

Reading Skills and Classroom Incentives as Predictors of Optimum Literacy in Elementary Education

Dr. Rhine Yvonne O. Camus¹, Dr. Honey Jane O. Sarsaba², Dr. Renante P. Camus³, Dr. Feleciano Cajote Abe⁴

¹Commonwealth Central School with SPED Classes

²Bemposa Elementary School

^{3,4}Southern Mindanao Colleges

* Corresponding Author

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ABSTRACT

Literacy remains a fundamental component of quality education and serves as a critical foundation for learners' academic success and lifelong learning. This study examined the extent to which reading skills and classroom incentives contribute to achieving optimum literacy in elementary education. Specifically, the study assessed the implementation of essential reading skills in terms of phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle, reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, as well as classroom incentives focusing on compliments, class goals, use of holidays, and reward systems. A descriptive-comparative research design was employed involving school administrators and teachers from public elementary schools in the Division of Zamboanga del Sur, Philippines. Data were gathered using a researcher-developed questionnaire and analyzed through weighted mean, t-test, z-test, and Pearson correlation. Findings revealed that both essential reading skills and classroom incentives were highly implemented across participating schools. Results further indicated no significant differences between the perceptions of school administrators and teachers regarding the implementation of reading skills and classroom incentives. Moreover, a significant positive relationship was found between reading skills and classroom incentives, suggesting that motivational classroom practices enhance literacy-related instructional outcomes. The study highlights the importance of integrating evidence-based reading instruction with supportive classroom incentive systems to strengthen learner engagement and literacy development. These findings support Sustainable Development Goal 4 by promoting inclusive, equitable, and quality education through effective literacy interventions and learner-centered educational practices.

Keywords: reading skills, classroom incentives, literacy development, elementary education, learner motivation.

INTRODUCTION

Literacy is widely recognized as a foundational component of quality education and a critical determinant of learners' academic success, cognitive development, and lifelong learning opportunities. Reading proficiency enables learners to access knowledge, interpret information, communicate effectively, and actively participate in educational and social environments. However, recent international and national assessments continue to reveal persistent literacy challenges among elementary learners, particularly in developing countries where disparities in educational resources, instructional practices, and learner motivation remain evident. The learning disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic further intensified concerns regarding reading achievement, resulting in substantial learning losses among young learners. In response, educators have increasingly emphasized evidence-based reading instruction and learner-centered approaches that strengthen foundational reading competencies while sustaining learners' motivation and engagement. Essential reading skills such as phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle, reading fluency, vocabulary development, and comprehension have

consistently been identified as critical predictors of literacy achievement and academic performance (Castles et al., 2021; Duke & Cartwright, 2021; Kim et al., 2023; UNESCO, 2024). Moreover, the promotion of literacy directly supports Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which advocates inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all by ensuring that learners acquire foundational literacy and numeracy skills necessary for lifelong learning and sustainable development.

Alongside effective reading instruction, classroom incentives have emerged as important motivational mechanisms that encourage learner participation, persistence, and engagement in academic tasks. Positive reinforcement strategies, goal-oriented learning environments, recognition systems, and supportive classroom climates have been shown to enhance learners' motivation and contribute to improved educational outcomes (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Howard et al., 2021; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2023). Recent local studies likewise highlight the importance of motivational and psychosocial support systems in promoting positive learning and developmental outcomes among individuals facing educational and social challenges. Alipoyo (2026) emphasized that supportive environments and positive reinforcement mechanisms contribute significantly to improving psychosocial well-being and quality of life, while Aranjuez and Molejon (2026) demonstrated that behavioral engagement and motivational influences play a critical role in shaping individual decision-making and outcomes. While numerous studies have independently examined reading instruction and learner motivation, limited empirical research has explored the combined influence of reading skills and classroom incentives on literacy development, particularly within elementary education settings in the Philippines. Existing studies often focus on either instructional competencies or motivational practices without examining how these factors collectively contribute to optimum literacy outcomes. Furthermore, there remains a scarcity of evidence from local educational contexts that investigates the perspectives of both school administrators and teachers regarding the implementation of reading skills and classroom incentives. Addressing this gap is important because literacy development is influenced not only by instructional quality but also by the motivational environment in which learning occurs. Hence, this study examined reading skills and classroom incentives as predictors of optimum literacy in elementary education, providing empirical evidence that may inform literacy interventions, instructional leadership, and educational policies aimed at improving learner outcomes.

