

Incorporating Culture and Textbook Adaptation Practice for Promoting Intercultural Competence in ELT

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Incorporating culture and textbook adaptation practice for promoting intercultural competence in ELT: teachers' perspectives

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It is currently accepted that language and culture are inseparable since culture becomes an essential aspect of learning a foreign language. In the Indonesian context, this broad understanding of the crucial role of culture in English teaching has raised challenges in different contexts for EFL teachers. The recent study focuses on Indonesian Junior High School teachers' views on integrating culture in ELT and practices of textbook adaptation to help students build intercultural competence. Therefore, to meet these aims, a questionnaire and an open-ended question were employed to collect the data from fifteen participants teaching English at public and private schools in Indonesia. The study results reveal that Indonesian EFL teachers have positive attitudes on integrating intercultural competence in ELT. Still, some of the difficulties confronted by their implementation of textbook adaptation have been highlighted in promoting intercultural competence. This study suggests that EFL teachers in Indonesia should be provided with teacher training relating to textbooks adaptation and teaching culture. The implementation of ICT in ELT classrooms is also recommended. Finally, the redesign of the curriculum with more integrated intercultural competency materials should be taken into account.

Keywords: culture; textbook adaptation; intercultural competence; English Language Teaching (ELT)

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INTRODUCTION

Initially, foreign language education is a cross-cultural issue. Both languages are used and reflect specific contexts within particular cultural contexts. Therefore, learning a foreign language requires more than gaining proficiency in that language in terms of language and communication. It also needs an increase in the familiarity of learners with the cultural context of the language. In line with this, [Hilliard \(2014\)](#) argues that it is practically unavoidable to teach a language without teaching any cultural knowledge. Besides, [Belli \(2018\)](#) asserts that interacting or negotiating with the native speakers of that language will be difficult, regardless of how proficient people are in all language skills in a foreign language or how flawless they speak that language, as they lack cultural awareness. In other words, in the excellent knowledge of a target language, the mastery of language skills, patterns, rules, and the target culture is involved.

One of the most crucial factors in deciding on good contact with speakers of the target community is speaking the language. Therefore, for the involvement in intercultural interactions and for the development of interpersonal relationships, language skills are important. For essential intercultural interactions, however, language fluency alone is not enough ([Lee and Li, 2019](#)). For this reason, language learners need to understand what culture means to do this, as language learning is a combination of foreign language proficiency, communication skills, successful intercultural communication and socio-cultural adaptation ([Masgoret and Ward, 2006](#))

In line with this, [Byram \(2008\)](#) explains the transition from concentrating on language skills to the role of a language as a means of communication to learn a foreign language effectively. He also emphasizes that the notion of intercultural competence is a goal of teaching languages. According to [\(Sercu, Méndez García and Castro Prieto, 2004\)](#), intercultural competence is one of the keys and most demanding objectives of foreign language teaching. This is because intercultural communication effectiveness arises when a negotiation is held between people based on both cultures, which is usually respectful and beneficial to each one.

Additionally, [Gonenand Saglam \(2012\)](#) claim that language and culture are so intertwined that another's importance will be lost by removing one from the other. Similarly, [Baltaci and Tanis \(2018\)](#) describe that culture is language-based, and culture is filled with language. Specifically, [McKay \(2003\)](#) states that language teaching is affected by the culture in two major ways: linguistically and pedagogically. Linguistically, in the linguistic dimension of the language itself, culture is essential, concerning the language's semantic, pragmatic, and discourse levels. Pedagogically, it affects the choice of language materials because, when deciding on language materials, the cultural content of the language materials and the teaching technique's cultural basis should be considered. He suggests that students must learn both linguistic and cultural norms to master a language.

[Moran \(2001\)](#) sees culture as a lively living thing that is widely practiced every day by individuals; therefore, history or culture is formulated. Then, he groups it into five aspects, namely: products, practices, perspectives, persons, and communities. 'Products' are the objects created or embraced by particular culture members, comprising plants, livestock, clothes, houses, economy, music, and religion, both tangible and intangible. 'Practices' relate to the acts and interactions that are carried out by particular culture members. These methods include modes of communication, product usage, time and space interpretations, and notions of appropriateness.

