

# Exploring the Inclusive Classroom Practice in a Public Junior School in Malang: A Case Study

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## Abstract:

This study explores the practice of Inclusive Education in the EFL context, especially in English teaching practices in the classrooms, along with the challenges, and solutions provided at one of the public junior high schools in Malang, East Java, Indonesia, by showing how students with special education needs are supported. In this qualitative case study research, the tools used in data collection are semi-structured interviews and classroom observations concerning English teachers and students with SEN. The findings indicate that the school accommodates SEN students utilizing differentiated teaching, special materials, and adapted assessments. Yet, several challenges persist in the areas of lack of infrastructure, inadequate teacher training, and problems in classroom management. The research also encourages some practical solutions, such as forming collaborative teams of teachers and better communication with parents. This study contributes to the insights of inclusive practices in EFL settings with recommendations on how teacher preparedness and resource allocation need to be improved to foster equitable learning environments.

**Keywords:** Inclusive Education, EFL, SEN Students, Differentiated Teaching

## Introduction

Education is a human right and a foundation of human development, yet achieving equal access to quality education remains a global challenge. The life stories around education have come to represent the aspirations of educational equality (Rhea, 2014). According to UNESCO, all students are equally important. However, millions of individuals around the world are still denied access to education for a variety of reasons, such as their gender, sexual orientation, nationality, language, religion, economic status, ability, or

ethnic or social background. All schools in Indonesia currently implement inclusive education (IE) to ensure that all children receive an equal education. Every citizen has an equal right to education, according to Article 31 Paragraph 1 of the Republic of Indonesia's 1945 Constitution. This is supported by Indonesian Law No. 20/2003 on the National Education System or Regulation No. 70/2009 of the Minister of National Education on Inclusive Education for Learners with Disabilities and Have Potential Intelligences and/or Special Talent.

IE has gained significant attention worldwide as a means of ensuring equitable learning opportunities for all students, including those with special educational needs (SEN). With its many dynamics and approaches, inclusive education has emerged as a global issue trend (Nuruddin & Rasidi, M. A., 2023). The government in Indonesia has taken steps towards inclusive education in mainstream schools, ranging from elementary, and junior high school, to senior high school levels, informed by the national policies that focus on education for all.

In implementing IE, the practical implementation of IE in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms remains a complex challenge due to linguistic demands and classroom diversity. In practically every class currently, foreign language teachers in public schools must work with students who have special education needs (Pokrivčáková, 2018). The distribution of IE in Indonesia is already spread in all provinces, especially in Malang City. All schools in Malang, from elementary to secondary, have implemented IE as well. The school, one of the senior high schools in East Java, Indonesia, serves as a compelling case study for exploring how IE is practiced within an Indonesian EFL context. The school has accommodated students with various special needs for years.

All schools in Indonesia still have a lot of challenges in implementing IE. According to Nuruddin & Rusidi, M. A. (2023), there is a crucial factor to improve the quality of IE in Indonesia, which is the availability of infrastructure. In addition, there is a lack of professional teachers who have no skill of teaching inclusive classrooms with SEN students (Sari, et. al, 2022). Hidayah & Morganna (2019) observed in the inclusive classroom that the teacher in the classroom seemed to have an adequate pedagogical skill wherein

the teacher could help guide normal students to solve their problems while working with their disabled friends. According to the inclusive education policy of the Indonesian government, special education needs pupils must be supported through specialized teaching methods, teacher collaboration, and school-level support structures. These policies are implemented in one of the public schools in Malang through practical initiatives that are promoted on the school website and social media.

While inclusive education has gained popularity in recent years, it still leaves many gaps in the specific challenges of EFL teachers regarding inclusion, especially in Indonesia. Previous studies often did not provide the particular linguistic and cultural factors that shape how strategies are employed in an EFL classroom (Tiraeni et al., 2024). While the theoretical frameworks of inclusive education are highly explored, the number of research studies offering practical insights into how these theories could be applied effectively in real classroom settings is limited (Cruz et al., 2023). In addition, teacher training and professional development for EFL teachers in Indonesia remain underexplored, meaning that many teachers are poorly prepared to meet the diverse needs of students in inclusive classrooms (Padmadewi et al., 2024). Furthermore, most current literature still focuses on mainstream EFL programs and does not reflect the specific experiences of students with special needs within an inclusive setting (Cruz et al., 2023).

