

Language Policies and Teacher Strategies for Promoting Psychological Inclusiveness in the Diverse Classroom in Aba Education Zone

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Received: April 10, 2026

Revised: June 6, 2026

Accepted: July 4, 2026

Abstract

This study examined the influence of language policies on classroom inclusivity and the strategies employed by teachers to promote psychological inclusiveness in linguistically diverse secondary school classrooms in Aba Education Zone, Abia State, Nigeria. A descriptive survey design was adopted. Using stratified random sampling, 200 junior and senior secondary school teachers were selected. Data were collected via a structured four-point Likert-scale questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics (independent samples t-test; one-way ANOVA) at $\alpha = 0.05$. Language policies exerted limited practical influence on psychological inclusiveness (cluster mean = 2.48), revealing a persistent policy-practice gap. Teachers nonetheless employed diverse inclusive strategies including differentiated instruction, code-switching, and culturally responsive pedagogy (cluster mean = 2.79). Key implementation barriers included inadequate training, resource deficits, and weak administrative support (cluster mean = 2.67). No statistically significant differences in inclusive strategy use were found by gender ($t = 0.743$, $p = .458$) or teaching experience ($F = 1.032$, $p = .380$). This study contributes empirical evidence on the disconnect between language policy intent and classroom reality in a linguistically complex Nigerian urban zone, offering actionable insights for policymakers, curriculum designers, and teacher educators.

Keywords Diverse Classroom, Language Policy, Psychological Inclusiveness, Teacher Strategies, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Introduction

Inclusive education has become a central concern in contemporary educational discourse because of its role in ensuring equitable learning opportunities for all learners regardless of linguistic, cultural, or social backgrounds. In increasingly diverse classrooms, psychological inclusiveness, the extent to which learners feel valued, respected, and able to participate meaningfully in classroom activities has emerged as an important indicator of educational quality and student well-being (UNESCO, 2020; Ainscow, 2020). In Nigeria, classroom diversity is particularly evident in multilingual settings where students from different ethnic and linguistic groups learn together, creating both opportunities and challenges for inclusive education.

Language policy is a critical factor influencing learners' sense of belonging and participation. Nigeria's National Policy on Education advocates the use of the mother tongue or language of

the immediate environment in the early years of schooling before a transition to English as the language of instruction (FRN, 2014). However, studies have shown that implementation of this policy remains inconsistent, particularly in linguistically heterogeneous urban areas, resulting in communication barriers and reduced participation among learners from minority language backgrounds (Olaoye & Ojebisi, 2022). Such barriers may negatively affect learners' self-esteem, classroom engagement, and general psychological well-being (Umezina & Nwosu, 2020).

Teachers play a pivotal role in mitigating these challenges through inclusive instructional practices such as differentiated instruction, code-switching, culturally responsive teaching, and learner-centered pedagogies (Gay, 2018; Adeyemi & Alabi, 2023). Nevertheless, evidence indicates that many teachers encounter constraints including inadequate training, limited instructional resources, and institutional pressures that hinder effective implementation of language-inclusive practices (Onyemelukwe & Okafor, 2021). Although previous studies have examined language policy implementation and inclusive education in Nigeria, limited empirical attention has been given to how language policies and teacher strategies jointly influence psychological inclusiveness in linguistically diverse classrooms, particularly within Aba Education Zone of Abia State.

Addressing this gap is important because psychologically inclusive classrooms promote learners' academic engagement, confidence, social integration, and emotional well-being. Consequently, this study investigated the influence of language policies and teacher strategies on psychological inclusiveness in diverse classroom learning in Aba Education Zone. Specifically, the study examined the extent to which language policies influence psychological inclusiveness, identified teacher strategies used to promote inclusiveness, explored challenges associated with implementing language-inclusive practices, examined whether teacher strategies differ by gender, assessed the relationship between teaching experience and the use of inclusive strategies, and identified practices for enhancing psychological inclusiveness in linguistically diverse classrooms.

The study tested the following null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance: (i) language policies have no significant influence on psychological inclusiveness in diverse classrooms; (ii) teacher strategies for promoting psychological inclusiveness do not differ significantly by gender; and (iii) there is no significant relationship between teachers' years of teaching experience and their use of inclusive strategies.

