

Navigating the Educational Landscape in Crisis: A Literature Review on the Challenges Encountered by Teachers During the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

This literature review focused on the challenges faced by teachers amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Three published research were considered. In the first research reviewed, the respondents shared similar challenges which were: sacrificing personal undertakings to meet expectations, difficulty in communicating and reaching out to the learners, difficulty in assessing academic performance and in assuring learning, and difficulty in making/crafting modules. In the second research reviewed, the results revealed that the following were the challenges faced by the teachers: lack of resources, difficulty in handling students, difficulties submitting paperwork, and other tasks assigned to the teachers. The last research reviewed revealed that the teachers faced challenges in initiating online class sessions which were themed as the following: knowledge and technological skills, technological access, course design, time, communication self-efficacy, environment, and interest.

Understanding these challenges faced by teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic is crucial for understanding their struggles, ensuring effective continuity of learning, addressing educational inequities, making informed policy decisions, supporting teacher well-being, fostering innovation in teaching methods, and preparing education systems for future crises. It ultimately contributes to a resilient and equitable education system that benefits both educators and learners.

Keywords: COVID-19 Pandemic, teachers, challenges, difficulties, encountered

Introduction

The global pandemic of COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally affected nearly every area of life, including education. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected education drastically as the worldwide closure of learning institutions has caused 1.5 billion learners to lose their chance of undergoing normal education (World Health Organization [WHO], 2020; United Nations, 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic is piloting educational systems to a “new normal”. The crisis is becoming a turning point that directs educational institutions to new modalities of instructional implementation. This challenge calls for extensive preparation for changes in the educational landscape to ensure that the learning of children continues in this new period in human history.

Nowadays, we are all staying in our homes due to the lockdown policy implemented by the government. However, learning should not halt. Different countries worldwide have introduced various

answers during the pandemic to continue the education process - the introduction of distance learning. These are online learning platforms such as Google, TV broadcasts, guidelines, resources, video lectures, and online channels were introduced (UNESCO, 2020). With schools to re-open their doors the following school year, it's vital to plan how schools will be able to pursue their mission of implementing quality education for every student. As school is a public place where the crowd is unavoidable and children are vulnerable, there is a need to strengthen policy in terms of the delivery of instruction - to provide opportunities for online learning platforms. Numerous innovative programs have been introduced.

In the realm of technology, blended learning is dubbed the "new normal: (Norberg et al., 2011) or the "new traditional model" (Ross and Gage, 2006) in educational technology. Though ambiguities surround its definition, blended learning can be simply understood as an instructional approach that integrates the traditional presence of both methods and online digital methods (Graham, 2013). It requires the physical presence of both teacher and student, with some elements of student control over time, setting, track, or pace (Huang et al., 2009). Given these characteristics of blended learning, it offers opportunities for use in education amid the COVID-19 constraints. Blended learning requires an amount of traditional classroom modality. With the constraints in amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, these modalities might just be modified or reduced, if not eliminated, from the options of instructional methods of teaching.

News has shown that there are teachers who are really having difficulties in adjusting and adapting to the new normal. Schools may have opted for printed modular learning but at the same time, there is ICT integration. This literature review presents the results of research conducted that aimed to know the challenges faced by teachers amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Discussion

In this literature review, we considered three published research that tackled the challenges faced by teachers amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

The first one is entitled "Teachers in the New Normal: A Grounded Theory", local research conducted in the Philippines that aimed to determine teachers' lived experiences in the implementation of the learning continuity plan and the challenges they have encountered in delivering quality education in this new normal setup. The Grounded Theory (1978) was utilized to determine teachers' lived experiences in the implementation of a learning continuity plan in the new normal and be able to generate the theory based on the findings. Based on the results of the study the following are the challenges faced by the teachers amidst pandemic:

All participants shared the same challenges:

1. They had to sacrifice personal things to meet expectations.

"Explaining to your students that need to answer every activity without copying the content from the net." (P1)

"Making RVL and checking all the works of students on your own." (P6)

"When there were much overlapping of tasks, like doing the modules and RVLs even late at night, and because of my passion being a teacher and I love my job, I am motivated." (P7)

"Time regarding making RVL and module crafting." (P6)

