How to Integrate Sustainable Development in English Lessons: Reflections from Teachers, Students and Academicians[*]

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Abstract

This qualitative descriptive study as one small part of a big project sought to examine the opinions and recommendations of different stakeholders (i.e. students, teachers and academicians) as to the basic characteristics of a middle school English language course integrating sustainable development content. Three different interview schedules for each group of participants were developed by the researchers to elicit participants' ideas about a sustainable development-oriented English course to be developed. Qualitative data were analyzed by means of content analysis and the main components of a course, that is, course aims, course content, learning-teaching experiences and course evaluation practices were utilized as themes to analyze the data. The results from this analysis indicated that the participants from each of these different stakeholder groups all appeared to appreciate and support the education for sustainable development. Their recommendations often pertained to course content that would include real-life videos and materials centering on the real-life issues already put forth by the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The utilization of technology and collaborative activities were recommended by all participants as an important dimension of teaching-learning experiences of this course. All stakeholders also emphasized the dominance or popularity of ecological dimension of sustainable development framework within their current experiences pointing out the lack or insufficiency in terms of including the economic and social dimensions of sustainable development for the teaching of English. Teachers and academicians mentioned some psychological conditions like students' developing ecophobia and losing hope for future and they warned that these should be seriously taken into consideration in the course design process. Several constraints were also reported by teachers and students against the optimal utilization of foreign language teaching irrespective of the integration of sustainable development content.

Keywords

sustainable development, sustainable development goals, education for sustainable development, English language curriculum, qualitative descriptive study, course design

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Introduction

Sustainable development (SD) is a concept that emerged in the 1980s in response to the need for a balance between economic and social progress, environmental sensitivity and the protection of natural resources. The report entitled "Our Common Future" published by the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987 plays an important role in the spread of the concept and its use in the literature. In this report, sustainable development is defined as the state or process of meeting the needs of the people currently existing in the world in a way that does not destroy or disrupt the ability of future generations to meet their needs (Bruntland Commission, 1987). In this sense, although the concept of development is based on the basic principle of meeting and satisfying human wants and needs, this should be realized in such a way that the environment and natural resources we live in can be provided adequately and effectively for future generations as well as today.

The aforementioned concept of "sustainable development" was used in the context of a focus on "sustainable use of resources" at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), known as Earth Summit, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 (Brinkmann, 2021). The most important outcome of this important meeting in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 was the production of a report or a document, expressed as Agenda 21 (United Nations, 1992), which contains a set of principles and guidelines for world governments and all other important social communities to plan their development and progress in the 21st century in a way that does not harm the environment. Chapter 36 of Agenda 21 focuses entirely on the concept of education and gives special emphasis and encouragement to educational institutions such as schools and universities to incorporate the concept of "Education for Sustainable Development" into their curricula. "Education for Sustainable Development" was identified as a core and key area of practice at the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 (United Nations, 2002). Insomuch that, following this meeting, the United Nations declared the period between 2005-2015 as "The UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development". The fundamental principle in this process is to ensure that everyone acquires and learns the basic awareness, thoughts, values, behaviors and norms necessary for a sustainable future and a sustainable world under equal and quality educational conditions (Jutvik & Liepina, 2009). Perhaps the step that made the concept of Sustainable Development more concrete and understandable can be considered to be the adoption of a total of 17 "Sustainable Development Goals" (SDGs) by the heads of states, world leaders, senior UN representatives and non-governmental organizations at the 70th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in 2015. In this respect, with the active support of UNESCO, 17 Global Goal areas were agreed upon for the next 15 years following 2015, and this new era is referred to as the "United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development"(United Nations, 2015).

Given the 17 concrete goals identified, it is seen and clearly stated by decision-makers that one of them, that is Goal 4, is expressed under the main heading of "Quality Education" and it is a special goal that will be instrumental for the other 16 goals, which is to say that it is an intermediary and special goal for the realization of other goals (United Nations, 2015). In this respect, theoretically, there is a need for future studies that will serve the main goal area of quality education in sustainable development. When the studies carried out in the

field of educational sciences and social sciences are examined, it is seen that the sustainable development framework which has a history of twenty years in the world, has been studied especially at European universities, perhaps especially with the insistence and encouragement of the United Nations on the "Decade Plan for Education for Sustainable Development". In the context of Türkiye, this subject area has been addressed by Turkish researchers, especially in terms of studying the ecological and environmental aspects, yet it has not become a fully comprehensive subject where all its dimensions are applied to educational environments and research (TTGV, 2022). It was only in 2018 that it was included as a new course in the compulsory teacher training curriculum to be offered by the Turkish faculties of education (Council of Higher Education, 2018). In this regard, it is our main responsibility, especially as a member state of Agenda 30, to investigate the topic of sustainable development, especially within Türkiye, and further adapt it to all levels of education and educational settings.

Within the scope of the national literature accessible to researchers of this paper, studies that adress the ecological dimension of sustainable development, especially in geography and social studies courses are striking (Şahin & Göcen 2021; Kaya & Tomal, 2011; Demirbaş, 2011; Demir & Atasoy, 2021). In addition to qualitative studies like the above seeking to understand participants' perceptions of sustainable development as to the ecological concerns of sustainable development, an instrument development study in Türkiye was also conducted by Akgül and Aydoğdu (2020) to determine students' awareness of sustainable development, which represented a study utilizing a different research design beyond the dominance of qualitative studies. When the relevant literature on how and in what ways the concept of sustainable development and its related values have been incorporated into foreign language studies and teaching practices is examined, it is seen that the number of studies conducted on this subject in the context of national literature seems limited based on the literature accessible to researchers (Arslan & Curle, 2021; Bedir, 2021). It can be stated that the studies within the scope of the literature accessible to the current researchers were conducted in the context of determining or investigating the current situation as to perceptions of sustainable development and what it refers to, and beyond this, there were no attempts to implement a design and development study in which the data from such perceptions were used to determine some contextual characteristics to guide the design process. In his study, Bedir (2021) found that English teachers lacked knowledge and experience on how to integrate sustainable development into their lessons. In this context, there is a need for future studies to be designed in a way that will guide both teachers and students and enable them to acquire the basic mentality of sustainable development. Furthermore, in a document analysis study conducted by Arslan and Curle (2021), the researchers examined the extent to which the concept of sustainable development was reflected in a textbook, and it was found that the level of representation of this high-school-level English course resource towards the development and inclusion of sustainable development outcomes was limited and insufficient. Arslan and Curle (2021) also emphasized that high schools try to teach the concept of sustainable development within the scope of values such as responsibility, justice and respect. Based on this finding, it would be wise to consider sustainable development as a sort of value in the minds of students, and a course can be designed with both language and value (content) dimensions, just like in values education, to gain awareness in addition to the academic aspect of the course.