'Perspectives' belong to the views, values, and behaviors of the members of a society that underpins the products and practices. The individual members who constitute the community are 'persons.' Finally, 'communities' have unique social backgrounds, situations and communities in which cultural activities are carried out by participants. In this study, the five components were adapted to examine how teachers help students become conscious of cultural factors that have emerged in EFL textbooks.

Language teacher's role has been considered a professional mediator between foreign languages and culture ([Byram and Risager, 1999](#); [Vo, 2016](#)). Nevertheless, according to [Gonen and Saglam \(2012\)](#), the value of teaching culture as part of language research is still overlooked by teachers in various classrooms in different parts of the world. The first phase in incorporating culture into language learning should recognize what teachers already think, believe, and do in the classroom to address this problem.

The integration of culture in English learning materials, including textbooks, is significant. In the Indonesian context, the latest curriculum (i.e., the 2013 Curriculum) elucidates that

the purpose of EFL at the level of Junior High School is to enable students to interact interpersonally, transactionally, and functionally about themselves, family, and others, as well as concrete and imaginary objects concerning the everyday contexts and activities of the students. Moreover, the mandated syllabus for Junior High School students advises teachers to adjust learning materials based on students' cultural and geographical characteristics (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2016). It can be inferred that focus is placed on using students' cultural backgrounds as a useful reference for learning English. Therefore, the government has tried to support EFL learners with locally developed textbooks that portray the students' culture and the target culture to make it easier for them to learn English more communicatively ([Novita et al., 2020](#)).

[Kramersch \(1993\)](#) recommends that learners' home culture should be incorporated into instructional materials and the target culture in the teaching of foreign languages so that they can comprehend it. The purpose of the theory is to allow foreign language learners to build meaning rather than making teachers provide quick knowledge about foreign culture. Additionally, educators should be able to raise the consciousness of culture among students, stipulate them with the meta-language of culture, and cultivate a degree of intellectual objectivity necessary for cross-cultural study ([Novita et al., 2020](#); [Sariyildiz, 2017](#)). It implies that teaching culture encourages the comprehension of intercultural context through the students' insider lens to make them capable of correctly deciphering foreign cultural behaviors.

Concerning textbook adaptation, [Moran \(2001\)](#) suggests an approach to curriculum development. In it, teachers can develop textbooks to promote students' intercultural awareness. As a result, cultural practices applied in four groups: the creation of skills (conversations or role-plays), gathering of information (true personal stories or authentic materials), the discovery of explanations (explanations of cultural concepts or projects), and reflection (cultural information related to their lives). Additionally, [Shawer \(2010\)](#) recommends teachers take a step forward in the curriculum-making approach by examining learners' needs, interests, and abilities. Here, teachers perform a needs analysis and communicate with their students about learning material and activities. By completing the stages, teachers get more space to develop their textbooks to serve them based on their desires, preferences, and skills.

In the background of English Language Teaching (ELT), studies on the vitality of culture in English language learning and teaching have gained growing prominence for a decade ([Baltaci and Tanis, 2018](#); [Choudhury, 2013](#); [Kahraman, 2016](#); [Lee and Li, 2019](#); [Luk, 2012](#); [Rodríguez, 2017](#); [Sarıçoban and Çalışkan, 2011](#)). The body of the research is mostly situated in the Middle East (Turkey and Saudi Arabia), Asia (Hong Kong and China), and South America (Colombia). The role of culture in the ELT in various contexts was correspondingly recorded in the samples of the research, such as the teachers' perception ([Luk, 2012](#); [Choudhury, 2013](#); [Baltaci and Tanis, 2018](#)), the students' views ([Sarıçoban and Çalışkan, 2011](#); [Kahraman, 2016](#)), and the cultural representations in English language textbooks ([Lee and Li, 2019](#); [Rodríguez, 2017](#)).

There have been myriads of research concerning to the insertion of culture in the ELT classroom. However, in Indonesia, studies on how and if EFL educators initiate to foster intercultural competence for students remain underrepresented in the literature. Therefore, to fill the gap, the present study needs to be undertaken to reveal the teachers' perspectives on including culture in their teaching activities. Moreover, it is worth examining how the teachers practice the textbook adaptation about promoting students' intercultural skills since the locally developed textbooks

mostly emphasize Indonesian cultural identity (Mahmud, 2019). For guiding the study, the following research questions generated to conduct the study:

- (1) How are the teachers' views on integrating culture in the ELT classroom?
- (2) How do the teachers say about the textbook adaptation in their teaching to promote students' intercultural competence?