2. Difficulty in communicating with the learners and reaching out to the learners

"There are some areas wherein I have difficulty in communicating my learners" (P1)

“When I went to our learning centers in a far-flung mountain area, where it was a struggle. I don't have a choice since it is a call of duty and responsibility.” (P7)

3. Difficulty in assessing academic performance and assurance of learning

“The no face to face factor. We cannot assure learning relying only on the module. There are those students that need further explanation and slow readers also.” (P2)

“I had and am still having difficulties in measuring students' learnings in my subject because I observed that they share the same answers.” (P8)

“The distance of the recipients, the parents/guardians limited academic skills and the declining scores/grades of the learners in assessing their answered modules.” (P7)

4. Difficulty in module making/crafting

“Module Making without references. You have to make use of whatever you can find that suits your teaching styles.” (P2)

“Time regarding making RVL and module crafting.” (P6)

The second one is another local research in the Philippines entitled: "The Experiences and Challenges Faced of the Public-School Teachers Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Phenomenological Study in the Philippines" that aimed to describe the lived experiences of public school teachers amidst the pandemic in one of the specific questions sought to know the challenging experiences of public-school teachers amidst the pandemic. This study employed Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) that aims to give definite assessments of personal lived experiences that used an interview guide to facilitate the productive and efficient gathering of responses. Based on the results of the study the following are the challenges faced by the teachers amidst pandemic:

1. Lack of resources

According to the participants, the public school system, such lack of necessary equipment, brought hardship to the school's key indicators, specifically, teachers and students.

Teacher no. 1 said;

“Ang sistema sa pampublikong paaralan ang ilan sa nagiging hamon sa isang guro. Ang kakulangan ng gamit tulad ng libro, upuan, at silid-aralan na nagiging sanhi ng kahirapan sa pag-aaral.” (The public school system is one of the challenges that a teacher faces. Lack of tools such as books, chairs, and classrooms causing learning difficulties.”)

This problem limits them from conducting certain activities.

As stated by Teacher No. 6;

“Sa tingin ko ay sa kakulangan ng kagamitan. Sapagkat may mga bagay kang nais na gawin ngunit hindi mo magawa dahil nga kulang sa gamit pampaaralan.” (“I think it's due to lack of equipment. There are things you want to do but can't because of lack of school supplies.”)

These findings supported the study of Granthorn (2020). According to the latter, the Philippine teachers are mostly and adamantly stressed due to a lack of budget. The study revealed that teachers are

in distress, looking for ways to ensure that their local governments' given account would meet all their students' needs.

2. Difficulty in Handling Students

Aside from the number of students, another problem encountered by the participants was getting the trust of their students and making them realize the importance of education.

Teacher no. 1 said;

“Bahagi na ng pang araw-araw naming gawain ang humarap sa mga mapanghamong ugali ng mga mag-aaral. Kung minsan, may mga mag-aaral na mahirap turuan dahil sa kawalan nila ng interes sa pag-aaral. Ito marahil ay bahagi ng kapaligiran na kanilang nilakihan. Mas nagiging mapanghamon sa amin ang kuhain ang kanilang loob at imulat sila sa kahalagahan ng edukasyon.” (“It is part of our daily routine to deal with the challenging habits of the students. Sometimes, some students find it difficult to teach because of their lack of interest in learning. It is probably part of the environment they grew up in. It makes it more challenging for us to take them in and report them on the importance of education.”)

These findings supported the statement of Wentzel during the episode of All4Ed's podcast. Specifically, Wentzel's statement highlighted the necessity of building a trusting relationship between students and their teachers; through this, it will never be hard to motivate students to engage themselves in things that the teachers would like them to do (All4Ed, 2018). Moreover, in this time of the pandemic, it is getting harder for them to facilitate the output given to their students.

Specifically, Teacher No. 3 said that;

“Ngayon talaga nahihirapan ako sa paghagilap ng mga estudyante kung bakit hindi sila gumagawa o nagpapasa ng module at kung bakit minsan ay hindi tapos.” (“Now I'm really having a hard time getting students to understand why they don't make or pass the module and why sometimes it's not done.”)