Within the scope of international literature, it is seen that the studies conducted were often carried out in the form of examining and evaluating sustainable development practices or courses that were currently being carried out (Bagoly-Simo, 2013; Pauw et al., 2015; Kater-Wettstädt, 2018). At this point, no study has been found in Türkiye that discusses sustainable development dimensions other than the environmental (ecological) dimension in terms of the implementation and evaluation of a course or course activity. In this context, there is a need for future research that will aim to put this sustainable development idea into practice in the form of courses or course activities. Among the sub-targets under the heading of "Key Goal 4: Quality Education" in Agenda 30, there is a very clear and precise statement that all curricula, regardless of disciplines, should be improved and developed to raise awareness and values of sustainable development. Therefore, for a more sustainable world and future, educating and supporting students at all school levels in the context of "sustainability" and "sustainable development values" is an inevitable area of need. More precisely, we need ways and methods to explain to our students that "we inherited this world from our ancestors, and we are borrowing it from our children" and in light of these values, we are going to inform them about what we need to learn and do ecologically, economically and socially for a more sustainable world. Guided by such concerns to promote education for sustainable development, the researchers attempted to develop a course for secondary school students (Grade 7). The research reported here was one small part of this course development study and involved one of the needs assessment tools on the way to course design.

Based on this need to empower the sustainable development idea in our curricular activities and teaching-learning environment at schools, as was already reported above, this study aimed to investigate the needs and conditions required to include the sustainable development idea in the arena of foreign language teaching. To evaluate and understand these conditions, this study sought to examine the perceptions and recommendations of different stakeholders regarding the fundamental characteristics of a middle school English course to be designed with sustainability content based on the assumption that such a new idea for the context of Turkish educational life deserves a detailed examination of the ideas of different stakeholders experienced with different dynamics of one big whole, that is, a foreign language classroom. Guided by the above concerns, this study aimed to answer the following main research question:

> *What should be the main characteristics of a middle school foreign language curriculum that will involve the concept of sustainable development? (in terms of course aims, course content, learning-teaching processes and evaluation)*

This main research question was better dealt with the guidance from the following sub-research questions:

- What are the expectations, wishes and needs of middle school foreign language students regarding the sustainable development-oriented English course?

- What are the experiences and suggestions of middle school English teachers who have a certain degree of awareness for the sustainability concept regarding the sustainable development-oriented English course?

- What are the experiences and suggestions of academicians with a certain degree of expertise in the sustainability concept regarding the sustainable development-oriented English course?

Method

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative descriptive design as the research reported here is aimed at examining and identifying several recommendations and perceptions of the study participants to determine the main characteristics of a secondary school English course. As the aim was to seek and determine these recommendations and ideas in an everyday conversation with the people around rather than receiving the direct experiences of the participants in a detailed manner as often sought in phenomenology studies (Sandelowski, 2010), the researchers wanted to name this current research as a qualitative descriptive design study. To put it differently, the researchers wanted to gain a basic, direct, and quick understanding of the different participants coming from different stakeholder groups regarding the main characteristics of an English course with sustainability content to be designed and this is this quick, easy and chat-like nature of the data collection process that makes it a qualitative descriptive type of qualitative inquiry, which was also previously put forth by Lambert and Lambert (2012).

Participants of the Study

Participants of this study can be grouped into three: a) seventh-grade state school students, b) English teachers who are on active duty, and c) academicians who have been conducting research or who have expertise in sustainable development framework. In the research, six secondary school students from Grade 7, five English teachers, and five academicians were interviewed (Tables 1, 2 & 3) with the help of an interview schedule prepared by the researchers. Throughout the research, these three groups were interviewed to investigate what should be done for the inclusion of SDGs and to promote education for sustainable development in the English lessons. Part of the aim in the interviews was to understand the current position of SDGs in English classrooms as reported by the teachers and students.

Table 1

Characteristics of Participating Students

Participant	Age	Gender	Participation in a Project related to SD
Student 1	12	Female	No
Student 2	13	Male	No
Student 3	13	Male	No
Student 4	13	Male	No
Student 5	13	Female	No
Student 6	13	Female	No

Table 2

Characteristics of Participating Teachers

Participant	Age	Gender	Years of Service	Attained Graduate Qualification (Master or Doctoral Degree)	Involvement in a Project related to SD (Researcher/ Coordinator)
Teacher 1	46	Female	21	No	No
Teacher 2	61	Female	36	No	Yes
Teacher 3	38	Female	12	No	No
Teacher 4	26	Male	3	No	No
Teacher 5	27	Male	3	No	No

Table 3

Characteristics of Participating Academicians

Participant	Age	Gender	Nationality	Field of Specialization
Academician 1	44	Female	Turkish	International Relations
Academician 2	46	Female	Turkish	Landscape Architecture
Academician 3	43	Female	Spanish	Education and English
Academician 4	39	Female	Turkish	Educational Sciences
Academician 5	29	Female	Turkish	English Language Teaching

Data Collection, Analysis and Reliability Procedures

Qualitative interviews were held with a total of three different stakeholder groups, and in the light of the awareness and information gained from the previous review literature by the researchers, three different interview schedules were developed to elicit data from these three different groups of participants. Expert opinions (*n*= 2) were also sought for the

interview schedules, and a pilot study was carried out for three different forms with a few participants with similar characteristics to the main participants. A couple of corrections were performed in the interview schedules regarding the wording, word choice and order for several questions.