This study is essential since it could benefit some stakeholders. The study reveals some of the latest ideas and good practices in the field of ELT and gives helpful insight into inclusive classroom practices. The results shall contribute to the improvement of the inclusive education programs offered by governments. In addition, the data shall guide the design of teacher training programs on customized instruction and classroom management in inclusive settings. This study aimed to investigate the English teaching practices that are conducted in inclusive classrooms at the school to dig deeper into the challenges that the teachers may face during the learning process and the solutions that the school can provide to support conducting inclusive education. This study specifically intended to figure out the following questions:

- 1) What does the school do to support SEN students?

- 2) How does the teacher conduct English learning in inclusive classrooms?
- 3) What are the challenges faced by the English teacher and the solution in teaching an inclusive classroom?

## **Review of Literature**

### **Inclusive Education**

Inclusive education is a concept or perspective that emphasizes the value and well-being of all pupils or students with special needs or disabilities by ensuring equality of opportunities, human rights, and social justice for all students regardless of their special needs or disabilities, gender, race, or cultural background (Armstrong et al., 2016). It comprises addressing and overcoming barriers to participation and learning, building environments to meet diverse needs, and cultivating an inclusive society in which everyone may contribute meaningfully. Inclusive education is more than merely integrating disabled students; it is about transforming educational procedures to benefit all students and promote democratic participation in schools and society.

### **Inclusive Education in the EFL Context**

Inclusive education in the EFL context focuses on creating accessible and supportive learning environments for all students in language learning that enable them to receive high-quality instruction, participate actively, and develop optimally (Anis & Khan, 2023). This approach requires adjusting teaching strategies, learning resources, and evaluation methods to overcome any possible barriers in the learning process. Furthermore, it allows all students, including those with special needs, can feel valued and have equal opportunities to develop in language learning.

### **English Teaching Practices in Inclusive Education**

Teaching English in inclusive classrooms involves several instructional strategies to take care of the diversified needs of the learners. According to Carr & Bertrando (2012), scaffolding instruction, differentiation of content with differentiated learning, and multimodal teaching methods as some of the effective approaches to address the issue of students' different learning

abilities or SEN students. An environment that has to be supportive through collaborative activities and clarity of expectations promotes engagement and learning outcomes. While teaching English in an inclusive classroom, the flexible and continuous assessment methods will allow the teacher to follow the progress and modify the instruction to meet individual needs. These approaches make learning English all the more inclusive and effective.

## **Method**

This study used qualitative research with a case study approach to explore English language teaching practices in an Inclusive classroom environment. Qualitative methods were chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the Inclusive classroom teaching strategies, challenges, and interactions that occur in this context.

## **Subjects of the Study**

The subjects of this study involved two teachers and a student with special educational needs (SEN) at one of the public junior high schools in Malang. Both teachers are English teachers who have experience teaching in inclusive classrooms. The first teacher is the one who actively teaches in the inclusive classroom, thus providing insight into the teaching strategies for SEN students during class. The second teacher also participated in the observation process by being interviewed to gain additional perspectives. The second teacher also serves as the inclusive coordinator at the school. In this section, the second teacher provided a broader understanding of the practices and policies in the inclusive classroom. Based on the combination of the roles and experiences of these participants, can enrich the data to fulfill this research.

## **Data Collection**

Data collection for this study was conducted using two main instruments: semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. Semi-

structured interviews were conducted with a second teacher who also acts as an inclusive coordinator and these interviews were designed to gain more detailed insights into teachers' experiences teaching in inclusive classrooms, their challenges, and strategies for implementing inclusive education. This flexible approach allowed participants to share their thoughts openly while ensuring key topics were covered.

Classroom observation captured real-time interactions, teaching strategies, and the overall dynamics of the inclusive environment. Notes during the observations documented teaching practices, student engagement, as well as classroom management techniques. By combining these methods, this study gained a comprehensive understanding of English language practices and the observed behaviors and perspectives of the participants.

