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From Screens to Pages: A Multimodal Text-Talk Stories Intervention for Struggling Grade 8 English Readers

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Abstract This study examined the effectiveness of Text-Talk Stories, a multimodal reading intervention modelled after digital communication formats, in supporting the reading fluency of struggling Grade 8 English learners. Using a quasi-experimental design, 42 students were randomly assigned to experimental and control groups, with reading fluency measured through Words Correct Per Minute (WCPM) using Phil-IRI passages. The experimental group demonstrated statistically significant improvements compared with the control group. Qualitative feedback gathered through interviews and written reflections indicated that the chat-like layout, visual cues, and culturally familiar elements of the Text-Talk Stories made reading more approachable and helped students engage more confidently with the texts. Some learners, however, continued to experience reading anxiety, vocabulary challenges, and cognitive load. Overall, the findings suggest that multimodal, conversational texts can enhance fluency development when supported by responsive instructional strategies that address both the academic and affective needs of struggling readers.

Key words: 1. reading fluency; 2. remedial instruction; 3. struggling readers; 4. text-talk stories; 5. action research

Od ekrana do stranica: multimodalna intervencija temeljena na tekstu i razgovoru kroz priče za učenike 8. razreda s teškoćama u čitanju engleskog jezika

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Sažetak Ovo istraživanje ispitalo je učinkovitost priča u porukama, multimodalne intervencije u poučavanju čitanja oblikovane prema obrascima digitalne komunikacije, u unapređenju tečnosti čitanja učenika 8. razreda koji imaju poteškoće u učenju engleskoga jezika. Primjenom kvazi-eksperimentalnog istraživačkog pristupa, 42 učenika nasumično su raspoređena u eksperimentalnu i kontrolnu skupinu. Tečnost čitanja mjerena je brojem točno pročitanih riječi u minuti (WCPM) pomoću standardiziranih Phil-IRI tekstova. Eksperimentalna skupina ostvarila je statistički značajno veća poboljšanja u odnosu na kontrolnu skupinu. Kvalitativni podaci prikupljeni putem polu-strukturiranih intervjua i pisanih refleksija upućuju na to da su izgled teksta nalik digitalnom razgovoru, vizualni signali te kulturološki poznati elementi priča u porukama doprinijeli većoj pristupačnosti tekstova i povećanom samopouzdanju učenika pri čitanju. Unatoč tome, kod dijela učenika i dalje su bili prisutni strah od čitanja, poteškoće u razumijevanju vokabulara te povećano kognitivno opterećenje. Zaključno, rezultati upućuju na to da multimodalni, konverzacijski oblikovani tekstovi mogu učinkovito pridonijeti razvoju tečnosti čitanja kada su podržani prilagodljivim nastavnim strategijama koje uvažavaju kako akademske tako i afektivne potrebe učenika s teškoćama u čitanju.

Ključne riječi: 1. tečnost čitanja; 2. dopunska nastava; 3. učenici s poteškoćama u čitanju; 4. priče u porukama; 5. akcijsko istraživanje

1 Introduction

Many Filipino students continue to struggle with reading fluency, accuracy, and comprehension, despite being highly familiar with digital communication. The 2022 PISA results revealed that only 24% of Filipino students met basic reading proficiency, far below the OECD average of 476 points (OECD, 2023). Although PISA assesses reading in the learners' primary language, these results reflect broader national literacy challenges that also affect English, which functions as a second language and medium of instruction in most Philippine secondary schools. Limited exposure to English outside the classroom, particularly in rural public schools, contributes to persistent reading fluency difficulties in English.

Traditional text-heavy materials do not align with students' communication habits, which involve emojis, icons, and informal language (Abdelhadi & Bellag, 2024). This disconnect between classroom instruction and students' digital fluency contributes to reading difficulties and disengagement. As Rollins (2020) noted, low fluency can lead to frustration, reduced motivation, and poor comprehension.

Research highlights that reading fluency and accuracy are essential foundations for comprehension. Feruzi (2021) explains that fluency involves smooth and accurate word recognition, while Tunmer and Hoover (2019) emphasise that accurate decoding is central to constructing meaning from text. As Van Dyke (2021) explains, struggling readers often expend cognitive resources decoding unfamiliar words, reducing their capacity for comprehension.

