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Original Research Article

Awareness of Dental Students About Evidence-Based Medicine

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ABSTRACT

Aim: This study aimed to evaluate dental students' awareness, knowledge, and behaviors regarding evidence-based medicine (EBM), including their use of scientific databases and experience with critical appraisal and research activities.

Material and Methods: A total of 274 dentistry students in their 3rd, 4th and 5th years participated in this survey. Data were collected via a questionnaire distributed through Google Forms. The questionnaire covered demographic data and knowledge/attitudes toward EBM. Statistical analyses included Chi-square, Fisher's exact tests, and trend analysis, with a significance threshold of $p<0.05$.

Results: While 56.6% of students had heard of EBM, only 4.7% had received formal EBM training. A significant proportion (62.8%) expressed a desire to learn more about EBM. The rate of students knowing how to conduct a literature review was 32.5%, and only 20.8% had previously performed one. Meta-analysis was correctly identified as the highest level of evidence by 20.8% of participants. Significant grade-level trends were observed: higher-grade students showed increased use of systematic reviews, expert opinions, and textbooks, while reliance on lecture notes decreased ($p<0.001$). PubMed awareness decreased with grade level ($p<0.001$), while Medline and ULAKBIM usage increased. Students in higher grades also showed significantly higher participation in research and critical appraisal activities ($p<0.05$).

Conclusion: Awareness and understanding of EBM among dental students are limited, particularly in earlier years of training. Incorporating structured EBM training into the dental curriculum may improve students' ability to engage with high-quality scientific evidence, promote the use of reliable databases, and support better clinical decision-making in their future practice.

Keywords: Awareness; Database; Dental students; Evidence-based medicine

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INTRODUCTION

Evidence-based medicine (EBM) is the honest, clear, and logical use of scientific evidence, as well as clinical experience, by physicians when making medical decisions about patients. In order to perform evidence-based medicine, it is necessary to have knowledge and skills in areas such as creating clinical questions, performing effective searches in databases, and critically evaluating scientific research.[1,2]

One of the important factors that prevents evidence-based medicine practices is the lack of sufficient knowledge and skills in this area. In today's world, where health care is more complex and expensive, and patient expectations are increasing, evidence-based medicine practices are needed to achieve the best results, reduce variations in clinical practices, provide higher quality service, and encourage cost-effective health service delivery.[3,4]

In recent years, the rapid increase in technology, malpractice laws, and information sources has given physicians the awareness to learn and use evidence-based medicine effectively and continuously throughout their lives. For physicians

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to use this skill in their daily practice, they need to receive effective evidence-based medicine training. While evidence-based medicine practice training is mostly a part of postgraduate education programs, education aimed at understanding evidence-based medicine and its importance should be a part of undergraduate education curricula.[5,6] Thanks to these trainings, information gaps regarding evidence-based medicine practice can be eliminated. As a result, physicians who can select valid and reliable information and use this information in daily practice can be trained. With the widespread use of evidence-based medicine practices, the most up-to-date information can be used in patient care, patient outcomes can be improved, treatment can be made more cost-effective, and health resources can be better utilized.[7]

To the authors' knowledge, no data exist in the literature evaluating the knowledge and awareness of evidence-based medicine among dental students. Therefore, the aim of this study is to evaluate the degree of awareness of evidence-based medicine among dental students. The null hypothesis is that dental students do not have awareness of EBM.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

A total of 274 participants, consisting of 3rd, 4th and 5th year students from the Faculty of Dentistry at Kırıkkale University during the 2023–2024 academic year, participated in this study. The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of the Declaration of Helsinki and was approved by the Non-Interventional Research Ethics Committee of Kırıkkale University (Meeting Date: 17/04/2024, Meeting: 2024/06, Decision Number: 2024.03.18). Informed consent was obtained from all participants at the beginning of the online survey form, which provided a brief explanation of the study's purpose and procedures. Participation was entirely voluntary.

Data were collected through a structured online questionnaire administered via Google Forms. The questionnaire was adapted from previous studies and revised based on expert input in the field of medical education.[8] A pilot application was carried out with a small group of students (n=10) to ensure clarity and relevance of the items.

