



Loose Parts-Based Learning Model in Developing Creativity and Independence of Early Childhood in the Independent Curriculum Era

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Abstrak

Early childhood education in the Merdeka Curriculum era emphasizes child-centered, exploratory learning, and optimally develops children's creativity and independence. However, much learning in early childhood education (PAUD) remains monotonous and overly structured, thus limiting children's opportunities to explore and develop ideas freely. Therefore, innovative learning models are needed that are suited to the characteristics of early childhood, one of which is loose-parts-based learning that utilizes open-ended materials as a medium for play and learning. This study aims to examine the loose-parts-based learning model in developing creativity and independence in early childhood in the Merdeka Curriculum era. The study used a qualitative approach with library research through a review of various relevant journals, books, and educational documents. Data analysis was conducted using content analysis by grouping and synthesizing various related literature. The results of the study indicate that loose-parts-based learning can create active, enjoyable, and meaningful learning. The use of open-ended materials provides opportunities for children to explore, imagine, solve problems, and optimally develop creativity. Furthermore, this learning model can also enhance children's independence through activities such as selecting materials, choosing games, and completing activities independently. Therefore, the loose parts-based learning model is considered relevant and effective in supporting the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in early childhood education.

PENDAHULUAN

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is a strategic level of education that plays a strategic role in optimally developing all aspects of a child's development. Early childhood is known as the golden age because during this period, a child's brain develops rapidly, necessitating appropriate and high-quality stimulation. Education at this stage focuses not only on academics but also on developing creativity, independence, critical thinking, social-emotional skills, and the life skills a child will need for the future. Every learning experience given to children at this time will influence their development at the next level of education, so a learning process is needed that is appropriate to the characteristics of early childhood. Teachers have an important role in creating a safe, enjoyable learning environment and are able to provide meaningful learning experiences for each child.

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Therefore, early childhood learning must be designed through fun, contextual, active, and child-centered activities so that all children's developmental potential can develop optimally (Suyadi & Ulfah, 2021). In line with the development of education in Indonesia, the government, through the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, emphasizes the importance of flexible, child-centered learning and provides students with the freedom to explore learning experiences according to their interests and developmental stage. The Independent Curriculum presents a form of educational transformation that places children as the primary subjects in learning. In its implementation, teachers are required to be able to create innovative learning that encourages children to actively explore, create, and build knowledge through direct experience. Learning is no longer one-way, but rather oriented towards an exploratory process and strengthening children's character from an early age. This learning approach is expected to create a more meaningful learning atmosphere because children are given the opportunity to learn through real-life experiences according to their developmental needs. Furthermore, the Independent Curriculum also provides flexibility for educational units to develop learning that utilizes the potential of the surrounding environment as a learning resource. (Kemendikbudristek, 2022)

However, the reality on the ground shows that the learning process in many early childhood education institutions still faces various obstacles. Some teachers still use conventional teacher-centered learning approaches, the use of monotonous learning media, and overly structured learning activities. These conditions result in children receiving fewer opportunities to explore and freely express their creative ideas. Furthermore, learning that relies too heavily on teacher instructions also impacts children's ability to be independent in making decisions and completing simple tasks independently (Wahyuni & Azizah, 2021). This situation indicates that the learning process in early childhood education still requires more flexible, creative learning innovations that provide children with greater space for exploration. Learning that is too focused on worksheets and teacher instructions tends to make children passive and less actively involved in the learning process. However, early childhood children essentially learn through direct experience, playing, experimenting, and interacting with their surroundings.

Creativity is an important aspect that needs to be developed from an early age because it is related to children's ability to generate new ideas, concepts, and works based on their imagination and experience. Children with high creativity tend to be more active, confident, capable of solving problems, and possess a strong sense of curiosity. Creativity is also a crucial competency in facing the challenges of the 21st century, which demand innovative and adaptive thinking. Therefore, early childhood education needs to be designed to provide ample space for children to explore and create meaningful learning experiences (Munandar, 2020). Furthermore, children's creativity cannot develop optimally if the learning process remains monotonous and limits their freedom to play and express themselves. Children need a learning environment that supports exploration, provides opportunities to try new things, and allows them to develop their imaginations according to their developmental stage.