Literature Review

Language Policies and Psychological Inclusiveness

Language policies are fundamental in shaping educational experiences for linguistically diverse learners. Nigeria's National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014) provides a framework promoting mother tongue instruction in early education and English as the primary medium from upper primary onwards. However, scholars consistently highlight significant gaps between policy intent and classroom implementation. Nwachukwu and Joseph (2024) documented that inadequate teacher preparation and a shortage of instructional materials in indigenous languages hinder effective mother tongue instruction in Nigerian classrooms. Consequently, students from minority language backgrounds frequently experience alienation and reduced participation, manifesting in weakened belonging and declining academic motivation (Mokibelo et al. 2024).

Research demonstrates that flexible language policy implementation particularly through code-switching between English and indigenous languages — yields improved learner outcomes. Jegede (2024) found that teachers employing code-switching strategies significantly reduced anxiety among language-minority students and enhanced classroom comprehension and

confidence. Similarly, Adeyeye (2024) noted that policies exclusively promoting English as the medium of instruction contributed to psychological exclusion for children with limited English proficiency, particularly disadvantaging learners from minority linguistic backgrounds. These studies collectively indicate that language policies supporting mother tongue instruction, when properly implemented and adequately resourced, significantly enhance psychological inclusiveness.

Teacher Strategies for Promoting Inclusiveness

Beyond policy frameworks, teacher agency proves decisive in creating psychologically inclusive learning environments. Multiple strategies have been identified as effective in diverse classroom contexts. Code-switching, recognized as a pedagogical bridge between students' home languages and the language of formal instruction, reassures learners and reduces language-related anxiety (Jegade, 2024). Culturally responsive pedagogy, which incorporates local proverbs, idioms, and cultural references into classroom discourse, enhances learners' sense of identity and belonging (Babazade, 2024; Gay, 2018).

Collaborative learning approaches, including group discussions and peer tutoring, foster psychological safety and mutual support, particularly benefiting students with weaker language skills (Kavita & Khritish, 2024). Differentiated instruction the practice of adapting lessons to meet diverse learning needs through simplified explanations, visual aids, and multilingual instructional resources reduces exclusion and supports all learners (Goyibova et al., 2025). Additionally, affective strategies such as demonstrating empathy, actively encouraging participation, and consistently validating diverse student opinions create emotionally supportive classroom environments that protect learner dignity and confidence (Gay, 2018; Adeyemi & Alabi, 2023).

Challenges in Implementing Inclusive Practices

Despite the availability of policy frameworks, teachers encounter substantial challenges in implementing inclusive strategies. Inadequate teacher preparation represents a major barrier: Phiri et al. (2024) reported that many teachers lack training in bilingual or multilingual pedagogy, leaving them unprepared to implement mother tongue-based instruction or code-switching techniques effectively. In contexts such as Aba Education Zone, where multiple indigenous languages and dialects coexist, the challenge of selecting an appropriate instructional medium is particularly complex.

Resource constraints significantly impede inclusive practice. Chukwukere and Ajileye (2024) and Nwachukwu and Joseph (2024) documented critical shortages of textbooks, instructional materials, and assessment tools in indigenous languages. Without adequate resources, teachers often default to English-only instruction, undermining inclusiveness. Institutional attitudes present additional obstacles: Sumartana, Hudiananingsih, and Rouf (2025) revealed that many parents and school administrators resist mother tongue instruction, perceiving it as educationally inferior to English. Such societal preferences exert pressure on teachers to abandon inclusive multilingual practices. Furthermore, large class sizes and overloaded curricula limit teachers' ability to individualize instruction (Vakili et al., 2024).

Gender Differences in Teacher Strategies

Research on gender variations in teacher strategies produces mixed findings. Zahir, Tofail, and Mussaddiq (2025) found that female teachers were more likely to employ affective and relational strategies, such as verbal encouragement and emotional empathy, compared to male counterparts, and that these differences correlated with greater perceived psychological inclusiveness. However, Imran et al. (2024) and Ahmad, Ziad, and Heather (2019) reported no significant variation between male and female teachers in the adoption of core instructional

strategies such as code-switching, differentiated instruction, or collaborative learning. These findings collectively suggest that gender influences the socio-emotional dimensions of inclusive practice more substantially than core instructional techniques.

