



Unveiling Attitudes of Parents in the Nomadic Communities towards Formal Education of their Out of School Children in Jaranwala, Faisalabad

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Submission: July 10, 2026 Revised: July 26, 2026 Accepted: August 27, 2026 Available Online: September 10, 2026 Keywords: Nomadic communities; educational exclusion; gender disparity; socio-cultural barriers; Pakistan Corresponding author: Abdur Rehman Shahzad Email: shahzad.rs@uaf.edu.pk	This study examines how nomadic ‘gypsy’ parents in Jaranwala Tehsil, Faisalabad District, Pakistan, view their children’s formal education outside of school, and whether these views are related to the barriers they face. Using a cross-sectional design, 100 parents were interviewed through a structured schedule. Parents were overwhelmingly positive: 90% want higher education for their children (mean = 4.49), 91% believe that schooling will improve their child’s future (mean = 4.44), and 82% would enroll them if conditions were supportive (mean = 4.12). Only 10% felt that education was a waste of time (mean = 1.96). Four hypotheses were tested using Cross-tabulations, chi-square, and Gamma. These statistics were used to examine the relationship between these attitudes and perceived barriers. The willingness to send children to assisted living was significantly associated with the level of barriers ($\chi^2=10.055$, $p=0.40$), but gamma was not (Gamma=0.148, $p=.732$). There were no significant association found with other attitude measures. Overall, parents were supportive regardless of barriers. This suggests that low enrollment is due to structural barriers, not parental neglect or resistance, and points to a need for structural rather than behavioral change interventions.

Introduction

Education is widely recognized as a fundamental human right and a key pathway to social development. Yet millions of children in developing countries miss out on formal education. The reasons are multifaceted. Poverty, social class, and cultural differences often combine to keep them out (Derrington & Kendall, 2008). In South Asia, these groups are often referred to as nomads. Their mobile lifestyle, makeshift settlements, and distinct traditions place them on the fringes of mainstream school systems (Brower & Barabara, 2007). In Pakistan, many of these families live in temporary tent settlements on the outskirts of towns and cities. They move from place to place to find work as seasonal laborers, artisans, or informal traders (Shaheen, 2011). A question that arises in researches on nomadic education is whether low enrollment is due to parents’ lack of appreciation for education or whether external structural barriers deter families who actually want to send their children to school (Morgan & Sengedorj, 2023; Safder et al., 2024; G. Shah & Bara, 2020). This study addresses this question and explores how nomadic parents in Jaranwala Tehsil, Faisalabad, view their children’s formal education outside of school. and assess whether these ideas are related to the extent to which parents perceive barriers

Jaranwala tehsil, located in Faisalabad district, one of Pakistan's major fishing and agricultural centres, is also home to many nomadic families living in makeshift tent settlements. Although they live close to the city's water and other educational facilities, the community is largely cut off from them (Riaz et al., 2019). Field observations show that children from nomadic families in Jaranwala rarely attend government schools, and when they do, most drop out in the first year (Altaf et al., 2024). Public opinion often suggests that this is because the community itself is disinterested in or opposed to formal education. However in Choudhry & Bokharey (2013), pointed out that recent studies of nomadic and traveller groups indicate to a different picture. Parents often value schooling and want it for their children, but financial and institutional barriers prevent them from accessing it to this extent.

Many studies in Pakistan have looked at school dropout and access issues among the rural poor (Mughal et al., 2019; Mughal & Aldridge, 2017; Satti & Jamil, 2021; Shahid Farooq, 2009). In a related analysis of the same dataset, the study also explored how local populations shape educational attainment among nomadic families in Faisalabad. However, what remains largely unexplored is the attitudinal dimension, specifically what nomadic parents themselves think about their children's formal education and whether these views are consistent with the extent to which they are excluded from school. This gap in both research and policy highlights the need for focused attitudinal studies. Therefore, the present work examines how nomadic parents in Jaranwala perceive formal education for their children outside of school.

Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study is to fill this gap by examining how nomadic parents in Jaranwala tehsil view formal schooling for their out-of-school children. It is to know whether the intended attitudes are related to parents' feelings of exclusion from education. The attitudes examined include wanting higher education for their children, believing that school has practical benefits for their future, preparing children to enroll, and seeing school education as a time-consuming process if some support is provided. Data will be collected directly from parents through a structured schedule of interviews. The aim is to provide a strong community-based view of whether the educational underachievement here is primarily due to parental attitudes or peer barriers, as most international research suggests.