A creative learning environment will help children build self-confidence, courage in expressing ideas, and the ability to think flexibly from an early age. In addition to creativity, independence is also a crucial developmental aspect to instill from an early age. A child's independence can be seen through their ability to perform simple activities without assistance, make decisions, take responsibility for assigned tasks, and control themselves in various situations. Independent children adapt more easily to their social environment and have greater self-confidence. However, in reality, many young children still exhibit high dependence on teachers and parents due to a lack of learning stimulation that provides opportunities for

independent learning (Hasanah & Nurhayati, 2022).

This low level of independence is also influenced by learning patterns that are still too teacher-directed, resulting in children becoming accustomed to receiving instructions without being given the opportunity to make choices or solve problems independently. If this condition persists, it can hinder the development of a sense of responsibility and decision-making skills in children from an early age. One learning model considered relevant for developing creativity and independence in early childhood in the Independent Curriculum era is the loose parts-based learning model. The concept of loose parts was first introduced by Simon Nicholson, who explained that an environment rich in open-ended materials can enhance children's creativity and exploration. Loose parts are various types of materials that can be moved, arranged, combined, disassembled, and reused according to children's imaginations.

These materials can be natural or used objects, such as stones, wood, twigs, leaves, bottle caps, cardboard, shells, popsicle sticks, and various other materials easily found in the surrounding environment. The use of these materials also aligns with the concept of environmentally friendly learning because it encourages children to utilize available resources around them. Besides being readily available, the use of loose parts can reduce dependence on manufactured educational play equipment, making learning more economical and contextual. (Nicholson, 1971).

In the context of early childhood learning, the use of loose parts provides opportunities for children to play freely and creatively without limitations on form or end result. Children can create various works and games based on their ideas and experiences. These activities can stimulate creative thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills, as well as increase children's self-confidence. Furthermore, the use of loose parts supports exploration and project-based learning, which are key characteristics of the Independent Curriculum (Rahmawati et al., 2023). Loose parts-based learning is also considered capable of creating a more enjoyable learning environment because children are directly involved in the process of discovering, experimenting, and creating something through play. Children are not merely recipients of information but also active subjects who construct their own learning experiences through interactions with various available materials.

In addition to supporting creativity and independence, the use of loose parts can also foster the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills in early childhood. When children are exposed to various objects that can be used freely, they are encouraged to try various possibilities, observe the results, and discover new ways to solve the game. This process provides a meaningful learning experience because children learn to understand cause-and-effect relationships through hands-on play. This type of learning aligns with the characteristics of the Independent Curriculum, which emphasizes active, experiential learning for children (Eriani et al., 2022).

Several previous studies have shown that the use of loose parts media has a positive impact on early childhood development. Research conducted by (Yulianti & Hartati, 2022) demonstrated that loose parts-based learning can enhance the creativity of children aged 5–6 years through constructive play activities. Another study by (Aisyah et al., 2023) explained that the use of loose parts media can improve children's creative thinking skills and active participation in learning. Furthermore, research by (Fitriani & Hasanah, 2024) also found that loose parts-based learning can increase children's self-confidence and independence in completing learning activities independently. Other research also shows that loose parts-based learning can be combined with the STEAM approach, helping children develop logical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication skills through contextual and enjoyable play activities (Ananda et al., 2023).

However, based on a review of several previous studies, several limitations remain, creating research gaps in research on loose parts in early childhood education. First, most previous research has focused on developing children's creativity, while aspects of children's independence have not been studied in depth and integrated within a single study. Second, research related to loose parts generally focuses solely on media use, with few specifically linking it to the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in early childhood education. Third, some previous studies have used a simple experimental approach without comprehensively describing how the loose parts-based learning model is implemented in children's daily learning activities (Sameto et al., 2025). Fourth, there is still limited research examining the use of loose parts as a learning model that not only enhances creativity but also shapes children's independent character through exploratory and contextual learning.