Teaching Experience and Inclusive Practices

Experienced teachers generally demonstrate greater capacity for implementing inclusive strategies. Dioquino and Paglinawan (2025) reported that teachers with over ten years of experience were more adept at integrating local languages and cultural knowledge into instruction and more sensitive to the individual needs of diverse learners. Graham et al. (2020) similarly found that experienced teachers demonstrated greater confidence in managing diverse classrooms and employed a broader range of inclusive strategies. By contrast, early-career teachers often adhered more rigidly to prescribed curricula, giving insufficient attention to student diversity (Leite et al., 2020). However, Stumbriene et al. (2024) noted that younger teachers may bring innovative technology-based language support methods, suggesting that the relationship between experience and inclusive practice is moderated by openness to professional innovation.

Methods

Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This design is appropriate for systematically documenting the attitudes, practices, and perceptions of teachers regarding language policies and inclusive strategies without experimental manipulation of variables. It permits the collection of data from a broad sample in a relatively efficient manner, facilitating both descriptive and inferential analysis.

Population and Sample

The target population comprised all junior and senior secondary school teachers in Aba Education Zone, Abia State, who are directly involved in classroom instruction and policy implementation. A sample of 200 teachers was drawn from the population using stratified random sampling. Schools were stratified according to location (urban and rural), and teachers were randomly selected from each stratum to ensure proportional and representative coverage.

Instrument for Data Collection

The main instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire divided into three sections: Section A collected demographic information (gender, years of experience, subject area); Section B contained items on the role of language policies in promoting inclusiveness; and Section C contained items on teacher strategies for fostering psychological inclusiveness. The questionnaire was designed on a four-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). The deliberate exclusion of a midpoint was intended to elicit definitive responses from participants.

Validity and Reliability

The questionnaire was subjected to content validity review by experts in Educational Psychology and Measurement and Evaluation. Validity was confirmed through expert judgment, and minor revisions were incorporated based on reviewers' feedback. Reliability was established through a pilot test administered to 10 teachers outside the study area. A Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.81 was obtained, exceeding the acceptable threshold of 0.70, indicating strong internal consistency.

Method of Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were employed to answer the research questions. The decision rule for interpreting mean scores was: 3.50-4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50-3.49 = Agree; 1.50-2.49 = Disagree; 1.00-1.49 = Strongly Disagree. A benchmark mean of 2.50 was used to determine the extent of agreement. Inferential statistics were applied to test the hypotheses: an independent samples t-test was used for Hypotheses 1 and 2 (involving two groups), and a one-way ANOVA was applied for Hypothesis 3 (involving multiple experience groups), all at the 0.05 level of significance.

Results and Discussion

Research Question 1: Influence of Language Policies on Psychological Inclusiveness

Table 1 presents the mean scores and standard deviations for items assessing the influence of language policies on psychological inclusiveness in diverse classrooms.

Table 1. Mean and Standard Deviation on How Language Policies Influence Psychological Inclusiveness in Diverse Classrooms

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
1	The current language policy in Nigeria enhances inclusiveness in classrooms.	2.19	0.93	Low Extent
2	The use of English as the official medium of instruction promotes fairness among students.	2.51	0.95	High Extent
3	The use of mother tongue in early education supports learners' confidence and participation.	1.98	0.86	Low Extent
4	Inconsistent implementation of language policies creates psychological barriers for students.	1.95	0.96	Low Extent
5	Minority language students often feel excluded in classrooms dominated by English.	1.84	0.99	Low Extent
6	Language policies in Nigeria adequately address the needs of linguistically diverse learners.	2.90	0.84	High Extent
7	Lack of clear implementation guidelines for language policies affects classroom inclusiveness.	2.28	0.83	Low Extent
8	Teachers are adequately informed about national language policies.	3.29	0.91	High Extent
9	Language policies encourage equal participation of all students in classroom activities.	3.30	0.66	High Extent
10	Language policies have a direct impact on students' sense of belonging in the classroom.	2.65	0.83	High Extent
	Cluster Mean	2.48	0.50	Low Extent

The results in Table 1 reveal a mixed pattern of responses. Teachers reported high extent of agreement for items 2, 6, 8, 9, and 10, indicating that they perceive language policies as encouraging equal participation and that teachers are generally aware of national policies.

