THE IMPLEMENTATION OF JIM CUMMINS' THEORY OF SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION IN ESL CLASSROOMS

*Ainne Aisyah Mohd Nadzir Huzaina Abdul Halim Department of Language and Literacy Education, Faculty of Education, Universiti Malaya *17202561@siswa.um.edu.my

This study was conducted to understand ESL teachers' implementation of Jim Cummins' theory of SLA which involves the use of the L1 when teaching English; the BICS/CALP, the developmental interdependence hypothesis (iceberg model) and threshold hypothesis. It was to investigate how theories are applied into teaching and learning situations while exploring the factors that led the teachers to use the theories as well as their limitations and advantages. 30 English teachers in Seremban, Malaysia, contributed their views and experiences through an online questionnaire and 10 of them were interviewed. The factors that led the teachers to use L1 when teaching with the guidance of Jim Cummins' theories were due to efficiency, external relevance and naturalness (Cook, 2001, p.413) cited in Mart (2013). The limitations of using L1 include students' willingness to communicate in the target language were compromised and they developed a dependence on L1. The advantages of using L1 in ESL classrooms were that teachers get to have a smooth lesson going and students' affective filters were lowered. The paper concludes that there are plenty of areas to be fine-tuned for teachers to feel at ease when using L1 in English lessons such as the confusion between the need to help the students and the struggle to maintain teacher's observation results by superiors with English supposed to be taught in the English language. It is discussed that the implementation of theories that support the use of L1 can be better viewed in Malaysia with proper policy and training.

Keywords: Second Language Teachers, L1 In L2 Classrooms, Theory and Practice

INTRODUCTION

The study was conducted to understand the reasons behind the application of theories that involve the use of L1 in ESL classrooms, particularly Jim Cummins'. There are many instances where English teachers in rural schools in Malaysia are faced with challenges to keep teaching English in English when the students can barely understand them. It is known in Malaysia that teacher beliefs regarding teaching and learning of English are to be conducted in English. During training, trainee teachers were drummed into understanding that it is not a great idea to mix the first language when teaching English. However, Jim Cummins' theories of SLA are frameworks for teachers to use L1 during lessons and that it was introduced during teacher training. With the existence of in-depth study of how the first language may affect the teaching and learning of a second language, these 'English should be taught in English' teacher beliefs should not be enforced especially for rural schools. This study was to investigate the reasons in which these teachers opt for L1 aid when teaching English, its advantages as well as its limitations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study draws on research done in the past which concerns putting theory into practice involving ESL teachers in technology and reading instruction (Yang et al., 2018), literature (Bagherkazemi & Alemi, 2010) and self-efficacy with communication (Maarof, 2015). It brings about an investigation of ESL teachers lacking pedagogical skills which involves ESL theories and implementation (Tran, 2015) as well as how it focused on language instruction guides (Valdes et al., 2014). A study by Nassaji (2012) was conducted to evaluate the transfer of theory into practice and how it went as well as an investigation done by Tran (2015) which confirms their findings. Regarding the L1 being treated as negative interference, studies by Krish and Oh (2020) and Channa et al. (2017) finds that there is significant interference. However, Channa et al. (2017) expounded that there is positive interference in L2 immersion as well as using L1 to support teaching and learning (Czerwionka & Cuza, 2017). The studies on interference have influenced the implementation of theories by ESL teachers and educators (Ellis, 2010).

The theories involved are to help students understand the language rules and functions by comparing its use in both social interactions and academic language as well as the proficiency of the first language supporting the acquisition of the second language (Cummins, 1999). Cummins (1999) also argued the reality is as such, L1 and target language depends on each other for an effective instructional method in areas where bilingualism is apparent. The BICS/CALP is to help children learn the target language while being able to converse in daily conversations and are able to use the language in an academic setting (Cummins, 1976 in Cummins, 2000). The interdependence hypothesis can be observed by working the languages under the common underlying proficiency of the two languages where it is possible to transfer cognitive/academic or literacy-related proficiency (Cummins, 1981 in Cummins, 2005).