The questionnaire consisted of two main sections. The first section collected demographic and background information from the participants, including age, gender, year of study, availability of digital devices such as computers, access to the internet, and the duration of internet use for general and professional purposes. The second section focused on students' knowledge, awareness, and experiences related to evidence-based medicine. It included items assessing familiarity with the concept of evidence-based medicine, previous training, completion of a research methods course, experience with literature review, ability to identify levels of evidence, participation in academic activities such as reading and evaluating scientific articles, involvement in research, and awareness of scientific databases. Students were also asked about their preferences for applying evidence-based approaches in their future clinical practice.

Sample Size Calculation

A priori power analysis was conducted using G*Power software (version 3.1.9.7; Franz Faul, Universität Kiel, Germany) to determine the minimum required sample size for detecting statistically significant differences. Assuming an effect size (Phi (φ) value) of 0.25, a significance level of 0.05, and a power of 90%, the required sample size was calculated as 264. With a total of 274 participants included in the study, the achieved power was deemed sufficient.

Statistical Analysis

SPSS 26.0 (IBM, Armonk, USA) program was used for statistical analysis. All collected data were analyzed using appropriate statistical methods. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the findings. Categorical variables were compared using Chi-square or Fisher's exact tests. In addition, trend analysis was performed to assess differences across grade levels. A p-value less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

RESULTS

This study included 274 students, of whom 60.6% (n=166) were female and 39.4% (n=108) were male. The median age was 23 years. 35.4% (n= 97) of the participants were in the 3rd grade, 31.8% (n= 87) were in the 4th grade, and 32.8% (n= 90) were in the

5th grade. 93.8% (n= 257) of the participants owned a computer. 99.6% (n= 273) of the participants used the internet. The median value of daily internet usage time was 5 hours (min:1, max:6), while the median value of daily internet usage time for professional information was 1 (min:0,5, max:2) hour. The sources used to obtain medical information included: textbooks 22.5% (n=207), non-textbook books 11.4% (n=105), narrative reviews 2.4% (n=22), systematic reviews 3.4% (n=31), research articles 14.5% (n=133), educational conferences 7.3% (n=67), expert opinions 12% (n=110) and lecture notes 26.6% (n=244) (Table 1). When scientific publication experiences were evaluated, 9.3% (n=34) received critical article reading training, 7.1% (n=26) critical article evaluation, 9% (n=33) participated in scientific research, 4.9% (n=18) had scientific publications, 13.7% (n=50) did poster preparation, 6.8% (n=25) was involved in article writing, and 4.4% (n=16) in oral presentation. Although the overall differences between grade levels were not statistically significant for most sources ($p>0.05$), a trend analysis revealed significant linear associations for several types of sources. Specifically, the proportion of students who reported using textbooks increased significantly from 3rd to 5th grade ($p<0.05$), as did the use of systematic reviews ($p<0.05$) and expert opinion ($p<0.05$). Conversely, reliance on lecture notes decreased significantly with higher grade level ($p<0.001$), suggesting a shift from instructor-provided materials to more diverse or independent sources as students' progress through the curriculum.

While 56.6% (n=155) of the participants had heard of the concept of EBM, only 4.7% (n=13) had received EBM training. It was determined that 36.1% (n=99) of the participants had taken a research methods course. 62.8% (n=172) of the participants stated that they wanted to learn more about EBM. 32.5% (n=89) of the participants stated that they knew how to conduct a literature review, and 20.8% (n=57) stated that they had conducted a literature review. The responses of the study participants to the question about which research method is the most reliable and at the top of the evidence pyramid were 20.8% (n=57) meta-analysis, 3.6% (n=10) case-control, 4.7% (n=13) *in-vitro* studies, 4.4% (n=12) reviews, and 2.9% (n=8) animal experiments.

