

Self-Esteem and Behavioral Engagement of Grade 5 and Grade 6 Learners at a Selected Elementary School in Western Visayas

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between self-esteem and behavioral engagement among Grade 5 and Grade 6 learners in a public elementary school in the province of Aklan, Western Visayas, Philippines. A quantitative descriptive-correlational research design was employed involving 30 respondents, consisting of 15 Grade 5 learners and 15 Grade 6 learners. A standardized questionnaire composed of two parts—self-esteem and behavioral engagement—was utilized, and responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale. The findings revealed a positive relationship between self-esteem and behavioral engagement, indicating that learners with higher levels of self-esteem are more likely to participate actively in classroom activities and demonstrate positive learning behaviors. These findings highlight the importance of fostering learners' confidence, self-worth, and sense of belonging

in promoting active participation and responsible behavior in school. Based on the findings, it is recommended that initiatives aimed at enhancing learners' self-esteem be strengthened through collaborative efforts among school administrators, teachers, and parents. Such efforts may contribute to the development of supportive learning environments that encourage positive behavioral engagement and holistic development among learners.

Keywords: *Behavioral Engagement, Elementary Learners, and Self-Esteem*

INTRODUCTION

Self-esteem is a crucial component of human development (Kapur, 2021). It shapes an individual's overall confidence and perception of personal value. Particularly during childhood and early adolescence, self-esteem plays a vital role in the development of attitudes, interpersonal relationships, and the ability to cope with various challenges. In contrast, learners with low self-esteem are more likely to experience mental health difficulties and are at greater risk of developing conditions such as anxiety and depression (Jurca et al., 2023).

Within the educational setting, self-esteem has been associated with learners' motivation, confidence, and behavioral engagement. Learners with positive self-esteem are more likely to pursue goals, demonstrate persistence, and participate actively in school-related activities. Similarly, Lim (2020) explained that self-esteem may either facilitate or hinder learners' development, as students with high self-esteem tend to exhibit more positive attitudes and behaviors toward learning. These findings suggest that self-esteem is an important factor that influences how learners participate and engage in the educational process.

Various factors influence the development of a child's self-esteem, one of which is parental care and family education. Parents are the first individuals to shape a child's behavior, and their influence can have lasting effects on the child's overall development. A lack of parental care and support may negatively affect a child's emotional well-being. Likewise, negative parenting styles characterized by excessive criticism, blame, negative evaluations, and punishment may impair children's self-esteem and lead them to question their worth and abilities (Huang et al., 2024).

Another factor that affects self-esteem is the teacher-student relationship. Teachers serve as important role models and significantly influence learners' self-perceptions. Therefore, they are expected to create a positive and supportive learning environment that promotes the development of healthy self-esteem. On the other hand, excessive criticism and punitive practices may negatively affect learners' self-worth. According to Chen et al. (2023), teacher criticism is not conducive to establishing healthy teacher-student relationships and may adversely affect learners' self-esteem.

Behavioral engagement refers to learners' active participation, effort, and involvement in classroom and school-related activities. It is reflected in behaviors such as completing assignments, following classroom rules, participating in discussions, and demonstrating persistence in accomplishing tasks. Since self-esteem influences learners' attitudes and motivation, it may also affect the extent to which they participate and engage in learning activities. Although numerous studies have investigated the relationship between self-esteem and various educational outcomes, only a limited number of studies have focused specifically on behavioral engagement among elementary learners.

Grade 5 and Grade 6 learners were chosen as respondents because they are in late childhood and are transitioning into early adolescence, a developmental stage characterized by increasing self-awareness and social sensitivity. During this period, learners begin to place greater importance on their perceived abilities and interactions with others, making self-esteem a crucial factor that may influence their engagement in school-related activities. Moreover, learners at this stage possess sufficient cognitive and emotional maturity to understand and respond appropriately to the survey instruments, making them suitable participants for the present study.

Therefore, this study aimed to determine the relationship between self-esteem and behavioral engagement among Grade 5 and Grade 6 learners at a public elementary school. Specifically, it assessed the level of self-esteem and the level of behavioral engagement of the respondents and examined the relationship between these variables. The findings of this study are expected to provide valuable insights into understanding learners' needs and contribute to the development of interventions and strategies that can enhance their behavioral engagement and support their holistic development.