This study serves to contribute to two important gaps in the research of theory and practice, particularly theories of Jim Cummins' concerning SLA. Firstly, the studies done are of specific fields in language instruction such as reading skills, writing skills and communication, but not in the areas where it addresses the teacher's knowledge of putting SLA theory into classroom practice. Secondly, the lack of address towards teachers' pedagogical knowledge mainly in theories and frameworks. In addition, the studies done were not carried out in the Malaysian context where ESL teachers are not prepared to face low to no understanding of basic English (Jay & Jessinta, 2019; Nambiar, 2019).

METHODOLOGY

A mixed-model research approach (Cropley, 2019, p. 118) was adopted to investigate the research questions proposed. 30 English teachers from Seremban were the participants for this study. They qualify as participants for the study as they are aware of SLA theories by Jim Cummins and uses L1 in their English lessons. All the participants were given an online questionnaire with open-ended questions to address the first and second research questions; (1) What are the factors that influence the use of Jim Cummins' theory being implemented in

ESL classrooms? (2) How is Jim Cummins' theory of second language acquisition being implemented in the context of ESL classrooms? Findings for the first and second research question were evaluated to find their percentile values. A semi-structured interview was also conducted with ten of the participants. The interview was to understand the third research question; What are the limitations and/or advantages of teaching using theories by Jim Cummins? The audio of the interview was transcribed verbatim. The data was analysed thematically to find common themes through codes assignment (Krippendorp, 2004 in Cohen et al., 2007, p. 478). The themes were evaluated through discourse and content analysis (Fairclough, 2013). Permission was taken from the Malaysian Ministry of Education through the Educational Research Application System and Negeri Sembilan State Education Department before the schools were contacted. The identities of the school, teacher participants, and students involved were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality.

FINDINGS

The questionnaire revealed that out of 30 English teachers, 11 of them use BICS/CALP in their teaching instructions, 2 participants believe that the interdependence hypothesis benefitted them, 16 of them used both BICS/CALP and the interdependence hypothesis while 1 participant relied on BICS/CALP and the threshold hypothesis.

Factors that influenced the use of L1

The percentile value in each factor that contributed to teachers' use of L1 when teaching English was elaborated by understanding **efficiency**, **naturalness** and **external relevance** (Cook, 2001, p.413 cited in Mart, 2013). **Efficiency** in this study would include factors such as enhancing understanding and achieving learning objectives. **Naturalness** would refer to factors that relate to the students' affective filter (Du, 2009). Lastly, **external relevance** was a factor that involved the locality of the school, the background of the students, exposure to English, and time constraints. The keywords of the questionnaire answers were identified and recoded into SPSS to find the percentile values and translated into charts.

22 of the participants used L1 to provide smooth instructions within the allocated time for their lessons. 5 of them revealed that they were obligated to use L1 as it deems fit for their rural location and the students' lack of exposure to English. 2 of the teachers shared their observations on their students' affective filters when L1 was used in class as well as the convenience of running the lesson smoothly without interruptions or misunderstandings. 1 participant revealed that all three of the factors contributed to the use of L1. The keywords in their answers were identified for the factors to be drawn out. The percentile values for the factors that influence the use of Jim Cummins' theory being implemented were 73.3% due to efficiency, 16.7% efficiency and external relevance, 6.7% efficiency and naturalness, and 3.3% were all three of the factors.

How L1 was implemented

The keywords on how they used L1 during their English lessons were identified and 4 themes were drawn from the answers given by the participants. The L1 was used for the **translation** of words, translation of context, to provide an example, and explanation of the task.

Teachers translate a few words at a time to assist students' understanding and is utilised to teach vocabulary. It could lead to a translation of context, in which a teacher interprets a text in L1 to help students understand. When a student asks how to use a new word or its synonym or antonym in L1, an example is provided. Lastly, the task explanation refers to offering direct directions to pupils during class control. The teacher uses L1 to emphasise complying as well as prevent repetition and misunderstanding.