Problems were already encountered at school; however, studying during the time of the pandemic was not different; in fact, it was worse according to the participants. According to the American Psychological Association [APA] (2020), the student's inter, and intrapersonal behavior can significantly affect their ability to learn, thus, their academic skills in general. In a classroom environment, it is a good thing that the teachers can manage the students' day-to-day behavior. However, they added that handling the students' behavior at home is not easy, specifically, because many parents and caregivers find behavior management challenges while adjusting to virtual or at-home education.

3. Submission and Workload

It is not just the students but also teachers who encounter difficulties submitting paperwork and other tasks assigned to them.

As stated by Teacher No. 2;

“Kapag nagkasabay-sabay ang napakaraming paperworks at deadlines pero at the same time ay kailangan pa ring magturo.” (“When so many paperworks and deadlines come together but at the same time still have to teach.”)

Moreover, tasks such as the grades of the students also brought difficulties to them, especially in the time of pandemic where communication was limited and challenged.

Teacher no. 8 said that;

"Siguro sa deadline ng submission ng mga grades tapos may mga bata na mababa ang grades. Syempre as an adviser ayaw ko naman na may naiwan kaya as much as possible ginagawan ko ng paraan. Ngayong may pandemya ang hirap nila kontakin through online tapos minsan dalawa lang kami sa google meeting. " ("They're probably going to be in the middle of a school year after the kids are born. As a consultant, I don't want to leave anything behind, so I try to do as much as possible. Now that the pandemic is over, it's hard to get in touch with them online after we've only had two Google meetings. ")

Despite this, Teacher No. 8 cannot complain because adjusting is what the pandemic really is all about. With this, the participant added that;

“Hindi ko naman sila masisisi or mapipilit kasi nga diba lahat tayo nag aadjust kaya sana mabalik na yung dating normal.” ("I can't blame them or force them to change so we can all get back to normal.")

These findings supported the study conducted by Aperribai (2020), which used an online survey to collect quantitative and qualitative data necessary to explore how teachers have been affected by the lockdown. Specifically, it impacts their mental health and their relationships in three main fields: work, family, and social relationships, and identifies the role of physical activity among these three. The results revealed in the study included that the teachers had experienced higher levels of distress due to the workload generated during the lockdown.

The last is international research conducted in Malaysia entitled "Teaching in the Time of Covid-19: The Challenges Faced by Teachers in Initiating Online Class Sessions" which aimed to know the challenges that teachers face in preparing, planning, and designing online lessons. This study used the questionnaire to collect data and applied thematic analysis of the responses to open-ended questions. The questionnaire was then prepared virtually using Google Form applications and distributed via social media groups that consist of professional Malaysian teachers, which include Facebook, Telegram, and WhatsApp. The respondents of this study were 192 secondary public school teachers around Malaysia. Based on the results of the study the following challenges faced by the teachers amidst the pandemic in initiating online class sessions are knowledge and technological skills, technological access, course design, time, communication self-efficacy, environment, and interest.

1. Knowledge and Technological skills

During the sudden transition into online education, teachers were expected to be able to use online learning platforms immediately (Zhang et al., 2020). However, teachers reported that they lacked the knowledge and skills to convert offline (hardcopy) materials into online (softcopy) materials and share them on online platforms. Having limited experience in online teaching caused a lack of online teaching skills among teachers. Thus, they faced challenges in preparing teaching materials that could cater to students of different levels, creating suitable methods for all students, and preparing synchronous lessons. Teacher 101 highlighted that online teaching requires thorough preparation, "teacher knowledge in using online resources is not enough," she also mentioned that she spent a tremendous amount of time preparing

for her lessons, and "need to take a long time in preparing the materials". Her encounter was similar to Teacher 97, who pointed out that online teaching was challenging because teachers had very limited practical experience in using online platforms to teach before the school closure.