Given these conditions, this study has a novelty that distinguishes it from previous research. This novelty lies in the integration of the loose parts-based learning model with the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, simultaneously developing two developmental aspects: creativity and independence in early childhood. This study not only examines the results of using loose parts but also describes the process of implementing contextual learning in children's play activities.(Ananda et al., 2023). Furthermore, this study positions loose parts not merely as a play medium but as an innovative learning model capable of supporting differentiated, exploratory, and child-centered learning, in accordance with the characteristics of the Independent Curriculum. Therefore, this research is expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions to the development of learning innovations in early childhood education.

Research on loose parts-based learning models in developing creativity and independence in early childhood during the Independent Curriculum era is crucial. This research is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the implementation of loose parts-based learning and serve as a reference for early childhood education teachers in creating innovative, enjoyable, and developmentally appropriate learning in the modern education era. In addition to providing theoretical benefits, the results of this study are also expected to serve as considerations for early childhood education institutions in developing more creative, innovative, and child-centered learning strategies. Thus, the implementation of loose parts-based learning is expected to support the achievement of the objectives of the Independent Curriculum, particularly in developing children who are creative, independent, and have optimally developed thinking skills.

METODE

This study employed a qualitative approach with a library research approach, aiming to examine in-depth the loose parts-based learning model in developing creativity and independence in early childhood during the Independent Curriculum era. This approach was chosen because the research focuses on analyzing concepts, theories, and previous research findings related to loose parts learning, children's creativity, independence, and the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in early childhood education. Data were obtained from various scientific literature sources, such as books, national and international journals, and scientific articles. Twenty-four reference sources were used in this study, consisting of 20 national and international journal articles, two scientific books, two policy documents, and other supporting references.

The literature used was published between 2020 and 2025 to ensure the data aligns with the latest research developments. Furthermore, several classic theories regarding loose parts and child development were retained as a conceptual

foundation as they were deemed relevant to the research focus. Literature sources were obtained through Google Scholar, Garuda, and ERIC using the keywords loose parts, early childhood creativity, early childhood independence, and the Independent Curriculum for Early Childhood Education (PAUD). The data analysis technique used content analysis with a qualitative descriptive approach. The analysis process was carried out through several stages: grouping literature based on research themes, understanding the literature's content in depth, identifying key concepts, and compiling a data synthesis to explain the role of loose parts-based learning models in developing creativity and independence in early childhood. Data validity was maintained through source triangulation by comparing various relevant references to obtain more objective, valid, and comprehensive data.

HASIL DAN PEMBAHASAN

A review of various literature shows that the loose parts-based learning model plays a significant role in supporting the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in early childhood education. The various studies analyzed demonstrate that the use of loose parts not only serves as a medium for play but also as a learning approach capable of creating active, meaningful, and child-centered learning experiences. These characteristics align with the principles of the Independent Curriculum, which provide students with the freedom to explore knowledge through real-world experiences according to their needs and developmental stage (Eriani et al., 2022). Therefore, the use of loose parts not only supports the achievement of learning objectives but also strengthens the process of character formation and the development of children's overall competencies. Based on the synthesis of various studies, the implementation of loose parts-based learning can transform learning patterns from previously teacher-centered to more student-centered learning. Children have the opportunity to determine the materials to be used, design the game, and complete activities based on their own ideas and experiences.

This situation demonstrates that children no longer act merely as recipients of information but rather as active subjects in constructing their own knowledge. This shift in roles is one of the main characteristics of the Independent Curriculum, which emphasizes the importance of learning through exploration, direct experience, and reflection on the learning process experienced by children (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). The research reviewed also shows that the use of loose parts can increase children's engagement during the learning process. Farikhah et al. (2022) reported that children showed greater enthusiasm when given the opportunity to use open-ended materials compared to learning media that already had a fixed form and function. These findings indicate that the open-ended nature of loose parts allows children to generate a variety of play possibilities without being limited to a single answer or a specific form of work (Farikhah et al., 2022).

This differs from the use of conventional media, which generally directs children to produce uniform products, thus limiting opportunities for exploration. When compared with several previous studies, there is a similar finding that the success of using loose parts is not solely influenced by the type of material used, but rather by the learning strategies implemented by the teacher. Some studies emphasize the importance of providing a variety of materials to stimulate children's creativity, while others show that learning success is influenced by the teacher's ability to facilitate exploration through open-ended questions, providing opportunities for choice, and respecting children's ideas. This analysis suggests that the effectiveness of loose parts-based learning models is a result of the interaction between the media used and the teacher's pedagogical competence in managing the learning.

