of the country's economic decline, a pointer to decline in value of the education (UNICEF Report, 1997).

The UBE policy was a response to provide access and expand educational opportunities in Nigeria since gaining independence, but lack of access remains among its children (UNICEF, 2015). Many developing countries, despite their challenges, have succeeded in improving their access to education. For example, Vietnam, has made access to education a high national priority. The country has been experiencing more productive labour forces and increased its per capita wealth generation (Holsinger and Jacob, 2009). Tanzania in East Africa has 97.3% of its school-age children enrolled in schools as outlined in the MKUKUTA targets (Implementation Report, 2007). Another example is Liberia—a West Africa sub-region with political conflicts for 14 years, ending in 2003. This conflict devastated the country and caused economic collapse, with a significant portion of the population remains displaced or refugees. However, within seven years of the conflict ending, the country had achieved 85% access to basic education (EEPCT, 2011).

Although all Nigeria's educational institutions are in dire need, the most troubled is the basic education-or what Illo and Bolaji (2007: 82) referred to as the 'bedrock' of education. Olarenwaju and Folorunsho (2009) reiterated

**Table 2.** The labour roles of Nigerian children under 14 years with no access to education

Categories of occupation	%
Street vendors/hawkers	64
Feet washers	8
Car washers	6
Scavengers	5
Shoe shiners	4

Source: Nigerian Union of Teacher's Bulletin (2004) and UNESCO (2006) Information Sheet on Child Labour in Nigeria.

that basic school net enrolment or attendance between 2000 and 2007 was 63%. The dropout rate for girls was 44%, while that of the boys in secondary school was 39%. Thus, access to education- enrolment, attendance and progression in basic education by Nigerian children is low. As outlined, education plays an important role in achieving high economic growth and freedom. Thus, early educational opportunities for children are essential because educating during adulthood becomes problematic. There are over eight million Nigerian children under the age of 14 who are in some form of labour because of lack of access to basic education programme (NUT, 2004; UNESCO, 2006; UNICEF, 2010, 2015) (Table 2).

UNICEF (2010) reported that Nigeria keeps the unenviable world record of harbouring the largest number of out-of-school children, after Pakistan. This finding drove this study to examine why achieving access in UBE Nigeria has been problematic.

### The problem

Since the Nigerian government's reform of basic education was introduced over a decade ago, the declining trend over the past four years poses a challenge to the country's ability to fulfil the goal of EFA (Education for All), as espoused in the policy of UBE. Lack of education access by many young people represents a waste of national resources. It constitutes an imminent threat to the stability of the country's volatile political landscape (USAID Mission Report, 2009, 2015). Previous research has clearly shown that there is a problem with implementing the basic education programme in Nigeria, as it relates to access in UBE (Olarenwaju and Folorunsho, 2009; Ogunjimi et al., 2009; Obayan, 2011; Bolaji et al., 2015, 2016). While the intentions and goals of the UBE policy are worthy, the implementation strategies have been inadequate.

### Research questions

The research questions driving the research were:

(1) In what ways did the bureaucratic policy implementation process affect access to basic education in Nigeria?

(2) How did the actions of the bureaucrats affect access to basic education in Nigeria?

These research questions guided the exploration of issues facing the bureaucracy in implementing the basic education programme in Nigeria.

### Theoretical framework

The top-down theory by Meter and Horn (1975) was the framework explored to understand the effect of public policy, and studies of intergovernmental relations in Nigeria. The Meter and Horn (1975) framework provided clarity in the exploration of the hierarchical structure of policy implementation in Nigeria. It assisted us in understanding the bureaucratic complexity and its impact on the implementation of the country's government policy on education (UBE). The six variables articulated by Meter and Horn assisted the researchers to understand the working of bureaucratic structure of policy objectives and effective implementation in Nigeria's organisation setting. These variables are:

- (1) Policy objectives are clear and consistent;
- (2) Policy implementation encompasses those actions by the public, groups or private individuals that are directed at achieving the objectives set forth in prior policy decisions;
- (3) The implementation process is structured adequately;
- (4) Implementing officials are committed to the programme's goals;
- (5) Interest groups and (legislative and executive) sovereigns are supportive; and
- (6) There are no detrimental changes in the socioeconomic framework conditions in understanding policy objectives and its implementation (Meter and Horn, 1975).