Analysis of qualitative data was carried out using content analysis method via deductive coding strategy in that the characteristics of an English course involving sustainable development content were examined as to four main analysis themes (i.e., course aims, course content, course learning-teaching processes, and course evaluation processes). The data obtained and recorded were first transcribed and then read again by the researchers. The data were analyzed in four subsequent stages: a) coding of the data, b) determining the themes and the categories of the coded data, c) confirming and organizing the codes and themes, and finally d) identifying and interpreting the findings. In the process of coding of the data and determining the themes (categories) for the coded data, the findings were double-checked by the peer researchers. A reliability check, referred to as "members check" by Miles and Huberman (1994), was performed by having the participants read the data and obtaining their approval regarding the accuracy of the data transcribed. Practices related to validity and reliability in qualitative research were especially taken into consideration in data analysis, data collection, and development of interview schedules. Obtaining expert opinions and members checks are seen among some of these reliability practices (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008).

Results

Which Skills Should be Integrated into the Objectives of the Sustainable Development-Oriented English Course?

The results from the interviews with Grade 7 students showed that the students wish to see not only receptive skills (vocabulary, grammar, and listening), but also productive skills (speaking, writing, and pronunciation) in their current foreign language education curricula. Some of the statements of the study participants related to this are presented in the following:

> In this unit, when we look at a book, I can't see much that is wrong, but as I said, words are too few, and explaining the meanings of these words in English instead of translating them into Turkish improves our English. Because an English word does not have a single Turkish meaning, but an English word can have more than one English meaning. (Student 1)

> I will have difficulties in my future business life. I want to be able to have a dialogue and talk. (Student 2)

> I mean, I would like to develop more in terms of speaking rather than memorizing. For example, I know the subject well, but I don't exactly know if I can have a dialogue with a stranger when I come across one. So, it would be better if it was more conversation based. (Student 3)

> I think my teacher should teach grammar rules and words but in a more fun way." (Student 6)

Teachers who were currently working at Turkish state schools at the secondary level, on the other hand, stated that although both receptive and productive skills were actively allocated

time in the class, because of the insufficiency of allocated time and lack of linkages among different skills of the target language in the curricula, teachers had some trouble connecting these productive skills with the other main or sub-language skills or the concepts of the lesson of the day. To compensate for these problems, teachers, as a strategy on their own wishes, had to repeat grammar rules and structures only try to promote speaking strategies (but no writing as a productive skills) in their classrooms. Some of the teachers pointed out these issues as in the following:

> We try to speak a little bit... But because it's crowded, it's a lot... Our book already contains relevant sections, but sometimes there are no details, so there are times where I have to add things myself on the spot and move on. (Teacher 2)

> After all, you have to follow the curriculum. Because we have a certain book we have to finish. I have certain learning outcomes set and we have to achieve these outcomes. When we think on the basis of a theme, the first target is 'speaking'. Although it seems like speaking, unfortunately, the main goal is the high-school entrance exam. (Teacher 1)

The academicians suggested that students should practice speaking skill with the help of an expert or perhaps any other more advanced peer due to the difficulty of understanding for the concept of sustainable development. They especially highlighted that without an expert, students would struggle in speaking and be discouraged. Writing was another productive skill that was reported to be developed in line with sustainability understanding on the part of the students. Below presents some of the ideas by academicians:

> Yes, speaking. Speaking and practicing. Dialogue. So, I think the most basic problem of this subject is when you leave the student alone with the subject. Because it's hard for them to understand, since it's technical stuff. Yes. And they always feel; 'Is this what he means?' It's actually a conversation with a guide. So, it's not like you're talking. It's a place to brainstorm. I think it would be very useful. Very simple writing. Because when you try to make them write about such SDGs, maybe there is something along the lines of memorization logic. It must be prevented. I think speaking is much more effective with examples. (Academician 1)

> Moreover, they highly recommended that especially with young learners, creative writing should be included into tasks. Students enjoy creative writing because it enhances their imagination and writing skills. They love anything unexpected. We do a lot of creative writing assignments. They can write a letter, an imaginary postcard to an author and so on. They like that kind of ideas a lot. (Academician 3)

Overall, given the recommendations as to which skills should be integrated into the objectives of the sustainable development-oriented English course, it is seen that students preferred an emphasis on productive skills of the target language in addition to the receptive ones. Both teachers and academicians agreed with the students on the point that productive skills should be included in this course. Teachers supported the idea that language skills should be practiced in an integrated manner in the sense that they should be presented together with other skills while academicians mentioned the importance of guidance and assistance from a more advanced participant in the classroom (peers or guest speakers etc.) to understand the tough content of sustainable development more effectively (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Recommendations for the Skills to be Integrated into the Objectives of the Sustainable Development-Oriented English Course
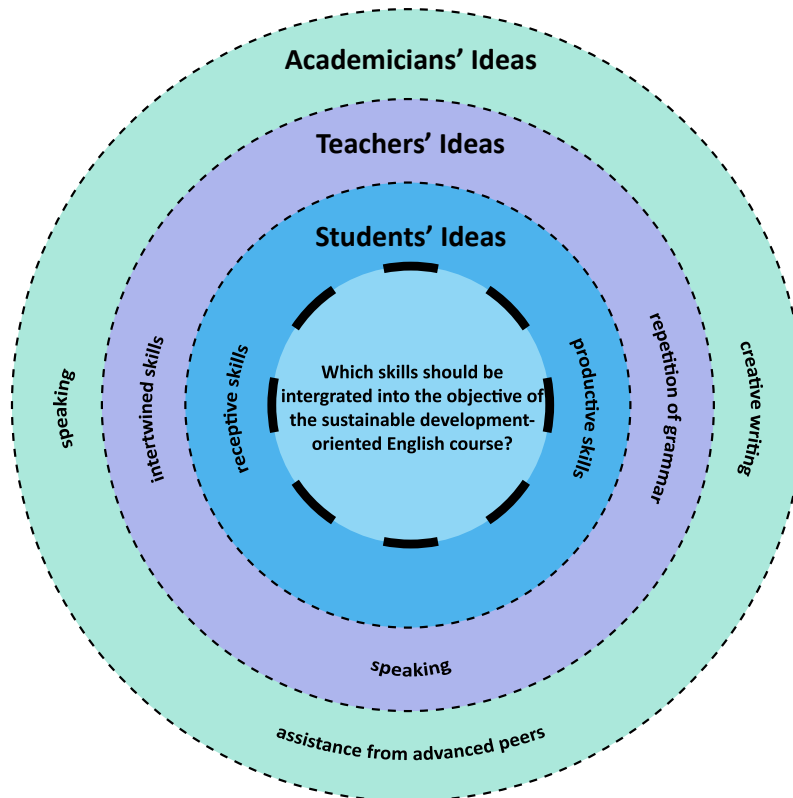
Which Content Should be Integrated into the Sustainable Development-oriented English Course?

