
The Influence of Tourism Educational Qualification Levels on Task Performance Behavior of Employees in Tour and Travel Firms in Nairobi

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Abstract: The growth of tourism has increased the demand for qualified human resources across sectors of the industry. Tour and travel firms are among the beneficiaries of qualified human resources, based on their ability to demonstrate task competencies in their areas of specialization. However, the extent to which educational qualification levels are making an impact on task performance behavior in the tourism labor market has not been given much attention. This study, therefore, aimed to establish the extent to which tourism educational qualification levels (TEQLs) influence task performance behavior (TPB) among tourism-qualified employees in tour firms in Nairobi, Kenya. Nairobi is the business hub for both local and international tour and travel firms. Data was collected from one hundred and thirty-one (131) supervisors of tour firms, who rated three (3) randomly selected employees from each of the following levels of qualification: one holder of a bachelor's degree; one diploma; and one certificate. Both descriptive and inferential data analysis was conducted to assess the extent to which TEQLs influence TJPB. The research findings show that TEQL explained 74.9% of the total variations in the TJPB ($R^2 = 74.9\%$). The regression coefficient output showed that TEQLs positively and scientifically influenced TJPB at ($\beta = 0.786$, $p = 0.001$). The implication of these findings validates the fact that transitioning from a lower level of tourism educational qualification to a higher level improves task job performance behavior of an employee by 0.786 units. Even though the magnitude seems small, it is evidently worth investing in developing tourism professionals, for this has benefits to employers, employees, and the economy at large. This study recommends that governments keep investing more in developing tourism personnel as this boosts the competitiveness of the industry.

Keywords: Tourism Qualification Levels, Task Performance Behavior, Tour Operations

1. Introduction

The progressive growth of the tourism industry has made it an important economic pillar for many destinations across the globe [24, 28, 29, 34, 20]. Despite the occasional slump characterized by natural and economic crises, tourism has proved to be a resilient industry that springs back after such catastrophes [18]. On the other hand, tourism, if not sustainably managed, has also the potential to pose a myriad of environmental and socio-economic threats that can easily

curtail destinations' developmental agenda [21, 39].

Despite such challenges, projections done by the World Tourism and Travel Council (WTTC) over the years show that tourism will continue to grow and tourism ecosystems will continue to inspire destinations' economic development [12, 14]. Given the dynamic and complex nature of the industry, it is imperative that destinations develop human capital with the requisite skills, knowledge, and innovations to manage the industry's demands [10, 13]. The success or failure of destinations largely depends on the skills, knowledge, and

competencies of human resources [3, 5]. Moreover, tourism is a service industry highly dependent on the abilities of human capital with the intellectual capacity to model the industry’s competitiveness [5, 15, 30]. It is for this reason that institutions of higher learning are expected to qualify graduates with competencies that match the industry’s expectations [11].

Moreover, the abilities of human resources are measured by their ability to perform a given task with skills, knowledge, and the competencies demanded by the occupation [9]. Employees with the ability to perform their job roles with excellence translate into team performance and unit performance, leading to overall organizational and industry performance. This eventually spirals up to the industry’s economic performance as seen in destinations’ contribution to gross domestic product (GDP) [31].

1.1. Problem Statement

The tourism industry in Kenya continues to post significant growth despite the global pandemic, economic recession, and other challenges. For instance, in 2019 prior to Covid-19, Tourism grew by 3.9%, earning the government 163.6 billion Kenya shillings from the previous year’s record of 157.4 billion shillings. This growth has increased the need for qualified human resources as a strategic tool for continually improving tourism services and products [17]. It is for this reason that in the recent past, the government has made a great milestone in the development of human capital, a strategic direction coming from a backdrop of the image of employment in the sector, which has for a long time, been viewed generally as an area that generates numerous jobs with little demand for high skills [26, 37]. Today, the industry is awash with high levels of qualified graduates with both postgraduate and undergraduate certificates and working in companies such as tour firms, which in the last decades, did not value such qualifications as important [33].