To support learners, scholars have highlighted the benefits of multimodal texts. Serafini (2020) shows that visual cues in picture-supported texts guide interpretation and scaffold comprehension, while McCuaig (2023) and Quecan (2021) demonstrate that multimodal and visually rich materials help struggling readers build vocabulary and understand complex ideas. Studies of digitally inspired, conversational formats similarly show that images, icons, and chat-like layouts can make reading less intimidating and more accessible for

adolescents, as seen in the studies of Almusharraf and Engemann (2020), and Lagercrantz (2024).

Complementing these insights, remedial instruction research underscores the importance of targeted, scaffolded approaches such as one-on-one or small-group interventions in improving fluency and comprehension, as emphasized by Xin and Yunus (2020), and Murphy (2023). Together, these findings support the relevance of culturally familiar, visually supported, and conversational reading materials, such as Text-Talk Stories, for struggling Filipino learners.

To address these challenges, the study introduced Text-Talk stories; printed,

conversational storybooks inspired by digital media. These texts integrate images, emojis, and informal language to support engagement, fluency, and understanding (Thompson & McIlnay, 2019). By tapping into students' digital habits, the intervention aims to make reading more accessible and enjoyable, supporting essential literacy skills.

2. Research aim, tasks and hypotheses

This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of Text-Talk Stories as a multimodal reading intervention in improving the reading fluency of struggling Grade 8 English learners. Specifically, the study sought to determine learners' baseline reading fluency using Words Correct Per Minute (WCPM), examine changes in reading fluency following exposure to the Text-Talk Stories intervention, compare post-test reading fluency performance between the experimental and control groups, and explore learners' perceptions of Text-Talk Stories as a remedial reading material. It was hypothesized that there would be a statistically significant difference in post-test reading fluency scores between learners exposed to the Text-Talk Stories intervention and those taught using traditional reading materials.

2.1. TYPE OF RESEARCH

This study employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine how Text-Talk Stories support the reading fluency of struggling Grade 8 English learners. The quantitative phase used a quasi-experimental design involving an experimental group exposed to Text-Talk Stories, and a control group that continued using traditional reading materials. Pre- and post-tests were administered using the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI), with fluency measured through Words Correct Per Minute (WCPM) based on the DIBELS framework. As explained by Fraenkel and Wallen (2019), the use of comparison groups in quasi-experimental designs allows researchers to examine differences in outcomes associated with an instructional intervention, without claiming full causal relationships.

The qualitative phase involved semi-structured interviews with students from the experimental group to explore their experiences, perceptions, and challenges during the intervention. This approach ensured that the qualitative data were grounded in the participants' direct engagement with the Text-Talk Stories. By combining quantitative and qualitative approaches, the study offered a comprehensive understanding of students' reading performance and reading experiences.

2.2. SUBJECTS, MEASURES AND DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

Data collection was carried out in three phases: preparation, implementation, and evaluation. The study involved 42 Grade 8 students aged 13 to 15 years old from a public secondary school in San Ildefonso, Bulacan. The sample consisted of 69% male and 31% female learners, most of whom came from low- to middle-income households. As English functions as a second language in this community, students' exposure to English outside the classroom was limited. Based on PHIL-IRI classifications, all participants were identified as performing within the instructional or frustration levels of reading proficiency, making them appropriate recipients for a remedial reading intervention.

During the preparation phase, the researchers secured school approval and retrieved the PHIL-IRI English pretest results. To validate these results, a Group Screening Test (GST) was conducted, followed by a second PHIL-IRI pretest using the Words Correct Per Minute (WCPM) metric. On the basis of these results, the 42 eligible students were randomly assigned to the experimental and control groups. The classroom teacher and students were oriented on the study's objectives, and coordination with the English and reading coordinators ensured a smooth implementation.

In the implementation phase, the experimental group participated in guided reading sessions using validated Text-Talk Stories, while the control group continued using traditional reading materials. Sessions were conducted one-on-one after class, with students progressing through the texts according to their reading levels. The intervention was delivered twice weekly for 6 weeks, totalling 12 sessions. Reading fluency was consistently monitored using WCPM.