In addition, the theory provided a framework to understand how policy decisions reached at the 'top' of a political system work 'down' to the implementers. According to Bardach (1997), the focus of the theory is not on the whole policy process, but merely on what happens after a bill becomes law. Thus, the theory helped the researchers to understand the layers of bureaucratic implementation processes after a policy decision has been that enacted.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study used qualitative methods that align with elucidating human environments and human experiences within a variety of perspectives or conceptual framework (Winchester and Rofe, 2010; Flick, 2014). This background informed the choice of the qualitative

**Table 3.** The documentary evidences on enrolment in SW from 1999-2009.

Year	Male	%	Female	%	Total
1999	420132	8.33	422823	8.22	16.55
2000	421284	8.35	423474	8.23	16.59
2001	422279	8.37	425874	8.28	16.65
2002	426376	8.46	436208	8.48	16.94
2003	471965	9.36	471651	9.17	18.53
2004	472631	9.37	472376	9.18	18.56
2005	469848	9.32	470072	9.14	18.46
2006	462730	9.18	479774	9.33	18.50
2007	489456	9.71	513197	9.98	19.68
2008	491342	9.74	513899	9.99	19.73
2009	494628	9.81	514567	10.0	19.81

Source: Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), Abuja- Enrolment Data for SW from 1999-2009.

research approach to study the effect of bureaucratic mechanisms of policy implementation on access to basic education among Nigerian children. The strengths of the research approach were premised on finding answers to the research questions that underpinned the study. Firstly, the qualitative approach provided a much-needed clear understanding of education policy implementation and was essential to gaining insight into the peculiarity and uniqueness of UBE. Secondly, the approach also provided a reflection on how policy ideas and expectations were disseminated, interpreted and implemented by the bureaucrats informed by Meter and Horn (1975) six variables presented in the theoretical framework. Meter and Horn stressed the importance of the hierarchical structure of implementing policy in an organisational setting to understanding the bureaucratic mechanism of policy implementation. This approach was taken to investigate the complex issue of implementing UBE.

#### Data collection

Data were collected via document analysis and interviews. The researchers reviewed documents on UBE from the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), State Universal Basic Education BOARD (SUBEB) and Local Government Education Authority (LGEA), and from the Legislative Committee on Education. Duffy (2005) stated the document analysis approach is unique because of its uses as the central or exclusive method of research (Duffy, 2005). Interviews were conducted with key stakeholders and digitally recorded. According to Bitchener (2010), interview is an instrument for gathering unanticipated data in research. There were 30 officials of UBE interviewed - federal (UBEC), state (SUBEBs) and district (LGEA) levels. The interview questions were informed by Meter and Horn (1975). Data were collected in a region where one of the researchers has worked however none of the participants were known to him. Knowledge of the context was helpful to accessing documents and participants and during data collection and analysis careful attention was paid to ensuring. Care was taken that the interviewees understood that they were under no obligation to participate. To ensure that the bureaucrats who were at the level of bureaucratic structure of basic education—such as the deputy executive secretary, chairperson of SUBEB and directors— could not be identified, their data were reported in aggregate form. Ethical approval was sought and granted for the research. As Cohen et al. (2007) suggested, the participants were

made aware that the research report could be accessed locally and abroad.

#### Data analysis

The data collected were analysed based on the understanding of the three critical processes of qualitative research methodology: preparing and organising the data; coding and recording, and the representing the data (Cresswell, 2013; Flick, 2014). The analysed data were from documents and semi-structured interviews. As the researchers became familiar with the data, general key issues emerged from the iterative process of comparison. The main ideas emerging from each source were compared and contrasted in order to extract major key issues. The method of analysis was consistent with the views of Silverman (2011) and Punch (2010), who suggest organising excerpts from transcripts into categories and searching for patterns and connections within the categories to identify themes.

