



CASE REPORT

# “Investigation of primary education teachers' happiness and mentality resilience after the covid 19 pandemic”

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## ABSTRACT

As the role of primary education teachers is crucial in shaping the psychological and social conditions of the world's future generations, it is important for teachers to be affective in their role. Their work efficacy, which depends on their psychological and mental state and their well-being, is related to subjective happiness and mental resilience being the two main determinants influencing the well-being of individuals. This quantitative study aims to investigate the levels of subjective happiness and mental resilience in primary education teachers and how these were affected after the COVID-19 pandemic. A quantitative survey questionnaire was used to analyze the factors contributing to the subjective happiness and mental resilience. The findings show that teachers with higher levels of happiness reported viewing their life and work more favorably, more positive outcomes at work, high self-satisfaction levels and greater ability to cope with challenges. Also, the study reveals that higher levels of happiness are preventing factors for the development of future psychological and mental disorders, while they have a negative correlation with disorders such as depression, and a positive correlation with mental resilience, self-perceived quality of life and flexibility in adverse situations.

**Keywords:** subjective happiness, COVID-19, resilience, teachers, primary education, RSES, SHS, RS

## Introduction

Well-being has been broadly defined as the psychological state of feeling good, developing one's potentials, experiencing positive relationships and emotions such as happiness, functioning well and having a sense of meaning and purpose. In this regard, subjective well-being encompasses a quality of life not only on an individual level but on a societal level as well allowing both individuals and society to function with better outcomes.<sup>1</sup> As a sustainable condition linked to positive mental health, the state of well-being enables individuals and society to thrive and further develop by increasing productivity, creativity, learning abilities, positive relations and prosocial behaviors. In this sense, subjective well-being is not only the absence of mental illness and the ability of individuals to cope with daily stressful situations but it extends to higher life satisfaction, better physical health, longevity and better individual and social performance.<sup>2,3</sup>

As well-being is a “multidimensional” concept encompassing both hedonistic (e.g. the pursuit of pleasure) and psychological (e.g. how well one functions or deals with stress) aspects, the variables used in this study were subjective happiness and mental resilience in order to include both the hedonistic and psychological features. Subjective happiness and resilience are two essential components of well-being that have been extensively examined in contemporary research, particularly in the field of education.<sup>4</sup> Subjective happiness influenced by emotional, work and social elements, refers to the extent to which individuals assess their quality of life as positive and satisfying, reflecting an overall positive mental world. In the field of education, teachers' happiness has been recognized as a critical parameter affecting both their teaching efficacy and their overall contribution to the education of their students.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, resilience represents a person's ability to effectively face challenges and recover from negative or difficult situations. In the educational field, where challenges are constant and multifaceted, teacher resilience is essential to maintaining their personal well-being and the impact they have on

their students. Positive feelings, personal satisfaction and the absence of unpleasant emotional states, such as melancholy and worry, are inextricably linked to human happiness and thereby to well-being. The long-term balance between positive and negative emotional experiences emerges as an important shaping factor of the subjective sense of happiness.<sup>6</sup> Seligman<sup>7</sup> refers to happiness as the satisfaction that results from the fulfillment of individual pursuits and desires, leading to a full and fulfilling life. He also emphasizes the importance of happiness through giving and the fulfillment of meaningful goals, where everyone's unique abilities are harnessed to achieve higher purposes offering a life of deeper meaning.<sup>8</sup>

As the parameters that make up teachers' happiness are critical, Coleman suggests that the importance of happiness in the education industry is made evident by the finding that it is impractical to analyze the emotional health of students in a school without simultaneously monitoring the emotional health of the teaching staff.<sup>9</sup> In the literature review it is found that the mental health and happiness of teachers is of immense importance as they are the ones who educate the next generation of the nation. Therefore, it is evident that exploring the determinants is critical to achieving happiness.<sup>10</sup> The model developed by Saaranen et al.,<sup>11</sup> determines the parameters that influence the professional happiness of teachers within the school environment and affect their daily life. These include: a) the working conditions, i.e. the working environment and the material infrastructure such as the availability and access to technological means (e.g. computers) which help teachers in effective teaching, b) the workload analysis which involves the quantity and quality of work required, c) the working community which involves the network of collaboration and support among teachers, d) the professional competence and opportunities for development which refer to the enhancement of skills and the prospect of professional advancement. In the context of primary education, some factors have a strong influence on teacher happiness. One such factor is the political and social ideological expectations prevailing in the educational sphere. Often, teachers' personal views

conflict with the ideas promoted by the state or society, causing confusion and internal conflicts as teachers need to be able to align their personal needs with the demands of the school.<sup>12</sup>