Literature Review

Self-Esteem of Learners

Self-esteem refers to an individual's overall evaluation of self-worth and confidence in one's abilities. During the elementary years, self-esteem plays an essential role in shaping learners' attitudes, behaviors, and interactions within the school environment. Bennie (2016) emphasized that students with positive self-esteem are more likely to participate actively in classroom discussions and school activities than those with lower self-esteem. Similarly, Wang et al. (2021) found that elementary learners with stronger self-esteem demonstrate greater confidence and positive adjustment in school. These findings suggest that self-esteem contributes to the development of learners' willingness to become involved in school-related tasks and experiences.

Supporting these findings, Villodres et al. (2023) concluded that students who believe in their abilities exhibit more positive behaviors and are more likely to engage in learning activities. Han and Park (2020) likewise reported that higher self-esteem is associated with stronger learning motivation and greater confidence, which encourages learners to participate actively in school-related activities. Ghilay and Ghilay (2017) further noted that enhancing self-esteem promotes active participation and encourages students to become more engaged in classroom activities.

However, Montalba (2026) presented contrasting findings, showing that some dimensions of self-esteem were not significantly associated with certain learning behaviors among Grade 6 learners in the Philippines. Nevertheless, the study highlighted the importance of positive feedback and encouragement from teachers in strengthening learners' confidence and fostering positive learning behaviors. These findings suggest that although self-esteem generally contributes to desirable behaviors, its effects may vary depending on learners' individual characteristics and environmental factors.

Overall, the reviewed studies consistently indicate that self-esteem is an important psychological factor that influences learners' confidence, motivation, and participation in school-related activities. Despite some variations in findings, most studies agree that fostering positive self-esteem contributes to students' active involvement in the learning process.

Self-Esteem and Behavioral Engagement

Behavioral engagement refers to students' active participation, effort, and involvement in academic and school-related activities. According to Steenberghs et al. (2021), behavioral engagement encompasses learners' participation in classroom tasks and positive conduct in school. Similarly, Gonzales et al. (2016) described behavioral engagement as students' involvement in learning activities and the attention they devote to academic tasks. Reschly et al. (2020) further explained that behavioral engagement includes exerting effort, initiating actions, and consistently participating in academic, social, and curricular activities.

Several studies have demonstrated that self-esteem is closely related to behavioral engagement. Van der Kaap-Deeder et al. (2016) conducted two studies examining the relationships among self-esteem, motivation, and engagement. Their findings revealed that students with higher self-esteem displayed stronger emotional and behavioral engagement, whereas lower self-esteem was associated with emotional disaffection and anxiety.

Similarly, Villodres et al. (2023) explained that learners with positive self-esteem tend to exhibit greater confidence and persistence in accomplishing school-related tasks. These characteristics encourage active participation and sustained effort, which are important indicators of behavioral engagement. Fredricks et al. (2016) also emphasized that engaged learners are characterized by persistence, participation, and positive classroom behaviors, all of which are supported by positive self-perceptions. Furthermore, Wang (2017) and Olivier et al. (2018) reported that behavioral engagement significantly influences students' learning experiences and is characterized by active participation and sustained effort in academic activities.

Although the majority of studies consistently report a positive association between self-esteem and behavioral engagement, differences exist regarding the strength and nature of this relationship. While van der Kaap-Deeder et al. (2016) focused on the relationships among self-esteem, motivation, and emotional and behavioral engagement, Han and Park (2020) emphasized the role of self-esteem in enhancing learners' motivation and confidence, which may encourage greater participation and persistence in school activities. Similarly, Wang et al. (2021) highlighted how positive self-esteem supports learners' adjustment and participation in school-related activities, whereas Villodres et al. (2023) stressed that students who believe in their abilities are more likely to demonstrate positive learning behaviors. Furthermore, some researchers focused on the psychological aspects of engagement, while others emphasized observable behaviors such as participation, effort, and persistence. These differences suggest that although self-esteem is generally associated with behavioral engagement, the nature and extent of this relationship may vary depending on the dimensions of self-esteem and engagement being examined.