Significance of the Study

The results of this study are useful for several groups. For policymakers, it clarifies whether low enrollment among nomadic children is due to weak parental demand for schooling or whether parents want education but are holding back due to poor supply. If demand is low, the response focuses on awareness campaigns and efforts to change attitudes. If demand is strong but unmet, the response will require structural solutions such as documentation assistance, mobile schools, and financial support. For NGOs and education practitioners, this study offers behavioral evidence for designing community-led programs that work against rather than against parents' existing views on schooling. Academically, it builds on the companion demographic analysis of this dataset (Arshad et al., 2023) by placing parents' own attitudes at the center. This adds a new perspective on educational exclusion for the underserved population in Pakistan.

Objectives of the Study

1. To document the views of nomadic parents on formal education and to assess how important they perceive barriers to their out-of-school children in Jaranwala Tehsil.
2. To explore the relationship between parents' attitudes towards formal schooling and perceived barriers to education, and to examine whether differences in attitudes help explain differences in how parents perceive their children to be excluded from the education system

Literature Review

Research as in Dyer, (2016); Kannabiran et al., (2018); Levinson & Hooley, (2014) on educational exclusion among nomadic and marginalized communities has grown steadily over recent decades, though coverage of South Asian Gypsy populations remains sparse relative to other regions. A recurring theme in this literature is the distinction between structural exclusion and attitudinal resistance. The vast international literature on Traveller and minority communities has argued that discrimination, residential instability and institutional neglect combine to produce patterns of school absenteeism that often grow as evidenced by external factors, while their underlying cause is often internal (Faridi, 2026; Jan et al., 2026; Shashikumar V, 2025).

Studies of artisan and peripatetic communities suggest that formal schooling is sometimes perceived as incompatible with traditional livelihoods and early participation in family-based economic activities, yet this perception coexists with a recognition

among parents of education's transformative potential — what Dyer et al. (2026) describe through the metaphor of education as “like wearing glasses,” a tool parents recognise as valuable even when structural conditions prevent them from acquiring it for their children. Discrimination from settled populations and school staff further compounds these attitudinal dynamics, discouraging sustained engagement with formal institutions even where initial parental attitudes are favourable (Bruno & Iborra Cuéllar, 2026; Mawene et al., 2026).

Within Pakistan, studies on out-of-school children have largely focused on rural poverty, gender disparities, and infrastructural deficits, with limited attention to the specific attitudes that nomadic parents hold towards formal education (Haider, 2026; I. Shah et al., 2026). Where attitudes are discussed, the emerging picture is one of favourable parental orientation towards schooling undermined by cost, documentation requirements, and mobility, rather than outright rejection of education as a value (Ahmed & Rönkä, 2026; Ali et al., 2026). The companion demographic analysis of the present dataset similarly found that structural and community-level factors — distance, safety, and mobility — rather than parental demographic characteristics, were the principal drivers of perceived educational exclusion among Gypsy families in Jaranwala, Faisalabad, a finding that raises the question addressed directly in this study: do parents who express more favourable attitudes towards education report correspondingly lower levels of perceived barriers, or do positive attitudes persist irrespective of the barriers families face?

Collectively, this body of literature suggests that educational exclusion among Gypsy communities cannot be explained by parental attitudes alone, and that testing the relationship between attitudes and perceived barriers directly — as this study does — is necessary to determine whether interventions should target parental beliefs or the structural conditions that constrain families regardless of those beliefs. On the basis of this literature, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- **H1:** Parents who aspire to higher levels of education for their children would report a lower sense of barriers to formal education.
- **H2:** Parents who believe formal education will improve their child's future would report a lower sense of barriers to formal education.
- **H3:** Parents who would send their children to school if conditions were supportive would report a lower sense of barriers to formal education.
- **H4:** Parents who perceive education as a waste of time for children of their community would report a higher sense of barriers to formal education.