Organizations are now using qualifications as a criterion for the selection and hiring of human resources [36]. This is because educational qualifications are perceived to be a precursor for positive task job performance which leads to an organization’s success [6]. Task job performance is the technical core competence that addresses the requirements specified in the job description [41]. However, a study done by

Zhao and Liao showed that there was no relationship between employees’ educational background and the performance of the companies under investigation [42]. They concluded that employees can be hired on the basis of their abilities and not academics. These findings contradict other studies that showed that the higher the employees’ educational qualifications, the better their performance [1, 4, 22]. In view of these findings, this study finds a gap in the following: 1). None of these studies focused on a specific dimension of job performance behavior, and 2). The divergent views in these study findings call for more research on a specific area of academic discipline and academic qualification. This study therefore aimed at establishing the influence of tourism educational qualification levels on task job performance behavior among tourism graduates in tour firms.

1.2. Study Objective

To determine the influence of tourism educational qualification levels on perceived task performance behavior of employees in tour firms in Nairobi, Kenya.

1.3. Theoretical Framework

Two theoretical frameworks helped to construct the conceptual framework which gave directions on the study variables. The educational qualification framework descriptors were used to define the composite independent variable, that is, tourism educational qualification level (TEQL) [32]. The qualification descriptors helped identify the skills, knowledge, and competencies for each level of qualification [32]. The job performance behavior model (JPB) provided the parameters for the variable of interest, that is, task performance behavior (TJPB) [27, 35, 38]. According to Bartolini [6], educational qualifications are particularly vital in the selection and recruitment of human resources, as qualification is perceived to determine an employee’s behavior at work. Task performance behavior is the contribution an employee makes in an organization using the core competencies [42]. Employees’ core competencies, skills and knowledge are more proximal determinants of tourism organizations and industry goals at large [12]. The two variables are conceptualized in Figure 1.

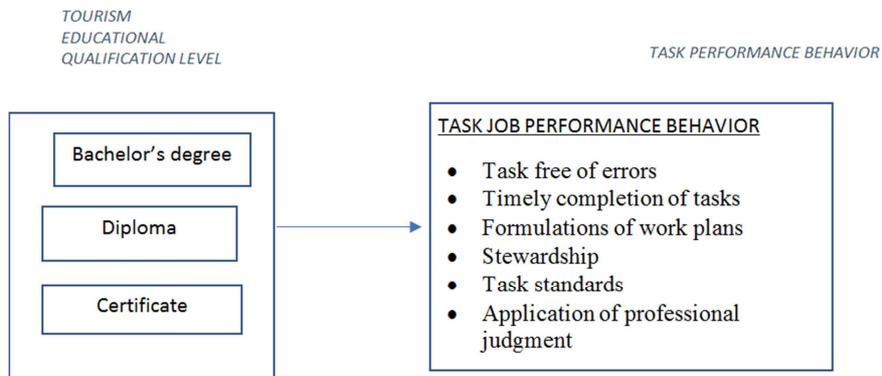


Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

2. Literature Review

Task performance behavior is an individual's deliberate actions that facilitate an organization's overall performance [9]. Such actions are articulated in a job description which contains information on what is expected of the employee and how they ought to perform their roles well [27, 35, 41]. Task performance consists of all activities that transform materials into goods or services produced by the organization or that allow the efficient functioning of the organization [16, 35, 41]. However, Campell and Wiernik [9] caution that the task performance behavior construct should not be mistaken for quantifiable outcomes of an individual's performance. On the contrary, task performance is associated with the transformational role of turning input into output in a competent and consistent manner. The result of this behavior is evaluated in terms of the quality of the finished good or service, consistency of performance, and commitment to the core task [9, 35]. The ability to transform depends on the individual's competency and the ability to comply with the company's outlined set standards. Some scholars argue that if an individual employee is proficient, such an employee is able to bolster teams and consequently organizational-wide performance is manifest [9]. Moreover, the ability of an individual to transform an organization for better results is one of the most important criteria organizations use to select and hire employees. Other terms used to define task job performance include job-specific task proficiency behavior; core task; and in-role job competency [16].

The contribution of task performance behavior to the overall performance of an organization has been the subject of research discourse. Scholars have developed over time, dimensions of task performance behavior which help evaluate an individual's work performance through employees' appraisals and aptitude tests [9, 7, 31]. These dimensions include competencies such as interpersonal skills; administrative skills; quality productivity; and job knowledge, among others [7]. All these put together make task performance behavior which is a key asset in the growth, performance, and competitiveness of an organization [11]. This is supported by human capital theorists whose view holds that human capital that has the capacity to perform through such abilities demonstrates a healthy company. However, although there are other dimensions of job performance behaviors that are used to determine an all-round employee, task performance is the building block upon which all others are based [9].

