STAGES AND FREQUENCY OF TEACHING EARLY GRADE READING IN ENGLISH IN PUBLIC LOWER BASIC SCHOOLS, WAMAKKO EDUCATIONAL ZONE, SOKOTO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined the stages and frequency of English-language early-grade reading instruction in public lower-basic schools in Wamakko Educational Zone, Sokoto State, Nigeria. A descriptive survey design was adopted. The study population comprised 503 public English teachers across six Local Government Areas (LGAs). Four LGAs, with a combined population of 322 teachers, were selected through stratified random sampling, and a sample of 196 teachers was determined using the Research Advisors table. Data were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire (STEGRQ) and an observation checklist (STEGROC), which was used to observe 40 teachers across two lessons each. Experts in Measurement and Evaluation and Social Science Education at Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, validated both instruments. A pilot study established their reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.81 and an inter-rater kappa of 0.79. Descriptive statistics addressed the three research questions. The findings showed that teachers applied the pre-reading, during-reading and post-reading stages inconsistently. Observations corroborated this pattern, with all three stages evident in fewer than half of the lessons observed. Reading instruction was infrequent, occurring mainly monthly or only when needed. Teachers attributed this primarily to inadequate training, insufficient materials, large class sizes and limited instructional time, rather than to unwillingness to apply the stages. The study concluded that implementation of the reading stages was inconsistent, based on both self-reported and observed practices, although it did not directly measure pupils' reading outcomes. It recommends structured in-service training on the reading stages, more frequent reading instruction, adequate instructional materials and dedicated reading time, and further research that directly assesses pupils' reading outcomes.

Keywords: Early-Grade Reading; Reading Stages; English Language; Lower Basic Schools

Introduction

Education is structured into levels to facilitate the organization and delivery of learning. These levels include nursery, basic, secondary and tertiary education. According to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED, 2011), basic education comprises primary education (the first stage, Primary 1–5) and lower secondary education (the second stage, Junior Secondary School 1–3). The nursery years and the first three years of basic education are commonly referred to as the early grades. This period provides the foundation for formal schooling and prepares pupils for further education; it is therefore central to the development of the wider educational system.

The National Policy on Education (2013) sets out approaches to meeting Nigerians' educational aspirations, including developing a literate citizenry. Reading is essential in a world shaped by knowledge and written communication. The ability to read strongly affects language acquisition and a child's educational development, providing a foundation for future academic achievement. By the end of basic education, pupils are expected to read simple sentences, particularly in English. However, pupils differ in how well they understand what they read: some acquire new vocabulary and build knowledge, while others struggle to comprehend texts. Meaning-making is therefore a central goal of learning to read.

Word recognition alone has limited value if pupils cannot construct meaning from a text. During the formative years of basic education, pupils develop the reading skills they need to understand, create and apply meaning. Azikwe (2017) describes a child as literate when the child can read and write proficiently and apply accumulated information to different situations. Sadiku (2015) considers reading the most important of the four language skills in second-language acquisition, particularly in English. Enighe and Afangideh (2018) argue that functional literacy extends beyond learning to read and includes the ability to use reading for everyday needs, even when a child's education ends at the basic-school level.

Effective reading instruction depends on knowledgeable, skilled and resourceful teachers. Teachers' knowledge and teaching practices influence how well pupils learn. If teachers use ineffective methods or assume that pupils will acquire reading skills through general English-language instruction, pupils' learning and performance may suffer. Research and experience suggest that pupils in second-language contexts such as Nigeria can learn to read and use reading to learn when teachers receive appropriate training and apply suitable methods and instructional

stages (McNamara & Magliano, 2015). Jiboku (2016) reports that many primary-school teachers have weak reading skills, while other studies identify outdated teaching methods and strategies as factors contributing to pupils' reading difficulties (Izuagba & Afurobi, 2016; Udosen, 2017; Izuagba & Nwigwe, 2019).