Methodology

This study employed a cross-sectional research design to examine the attitudes of Gypsy parents towards formal education and their relationship with perceived barriers to their out-of-school children's schooling in Tehsil Jaranwala, District Faisalabad, Pakistan. The target population comprised Gypsy households living in temporary tent settlements, estimated at approximately 150 tents across the study area. A sample of 100 respondents was selected using random sampling, supported by an area enumeration technique in which a complete list of tents was compiled during pre-testing to serve as the sampling frame. Where a selected tent was unavailable, sampling with replacement was applied to maintain the intended sample size. Given the generally low literacy levels within the study population, data were collected through a structured interview schedule using five-point Likert-type items.

Four attitudinal items — aspiration for higher education, belief in education's role in the child's future, conditional willingness to enrol children given supportive conditions, and perception of education as a waste of time — were each recoded from their original five-point response scale into three ordinal categories (Low = Strongly Disagree/Disagree, Medium = Neutral, High = Agree/Strongly Agree) to allow cross-tabulation. The dependent variable, overall perceived Barriers to Formal Education, was constructed as a composite of the same seven barrier items reported in Table 2 (Cultural Traditions and Customs, Discrimination in Schools, Poor Treatment of Unhygienic Children, Language Differences, Safety Concerns, Frequent Dislocation, and Distant Schools) and categorised into Low, Medium, and High tertiles, reproducing the same 39.0% / 32.0% / 29.0% marginal distribution used in the companion analysis of this dataset (Arshad et al., 2023) so that the dependent variable remains comparable across both studies. Data were analyzed using univariate techniques (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) and bivariate techniques, including cross-tabulation with the chi-square test and the Gamma statistic to examine the strength and direction of ordinal association between attitudes and perceived barriers. This was M.Phil research conducted in May to June 2026 and presented in partial fulfilment of the M.Phil degree in Sociology at the University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, Pakistan.

Results and Discussion

Respondents' attitudes towards the formal education of their children are summarised in **Table 1**

Parents' Attitudes towards Formal Education

Sr. No	Intentions	Categories	Count	Percent %	Mean	S.D
1	I Want My Children to Achieve Higher Levels of Education	Disagree	2	2.0	4.49	0.9
		Strongly Disagree	2	2.0		
		Neutral	6	6.0		
		Agree	25	25.0		
		Strongly Agree	65	65.0		
2	Formal Education will Improve My Child's Future	Disagree	5	5.0	4.44	0.8
		Strongly Disagree	0	0.0		
		Neutral	4	4.0		
		Agree	33	33.0		
		Strongly Agree	58	58.0		
3	I Would Send My Children to School if Conditions Were Supportive	Disagree	4	4.0	4.12	0.9
		Strongly Disagree	2	2.0		
		Neutral	12	12.0		
		Agree	44	44.0		
		Strongly Agree	38	38.0		
4	Education is a Waste of Time for Children of Our Community	Disagree	46	46.0	1.96	1.0
		Strongly Disagree	36	36.0		
		Neutral	8	8.0		
		Agree	6	6.0		
		Strongly Agree	4	4.0		

Table 1 presents respondents' agreement with four attitudinal statements concerning the value of formal education for their children, measured on a five-point scale, together with the corresponding mean scores and standard deviations. Aspiration for higher education among Gypsy parents emerged as the most strongly endorsed attitude (Mean = 4.49, SD = 0.9), with 90.0% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that they want their children to achieve higher levels of education. This was closely followed by belief in education's instrumental value for the child's future (Mean = 4.44, SD = 0.8), endorsed by 91.0% of respondents, and conditional willingness to send children to school given supportive conditions (Mean = 4.12, SD = 0.9), endorsed by 82.0%. By contrast, the reverse-scored item measuring negative attitude – that education is a waste of time for children of the community – recorded the lowest mean of all attitudinal statements in the study (Mean = 1.96, SD = 1.0), with 82.0% of respondents disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. Taken together, these results indicate a near-uniform, favourable parental orientation towards formal education among Gypsy families in Jaranwala, with little evidence of the attitudinal indifference or resistance sometimes assumed in public discourse about nomadic communities. The barriers Gypsy parents perceive to their children's formal education – reported herefor comparability with the attitudinal findings above – are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Barriers to Formal Education