The findings were consistent with students' proficiency and how it affects the way teachers implement L1 in classes. Participants 1 and 6 said their students could not comprehend them if they speak full English. Participant 7 may have high-to-advanced pupils who needed little L1 help. Two teachers employed all three L1 help strategies with starting pupils. Table 4.1 shows how many participants taught English using L1.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Translation of Words	4	13.3	13.3	13.3
Provide Example	1	3.3	3.3	16.7
Translation of Context	8	26.7	26.7	43.3
Explanation of task	5	16.7	16.7	60.0
Translation of Words & Translation of Context	3	10.0	10.0	70.0
Translation of Words & Explanation of task	2	6.7	6.7	76.7
Provide Example & Explanation of task	1	3.3	3.3	80.0
Translation of Context & Explanation of task	2	6.7	6.7	86.7
Translation of Words & Provide Example & Translation of Context	1	3.3	3.3	90.0
Translation of Words & Translation of Context & Explanation of task	1	3.3	3.3	93.3
All	2	6.7	6.7	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	

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Advantages of using L1 in ESL classrooms

The transcription codes revealed 7 themes. They were then separated into L1 advantages and limitations to answer the third study question: What are the limitations and/or advantages of teaching with Jim Cummins' theories? The remaining themes that do not fit are presented as neutral.

Students understood more and were more responsive to the lesson. Involving their mother tongue can lessen their affective filter (Du, 2009), thus making classes more student friendly. **Table 4.2** shows how it benefitted participants 1, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11.

Item	Time	Interview answers
4.	00:37	[] In my opinion it helped my students to understand what I'm trying to
		teach them in terms of the vocabulary, the instructions, []
22.	00:00-	[] They could not understand me when I speak in English continuously
	00:31	and I figure out when I help them translate in their language which is Bahasa
		Melayu, they can understand better.
25.	00:00-	[] It can help us to like make the students understand better in our
	00:32	instruction, our explanation during lessons []
35.	00:11	[] Using L1 to compare the terms to make it easier for my students to
		understand the lesson. They can immediately understand what I was trying
		to express the moment I translate certain terms to L1. []
40.	00:00-	[] it will help these students to understand the question, the terms, the
	00:16	rules better.
50.	00:00-	I think the advantage of using L1 in a classroom is that it helps students to
	00:30	understand better especially when the words that they encounter at that
		moment is the new one, new vocab []
61.	00:00-	Using L1 in my class helps the students to have better and clearer idea on
	00:11	what they have to do on that day.
70.	00:00-	[] and also helps the students to have the basic idea on the content of the
	00:25	lesson.
79.	00:00-	[] My students can comprehend and connect to the lesson more when I'm
	00:20	using the mix language.
89.	00:00-	[] For me, using L1 in my teaching help students to understand more
	00:53	about the lesson []

Table 4.2

Using L1 according to Jim Cummins' BICS/CALP matrix and/or interdependence hypothesis helped teachers (1) achieve the target, (2) save time, (3) facilitate teaching, and (4) get responses throughout classes. These teachers also shared that it assisted with (1) students' motivation in learning English, (2) making the lesson student-oriented, and (3) indirect learning. Participants 2, 6, 10, and 11 gave the following interview excerpts.

Table 4.3

Item	Time	Interview answers
14.	04:35	[] we have to use our L1 to explain to them. Or not, they will just discard
		the subject itself. They will just turn away and then we will be talking to
		ourselves.
35.	00:11	[]Thus, make it easier to teach and also encourage them to learn more.
79.	-00:00	[] They give me full attention when I'm using Bahasa in the mix. []
	00:20	
85.	00:00-	[] but the weird thing is they will speak in English when they are outside
	00:30	of the classroom or what can you say which is in indirect learning session.
86.	-00:00	[] Maybe from my own point of view, it helped them to sometime- of
	00:50	boosting their [pause] confidence in using English because when they are in
		indirect lessons, they can show off to other students that they can use English
		even though they use only simple words. For example, during the school
		sports day, when I use English to call all the participants and their events,
		miraculously, the students understood that they are the ones being called to
		the field.

Limitations of using L1 in ESL classrooms

The interview revealed that the students had the following tendencies trailing the usage of L1 during their English lessons:

- 1. Dependency on the teacher
- 2. Dependency on the L1
- 3. L2 avoidance
- 4. Refusing to even try to use L2
- 5. Being afraid to use L2
- 6. Tendency to use L1
- 7. Decline in students' performance
- 8. Reduce exposure of English

According to participants of this study, students rely on teachers for translation rather than figuring out the meaning themselves. They refuse to speak English. When asked or urged, they replied in L1. When complete English is used in lessons, students' response rates drop. They are quieter and less attentive until teachers code-switch. Below are interview excerpts from participants 1, 4, 8, 9, 10, and 11 highlighting (1) teacher dependency and (2) L1 dependency.