### Instruments

Interviews were conducted with teachers to gather detailed information about their experiences, challenges, and strategies for implementing inclusive education. These semi-structured interviews provided an opportunity for teachers to share their personal and professional perspectives on creating an inclusive classroom environment. The interview blueprint included questions focusing on their teaching practices, methods of adapting lesson plans to accommodate diverse students, use of resources and materials, and their approach to classroom management. Additional questions addressed the challenges they faced, such as managing the needs of diverse students, time constraints, and the availability of support systems. This comprehensive approach ensured that the interviews captured a thorough understanding of teachers' roles and experiences in promoting inclusivity in the classroom.

**Table 1. Blueprint of Observation Classroom Checklist**

No	Aspects	Indicators
1	Participation in Classroom Activities	<p>SEN students are encouraged to join all class activities</p> <p>SEN students actively participate in group or pair activities</p> <p>SEN students are involved and responsive during</p>

individual work.

2.	Understanding the Instructions	<p>The teacher provides clear and simple instructions to SEN students</p> <p>SEN students show understanding of instructions (e.g., by following steps or asking questions)</p> <p>The teacher checks the SEN students to ensure that they understand the given task.</p>
3.	Interaction with Teacher	<p>Teachers often interact with SEN students to monitor their progress</p> <p>The teacher provides positive feedback and encourages SEN students.</p> <p>The teacher adjusts the interaction style (tone, speed) when communicating with SEN students.</p>
4.	Interaction with Peers	<p>SEN students collaborate actively with peers in group activities.</p> <p>Peers support, involve, and show kindness to SEN students during classroom activities.</p>
5.	Adaptation of Teaching Materials	<p>The teacher provides modified materials (e.g., visuals or simplified texts) for SEN students.</p> <p>SEN students are given access to alternative resources if needed (e.g. audio materials, zoomed text)</p>
6	The Use of Shadow Teachers	<p>Shadow teacher provides direct support to SEN students during lessons.</p> <p>Shadow teacher helps SEN students stay on task and engaged.</p> <p>The teacher or shadow teacher offers emotional support when SEN students appear stressed or confused</p>

7.	Emotional and Behavioral Support	<p>The teacher or shadow teacher offers emotional support when SEN students appear stressed or confused</p> <p>SEN students receive behavioral support if needed (e.g., reminders to focus, calming strategies)</p>
8.	Feedback and Appreciation	<p>Teachers provide specific feedback to help SEN students understand areas for improvement</p> <p>The teacher gives appreciation to the SEN student after completing the task or doing the activity.</p>
9.	Classroom Environment	<p>The classroom setting is inclusive and welcoming for SEN students.</p> <p>SEN students are seated in areas where they can easily see and hear the teacher.</p> <p>There are signs of exclusion or discrimination towards SEN students.</p>

**Table 2. Blueprint Interview with the English Teacher**

No.	Aspects	Indicators
1.	Student Demographics and Information	<p>Number of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN)</p> <p>Types of special needs represented in the school populations</p> <p>Process of identifying and categorizing SEN students</p>
2.	Institutional Support and Resources	<p>Availability of specialized facilities</p> <p>Resource allocation for SEN students</p> <p>Presence of support personnel (e.g., shadow teachers)</p>

Infrastructural adaptations	
3. Classroom Management	<p>Techniques for maintaining inclusive environment</p> <p>Strategies for student engagement and to promote active student involvement</p> <p>Methods to support diverse learning needs and ensure inclusive classroom participation</p> <p>Differentiated instructional strategies</p> <p>Strategies to support students with different learning capabilities</p>
4. Subject-Specific Adaptations (English Class Focus)	<p>Language learning modifications</p> <p>Specialized teaching techniques for SEN students</p> <p>Strategies to encourage participation</p>
5. Challenges and Problem-Solving	<p>Identified difficulties and specific challenges in English language teaching in inclusive classroom</p> <p>Adaptive strategies and intervention approaches</p> <p>Mechanisms for addressing learning barriers</p>

## Data Analysis

Miles & Huberman (1994): data reduction, data display, and conclusion. In data reduction, the researchers arranged the field notes from observations and completely transcribed the interview recordings. After that, the field notes and transcripts were organized to identify significant patterns and concepts that were relevant to the study topics. The interview was conducted in Bahasa Indonesia and the interview transcript was translated into English. In the data display, the coded information was organized thematically, with direct quotes from interviews and descriptive quotes from observation notes used to illustrate key findings. The data from the interview were coded as T (as teacher). And finally, the conclusions were drawn by identifying repeated

patterns and themes, while noting differences or unique cases. The themes were related to the research questions. To ensure reliability, member checking was conducted by sharing the initial findings with the participants for feedback and verification. Additionally, triangulation of data from multiple sources (interviews, observations, and field notes) was used to enhance the validity of the findings.