#### DISCUSSION

The enrolment data shown in Tables 3 and 4 reaffirm the NGO report data (Table 1) showing limited increase in the enrolment of students in government schools in the sample regions.

Evidence from the research indicated that the lack of enrolment was not a result of a lack of knowledge, effort or intent but of implementation complexities. The creation of the UBE board in the states and the uniformity of a compliance template all levels of implementation are examples of government's effort towards eradicating the gap of educational opportunities across regions. The policy was detailed in all aspects of teaching and learning programmes. As pointed out by the bureaucrats, the UBE

**Table 4.** The documentary evidences on enrolment in NC from 2005-2009.

Year	Male	%	Female	%	Total%
2005	504794	21.36	490022	20.84	42.20
2006	450087	19.04	454034	19.31	38.35
2007	420462	17.79	417250	17.75	35.54
2008	415024	17.56	414492	17.63	35.19
2009	573260	24.25	575164	17.63	48.72

Source: Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), Abuja- Enrolment Data for NC from 2005-2009.

policy, focussed on access, paid attention to developing adequate monitoring and supervision structures, evaluation processes, and feedback for public accountability. The bureaucrats agreed that despite the government readiness to achieve education access, enrolment of children across all the public schools in the regions is very low and marginal.

*Despite the fact we have child-friendly schools, the materials are there, the enrolment rate is not affected as expected. I can say that. (B3)*

*I can only feel the improvement of enrolment in the villages and less developed areas where there are little or no private schools. And it is the illiterate parents and poor parents that take their children to public schools. At least, I could remember teachers run after school age children 15-16 years ago to come and enrol in schools in order to safeguard their job to avoid being retrenched by the government due to high ratio of teachers to pupils. There is increment in the number of enrolment now because of the population explosion mostly from illiterate and poor parents (sic). (B5)*

The bureaucrats across the three (3) regions reflected that UBE policy was designed to provide solutions to the numerous issues affecting the development of education in Nigeria. It is this reality of 'numerous issues' that results in the complexity of policy implementation and the significance of the inter-related nature of these issues. This complexity was under-estimated at the regional level resulting in limited improvement in access. Two examples are presented to illustrate the impact of this complexity on improving access: disarticulation; and monitoring and supervision.

### **Problem of disarticulation**

The reflection of the bureaucrats revealed the difficulty in the disarticulation of schools and transition from the primary to the secondary school in the UBE implementation. Disarticulation in this study means the transition or upward movement of learners from one level

to another (for instance, from basic six to basic seven). The challenge of disarticulation mentioned by the bureaucrats is because the orthodox schools are not willing to have the pupils of the UBE to transit to the senior classes despite the directive of the government. Fewer people attend secondary school than primary school because of the problem of transition (National Population Commission Report, 2011). Akowe (2011) on schooling status (attendance and transition) reported that fifty years after independence education imbalance remains obvious because of some issues with the basic education implementation. He opined that less than sixty percent of the primary school children transit to the secondary school under the basic education programme in NC and less than seventy percent transition in SW. As reported in Tables 3 and 4, the challenge of transition adversely affected the enrolment and progress of students. The data presented in Table 5 below affirmed the impact of disarticulation on the attendance and transition rate from the two regions.

The percentage of the basic education school age population that attended and transitioned in both primary school and secondary school from 2008-2011 (the gender parity is the ratio of both the males and females attended and transitioned from primary and secondary schools) is represented in Table 5. The consequence of the challenge of transition as seen in the Table 5 is drop-out syndrome, the very essence for the establishment of basic education of 1999. Table 6 informs the understanding of the negative impact of the consequence of drop-out of school age children who are not attending school in the SW and NC.