However, items 1, 3, 4, 5, and 7 received low-extent ratings, suggesting that the current language policy does not adequately enhance classroom inclusiveness, that mother tongue instruction is underutilized, and that inconsistent implementation creates psychological barriers. The cluster mean of 2.48 (SD = 0.50) falls marginally below the benchmark of 2.50, indicating that language policies collectively exert limited influence on psychological inclusiveness in diverse classrooms in Aba Education Zone. This finding reveals a critical paradox: while teachers are aware of policies and believe they theoretically encourage participation, the practical implementation of those policies does not translate into a psychologically inclusive classroom environment.

Research Question 2: Teacher Strategies for Promoting Inclusiveness

Table 2 presents the mean scores and standard deviations for items assessing teacher strategies for promoting psychological inclusiveness in diverse classrooms.

Table 2. Mean and Standard Deviation of Teacher Strategies for Promoting Inclusiveness in Diverse Classrooms

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
11	I adapt my teaching strategies to meet the language needs of all learners.	2.70	1.00	Agree
12	I use code-switching (switching between English and mother tongue) to aid inclusiveness.	2.19	0.90	Disagree
13	I employ culturally responsive teaching methods to accommodate diverse learners.	2.71	1.05	Agree
14	I encourage peer learning among students from different language backgrounds.	2.51	0.85	Agree
15	I simplify instructional language to ensure all learners can understand.	2.90	0.93	Agree
16	I use visual aids, charts, and demonstrations to overcome language barriers.	2.90	1.02	Agree
17	I deliberately create classroom discussions that value every student's contribution.	2.98	1.20	Agree
18	I adjust lesson delivery to accommodate slow learners.	3.33	0.78	Agree
19	I provide psychological support to students who feel excluded.	2.76	0.93	Agree
20	I use group activities to foster cooperation among linguistically diverse students.	2.92	1.04	Agree
	Cluster Mean	2.79	0.50	Agree

Table 2 shows that teachers reported employing a range of inclusive strategies in diverse classrooms. All items except Item 12 (code-switching, mean = 2.19) received agreement ratings above the 2.50 benchmark. Notably, adjusting lesson delivery for slow learners recorded the highest mean score (3.33), while the use of code-switching recorded the lowest (2.19). The cluster mean of 2.79 (SD = 0.50) indicates that teachers broadly agree that they adopt diverse inclusive strategies in their classrooms. However, the notably low mean for code-switching

represents a significant missed opportunity, given the demonstrated effectiveness of this strategy in reducing language-related anxiety and enhancing comprehension among minority-language students.

Research Question 3: Challenges in Implementing Inclusive Practices

Table 3 presents mean scores and standard deviations for items assessing challenges teachers face in implementing inclusive practices.

Table 3. Mean and Standard Deviation of Challenges Teachers Face in Promoting Inclusiveness in Diverse Classrooms

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
21	Lack of training on inclusive teaching practices affects my effectiveness.	2.68	0.90	Agree
22	Large class sizes make it difficult to promote inclusiveness.	2.49	0.88	Agree
23	Pressure to complete the curriculum reduces my ability to apply inclusive strategies.	2.45	0.94	Disagree
24	Insufficient teaching resources hinder my ability to support all learners.	2.96	0.80	Agree
25	Some students resist participating because of language barriers.	2.66	0.80	Agree
26	Teachers are often not given professional development opportunities on inclusiveness.	2.98	0.87	Agree
27	Lack of support from school administrators makes inclusiveness difficult.	2.64	0.84	Agree
28	I find it difficult to balance language policy requirements with classroom realities.	2.65	0.89	Agree
29	Students from minority language groups are often marginalized in assessments.	2.59	0.98	Agree
30	Implementing inclusiveness requires more support than teachers currently receive.	2.62	0.94	Agree
	Cluster Mean	2.67	0.36	Agree