After the analysis of the interviews, it was seen that most of the students highlighted the importance of learning daily-life language in the lessons. Students reported on the importance of real-life and real-life topics as follows:

> ...But unit words are not suited for our everyday speech. So, it's not very daily stuff... I think we should study it separately, like daily-life and so on. (Student 2)

> For example, there are aspects about the environment that affect both my English study and my daily life. (Student 3)

> My expectation is not to memorize something like it's a straight rule, but to study it with a few examples or, for example, in terms that we can use in real life, and then somehow put it into reality. (Student 4)

General cultural knowledge was one of the recurring ideas in students' responses from the interviews. They expressed their concerns about their insufficient knowledge regarding the target culture or other cultures. Their main concern was that they felt distant to recent changes in both their culture and the target culture. Some students stated as follows:

We can learn stuff about… Famous painters, painters, artists, maybe their life stories or something. (Student 2)

Learning about what other people around the world are doing, how they are dressed or what festivals they have seems very interesting to me. I wish we had more of these in our classrooms. (Student 3)

Teacher participants stated that in their current teaching they mostly value academic success and plan their content around the mandatory high school entrance exam. However, they strongly stated that they sometimes tried to integrate general cultural information and social skills in their lessons as much as possible. Teachers also advocated the belief that encouraging such sort of cultural piece of information and thus increasing students' awareness should be among the course aims to promote sustainable development.

So, I try to let children speak more. I choose a topic, a topic often related to world problems or sustainable development maybe and tell them to create a dialogue about the topic. I ask them to choose a partner and give them some time. Then, the ones who created the dialogue among themselves present their dialogue comfortably. (Teacher 3)

Of course, our main request is to get them to A1 or A2 level in daily life. We want them to be graduated with a B2 level. However, we need to follow the curriculum of the Ministry of National Education. We have a book to be finished and objectives to be acquired. We have to give these objectives to students. The main aim seems to be speaking but it is not; it is LGS (high school entrance exam), unfortunately. That is a fact. (Teacher 1)

I want to increase students' knowledge in different subjects, that is my main goal, but I also try to improve their vocabulary because they need vocabulary for the high school entrance exam. (Teacher 5)

Academicians supported the idea that students need to understand environmental issues such as ecological changes, environmental degradation and limited sources of the world. That is, the English course with a sustainability focus needs to encompass these issues related to ecological decline and degradation.

For example, when they buy a cup of coffee, they should know what impact it has on the rainforest. When they buy a phone, they need to understand the impact on the mining industry when you extract the metals in it. That resource is not unlimited, it is a finite resource, and accessing that resource can sometimes be very costly and very damaging. When they use it, when they consume it, that's fine, but then when they throw those products away, instead of icebergs, mountains of plastic start to appear. They need to understand this cycle. You know, there is a system of buying, buying, using, throwing away, which is not a cycle according to them. I think they need to have an understanding of how it actually is and how it can be. (Academician 2)

While our students live by nature or are very much dependent on the nature or mother earth to live and survive, they do not really recognize or have an understanding concerning the harm they give to nature. They should be informed about the fact that there is this reality of environmental decline. (Academician 4)

It is important that they are more sensitive to the environment. For example, they should be more aware of the use of water and energy in their daily lives. As an individual, I find it important for them to evaluate these SDGs within the scope of good citizenship. (Academician 1)

The academicians also highlighted that teachers should teach students such ecological concerns and sorrowful environmental trends; however, it would be likely that these students

could develop ecophobia, or in other words, eco-anxiety or even show adverse behaviors due to this feeling of pervasive worry over alarming environmental changes and conditions. For this reason, teachers are also required to help them to see how to cope with this feeling and instill hope. The following presents some of the sentences uttered by these academicians related to the above account:

> This recognition that the environment is under constant decline can also provoke antipathy or pessimism towards the outside environment, but this type of content should be taught to the students in any case. They can feel fear; but without feeling this fear, these students cannot take any action to reverse this ecological decline. To take action, these students or kids should be encouraged by giving some hope about the positive influence of taking action to change things. (Academician 4)

> Right now, the climate crisis, thirst... These are such big problems. What I see especially in young people is the idea that we cannot deal with them. These are not problems that we can oppose with our individual actions. Young people think that the world is going to end anyway, so whatever we live is good. In other words, because they think that they cannot cope with a problem, people start to shift towards lifestyles that are actually very bad for the solution of that problem. In order to maximize in the short term. But actually, at this point we need to slow down, calm down and be less. That's why I think eco-phobia is one of the issues that should be addressed, especially for young people, children and young people. We may never be able to solve these problems. You know, the world is really going to disappear. Ten years from now we will be in a very different place. But common concerns will not take us anywhere. Only if we can create a common hope, if we can develop a spirit of struggle together, if we can break that phobia a little bit, if we can connect it with hope, only after that point, I think we need to provide that unity towards a solution. That's why I think there should be a content that will foster hope. (Academician 2)

Academicians also stated that real life experiences have a crucial role in SDG learning. If the students experience real life situations, their learning can be more permanent. However, they suggested that the topics to be covered and its relevance to the SDGs should be carefully chosen before exposing students to real situations.