In response to concerns about pupils' English-reading skills in Sokoto State, the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), in collaboration with donor agencies, developed and implemented the *Let's Read* programme. The programme provided teachers' guides and pupils' books to support reading skill development among school-age children. Donor agencies included LEAP, NEI+, USAID, and RANA. As the lead implementer of English early-grade reading standards, EDC supported teacher training, improved pupils' access to quality reading instruction, promoted more conducive teaching and learning environments, and worked to incorporate early-grade reading concepts, techniques and materials into national teacher-training programmes. Despite these efforts and the provision of resources such as instructional materials, trained teachers, infrastructure and funding, reports indicate that reading achievement remains low. EdData II (2016), for example, reported that overall reading levels among Primary 2 and 3 pupils were very low. The causes of poor reading skills are multifaceted and remain a concern for government, parents, teachers and pupils. Against this background, the present study investigated the stages of teaching early-grade reading in English in public primary schools in Wamakko Educational Zone, Sokoto State, Nigeria, to contribute to efforts to improve reading instruction.

Literacy is a principal goal of basic education in Nigeria. Recent reports from various sources indicate that few pupils learn to read in English during the early grades (Ene, 2019). Although many studies have recommended teaching techniques and strategies to improve reading, the state of reading instruction in Nigerian basic schools-and in Sokoto State in particular-remains concerning. Omojuwa (2015) observed that difficulties with pronunciation, grammar and meaning characterize learners' use of English across educational levels in Sokoto State. Pupils' limited English-reading proficiency in Wamakko Educational Zone has created social and academic challenges. These difficulties may hinder the achievement of the educational objectives set out in the National Policy on Education and concern education stakeholders in the state. The need to explore ways of improving pupils' reading development motivated this study, which investigated the stages of teaching early-grade reading in English in Wamakko Educational Zone, Sokoto State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Although previous studies have examined reading difficulties and instructional strategies in Nigerian primary schools, limited empirical evidence exists on how systematically teachers in Wamakko Educational Zone implement the pre-reading, during-reading, and post-reading stages, and how frequently they teach reading in lower-basic classrooms. Anecdotal and administrative reports suggest that early-grade reading instruction in the zone is irregular and that teachers do not consistently apply the recommended stages. However, these claims have not been verified using data collected directly from teachers and classroom observations. This evidence gap matters because, without a clear understanding of current teaching practices, interventions and policy decisions to improve early reading may not address the zone's actual needs. Therefore, this study investigated the stages of early-grade reading instruction used by English teachers, the frequency of reading instruction, and teachers' views on the challenges affecting their practice in Wamakko Educational Zone, Sokoto State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of this study was to investigate the stages and frequency of English-language early-grade reading instruction in public lower-basic schools in Wamakko Educational Zone, Sokoto State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study aimed to:

1. identify the stages of early-grade reading instruction in English used by teachers in the zone;
2. determine how frequently reading in English is taught in lower-basic schools in the zone; and
3. examine English teachers' views on the challenges affecting early-grade reading instruction in the zone.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the stages of teaching early grade reading in English language in Wammako Educational Zone of Sokoto State, Nigeria?

2. How often is reading in English language taught in Lower Basic Schools in Wammako Educational Zone of Sokoto State, Nigeria?

Methodology

The study employed a descriptive survey design to document teachers' practices as they occurred naturally, without manipulating any variables. Gay (2013) describes this design as appropriate for collecting data on the current status of a subject, particularly when the population is too large to study exhaustively. The study was conducted in Wamakko Educational Zone, Sokoto State, Nigeria. According to the Sokoto State Universal Basic Education Board (2021), the zone comprises six Local Government Areas (LGAs): Dange-Shuni, Kware, Sokoto-North, Sokoto-South, Tureta and Wamakko. The study population consisted of 503 public English teachers working in 370 public schools across these LGAs. The LGAs were divided into two strata of three, and two LGAs were selected from each stratum through simple random sampling. The selected LGAs, Kware, Sokoto-North, Sokoto-South and Wamakko, had a combined population of 322 teachers. Using the Research Advisors (2006) table for a 95 per cent confidence level, a sample of 196 teachers was determined. Forty schools were randomly selected using a hat-and-draw method, and the teacher sample was allocated proportionately across the selected LGAs, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Sample Size of the Study

S/N	LGA	Population of English Teachers	Sample size
1	Kware	95	58
2	Sokoto North	43	26
3	Sokoto South	49	30
4	Wammako	135	82
Total		**322**	**196**

Source: Office of the Director, Wammako Zonal Education Office, Sokoto State (2021).