Sr. No	Intentions	Categories	Count	Percent %	Mean	S.D
1	Cultural Traditions and Customs	Disagree	10	10.0	3.43	1.2
		Strongly Disagree	12	12.0		
		Neutral	22	22.0		
		Agree	37	37.0		
		Strongly Agree	19	19.0		
2	Discrimination with children in Schools	Disagree	09	9.0	3.06	1.1
		Strongly Disagree	21	21.0		
		Neutral	39	39.0		
		Agree	17	17.0		
		Strongly Agree	14	14.0		
		Disagree	6	06.0		

3	Poor treatment of Schools for unhygienic Children	Strongly Disagree	18	18.0	3.31	1.2
		Neutral	36	36.0		
		Agree	19	19.0		
		Strongly Agree	21	21.0		
		Disagree	7	07.0		
4	Language Differences	Strongly Disagree	21	21.0	3.01	1.0
		Neutral	47	47.0		
		Agree	14	14.0		
		Strongly Agree	11	11.0		
		Disagree	4	04.0		
5	Safety Concerns	Strongly Disagree	17	17.0	3.52	1.2
		Neutral	28	28.0		
		Agree	25	25.0		
		Strongly Agree	26	26.0		
		Disagree	5	05.0		
6	Frequent Dislocation	Strongly Disagree	15	15.0	3.50	1.0
		Neutral	21	21.0		
		Agree	43	43.0		
		Strongly Agree	16	16.0		
		Disagree	5	05.0		
7	Distant Schools	Strongly Disagree	15	15.0	3.55	1.1
		Neutral	24	24.0		
		Agree	32	32.0		
		Strongly Agree	24	24.0		

Table 2 presents respondents' agreement with seven potential barriers to their children's formal education, measured on a five-point scale together with the corresponding mean scores and standard deviations. Distant schools emerged as the most strongly endorsed barrier (Mean = 3.55, SD = 1.1), with 56.0% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that the distance to school discourages enrolment. This was closely followed by safety concerns (Mean = 3.52, SD = 1.2), endorsed by 51.0% of respondents, and frequent dislocation (Mean = 3.50, SD = 1.0), endorsed by 59.0%, reflecting the semi-nomadic and mobile lifestyle that disrupts continuous schooling for many Gypsy children. Cultural traditions and customs also ranked highly as a barrier (Mean = 3.43, SD = 1.2), with 56.0% of respondents in agreement. Poor treatment of unhygienic children by schools (Mean = 3.31, SD = 1.2) and discrimination against Gypsy children in schools (Mean = 3.06, SD = 1.1) were rated as moderate but still notable barriers, while language differences were rated as the least influential barrier (Mean = 3.01, SD = 1.0). Read alongside Table 1, these results present a striking pattern: the same parents who report strongly positive attitudes towards formal education also report meaningful, structurally rooted barriers to accessing it – a pattern that is examined directly through the hypothesis tests reported in Table 3.

Table 3 cross-tabulates the four attitudinal variables with respondents' overall level of perceived barriers to formal education (categorised as low, medium, or high), and reports the chi-square and Gamma statistics used to test each hypothesis.

Table 3: Testing of Hypotheses: Parental Attitudes and Perceived Barriers to Formal Education

Demographic Characteristics	Barriers to Formal Education			Total	X ²	P Value	Gamma (λ)	P Value
	Low	Medium	High					
1 High Level of Education								
	2	1	1	4	1.667	.797	-0.10	0.840
Low	50.0%	25.0%	25.0%	04.0%				
	1	3	2	6				
Medium	16.7%	50.0%	33.3%	06.0%				
	36	28	26	90				
High	40.0%	31.1%	28.9%	90.0%				
	39	32	29	100				
Total	39.0%	32.0%	29.0%	100.0%				
2 Formal Education Improve's Child Future								