> Maybe, it's necessary to talk about some beautiful examples from the world... like, they should be fed with case studies to support them… (Academician 2)

> You can go to the seaside with your students to pick up litter and plastics. While doing it, you can teach them the vocabulary right there and maybe differences between water animals and so on. Instruction should be practical, not theoretical. (Academician 3)

Given the content to teach to promote sustainable development idea in English classrooms, the academicians participating in this study also shared the idea that cultural and creative content should be integrated in the lessons with the help of technology. They said that technology helps them to understand the terms and real situations that they cannot imagine on their own and enhance their attention towards the lesson. As their attention towards the course increases, their creativity in the tasks will increase in parallel terms. The statements uttered by the academicians are in the following:

> Surely, students' digital skills or other skills are built in other classes, but those skills can be integrated into this class, too. For instance, they can create a campaign on social media about Sustainable Development Goals. They're really good at using social media. So, what's happening in the end? In this way, you may collaborate both their digital skills and the objectives of the course. This is my suggestion. (Academician 1)

> Let's say, there is a one-square-kilometer garbage island on the ocean… They should be aware of and see it. That's why I think that these kind of video contents are really important. Even if it is not possible to visit it, there are many video contents in English to show them. You can support your classes with those videos, too. (Academician 2)

In general, given the recommendations as to which contents should be integrated into the sustainable development-oriented English course, students appear to be interested in learning a language that they can actively use in their daily lives. They also prefer to be taught topics that are relevant to real life and new topics that will enhance their cultural knowledge. The teachers also mentioned the importance of cultural knowledge and stated that it could be incorporated into different activities while developing students' social skills. The academicians appear to share the same views as the students. They stated that topics related to real life and cultures should be taught. They suggested that students should be presented with real-life experiences and that could be performed through the help of technology or experiences. They also mentioned the importance of providing environment for students to use their creativity, utilize technology and find solutions to ecological problems, while at the same time providing environment for them to develop ecological management strategies and raising their hopes for the future (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Recommendations for the Content of the Sustainable Development-Oriented English Course
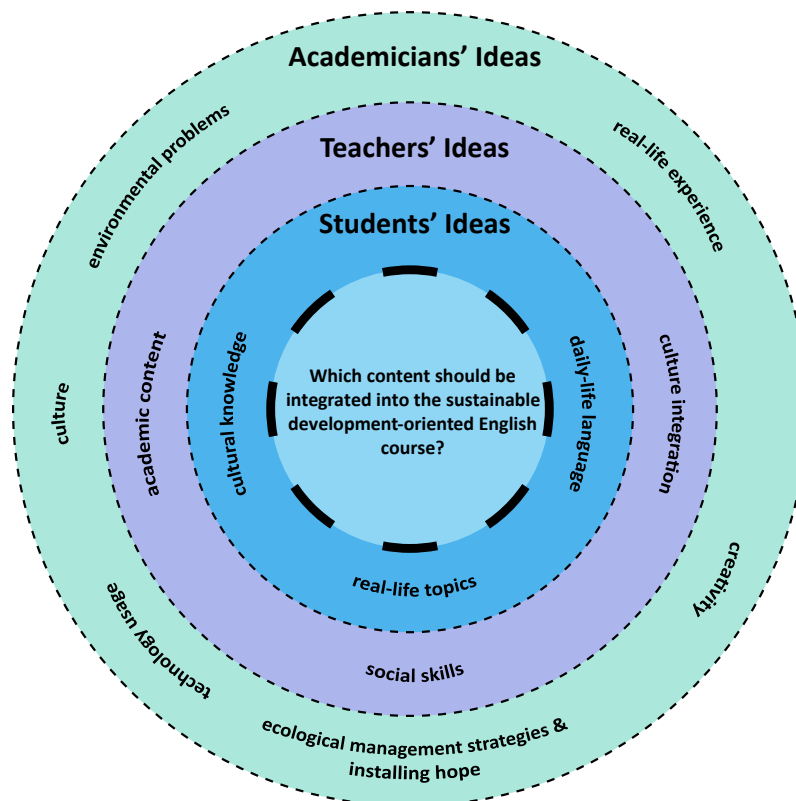
How Should Teaching and Learning Process be Organized in the Sustainable Development-oriented English Course?

From the responses of the students, it was understood that Grade 7 students enjoy group-work and feel the need to take part in exciting and entertaining activities with their peers. Of these types of activities, the most favored ones were those with a competitive nature.

> Both we understand the topic better and we share more with our friends because we spent more time together. Also, everyone wants to speak more when there is competitive environment. (Student 2)

> As I told you, it might be more possible to study it in English if there are more speaking or game-based activities. For example, we try to solve a problem in Math class. Who will solve it faster? How is it going to happen? So, it's more fruitful when there's a competitive environment. (Student 4)

> In group work, not only do we comprehend a topic better, but we also share more because there is a unity in terms of our friendships. Also, when there is an atmosphere of competition, everyone wants to speak more. Although there should be individual work, I think something done in a group and a team is more fun and more productive. (Student 5)

During these activities, students voiced the need for using out-of-class materials to enhance their learning. Most of them highlighted that technology usage in language lessons has a positive effect on them, thanks to multiple applications or websites, and it makes the learning more permanent. In addition, the students also constantly stated that they wanted to see instructional materials or media which are related to their daily life and experiences more often in their classrooms. Generally, they suggested some videos from YouTube, up-to-date movies, and popular television series.

> Then, there was a cartoon with short episodes named as Pink Panther. We were watching it; it was really fun! Then, the teachers were asking questions to us and we were responding like an oral exam. (Student 4)

> Then, there was one more word... It was in the quiz today. There is someone in the classroom and they pronounce it like it's written. There are some applications on Internet. Or, maybe in YouTube... Foreigners pronounce the words to show how to read it. There're many videos like this in YouTube. (Student 5)

> More catchy games or apps like Kahoot are more memorable. For example, there are many things that I remember from today when we use this technology in the class. (Student 3)

> For example, in the sports units, our teacher can demonstrate sports through drama and then open a video from the smartboard. In this way, we can see a real-life example. (Student 6)

Another common problem of the foreign language classes, that is, the target language use, was also mentioned by the students; but, it was interesting to see that almost all the students reported they had problems with translation during the lesson and that they preferred English-medium classes instead of Turkish explanations for instructions, activities and so on.

> They usually teach by speaking in Turkish, which is normal, but like, if the teachers started to lesson teaching in English from the beginning it would be more beneficial for use even though the sentences were inverted sentences. I wish the meaning of the words were told to us in English instead of Turkish. (Student 1)

> For example, it's better to play games in English. Because, it's better to learn an English word's meaning in English. For instance, there's a word in English and it's meaning in English as well. We don't need to struggle with translating it. As I know, it's better to learn it in English, not in Turkish. (Student 5)

The teachers mentioned that because many students who come from different backgrounds and families are gathered together in the same class, a common level could not be determined and there were different problems while teaching the lesson. They stated that students who received more support from their parents, following their family environment, had higher motivation levels and stronger relations with their friends were more willing to participate in the lesson and were more likely to improve themselves.