Table 4.4

Item	Time	Interview answers
6.	01:16	[] I think I find my students rely too much on me [] Okay, so it makes
		my students too dependent on me. []
25.	00:00-	[] but then if we use too much of L1 I'm afraid they will rely too much on
	00:32	the L1 rather than L2. []
54.	00:00-	So, sometimes students become dependent to the teachers for instructions in
	00:29	<u>L1</u> []
71.	00:00-	But then when the teachers start to use L1 in English class, the students will
	00:14	have high dependency on the teachers to explain each word that they find in
		English.
89.	00:00-	[] for the disadvantage, I think by keep using L1 the students might only
	00:53	depend on my Malay explanation in the class.

The following excerpts are to highlight the concerns of (3) L2 avoidance, (4) refusing to even try to use L2, (5) being afraid to use L2, and (6) tendency to use L1. They are interview answers from participants 2, 3, 7, 8, and 9.

Ta	ble	4.5
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Item	Time	Interview answers
13.	03:37	[] But, because they are used to it, they tend to speak in Malay straight
		away. So, I have to reinforce, telling them you have to try to speak in English
		since you are just using basic words and structure. []
19.	03:38	[] And the disadvantages, I think when I am using Malay in teaching
		English sometimes my students will just simply answer in all Malay. They
		don't really- some of them don't try to even try to use English, they will
		simply reply in Malay until- I need to like reply back, help them to translate
		back the answers in English.
43.	00:00-	[] "this teacher is using L1 so I don't have to work hard to understand the
	02:27	lesson". Do you know what I mean? [Pause] The students become-jadi malas,
		malas nak berfikir.* [] Same with the students, when we enable them, when
		we give them chance, they will take the opportunity and chance and just refuse
		to work hard to use the dictionary, to think using their brain to understand the
		language. For me, that's the disadvantage.
53.	00:00-	I think there is also a disadvantage of using L1 in an English classroom
	00:20	because [pause] students will tend to actually translate every new encounters
		instead of trying to figure it out.
72.	00:00-	And also, they will try to avoid using L2 as they know that the teachers are
	00:11	open to use L1 in English class.
Turner al	ation. Th	are become lowe to think

*Translation: They become lazy to think.

The last two concerns were a 7) decline in student's performance and 8) reduced English exposure. It is safe to assume that the teachers are likely referring to students' willingness to communicate and classroom participation; not academic performance.

Table 4.6

Item	Time	Interview answers
32.	04:56	Okay, the disadvantage, [pause] if I were to use L1 in my class, is that [pause the student would be less exposed to the English-speaking environment. [] If the teacher uses L1 in the class, the students would be less exposed to this English-speaking environment. That is one of the disadvantages. I'll just give you one.
43.	00:00- 02:27	[pause] <u>teachers are the source where the students can practice their English</u> [] So, <u>this affects the students' performance</u> and as well as the teachers performance. []

The following concerns were detected which contributes to the limitations of L1 usage in English classrooms:

- 1. Unable to have a smooth English lesson
- 2. Teachers' performance
- 3. Teachers' leniency

The excerpts shown were how the teachers had to resort to the use of L1, to a point where they could not proceed with their lessons effectively and how that affects the teachers' teaching. They had to depend on code-switching to be able to have the students follow instructions and overall understanding of the lesson.

Table 4.7

Item	Time	Interview answers
14.	04:35	[] they will just discard the subject itself. They will just turn away and then we will be talking to ourselves.
16.	00:35	[] If I am using fully English, my students will be just [pause] <u>quiet and no</u> respond.
29.	00:36	[] So, it's useless when you talk- let's say that you are teaching in a -front classes whereby their proficiency is very low you don't want to use 100% English and they don't understand you a bit. You want to avoid that. So, you need to mix your L1 and English so that the student will get something at least from the class.
31.	03:56	[] There is no point of you teaching using English, 100% English but then your students do not understand you even one bit. [] There is no point for you to use 100% English but your student doesn't understand you a bit. []

Participant 7 mentioned that his/her friends' English proficiency declined owing to a lack of practise. They speak L1 so much in English class that they cannot converse in English. This affected the teacher's performance.