The yardstick many organizations use to gauge an employee's capacity to perform core tasks is educational qualification levels. Educational qualification levels are the learning outcomes, defined as a set of knowledge, skills, and competencies an individual has acquired and/or is able to demonstrate after the completion of a learning process. From the context of Kenya National Qualifications Framework (KNQF), educational qualifications are the learning outcomes focusing on the results of training (output) rather than the

process of training (input) [30, 32]. The process of assigning qualification levels involves judgment about the relative worth or value of different qualifications. These learning outcomes identify the scope and depth of the graduate's skills and knowledge application by the end of a program. In the recent past, there has been a high level of national and international interest in qualifications and qualifications systems. For this reason, many countries have invested in national qualification frameworks. The growth is a demonstration of the increasing roles of qualifications, especially in the context of the industrial and social demands for knowledge-based economies. This, in turn, has imposed a greater role for governments to design and manage qualification descriptors for all levels in such a way to benefits the labor market [25, 32].

The educational qualifications are meant to transition a graduate into work environment with an assumption that qualified graduates will put into practice the knowledge and skills they have acquired, translating to positive task job performance behavior. For instance, graduates with bachelor's degree are expected to become managers, diploma diploma-qualified graduates as supervisors and certificated students are expected to become operatives. From the tourism context, diplomas and certificate levels of qualifications have, for a long time dominated the jobs in tour and travel firms, as they have been perceived to be technical in nature [33, 36, 40]. However, there is a shift to this perception, employers are now seeking bachelor's degrees for jobs that formerly required less education, even when the actual skills required have not changed. Some studies have found out that having higher professional qualifications leads to even higher task performance than lower qualifications [19, 22]. According to Hashimi [19], employees with professional training were found to be better in such areas as time management; team roles, and emotional intelligence, among other qualities.

Although a study by Zhao and Liao [42] found no correlation between officers' education background and task performance of listed companies under investigation, it is evident that educational qualifications are key to industry performance, and it is therefore important that graduates transitioning to work environment have the requisite skills that will make them relevant in the core areas of specialization. The distinct abilities for the different levels of qualifications are equally important [23]. Moreover, training is necessary with special emphasis on equipping graduates with the right skills, at different levels, which will match the needs of the job market [24], especially in the tourism industry. However, the measure of such qualification is not only in graduates passing examinations and being qualified to enter the job market, the real test of graduates' skills, knowledge, and competency is when they transition into the work environment [30, 32].

3. Methodology

The study was carried out in four firms in the capital city of Kenya. A survey design was adapted where data was collected

using Likert scale containing individual work performance (IWP) questions. The unit of analysis consisted of supervisors responsible for monitoring employees’ job performance. Out of 175 tour firms in the Tourism Regulatory Authority (TRA) register for 2019, only 131 responded and met the criteria set for the study. This is an acceptable response rate of 70%. Each of the 131 supervisors was required to give responses on task job performance behavior of at least one randomly sampled bachelor’s degree, diploma, and certificate employee.

Both descriptive and inferential data analysis was conducted to assess the influence of TEQL on TJPB. The research findings showed that TEQL explained 74.9% of the total variations in the TJPB ($R^2 = 74.9\%$). The regression coefficient output showed that TEQLs positively and scientifically influence TJPB ($\beta = 0.786, p = 0.001$).

4. Research Findings

4.1. Descriptive Analysis

In task job performance behavior, the study focused on the ability of an employee to: perform assigned duties with minimal errors; complete assigned duties within scheduled time; formulate work plan/schedule for self; formulate work plan/schedule for others under him/her; monitor and control resources within his/her jurisdiction; and ability to apply professional judgment in solving complexities of his/her tasks. On the aspect of task performance behavior, a 5-point Likert scale was used, where “1 = Poor” and “5 = Excellent”. Mean scores, standard deviations, and coefficient of variation for the indicators are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Responses on task job performance behavior.

