

## **Technology training for ELT teachers at a Private University in Malaysia**



**Karthiyaini Devarajoo<sup>1</sup>, Siti Maziha Mustapha<sup>2</sup>, Suraya Amirrudin<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1,2,3</sup> Infrastructure University Kuala Lumpur

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**ABSTRACT:** Online teaching and learning are not new experiences in the field of ELT, but the sudden need for everyone globally to go virtual due to the pandemic is unprecedented. Currently, with the Covid-19 pandemic, online classes are being conducted globally as a short-term emergency response to sustain education through crisis management. This study explores the effect of technology training on the teacher trainees' preference to use print and digital media in the ELT classroom. As students in schools in the recent past years, the participants who are presently TESOL trainee teachers had never or rarely had the experience of using digital media in the ELT classroom. The study employs a qualitative method based on data gathered online through questions posed to TESOL trainee teachers during their online class on Media Resources in November 2020 – February 2021. A total of 10 TESOL trainee teachers responded to 8 open-ended interview questions posed to them digitally. Data collected was analysed qualitatively by identifying statements that respond to the research questions. Expression used in these statements were categorized to narrow down the themes. The expressions were then uploaded into a Word Cloud to identify the most significant expression that was used repetitively in response to each research question. The findings of this study will inform practice among teacher educators as the current generation of teacher trainees seem to be garnering momentum to improve the use of technology in the ELT classroom with a special focus on digital media and to encourage other ELT teacher trainees to gain confidence to use technology in their future ELT classroom. The above findings show that even though the 10 students had little exposure to digital technology when they were school students themselves, but with appropriate training to use print and digital technology and resources in the ELT classroom, they were confident of using both media resources in the future.

**KEYWORDS:** ELT, technology, digital media, print media, media resources, TESOL

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Online teaching and learning are not new experiences in the field of ELT, but the sudden need for everyone globally to go virtual due to the pandemic is unprecedented. Globally, baby boomers as ELT teachers are phasing out and the next generation of teachers are in service now. The generation of teachers now is the senior teachers from "Generation X", who were born from 1965 to 1976 and followed by the younger teachers from "Generation Y", born between 1981-1996. These two generations have been exposed to technology in ELT more than previous generations of ELT teachers. Yet, the British Council (BC) Survey (British Council, 2020) reveals that teachers now are challenged with the need to design and present appropriate online tasks. Without face-to-face interaction and lack of immediate feedback from the students, teachers are concerned that the tasks they design might not be understood well by the students. This could lead to teachers not knowing whether students have understood the tasks.

Currently, with the Covid-19 pandemic, online classes are being conducted globally as a short-term emergency response to sustain education through crisis management. Virtual classrooms in response to the pandemic are in response to an emergency, without much time for curriculum design or training of teachers/lecturers. This study explores the effect of technology training on the teacher trainees' preference to use print and digital media in the ELT classroom. As students in schools in the recent past years, the participants who are presently TESOL trainee teachers had never or rarely had the experience of using digital media in the ELT classroom.

### **2. BACKGROUND OF STUDY**

ELT instructors have been using technology in the classroom for decades now. In the early days, print technology, in the form of printed newspapers and magazines were used extensively in the ELT classrooms, along with textbooks and workbooks. Availability of technology has ensured that exposure in an informal manner far exceeds the formal learning environments (Trinder, 2017). Presently, with the advancement of technology, digital media has replaced print media in the field of education, especially in the ELT classroom. Instructors use technology in teaching to enhance learning, increase engagement and motivate students (Alqahtami,

2019).

Different learning networks and online communities are reported in studies as being created from various social networking websites (Tinmaz, 2020). The views and attitude of a few ELT educators who are famous in online media such as Telegram and WhatsApp were surveyed in relation to the use of social media in ELT. This study results demonstrated that by and large, the members showed a positive attitude towards the use of web-based social media in ELT. Furthermore, most members additionally demonstrated high familiarity with the educational possibilities offered by web-based social media in ELT rehearses, and a few components which might actually prevent the genuine utilization of online social media were identified (Rezaei & Meshkatian, 2017).