When the participants' knowledge of the available databases was evaluated, 26.6% (n=167) was aware of Pubmed, 31.8% (n=200) Google Scholar, 15.8% (n=99) Medline, 2.1% (n=13) UpToDate, 1.6% (n=10) Embase, 2.7% (n=17) Elsevier Science Direct, 5.4% (n=34) Ulakbim, 1.4% (n=9) Cochrane Database, 4.8% (n=30) Dynamed, and 0.8% (n=5) Springerlink. In response to the question 'Which of the following tools would you prefer to use in the practice of evidence-based medicine in the future?', 31.6% (n=203) of the participants responded by accessing decision support systems via tablets or smartphones, 22.6% (n=145) by group meetings such as conferences and seminars, 22.7% (n=146) by face-to-face individual interviews by experts, 10.6% (n=68) by accessing online decision support systems, 6.4% (n=41) by written reminders sent to my address as letters, scientific journals or booklets, and 6.2% (n=40) by e-mail.

38.5% of those who received EBM education responded to the question about which one was at the top of the evidence pyramid (n=5) as a meta-

Table 1. Students' preference of sources for obtaining medical information according to the grade they study

	3rd grade		4th grade		5th grade		
	n	%	n	%	n	%	P
Textbook	64	66.0	68	78.2	76	84.4	**0.012**
Books other than textbooks	32	33.0	35	40.2	38	42.2	0.395
Author compilations	5	5.2	8	9.2	10	11.1	0.336
Systematic reviews	5	5.2	11	12.6	15	16.7	**0.034**
Research articles	45	46.4	41	47.1	48	53.3	0.596
Education conference	23	23.7	23	26.4	21	23.3	0.878
Expert opinion	32	33.0	32	36.8	46	51.1	**0.033**
Lecture notes	93	95.9	84	96.6	67	74.4	**<0.001**

Statistical analysis was performed using Chi-square and Fisher's exact tests, as appropriate. Significance threshold was set at $p < 0.05$.

analysis, and this was not found to be statistically significant compared with those who had not received EBM education (p>0.05). 37.4% (n=37) of those taking the research methods course responded to the question about what is at the top of the evidence pyramid as meta-analysis. However, this did not create a statistically significant difference (p>0.05).

24.6% (n=14) of 3rd graders 14% (n=8) of 4th graders and 61.4% (n=35) of 5th graders responded to the question about what is at the top of the evidence pyramid as a meta-analysis. These differences were statistically significant (p<0.001), but clearly without a linear trend. When the students' knowledge of databases was evaluated according to the grade they were studying, there was a statistically significant difference in their knowledge of Pubmed, Medline, Ulakbim databases. (p<0.001) (Table 2). 65.2% (n=58) of those who knew how to conduct a literature review answered the question regarding which one is at the top of the evidence pyramid with meta-analysis (p<0.001). Trend analysis of database usage revealed several significant patterns across grade levels. PubMed usage showed a significant decreasing trend from 3rd to 5th grade (p<0.001), whereas Medline (p<0.001) and ULAKBIM (p<0.001) usage increased significantly. Other databases, including Google Scholar, UpToDate, and SpringerLink, did not demonstrate statistically significant linear trends in usage (p>0.05).

Receiving training in critical article reading, critical article evaluation, participating in scientific research, poster preparation status, and desire to learn more about EBM showed statistically significant differences at the grade level. (p<0.01; p<0.01; p<0.05; p<0.001; p<0.001, respectively) (Table 3).

Table 2. Students' knowledge of databases according to the grade they study

	3rd grade		4th grade		5th grade		
	n	%	n	%	n	%	P
Pubmed	72	74.2	33	37.9	62	69.7	**0.001**
Google Scholar	74	76.3	56	64.4	70	78.7	0.081
Medline	33	34.0	18	20.7	48	53.9	**0.001**
Up to Date	3	3.1	2	2.3	8	9.0	0.108
Embase	1	1.0	5	5.7	4	4.5	0.152
Elsevier Science Direct	6	6.2	6	6.9	5	5.6	0.952
Ulakbim	12	12.4	2	2.3	20	22.5	**0.001**
Cochrane Database	4	4.1	4	4.6	1	1.1	0.404
Dynamed	11	11.3	8	9.2	11	12.4	0.833
Springerlink	2	2.1	1	1.1	2	2.2	1.000

Statistical analysis was performed using Chi-square and Fisher's exact tests, as appropriate. Significance threshold was set at p < 0.05.