METHODS

This research included fifteen EFL teachers who had 10-26 years of experience teaching English in Indonesian Junior High Schools from public and private schools. The

following table shows their general information about gender, knowledge sources for cultural teaching, and experience in countries of the target language.

Table 1. The general information of EFL teachers

		n=15	
		F	%
Gender	Male	3	20.0
	Female	12	80.0
Knowledge sources about culture teaching	Coursework	13	86.7
	Training	0	0
	Conference	0	0
	Personal interest	1	6.67
	Not at all	1	6.67
Do you have any actual experiences in countries of the target language?	Yes	2	13.3
	No	13	86.7

Note: n: the total number of participants; F: frequency; %: percentage

A questionnaire developed to attain the data consisting of two key components: background and content. The background section questioned teachers' individual information (see Table 1). Moreover, the contents of the survey consisted of two parts. The first part was to study the teachers' views on integrating culture in the ELT classrooms; it adopted and adapted from Sercu, Méndez Garcia and Castro Prieto (2004) and Han (2009) containing three aspects: (1) the teachers' views about culture teaching (9 items), (2) the teachers' familiarity with cultural themes (10 items), and (3) teachers' perception of the cultural role in the ELT classrooms (10 items). Moreover, to investigate the teachers' perceptions of the textbook adaptation in their teaching to promote students' intercultural competence, the researcher-developed questionnaire was constructed (8 items). The open-ended question was also included in the questionnaire to support the participants' choice of the items that need verification to attain the rigorous data.

In the present study, to answer the research questions, research procedures are required to obtain the data. For this, the questionnaire was distributed to the participants to complete. Here, they were asked to indicate on a four-point Likert-type scale opinion poll to represent their perceptions. They also asked to answer an open-ended question about their willingness to perform textbook adaptation to promote

intercultural competence in the ELT classrooms.

As abovementioned, the data collected from fifteen Indonesian EFL teachers of Junior High Schools. Then, they were analyzed quantitatively using descriptive statistics. Meanwhile, to ensure the reliability of the outcomes, the open-ended section of the survey was qualitatively evaluated consecutively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The teachers' views on integrating culture in the ELT classroom

The teachers' perceptions about the integration of culture in the ELT classrooms were examined through the three questions, and the findings are as follows:

The teachers' understanding of culture teaching

In this section, the participants were asked to answer nine items of the questionnaire to explore the teachers' knowledge of culture teaching in the context of English teaching, including attitude (item number 1), knowledge (item number 2-5), and skills (item number 6-9). The results are represented in Table 2.

Table 2. The teachers' understanding of cultural teaching

Items of the questionnaire		F	%
1. Tendencies of responsiveness and acceptance to other cultures and communities established by culture teaching.	Strongly agree	12	80
	Agree	3	20
	Disagree	0	0
	Strongly disagree	0	0
2. Culture teaching provides details on everyday life and habits.	Strongly agree	10	66.7
	Agree	5	33.3
	Disagree	0	0
	Strongly disagree	0	0
3. Culture teaching provides information on the history of international culture(s), geography, and political conditions.	Strongly agree	9	60
	Agree	5	33.3
	Disagree	1	6.7
	Strongly disagree	0	0
4. Culture teaching provides information on shared values and beliefs.	Strongly agree	14	93.3
	Agree	1	6.7
	Disagree	0	0
	Strongly disagree	0	0
5. Culture teaching provides experiences (literature, music, theater, film, etc.) with a wide variety of cultural expressions.	Strongly agree	10	66.7
	Agree	4	26.7
	Disagree	1	6.7
	Strongly disagree	0	0
6. Culture teaching promotes increased awareness of students' home culture.	Strongly agree	11	73.3
	Agree	3	20
	Disagree	1	6.7
	Strongly disagree	0	0
7. Culture teaching promotes reflection on cultural diversity.	Strongly agree	12	80
	Agree	3	20
	Disagree	0	0
	Strongly disagree	0	0
8. Culture teaching promotes the skills to empathize with individuals living in other cultures.	Strongly agree	15	100
	Agree	0	0
	Disagree	0	0
	Strongly disagree	0	0
9. Culture teaching promotes the ability to cope with intercultural interaction situations.	Strongly agree	15	100
	Agree	0	0
	Disagree	0	0
	Strongly disagree	0	0