INDICATORS OF TJPB	TOURISM EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION LEVELS								
	BSC			DIPLOMA			CERTIFICATE		
	M	SD	CV	M	SD	CV	M	SD	CV
Ability to perform assigned tasks with minimal errors	4.37	.682	15.6	4.24	.646	15.2	4.28	.648	15.1
Completes assigned duties within the scheduled time	4.20	.587	14.0	4.24	.657	15.5	4.18	.685	16.4
Able to formulate work plan/schedule for self	4.18	.718	17.2	4.14	.731	17.7	3.98	.701	17.6
Able to formulate work plan/schedule for others under him/her	4.09	.717	17.5	4.14	.710	17.1	3.99	.760	19.0
Able to monitor and control resources within his/her jurisdiction	4.17	.725	17.4	4.02	.728	18.1	4.07	.725	17.8
Maintains the set work standards in his/her job roles	4.18	.699	16.7	4.07	.746	18.3	4.15	.681	16.4
Applies professional judgment in solving complexities of his/her tasks	4.37	.612	14.0	4.25	.624	14.7	4.36	.633	14.5

Adopted from Sonnetang & Frese, 2005

In the mean scores, it can be observed in Table 1, that in the educational qualification levels indicators with the top three mean scores were: the ability to apply professional judgment in solving complexities of the employee’s tasks, ability to perform assigned tasks with minimal errors and ability to complete assigned duties within the scheduled time. For the least mean score, degree holders had the ability to formulate work plans/schedules for themselves and others and the ability to control resources, both with the least mean score of 4.09.

For the diploma educational qualification level, indicators with the top three mean scores were: the ability to apply professional judgment in solving complexities of the employee’s tasks; the ability to perform assigned tasks with minimal errors, and the ability to complete assigned duties within scheduled time. For the lowest mean score, the diploma had the ability to control resources and ability to maintain the company’s set standards.

In the mean scores certificate level indicators with the top two mean scores were the ability to apply professional judgment in solving complexities of the employee’s tasks, and the ability to perform assigned tasks with minimal errors while the lowest scores were observed in the formulation of work plan; monitoring and control of resources with mean scores of 3.99 and 4.07 respectively.

Despite these slight variations, it can, nonetheless, be observed that the mean ratings do not widely vary from one another in the three academic qualification levels. For standard deviations, responses for degree holders showed a high standard deviation on the ability to monitor and control

resources within the employee’s jurisdiction ($SD = 0.725$), while the least standard deviation was observed on the ability to complete assigned duties within scheduled time ($SD = 0.587$). Responses for diploma holders showed a high standard deviation on the ability to maintain the set work standards in the individual’s job roles ($SD = 0.746$) with responses on the ability to apply professional judgment in solving complexities of assigned tasks having the least standard deviation of 0.624. For certificate holders, the ability to formulate work plans/schedules for others under the employee and the ability to apply professional judgment in solving complexities of the employee’s task had the highest standard deviation ($SD = 0.76$) and the lowest standard deviation ($SD = 0.633$) respectively.

To examine uniformity in the responses, the coefficient of variation was used. For degree holders, the ability to complete assigned duties within the scheduled time and the ability to apply professional judgment in solving the complexities of assigned tasks had the least coefficient of variation ($CV = 14\%$). It is a coincidence that the ability to apply professional judgment in solving complexities of assigned tasks had the least coefficient of variation for diploma holders ($CV = 14.7\%$) and certificate holders ($CV = 14.5\%$). This trend is not only further evidence of similarities on how the respondents view their employees but also an indication that the responses are more uniform compared to other aspects of task job performance behavior. The similarity in the distribution of perceptions that supervisors have on their employees is still clear in the indicators with the highest coefficient of variation values, irrespective of the academic qualification level. Even

though the values of mean scores, standard deviations, and coefficient of variations may not be the same for the three academic qualification levels, the values, however, exhibit a general trend. This implies that the perceptions that supervisors have regarding their employees with different academic qualification levels do not significantly vary.

4.2. Testing of Research Hypothesis

The influence of tourism educational qualification level on task job performance behavior was determined by testing the null hypothesis presented below;

H_0 : The level of educational qualification has no significant influence on task job performance behavior of employees.