The results in Table 3 indicate that teachers face multiple significant barriers to implementing inclusive practices. With the exception of Item 23 (curriculum pressure, mean = 2.45), all items met or exceeded the 2.50 benchmark. The highest-rated challenges were insufficient teaching resources (mean = 2.96) and lack of professional development (mean = 2.98), highlighting critical systemic deficiencies. The cluster mean of 2.67 (SD = 0.36) confirms that teachers broadly agree that systemic barriers impede the implementation of inclusive practices in their classrooms.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1: Influence of Language Policies on Inclusiveness

Table 4. Independent Samples t-test for Language Policy Influence on Psychological Inclusiveness

Variable	t-value	df	p-value	Decision
Language Policy Influence on Inclusiveness	1.847	198	.066	Not Significant
Policy Awareness vs. Implementation Gap	6.312	198	.000	Significant

The t-test results in Table 4 show that language policies do not exert a statistically significant influence on psychological inclusiveness ($t = 1.847$, $df = 198$, $p = .066 > .05$). H_{01} is therefore retained. However, the analysis also revealed a highly significant gap between policy awareness and implementation ($t = 6.312$, $df = 198$, $p < .001$), confirming that while teachers are knowledgeable about language policies, this knowledge does not translate into inclusive classroom outcomes. This finding underscores the distinction between policy existence and effective policy enactment.

Hypothesis 2: Gender Differences in Teacher Strategies

Table 5. Independent Samples t-test for Gender Differences in Teacher Strategies

Variable	t-value	df	p-value	Decision
Male vs. Female Teacher Strategies	0.743	198	.458	Not Significant
Affective Strategy Use (Male vs. Female)	1.221	198	.224	Not Significant

Table 5 reveals no statistically significant difference in the inclusive strategies adopted by male and female teachers ($t = 0.743$, $df = 198$, $p = .458 > .05$). H_{02} is retained. Nor was there a significant difference in affective strategy use between male and female teachers ($t = 1.221$, $df = 198$, $p = .224$). Both male and female teachers in Aba Education Zone appear to employ comparable approaches to promoting psychological inclusiveness, suggesting that gender is not a primary determinant of inclusive practice in this context.

Hypothesis 3: Teaching Experience and Inclusive Strategy Use

Table 6. One-Way ANOVA for Teaching Experience and Use of Inclusive Strategies

Variable	F-value	df	p-value	Decision
Teaching Experience (0-5 years)	1.032	3,196	.380	Not Significant
Teaching Experience (6-10 years)	0.987	3,196	.400	Not Significant
Teaching Experience (11+ years)	1.145	3,196	.331	Not Significant

The ANOVA results presented in Table 6 indicate no statistically significant difference in inclusive strategy use across experience groups ($F = 1.032$, $df = 3,196$, $p = .380 > .05$). H_{03} is therefore retained. Teachers with 0-5 years, 6-10 years, and 11 or more years of experience did not differ significantly in their use of inclusive strategies. This finding suggests that the systemic barriers identified in Research Question 3 inadequate training, resource scarcity, and limited administrative support affect teachers uniformly, regardless of their years of experience.

Discussion of Findings

Language Policies and Psychological Inclusiveness

The finding that language policies exert limited influence on psychological inclusiveness (cluster mean = 2.48) reveals a critical paradox at the heart of Nigerian educational practice: while policies formally exist and teachers are broadly aware of them, their practical

implementation contributes minimally to creating psychologically safe and inclusive classrooms. This finding aligns closely with research by Nwachukwu and Joseph (2024) and Mokibelo et al. (2024), who documented persistent implementation gaps between Nigeria's National Policy on Education and classroom reality. The awareness-practice discrepancy where teachers report high agreement with items on policy awareness (mean = 3.29) and equal participation (mean = 3.30) yet acknowledge limited actual inclusiveness suggests that awareness alone is insufficient to drive inclusive outcomes. Policy implementation must be actively supported through training, resources, and administrative accountability.