## **Results and Discussions**

### **The School's Efforts to Support SEN Students**

In the school, students with special needs were treated well. There were students with low vision and slow learners who were helped by the teacher in the classroom. For students with low vision, the teacher provides help by reading the text for them so that the student can process and understand the material better by listening. As the teacher claimed:

*“We helped the student by reading the text for him so he could listen to the teacher and continue the learning process.” T1*

This is in line with the result of previous research conducted by Damyanov (2024) that found tools such as adaptive keyboards, screen readers, and speech-to-text software empower students to access educational content in ways that align with their capabilities. This not only promotes independence but also boosts self-confidence in their learning journeys. Even though the ways are quite different, the research has similar findings. Multimodality implementation for inclusive classrooms brought a positive impact on the learning process. Assistive technology such as screen readers helps students with visual impairments to actively participate in the classroom due to the teacher does not need to spend valuable time with only one student, the learning process becomes more effective and the students with special needs has his/her own learning pace through using the assistive technology. This way not only accommodates visual impairments but also creates an inclusive classroom environment where all students can actively participate in the learning process.

For slow learner students, the school implemented differentiated learning by providing different texts and tasks. These texts and worksheets designed for each meeting are simplified to suit his ability. This aligns with classroom observations that students were given simplified texts and questions different from their peers. The text is more simple and the number of questions is less.

*“For slow learners, we simplify, the difficulty level of the questions will be lowered and the number of questions will be reduced. That's what has been done in English class.” T1*

These results are in line with previous research conducted by Putri & Maharsi (2024) who found that the teacher taught regular students with complete materials, while for SEN students the teacher provided the same materials but with different activities and different worksheets based on the students' conditions and abilities. Thus, the school supports SEN students to get the same education as their peers without burdening students.

In addition, this is also aligned with Muksalmina, M. et al. (2024) which implemented customizing lessons such as modifying the content, processes, and products based on the students' interests and abilities, the study found that the implementation of DI models showed potential in improving the learning experiences and outcomes for special needs children. Teachers reported the model increased students with special need engagement and motivation when tailored instructional approaches are used.

The implementation of special teams to create exam questions also highlights the school's dedication to inclusivity. When conducting formative and summative assessments, some teams created special exam questions for both low-vision and slow-learner students. As the teacher shared:

*“At the end of the semester or when there was a test, there would be special teams that created the special exam questions for students with special needs and there were teams that review the special questions” T1*

This collaboration ensures that assessments are fair which allows SEN students to effectively show their knowledge. In addition, there is a teacher who has expertise in special needs education that helps other teachers in designing lesson plans when they have SEN students in their class. This is similar to the findings from Efendi et al. (2022), where teachers believe that the learning requirements of students with special needs can be met through a team teaching approach. Collaboration between inclusive classroom teachers can improve the educational experience and learning outcomes of students with special education needs.

### **English Learning Implementation in Inclusive Classroom**

An inclusive classroom has a specialized lesson plan to provide better learning for students with special needs. Some steps are exclusively designed for students with special needs. During the pre-activity, The teacher greeted, checked attendance, gave triggered questions, and invited students to sing together with a song related to the learning topic which is recount text. After that, in the activity, the students are asked by the teacher to look at the narrative story “An Elephant and His Friends” in the coursebook pages 109-110. For inclusive students, the teacher gives a special text “The Friendly Pine Tree”. Upon completion, students work in groups to answer the questions on certain pages of the book, while the teacher guides inclusive students to do the special questions that are designed for them. Students write the answers on paper and then put it on the whiteboard, and together, the teacher and students discuss the correct answers. Then students are asked to give scores to the answers of other groups that have been put on the board. When the discussion was done, the students with special needs presented the results of their work in front of the class guided by the teacher. Finally, in the post-activity, the teacher invited students to sing the narrative text song as done at the beginning of the activity and the teacher ended the lesson. As for the teaching method, the teacher used differentiated learning strategies, the teachers often used differentiated learning strategies to accommodate the needs of students with SEN. As the teacher claimed that:

*“We have a differentiated learning approach program, so we serve children uniquely.” T1*

Marlina et al. (2019) state that differentiated learning can meet the diverse needs of students in inclusive schools. Teachers must modify their teaching in content (what is learned), process (how it is taught), and product (how learning is evaluated). This approach not only meets the learning needs of students with special needs but also promotes the development of their social skills. This is in line with the practice observed at the school, where teachers adapted materials and tasks to suit the abilities of SEN students.