The reviewed literature demonstrates several similarities among studies, particularly in recognizing self-esteem as an important factor that promotes active participation, motivation, and positive learning behaviors. However, differences exist concerning the dimensions of self-esteem examined, the indicators used to measure engagement, and the characteristics of the participants involved.

Furthermore, although previous studies have established the importance of self-esteem in promoting positive learning behaviors, limited studies have specifically examined its relationship with behavioral engagement among upper elementary learners, particularly Grade 5 and Grade 6 pupils in the Philippine context. Hence, there remains a need to investigate how self-esteem relates to behavioral engagement among upper elementary pupils to

provide context-specific evidence that may guide interventions aimed at enhancing learners' participation and engagement in school. Addressing this gap, the present study aims to determine the relationship between self-esteem and behavioral engagement among Grade 5 and Grade 6 learners at an elementary school in the province of Aklan, Philippines. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the existing body of knowledge and provide insights into the role of self-esteem in fostering positive behavioral engagement among elementary learners.

METHODS

Research Design

This study utilized a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design to determine the relationship between self-esteem and behavioral engagement of Grade 5 and Grade 6 pupils. A descriptive-correlational research design is a type of quantitative research that describes the characteristics or conditions of variables and examines the degree of relationship that exists between them without manipulating any variable. In this study, the descriptive method was used to determine the levels of students' self-esteem and behavioral engagement, while the correlational approach was employed to determine the significant relationship between these two variables.

Respondents of the Study

The study's respondents were the elementary school learners of a selected public elementary school in the province of Aklan in the Western Visayas region, Philippines, specifically the Grade 5 and Grade 6 pupils, with 15 pupils from each grade level, for a total of 30 respondents. These respondents were chosen as they can understand and answer the survey questionnaire related to self-esteem and behavioral engagement using the purposive sampling technique. The purposive sampling technique is used for small samples requiring a deep understanding of specific characteristics related to the research question, which is suitable for this study. Only Grades 5 and 6 were selected for the School Year 2025–2026. They were deliberately chosen based on the researchers' predetermined criteria to ensure that the participants were relevant to the objectives of the study.

Research Instrument

The instrument used in the study was a standardized survey questionnaire that consisted of two parts and underwent a series of validations. The questionnaire contained closed-ended questions in which the respondents chose the answers that best fit their preferences. The questions were specifically designed to gather data on the respondent's level of self-esteem and behavioral engagement. The survey questionnaire consisted of 15 items and used a 5-point Likert scale. The first part measured the self-esteem of the respondents and contained ten (10) items, while the second part was focused on behavioral engagement and consisted of five (5) items. The Likert scale used five scores, which range from (1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Neutral, (4) Agree, (5) Strongly Agree, and was assigned to each of the 15 items.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers sent a formal letter to seek permission from the school principal of the elementary school prior to the conduct of the study. Informed consent was sought from the participants prior to their involvement. Before the pupils accepted the informed consent form, they were oriented towards the objectives of the study and the extent of their involvement. Also, attached to the informed consent are the parents' consent form with the parents' approval. They were also briefed about the confidentiality of information, their anonymity, and their right to refuse to participate in the investigation.

Statistical Tools

To ensure accurate analysis and interpretation of the gathered data, the researcher utilized appropriate descriptive and correlational statistical tools. Frequency, mean, and standard deviation were used to determine the

levels of self-esteem and behavioral engagement among elementary school learners. Meanwhile, the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (Pearson's r) was employed to determine the significant relationship between the variables of self-esteem and behavioral engagement. All data gathered were tabulated, analyzed, and interpreted using Microsoft Excel.