> Is there any effect of families? Yes, they have an effect, too. So, we have 9 classes in the 6th grade in this school. You can calculate how many students we have. Each class has 30 students. Probably, 75% of their families are not that much consciousness. You can do whatever you want here. No matter what you do, it doesn't work if you don't have the support of students' families. (Teacher 1)

> We can't have a healthy response or effective relationship from students with low expectations when you consider their educational background or family background. However, I see many expectations from students whose families support them or students who has a better educational background. They're already more eager to participate in the class and they ask more questions. They do more research, and they learn more naturally. (Teacher 4)

Apart from these above factors, the teachers also stated the issues related to physical factors. For example, classrooms were reported as not suited to the number of students in a class and materials as being insufficient for possible activities and the classroom hours as not sufficient for effective learning.

> The number of students is too much in many classes. It's hard to control them as well. (Teacher 4)

> The number of students in our classes changes between 30 - 35. Naturally, we can't apply all the activities that students prepared before class. Even if you spend only 1 minute per student, it'll take 35 minutes. The class duration is 40 minutes, which is impossible to implement an activity in one minute. (Teacher 1)

The teachers mentioned that they try to keep students engaged and focused during the lessons with different types of activities, challenging questions, and real-life materials which they can enjoy themselves. They suggested the usage of technology and social media in the teaching and learning process.

> I let them visit many museums and art galleries by using internet connection and smart boards that available in the class. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, they created many online museums, trips, tours, and these kinds of activities. There are more online resources now. I think that this is a positive effect of the pandemic. That's why, there are more digital materials now. (Teacher 4)

> There are some game websites that I use often. One of them is called science activity. There are competitions in English as well even if the name of the activity is science. The games get the children move. The back shouts for example. Come on Ayşe, come on Ayşe, come on you can do it. They give directions like "Look, that can happen". You know, sometimes maybe there is a little too much noise, but I think it has a positive effect on their learning. So, we try to do more game-based lessons. (Teacher 1)

Academicians defended the importance of learning by doing for this age group. In particular, they suggested that if teachers had the chance, they should take students to real-life areas to observe the things in their real settings.

> A student cannot understand something that s/he cannot imagine, it's not that much possible. For instance, I like "dump" activity. The saying "you're throwing your rubbish and it's done" is not a solution. It's more effective when we took them to visit a dump because they feel the disgusting smell and they want to leave immediately. It's more effective to let them understand the situation. (Academician 2)

> I think learning by doing and experiencing activities is always the most permanent. Lessons should be designed to allow the student to do certain tasks around a topic rather than giving the information directly. Of course, there will be theoretical parts, but for the majority of the lesson, the student must be active. (Academician 5)

The academicians also stated that lessons should be student centered because when they are in the center of the lesson, they feel important and included. It further helps them to engage in the lessons. The main point of the lessons should be raising awareness towards the world's problems and SDGs and the output of these lessons should be changes in the behaviors. Some academicians reported as follows:

> It should be a piece of content that is not that much technical. You can talk about the goals (SDGs) if the students are at a higher education level. They can understand it. However, in primary-level education, it should be more about gaining a point of view about Sustainable Development Goals, at least related to five of them. It should be more about awareness raising and improving consciousness about the topic. I think that it is so valuable. … Children may do some activities related to the environment. For example, we can give a topic to students. School's student policy or gender-equality policy… Does the school care about those policies? These kinds of fields might be chosen and those targets may give to the students to improve some ideas. Some suggestions might be created by students. (Academician 1)

> "Students can decide on the activities or topics. They have to debate, take part in the lesson and represent their ideas." (Academician 3)

Academicians shared the same idea with the teachers in terms of designing activity-based lessons. Since activity-based lessons make the learning permanent and fun to students, course developers should prefer different types of activities to enhance learning of the students.

> For instance, role playing is a must. It helps students to wear someone else's shoes and understand them. They are learning by doing and this way is very interesting for them. (Academician 3)

> I can recommend the apple activity. For the activity we give students an apple and a knife. We say this is your world. Your world that you can eat for lunch. But how much of the world do we use? First of all, about seventy-five percent of the earth's surface is oceans and deserts. So, let's cut an apple into quarters. We divide the apple. We are left with one slice. Therefore, this is the part of the world that human beings can actually use. You think you have an apple. No, you don't have an apple, you don't have a world. You actually have a quarter of it. But you can't use the inside of it either. Because with mechanisms, we can drill up to a kilometer. Therefore, that inside is also a resource that we cannot access. We also have it extracted. They are left with a tiny piece of that quarter of an apple slice and we say, "yes, this is all you can use from the earth". This is your lunch. Enjoy your lunch. We don't know if you're going to be full or not. Then you can decide what to do or what to ask. (Academician 2)

Overall, given the recommendations as to how teaching and learning should be organized in the sustainable development-oriented English course, the students expressed that they liked competitive games, fun and exciting activities involving technology. They also made it clear that they preferred English-medium classes, which they felt were more beneficial for them. Teachers mentioned that they tried to provide students with a variety of learning experiences through different classroom activities, but they could not get the desired efficiency due to insufficient class time. Although they stated that they tried to provide their students with information on different subjects with technology-supported activities, they could not realize effective teaching because they could not get support from parents on various issues. Academics also emphasized the importance of activity-based teaching and explained the effectiveness of learning by doing. They argued that teaching should be student-centered and students' awareness of SD should be raised through activities (Figure 3).