### 3. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

A recent study on English Language Teaching and Covid-19 based on data gathered during the early days of the pandemic (3 April to 32 May 2020) from 9600 respondents from 150 countries (British Council, 2020) testified that teachers are seeking more training and preparation support for online teaching. These findings show that teachers were neither exposed nor trained to use digital media in the classroom. This, teachers need support to confidently use digital media in the ELT classrooms.

Similarly, Alqahtani (2019) claimed that training/retraining of English language teachers in the use of technology and materials development was insufficient. This finding is further supported by the BC Survey that revealed that teachers lack the confidence to manage the challenges of using technology in the classroom. Carabantes and Paran (2017) stated that materials development and use are still the central core of language teaching, and ELT teachers should be trained to use digital materials for effective teaching and learning. Materials development is a core component that must be emphasized in all teacher training programmes (Tomlinson, 2016), and he confirmed that most ELT classrooms around the world are based on materials. Thus, training of teachers to develop and use both print and digital media is important.

Thus, this study explores the effect of technology training among TESOL teacher trainees' and its influence on their intention to use print and digital media, including social media, in their own future ELT classrooms although their ELT English teachers never or rarely used digital technology in their classrooms. The findings of this study confirm the need for training to use both print and digital technology in the ELT classroom.

### 4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

The research objective of this study is to explore the importance of technology training and how this can influence preferences for use of technology in the ELT classroom by TESOL trainee teachers.

Six research questions on the participants' experiences of and preferences for technology in the ELT classrooms guide this study:

1. What were the types of media used in the English Language classroom when the trainee teachers were school students?
2. What were the trainee teachers' experiences when learning English using print and digital media?
3. What were the trainee teachers' challenges when learning English using print and digital media?
4. What are the trainee teachers' preferred types of media to learn the English language?
5. What are the trainee teachers' preferred types of media for use in their own ELT classrooms after technology training?
6. How useful was technology training in their preparation to be English language teachers?

### 5. LITERATURE REVIEW

The use of technology and the skills to use technology is crucial for now and the future. The application of language skills by students in an authentic context is enhanced with the advancement of technology (Alqahtani, 2019).

In the current global ELT environment various factors such as English as lingua franca, technological progress and other related factors have a deep effect on educational matters related to policy, curriculum development, language teaching and learning methods, and materials development and use.

Alqahtani (2019) asserts that technology can fill the gap in ELT with the use of traditional methods such as reaching out to students of different academic abilities and background with differentiated instructions. He further highlights that not all students are the same and technology allows for individualized teaching. Technology with the use of social media and network has been promising in the field of education. Rezaei & Meshkatian (2017) claim that just like in other fields of education, ELT teachers have actually been using social media in their classrooms. This is supported by Alqahtani (2019)'s findings that technological tools give teachers much-needed resources to reach all learners. He claimed that teachers must utilize technology in a way that's intentional and purposeful. No matter how they utilize devices when planning technology used in language classrooms, teachers should make sure they're meeting an educational objective. The application of modern technology represents a significant advance in contemporary English language teaching methods (Alqahtani, 2019). However, it must be noted that teachers must be trained to develop materials that are content

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and context appropriate (Tomlinson, 2016) using both print and digital technology resources. Tomlinson (2016) also asserted the need for materials development training component in all ELT teacher training programmes.

In addition to the above advantages of technology, Jacqui (2015) states that technology permits learners to show autonomy, identifies student needs, encourages learning by utilizing materials that interest students, promotes effective use of technology among students, gives students a voice, and empowers students to build strong content knowledge as they finish their work. ELT students are highly motivated to learn and use technology (Nasser, 2017). With the current trend in the use of technology in language learning, Patel (2017) asserts that more appropriate technology will be developed.

Further, Alqahtani (2019) asserted that technology engages students in learning experiences, and brings other culture and different lifestyles into the classroom. Technology enables students to experience language learning in a totally different manner, he stated. Findings from another study also supports a similar idea that students prefer using different technologies in the ELT classroom especially in self-regulated contexts (Trinder, 2017).