Table 3. Evaluation of the questions related to the research according to the students' grade

	3rd grade		4th grade		5th grade		
	n	%	n	%	n	%	P
Training in critical article reading	10	10.3	5	5.7	19	21.3	**0.006**
Critical article evaluation	7	7.2	3	3.4	16	18.0	**0.004**
Participation in scientific research	5	5.2	12	13.8	16	18.0	**0.018**
Scientific publication	6	6.2	4	4.6	6	6.7	0.788
Poster preparation	32	33.0	8	9.2	10	11.2	**<0.001**
Article writing	7	7.2	6	6.9	12	13.5	0.260
Making an oral presentation	48	49.5	61	70.1	55	61.8	0.854
Taking a research method course	49	50.5	26	29.9	34	38.2	**0.017**
Previous training in evidence-based medicine	2	15.4	1	7.7	10	76.9	0.091
Knowing the research method at the top of the evidence pyramid	14	24.6	8	14.0	35	61.4	**0.001**
Desire to learn more about evidence-based medicine	71	41.3	59	34.3	42	24.4	**0.001**

Statistical analysis was performed using Chi-square and Fisher's exact tests, as appropriate. Significance threshold was set at p < 0.05.

A trend analysis revealed that training in critical article reading increased significantly across grade levels (p<0.01), as did critical article evaluation skills (p<0.01) and participation in scientific research (p<0.05). Students in higher grades were also more likely to know the research method at the top of the evidence pyramid (p<0.01). In contrast, poster preparation (p<0.001), taking a research method course (p<0.05), and desire to learn more about evidence-based medicine (p<0.01) significantly decreased with increasing grade level. No statistically significant trends were found for scientific publication, article writing, or making an oral presentation (p>0.05). 64.9% (n=63) of 3rd graders, 49.4% (n=43), of 4th graders and 54.4% (n=49) of 5th graders reported having heard of the concept of EBM. This difference was not statistically significant (p > 0.05). 13.4% (n=13) of 3rd graders, 23.0% (n=20) of 4th graders, and 26.7% (n=24) of 5th graders have previously conducted a literature review. Although the difference was not statistically significant overall (p>0.05), a significant linear trend was observed across grade levels (p<0.01), indicating that higher grade students were more likely to have conducted a literature review.

DISCUSSION

In the present study evaluating the awareness of EBM among dental students, the null hypothesis that dental students were not aware of EBM was tested against the alternative hypothesis that they were sufficiently aware of EBM and the null hypothesis was accepted. Approximately 44% (n=119) of the dental students had not heard of the concept of EBM. It is important for every physician and prospective physician to know about EBM due to the rapid change in scientific data and the need to follow it.

The implementation of evidence-based diagnosis and treatment protocols is the preparation of diagnosis and treatment protocols according to the needs of each clinic by combining the experience and knowledge of the clinics with reliable information in the literature. One of the main goals of evidence-based medicine is to find the best evidence and translate it into everyday practice.[9] In this way, it may be possible to resolve inconsistencies between clinical research and clinical practice.[10] Evidence-based medicine provides significant advantages to physicians, patients and clinics.[11,12] It has been shown that physicians who make evidence-based clinical decisions can continuously improve their clinical skills and performance. Making decisions based on the best evidence in terms of treatment outcomes and cost-effectiveness, taking into account patient preferences, can improve the quality and outcomes of treatment.[10,11,13,14] Patients may be more confident and satisfied with their doctors if they know they are being treated according to evidence-based practice.[11,15] Thus, clinicians can deliver scientific, safe, effective and cost-effective interventions.

In a study conducted by Saygılı *et al*.[16] it was found that 84% of the students knew about EBM and 32% of them received training on EBM. In another study,[17] it was revealed that 92% of the students had heard of EBM and 43.6% had received EBM training. In another study,[18] it was found that the majority of students did not have sufficient knowledge about the term EBM. In another study,[19] it was found that the participants had limited knowledge about EBM and had a positive attitude towards EBM and wanted to receive training on this subject in the future. In a study[20] conducted in Iran, it was determined that students were willing to participate in EBM training courses. In our study, 56.6% (n=155) of the participants had heard of the concept of EBM, and 4.7% (n=13) of the participants received EBM education, which contrasts with some studies in the literature and is in parallel with some studies. The reason for this situation may be the different samples invited to the survey. The fact that 62.8% (n=172) of the participants stated that they wanted to learn more about EBM is in line with the literature. The desire to receive more education may be because they felt inadequate in this subject with the survey conducted on EBM. Dentistry students' level of knowledge about EBM, their experience in scientific publications, and their command of databases are quite low. This situation shows that more arrangements should be made regarding EBM in the curriculum of dentistry students. In this way, both the diversification of reliable sources that students will use to obtain information and the selection of sources and databases suitable for EBM will be provided.