According to Munandar (2020), creativity is the aspect of development that experiences the greatest improvement through the implementation of loose parts-

based learning. Nearly all of the studies analyzed indicate that children have greater opportunities to generate ideas, create new forms, and develop their imaginations when playing with open-ended materials. The freedom to determine how to use materials provides children with space for divergent thinking and generates alternative solutions to play activities. This situation suggests that creativity develops not because children are directed to produce specific works, but because they are given the opportunity to explore various possibilities based on their experiences and imagination. This finding is reinforced by research by Farikhah et al. (2022), which showed that children are more active in developing various forms of play when using loose parts. Children are able to utilize one type of material to create various different works based on ideas that emerge during play. Furthermore, research by Hernawati et al. (2024) revealed that this activity also encourages the development of critical thinking skills because children must consider the best way to arrange, combine, and modify the various materials available.

Thus, the creativity developed through loose parts-based learning is not only related to the ability to produce new works, but also involves thinking processes, decision-making, and simple problem-solving (Hernawati et al., 2024). However, the analysis shows that increased creativity does not occur automatically simply because of the use of loose parts. Several studies indicate that learning success is influenced by how teachers provide stimulation to children. Teachers who provide open-ended questions, opportunities for discussion, and freedom to explore tend to produce more effective learning than teachers who still dominate play activities. This demonstrates that the teacher's role remains crucial in optimizing the potential of loose parts as a learning model. Therefore, teacher competence in designing learning experiences is a key factor in successfully developing children's creativity through this approach.

Analysis of various studies also shows that the creativity developed through loose parts-based learning is closely linked to the objectives of implementing the Independent Curriculum. Learning that provides children with the freedom to try, experiment, and independently discover various solutions creates a more meaningful learning experience than learning that is solely focused on completing tasks. Therefore, the use of loose parts not only supports the development of creativity as an aspect of early childhood development but also strengthens the implementation of child-centered learning in accordance with the principles of the Independent Curriculum. The analysis of various studies indicates that the loose parts-based learning model not only impacts the development of creativity but also makes a significant contribution to fostering independence in early childhood. Unlike learning that is still dominated by teacher instruction, loose parts-based learning provides children with the opportunity to make choices, use materials according to their needs, and take responsibility for the process and results of their activities (Isnaini & Ariyanti, 2022). These opportunities encourage children to learn to make independent decisions, from the planning stage to the completion of an activity. This demonstrates that independence develops through direct experience during the learning process, not just through advice or direction from teachers (Hasanah & Nurhayati, 2022).

Research by Fitriani and Hasanah (2024) explains that children who participate in loose-parts-based learning experience increased self-confidence in choosing learning activities and completing assignments without relying entirely on teacher assistance. Children also become accustomed to returning play equipment after use, demonstrating responsibility for the learning environment. The results of this study demonstrate that loose-parts-based learning not only develops independent work skills but also instills the values of discipline and responsibility through habits developed during play (basith).

Compared with previous research, it appears that most studies still view independence as an additional impact of using loose-parts, while discussions focus more on increasing creativity. However, based on a synthesis of various literature, both aspects develop simultaneously as long as children have the opportunity to explore their learning environment. Creativity emerges when children generate new ideas, while independence develops when children have the freedom to make choices and take responsibility for their decisions. This analysis demonstrates that the relationship between creativity and independence is complementary, and therefore, both need to be studied in an integrated manner in the implementation of loose-parts-based learning.

Furthermore, the analysis indicates that the success of developing independence is influenced by the teacher's role in providing proportional support. Teachers who excessively provide examples or solve children's difficulties can actually reduce their opportunities to learn to make their own decisions. (Basith et al., 2020) Conversely, teachers who act as facilitators by providing stimulating questions and opportunities for exploration are better able to foster children's self-confidence and responsibility. Therefore, the success of loose parts-based learning models is determined not only by the availability of media, but also by the mentoring strategies implemented by teachers throughout the learning process.