	1	2	2	05	0.992	.911	-0.118	0.828
Low	20.0%	40.0%	40.0%	05.0%				
	2	1	1	04				
Medium	50.0%	25.0%	25.0%	04.0%				
	36	29	26	91				
High	39.6%	31.9%	28.6%	91.0%				
	39	32	29	100				
Total	39.0%	32.0%	29.0%	100.0%				
3 Willingness Given Supportive Conditions								
	1	0	5	06	10.05	.04*	-0.148	.732
Low	16.7%	0.0%	83.3%	06.0%				
	6	4	2	12				
Medium	50.0%	33.3%	16.7%	12.0%				
	32	28	22	82				
High	39.0%	34.1%	26.8%	82.0%				
	39	32	29	100				
Total	39	32	29	100				
	39.0%	32.0%	29.0%	100.0%				
4 Education is Waste of Time								
	36	24	22	82	7.09	.131	0.379	.264
Low	43.9%	29.3%	26.8%	82.0				
	1	5	2	8				
Medium	12.5%	62.5%	25.0%	08.0%				
	2	3	5	10				
High	20.0%	30.0%	50.0%	10.0%				
	39	32	29	100				
Total	39.0%	32.0%	29.0%	100.0%				

Regarding the first hypothesis, the bivariate analysis in Table 3 revealed no statistically significant association between aspiration for higher education and the perceived level of barriers to formal education ($\chi^2 = 1.667$, $p = .797$; Gamma = -0.102 , $p = .840$). Respondents in the High-aspiration category were distributed across the low (40.0%), medium (31.1%), and high (28.9%) barrier categories in proportions broadly similar to the sample as a whole, and the small number of respondents in the Low- and Medium-aspiration categories (4 and 6 respectively) further limits the power of this test. H1, which proposed that parents who aspire to higher levels of education for their children would report a lower sense of barriers, is therefore not supported.

For the second hypothesis, the association between belief in education's role in the child's future and the perceived level of barriers was likewise not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 0.992$, $p = .911$; Gamma = -0.118 , $p = .828$). As with the first attitude, the overwhelming majority of respondents (91.0%) fell into the High category on this item, leaving little variation with which to detect an association. H2, which proposed that parents who believe formal education will improve their child's future would report a lower sense of barriers, is therefore not supported by the data.

In testing the third hypothesis, the analysis revealed a statistically significant association between conditional willingness to send children to school given supportive conditions and the perceived level of barriers to formal education ($\chi^2 = 10.055$, $p = .040$), although the corresponding Gamma statistic did not reach significance (Gamma = -0.148 , $p = .732$). Notably, among the small group of respondents in the Low-willingness category ($n = 6$), 83.3% fell into the high-barrier group, compared with 26.8% of respondents in the High-willingness category, a pattern broadly consistent with the hypothesised direction even though the ordinal Gamma statistic itself was weak and not significant, likely reflecting the small and unevenly distributed cell counts. H3, which proposed that parents willing to send their children to school under supportive conditions would report a lower sense of barriers, therefore receives partial support: the overall (chi-square) association is significant, but the strength and consistency of the ordinal relationship (Gamma) is not.

Finally, the fourth hypothesis, which proposed that parents who perceive education as a waste of time would report a higher sense of barriers, was not statistically supported at conventional thresholds ($\chi^2 = 7.099$, $p = .131$), although the Gamma statistic was the largest observed among the four attitudes and ran in the hypothesised positive direction (Gamma = 0.379 , $p = .264$). Respondents

in the High waste-of-time category ($n = 10$) were more likely to fall into the high-barrier group (50.0%) than respondents in the Low waste-of-time category (26.8%), suggesting a substantively meaningful, if statistically inconclusive, relationship that may reflect the small number of respondents ($n = 10$) expressing this negative attitude. Overall, of the four hypotheses tested, only the association involving conditional willingness given supportive conditions reached statistical significance on the chi-square test, and even then the ordinal Gamma statistic did not confirm a strong, consistent relationship. This suggests that Gypsy parents' attitudes towards formal education in Jaranwala are overwhelmingly positive and are held largely independently of how strongly they perceive barriers to their children's schooling — reinforcing the conclusion of the companion demographic analysis of this dataset (Arshad et al., 2023) that exclusion among Gypsy children is driven primarily by structural and community-level factors rather than by variation in parental orientation towards education.