As can be seen from the table, nearly 3 all the participants show their highly agreed view on their understanding of the concept of culture teaching in the EFL classrooms, including attitude, knowledge, and skills. Surprisingly, 100% of respondents chose "agree" that culture teaching makes it possible for people living in other communities to be empathetic (item number 8) and the ability to deal with circumstances of intercultural contact (item number 9). Besides, only 1 participant (6.7%) stated "disagree" for the 3rd, 4th, and 6th items. It implies that almost all teachers understand the concept of culture teaching.

The current study reveals similar results to [Kahraman's Table 3](#). The teachers' familiarity with English-related cultures

(2016) research that sees the cultural teaching is essential in EFL classrooms. The participants had a strong belief about the culture teaching to promote intercultural competence among EFL learners. Further, [Vo \(2017\)](#) proposed that whenever teachers are aware of the principle of cultural teaching, they are then prepared to participate in their teaching practice with intercultural communication competence.

The familiarity of teachers with English-related cultures

Concerning the teachers' familiarity with topics integrating into the ELT classroom, teachers were asked to answer the ten items presented in [Table 3](#).

Items of the questionnaire		F	%
1. The political system, history, and geography	Very familiar	2	13.3
	Sufficiently	2	13.3
	Not sufficiently	10	66.7
	Not familiar at all	1	6.7
2. Daily life and routines, living conditions, food, and drink, etc.	Very familiar	2	13.3
	Sufficiently	10	66.7
	Not sufficiently	3	20
	Not familiar at all	0	0

Items of the questionnaire		F	%
3. Youth culture	Very familiar	2	13.3
	Sufficiently	8	53.3
	Not sufficiently	4	26.7
	Not familiar at all	1	6.7
4. Literature, art, and drama	Very familiar	2	13.3
	Sufficiently	2	13.3
	Not sufficiently	10	66.7
	Not familiar at all	1	6.7
5. School and education	Very familiar	2	13.3
	Sufficiently	10	66.7
	Not sufficiently	3	20
	Not familiar at all	0	0
6. Body language	Very familiar	2	13.3
	Sufficiently	7	46.7
	Not sufficiently	5	33.3
	Not familiar at all	1	6.7
7. Tradition, folklore, and tourist attractions	Very familiar	2	13.3
	Sufficiently	5	33.3
	Not sufficiently	7	46.7
	Not familiar at all	1	6.7
8. Values and beliefs	Very familiar	2	13.3
	Sufficiently	6	40
	Not sufficiently	6	40
	Not familiar at all	1	6.7
9. Different ethnic and social groups	Very familiar	2	13.3
	Sufficiently	6	40
	Not sufficiently	7	46.7
	Not familiar at all	0	0
10. International relations (political, economic, and cultural), with students' own country and other countries	Very familiar	2	13.3
	Sufficiently	4	26.7
	Not sufficiently	8	53.3
	Not familiar at all	1	6.7

Based on the study results, the topics of daily life and routines, living conditions, food, and drink, etc. (item number 2) and school and education (item number 5) have the highest rank seen from the table. Here, 80% of the participants show their familiarity with these topics. These topics followed by youth culture (66.6%) and body language (60%). About 53.3% of the participants say they are familiar with values and beliefs and different ethnic and social group topics. Moreover, 46.6% of the participants are recognizable to the topic of tradition, folklore, and tourist attractions. Finally, the three low familiarity topics are international relations (40%), literature, art, and drama (26.6%), and political system, history, and geography (26.6%). Cultural topics can be included in the ELT classroom to promote the students' intercultural competence (Byram, 2008; Gonen and Saglam, 2012; Lee and Li, 2019; McKay, 2003). Gonen and Saglam (2012) explicitly notes that when teachers are familiar with different aspects of the target culture, they therefore have a positive effect on learners in helping them with intercultural competence.