During the evaluation phase, a post-test using the same PHIL-IRI passages was administered to both groups. Students in the experimental group

also provided written responses to semi-structured interview questions to capture their reading experiences. All data collection followed ethical standards to maintain confidentiality and research integrity.

2.3. DATA ANALYSIS

Data were analysed using Microsoft Excel and SPSS to evaluate the effectiveness of Text-Talk Stories in improving the reading fluency of struggling Grade 8 students in a public school in San Ildefonso, Bulacan. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise fluency levels before and after the intervention, while a paired samples t-test measured the significance of changes within the experimental group. An independent samples t-test compared the post-test scores of the experimental and

control groups to determine the effectiveness of the intervention.

Qualitative data from student responses were analysed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step method. Open and axial coding identified recurring themes related to student engagement, motivation, and perceived benefits. These themes provided insights into students' experiences and supported the interpretation of the quantitative results, offering a fuller understanding of the impact of Text-Talk Stories.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1. BASELINE READING FLUENCY PRIOR TO THE INTERVENTION

Before the intervention began, a pre-assessment using the Group Screening Test and an adapted DIBELS framework with Phil-IRI passages was conducted among 84 Grade 8 students to identify struggling readers. Of the 42 students selected for the study, 40 fell below the benchmark range of 109 WCPM, confirming substantial fluency difficulties. Only two students met the expected fluency range. These 42 students were then randomly assigned into two equal groups of 21: the experimental group (Text-Talk Stories) and the control group (traditional materials).

Table 1: Students' WCPM Levels Prior to the Intervention

Benchmark Cut-Scores	Control Group	Percentage	Experimental Group	Percentage
Above Benchmark (142 words and above)	0	0	0	0
At Benchmark (125 – 141 words)	1	4.76%	1	4.76%
Below Benchmark (0 – 109 words)	20	95.24%	20	95.24%
Total:	21	100%	21	100%

Based on the Pre-test results, 95.24% of students in both groups were below the reading fluency benchmark, with only one student per group (4.76%) meeting the benchmark and none exceeding it. This baseline confirms the need for a targeted reading intervention. Research identifies WCPM as a reliable indicator of reading

fluency (Martinez & Lee, 2022) and highlights the importance of using culturally adapted assessment tools like Phil-IRI to ensure valid measurement in local contexts (Reyes & Nakamura, 2020). Establishing an accurate baseline is essential for designing evidence-based interventions for struggling readers (Smith & Gonzalez, 2021).

Pre-Test Reading Fluency Levels

A pre-test using the Words Correct Per Minute (WCPM) measure was administered to both control and experimental groups under standardized conditions to establish a baseline for evaluating the Text-Talk Stories intervention.

Table 2: Comparison of Pre-Test WCPM Scores Between Groups

Group	N	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value	Decision	Verbal Interpretation
Control	21	65.24	29.82	0.58	0.56	Fail to Reject H_0	Not Significant
Experimental	21	59.57	32.54				

Legend: $p < 0.05$ = Significant

The control group obtained a mean WCPM score of 65.24, while the experimental group scored 59.57. The independent samples t-test ($t = 0.588$, $p = 0.560$) indicated no significant difference between the two groups at pre-test, confirming that the groups were statistically comparable prior to the intervention. The sizable standard deviations reflect the varied fluency profiles typical of struggling readers, underscoring the need for differentiated reading support (Williams & Garcia, 2024). Establishing baseline equivalence strengthens the validity of subsequent comparisons between groups (Johnson & Smith, 2022).

3.2. POST-TEST READING FLUENCY LEVELS

Following the intervention, students demonstrated varying levels of improvement, reflected in their post-test WCPM classifications.