Objectives of the Study

This study examined reading skills and classroom incentives as predictors of optimum literacy in elementary education. Specifically, it sought to:

- Determine the extent of implementation of reading skills in terms of phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle, reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.
- Determine the extent of implementation of classroom incentives in terms of focus on compliments, focus on class goals, use of holidays, and reward ideas.
- Compare the perceptions of school administrators and teachers regarding the implementation of reading skills and classroom incentives.
- Determine whether significant differences exist between the perceptions of school administrators and teachers regarding the implementation of reading skills and classroom incentives.
- Examine the relationship between reading skills and classroom incentives as predictors of optimum literacy.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive-comparative and correlational research design to examine reading skills and classroom incentives as predictors of optimum literacy in elementary education. The study was conducted in public elementary schools within the Division of Zamboanga del Sur, Philippines. The respondents consisted of 379 school administrators and 1,000 teachers selected through simple random sampling from the identified school districts in the division. Data were gathered using a researcher-developed questionnaire anchored on the dimensions of reading skills, namely phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle, reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, as well as classroom incentives, including focus on compliments, focus on class goals, use of holidays, and reward ideas. Before data collection, the instrument underwent content validation by experts in

educational management and literacy education to ensure its relevance, clarity, and appropriateness. Permission to conduct the study was secured from the concerned educational authorities, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. Ethical principles of voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity, and data privacy were strictly observed throughout the conduct of the study. While the study examined the perceptions of school administrators and teachers regarding reading skills and classroom incentives, it did not directly assess learners' literacy achievement through standardized reading assessments. Consequently, the findings primarily reflect the implementation of literacy-related instructional and motivational practices rather than direct measures of learner literacy outcomes.

Descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were utilized to analyze the data. Weighted mean and ranking were employed to determine the extent of implementation of reading skills and classroom incentives. Independent samples t-test and z-test were used to determine significant differences between the perceptions of school administrators and teachers regarding the identified variables. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (Pearson r) was utilized to examine the relationship between reading skills and classroom incentives. All statistical tests were analyzed at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings served as the basis for drawing implications on how reading skills and classroom incentives contribute to achieving optimum literacy and sustaining learner engagement in elementary education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Extent of Implementation of Reading Skills in Elementary Education

Reading Skills	Mean	Interpretation	Rank
Phonemic Awareness	5.47	Always Applied	1
Alphabetic Principle	5.45	Always Applied	2
Vocabulary	5.44	Always Applied	3
Reading Fluency	5.40	Always Applied	4
Comprehension	5.39	Always Applied	5
Overall Mean	5.43	Always Applied	

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that reading skills were consistently and extensively implemented by elementary school teachers, as reflected in the overall mean of 5.43, interpreted as “Always Applied.” Among the five dimensions, phonemic awareness obtained the highest rating, followed by alphabetic principle and vocabulary, while comprehension received the lowest, although still within the “Always Applied” category. The prominence of phonemic awareness and alphabetic principle suggests that teachers place substantial emphasis on foundational literacy competencies that support decoding, word recognition, and early reading development. These findings are consistent with recent evidence indicating that explicit instruction in phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, and fluency remains essential for improving reading achievement and literacy outcomes among elementary learners. Studies have shown that strong foundational reading skills contribute significantly to reading comprehension, academic performance, and long-term educational success (Ehri, 2020; Foorman et al., 2020; Wanzek et al., 2023; Vaughn et al., 2024; Petscher et al., 2025). The consistently high ratings across all dimensions suggest that teachers recognize the importance of comprehensive literacy instruction in fostering learners’ reading proficiency and educational development.