The most frequently used sources of information among students were personal lecture notes,

textbooks, clinical diagnostic manuals and colleagues.[21] Another study,[22] reported that many people still use textbooks and colleagues' opinions to answer clinical problems in daily practice. In another study,[8] 93% used lecture notes, 75% used textbooks and 56% used expert opinions. In the present study, textbooks were used by 22.5% (n=207), expert opinions by 12% (n=110) and lecture notes by 26.6% (n=244). The results of our study seem to be consistent with literature. These findings indicate a developmental trend in students' information-seeking behavior. As students advance in their academic years, they tend to rely less on lecture notes and increasingly incorporate more formal and evidence-based sources such as systematic reviews and expert opinions. This may reflect growing academic maturity and greater exposure to research-oriented coursework.

When the scientific article reading habits and research involvement of dentistry students were evaluated, it was found that although the students did not actively engage in reading or conducting scientific research, they still had some knowledge about meta-analysis.[21] In another study,[23] it was determined that 34% of the participants read research articles regularly and 28% occasionally. In the study conducted by Novak *et al*.[24] it was determined that approximately half of the students answered correctly to the question that the research at the top of the evidence pyramid is meta-analysis. In our study, 20.8% (n=57) of the answers to the question of which research method is at the top of the evidence pyramid is meta-analysis, which shows that the majority of the participants do not know the research method at the top of the evidence pyramid. This situation is in line with studies in literature. In this study, as the grade level increased, the number of those who responded to the question about which was at the top of the evidence pyramid as a meta-analysis increased. This is consistent with having taken a research methods course. In other words, it shows that taking the course affected the correct answer status.

In a study[8] evaluating students' knowledge of databases, the most frequently known databases were Pubmed, Google scholar Medline and UpToDate, respectively. In another study,[16] when students' knowledge of databases used for evidence-based information needs was evaluated, it was found that Medline, Pubmed, Cochrane Library were known, respectively. In our study, when the knowledge of database names was evaluated, it was determined that (n=200) Google Scholar, (n=167) Pubmed, (n=99) Medline were the most commonly known, respectively. Our findings seem to be consistent with the use of the most commonly used databases in the field of health. These findings imply that as students advance in grade level, their use of certain specialized databases such as Medline and Ulakbim increases, possibly reflecting a shift toward more academic and research-oriented tools. Conversely, the decline in PubMed usage at the 4th grade level may indicate transitional challenges in accessing or understanding database content at that stage. The relatively lower usage of PubMed compared to Google Scholar may be attributed to factors such as limited English language proficiency among students, the simpler and more familiar interface of Google Scholar, and the broader access to Turkish-language content outside PubMed. This may reflect a preference for convenience and accessibility over scientific indexing quality. In one study, the rates of receiving critical article reading training, evaluating critical articles and participating in scientific research were compared between classes. Participation in scientific research was found to differ between classes, as were the rates of receiving training in reading critical articles, evaluating critical articles, and participating in scientific research. In our study, it was found to be higher in the last year. We think that this result is due to the article reading comprehension studies in some internships in the last year.

In the study[8] evaluating the means of obtaining evidence-based information, 89% tablets, 85% smartphones and 82% group meetings such as conferences and seminars were the top three most preferred options. In our study, 31.6% of the participants stated that they would prefer accessing decision support systems through tablets or smartphones, 22.6% through group meetings such as conferences and seminars, and 22.7% through face-to-face individual interviews with experts. The reason for the differences with the compared study may be the different student groups.