Table 3: Students' WCPM Levels After the Intervention

Benchmark Cut-Scores	Control Group	Percentage	Experimental Group	Percentage
Above Benchmark (142 words and above)	0	0	7	33.33%
At Benchmark (125 – 141 words)	1	4.76%	2	9.52%
Below Benchmark (0 – 109 words)	20	95.24%	12	57.14%
Total:	21	100%	21	100%

Seven students (33.33%) in the experimental group reached the "Above Benchmark" level after the intervention, while none of the students in the control group moved into this category. Another two students in the experimental group met the benchmark level, compared with only one student in the control group. This upward movement suggests that the Text-Talk Stories may have supported key fluency processes such as decoding accuracy and smoother word recognition skills identified by Feruzi (2021) as essential to fluent reading, and by Tunmer and Hoover (2019) as foundational to constructing meaning from text.

The visual and conversational features of the Text-Talk Stories may also have contributed to students' improvement. Serafini (2020) explains that visual cues in picture-supported texts guide interpretation and provide scaffolds that help readers make sense of unfamiliar words. Quecan (2021) similarly notes that multimodal materials reduce linguistic load for second-language learners by providing contextual support. The chat-like layout of the stories likely enhanced approachability as well; Thompson and McIlnay (2019) emphasise that digitally inspired formats mirror adolescents' everyday communication practices, making reading tasks feel less intimidating.

Despite these gains, most students in both groups remained below the benchmark. Persistent barriers such as irregular attendance, the presence of non-readers, and environmental challenges may have limited overall progress. Research on remedial instruction supports this pattern; Pollock and Tolone (2020) argue that learners with multiple reading difficulties often require sustained, individualised support, while Xin and Yunus (2020) highlight the need for repeated, scaffolded practice to develop lasting fluency gains.

3.3. WITHIN-GROUP COMPARISON OF READING FLUENCY (EXPERIMENTAL GROUP)

A paired samples t-test was performed to determine whether the experimental group's reading fluency improved significantly following the Text-Talk Stories intervention.

Table 4: Pre- and Post-Test WCPM Scores of the Experimental Group

	N	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value	Decision	Verbal Interpretation
Pre-test	21	59.57	32.54	-9.63	<.001	Reject H_0	Highly Significant
Post-test	21	109.60	37.44				

The experimental group showed a substantial increase in reading fluency, with mean WCPM scores rising from 59.57 at pre-test to 109.00 at post-test. The paired samples t-test indicates that this improvement was statistically significant ($t = –9.639$, $p < .001$). Feruzi (2021) notes that fluency depends on smooth pacing and accurate word recognition, while Tunmer and Hoover (2019) emphasize that gains in decoding automaticity free cognitive resources needed for comprehension. The magnitude of improvement observed in this study suggests that the intervention supported these foundational processes in meaningful ways.

The multimodal features of the Text-Talk Stories may have contributed to these gains by providing visual and contextual scaffolds that helped students decode unfamiliar words more efficiently. Serafini (2020) explains that visual cues in picture-supported texts guide readers toward meaning, while Quecan (2021) highlights how multimodal materials reduce linguistic load for English language learners. These features likely helped students read with greater confidence and less hesitation. The conversational, chat-like format may also have increased approachability and engagement, aligning with Thompson and McIlnay's (2019) observation that digitally inspired layouts mirror adolescents' everyday communication practices.

While the significant improvement demonstrates the potential of the intervention, the presence of wide score variability suggests that some students may require more sustained or intensive support. Pollock and Tolone (2020) emphasize that individualised and scaffolded instruction is often necessary for learners with persistent reading difficulties, and Xin and Yunus (2020) note that repeated practice,

combined with timely feedback, strengthens fluency development over time. Thus, although the Text-Talk Stories appear to have supported important gains in fluency, ongoing and differentiated interventions may be needed to address deeper or more persistent reading challenges.

3.4. BETWEEN-GROUP COMPARISON OF POST-TEST READING FLUENCY

An independent samples t-test was conducted to determine whether post-test reading fluency differed significantly between the control and experimental groups.

Table 5: Post-Test WCPM Scores of the Control and Experimental Groups

Group	N	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value	Decision	Verbal Interpretation
Control	21	77.19	30.89	-3.06	<.05	Reject	Highly Significant
Experimental	21	109.60	37.44				

The experimental group achieved a substantially higher post-test mean WCPM score (109.60) compared with the control group (77.19). The independent samples t-test confirmed that this difference was statistically significant ($t = -3.061$, $p = .004$), indicating that students who used the Text-Talk Stories performed better in reading fluency at the end of the intervention period. This upward shift suggests an improvement in foundational fluency processes, including decoding accuracy and smoother word recognition—skills identified by Feruzi (2021) and Tunmer and Hoover (2019) as essential for supporting comprehension.