The findings imply that sustained implementation of foundational reading skills can significantly contribute to achieving optimum literacy among elementary learners. The high ratings across all dimensions demonstrate teachers’ commitment to strengthening learners’ decoding, fluency, vocabulary acquisition, and comprehension abilities, which are critical components of literacy development. Schools may further enhance literacy outcomes by strengthening professional development initiatives focused on evidence-based reading instruction, differentiated literacy interventions, and reading assessment practices. Such efforts can support learners in developing higher levels of reading proficiency, improve academic achievement across learning areas, and

contribute to the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) by ensuring inclusive and effective literacy learning opportunities for all learners.

Table 2. Extent of Classroom Incentives Used to Spark Learners’ Interest and Understanding

Classroom Incentives	Mean	Interpretation	Rank
Reward Ideas	5.52	Always Applied	1
Focus on Compliments	5.49	Always Applied	2
Focus on Class Goals	5.46	Always Applied	3
Use of Holidays	5.41	Always Applied	4
Overall Mean	5.47	Always Applied	

The findings reveal that classroom incentives designed to spark learners’ interest and understanding were consistently implemented by teachers, as reflected in the overall mean of 5.47, interpreted as “Always Applied.” Among the dimensions, reward ideas ranked first, followed by focus on compliments, focus on class goals, and use of holidays. The prominence of reward-based strategies suggests that teachers recognize the motivational value of positive reinforcement in encouraging active participation, persistence, and engagement in learning activities. Similarly, the high ratings for compliments and goal-oriented incentives indicate that teachers frequently employ supportive and affirming classroom practices that foster learner confidence and achievement. Contemporary educational research emphasizes that positive reinforcement, recognition, and goal-setting strategies significantly enhance student motivation, engagement, self-efficacy, and academic performance. When learners perceive their efforts to be acknowledged and rewarded, they are more likely to develop intrinsic motivation and maintain sustained participation in classroom activities (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Wentzel & Miele, 2022; Reeve, 2023; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2024; OECD, 2025). The results therefore suggest that classroom incentive systems remain important pedagogical tools for cultivating positive learning experiences and strengthening learner commitment to educational tasks.

The findings imply that effective classroom incentive systems can serve as valuable mechanisms for sustaining learners’ interest, engagement, and academic motivation. Teachers’ consistent use of rewards, compliments, and goal-oriented reinforcement reflects a learner-centered approach that promotes positive classroom climates and encourages active participation. Schools may strengthen these practices by providing professional development opportunities on motivational teaching strategies, positive behavior support, and learner engagement techniques. Furthermore, educators may consider balancing extrinsic incentives with approaches that nurture intrinsic motivation, self-regulation, and lifelong learning habits. Such initiatives can contribute to improved learner outcomes, greater classroom participation, and the achievement of inclusive and quality education consistent with Sustainable Development Goal 4.

Table 3. Comparability of the Responses of School Administrators and Teachers on Reading Skills and Classroom Incentives

Variable	School Administrators	Teachers	Overall Mean	Interpretation
Reading Skills	5.49	5.40	5.45	Always Applied
Classroom Incentives	5.51	5.43	5.47	Always Applied
Grand Mean	5.50	5.42	5.46	Always Applied

The findings indicate a high degree of comparability between the responses of school administrators and teachers regarding the implementation of reading skills and classroom incentives. Both groups consistently rated the variables as “Always Applied,” suggesting a shared understanding and common perception of literacy instruction and motivational practices within elementary schools. The minimal differences in mean scores demonstrate alignment between instructional leadership and classroom implementation, indicating that literacy-related initiatives and learner engagement strategies are effectively communicated and practiced across the school system. Such consistency reflects a collaborative educational environment where administrators and teachers work toward common literacy goals. Recent studies emphasize that shared educational visions, collaborative leadership, and collective responsibility among school stakeholders contribute significantly to

improved instructional quality and learner achievement. Schools characterized by strong professional collaboration often demonstrate greater consistency in instructional practices and more successful implementation of literacy programs (Leithwood et al., 2021; Hargreaves & O’Connor, 2022; Fullan et al., 2023; Hallinger, 2024; Harris & Jones, 2025). The comparable responses observed in this study therefore suggest the presence of a supportive professional culture that reinforces literacy development and learner engagement.