The teachers' responses show that they have positive attitudes towards culture in the ELT classroom. Almost all the participants state that they have a higher agreement in viewing culture teaching as essential as well as the EFL teaching (93.3%).

Remarkably, none of the participants disagree with the statements: "The integration of language and culture helps to develop language skills for learners;" "The more students know about the native culture, the more tolerant they are;" "Misunderstandings occur equally much from linguistic as well as cultural gaps when speakers of various languages interact;" and "Teaching at the EFL should strengthen the awareness of students of their own cultural identity." Meanwhile, no participants express their agreement on the items: "A focus on the study of native cultures may lead to the students' loss of cultural identity;" "The study of culture will impede progress in linguistic accuracy in the ELT classes;" and "Learning about native cultures will change the attitude of the learner towards their own culture." The findings confirm the study of Belli (2018), who argues that the full mastery of a target language requires the knowledge of language skills, patterns, and rules and the mastery of the target culture.

The teachers' views on the role of culture in the ELT classrooms

Ten questions were designed to examine teachers' attitudes about the role of culture in the ELT classroom, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. The teachers' perceptions of the role of culture in the ELT classrooms

Items of the questionnaire		F	%
1. In an integrated way, it is not easy to teach a foreign language and foreign culture.	Strongly agree	0	0
	Agree	1	6.7
	Disagree	1	6.7
	Strongly disagree	13	86.7
2. Teaching culture is as important in an ELT classroom as teaching EFL.	Strongly agree	14	93.3
	Agree	0	0
	Disagree	1	6.7
	Strongly disagree	0	0
3. The integration of language and culture helps to develop language skills for learners.	Strongly agree	14	93.3
	Agree	1	6.7
	Disagree	0	0
	Strongly disagree	0	0
4. The more students know about the native culture, the more tolerant they are.	Strongly agree	13	86.7
	Agree	2	13.3
	Disagree	0	0
	Strongly disagree	0	0
5. Misunderstandings occur equally much from linguistic as well as cultural gaps when speakers of various languages interact.	Strongly agree	12	80
	Agree	3	20
	Disagree	0	0
	Strongly disagree	0	0
6. Teaching at the EFL should strengthen the awareness of students of their own cultural identity.	Strongly agree	10	66.7
	Agree	5	33.3
	Disagree	0	0
	Strongly disagree	0	0
7. The cultural dimension should be extended in the ELT classrooms.	Strongly agree	9	60
	Agree	5	33.3
	Disagree	1	6.7
	Strongly disagree	0	0
8. A focus on the study of native cultures may lead to the students' loss of cultural identity.	Strongly agree	0	0
	Agree	0	0
	Disagree	1	6.7
	Strongly disagree	14	93.3
9. A focus on the study of native cultures may lead to the students' loss of cultural identity.	Strongly agree	0	0
	Agree	0	0
	Disagree	1	6.7
	Strongly disagree	14	93.3
10. Learning about native cultures will change the attitude of the learner towards their own culture.	Strongly agree	0	0
	Agree	0	0
	Disagree	1	6.7
	Strongly disagree	14	93.3

Table 5. The teachers' perceptions of the textbook adaptation in their teaching practice

Items of the questionnaire		F	%
1. To demonstrate an aspect of a foreign culture, I use videos, CD-ROMs or the Internet.	Often	2	13.3
	Sometimes	1	6.7
	Seldom	1	6.7
	Never	11	73.3
2. To improve their cultural awareness, I ask my students to individually explore an element of foreign culture concerning the students' home culture represented in the textbook.	Often	2	13.3
	Sometimes	0	0
	Seldom	1	6.7
	Never	12	80
3. I have heard (or read) about a country or culture abroad, and I share it with my students.	Often	2	13.3
	Sometimes	0	0
	Seldom	2	13.3
	Never	11	73.3
4. I ask my students to think about the picture of the foreign country that the media are promoting.	Often	2	13.3
	Sometimes	1	6.7
	Seldom	1	6.7