RESULTS

Table 1. *Frequency Distribution of Responses on Self-Esteem*

Statement	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
1. I believe I can do well in my subjects. (<i>Gapati ako nga kaya ko maging mayad sa akon nga asignatura.</i>)	3	0	13	7	7
2. I feel confident completing difficult tasks. (<i>Gapati ako sa akon nga abilidad nga taposon do mga malisod nga obrahon.</i>)	2	1	13	11	3
3. I try again when I make mistakes. (<i>Gauman ako pag nagkasaea ako.</i>)	1	4	9	7	9
4. I feel that I am not good at schoolwork. (<i>Gapati ako nga bukon akot mayad sa mga obrahon sa eksuylahan.</i>)	1	10	14	5	0
5. I easily give up when tasks are difficult. (<i>Madali ako magsuko kapag mabudlay do obrahon.</i>)	5	11	8	6	0
6. I do not feel good about myself. (<i>Bukon it mayad ro pagtanaw sa akon sarili.</i>)	6	7	9	6	2
7. I think I am a good student. (<i>Gapati ako nga ako hay mayad nga estudyante.</i>)	4	1	9	8	8
8. I feel confident when answering questions in class. (<i>May kumpyansa ako nga mag sabat sa klase.</i>)	4	2	9	7	8
9. I feel like I belong in my school. (<i>Nabatyagan ko nga ako hay kaibahan sa eskuylahan.</i>)	1	2	5	8	14
10. I feel that I am a capable student. (<i>Gapati ako nga kaya ko nga mag tuon.</i>)	4	1	12	4	9

Table 2. *Frequency Distribution of Responses on Behavioral Engagement*

Statement	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
11. I complete my assignments on time. (Ginatapos ko do akon nga takdang-aralin sa tamang oras.)	4	1	6	9	10
12. I listen carefully to my teacher. (Gapamati ako it mayad sa akon ng maestra.)	4	1	9	6	10
13. I do not follow instructions during class activities. (Owa ako ga sunod sa mga sueondan sa mga obrahon sa klase.)	3	8	10	5	4
14. I study regularly. (Pirme ako nga nagatuon.)	4	3	8	6	9
15. I do not try to improve my grades. (Owa ako ga himatuon nga magtaas ang grado.)	6	9	9	3	3

Table 3. *Level of Self-Esteem of Grade 5 and Grade 6 Learners*

Question no.	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)	Interpretation
1	3.50	1.17	High
2	3.40	0.97	Moderate
3	3.63	1.16	High
4	3.23	0.77	Moderate
5	3.53	1.08	High
6	3.32	1.31	Moderate
7	3.61	1.28	High
8	3.36	1.26	Moderate
9	4.03	1.14	High
10	3.43	1.33	High
General Weighted Average	3.50	1.15	High

Legend: 4.21 – 5.00 – Very High Self-Esteem, 3.41 – 4.20 – High Self-Esteem, 2.61 – 3.40 – Moderate Self-Esteem, 1.81 – 2.60 – Low Self-Esteem, 1.00 – 1.80 – Very Low Self-Esteem

Table 4. *Level of Behavioral Engagement of Grade 5 and Grade 6 Learners*

Question no.	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)	Interpretation
1	3.74	1.43	High
2	3.57	1.36	High
3	3.17	1.15	Moderate
4	3.43	1.38	High
5	3.46	1.15	High
General Weighted Average	3.47	1.29	High

Legend: 4.21 – 5.00 – Very High Behavioral Engagement, 3.41 – 4.20 – High Behavioral Engagement, 2.61 – 3.40 – Moderate Behavioral Engagement, 1.81 – 2.60 – Low Behavioral Engagement, 1.00 – 1.80 – Very Low Behavioral Engagement

Table 5. *Relationship Between Self-Esteem and Behavioral Engagement of Elementary Learners*

Variables	r-value	p-value	Interpretation
Self-Esteem and Behavioral Engagement	0.751	< 0.001	Strong Positive Relationship

DISCUSSION

Table 1.

The frequency distribution of responses indicates that the learners generally exhibited positive self-perceptions, although the responses varied across the different indicators. Statements related to perseverance, confidence, and school belongingness received relatively higher levels of agreement, suggesting that many learners view themselves as capable and accepted members of the school community. However, the presence of neutral responses and lower levels of agreement in some items indicates that not all learners consistently possess strong self-confidence, and some may still experience feelings of uncertainty regarding their abilities.

These findings support the studies of Bennie (2016), Wang et al. (2021), and Villodres et al. (2023), which emphasized that positive self-esteem contributes to learners' confidence and active participation in school-related activities. Similarly, Han and Park (2020) found that learners with higher self-esteem demonstrate stronger motivation and confidence. Nevertheless, the variations in responses among the indicators support the findings of Montalba (2026), who suggested that self-esteem may differ among learners and may be influenced by various personal and environmental factors. This implies that while most learners possess positive self-esteem, some may still require support and encouragement to strengthen their confidence and self-worth.