The mental resilience of teachers is considered a skill, a process and an outcome at the same time. As a skill it characterizes the teachers' ability to overcome personal weaknesses and external pressures while facing risks to maintain their well-being.<sup>13</sup> As a process mental resilience is a means of dealing with stressful events in the school context, and as a result it empowers teachers to focus on the teaching process and experience satisfaction despite difficulties.<sup>14</sup> The recent research by Flores et al.,<sup>15</sup> examines the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health and subjective happiness of primary school teachers. The study, conducted on a sample of 624 teachers from Northern Chile, revealed that teachers' emotional strategies and spirituality do not directly affect their mental health, but contribute to their life satisfaction, which is a global evaluation. This suggests that teachers who deal with stress and depression using socio-emotional approaches and spiritual practices experience greater resilience and happiness. The research highlights the importance of comprehensive support for teachers, especially during times of crisis such as the pandemic which has affected both their professional and personal well-being. The study by Papazis et al.,<sup>16</sup> analyzes the resilience levels of Greek teachers during the lockdown of the COVID-19 pandemic and how they are influenced by the attitudes towards remote emergency teaching and perceived stress. Using three self-assessment tools, the research examined the reactions of 1415 teachers from central Greece. The findings indicated that teachers had neutral attitudes toward distance learning, moderate levels of resilience, and experienced slightly increased levels of stress. Teachers' perception of resilience significantly predicted their attitudes toward distance learning and the levels of stress they experienced during the pandemic. The study highlights the importance of developing adequate levels of resilience to cope with adverse conditions and

suggests specific directions to support teachers who have an increased need for counseling and professional support to strengthen their resilience. Wei's research in 2022<sup>17</sup> explores the relationship between teachers' mindfulness, work engagement, and classroom emotions. The study, conducted on a sample of 498 Chinese primary, secondary and upper secondary teachers, revealed that mindfulness, work engagement and emotions in the classroom are intermediate and significantly correlated. The effect of mindfulness on classroom emotions partially influences work engagement. Furthermore, negative emotions have a moderate effect on the effect of mindfulness on work engagement, while positive emotions have a full effect. Findings highlight the importance of promoting teacher mindfulness through mindfulness-based interventions, developing emotion regulation in teacher education, and fostering supportive classroom and school climates so that teachers experience more positive emotions than students and the administrative employees. The study by Jiang et al., in 2023,<sup>18</sup> examines the effect of job satisfaction on teacher burnout, using a mediated mediation model. The results of the survey conducted on 496 primary and secondary teachers in China showed that job satisfaction has a negative relationship with burnout and a positive relationship with psychological capital. Psychological capital partially mediates between job satisfaction and burnout, while physical exercise acts as a moderator of this mediation. The findings suggest that increasing psychological capital and engaging in physical activities can reduce burnout, offering important directions for supporting teachers' resilience and happiness in the education sector. Zhi's study<sup>19</sup> investigates the psychological support of publicly funded teachers involved in the teaching profession in China. Research shows that 70% of teachers face significant professional pressure, which negatively affects their mental, physical and personal development. Using the SCL-90 scale, the study analyzed the professional psychology of teachers and found that only 11.9% of publicly funded students are willing to serve in rural education.