Thus, with the present necessity to switch to online teaching and learning in the current crisis, methodologies and materials design becomes a major concern for teachers. This is more so because before the pandemic, online classes for ELT were limited. Hence, the BC Survey brought to light some of the concerns raised by teachers and teacher educators which include the need for advice on planning online lessons and task design for distance learning. They were also concerned that there is a lack of proper equipment for teachers and/or learners, poor internet connection/ no access to the internet, and the need for class management strategies.

The study also highlighted that there could be a possibility that now teachers realize that they need new ways of delivery but they lack the knowledge, skills and experience to handle this current demands, and thus, have to quickly learn more.

Numerous studies assert the effectiveness of using technology in the ELT classroom. Use of present day technology enhances student learning including better motivation, more response from students, improved accomplishment levels, and better communication between students and teachers (Alqahtani, 2019). Likewise, Ahmadi (2018) asserts that online training programmes is much preferred by teachers since they apparently improve student engagement with teachers and overall boosts English language learning.

The use of state-of-the-art sound and visual devices and tablets are more impressive in teaching English language skills because of their promptness and easy to understand English content, which reflects authentic situations in real life, in contrast to the traditional teaching methods that are rigid, not interesting and bore students in the ELT classroom (Alqahtani, 2019). However, he asserted that the ELT pedagogy in various educational institutions was hindered by the unequal availability of technology and connectivity.

## 6. METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative study based on data gathered online through questions posed to TESOL trainee teachers during their online class on Media Resources in November 2020. A total of 10 TESOL trainee teachers registered for the course on technology training (Media Resources in ELT) responded to 8 open-ended interview questions posed to them digitally.

### a. Sample and Data analysis

A purposive sampling procedure was used to identify teacher trainees on an ELT programme. The 10 participants were between 20-25 years of age in various stages in a 3-year TESOL bachelor's degree programme at a private university in Malaysia. Among the 10 participants, 2 were male participants and one was an international student. All these participants have a good command of the English language and can share their views by reflecting on their own experiences in school and then decide on their own intentions and actions for their future ELT classrooms.

The sample is from a course on Media Resources in ELT and these participants were trained to use various digital platforms and tools in the ELT classroom during this course. Data was collected throughout the semester as the participants were introduced to the basics of media resources in ELT including the different types of media resources used in the ELT classrooms and the print and digital resources available to ELT teachers.

Data collected was analysed qualitatively by identifying statements that respond to the research questions. Expression used in these statements were categorized to narrow down the themes. Then, these expressions were then uploaded into a Word Cloud to identify the most significant expression that was used repetitively in response to each research question. The Word Cloud enabled identification of a pattern of thought that emerged based on the frequency of the expressions used in response to each question.

### b. Theoretical Framework

Connectivism was introduced as a learning theory in 2004 (Downes, 2020), and since then, internet technologies have changed teaching and learning with the introduction of new learning activities (Tinmaz, 2020), and, it has had an ongoing expansion which is portrayed as a learning hypothesis of the computerized time.

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Utecht and Keller (2019) asserts that Connectivism Learning Theory can be applied in K-12 and tertiary education. They further state that this theory will permit institutions to exploit technology that exist now and in the future. They further claim that technology has not reached its maximum capacity is still a long way from accomplishment (Utecht and Keller, 2019).

George Siemens is a familiar but controversial face at numerous e-learning conferences. Siemens asserts the limitations of past learning theories i.e., behaviourism, cognitivism, and constructivism, and introduces Connectivism as a learning theory for the digital era (Herlo, 2017). In 2005, Siemens identified 8 principles of Connectivism: 1. learning and knowledge rest in diversity of opinions, 2. learning is a process of connecting, 3. learning may reside in non-human appliances, 4. capacity to know more is more critical than what is currently known, 5. nurturing and maintaining connections is needed for continual learning, 6. ability to see connections between fields, 7. ideas, and concepts is a core skill, and 8. accurate, up-to-date knowledge is the aim of all Connectivist learning, decision-making is a learning process. Researchers use the term 'connectivist environment' to describe the learning environment using technology (Aldahdouh, 2019).