The findings imply that the alignment between school administrators and teachers can strengthen the implementation of literacy programs and classroom motivational strategies. When educational leaders and teachers share common perspectives regarding instructional priorities, schools are more likely to achieve coherence in program implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. This consistency may facilitate the successful delivery of reading interventions, improve communication among stakeholders, and enhance learner outcomes. Educational institutions may further strengthen this collaborative culture through professional learning communities, instructional coaching, and shared decision-making processes that promote collective ownership of literacy improvement initiatives. Such collaborative efforts can contribute to sustainable literacy development and continuous school improvement.

Table 4. Test of Significant Difference Between the Responses of School Administrators and Teachers on Reading Skills and Classroom Incentives

Variable	Computed Value	Tabular Value	Decision	Interpretation
Reading Skills	Computed t-value < Tabular Value	0.05 Level of Significance	Accept Ho	Not Significant
Classroom Incentives	Computed z-value < Tabular Value	0.05 Level of Significance	Accept Ho	Not Significant

The results revealed no significant differences between the responses of school administrators and teachers regarding the implementation of reading skills and classroom incentives. The null hypothesis was accepted because the computed test values were lower than the critical values at the 0.05 level of significance, indicating that both groups shared similar perceptions of the literacy practices and motivational strategies employed in elementary schools. This finding suggests that reading instruction and classroom incentive systems are consistently implemented across schools regardless of the respondents’ professional roles. The absence of significant differences may reflect effective communication, shared instructional expectations, and alignment between school leadership and classroom practice. Recent educational studies indicate that when school leaders and teachers maintain common instructional priorities and collaboratively support literacy initiatives, consistency in educational practices and improved learning outcomes are more likely to occur (Robinson et al., 2021; Spillane et al., 2022; Datnow, 2023; Day & Sammons, 2024; UNESCO, 2025). The similarity in perceptions observed in this study demonstrates a unified commitment among educational stakeholders toward promoting literacy development and learner engagement.

The findings imply that literacy programs and classroom motivational strategies are being implemented in a coordinated manner across elementary schools. The consistency between the perspectives of school administrators and teachers reflects organizational coherence, which is essential for sustaining effective literacy interventions and fostering positive learning environments. Educational leaders may capitalize on this alignment by strengthening collaborative planning, instructional supervision, and continuous professional development initiatives focused on literacy instruction. Maintaining a shared commitment to reading development and learner motivation can help ensure the successful implementation of school-wide literacy programs and support long-term improvements in learner achievement. Furthermore, the absence of perceptual differences suggests that future literacy initiatives may be implemented more effectively because both administrators and teachers possess a common understanding of educational goals and instructional practices.

Table 5. Relationship Between Reading Skills and Classroom Incentives as Predictors of Optimum Literacy

Variables	r-value	Interpretation	Decision
Reading Skills and Classroom Incentives	Significant Positive Correlation	Marked Relationship	Reject Ho

The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between reading skills and classroom incentives, suggesting that effective literacy instruction and motivational classroom practices work synergistically in promoting optimum literacy among elementary learners. This relationship indicates that teachers who consistently implement foundational reading skills such as phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension also tend to employ motivational strategies that encourage learner participation and engagement. The result supports the view that literacy development extends beyond the acquisition of reading competencies and is influenced by the learning environment in which instruction occurs. When learners experience encouragement, recognition, and meaningful incentives, they are more likely to participate actively in reading activities, persist through learning challenges, and develop positive attitudes toward literacy. Recent studies have demonstrated that learner motivation, classroom engagement, and supportive instructional environments significantly influence reading achievement and literacy outcomes. Moreover, the integration of cognitive and motivational dimensions of learning has been found to produce stronger educational outcomes than focusing on instructional factors alone (Guthrie et al., 2021; Wigfield et al., 2022; Toste et al., 2023; Klauda & Guthrie, 2024; Cambria & Guthrie, 2025). The findings therefore affirm that literacy instruction becomes more effective when accompanied by classroom practices that foster motivation, engagement, and learner confidence.