Two researcher-developed instruments were used: the Stages of Teaching Early Grade Reading Questionnaire (STEGRQ) and the Stages of Teaching Early Grade Reading Observation Checklist (STEGROC). The STEGRQ comprised Section A, which collected respondents' biographical information, and Section B, which contained 36 items across three categories: 20 items on the pre-reading, during-reading and post-reading stages; 10 items on the frequency of reading instruction; and six items on teachers' views of challenges affecting instruction. Items were rated on a four-point scale from Strongly Agree (4) to Strongly Disagree (1). For reporting,

Strongly Agree and Agree responses were combined as "Agree," and Disagree and Strongly Disagree responses as "Disagree." The STEGROC listed observable indicators of the three reading stages. Each indicator was scored as "Evidenced" or "Not evidenced/Only partially evidenced"; a stage was recorded as present when most of its indicators were evidenced. One teacher from each of the 40 selected schools was observed teaching two reading lessons, resulting in 80 observations.

Three Faculty of Education experts at Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, two in Measurement and Evaluation and one in Social Science Education, reviewed both instruments for clarity, relevance to the study objectives, coverage of the reading stages and suitability of response formats. Following their recommendations, ambiguous or redundant items were revised or removed, two challenge items were reworded, and the checklist indicators were grouped more clearly under the three reading stages. The instruments were then considered valid for the study. Reliability of the STEGRQ was assessed through a pilot test involving 20 English teachers in Illela Educational Zone, outside the study area. Cronbach's alpha was 0.81 overall, with coefficients of 0.78, 0.84 and 0.76 for Categories 1, 2 and 3, respectively. For the STEGROC, two trained observers independently scored 10 lessons during the pilot; Cohen's kappa was 0.79, indicating substantial agreement.

The researcher and three trained research assistants administered the questionnaires in the selected schools after presenting a letter of introduction and briefing participants. Respondents were given sufficient time to complete the questionnaires, and all 196 copies administered were retrieved. The researcher and one trained research assistant also used the STEGROC to observe two reading lessons in each of the 40 sampled schools. Data from both instruments were analysed using frequency counts and percentages in SPSS version 20. These descriptive statistics were used to answer the three research questions and compare teachers' self-reported practices with observed classroom practices.

Results

Research Question One: What are the stages of teaching early grade reading in English language in Wammako Educational Zone of Sokoto State, Nigeria?

Table 2: Pre-Reading Stage

S/N	Items	Agree F (%)	Disagree F (%)

1	The teacher assigns the pupils to brainstorm ideas about the meaning of a title or an illustration	14 (7.1)	182 (92.9)
2	The teacher leads discussion by drawing out the information pupils already have	31 (15.8)	165 (84.2)
3	The teacher openly links the pupils' prior knowledge and important information in the text	107 (54.6)	89 (45.4)
4	The teacher explains some key vocabularies and ideas in the text	142 (72.4)	54 (27.6)
5	The teacher guides the pupils' awareness of the purpose and goals to reading	27 (13.8)	169 (86.2)
6	The teacher makes sure that the topic of chosen texts are in accordance with the learners' age range, interest, sex and cultural background	193 (98.5)	3 (1.5)
7	The teacher provides necessary background information to the reader in order to facilitate comprehension	150 (76.5)	46 (23.5)

Source: Field survey, 2021

Table 2 presents teachers' reported use of pre-reading practices in teaching early-grade English reading in Wamakko Educational Zone. Fewer than one in five respondents reported assigning pupils to brainstorm the meaning of a title or illustration (7.1%), leading discussions to elicit pupils' prior knowledge (15.8%), or guiding pupils to identify the purpose and goals of reading (13.8%). A little over half (54.6%) reported explicitly linking pupils' prior knowledge to the text, while 72.4% said they explained key vocabulary and ideas. Most respondents reported selecting texts appropriate to pupils' age, interests, sex and cultural background (98.5%) and providing background information to support comprehension (76.5%). Across the seven items, mean agreement was 48.4%, suggesting that teachers' reported use of pre-reading practices was inconsistent.