Examples of differentiated learning implementations are giving extra attention, different worksheets to the SEN student, and giving special opportunities to present their assignment in front of the class. Furthermore, according to the teacher, the ideal class size for effective differentiation is around 20 students, but in reality, classes often have 30 to 40 students which makes it difficult to provide individual attention, especially for SEN as the teacher claimed:

*“That's why if there are too many students, the teacher is getting confused. The most ideal is 20 students” T1.*

In the learning process, it is recommended that the teacher not say if the student is special. In the class, the teacher was told directly to the students about the special or extra treatment for the SEN student in the inclusive classroom. This is supported by the data from the interview as the teacher stated:

*“Don't say that the questions this student (SEN student) is different from you (mainstream students), don't show the difference.” T1*

Classroom management when there is a student with special needs is necessary, to provide a better learning environment for the student with special needs. Observations show that SEN students sit in the front row close to the teacher's desk and the blackboard. The teacher seated the student with

special needs near the teacher's desk to ensure that the student with special needs could be monitored by the teacher and the teacher could assist the student more easily on the learning process as shown in Figure 1 below.

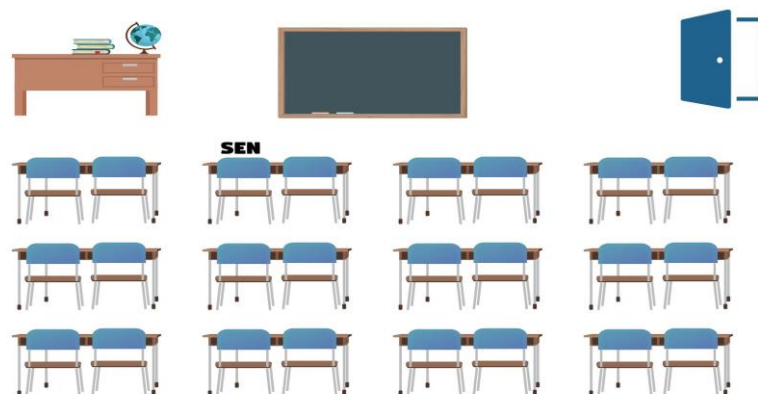


Figure 1. Seating Arrangement for SEN Student

This aligns with the results of Ngware et al. (2013) who found that sitting at the front has a positive influence on comprehension and results in learning. Students who sit at the front are more likely to interact with the teacher. In addition, teachers have greater control over students sitting in the front row which makes it possible that they can get more benefit from their learning than students sitting at the back (Sholihah et al., 2020).

### **The Challenges and Solutions of Teaching in Inclusive Classrooms**

Firstly, the implementation of inclusive classrooms in reality still has challenges that need to be addressed. One of the challenges is that teachers need to pay more attention to students with special needs. In class practice, SEN students get more attention than other students. This was seen during classroom observations, where the teacher prioritized guiding SEN students after explaining the material which limited her ability to control other students working in groups. This made the classroom noisy and the mainstream students were not focused on the work that had been assigned to them. This finding differs from previous research conducted by Putri & Maharsi (2024) that the teacher can manage the class so that learning occurs well. This

happens because there is a shadow teacher who helps and guides SEN students to understand the material and complete assignments. So the teacher is not overwhelmed and does not have difficulty dividing her attention to all students.

Secondly, the teacher also needs more time and effort to organize teaching strategies and prepare worksheets that match students' abilities because students with special needs have specialized or different materials.

*“We have to prepare something separate. Obviously, it takes time and energy. We have to do this and that, so we have to pay more attention.” T1*

The worksheets and materials should be different for students with special needs. It is prepared by the teacher for each lesson with simple activities, fewer questions, and simpler texts/paragraphs adapted to the ability of the SEN students.