The significant relationship between reading skills and classroom incentives highlights the need for a holistic approach to literacy instruction that combines evidence-based reading practices with motivational support mechanisms. Schools and teachers may strengthen literacy programs by integrating reading interventions with positive reinforcement strategies, learner recognition systems, goal-setting activities, and engaging classroom experiences. Such an approach can help sustain learners' interest in reading, improve comprehension and language development, and foster positive learning behaviors. Educational leaders may likewise support teachers through professional development programs that emphasize both literacy pedagogy and motivational teaching strategies. By recognizing the interconnectedness of instructional quality and learner motivation, schools can create learning environments that maximize literacy achievement and contribute to the attainment of quality, equitable, and inclusive education consistent with Sustainable Development Goal 4.

Although a significant positive relationship was found between reading skills and classroom incentives, the findings should be interpreted with caution. The relationship identified in this study reflects associations based on the perceptions of educational practitioners rather than direct measures of learners' literacy performance. Consequently, while the results suggest that literacy instruction and motivational practices are interconnected, they do not establish that classroom incentives directly cause improvements in literacy achievement. Nevertheless, the findings provide important preliminary evidence that supportive instructional environments may complement effective reading instruction in promoting literacy development among elementary learners.

Limitations of the Study

This study was subject to several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the study was conducted exclusively among school administrators and teachers in selected public elementary schools within the Division of Zamboanga del Sur, Philippines. Consequently, the findings may not be fully generalizable to private schools, secondary schools, or educational institutions located in other geographic regions.

Second, the study relied primarily on the self-reported perceptions of school administrators and teachers regarding the implementation of reading skills and classroom incentives. Although these perspectives provide valuable insights into instructional and motivational practices, they may be influenced by personal biases, subjective interpretations, and social desirability tendencies. More importantly, the study did not incorporate direct measures of learners' literacy achievement, such as standardized reading assessments, reading proficiency tests, or classroom-based literacy performance indicators. As a result, the findings cannot conclusively determine the extent to which the reported practices directly translate into actual literacy outcomes among learners.

Third, the study employed a descriptive-comparative and correlational research design. While this approach was appropriate for examining patterns, differences, and relationships among variables, it does not permit causal inferences. Therefore, the significant relationship observed between reading skills and classroom incentives

should not be interpreted as evidence that classroom incentives directly cause improvements in literacy achievement.

Finally, the study focused only on selected dimensions of reading skills and classroom incentives. Other variables that may influence literacy development, including parental involvement, socioeconomic status, school resources, teacher quality, learner self-efficacy, digital literacy, and home learning environments, were beyond the scope of the investigation. Future studies may address these limitations through the use of direct literacy assessments, longitudinal designs, experimental interventions, and mixed-methods approaches to provide more comprehensive evidence regarding the factors that contribute to optimum literacy among elementary learners.

CONCLUSION

This study examined reading skills and classroom incentives as predictors of optimum literacy in elementary education. The findings revealed that the essential reading skills of phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle, reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension were consistently implemented and perceived as always applied by teachers. Likewise, classroom incentives, particularly reward ideas, compliments, class goals, and the use of holidays, were likewise rated as always applied, indicating the importance of motivational practices in sustaining learners' interest and engagement in classroom activities. These findings demonstrate that both cognitive and motivational dimensions of learning are actively integrated into literacy instruction within elementary schools.

Furthermore, the study established that school administrators and teachers shared comparable perceptions regarding the implementation of reading skills and classroom incentives, with no significant differences observed between the two groups. This consistency reflects a common understanding of literacy goals and instructional practices across schools. More importantly, the significant positive relationship between reading skills and classroom incentives confirms that effective literacy instruction is strengthened when complemented by supportive and motivating classroom environments. The findings suggest that optimum literacy is more likely to be achieved when foundational reading competencies are reinforced through learner-centered motivational strategies. Consequently, the integration of evidence-based reading instruction and meaningful classroom incentives serves as an effective approach for enhancing literacy development, fostering learner engagement, and promoting quality education among elementary learners.