Table 3: During-Reading Stage

S/N	Items	Agree F (%)	Disagree F (%)
1	The teacher teaches pupils to master the skill of predicting what happens next in a text	66 (33.7)	130 (66.3)
2	The teacher guides the pupils to be able to differentiate between significant information and insignificant information by underlining significant information	127 (64.8)	69 (35.2)
3	The teacher made your pupils aware of the importance of re-reading to increase their comprehension	153 (78.1)	43 (21.9)
4	The teacher explains the meaning of some new words	196 (100.0)	0 (0.0)

5	The teacher ensures that my pupils read together in group as it will improve their vocabulary	14 (7.1)	182 (92.9)
6	The teacher reads with the same speed from the beginning of a text to the end	52 (26.5)	144 (73.5)
7	The pupils pause while reading a text to absorb and internalize material being read to sort out information	73 (37.2)	123 (62.8)
8	The pupils pause to check the pupils understanding of the text in order to evaluate if the reading meets their goals	147 (75.0)	49 (25.0)

Source: Field survey, 2021

Table 3 presents teachers' reported use of during-reading practices. About one-third (33.7%) said they teach pupils to predict what happens next in a text, while 64.8% reported guiding pupils to distinguish significant from less significant information. Most respondents reported encouraging pupils to reread (78.1%), explaining new words (100.0%) and pausing to check comprehension against reading goals (75.0%). However, few reported having pupils read together in groups (7.1%), and 37.2% said pupils pause to reflect on what they have read. For the item on maintaining the same pace throughout a text, 26.5% agreed, and 73.5% disagreed. The mean agreement across the eight items was 52.8%, indicating that reported use of during-reading practices was mixed.

Table 4: Post-Reading Stage

S/N	Items	Agree F (%)	Disagree F (%)
1	The teacher monitors pupils' comprehension after reading	154 (78.6)	42 (20.9)
2	The teacher holds group discussion session to check for miscomprehension after reading	65 (33.2)	131 (66.8)
3	The teacher organise a role-playing session in my classroom after reading	40 (20.4)	156 (79.6)
4	The teacher teaches my pupils how to make or answer questions be it written or oral after reading	139 (70.9)	57 (29.1)
5	The teacher discusses the text with my pupils after reading	167 (85.2)	29 (14.8)

Source: Field survey, 2021

Table 4 presents teachers' reported use of post-reading practices. Most respondents said they monitored pupils' comprehension after reading (78.6%), taught pupils to formulate or answer questions (70.9%), and discussed the text with pupils (85.2%). Fewer reported holding group discussions to identify misunderstandings (33.2%) or organising role-play activities (20.4%). The

mean agreement across the five items was 57.7%, the highest of the three reading stages, although reported use of group discussion and role-play remained limited.

Taken together, Tables 2-4 indicate that teachers reported using the pre-reading, during-reading and post-reading stages inconsistently. Mean agreement was 48.4%, 52.8% and 57.7%, respectively. Practices involving active pupil participation, such as brainstorming, group reading and role-play, were among the least frequently reported.

Research Question Two: How often is reading in English language taught in Lower Basic Schools in Wammako Educational Zone of Sokoto State, Nigeria?

Table 5: Frequency of Teaching Early Grade Reading

S/N	Items	Agree F (%)	Disagree F (%)
1	The teacher teaches reading in English studies everyday of a week	0 (0.0)	196 (100.0)
2	The teacher teaches reading in English studies after every 2days	36 (18.4)	160 (81.6)
3	The teacher teaches reading in English studies weekly	41 (20.9)	155 (79.1)
4	The teacher teaches reading in English studies fortnightly	0 (0.0)	196 (100.0)
5	The teacher teaches reading in English studies monthly	147 (75.0)	49 (25.0)
6	The teacher teaches reading in English studies at least once in a term	13 (6.6)	183 (93.4)
7	The teacher only teaches reading in English studies when the need arises	166 (84.7)	30 (15.3)
8	The teacher teaches all the English studies components as arranged in the National English Studies Curriculum	196 (100.0)	0 (0.0)
9	The teacher teaches reading skills at all	0 (0.0)	196 (100.0)
10	The teacher only teaches reading in English studies upon sighting representatives from the ministry	0 (0.0)	196 (100.0)

Source: Field survey, 2021

Table 5 presents how frequently early-grade reading is taught in lower-basic schools in Wamakko Educational Zone. None of the respondents reported teaching reading daily or fortnightly. Some said they taught it every two days (18.4%) or weekly (20.9%), while most reported teaching it monthly (75.0%) or only when needed (84.7%). All respondents said they taught English components according to the curriculum, and none reported teaching only when ministry officials

were present. Overall, the responses indicate that reading instruction was generally infrequent, occurring mainly monthly or when teachers considered it necessary.