The multimodal and conversational features of the Text-Talk Stories may have contributed to these differences. Serafini (2020) explains that visual cues embedded in texts help guide readers toward meaning and reduce ambiguity, particularly for learners who struggle with unfamiliar vocabulary. Quecan (2021) adds that multimodal materials lessen linguistic load for English language learners by providing contextual scaffolds. In this study, the integration of emojis, images, and conversational text structures appears to have facilitated students to decode more efficiently and read with greater confidence. The familiar, chat-like format reflects findings by Thompson and McIlnay (2019), who observed that digitally inspired texts increase approachability and engagement among adolescent readers.

The significant difference in outcomes also aligns with principles of remedial

instruction. Pollock and Tolone (2020) emphasise that structured, scaffolded reading support is critical for learners with persistent fluency challenges, while Xin and Yunus (2020) note that repeated practice with guided feedback strengthens automaticity over time. The higher post-test scores in the experimental group suggest that combining individualised support with multimodal, culturally familiar reading materials may help struggling learners make more meaningful progress in fluency. However, the variation within groups indicates that some students may require extended or more intensive interventions to sustain long-term gains.

3.5. STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE TEXT-TALK STORIES INTERVENTION

To complement the quantitative findings, qualitative data were gathered from 21 Grade 8 students through semi-structured interviews and written reflections. Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis, three central themes emerged: enhanced reading motivation, improved comprehension and fluency, and greater engagement with the multimodal design of the Text-Talk Stories. These themes reflect how students interacted with the visually enriched, conversational format, which closely resembles the digital communication environments familiar to them.

Table 6: Thematic Analysis of Students' Perceptions of Text-Talk Stories

Theme Cluster	Subthemes	Formulated Meanings
A. Enhanced Reading Motivation	1. Familiar Design and Structure 2. Confidence in Reading	The chat-like, colourful layout made reading approachable and less intimidating. Repeated exposure to accessible texts increased students' self-confidence and willingness to read.
B. Improved Comprehension and Fluency	1. Picture-Aided Understanding 2. Vocabulary Recognition and Pronunciation	Visual cues (images, emojis) supported comprehension and helped clarify story events. Frequent encounters with contextual words strengthened vocabulary recognition and pronunciation.
C. Increased Engagement with Format	1. Chat Format Appeal 2. Emotional and Cultural Relevance	The messaging-style format resonated with digital-native learners and encouraged sustained interest. Relatable and culturally familiar storylines increased enjoyment and personal connection.

Students described the Text-Talk Stories as motivating and approachable, often emphasising the familiarity of the chat-like layout and the confidence they gained from reading texts that felt less intimidating. This reflects Thompson and McIlnay's (2019) observation that digitally inspired formats mirror adolescents' everyday communication practices, reducing the affective barriers often associated with traditional print. As students encountered visually engaging and conversationally structured texts, many expressed greater willingness to participate and persist during reading tasks, supporting Dove's (2020) view that emotional factors play a crucial role in reading development.

Students also shared that pictures, emojis, and other visual elements supported their understanding of vocabulary and storyline events. Serafini

(2020) explains that visual cues in picture-supported texts guide readers toward meaning, while Quecan (2021) notes that multimodal scaffolds lighten linguistic demand for English language learners. Consistent with these insights, students reported improved comprehension, recognition of new words, and clearer pronunciation through repeated exposure to contextual vocabulary, an outcome consistent with Xin and Yunus's (2020) findings on the benefits of guided, repetitive reading.

Engagement emerged as another key theme. Learners found the stories enjoyable, relatable, and culturally familiar, which helped sustain their interest and reduced anxiety. This pattern aligns with Kress's (2020) argument that visually rich and culturally relevant texts promote deeper reader involvement. By mirroring the rhythm and appearance of everyday messaging environments, the Text-Talk Stories provided a low-pressure reading platform that encouraged struggling readers to participate more actively and express greater confidence in reading English texts.