Within the communication environment of the Internet is the data stores of virtual classrooms, social media, and virtual realities, to create and transform data for learners and educators. The internet has become the focal point of this theory, though it does not lack critics (Kropf, 2013). Connectivism is the a new philosophy of education for the digital age by including learning that lies outside the learner, in social networks and technological tools (Mattar, 2018). Connectivism explains learning in terms of interactions on a network where the learners exchange their knowledge (Tinmaz, 2020).

With reference to massive open online courses (MOOCs), Mattar (2018) claims that Connectivism is the new and important theory with reference to pedagogy and practice in MOOCs. In addition to MOOCs, the implementation of Connectivism includes the social networking websites which offer connections in the form of friendships (Tinmaz, 2020).

While Connectivism gives a supportive focal point through which teaching and learning using computerised developments can be better seen and comprehended, further study and testing is required. There is most likely not going to be a single theory that will explain teaching and learning in this technological era. Teachers and researchers have a significant task to carry further exploration on online learning (Goldie, 2016). Many educational institutions have taken advantages of social networking websites for maintaining their teaching and learning activities. On the other hand, institutions suffer from the deficiency of guiding learning theories and their effective implementation (Tinmaz, 2020). However, for the time being, Connectivism is still the theory that supports this age of technology in the field of education.

### 7. SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

The findings of this this will inform practice among teacher educators as the current generation of teacher trainees seem to be garnering momentum to improve the use of technology in the ELT classroom with a special focus on digital media.

The findings will also encourage other ELT teacher trainees to gain confidence to use technology in their future ELT classroom. Curriculum designers at tertiary levels i.e. at teacher training colleges and universities, will be able to include a component on the use of media, both print and digital, in their teacher training programmes. The findings of this study is evidence that given the right training, ELT teachers are prepared to take technology a step further in the ELT classroom.

Policy makers involving teacher education at the education ministry levels will also be able to cite the need for technological-based teacher training for the future, and take further action to ensure that this component is supported in teacher education programmes with sufficient funding to training institutions.

### 8. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The 4 research questions are presented below and discussed based on the responses provided by the participants and findings from other past studies:

#### 1. What were the types of media used in your English language classroom?

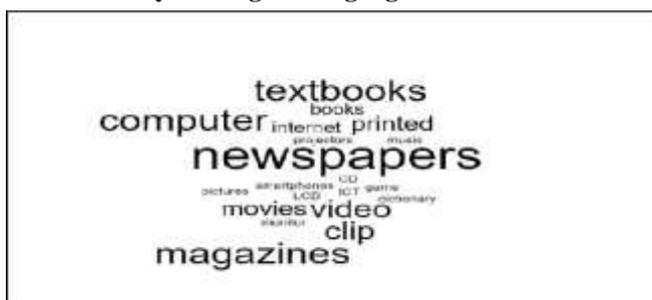


Figure 1: Types of media used in the ELT classrooms

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All ten participants highlighted the that the main media used in the classrooms were newspapers and textbooks as shown in the Figure 1 Word Cloud. Students shared different views as they had differing experiences. The use of print media was still in place more frequently and responses included:

- *print media like newspapers and magazines is the most common one for various activities like scrapbook making, comprehension activities and etc.*
- *the primary media used in my English Language Classroom when I was in primary school until finishing high school is books (textbooks and reference books)*
- *our English lessons is mostly conducted on printed materials including short notes and worksheet*
- *flipping through newspapers and circling words that were new to us and looking up the definition of it in the dictionary*
- *our English teacher would bring some English magazines, sometimes fashion magazines*
- *the printed media that were being used are such as newspaper and magazines.*

However, a few of the responses indicated the use of digital media in the classroom:

- *In my primary school years, the government was very interested in introducing ict in the classrooms. Almost every classroom in my school had lcd projectors and a monitor on the teacher's desk, which were used at an almost weekly basis*

The above participant also highlighted when in secondary school, it was back to print materials:

- *Though, when I was in my secondary years, the textbook had taken total control as the media used in class*

So, there could have been a change in practice among teacher, policy changes or lack of maintenance of existing digital equipment. One respondent highlighted the use of different media in the ELT classroom – “Compared to a lot of other subjects and classes, the English classes I had used a large assortment of media in their lessons”.