The study also showed that loose parts-based learning impacts the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills in early childhood. When children are exposed to a variety of materials with different shapes, sizes, and functions, they are encouraged to observe, compare, try various alternatives, and evaluate the results obtained during play activities. This process helps children develop logical thinking skills through real-life experiences, rather than simply receiving information from teachers. These findings support the research of Hernawati et al. (2024), which states that assembling and modifying various materials can improve children's ability to find solutions to simple problems (Hernawati et al., 2024). In addition to critical thinking skills, loose parts-based learning also contributes to children's social and emotional development. Various studies have shown that play activities using loose parts are more often conducted in groups, providing children with opportunities to discuss, share tools, express opinions, and collaborate on activities. This situation allows children to learn to appreciate different ideas, control their emotions when facing difficulties, and build effective communication with peers (Fitri & Hasbi, 2025).

Therefore, the benefits of loose parts are not only evident in cognitive aspects but also in the development of social skills, which are important indicators in early childhood education. Compared with conventional learning, which emphasizes completing tasks according to teacher examples, loose parts-based learning provides more space for children to experience independent thinking processes. Children are not directed to produce the same answer, but are instead given the freedom to discover various alternative solutions based on their ideas and experiences. This difference is one of the advantages of loose parts compared to the use of closed-ended learning media. Thus, this learning model is more in line with the characteristics of the Independent Curriculum, which positions the learning process as an active, contextual, and meaningful experience for each child (Nurjanah & Muthmainah, 2023).

Based on the results of a synthesis of various studies reviewed, it was found that most previous research focused more on enhancing children's creativity through the use of loose parts. For example, research by (Yulianti & Hartati, 2022) focused more on enhancing creativity through constructive play activities. Meanwhile, research by (Yuliani & Kristiana, 2024) primarily discussed loose parts as a creative learning medium without linking them to independent character development or the

implementation of the Independent Curriculum. These differences in research focus indicate that studies on the integration of creativity and independence are still relatively limited, requiring a more comprehensive discussion. The analysis also shows that some studies still view loose parts as merely a play medium, rather than as a learning model with clear implementation stages and pedagogical objectives. However, research by Putri and Efastri (2025) confirms that loose parts can be a learning approach that supports student-centered learning when designed systematically. This analysis shows that the successful implementation of loose parts learning depends not only on the availability of the materials used, but also on the teacher's ability to design learning activities that encourage children's exploration, reflection, communication, and collaboration (Putri & Efastri, 2025).

Therefore, this study offers a distinct contribution compared to previous research because it not only examines the benefits of loose parts on creativity but also analyzes their relationship to the development of children's independence in the context of implementing the Independent Curriculum. This approach provides a more comprehensive picture of how loose parts can function as a learning model that supports character building, critical thinking skills, communication, collaboration, and child-centered learning (Rahma et al., 2023).

Although various studies have shown that loose parts-based learning models have a positive impact on creativity and independence in early childhood, the results also indicate that their implementation in various early childhood education institutions still faces several challenges. These challenges relate not only to the availability of materials but also to teacher readiness, a supportive learning environment, and an understanding of the concept of child-centered learning (Putri & Efastri, 2025). This situation indicates that the successful implementation of loose parts is not simply about providing various materials; it also requires a shift in the learning paradigm to better align with the principles of the Independent Curriculum.

Based on the results of a synthesis of various studies, one of the most frequently encountered obstacles is teachers' limited understanding of the concept of loose parts. Some teachers still view loose parts as merely a play tool, thus orienting learning more towards the use of specific objects, rather than the child's exploration process. As a result, teachers often provide examples to be imitated or direct the final outcome of activities, thus diminishing children's freedom to be creative. This situation is inconsistent with the principles of the Independent Curriculum, which provide space for students to construct knowledge through independent learning experiences (Kemendikbudristek, 2022).