H_1 : The level of educational qualification has a significant influence on task job performance behavior of employees.

The corresponding regression model takes the general form below;

$$TJPB = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{EQL} + \varepsilon \quad (1)$$

Where TJPB is Task Job Performance Behavior (Dependent variable) and EQL is Educational Qualification Level (Independent variable), while β_0 and β_1 are regression coefficients for the constant term and the independent variable respectively. Regression analysis output for testing H_0 was summarized as shown in Tables 2, 3, and 4.

Table 2. Model Summary for the Influence of educational qualification on task job performance behavior.

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	SE
.866	.749	.747	3.428

Model summary statistics presented in Table 2 show that the observed value of R^2 was 0.749 and an adjusted R^2 of 0.747 with a corresponding standard error of 3.428. The value of R^2 implies that the explained variation was 74.9%. That is, of the total variations in task job performance behavior, educational qualification level accounts for up to 74.9%, an indication that there are other predicting factors that influence task job performance but are not included in the model. To determine whether the model explains how educational qualification level affects task job performance behavior, the

ANOVA results were used. The ANOVA outputs were summarized as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. ANOVA Results for the Influence of educational qualification on task job performance behavior.

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	4534.697	1	4534.697	385.820	.001
Residual	1516.188	129	11.753		
Total	6050.885	130			

Dependent Variable: Task Job Performance Behavior
Predictors: Constant, Tourism Educational Qualification Level

The ANOVA results in Table 3 show that the regression model explains the influence of tourism educational qualification level on task job performance behavior. This was indicated by the F-statistic of 385.82 and a p-value = 0.001. Since p-value < 0.05, it implied that the model correctly fitted the data collected and described how tourism educational qualification level influences task job performance behavior of employees. Similarly, the significance of model fit in regression analysis can also be examined by comparing the F-ratio with the tabulated F value read at specific degrees of freedom. In this case, the F-tabulated was obtained at (1,129) degrees of freedom and at 5% level of significance. Using these values, the tabulated F-value was 3.90. Using F-statistics, the decision is to reject the null hypothesis whenever the F-ratio value is greater than the F-tabulated. A significant fit is, therefore, shown by having the observed F-statistic (F-ratio) being greater than the tabulated F-critical value. In this case, $385.82 > 3.90$, is an indication of a significant fit. Therefore, both p-value and F-ratio indicated a significant model fit, and consequently, the outputs in Table 3 and Table 4 can, thus, be used to test the hypothesis about the significance of how tourism educational qualification level influences task job performance behavior of employees.

Since the model was found to be a significant fit, next is to determine the nature of the relationship between tourism educational qualification level and task job performance behavior of employees. This was done using the results in the regression coefficients output shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Regression Coefficients for the Influence of educational qualification on task job performance behavior.

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	6.902	4.123		1.674	.097
EQL	.786	.040	.866	19.642	.001

Dependent Variable: Task Job Performance Behavior
Predictors: Constant, Tourism Educational Qualification Level

The regression coefficients' output gives the model coefficients with corresponding standard errors, t-statistics, and p-values. The coefficient values are used to determine the nature of the influence of the predictor(s) on the dependent variable. The significance of the influence is determined using the t-statistics and/or the p-values. Therefore, the decision while testing the null hypothesis H_0 is arrived at using the p-value of t-statistics for the independent variable. Results in

Table 4 show that tourism educational qualification level, as an independent variable, positively influences task job performance behavior. This is shown by a positive regression coefficient value corresponding to EQL ($\beta = 0.786$, $SE = .040$). The corresponding t-statistics and p-value for the independent variable was $t = 19.642$ and p-value = 0.001. The fact that 0.001 is less than 0.05 was evidence that tourism educational qualification level significantly influences task job

performance behavior in a positive way. That is, transitioning from a lower educational qualification level to a higher one results in an improvement in task job performance behavior by 0.786 units. However little the magnitude of the effect may be, the influence is, nonetheless, significant. For the constant term, the coefficient ($\beta = 6.902$) was not found to be significant since the p-value ($= 0.097$) was greater than 0.05. Based on the values of the regression coefficients, the following regression model of task job performance behavior on educational qualification level was expressed as follows