Items of the questionnaire		F	%
5. I invite my students to imagine what living in a foreign community will be like.	Never	11	73.3
	Often	2	13.3
	Sometimes	0	0
	Seldom	1	6.7
6. In a foreign language, I invite my students to explain an element of their own culture.	Never	12	80
	Often	2	13.3
	Sometimes	0	0
	Seldom	1	6.7
7. I encourage my students to contrast an element of their own culture with the component of the foreign culture.	Never	12	80
	Often	2	13.3
	Sometimes	1	6.7
	Seldom	0	0
8. I explore prejudices about specific cultures and countries with my students or the inhabitants of particular countries.	Never	12	80
	Often	2	13.3
	Sometimes	0	0
	Seldom	1	6.7
	Never	12	80

Teachers' voice about the textbook adaptation in their teaching to promote students' intercultural competence

To know the teachers' perceptions of the textbook adaptation in their teaching to support students' intercultural competence, the participants were asked to answer eight items and the open-ended questions to clarify their choices. The results of the study are presented in the following sections.

Table 5 shows the textbook adaptation practice frequency in the ELT classrooms to promote students' intercultural competence. In this present study, nearly all the participants opt "never" in every questionnaire item statement. Notably, 80% of the participants' state "never" for the items: 2, 5, 6, 7, and 8. Then, around 73% of the participants share "never" for the items: 1, 3, and 4. Only 13.3% out of the fifteen participants often do the activities mentioned in the questionnaire. Here, the findings reveal that nearly all the current study participants experience their insignificant implementation of the textbook adaptation with developing the students' intercultural competence.

Additionally, according to the open-ended questions, the participants explicitly explained why they did not practice textbook adaptation in their English teaching activities. The participants stated that they had time limitations, lack of facilities, and culture inclusion was not mentioned in the syllabus. The following excerpts are the samples of the explanations written by the participants.

"My students are very interested in cultural events, but due to limited time, I cannot spend much time on those activities."

"The easiest way to enrich the students' knowledge about culture actually is from the internet resources; however, I can't practice it since the school has no experience to support this."

"Since it is not stated in the syllabus, I feel hard to implement the textbook adaptation. Initially, I realize that cultural knowledge is essential for my students."

The study results show that it is often overlooked to teach the culture of the target language. Teachers would rather save their time and follow the curricula because teaching culture in the ELT classroom would consume much time and needs more facilities and infrastructure. Here, the current research is consistent with [Gonen and Saglam's \(2012\)](#) and [Vo's \(2017\)](#) studies.

CONCLUSION

The present study aimed to shed light on how Indonesian Junior High School EFL teachers deal with cultural integration in ELT classrooms and their impressions of textbook adaptation in their teaching to facilitate students' intercultural skills. It confirms that generally the teachers are aware of the cultural integration in the ELT classrooms. Most of them know the concept of culture teaching. They believe that people living in other communities empathize with them and coping with intercultural communication situations is enhanced by intercultural competence. Also, EFL teachers have sufficient knowledge of the cultural subjects that can be used in the ELT classroom to facilitate students' intercultural competence. In terms of the role of culture in the ELT classroom, teachers' responses also indicate that they have positive attitudes to view the importance of culture teaching and EFL teaching. They consider that the target language mastery includes language skills, patterns, rules, and target culture mastery.

However, the teachers' practices deal with textbook adaptation are not well implemented, although they believe that cultural competence in their teaching activities is crucial. The study findings suggest that teaching target language's culture is often ignored as teachers would prefer to save their time and adopt the curricula because it would take a lot of time to teach culture in the ELT classroom and need more facilities and equipment. Therefore, several potential suggestions to strengthen intercultural competence in EFL teaching are suggested from the challenges found in the current study as follows.

First, more training workshops in the field of cultural integration in the ELT classrooms for Junior High School teachers should be delivered, including how to use the ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) to support the cultural integration practices. Secondly, the curriculum redesign with a more integrated intercultural competence substance should be considered. The English curriculum should give more room for teachers in serving the students based on their needs, preferences, and skills, especially for enhancing students' mastery on the target language. Once these recommendations can be adopted, it is firmly assumed that the expectations and behaviors of the intercultural communication skills involvement of EFL educators will change positively.

Finally, more studies must also be conducted in the current context to integrate with other research tools, including classroom observation and document analysis, to gain a deeper understanding of intercultural competence's involvement in EFL teaching. Moreover, to gain better insights into the effectiveness of intercultural competence interaction in the EFL curriculum, more comparative studies between the different middle schools in Indonesia are highly suggested.

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