The findings highlight the need to strengthen psychological resilience and provide adequate support to teachers through an integrated support system that includes social, government and family support. Strengthening the psychological resilience of teachers is deemed necessary to improve their professional life and the educational process. The research of Sipeki et al.,<sup>20</sup> examines the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of students and faculty. The study was conducted at Semmelweis University and included 237 participants, of which 202 were students and the rest were instructors and lecturers. The analysis of the data revealed that the students presented lower levels of self-regulation, creative-executive efficiency and mental resilience compared to the teachers. Having a separate space for learning during distance education was found to be significantly associated with participants' well-being. The findings highlight the need to provide support for the mental health of both students and teachers, particularly in crisis situations such as the pandemic. The main purpose of this research is to investigate subjective happiness and mental resilience among primary school teachers in Greece after the pandemic examining the factors that influence these two important psychological dimensions. The research seeks to understand how various personal and professional factors influence their well-being and how these findings can contribute to the development of policies and practices that will support mental resilience in the educational environment after periods of crisis. In the educational setting, where teachers are exposed to constant challenges and demands, happiness and resilience can affect both their personal well-being and their professional performance and success.<sup>21</sup>

## Materials and Methods

Quantitative methodology was chosen for this research due to the need for a systematic and objective evaluation of the data. The data was collected through questionnaires distributed to teachers, allowing for speed and ease in gathering a large amount of information. The analysis of the

responses was carried out using statistical software (SPSS), thus offering the possibility of applying a variety of statistical tests to assess the significance of the findings. The questionnaire used to collect the data consists of a total of 51 questions. The first questions concern basic demographics such as gender, age, marital status, academic background, professional status, workplace and work preferences. The following set of questions regard the attitude of teachers towards their profession using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, 1965)<sup>22</sup>, their self-assessment of happiness using the Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) of Lyubomirsky,<sup>23</sup> and their resilience in difficult situations using the Resilience Scale of Wagnild & Young.<sup>24</sup> The research was approved by the Committee of the Department of Education and Social Work Sciences and ended in May 2023.

## Results

A total of 111 people participated in this research, of which the demographic gender is distributed as 1 person answering 'Other' (0.9% of the total), 20 people 'Male' (18%), 89 people 'Female' (80.2%), and 1 person stating 'Do not wish to state gender'. This distribution shows a significant overrepresentation of women in the sample, as 80.2% of the participants correspond to women. The existence of mostly women in the sample may reflect the more general trend of the gender ratio in the primary education sector, which often sees a higher presence of women in these posts. The age distributions were 27 people (24.3% of the total) in the 27-year-old age group, 26 people (23.4%) in the 26-year-old age group, 30 people (27.0%) in the 30-year-old age group and 28 people (25.2%) in the age group of 28 years. The overall distribution covers a narrow age range from 26 to 30 years, showing a homogeneity of the sample in the age structure, which is indicative of the labor dynamics in the primary education sector, with the younger age group dominating. Regarding the marital status of the participants, the data show that 38 people (34.2% of the total) are single, 4 people (3.6%) are divorced or separated, 68 people



(61.3%) are married or in cohabitation, and 1-person (0.9%) reported belonging to a single-parent family. Regarding the levels of academic study, out of the 111 people who answered the questionnaire, 1 person (0.9% of the total) stated that they have a degree from TEI (Technological Educational Institute), 8 people (7.2%) hold a PhD, 45 people (40.5%) hold a master's degree, and 57 people (51.4%) have a bachelor's degree showing a variety in the distribution of professional qualities. Kindergarten teachers represent the largest group with 48 people (43.2% of the total), followed by teachers with 31 people (27.9%). Also, 18 people (16.2%) are specialty teachers and 10 people (9.0%) work in parallel support in the classroom. There was lower participation of people working in other related positions, with one (1) civil servant, one (1) participant working at the Centre of Creative Activities for Children, one (1) computer engineer, and one (1) participant being a physical therapist each making up just 0.9% of the sample.

In the sample of 111 participants, the majority, 73 people (65.8%), reported that they find their profession difficult "Sometimes", while 30 people (27.0%) answered "Yes" indicating that their occupation is consistently difficult. Only 8 people (7.2%) stated that they do not find their occupation difficult. These results indicate that the majority of teachers experience difficulties, at least periodically, in their work and that there is high challenge and demands involved in the field of education. The answers also possibly reflect an increased psychological burden and the need for effective support strategies for teachers revealing a complex picture of the challenges. Of the 111 participants, 45% did not name a specific difficulty, indicating a more general level of satisfaction or difficulty in pinpointing problems. The remaining 55% reported specific issues, with each given by one (0.9%) participant. Bureaucratic difficulties, paperwork, parent management, behavior, classroom management and administrative work were frequently mentioned indicating that balancing teaching and administrative requirements, managing difficult children, enforcing classroom discipline and working with "difficult" parents are