It is possible that students have difficulty reading scientific articles and this can be attributed to a variety of factors, including unfamiliar terminology or research techniques in scientific articles, difficulty understanding statistics, and having to review numerous articles to find information.[25,26] Previous studies[15,27,28] have also indicated that dental students lack resources to obtain evidence-based information, which is a barrier to moving in this direction. With the developing technology and information network, it is not very difficult to access information or related databases within the university today. It is extremely important to increase students' awareness on this issue, to guide them and to include them in the education curriculum.

This study has some limitations. Participants were not randomly selected and therefore may overrepresent the views of a particular group rather than the general population. Respondents may not have shared their true opinions due to social favorability bias. Since it was conducted in a certain period of time, it may have been affected by periodic factors. Another limitation of this study may be the students' limited proficiency in English, which could have affected their access to and preference for certain scientific databases such as PubMed.

CONCLUSION

This study revealed that while the concept of EBM is familiar to many dental students, formal education and practical experience with EBM remain limited, particularly in earlier years of academic training. Students in higher grades demonstrated greater awareness of the evidence hierarchy, more frequent engagement in research-related activities, and better recognition of reliable scientific sources. However, a decline in the desire to learn more about EBM among senior students highlights a critical missed opportunity in the current educational structure. These findings suggest that structured and longitudinal integration of EBM into the dental curriculum is necessary to promote sustained interest and competency in evidence-based clinical decision-making. Enhancing research literacy and fostering critical appraisal skills from the early years may improve students' ability to effectively use scientific evidence throughout their professional careers.

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The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

Diş Hekimliği Öğrencilerinin Kanıta Dayalı Tıp Konusunda Farkındalığı

ÖZET

Amaç: Bu çalışmanın amacı, diş hekimliği öğrencilerinin bilimsel veri tabanlarını kullanma, eleştirel değerlendirme ve araştırma faaliyetleriyle ilgili deneyimleri de dahil olmak üzere kanıta dayalı tıp (KDT) konusundaki farkındalıklarını, bilgilerini ve davranışlarını değerlendirmektir.

Gereç ve Yöntem: Bu ankete 3., 4. ve 5. sınıfta okuyan toplam 274 diş hekimliği öğrencisi katılmıştır. Veriler Google Forms aracılığıyla dağıtılan bir anket aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. Anket demografik verileri ve KDT'ye yönelik bilgi/tutumları kapsamaktadır. İstatistiksel analizler, $p<0.05$ anlamlılık eşiği ile Ki-kare, Fisher'in kesin testleri ve eğilim analizini içermektedir.

Bulgular: Öğrencilerin %56,6'sı KDT'yi duymuş olsa da, sadece %4,7'si resmi KDT eğitimi almıştır. Önemli bir oran (%62,8) KDT hakkında daha fazla bilgi edinme isteğini dile getirmiştir. Literatür taramasının nasıl yapılacağını bilen öğrencilerin oranı %32,5'tir ve sadece %20,8'i daha önce bir literatür taraması yapmıştır. Meta-analiz, katılımcıların %20,8'i tarafından en yüksek kanıt düzeyi olarak doğru şekilde tanımlanmıştır. Sınıf düzeyinde önemli eğilimler gözlenmiştir: yüksek sınıf öğrencileri sistematik derlemeleri, uzman görüşlerini ve ders kitaplarını daha fazla kullanırken, ders notlarına güven azalmıştır ($p<0.001$). PubMed farkındalığı sınıf seviyesiyle birlikte azalırken ($p<0.001$), Medline ve ULAKBİM kullanımı artmıştır. Yüksek sınıflardaki öğrencilerin araştırma ve eleştirel değerlendirme faaliyetlerine katılımı da anlamlı derecede yüksektir ($p<0.05$).

Sonuç: Diş hekimliği öğrencileri arasında KDT farkındalığı ve anlayışı, özellikle daha önceki akademik yıllarda sınırlıdır. Yapılandırılmış KDT eğitiminin diş hekimliği müfredatına dahil edilmesi, öğrencilerin yüksek kaliteli bilimsel kanıtlarla etkileşim kurma becerilerini geliştirebilir, güvenilir veri tabanlarının kullanımını teşvik edebilir ve gelecekteki uygulamalarında daha iyi klinik karar vermeyi destekleyebilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Diş hekimliği öğrencileri; Farkındalık; Kanıta dayalı tıp; Veritabanı

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