$$TJPB = 6.902 + 0.786 EQL \quad (2)$$

5. Discussion

From the descriptive results, it can be confirmed that the three levels of qualification performed well in the seven indicators of task performance behavior. However, the results failed to demonstrate a significant difference in task job performance behavior between employees with degree, diploma, and certificate level of qualifications, in accordance with the qualification descriptor model of Kenya National Qualifications Framework. (KNQF). These findings are consistent with the research finding of Mukhwana [32], whose study confirmed the same and attributed it to failure by institutions of higher learning, to differentiate content for curricula for different levels of qualification. The author found out that some TVET institutions develop and implement a curriculum in a given area of discipline, covering the same content as degree programs. As a result, students progressing into the degree programs are often forced to repeat the same units that have been covered at a lower level. This may help explain the insignificant difference in performance between employees holding degree, diploma, and certificate levels. These results raise an issue of overqualification, underqualification, or overutilization of staff, an observation that calls for further investigations.

The most significant observation was in the application of professional judgment in solving complex job tasks. Bachelor's degree holders scored ($M=4.37$); diploma holders ($M=4.25$), and certificate holders ($M=3.6$). Application of professional judgement is perceived as a high level of performance which diploma and certificate holders would be expected to score much lower than degree holders. From the mean score, certificate holders are almost at par with degree employees. This again confirms the findings of Mukhwana [32] who postulates that if training for all levels of qualification is by the same curriculum content, then the outcome would not yield much difference when it comes to task performance behavior. According to the national qualification descriptors, employees holding certificate-level qualifications are competent in technical operations. Even if they are expected to apply logic in their job roles, their cognitive ability is assumed to be lower than that of a degree holder.

In testing the null hypothesis H_0 , both t-statistics and the corresponding p-value for the independent variable (EQL)

were used. The null hypothesis was rejected because the corresponding p-value was less than the level of significance $< .05$. Alternatively, using the t-statistics, also known as the observed t-value, the decision is to reject the null hypothesis whenever the observed t-statistics is greater than the tabulated t-critical value. The tabulated value is usually read at (n-1) degrees of freedom and in this case, 130 degrees of freedom. Using the p-value criterion, the observed p-value was 0.001, which was < 0.05 , evidence that educational qualification level significantly influences task job performance behavior, and hence the null hypothesis H_0 was rejected. A similar inference was made when the observed t-value was compared with the tabulated-critical value. At 130 degrees of freedom, the tabulated t-critical value is 1.976. When compared with the observed t-statistic ($= 19.642$), it implies that the decision is to reject H_0 since $19.642 > 1.976$. This inference of rejecting H_0 using the two approaches implies that educational qualification level has a significant and positive influence on task job performance behavior up to 74.9%. This implies that there are other predictors of TJPB other than TEQL as alluded to by Johnson [24]. From this author's findings, the tourism industry requires other talents and employability skills for more efficiency. Further, the significant influence of TEQL on TJPB is confirmed by findings of other research whose results agree that education and training play a great role in influencing task job performance behavior of employees at different levels of qualification [1-3]. This therefore brings a general consensus that education and training equip employees with task competencies that are key to achieving organization and industry goals [9, 7, 31].

6. Conclusion

This study concluded that educational qualification level influences the task performance behavior of employees up to 74.9%. This is an indication that there are other factors that contribute to task job performance of employees and this can be established through further investigations. However, all supervisors' views indicated an insignificant difference in task performance for the three levels of educational qualifications. This calls for more clarifications in the qualification descriptors to clearly define in clear terms the skills, knowledge and competencies for each level of qualifications. This conclusion could also mean that the curricula for the three levels of qualification may be more or less the same.

7. Recommendations

The Research findings have concluded that tourism educational qualification levels have an influence on TJPB. However, there were parameters of task performance where employees with a certificate and diploma qualification performed equally to degree holders. More research is recommended to establish the clarity of job roles for each level of qualifications. Further research is also recommended to establish Employers' perception of tourism educational qualifications to avoid either underutilization or

overutilization of employees. The findings also established that the contribution of TEQ to TJPB was up to 74.9%. More research is recommended to establish the factors that contribute to the remaining 25.1%. The findings may help tourism educators review tourism curriculum content for all levels of qualification to avoid duplication.

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