common concerns which raise significant challenges and difficulty. Educational challenges, i.e. the need for continuous training and the difficulty of implementing ideas due to limitations or force majeure, are significant obstacles for many teachers, while the constant change of textbooks, psychological and mental fatigue, and stressful working conditions were also mentioned as having a serious psychological and physical impact. Such difficulties reinforce the need for strong support networks and effective stress management strategies. The investigation of participants' self-image in two different dimensions is captured through Tables 1 and 2. In Table 1, which examines the General Self-Concept, the results show that individuals tend to have a positive self-image. A small percentage, 2.7%, showed very low self-esteem (grade 2) while 3.6% showed low and 16.4% slightly low self-esteem (grade 4). While 29.7% rate their self-esteem relatively high (grade 5), most people (34.5%) rate their self-image high (grade 6), and 12.7% with the highest score of very high (grade 7), confirming a particularly positive self-image. In Table 2, which examines self-perception of happiness compared to colleagues, the data suggest a similar positive trend. Very few people, 1.8%, state that they feel inferior (grade 1), while an additional 0.9% give a grade 2 (slightly inferior). This is followed by 3.6% with a grade 3 and 23.6% with a grade 4. The majority, however, is again in the top ranks, with 28.2% of responses being grade 5, 31.8% being grade 6 and 10% representing the highest score of 7, showing that many feel they are consistently superior to most of their peers there.

Table 1: The General Self-Concept of primary school teachers.

Table 1: In general, I consider myself:

		Freque ncy	Percent	ValidPerc ent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	3	2,7	2,7	2,7
	3	4	3,6	3,6	6,4
	4	18	16,2	16,4	22,7
	5	33	29,7	30,0	52,7
	6	38	34,2	34,5	87,3
	7	14	12,6	12,7	100,0
	Total	110	99,1	100,0	
Missin g	Syste m	1	,9		
Total		111	100,0		

Table 2: The perceived levels of happiness of primary school teachers compared to their colleagues'.

Table 2: Compared to most of my colleagues, I consider myself happy

		Frequen cy	Percent	ValidPerc ent	CumulativeP ercent
Valid	1	2	1,8	1,8	1,8
	2	1	,9	,9	2,7
	3	4	3,6	3,6	6,4
	4	26	23,4	23,6	30,0
	5	31	27,9	28,2	58,2
	6	35	31,5	31,8	90,0
	7	11	9,9	10,0	100,0
	Total	110	99,1	100,0	
Missin g	Syste m	1	,9		
Total		111	100,0		

Table 3 examines the self-perception of happiness in life in general and satisfaction of life regardless of circumstances. A small percentage, 2.7%, do not feel that they fit this description at all (grade 1) and another 2.7% feel that they slightly fit this description (grade 2). 5.4% answered that they rarely feel that they are characterized by this positive disposal (grade 3), while most responses indicate a relatively positive self-assessment of mood. 27.3% of people report moderate alignment with the description (grade 4), while 37.3% state that they often feel happy regardless of circumstances (grade 5). 19.1% rate

their pleasure with 6, and 5.5% with the highest rating of 7, confirming a very high degree of optimism and life satisfaction.

**Table 3:** The levels of perceived happiness and general satisfaction in life of primary school teachers regardless of circumstances.

**Table 3:** "Some people are generally very happy. They enjoy life no matter what happens, making the most of every situation." To what extent does this description describe you?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	3	2,7	2,7	2,7
	2	3	2,7	2,7	5,5
	3	6	5,4	5,5	10,9
	4	30	27,0	27,3	38,2
	5	41	36,9	37,3	75,5
	6	21	18,9	19,1	94,5
	7	6	5,4	5,5	100,0
	Total	110	99,1	100,0	
Missing	System	1	,9		
Total		111	100,0		

From the total of 111 participants, 13.5% disagreed with the view that they have a positive attitude towards themselves, indicating a lack of self-esteem. A very small percentage, 1.8%, strongly disagree, highlighting even greater difficulty in developing or maintaining a positive self-concept. On the other hand, the majority, 56.8%, agree that they feel positive about themselves, while 27.9% strongly agree, confirming that they maintain a strong and positive relationship with themselves. These findings capture a generally positive frame of self-concept in the research sample.