Table 2.

The distribution of responses on behavioral engagement suggests that the learners generally exhibit positive learning behaviors, particularly in completing assignments, listening attentively, and participating in classroom activities. However, variations in responses across the indicators indicate that learners do not demonstrate the same degree of engagement in all aspects. Some learners showed lower levels of agreement regarding behaviors associated with following classroom instructions, suggesting that consistent participation and adherence to classroom expectations remain areas that may require further improvement.

These findings are consistent with the descriptions of behavioral engagement provided by Steenberghs et al. (2021), Gonzales et al. (2016), and Reschly et al. (2020), who characterized behavioral engagement as learners' active participation, effort, and involvement in academic and school-related activities. Likewise, the results support the findings of Fredricks et al. (2016), Wang (2017), and Olivier et al. (2018), which emphasized that engaged learners are characterized by persistence, participation, and positive classroom behaviors. The variations observed among the indicators suggest that although learners generally demonstrate desirable behaviors, some aspects of engagement may still need to be strengthened through appropriate classroom practices and supportive learning environments.

Table 3.

Table 3 shows the level of self-esteem of Grade 5 and Grade 6. The findings revealed that Grade 5 and Grade 6 learners possess a high level of self-esteem, indicating that they generally have confidence in their abilities and maintain positive perceptions of themselves. The high rating obtained by the statement "*I feel like I belong in my school*" suggests that learners experience a sense of acceptance and belonging within the school environment, which may contribute to the development of positive self-worth. However, the moderate rating obtained by the statement "*I feel that I am not good at schoolwork*" indicates that some learners still experience self-doubt regarding their academic abilities.

These findings are consistent with the studies of Bennie (2016), Wang et al. (2021), and Villodres et al. (2023), which emphasized that positive self-esteem enables learners to become more confident and actively involved in school-related activities. Likewise, Han and Park (2020) reported that students with higher self-esteem demonstrate stronger motivation and confidence in performing academic tasks. The findings also support Ghilay and Ghilay (2017), who found that strengthening self-esteem promotes active participation and positive learning behaviors. However, the presence of moderate responses among some indicators suggests that self-esteem may vary among learners, supporting the findings of Montalba (2026), who noted that the influence of self-esteem may differ depending on individual and environmental factors. This implies that despite the generally high level of self-esteem among the respondents, some learners may still require encouragement and support to strengthen their confidence.

Table 4.

Table 4 shows the level of behavioral engagement of Grade 5 and Grade 6 learners. The results showed that the respondents exhibit a high level of behavioral engagement, suggesting that they actively participate in learning activities and demonstrate positive classroom behaviors. The high ratings for completing assignments on time and listening carefully to teachers indicate that the learners generally display responsibility and attentiveness in the classroom. Nevertheless, the moderate rating for following instructions during class activities suggests that some learners occasionally encounter difficulties in maintaining consistent participation and compliance with classroom expectations.

The findings are consistent with the descriptions of behavioral engagement presented by Steenberghs et al. (2021), Gonzales et al. (2016), and Reschly et al. (2020), who emphasized that behavioral engagement involves active participation, effort, and involvement in academic and school-related activities. Likewise, the findings support those of Fredricks et al. (2016), Wang (2017), and Olivier et al. (2018), who highlighted that engaged learners demonstrate persistence, participation, and positive learning behaviors. The moderate responses observed in some indicators suggest that although learners generally exhibit desirable behaviors, there remains room for improvement in fostering consistent engagement in classroom activities.

Table 5.

Table 5 shows the relationship between self-esteem and behavioral engagement among elementary learners. The findings revealed a strong positive and significant relationship between self-esteem and behavioral engagement among Grade 5 and Grade 6 learners. This indicates that learners who possess positive self-perceptions and confidence in their abilities are more likely to participate actively in classroom activities, complete assigned tasks, and demonstrate desirable learning behaviors. These findings imply that self-esteem serves as an important factor in promoting learners' active involvement in school-related activities.