A few of the participants shared that “The use of digital media is very common too, as teachers are pushing the use of computers in class.”, “My teacher used to share with us short movies, videos and music to improve a specific language skill.”, and “Occasionally we would go to the computer room to watch a clip of a movie on the computer, and then answer some questions”.

These 10 participants seem to have experienced the transition period to the implementation of digital media in the ELT classroom in Malaysia.

## 2. What were the trainee teachers’ experiences when learning English using print and digital media?

This research question explored the participants’ experiences using print and digital media. The Figure 3 shows that “learning” was the word repeatedly used to describe their experience and the participants linked their experience to being “academic” when using print media to learn English. Participants shared that:

- *using print material is necessary to score well in exam*
- *printed material is the only medium we used in schools, therefore our learning process was depending on printed media*
- *My experience on learning using printed media was quite interesting back in those high school years*

One respondent highlighted that “The class is a bit boring, but the quality of the class is higher than digital media class somehow.”

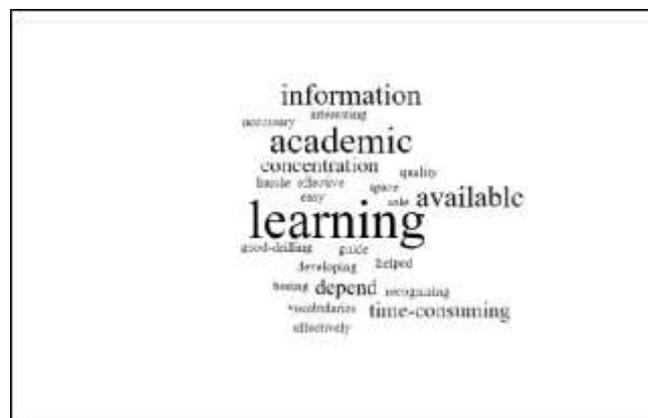


Figure 2: Experiences when using print media in the ELT classroom

Though a few participants stated that print media were interesting and effective, others stated that it was boring, time consuming to flip through the pages to look for specific information and the print media materials took up lots of storage space.



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“will likely be favoured by more students of the generations ahead”.

One of the two respondent who preferred print media confessed that “I personally prefer print media. It may be that I have rarely used digital media before, and the experience is not very good. I feel more secure when using print media and know what I should do and how to do it.”. This could be due to her experience with digital media in her home country where technology seeped into the ELT classroom rather slowly. She shared that even in her current programme she needs to print out all lecture materials to read and understand the contents. The other respondent who preferred print media shared that “I actually prefer Print Media because I absorb the information rapidly and better while reading through papers. Some how I feel more satisfied while going through papers.”

### 5. What are the trainee teachers’ preferred types of media for use in their own ELT classrooms after technology training?

Of the 10 participants, 8 of them preferred to use a combination of both print and digital media in their ELT classroom. The trainee teachers identified that print media provides the “main information needed for my students, especially textbooks” which “written according to their needs to develop English skills”.

By using both media resources in the ELT classroom, participants shared that students will “know the advantages and disadvantages” and be able to identify which “is more exciting and fresh to them”. Further, using the print media “contributes experience and impact that printed media may potentially fail to deliver to the students” and they further elaborated that One respondent said that print media “contain textures that digital media does not really possess” and another responded said she wants her students to “students to appreciate print media”.

The participants also stated that digital media can function as “supplementary material to make learning process become more enjoyable and fun for my students” but “cannot completely replace printed media and vice versa”. This is an interesting observation as the teacher trainees recognize the importance of both media in the ELT classroom. A few of the also highlighted that the use of digital media might be a concern due to “long exposure to blue light emitted from screens (which) can be a health hazard for younger students”. However, they also observed that the use of digital media “has become a trend, and now children are born with digital media” and “digital media it would more astonishing and inspiring”.

The two participants who preferred the use of only digital resources in the ELT classroom cited that it is “important to base language learning on real time situations and information”. This view is similar to Alqahtani (2019)’s statement that enhancing timely understanding enables students to learn more efficiently.