Teacher Strategies and Agency

Despite the constraints imposed by systemic inadequacies, teachers demonstrated commendable agency in employing diverse inclusive strategies. The cluster mean of 2.79 across Strategy items reflects genuine professional commitment to inclusiveness. The adoption of differentiated instruction (mean = 3.33), visual aids (mean = 2.90), simplified language (mean = 2.90), and inclusive classroom discussions (mean = 2.98) corroborates research by Gay (2018) and Adeyemi and Alabi (2023) regarding the effectiveness of culturally responsive and learner-centered pedagogies. These findings affirm that teachers are not passive recipients of systemic failures but active agents who exercise professional judgment in the interest of their students.

Nevertheless, the underutilization of code-switching (mean = 2.19) is a significant and concerning finding. Code-switching has been consistently demonstrated to reduce language anxiety and improve comprehension among minority-language learners (Jegede, 2024). Its low adoption in Aba classrooms may reflect inadequate professional training in multilingual pedagogy, institutional resistance to the use of indigenous languages, or teachers' limited confidence in deploying this strategy. Addressing this gap through targeted professional development in code-switching and multilingual instructional techniques is therefore a priority.

Barriers to Inclusive Practice

The identification of systemic barriers (cluster mean = 2.67) confirms that teachers operate within constrained institutional environments. Insufficient teaching resources (mean = 2.96) and the absence of regular professional development (mean = 2.98) represent the most critical bottlenecks. These findings align with Chukwukere and Ajileye (2024) and Phiri et al. (2024), who documented resource scarcity and training deficiencies as major impediments to inclusive practice in similar African educational contexts. The reported difficulty in balancing language policy requirements with classroom realities (mean = 2.65) suggests that policy mandates and the practical realities of diverse classrooms are not sufficiently aligned, generating tensions that undermine teachers' efforts. Addressing these barriers requires sustained institutional investment rather than relying solely on individual teacher resilience.

Gender, Experience, and Inclusive Practice

The absence of statistically significant differences by gender or teaching experience challenges commonly held assumptions about these variables as predictors of inclusive teaching. The finding that male and female teachers employ comparable strategies aligns with Imran et al. (2024), who found no gender variation in core instructional approaches. Meanwhile, the absence of experience-based differences is noteworthy given that Dioquino and Paglinawan (2025) found experienced teachers to be more adept at integrating local knowledge. In Aba's educational context, the systemic barriers of training deficits, resource scarcity, and limited administrative support appear to affect all teachers regardless of gender or experience, underscoring the primary importance of structural rather than individual factors in determining the quality of inclusive practice.

Conclusion

This study investigated the influence of language policies and teacher strategies on psychological inclusiveness in diverse classrooms in Aba Education Zone, Abia State. The findings reveal a persistent gap between the intentions of Nigeria's national language policy and its implementation in classroom practice. Although teachers demonstrated awareness of inclusive pedagogical approaches and reported using various strategies to support learner participation and belonging, language policies contributed only modestly to psychological inclusiveness due to implementation challenges. Inadequate teacher preparation, limited availability of instructional resources in indigenous languages, and insufficient institutional support emerged as major barriers to effective language-inclusive practice. Furthermore, these challenges cut across gender and years of teaching experience, suggesting that structural and systemic factors exert a stronger influence on inclusive practice than individual teacher characteristics. The study therefore highlights the need for stronger alignment between policy intentions and classroom realities, as meaningful psychological inclusiveness depends on coordinated efforts by policymakers, teacher education institutions, school administrators, and local communities to strengthen support systems and improve multilingual education practices.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, several practical recommendations are proposed. Federal and state ministries of education should develop clearer implementation frameworks for the National Policy on Education, with explicit guidelines for managing linguistic diversity in multilingual classrooms. Teacher education programmes should strengthen training in multilingual pedagogy, culturally responsive teaching, and code-switching strategies to better prepare teachers for diverse learning environments. Government agencies should also increase investment in the development and distribution of instructional materials and assessment tools in Nigerian indigenous languages to support effective mother tongue-based instruction. In addition, school administrators and education authorities should provide regular professional development opportunities focused on inclusive teaching practices and psychological inclusiveness. Curriculum planners should introduce greater flexibility to enable learner-centred and inclusive instructional approaches, while schools and communities should promote constructive engagement among parents, teachers, and administrators on the educational value of multilingualism and mother tongue instruction.

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