The present findings are consistent with the studies of van der Kaap-Deeder et al. (2016), which revealed that higher self-esteem is associated with stronger emotional and behavioral engagement. Similarly, Villodres et al. (2023) explained that learners with positive self-esteem tend to exhibit greater confidence and persistence, characteristics that encourage active participation and sustained effort. The findings also support those of Wang et al. (2021) and Han and Park (2020), who found that students with stronger self-esteem display greater motivation and confidence in performing academic tasks. Furthermore, the results are in agreement with Fredricks et al. (2016), Wang (2017), and Olivier et al. (2018), who emphasized that behavioral engagement is reflected in learners' participation, effort, and persistence.

Although previous studies generally reported a positive association between self-esteem and engagement, differences exist regarding the dimensions and strength of this relationship. Nevertheless, the strong relationship found in the present study suggests that self-esteem is a significant factor that may influence learners' behavioral engagement. This finding underscores the importance of creating supportive school environments and implementing strategies that foster learners' confidence and sense of belonging to encourage active participation in learning.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study emphasize the important role of self-esteem in fostering behavioral engagement among Grade 5 and Grade 6 learners. Positive self-perceptions and confidence appear to encourage learners to become more active participants in classroom activities and to demonstrate desirable learning behaviors. This suggests that developing learners' self-esteem extends beyond promoting positive feelings about themselves; it also contributes to their willingness to participate, persevere, and fulfill their responsibilities as students.

Moreover, the findings imply that promoting behavioral engagement requires attention not only to learners' academic needs but also to their social and emotional development. Since some learners exhibited lower levels of engagement despite having generally positive self-perceptions, behavioral engagement may also be influenced by factors such as teacher support, peer relationships, family environment, and individual motivation. Thus, creating a supportive and nurturing learning environment is essential in encouraging learners to become active and responsible members of the school community.

Overall, the study highlights the importance of fostering healthy self-esteem among upper elementary learners as a means of promoting positive behavioral engagement. The findings provide evidence that learners' psychological well-being is closely associated with their participation in school-related activities, underscoring the need for schools and families to work collaboratively in supporting learners' holistic development.

Implications for Practice

The findings indicated that self-esteem is an important factor in enhancing the behavioral engagement of Grade 5 and Grade 6 learners. Learners who possess high levels of self-esteem tend to participate actively in classroom activities, complete their assignments on time, and demonstrate positive learning behaviors. Therefore, schools should consider implementing programs and activities that foster learners' confidence, self-worth, and sense of belonging. Furthermore, teachers should provide encouragement and positive reinforcement to help learners develop healthy self-esteem and become more engaged in the learning process.

To the Department of Education and Division Offices. The Department of Education and Division Offices may develop and support training programs that equip teachers with strategies for promoting learners' self-esteem and behavioral engagement. They may also encourage schools to integrate social-emotional learning activities into existing programs and provide technical assistance in implementing learner support initiatives.

To School Administrators. School administrators may implement school-based programs such as quarterly self-esteem enhancement workshops, peer-support activities, and recognition programs that acknowledge learners' efforts, participation, and positive behavior. They may also strengthen guidance and counseling services and organize activities that promote a sense of belonging and positive relationships among learners.

To Teachers. Teachers may adopt classroom strategies that promote learners' confidence and participation, such as providing positive feedback, using cooperative learning activities, recognizing learners' efforts through weekly or monthly awards, and conducting class meetings that encourage self-expression and mutual respect. These practices may help improve learners' self-esteem and encourage active participation in classroom activities.

To Parents. Parents may provide consistent emotional support and positive reinforcement at home by recognizing their children's efforts, maintaining open communication, and establishing regular study routines. They may also participate actively in school activities and collaborate with teachers to monitor and support their children's behavioral development.

To Learners. Learners are encouraged to participate actively in classroom discussions, group activities, and school programs that promote cooperation and responsibility. They may also develop positive self-perceptions by setting personal goals, recognizing their strengths, and seeking support from teachers and parents whenever needed.

To Future Researchers. Future researchers may investigate other factors that influence learners' behavioral engagement, such as peer relationships, teacher support, family environment, and learning motivation. They may also employ larger sample sizes and different research designs to further validate and expand the findings of the present study.

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