3.6. CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED DURING THE INTERVENTION

To understand factors that may have limited students' progress, challenges encountered during the Text-Talk Stories intervention were examined through thematic analysis. Three key themes emerged: reading anxiety and shyness, vocabulary and language difficulties, and cognitive load and recall issues. These themes highlight the affective, linguistic, and cognitive barriers that shaped students' reading experiences.

Table 7: Thematic Analysis of Challenges Encountered by Students

Theme Cluster	Subthemes	Formulated Meanings
A. Reading Anxiety and Shyness	1. Nervousness and Embarrassment 2. Fear of Making Mistakes	Students felt anxious or embarrassed when reading aloud, affecting confidence and participation. Fear of mispronunciation or judgment reduced students' willingness to read in English.
B. Vocabulary and Language Difficulties	1. Difficulty with English Words 2. Pronunciation and Word Recognition	Unfamiliar vocabulary hindered comprehension and slowed reading. Limited phonological awareness led to misreading or skipping words.
C. Cognitive Load and Recall Issues	1. Memory and Comprehension Gaps 2. Challenges Answering Questions	Students struggled to retain story details, especially when decoding demands were high. Difficulty recalling key information affected performance in comprehension tasks.

Students' reports of anxiety and shyness reflect the emotional barriers commonly experienced by struggling readers. Hussein (2020) explains that fear of making mistakes and embarrassment when reading aloud can significantly inhibit participation and lower confidence, especially in second-language contexts. In this study, several learners described feeling nervous during oral reading tasks, suggesting that emotional stress may have limited their willingness to engage fully with the intervention.

Vocabulary and language difficulties also surfaced as major challenges. Many students reported encountering unfamiliar or complex English words that disrupted their reading flow. Serafini (2020) notes that limited vocabulary knowledge can hinder comprehension by forcing readers to decode words without adequate semantic grounding. Quecan (2021) adds that linguistic load is particularly heavy for English language learners, who often struggle with pronunciation and word recognition.

Finally, some students experienced cognitive load and recall issues, particularly during comprehension checks. Kress (2020) explains that when readers expend most of their cognitive resources on decoding, little capacity remains for understanding or remembering content. This was evident among students who struggled to retain story details or answer comprehension questions, especially when limited visual support was available.

4 Conclusion

The study found that Text-Talk Stories supported meaningful improvements in the reading fluency of struggling Grade 8 learners. Students exposed to the intervention demonstrated statistically significant gains in Words Correct Per Minute and reported that the multimodal, conversational format made reading more approachable and engaging. Qualitative insights highlighted that the visual cues, familiar chat-like layout, and culturally relatable content helped reduce intimidation and supported comprehension, particularly for learners navigating English as a second language.

Despite these positive outcomes, some students continued to experience reading anxiety, vocabulary difficulties, and cognitive overload. These challenges suggest that while the multimodal design helped strengthen

decoding and confidence for many learners, others may require additional scaffolds or extended support. Overall, the findings indicate that Text-Talk Stories can be a valuable component of remedial reading programs when paired with strategies that address both academic and affective barriers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, several recommendations are proposed to strengthen the implementation of the Text-Talk Stories intervention. Teachers may incorporate peer-assisted reading and small-group discussions to reduce reading anxiety and promote confidence among struggling learners. Providing vocabulary scaffolding such as pre-teaching key terms, using word banks, or integrating vocabulary games can help students manage unfamiliar words and improve decoding accuracy. To lessen cognitive load and support comprehension, reading sessions may be broken into smaller, more manageable segments, accompanied by tools such as story maps and guided summaries. Allowing self-paced reading can further reduce performance pressure and encourage independent learning. Incorporating supplementary digital tools, including audio versions or interactive quizzes, may enhance engagement and offer immediate feedback. Using culturally familiar narratives can also strengthen motivation by helping students connect more meaningfully with the text. Finally, the regular monitoring of students' reading progress is recommended to guide instructional adjustments and provide timely, targeted support for learners who require additional assistance. These strategies may be adapted in other remedial reading settings to support learners with similar profiles.

Conflict of interest statement

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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