The ability to integrate technology, content, and pedagogy based on knowledge and skills contributes to an effective lesson delivery. Therefore, these knowledge and skills are crucial for teachers in this era. According to Koehler, Mishra, and Cain (2013), Technology Pedagogy Knowledge (TPK) refers to a teacher's expertise in altering the T&L process in correspondence with a particular technology that is newly introduced, whereas Technology Content Knowledge (TCK) is the understanding of specific techniques that complement the teaching of the subject matter. In this regard, Teacher 50 stated, "I need to plan my teaching and learning with simplified and easy follow,". However, challenges arose when teachers were unable to provide learning platforms with appropriate lesson designs and plans, "I am lacking in skills to provide learning resources such as using video with the lesson plan for the teaching and learning process on the online platforms" (Teacher 181). It was a struggle, especially for novice teachers, to switch from T&L sessions in physical classrooms to online T&L. Even though most people own internet-connected devices such as smartphones, it cannot be assumed that they are technology-literate, let alone being able to teach using technology. The data released by the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2020) shows that 97.1% of Internet users in Malaysia acknowledge social interactions as their main Internet activity, 84.7% download images, videos, music, and games online, and 83.5% use the Internet to find information related to goods and services (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020). In summary, this report reveals that the Internet is seldom used for academic purposes.

2. Technological access

Access to technology appears to be the most reported challenge that hinders the smooth flow of online T&L sessions. Limited internet access due to unstable internet connection, unstable internet speed, and insufficient data for those who are using mobile data are among the challenges that arose under this theme. It is of utmost importance to look into this particular issue as online teaching and learning require frequent synchronized and asynchronized communication (Akbulut, Şahin, & Esen, 2020; Awang et al., 2018). An unstable internet connection will result in less effective lesson delivery. On the other hand, unreliable devices or gadgets are another obstacle in online T&L even if the internet connection is stable (Sadeghi, 2019). Quality technology infrastructure should be prioritized as recommended by UNESCO and OECD to ensure education continuation using online learning platforms (UNESCO, 2020; Reimers & Schleicher, 2020). However, this issue has not been resolved satisfactorily since the utilization of VLE-Frog for learning management systems (Ramli & Saleh, 2019; Awang et al., 2018).

Zhang et al., (2020); and Akbulut et al. (2020) reported that access to technology was the most prevalent challenge that arose in their respective study. Zhang et al. (2020) highlighted that online learning systems often become overwhelmed and crash due to large volumes of users. Besides, places with challenging geographical structures, such as mountainous and rural localities, usually have little to no access to technology. In this study, Teacher 34 voiced out that, "slow or sometimes no internet access," was what she faced while preparing for online classes. As asserted by Akbulut et al. (2020) the fact that not everyone is privileged to have access to either the internet or computers makes online education unfair. For instance, Teacher 37 discussed the suitability of using the asynchronous mode of teaching; 'I need to think of the correct method and platform to use so that it won't burden my students and it is easy for them to access the materials. For example, I don't think video conferencing is suitable for Malaysian school

students as not all families afford to provide a mobile phone for their kids. Hence, some need to lend their phones to their kids. So, I need to spend some time doing a brief research on which platform is suitable to be used for that particular lesson.

Zhang et al. (2020) discovered that technology infrastructure was the main challenge in the implementation of 'Suspending Class without Stopping Learning'. Internet availability and stability, as well as internet-connected devices such as laptops and smartphones, are the two most crucial elements in online T&L. Thus, without proper internet and devices, the lesson cannot take place. However, it is no surprise that the best technology infrastructure is unaffordable at a time when people are financially challenged due to restrictions on movement to contain the COVID-19 outbreak (Dhawan, 2020). Many are influenced by salary reductions, and some even lose their jobs (United Nations, 2020). During the crisis, people prioritize spending on the essentials for survival over other needs (Reimers & Schleicher, 2020). Therefore, in such circumstances, the government and private sectors need to sponsor access to technology for suburban teachers, students, and the underprivileged.