However, because the findings were derived from the perceptions of school administrators and teachers rather than direct assessments of learner literacy performance, the results should be interpreted as indicators of instructional and motivational practices associated with literacy development rather than definitive measures of literacy achievement. Future studies incorporating learner assessment data and more rigorous research designs may provide stronger evidence regarding the effectiveness of classroom incentives in supporting literacy outcomes.

RECOMMENDATION

In light of the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are offered:

- The Department of Education (DepEd) Schools Division Office and Curriculum Implementation Division may strengthen literacy enhancement programs by continuously promoting evidence-based reading instruction focusing on phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle, reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Regular monitoring and evaluation of literacy interventions may further improve reading outcomes among elementary learners.
- School administrators and instructional leaders may provide sustained professional development opportunities, mentoring programs, and instructional coaching to enhance teachers' competencies in implementing effective reading instruction and literacy intervention strategies. Strengthening instructional leadership may contribute to the consistent delivery of quality literacy programs across schools.
- Elementary school teachers may continue integrating diverse and learner-centered reading strategies while utilizing positive classroom incentives such as recognition systems, goal-setting activities,

constructive feedback, and meaningful rewards to sustain learners' motivation, participation, and interest in reading activities.

- School heads, teachers, and parents may strengthen home-school partnerships by encouraging reading-related activities both inside and outside the classroom. Collaborative efforts among stakeholders may help cultivate positive reading habits and reinforce literacy development among learners.
- Local Government Units (LGUs), Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs), and community stakeholders may support literacy initiatives through the provision of reading materials, community-based reading programs, learning resources, and literacy advocacy activities that promote a culture of reading among school-aged children.
- The Department of Education and school administrators may institutionalize learner motivation programs that complement literacy interventions, recognizing that classroom incentives and supportive learning environments play an important role in sustaining learner engagement and improving educational outcomes.
- Future researchers may incorporate direct measures of literacy achievement, including standardized reading assessments, comprehension tests, and reading proficiency evaluations, to validate the relationship between reading skills, classroom incentives, and actual learner outcomes. Such approaches may provide stronger empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of literacy interventions and motivational practices in improving reading achievement.
- Future researchers may conduct similar studies in other educational settings, including secondary schools and diverse geographic locations, to validate the findings of this study. Future investigations may also employ mixed-methods approaches incorporating interviews, focus group discussions, and classroom observations to gain deeper insights into how reading skills and motivational practices collectively influence literacy development.
- Higher education institutions and educational researchers may further explore other factors influencing literacy achievement, such as parental involvement, digital literacy, instructional technology, learner self-efficacy, and socio-emotional learning, to develop more comprehensive literacy development frameworks and interventions.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to established ethical principles governing educational research to ensure the protection, dignity, and rights of all participants. Prior to the conduct of the study, permission was secured from the appropriate educational authorities and school administrators within the Division of Zamboanga del Sur. Participation in the study was strictly voluntary, and respondents were adequately informed regarding the purpose, objectives, procedures, and significance of the research. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before the administration of the research instrument, ensuring that their participation was based on free and informed choice.

The study likewise observed the principles of confidentiality, anonymity, and privacy. No personally identifiable information was collected, recorded, or disclosed in any part of the research process. Responses were treated with utmost confidentiality and were utilized solely for academic and research purposes. Participants were informed of their right to decline participation or withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty or adverse consequences. All collected data were securely stored, protected from unauthorized access, and reported only in aggregated form to prevent the identification of individual respondents or schools.

Furthermore, the study upheld the principles of beneficence, non-maleficence, and respect for persons by ensuring that no physical, psychological, social, or professional harm resulted from participation in the research. The findings were presented honestly, accurately, and objectively, maintaining the integrity of the research process. Consistent with the ethical standards for educational research and the principles outlined in the Belmont Report, the study sought to contribute to the improvement of literacy instruction and learner motivation while safeguarding the welfare and rights of all participants involved.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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