One of them stated that the use of digital media “doesn’t limit my scope of materials and allows me to freely explore new topics of interest for my students”. Both also highlighted that they “have to keep up with the students’ interest and capabilities on using it as the medium to explore more about the language itself”. The participants’ views that technology supports students interest concurs with Alqahtani (2019) that technology is deemed interesting and motivating as the student reacts with the subject.

They explained that digital media can be utilized in various ways and “it can save more time and energy too” especially “when it comes to preparing the sheets for classroom activity”. They believe that “workload will be a bit easier” and it would be easier to put forward ideas and how to visualize it to the ELT students. They also said that the used of digital media will facilitate students learning of the four language skills. These views concur with Jacqui (2019) who asserted that technology allows students to be autonomous learners in an engaging manner with deeper understanding of their learning experience through completion of assigned tasks. Hence, it can be said that both printed media and digital medias has and disadvantages, and the choice depends on students’ preference, needs and learning style.

### 6. How useful was technology training in their preparation to be English language teachers?

All the participants in this study confirmed the need for training to use both print and digital resources in the classroom. Teacher trainees are aware that both print and digital media are important in the current environment in ELT. This view was also shared by Patel (2017) that with advancement in both the technology and the users of that technology, more technology- based language learning methods will surely emerge.

Some of the trainee teachers’ responses included:

*“A course on media resources really helps the teachers to discover a lot about different types of media to bring into their classroom to cater to the ever-changing needs of the students.”*

- Participant 1

*“Yes, because nowadays the materials are no longer limited to textbook. Media resources helps me to explore variety of other available resources (physical and virtual) that can improve my teaching skills, as well as to understand student’s learning needs, preferences and styles. In addition, due to the focus of education is now on blended learning / online learning, media resources*

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*course teaches me on how to prepare digital materials that are appropriate, interesting and interactive.”*

- Participant 3

- *“Definitely YES. From this course future teachers can explore new platforms to teach their students.”*

- Participant 6

*“Yes, teachers will explore many platforms or tools that they are not familiar with before, so as to get more ways to obtain or create materials, thereby bringing higher quality English classes to students.”*

- Participant 7

### Course Content

This course on Media Resources in ELT encompasses both print and media technologies for use in the ELT classroom. Teacher trainees are introduced to various aspects of the topic including the history of print technology and the evolution of print media into the ELT classroom. With the current pandemic, the digital component was given more emphasis as these students were into online teaching for their micro-teaching tasks.

The teacher trainees reflected on the different types of media that were used by their teachers and explore the myriad of media resources available for ELT teachers now, including both print and digital media. These students explored the different digital tools and platforms and shared how these can be used in the ELT classroom effectively. Gamification was an element that they had to include in the Final Project for this course. This was an attempt to keep students engaged during online class as some of them acknowledged the fact that digital resources can be distracting and often, they wander off virtually. Hence, with elements of gamification in the digital resources, student anchorage and engagement in learning can be ensured. Training of teachers to develop their own materials should be part of all teacher training programmes (Tomlinson, 2016) and as such this course and a few other courses in the TESOL programme at this university are core for all trainee teachers.

### CONCLUSION

The above findings show that even though the 10 students had little exposure to digital technology when they were school students themselves, but with appropriate training to use print and digital technology and resources in the ELT classroom, they were confident of using both media resources in the future.

In this course on Media Resources, the content focuses on the different media and digital platforms that can be introduced into the ELT classroom and guides trainee teachers on the selection criteria for both print and digital resources for use in the language classroom. Such training prepares trainee teachers to use different media resources confidently in the ELT classroom as recommended by Aqahtani (2019). He further noted that students should also be given appropriate training in maneuvering technology to enhance effectiveness and efficiency in using technology in the ELT classroom. Technology training support for students is an area of ELT that needs further study as it would be a whole school project across the board for all subjects. As for the ELT teachers, with sufficient exposure to digital technology and appropriate training, they will surely have more confidence in using technology in their ELT classroom. With exposure to social media and digital technology, trainee teachers are able to weigh the pros and cons of these digital tools and platform.



Based on the findings of this study, the researchers propose that Connectivism as the underpinning theory of the digital age in ELT connects technology to teaching, learning and training (Diagram 1) as the dynamics that result in intense student engagement in their own learning through efficient materials development using print and digital media resources.

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