Figure 3

Recommendations for the Teaching and Learning Process of the Sustainable Development-Oriented English Course
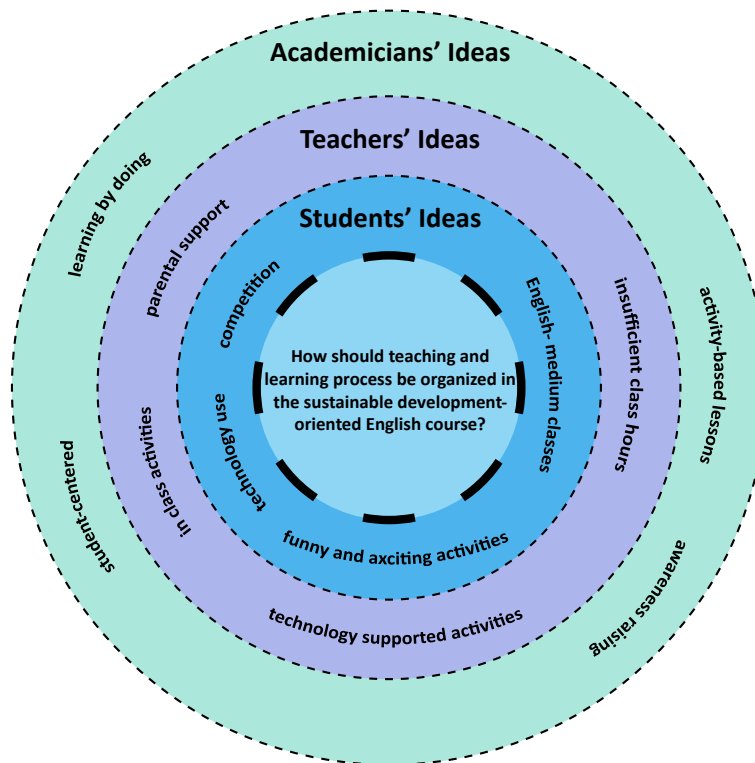
How Should the Outcomes of the Sustainable Development-oriented English Course be Assessed?

In the interviews, the students did not clearly share what they think about this subject. However, it was understood that rather than taking a big test, the students prefer short quizzes proctored and dispersed at different time periods throughout the year or they prefer to see various assessment tools for course evaluation purposes.

> For example, when the teacher asks questions that most people may not know but only a few people know, the teacher may give an extra plus to those who know. This, in turn, can affect their oral grades. (Student 4)

> Quizzes are being held to determine the grades for the report card. The teacher does it accordingly. But I don't think it should be like that. There should be more class participation. (Student 3)

> Our teacher may evaluate us based on our speaking and writing skills. If we make a mistake, our teacher should grade us accordingly. (Student 6)

English teachers think that traditional assessment methods such as question and answer, fill-in-the-blanks, multiple choice and written exams should be used together with alternative ones like homework, in-class assessment, student projects, drama and alternative exams. That is, most of the teachers shared the opinion that process-based and formative assessment methods should be part of the assessment system. Examples of the comments on this issue are in the following:

> There are several ways to do this. While the unit is still being processed, we expect some verbal answers and reactions from them based on each unit at work. In fact, it is different, or rather a challenger that will challenge them by posing different questions. By giving in-class tasks instantly, we want them to complete them as necessary or to give the necessary answers. We say that a student who can do it without problems and easily has already acquired the necessary gains and does not have any difficulties anymore. It is an intermediate level with some difficulty. If we can't get along at all, or if he has trouble understanding even the given task, if he has trouble completing it, we say that his level is low yet. We say that the student is low in gaining and understanding that subject. Apart from that, we have assignments. After class, that's what we call homework. We can evaluate that the performance of students who successfully complete them and do them regularly is good, on the contrary, the performance of those who fail at work or those who cannot or do not do it is bad. Finally, there are the exams that we already do regularly. There are written exams. Those exams have already documented the success of children in an objective and concrete way. We evaluate them in different ways all the time. In other words, we regularly check them in class, after class and even with exams. Evaluation is not something that actually ends. Evaluation is always there. It just changes shape. (Teacher 4)

> I try to use more modern methods such as in-class participation, group activities, drama, but since the classes are crowded and our weekly class hours are limited, I have to use traditional methods. For example, last lesson I tried to have group work and although I planned it as one lesson, it took two lessons, so I had to process my next lesson faster. But as much as I can, as I said, I try to use more alternative methods. (Teacher 5)

The academicians like teachers suggested using alternative process-based assessment tools and various methods of assessments in combination to assess the outcomes of the lesson. In terms of traditional assessment, they suggested writing; but, they also said that

creative writing tasks were beneficial to students. In addition, alternative assessments such as student projects, making dialogues and lots of speaking activities can be used in the assessment process.

> I do not like exams but because of the traditions, we have to do it. My ideal assessment technique is projects. Students can work in groups to make projects and this way is more beneficial. Please do not give children a test. Because the issue of sustainable development is not like what the third goal said, what did it aim for, what did the fifth say, define it. It should be a training module without a written exam. (Academician 3)

> Children can work in teams on a project until the end of the year. So, in my opinion, this is the best measurement method. They present their projects. While presenting their projects, their teachers also evaluate features such as whether they have an awareness of sustainable development goals, whether they have been able to implement this subject or whether they have been able to present and research it correctly in their current lives. So, for example, what we call a project can be a social responsibility project, they will use SDGs. It can be given to students. Here, of course, it is very important how the teacher will give that question and project. But teachers should not leave the children alone too much and should explain which subject they should research and how, through teamwork and making a presentation together at the end of the year, if possible, by applying it in real life. (Academician 1)

> For example, students may be asked to write, discuss, speak, or make presentations in certain areas. For example, we just talked about it, and it is necessary to evaluate it with creative projects and activities. (Academician 2)

> You can think of a portfolio system where they prepare a task every week. Our aim here is to observe not only their language development but also their attitudes towards sustainable development and the change in their level of knowledge. You can make your evaluation with a portfolio in which they write their daily reflections, maybe they will put documents confirming that they have completed the task you will give them, archive their short stories or other writings. (Academician 5)

In summary, the qualitative results pertaining to how the outcomes of the sustainable development-oriented English course should be assessed indicated that teachers, students and academicians agreed on the use of various assessment tools for this course. That is, it appears that all participant groups supported alternative assessment methods and formative assessment in the evaluation of sustainable development-oriented English course (Figure 4).