The pattern of drop-out rates in the two regions is shown in Table 6. It demonstrates the drop-out rates are highest in the sixth grade (15%) and lowest at the third grade in NC. Whereas in SW, it is lowest at grade five and the highest at sixth grade. It also confirms the position of the bureaucrats and the analysed documents that the distortions hampering effective implementation of basic education are yet to be resolved. Onyukwu (2011) submitted that transition has been a recurrent issue with basic education provision in Nigeria. UNESCO (2009) also revealed that the gross enrolment ratio at the primary level was eighty-nine percent (ninety-five percent male and eighty-four percent female). The net enrolment

**Table 5.** National Population Commission statistics on school attendance (NPC Report, 2011).

Region	Male	Female	Total	Gender Parity
<b>Basic Education School Attendance and transition</b>				
North-Central	71.7	69.2	70.5	0.97
South-West	77.8	75.2	76.6	0.97
<b>Secondary School Attendance and transition</b>				
North-Central	50.1	41.6	46.0	0.83
South West	68.5	68.9	68.7	1.01

**Table 6.** National Population Commission statistics on drop-out (NPC Report, 2011).

Background (Year of School)	Drop-out rate school grade					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
NC	0.4	0.2	0.0	0.1	0.3	15.0
SW	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.2	4.7

rate (as a percentage of children in the 6-12 age group) was a much lower sixty-one percent (male children sixty-four percent, female children fifty-eight percent) which implies that there has not been any significant impact of the UBE policy at the level of enrolment and transition. The Nation (2009) and Bolaji et al. (2016) reported that no sooner had the disarticulation begun than confusion erupted among the policy implementers about the philosophy and context of the policy. There were crises of confidence among the state bureaucrats over the modalities for implementing the proposed 9-year basic education by the Federal Government as it involves the disarticulation of junior secondary schools from senior secondary schools.

### Monitoring and supervision

Monitoring and supervision quality has affected the government's success in the provision of free and compulsory basic education for the Nigerian citizenry. According to the research participants, effective supervision and monitoring is lacking in the UBE implementation. This is responsible for the questionable practices recorded in the implementation programmes especially in school supplies. The bureaucrats identified insensitivity of government officials to supervision, lack of funds and lack of logistics as impediment to monitoring. The geographical location of schools is also a challenge. This is because some schools within a district are not easily accessible during the raining season because of the deplorable condition of the roads. In some instances, it takes close to three days to get to a school for supervision, in another instance, monitoring officials have to paddle a canoe to get to schools in the riverine

districts. The view of B15 is relevant in placing supervision in proper perspective.

*"...the constraint is the issue of roads when you put teachers in some areas, for example, where they have to go by boat and some of the teachers I know of two communities like that even in a district in PS and badly enough in those areas the quality of houses there are not acceptable to teachers we post there so they just have to manage, come back home and they continue to complain of risks. This means that without adequate logistics, school monitoring may not be effective".*

The NPC (2011) reported that the education bureaucracy in Nigeria is not achieving its stated objectives and the decay in the system grows deeper with a lack of adequate mechanism for effective monitoring and supervision. According to Wike (2011), UBE monitoring and supervision is very bad and the task is huge because of inadequate vehicles for monitoring, inadequate number of qualified monitoring officers, inadequate office accommodation, lack of funds, transport equipment and time factor militate against effective supervision of the UBE programme (Edho, 2009). In this study, educational supervision is concerned with those particular activities and aspects which maintain and promote the effectiveness of teaching and learning in schools. The challenge with the implementation of UBE policy is the effective monitoring and supervision of schools (Ochoyi and Danlandi, 2009; Adeyanju, 2010; Anaduaka and Okafor, 2013). As long as there is lack of synergy and co-operation among the officials within and across districts, little or no improvement will be achieved in monitoring and supervision. A key example of the impact of poor

quality monitoring and supervision identified in this research is the Food Project

### Food project

The food Project was one of the objectives of the UBE programme. The Project was cancelled due to a lack of transparency in ensuring the effective utilization of Project funds. The bureaucrats opined that the cancellation of the meal-a-day project contributed to the decline in school enrolment and transition. The cancellation of the Project was as a result of questionable actions and controls at state government level. The view of Shaka-Momodu (2012) aligned with the observation of the bureaucrats, that the revocation of the food programme makes mockery of the original idea of the UBE policy. It is sad that government funds made available for the food programme were without proper supervision and monitoring of the project (Anaduaka and Okafor, 2013). According to the bureaucrats, the food programme lasted less than one year, not because of lack of funds to implement the programme, but because of the mismanagement at state level.