3. Course Design

Teacher 146 mentioned that "Delivering content knowledge is the hardest part. Students tend not to read before class. Even when I've told them to read. The lecture on "Teams" meeting was not a good way. Basically, I don't think I know how to prepare a good lesson for synchronized lesson". Apart from that, the school's management has shown support by simplifying the lesson plan for teachers. Teacher 173 reported that 'management request us doing daily lesson plan based on school timetable where only notes needed and flexible time'. Difficulties in designing online T&L were expressed by Teacher 188, "difficulties in planning and designing interesting activities that attract students interest,"; ergo, it is clear that online teaching requires a specialized skill set in terms of how to teach, how and when to use either synchronous, asynchronous or both teaching strategies, preparing and designing a lesson, gathering feedback, and reflecting lessons taught (Martin, Budhrani, Kumar, & Ritzhaupt, 2019; Abdous, 2011). Although the MoE has provided plenty of online learning platforms such as Digital Textbook, EduwebTv, and CikgoTube, insufficiency of adequate materials was still reported as one of the challenges as most of the materials are in hardcopy and placed in schools. Teacher 145 complained that "Some of the materials are in hardcopy. And I could not reach them since they were in my school place while I'm at home,". Moreover, finding materials that are compliant with the school syllabus and appropriate for students' comprehension level is another challenge faced by the teachers. For example, 'looking for suitable learning materials for every level of students is quite a challenge as most are at school,' (Teacher 35), and 'limited teaching resources because most of it is international syllabus', (Teacher 47). Course design involves lesson planning with appropriate objectives, instructional strategies, activities, and assessments (Martin, Budhrani, & Wang, 2019b). In general, a complete online class requires a thorough lesson plan design, teaching materials, and a technology support team (Bao, 2020). To assist teachers in shifting from traditional face-to-face teaching to online teaching, the MoE has collaborated with UNICEF Malaysia to create a Digital Learning Teachers Community (Komuniti Guru Digital Learning - Modul 1 - 5) that consists of five training modules to guide teachers from the basic level of how to start an online teaching platform to the more advanced level of how to establish a positive digital platform (Ministry of Education, 2020d). The effort made to provide teaching support during the crisis is based on what has been suggested by the United Nations, UNESCO, and OECD (United Nations, 2020; UNESCO, 2020; Reimers & Schleicher, 2020). As reviewed by Zhang et al. (2020), knowledge and technological skills supplement

the competencies needed in online teaching; nonetheless, many teachers find it challenging to integrate suitable pedagogies in their online classes. Teaching in a virtual environment is not as easy as it seems as it involves a great deal of preparation such as developing and delivering the content, executing the lesson, tracking and reporting students' progress, and integrating other software into one learning platform (Ramli & Saleh, 2019; Watson & Watson, 2007; Alias & Zainuddin, 2005). The pedagogical practices of teachers, as in how they incorporate technology in their teaching, vary depending on individual preferences, different natures of subjects, as well as unique school settings (Szeto & Cheng, 2017).

4. Time

As teachers who never attempted to use online platforms in their T&L were required to pick up new skills out of a sudden, many of them spent a lot of time groping in the dark. Even teachers with prior experience in using online learning tools for blended learning opined that the preparation of online lessons was time-consuming (Akbulut et al., 2020). For instance, Teacher 4 and Teacher 162 mentioned that they faced time constraints in online T&L. Teacher 44 admitted that she always took 2 to 3 hours worth of extra time to prepare the materials. This issue arose because teachers were not familiar with the chosen online teaching platforms (Zhang et al., 2020; Zhou, Wu, Zhou, & Li, 2020) and the ways to look up materials that suit the national syllabus. Besides, teaching from home during school and nursery closure added parental burden on some teachers as time management was a big challenge for them.

5. Communication self-efficacy

According to Martin et al. (2019a), an ideal online T&L session occurs when the teacher can communicate and complete the online task. In this research, communication self-efficacy involves a teacher's ability to express himself or herself through writing, video/audio, conducting either synchronous or asynchronous lessons, and how a teacher uses the available online applications such as Google Classroom for LMS or social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Telegram for effective communication in online T&L. In this study, Teacher 2 highlighted that she encountered challenges in asking students to do their tasks, whereas, Teacher 10, had issues in, 'gathering all students in one WhatsApp group as a class'.

Before the school closure, teachers and students were able to interact physically and use facial expressions to communicate their emotions. In line with this, Teacher 22, highlighted that 'I can't face-to-face with students and look out their facial expression and behavior, and body movement'. According to Teachers 107 and 103, the online T&L situation rendered it difficult for teachers to know whether students understood the content matter or enjoyed the class, as traditionally, observation is one of the most common methods used by teachers in doing reflections (Tseng & Yeh, 2019).