Limitations

This study is subject to several limitations. First, the cross-sectional design captures attitudes and perceived barriers at a single point in time and cannot establish causal direction between the two. Second, the sample was drawn from a single tehsil (Jaranwala) within one district (Faisalabad), which may limit generalizability to nomadic communities in other regions of Pakistan. Third, reliance on a structured interview schedule with a low-literacy population may be subject to social-desirability bias, which is a particular concern for attitudinal items such as those in Table 1, where agreement rates exceeded 80–90% on positively worded statements; some portion of this apparent consensus may reflect a tendency to give normatively expected answers rather than fully independent attitudes. Fourth, the strongly skewed distribution of responses on three of the four attitudinal items (Table 1) resulted in small and uneven cell counts in the Low and Medium categories of Table 3, meaning that several of the chi-square tests reported here should be interpreted with caution, as standard assumptions regarding minimum expected cell counts were not fully met. Finally, as with the companion demographic analysis of this dataset, the composite Barriers to Formal Education index is reported here with its underlying construction (seven-item composite, tertile cut-points reproducing a 39.0%/32.0%/29.0% split) so that findings can be compared across future studies, though an internal-consistency statistic for this composite was not computed and would strengthen future replications.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to data collection, verbal informed consent was obtained from all adult respondents after the purpose, voluntary nature, and confidentiality of the study were explained to them in their local language. Given the generally low literacy levels within the study population, written consent forms were not used; instead, verbal consent was sought and recorded by the interviewer immediately before each interview began. Data collection and the consent procedure were carried out under the academic supervision of the Department of Rural Sociology, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, as part of the requirements for the first author's M.Phil degree.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine Gypsy parents' attitudes towards the formal education of their out-of-school children in Tehsil Jaranwala and to test whether four such attitudes — aspiration for higher education, belief in education's role in the child's future, conditional willingness given supportive conditions, and perception of education as a waste of time — shape the extent to which parents perceive barriers to schooling. The attitude profile confirmed the highly favorable attitude of parents towards formal education with 90% of respondents wanting higher education for their children. 91% believed that formal education would improve their child's future. 82% would send their children to school in supportive high-quality conditions and only 10% agreed on the timing of education. Against this backdrop, remoteness of schools, safety concerns and frequent migration remained the most strongly endorsed barriers to formal education, followed by cultural traditions and customs, discrimination, unhealthy behaviour and language differences.

Of the four hypotheses tested, only the relationship between conditional consent, supportive circumstances and perceived barriers reached statistical significance on chi-square test, and even this relationship was not confirmed by the Ggamma data. Desire for higher education showed no significant relationship with perceived barriers to education in the child's future and the perception of education as a waste of time. This pattern indicates that parental positive attitudes towards formal education among nomadic families in Jarawala are almost universal and largely independent of the structural barriers, distance, safety, mobility, discrimination, and cultural friction that families face. The findings extend the companion demographic analysis of this dataset by showing that, the low school enrollment rate for the Gypsy or nomadic community cannot be attributed to attitudinal resistance or parental apathy. Nomadic parents in Jarawala want their children to be educated and believe in the value of education, but beyond their attitudes, structural and institutional barriers keep their children away from school.

Recommendations

Building on these findings, several recommendations follow. First, because parental attitudes towards formal education are already overwhelmingly positive, awareness or attitude-change campaigns aimed at convincing Gypsy parents of the value of education are unlikely to be an effective use of resources; interventions should instead target the structural barriers — distance, safety, mobility, and documentation — identified in Table 2. Second, given that 82.0% of parents indicated they would send their children to school if conditions were supportive, and that this was the one attitude significantly associated with perceived barriers, priority should be given to identifying and removing the specific “supportive conditions” parents have in mind, such as nearby schooling, safe transport, and affordable school-related costs. Third, education providers should introduce flexible and transferable enrolment systems, mobile or seasonal schooling models, and portable learning records that allow children to continue their education as families relocate, building on parents' demonstrated willingness to engage with such models. Fourth, because a small but identifiable minority of parents (10.0%) view education as a waste of time and this group showed a tendency towards higher perceived barriers, targeted community dialogue with this subgroup — rather than generic awareness campaigns — may help close the remaining attitudinal gap. Finally, given the consistency of these attitudinal findings with the demographic analysis of this same dataset, policymakers and NGOs should treat Gypsy communities in Jaranwala as a population with strong, pre-existing demand for education, and design interventions accordingly, focusing resources on supply-side and structural solutions rather than demand generation.

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