Table 4 shows the self-satisfaction levels of primary school teachers. Overall, the results show a strong positive self-esteem of the subjects. Of the 111 people only 8.1% feel less satisfied with themselves and the majority, 82.9%, state that they are satisfied with themselves. An additional 9% of primary school teachers express complete satisfaction with themselves.

**Table 4:** The self-satisfaction levels of primary school teachers.

**Table 4: Overall, I am satisfied with myself**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	9	8,1	8,1	8,1
	Agree	92	82,9	82,9	91,0
	Strongly Agree	10	9,0	9,0	100,0
	Total	111	100,0	100,0	

Table 5 indicates the extent to which individuals perceive themselves as having a positive attitude toward themselves. 13.5% state they disagree with the view that they have a positive attitude towards themselves, indicating a lack of self-esteem. A very small percentage, 1.8%, strongly disagree, highlighting even greater difficulty in developing

or maintaining a positive self-concept. On the other hand, the majority, 56.8%, agree that they feel positive about themselves, while 27.9% strongly agree, confirming that they maintain a strong and positive relationship with themselves. These findings capture a generally positive frame of self-concept in the research sample.

**Table 5:** The extent to which primary school teachers believe they have a positive attitude toward themselves.

**Table 5: I have a positive attitude towards myself**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	15	13,5	13,5	13,5
	I absolutely disagree	2	1,8	1,8	15,3
	Agree	63	56,8	56,8	72,1
	Strongly Agree	31	27,9	27,9	100,0
	Total	111	100,0	100,0	

### Limitations of the study

Although the research study offers important findings it is also prone to some limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. Firstly, the research sample was limited in terms of population size and diversity, thus limiting the generalizability of the findings. Secondly, the geographic limitation of the research to a specific region also affected the generalizability of the results to other geographic contexts and cultural settings. A future expand of the sample population to a larger and more diverse base would provide a more comprehensive picture of the factors influencing the happiness and resilience of teachers in different settings and socio-economic conditions. Also, the expand in a wider geographic area in Greece would allow the analysis of local and cultural influences on teachers' mental well-being potentially leading to the creation of more targeted support and development programs for teachers, tailored to the specific needs and challenges they face in each setting. Finally, future research could examine more thoroughly the effect of implementing specific interventions and programs aimed at improving mental resilience and subjective happiness. Experimental studies that implement and evaluate

such programs could provide practical evidence of their effectiveness, strengthening the scientific basis for best practices in the educational community.

### Discussion

Happiness and mental resilience are two basic determinants for an individual's well-being. Happiness refers to the personal state of satisfaction and inner balance, i.e. how one person perceives the life they lead in a favorable way.<sup>25</sup> Also, subjective happiness and mental resilience are not only basic components but also main predictors of well-being and mental health,<sup>26</sup> as well-being is a positive state of being related to quality of life and positive outcomes, while providing meaning and purpose.<sup>27</sup>

Mental resilience refers to the ability of individuals to cope with difficulties and recover from them while maintaining their psychological and emotional health and is related to subjective happiness and subjective well-being.<sup>25</sup> Resilience being inextricably linked to subjective happiness, is a reactive concept with emphasis on adaptation in adverse conditions.<sup>28</sup> The present study aimed to investigate the subjective happiness and mental resilience of primary school teachers in Greece and how much these two variables



were affected during the COVID-19 pandemic. As primary school teachers present a group of professionals who are in charge of imparting various components of these variables to the future generations it is important to investigate the subjective happiness and mental resilience of primary school teachers since they play a key role in their work performance.