Thirdly, the teacher needs to prepare different worksheets and material for the students with special needs, the teacher prepares worksheets for each lesson that are simple activities with fewer questions and simpler texts/paragraphs, and of course, also adapted to the abilities of SEN students. Teachers have to design worksheets with simpler text and fewer questions adapted to the student's abilities. In addition, there were also instances of discrimination against SEN students, such as giving “special” labels in front of the class. This practice can trigger negative reactions from their peers who are jealous of the easier assignments given to SEN students.

Fourth, some parents feel offended if the teacher says that their son/daughter cannot follow the learning process. Fifth, the teacher could not monitor the activity of the student with special needs at home, the teacher needed to know the SEN students' activity at home to ensure the students were not learning only at school with the teacher.

Finally, the discrimination in the classroom needs to be addressed because the students are treated specially which makes the other mainstream students jealous. At the beginning of the lesson, T2 said, “Your friend is different, your friend is special...”. This causes almost all students to feel jealous of the attention that SEN students get, and there is one noisy student

who provokes the anger of students with special needs by disturbing SEN students during the lesson. The teacher who noticed the behavior immediately reprimanded the SEN student not to bother him.

There are several solutions to address the challenges. Firstly, the teacher needs to avoid telling the parents at first, when SEN students face difficulties in following lessons, teachers usually avoid telling parents immediately to keep their feelings. Instead, they first engage in a discussion with MGMPs (*Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran Sekolah*) and involve the counseling teacher. This is in line with Surender (2023) view that collaborative efforts among teachers play an important role in this process as by working together to create effective lesson plans, teachers can better meet the needs of diverse students and share valuable resources and practices. This will ultimately benefit the entire education system. Secondly, to monitor the students' activity at home, the teacher keeps in touch with the parents of SEN students regularly. By keeping in touch, teachers can better understand the student's condition and get information about their needs. Maintaining regular communication with parents also allows teachers to better understand and meet the unique needs of SEN students.

Thirdly, the school created a special team to design special exams and special assessments for SEN students. The school provides a special team that includes some teachers who are experts in making assessments and reviewing assessments for inclusive education; setting up a dedicated team to design fair assessments which can also ensure that SEN students can demonstrate their knowledge effectively without excessive pressure. Lastly, the teacher needs to avoid telling other students that a SEN student is special. It is important to keep the student's mental stability. In an interview with a teacher who assesses other teachers during class, she suggested that teachers should avoid emphasizing that SEN students are "special" in the eyes of their peers. The teacher is not allowed to say loudly that the student is special in front of the class. Furthermore, by avoiding that the students are special, the other students would also not mock the SEN students.

From these findings, several implications can be drawn. First, schools should make investments in teacher training programs that equip educators with the skills to balance individualized support with maintaining a supportive

classroom environment. Secondly, collaboration between teachers, parents, and special education experts is crucial to developing effective strategies for inclusive education. Finally, overcoming negative stereotypes and fostering mutual respect among students is also necessary to improve the overall classroom environment and ensure that all students can grow well in an inclusive environment.

## **Conclusion**

Inclusive education (IE) plays a crucial role in ensuring that all students, including those with special educational needs (SEN), have equal access to quality education. At the studied school, the implementation of IE in classroom learning has made significant progress, although some challenges remain. The school has actively supported SEN students by incorporating various learning strategies, such as the use of adapted learning tools and adjustments in teaching methodologies.

In this current study, teachers at the school are highly attentive to inclusive learning, particularly for SEN students. They employ strategies like reading texts aloud for students with low vision and simplifying tasks for those who learn at a slower pace. In English lessons, inclusive teaching involves specially designed lesson plans that cater to the needs of SEN students. Also, a differentiated teaching approach is applied, where materials and methods are tailored to suit each SEN student's abilities and requirements.

Despite these positive developments, challenges persist, particularly in terms of infrastructure and professional training for teachers in managing inclusive classrooms. This study highlights the need for enhanced teacher training and improved resource development to strengthen inclusive education in Indonesia. Overall, the findings provide valuable insights into best practices in inclusive education at the school and emphasize the importance of collaboration among teachers, schools, and stakeholders to enhance educational quality for all students.

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