Figure 4

Recommendations for the Assessment Procedures of the Sustainable Development-Oriented English Course
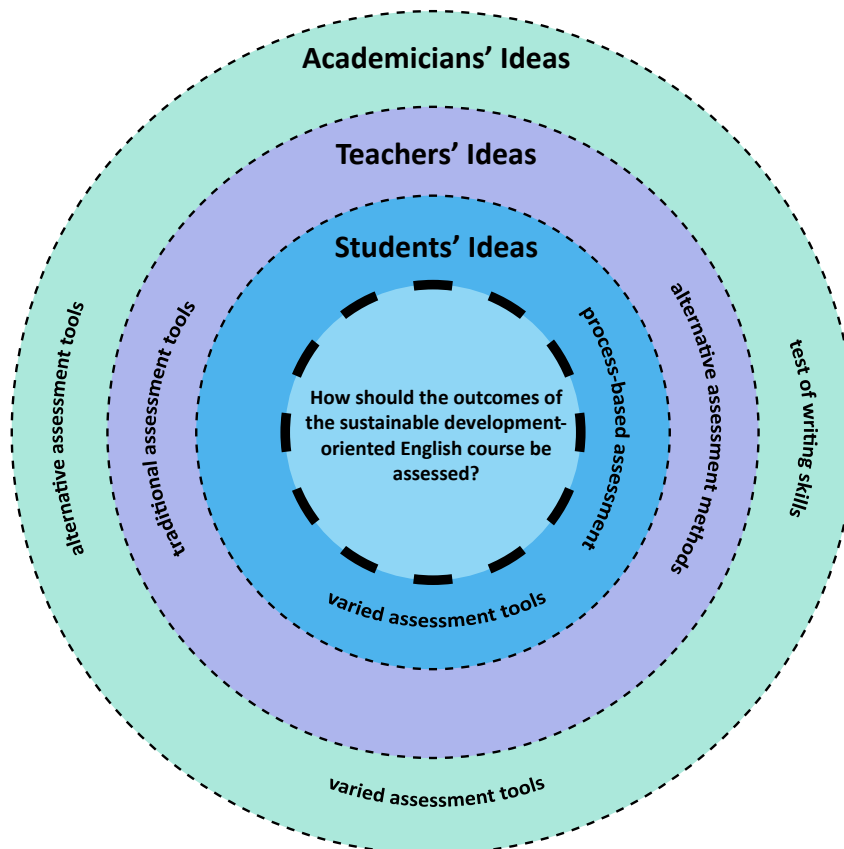
Discussion and Conclusion

The qualitative interviews with students, teachers and experts provided valuable insights into the characteristics of a course that incorporates sustainable development content. Although the students provided limited data on the inclusion of SD content and values to the interviewers because of the advanced academic or perhaps abstract dimensions of this issue, which requires more expertise beyond the level of the students and their concrete thinking abilities, they shared the characteristics of a course that interests them most sincerely. In the interviews, they stated that they preferred group work, they thought that examples from daily life should be the subject of the lessons, they wanted to see more effective use of technology in the lessons, and they wished to be subjected to alternative assessment as well as traditional assessment. Students also provided implicit information about the inclusion of SD content and values and stated that they wanted to gain cultural and environmental awareness in their lessons. In this respect, the interviewees concluded that the social dimension of SD should be included at least as much as the ecological dimension. The results of the interviews with teachers are in line with the students' responses. Teachers were aware

of the importance of technology and thought that it should be included in the teaching and learning process. At the same time, teachers stated that alternative assessment methods are less stressful for students and suggested that this method should be utilized more in the assessment phase of the lessons. Finally, teachers stated that in lessons supported with SD, productive skills should be prioritized, and students should be improved in this direction. Academicians, on the other hand, provided the interviewees with much detailed information about the characteristics of an English lesson that incorporates SD content and values. While some academicians suggested focusing only on a specific SDG, others said that all SDGs should be covered throughout the semester. Apart from the disagreement on this issue, the experts emphasized the importance of raising students' awareness about SDGs through student-centered activities. They emphasized that activities in which students can use their creativity should not be ignored while planning the lessons, and they also stated that the promotion of students' productive language skills is one of the most important outcomes for English lessons. Arguing that traditional assessment is often contrary to the essence of the course, the academicians stated that process-based assessment practices would be the most appropriate assessment method for a course in which the content and principles of SD were included.

Sustainable development framework or formally speaking Agenda 30 agreed upon by the world governments with the leading encouragement of the United Nations is a common agenda and a sort of obligation of all member countries around the world, and in this context, this study could be interpreted as a sort of attempt to work towards and achieve an indicator of "Quality Education" (SDG 4) in the sense that this goal requires education for sustainable development should be achieved in national policies, curricula, teacher education practices, and student assessment (United Nations, 2016). To put it differently, this study served the requirement that education for sustainable development (ESD) should be reflected when designing curricula and assessing students based on these curricula. However, as previous studies mentioned ESD implementation in education has not reached the desired level although there have been improvements (Walls & Kieft, 2010). However, on the way to achieving education for sustainable development indicators, this study generated results about four main elements of curricula, course aims, course content, teaching and learning experiences, and lastly course assessment. The results implied that teachers should be trained to promote a sustainable development framework in their classrooms as their responses often included difficulties in teaching a foreign language in a general sense mostly lacking a particular consciousness and knowledge of teaching for sustainable development. However, the perspectives put forth by the academicians included more detailed, concrete, and reliable ideas and recommendations for integrating sustainable development into English lessons. Therefore, expert opinions especially from those who have done research related to sustainable development and education for sustainable development should be consulted in a more detailed manner for future course design studies.

The relevant literature emphasizes the shortcomings or inaccuracies of curriculum development studies conducted at the desk and disconnected from the basic needs and expectations of both the target student population and the current world agenda (Mutlu & Yıldırım, 2021). Hence, this current study aimed to conduct a sort of needs assessment

as a previous step for a research-based course design and curriculum development study that would include the concept of sustainable development. Furthermore, there is a major trend in the literature to conceptualize sustainability firstly as environmental sustainability and to study this environmental sustainability concept (Jutvik & Liepina, 2007). However, as Macer (2004) emphasizes in his metaphor of the "chair of sustainable development", sustainable development has economic, social, and cultural legs (dimensions) in addition to its environmental/ecological leg, and this chair cannot be balanced without the other three legs in addition to the environmental leg. This one-dimensional conceptualization or popularity of one particular dimension over the others was also detected in this study in the reporting of all groups of participants, thus showing us the need to consider the current curricular practices again and add to the lack or insufficiencies in terms of the composite consideration of sustainable development with all four dimensions in school curricula.

It is also known that there is a recent surge of interest in investigating sustainable development education (Yıldırım, 2020); however, in the Turkish context, most of these studies appear to examine the ecological dimension of sustainable development (Bulut & Çakmak, 2018) and thus appear to develop more insights as to environmental education. Accordingly, further research is needed in Türkiye to explore the economical, social and cultural dimensions of sustainability and also to investigate some teaching ideas and methodologies for sustainability education emphasizing all of the dimensions of sustainable development

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