Table 4.8

Item	Time	Interview answer
43.	-00:00	[] Because I have I few friends and I notice they themselves- they tell me
	02:27	this; When they are used to teaching weaker students and they have to use L1
		in their teaching, when they have to converse in English- in proper English,
		it's not that they can't, but they will have difficulties because they have been
		teaching English in not English- in the language that they are not supposed
		to use in. []

L1 usage influences the teachers' class-control leniency. Due to time constraints, teachers resort to employing L1 to give pupils an easy way to make meaning themselves.

Table 4.9

Item	Time	Interview answers
43.	00:00- 02:27	[] They want to understand the lesson but in L1. <u>So, we as teachers just</u> doesn't want to go through the burden, doesn't want to through the hassle of
	02.27	[pause] having students [pause] not knowing the lesson. Usually, teachers- we just sought to using L1. []

Neutral matters that were neither an advantage nor a limitation

The interviewees had two concerns. First, the **student's proficiency level**. Teachers used L1 more in low- to intermediate-level classes. Advanced classes did not require much L1. Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, and 9 code-switch for 'weak' or 'low-proficient' students. Teachers 6, 8, 10, and 11 did not divulge their pupils' skill level, but they did say they were from a rural place and did not use English daily.

Next, they recommend pupils **use a dictionary**. Participant 8 thinks that constantly resorting to the dictionary is a sign of **weakness**.

Table 4

Item	Time	Interview answers
54.	00:00-	So, sometimes students become dependent to the teachers for instructions in L1
	00:29	and they are also becoming dependent towards dictionary [].

While participant 7 shared that they **encourage** the use of the dictionary. Students would deem to put effort into learning English when they refer to the dictionary.

Table 4.11

Item	Time	Interview question
43.	-00:00	[] and just refuse to work hard to use the dictionary, to think using their
	02:27	brain to understand the language. For me, that's the disadvantage.

Participant 1 shared that referring to the dictionary is something that is both good and should be avoided as it is a sign of an effort to acquire English.

Table 4.12

	Item	Time	Interview answers
	4.	00:37	[] the instructions, okay they could also learn new vocabs along the
			way as they don't -without the need to look at the dictionary all the time.
	6.	01:16	[] I think I find my students rely too much on me and they only use
			the dictionary only when I tell them to. *Kalau tak, teacher what is this,
			what is that. []
*Translation: If not			

These participants shared that they **know their students**. They use L1 in their lessons because they know there is a need, and it helps facilitate their lessons.

Table 4.13

Item	Time	Interview answer
20.	05:08	[] I think, <u>it depends on your students</u> . If your students they are good enough in English so you don't really have to mix it with the L1 but if your client, your student not so good in English then you need to mix it with the L1 itself for them to be able to learn better. That's all, thank you.
44.	00:00- 01:03	[] But personally, for me, at certain times when you have to have use L1, you just use it and you know your students. Some are able, some are not able. You are the one who pushes your students to excel and be better.

They also mentioned how they used the L1. The following excerpts show that these participants use L1 to **compare terms between the two languages**.

	Та	ble	4.14
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Item	Time	Interview answers
23.	00:00-	[] They also enhance their vocab since they can actually compare the
	00:26	meaning in the first language. []
35.	00:11	[] Using L1 to compare the terms to make it easier for my students to
		understand the lesson. []
80.	00:00-	[] For example, when I teach them new phrase, I would tell them the
	00:26	counterparts in Bahasa to give them better contextual clues. []

They employ **contextual clues** to develop lesson meaning. These contributed to their teaching approaches with the BICS/CALP matrix; creating meaning by leveraging or eliminating context (Firdus, 2017).