*Government thought of feeding initially, that is, a meal a day to encourage enrolment and the health of the pupils..... But some state governors started importing food by giving out contracts to their cronies from South Africa and the government stopped it. (B25)*

Providing school meals have been a global strategy to meet education objectives through increasing attendance and improving health outcomes. India, as a case in point, has had a long tradition of school food programmes since 1920. The National School Lunch Programme (NSLP) Act in America dates from 1946. Brazil had the food programme in the country's constitution covering thirty-seven million children every year (Akanbi and Alayande, 2011; Schirm and Kirkendall, 2010; Yunusa et al., 2012). The Food Project is in agreement with the research findings that healthy eating habits among children play a key role in their mental and physical development. Also, it promotes growth and reduces many risks associated with both immediate and long-time health related issues (Bordi, 2002; Yunusa et al., 2012). It has been established that one of the child-related challenges in Sub-Saharan Africa is malnutrition. According to Olusanya (2010) malnutrition has continued to be a public problem in developing countries where the poor socio-economic condition has continued to work in synergy with malnutrition. Malnutrition affects cognitive development of children. It can relate to poor attendance at school. This is because low health status will invariably lead to high withdrawal rate (Olusanya, 2010; Grantham-McGregor, 2001; Ogbimi and Ogunba, 2011). Nigeria and Ethiopia

are countries with a high rate of malnutrition because the diet that is commonly offered to young children is of low quality and often is lacking in variety of nutrient adequacy (Adewara and Visser, 2011). The research findings revealed that the stoppage of the meal project portends a great danger, especially in low socio economic status countries (Bolaji et al., 2015).

### Conclusions

The analysis of data revealed that the bureaucrats are knowledgeable and have the requisite technical-know in turning policy to action. These skills impacted on the marginal increase in education access in the remote communities. Therefore, the initial notion hitherto that the failure in implementing policy in the past was due to lack of understanding should be rejected. The intent of the UBE policy initiative which is to ensure that all the children of school-aged in Nigeria have uninterrupted access to education has not been realised because of the identified complexities. Bureaucrats 'on the ground' endeavoured to fulfil their requirements of policy implementation at the local level but did so without an understanding of the overall vision and purpose resulting in a situation described by Kaufman, "Confronted by the demands he cannot satisfy, he will fashion his own policies to handle the situation. His own policies often do not coincide with the policies of his leaders" (Kaufman, 1973, p. 3). This lack of understanding of the critical impact one decision can have on the success of the implementation of the whole policy, is illustrated in the Food Project. The analysed data established bureaucratic complexity namely, disarticulation, aborted food project and inadequate supervision as the key issues affecting education access in the UBE implementation.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are proposed based on the data from this research. Introduction of these recommendations may contribute to improved outcomes for UBE policy implementation.

(1) There is need to review the constitution to give the Federal government the exclusive right to administer UBE in Nigeria. This will ensure the overlapping bureaucracy in UBE administration in the states and LGEAs become a thing of the past. It will also ensure that the issue of transition, unwillingness of the states to provide their counterpart fund for UBE implementation is done with. The review of the constitution will enable the Federal Government to create regional offices in the six geo-political zones of the country against the state SUBEB that is existing presently. It will facilitate effective



monitoring and supervision of policy implementation task. (2) The community involvement through SBMC should be encouraged and motivated for efficient monitoring and supervision of basic education in every locality. This is because the few states that explore the SBMC towards policy implementation recorded pockets of achievements in the UBE implementation. Distribution of school supplies should be done through the SBMC who are distinguished and retired administrators in their localities with track recorded of honesty, integrity and truthfulness. This will ensure that the unethical practices that are noted with the distribution are faced out.

(3) To encourage increase in enrolment, the food project should be revisited. Regionalization of education will ensure that the objectives of setting out the project will be achieved. Periodical appraisal of the policy implementation of UBE should be encouraged to be able to know the areas of strengths and weaknesses of the policy that need to be address.

### Conflict of Interests

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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