Another challenge relates to teachers' ability to fulfill their role as facilitators. Analysis shows that teachers accustomed to conventional learning tend to struggle when asking open-ended questions, facilitating discussions, or providing opportunities for children to make their own choices. However, research by Rohmatun et al. (2021) confirms that the quality of interaction between teachers and children is a determining factor in the success of loose parts-based learning. Teachers no longer act as the primary source of information, but as companions who provide stimulation so that children are able to think, explore, and find solutions independently (Rohmatun et al., 2021). In addition to teacher factors, managing facilities and infrastructure also poses a challenge in implementing loose parts. Although the materials used are relatively easy to obtain locally, each material must meet safety, hygiene, and suitability requirements for children's developmental characteristics. Teachers need to conduct a selection process before using materials to avoid posing a risk to children's safety. Therefore, implementing loose parts requires careful planning, from collection, storage, utilization, and evaluation of the materials' use in learning activities.

The study also showed that the success of loose parts implementation is influenced by parental and school support. Children will have a more optimal learning experience if exploration activities at school are also supported at home by providing simple, safe materials for play. Furthermore, the principal plays a crucial role in encouraging teachers to participate in training, share good practices, and develop learning innovations aligned with the characteristics of the Independent Curriculum. Therefore, implementing loose parts is a shared responsibility between teachers, schools, parents, and the surrounding community, ensuring a sustainable learning process. Based on the analysis of various studies, the loose parts-based learning model has important implications for the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in early childhood education. This learning model creates a more active learning environment because children are given the opportunity to explore various possibilities through play. Children not only gain knowledge but also learn to develop creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and independent decision-making. All of these skills are expected to develop through child-centered learning.

The study also showed that the use of loose parts can be an alternative learning innovation that is easy to implement because it utilizes materials readily available in the surrounding environment. This benefits early childhood education units with limited learning resources, as teachers can still create meaningful learning experiences without relying on expensive educational play equipment. In addition to supporting children's creativity, the use of natural and recycled materials can also instill a sense of environmental stewardship from an early age (Ernitasari et al., 2026). When linked to the Pancasila Student Profile, loose parts-based learning contributes to strengthening several dimensions, such as critical reasoning, creativity, independence, mutual cooperation, and faith and noble character. Children have the opportunity to express ideas, collaborate with peers, respect differences of opinion, and take responsibility for their activities. Therefore, the implementation of loose parts is not only oriented towards cognitive development but also supports character formation, which is the primary objective of the Independent Curriculum (Nurjanah & Muthmainah, 2023).

Based on the synthesis of various analyzed studies, it is clear that the loose parts-based learning model is a relevant learning approach for early childhood education in the Independent Curriculum era. Various studies have consistently shown that the use of loose parts can enhance children's creativity, independence, critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and problem-solving skills through exploratory learning experiences (Sholihah et al., 2025). However, the effectiveness of the loose parts-based learning model is not solely determined by the availability of materials or media used, but is also greatly influenced by the teacher's competence in designing lessons, providing stimulation, and creating a safe and supportive learning environment for children's exploration. In other words, loose parts is not simply a collection of open materials, but rather a learning model that requires ongoing planning, guidance, and reflection to optimally achieve learning objectives.

The results of this study also indicate a gap in previous research, which largely focused on enhancing creativity, while discussions on the relationship between creativity, independence, and the implementation of the Independent Curriculum are relatively limited. Therefore, this study contributes by presenting a synthesis that integrates these three aspects into a comprehensive discussion. These findings are expected to serve as a reference for teachers, principals, and future researchers in developing more effective learning innovations, contextual, and child-centered so that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in early childhood education can be carried out optimally.

KESIMPULAN

Based on the literature review, it can be concluded that the loose parts-based learning model is an effective approach to supporting the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in early childhood education. This learning model fosters children's creativity and independence through exploratory activities that provide freedom to think, create, make decisions, and solve problems appropriate to their developmental stage. Furthermore, loose parts-based learning also contributes to the development of critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and responsibility skills, as part of strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile.

However, the success of implementing the loose parts-based learning model is determined not only by the availability of materials but also by the teacher's competence in designing child-centered learning, creating a safe learning environment, and providing stimulation that encourages exploration and independence. Therefore, support from schools, parents, and various relevant parties is needed for optimal and sustainable implementation of the loose parts-based learning model. Further research is recommended to test the effectiveness of the loose parts-based learning model through field research with various characteristics of early childhood education institutions to obtain more comprehensive empirical evidence regarding its implementation.

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