Efficiency, external relevance, and naturalness led teachers to use L1 in their lessons. Teachers employ L1 to translate words, context, examples, and instructions. The advantages and limitations of using L1 in an English classroom entail the teachers' manner of teaching, performance, and the lesson aim, which depends on the students' proficiency level, background, as well as lesson time.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The factors influencing the use of Jim Cummins' theory in ESL classrooms were concluded to: efficiency, external relevance, and naturalness (Cook, 2001, p.413) cited in Mart (2013). The teachers shared that it is most efficient for them to use L1 to aid comprehension in their learners as the majority of them needed help in understanding English. The students may have the L1 overshadowing their exposure to English which then had hindered their acquisition as compared to foreign language acquisition (Pan & Pan, 2010). The participants also used L1 as it is observed that their students respond better during class activities and were more attentive during lessons.

The participants shared on how they implement the theory in their lessons by codeswitching when they teach a new phrase or grammar rule. It is better understood by the students when examples are provided of their counterparts in L1. They have also benefitted from the ample contextual clues provided in L1 as it aids in text comprehension (Ko, 2005). As for the time allocated for teachers to have their lessons, they get to have their students to work faster when they give instructions as well as explain tasks in L1.

The advantages and limitations were laid out by the participants during the interview. As Halasa and Manaseer (2012) expounded, with precautions and preparations provided for teachers to use L1 in L2 classes, L1 interference can be minimised, and target language can be acquired successfully.

Teacher Training

With regards to teacher training, the following were highlighted during the interview. Firstly, the **theory** mentioned the most was Jim Cummins' quadrant; the BICS/CALP, and the interdependence hypothesis. The interviewees shared that they prefer to have ample contextual clues in L1 to successfully deliver their lessons as well as to teach with basic English. The participants who had relied on the interdependent hypothesis believe that the two languages are reliant on each other, and they teach by providing various comparisons between the two languages for the students to understand how the languages can be used in situations.

Secondly, the teachers shared different **teacher beliefs** from themselves, their superiors, and educators during their teacher training. Some were supportive when it comes to L1 usage in English classrooms, while others opposed the idea.

This brings to the next concern when the participants are being observed. **During observations** by administrative, participants 2 and 5 shared that they had to take measures to ensure it does not affect their performance.

Table 5.1: During observations

Item	Time	Interview answers
12.	02:23	[] If let's say I am being observed by the PPD, by the Nazir, I will be
		using all in English, entirely in English. And I do have to use baby talk
		at that time and my – and the topic that I'll be teaching or the subtopic
		that I'll be teaching something that [pause] more towards revision. That
		means I have taught the previously, I have used dual language, L1 and
		L2 and I know they can, they remember some of it so I'm able to teach
		fully in English but using baby talk, and relate to the notes that they
		have written. []
30.	02:06	[] When we are talking about being observed, this would be a
		different scenario I believe because usually we teachers, we would
		choose the front classes. For us to actually get response from them, so
		when we ask a question, we would want the students to answer so if we
		were to choose the back classes we ask them question in English, it is
		rare for us to get response from them and it could affect our
		performance. []

Table 5.1 shows evidence of measures taken by the participants to ensure that when being observed, they can use full English. This shows that the teacher beliefs of the teacher themselves, the administrations were on the premise of English being taught in full English due to teachers believing that they have to implement what their teachers used to use for them back in the day, and it is called 'apprenticeship of observation' Lortie (1975) in Wach and Monroy (2020).

The last question of the interview protocol was asking how the teachers had their teaching foundations with L1 involvement. All except two responded with either their teacher training was set for full L2 exposure- no L1 allowed, or depending on situations. The other two responded with neither and remained based on teacher training set consisting of their foundations on basic pedagogy and ways to teach English. With this information, the study reveals that there is a need for further investigation to better the teacher training targeted, especially in the preparation of teaching students with minimal exposure to English. It can also be compared to learning a foreign language as it would be tough for learners to understand meaning without first having something to compare them to (Wach & Monroy, 2020).

The study hopes to contribute to policy-making literature with regards to the use of L1 with careful guidance from selected SLA theories. There is an urgent need to further investigate what other benefits and limitations that come from teachers who use L1 to aid their English lessons and result in normalising the needs to use L1 to support English lessons.

It is clear that the area of study will need thorough considerations when L1 is being used for ESL classrooms. The students may indeed tend to depend on L1 while the teachers could have their English proficiency deteriorate due to lack of practice. There is room for further training to normalise the use of L1 effectively to ensure minimal repercussions.

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