Besides, teachers had less confidence communicating in the online T&L environment as most of the time, they use online platforms only for social interaction. Teacher 54 attributed her lack of confidence to age, "not confident as I am from the older generation".

6. Environment

During the movement control, teaching was conducted at teachers' respective houses. Concerning it, a teacher's home environment plays a role in determining the success of an online class (Zhang et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2020). As the first country in the world that implement education continuation via online platforms, China discovered that environmental distractions such as house chores and kids were significant

challenges faced by teachers when conducting online classes (Zhang et al., 2020). Teachers who are also parents are more susceptible to their home environment which may influence their focus on online classes (Zhang et al., 2020). As their kids were also at home due to school closure, they had to juggle between house chores such as preparing meals, monitoring their kids' online classes, and cleaning and the preparation of their online classes (Reimers & Schleicher, 2020; Zhang et al., 2020). A similar was reported by Teacher 68, 'My kids are still in primary school. They also need to use the internet and be monitored,' while Teacher 179 confessed that, 'my home environment is not conducive,' and Teacher 183 talked about, 'the needs of kids at home'. In general, the double demands of house chores and online teaching at home posed an influential challenge to online teaching (Kumar & Bervell, 2019; Awang et al., 2018).

7. Interest

A teacher will not be able to fully utilize online classes to ensure education continuation if he does not experience the benefits of online classes (Akbulut et al., 2020). Not only that, but a teacher will also be highly reluctant to conduct online classes if he finds it complicated and not useful (Moses, Wong, Bakar, & Mahmud, 2013). For example, Teacher 51 expressed that he or she is 'not interested in using online teaching and learning applications', thus, this teacher did not conduct any online lessons during the school closure. This issue should be addressed as it will deprive students of their right to receive education and they will be left behind. United Nations (2020) is concerned that sudden school closures might pose a threat to students' learning opportunities. Teachers' lack of interest in conducting online classes will worsen the situation.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the researches reviewed according to the teachers they had to sacrifice personal things to meet expectations to the teachers in the new normal, difficulty in communicating to the learners and reaching out the learners, difficulty in assessing academic performance and assurance of learning, difficulty in module making/crafting, lack of resources (lack of necessary equipment), handling Students (handling the students' behavior at home is not easy as getting the trust of their students and making them realize the importance of education is difficult), submission and workload (both learners and teachers encountered difficulties submitting paperwork and other tasks assigned to them especially in the time of pandemic where communication was limited and challenged), knowledge and technological skills (teachers reported that they lacked knowledge and skills to convert offline (hardcopy) materials into online (softcopy) materials and share them on online platforms), technological access (most reported challenge that hinders the smooth flow of online teaching and learning sessions is limited internet access due to unstable internet connection, unstable internet speed, and insufficient data for those who are using mobile data are among the challenges), course design (difficulties in planning and designing interesting activities that attract students interest), time (teachers who never attempted to use online platforms in their teaching and learning were required to pick up news skills out of a sudden spent a lot of time groping in the dark and the preparation of online lessons was time consuming), communication self-efficacy (teachers had less confidence communicating in the online teaching and learning environment as most of the time), environment (the double demands of house chores and online teaching at home posed an influential challenge to online teaching), and interest (teachers' lack of interest in conducting online classes).

The researchers found out that teachers were having difficulties and lots of challenges in delivering quality education in the new normal and that they opted for the traditional way. In this case, teachers should learn to adapt to the changes, be open to learning the skills required in performing the duties and responsibilities of a teacher in the current situation, and be equipped with coping mechanisms for the challenges they encounter. Understanding their circumstances, accepting the challenges, and exerting effort to solve the challenges such as learning to be digitally literate is necessary. Teachers must be more supportive and dedicated to teaching the students, despite the difficulty in proximity and communication.

Furthermore, the government must provide the needed assistance and funds in education. Providing enough resources for the teachers and students, such as schools with limited internet connection or data, and schools that lack modules, technologies, and gadgets in this new learning system. This assistance or fund will allow teachers and students to have an effective learning system despite the pandemic. This will help form and maintain healthy relationships that promote perseverance, significance, and optimism in the learning environment. This will also motivate the learner to give importance to education. The teachers will also be motivated to do their workloads and to do more if enough resources and assistance are provided.

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