The data analysis of the quantitative questionnaire offered clear answers to the central research questions. They demonstrated a strong positive correlation between subjective happiness and resilience in teachers. Teachers with higher levels of happiness reported greater ability to cope with challenges, as well as greater flexibility in adverse situations. Factors such as job satisfaction, interpersonal relationships and work-life balance play a critical role in the levels of subjective happiness. As reported by teachers themselves, resilience and subjective happiness are also associated with improved professional performance. Resilience has positive associations with both the variables of subjective well-being and subjective happiness<sup>27</sup> all being indicators of good mental health and preventing factors for mental illness disorders. As during the COVID-19 health crisis, studies showed an increase in the vulnerability levels of individuals and a decrease in their mental resilience,<sup>29</sup> the present study also aimed to identify the factors that influence these variables. As mental resilience helps create effective stress coping strategies it was an important component in coping with the fear, stress and anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic. The strategies created with the presence of mental resilience protect not only the individual's physical and mental health from psychological disorders such as depression, but also the individual's economical health, and this also applies to groups, organizations and various other systems.<sup>30</sup> Teachers who feel satisfied with their work and have positive interpersonal relationships reported higher levels of happiness and resilience.

It is important to note that the distribution of male and female teachers in the study sample shows a

significant overrepresentation of women (80.2%) and a homogeneity in age, ranging from 26 to 30 years, with the younger age group dominating. These facts most probably constitute indicative factors of the labor dynamics in the primary education sector in Greece. The study results indicate that the majority of teachers experience difficulties, at least periodically, in their work with their answers revealing a complex picture of challenges. These include bureaucratic difficulties, paperwork, parent management, behavior, classroom management and administrative work. Also, balancing teaching and administrative requirements, managing difficult children, enforcing classroom discipline and working with "difficult" parents were frequently mentioned common concerns. Educational challenges such as the difficulty of implementing ideas due to limitations or force majeure, the constant change of textbooks, psychological and mental fatigue and stressful working conditions were also mentioned by a large number of participants as significant obstacles which have a serious psychological and physical impact on them. Such complex picture of difficulties reinforces the need for strong support networks and effective stress management strategies. This also demonstrates that there is increased psychological burden, high challenges and demands involved in the field of education in Greece. Regarding the General Self-Concept of the study sample, the results show that individuals tend to have a positive self-image with only a very small percentage (2.7%) showing very low self-esteem. Their self-perception of happiness compared to colleagues also showed very few people (1.8%) stating that they feel inferior. The question about happiness and satisfaction of life in general regardless of circumstances revealed that the participants had a relatively positive self-assessment of mood capturing a generally positive frame of self-concept in the research sample. The results for self-satisfaction levels of the participants show a strong positive self-esteem of the subjects and there are similar results concerning the extent to which the participants consider they have a positive attitude toward themselves. The study also

revealed that mental resilience and subjective happiness have a positive correlation with the ability to stay strong during challenging times, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and adapt to new teaching tools and methods in a supportive and affective way for the students. The new teaching methods during the COVID-19 pandemic including better classroom management and new strategies for the increase of creativity in teaching had a strong positive association with overall satisfaction with the profession.

## Conclusions

The present study investigated how subjective happiness and mental resilience of primary school teachers in Greece affected their job and how these variables were affected by the global health crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings demonstrate a strong positive correlation between subjective happiness and mental resilience in teachers. Also, mental resilience has positive associations with the subjective well-being which is in turn associated with subjective happiness. Teachers with higher levels of happiness reported greater ability to cope with challenges, as well as greater flexibility in adverse situations. The levels of subjective happiness were mainly influenced by the factors of job satisfaction, interpersonal relationships and work-life balance.

These findings highlight the need for teachers to receive support in maintaining the levels of personal happiness as it is strongly and positively associated with their job performance. The happier teachers are the better job they do with the children who are the key players for the construction of the future. As primary school constitutes the secondary socializing environment of children, primary school teachers are the main people, after family members, who shape children's view of life. Thus, further supporting teachers enhance their happiness and resilience through implementing policies focused on their mental well-being will in turn help in the creation of happier and more efficient future generations. This research demonstrates that happiness and

resilience is enhanced through health, job satisfaction, and support from social networks, while influenced by multiple factors such as environment, personality, and relationships. Opportunities for professional development, good salaries and a more relaxed work environment with clear and separate duties for each faculty member are some key measures for improving the future well-being of teachers and their students in consequence.

## Conflict of Interest Statement:

None

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None

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