Research Question Three: What are English teachers' views on the challenges affecting the teaching of early grade reading in Wamakko Educational Zone of Sokoto State, Nigeria?

Table 6: Teachers' Views on Challenges of Teaching Early Grade Reading (n = 196)

S/N	Items	Agree F (%)	Disagree F (%)
1	I have not received specific training on how to apply the pre-reading, during-reading and post-reading stages	142 (72.4)	54 (27.6)
2	Inadequate instructional materials limit my ability to apply the reading stages effectively	158 (80.6)	38 (19.4)
3	Large class size makes it difficult to monitor individual pupils' reading progress	171 (87.2)	25 (12.8)
4	I would apply the reading stages more consistently if regular in-service training was provided	180 (91.8)	16 (8.2)
5	Pupils' limited vocabulary in English slows down reading instruction	149 (76.0)	47 (24.0)
6	The number of periods allocated to reading on the school timetable is not sufficient for effective stage-by-stage instruction	163 (83.2)	33 (16.8)

Source: Field survey, 2021.

Table 6 indicates that teachers attributed inconsistent use of the reading stages mainly to structural and support-related challenges. Most respondents reported receiving no specific training on the three stages (72.4%), lacking adequate instructional materials (80.6%), and facing large class sizes that made it difficult to monitor pupils individually (87.2%). Many also identified pupils' limited English vocabulary (76.0%) and insufficient timetable time for reading (83.2%) as constraints. Moreover, 91.8% said they would apply the stages more consistently with regular in-service training. These responses suggest that teachers perceived training and resource limitations as important barriers to consistent implementation.

Observation Checklist Results

Table 7: Summary of Classroom Observation Compared with Questionnaire Self-Report

Stage	Lessons Evidencing Stage F (%) (n = 80)	Lessons Not/Partially Evidencing Stage F (%) (n = 80)	Questionnaire Self-Report Mean Agreement (%)
Pre-reading	29 (36.3)	51 (63.8)	48.4
During-reading	35 (43.8)	45 (56.3)	52.8
Post-reading	38 (47.5)	42 (52.5)	57.7

Source: Field observation, 2021 (40 teachers, two lessons each = 80 lesson observations).

Table 7 compares the proportion of observed lessons in which each reading stage was clearly evidenced with teachers' mean self-reported agreement. For all three stages, the proportion of lessons showing clear evidence was lower than the corresponding self-reported agreement: 36.3% versus 48.4% for pre-reading, 43.8% versus 52.8% for during-reading, and 47.5% versus 57.7% for post-reading. This pattern suggests that classroom implementation may have been more limited than teachers' questionnaire responses indicated. The observations provide an additional source of evidence about instructional practice, neither the questionnaire nor the observation checklist directly measured pupils' reading fluency or comprehension.

Discussion of Findings

This study investigated the stages and frequency of English-language early-grade reading instruction in basic schools in Wamakko Educational Zone, Sokoto State. Of the participating English teachers, 50.5% held the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE), 37.8% held a first degree and 11.7% held a master's degree. Most had between six and ten years of teaching experience, followed by those with 11–15 years. This range of qualifications and experience reflects a diverse group of respondents and provides context for interpreting the descriptive findings. However, these characteristics do not establish the validity of causal claims about pupils' outcomes.

The findings for Research Question One showed that teachers applied the pre-reading, during-reading and post-reading stages inconsistently. Classroom observations supported this pattern, with each stage clearly evidenced in fewer than half of the lessons observed. This finding is broadly consistent with Ukumo and Berlie (2024), who found that primary English teachers did not use appropriate literacy instructional strategies in most observed lessons in a comparable Sub-Saharan African context. It also aligns with Kamanzi and Seni (2024), who reported that teachers' understanding and implementation of structured phonics and reading-stage practices in Tanzanian primary schools remained partial, despite broad awareness of the approach. Although Ally (2018)

reported effective use of structured reading stages where adequate support was available, the present findings and much of the cited evidence suggest that consistent implementation may be constrained by teachers' access to relevant methods and materials. In northern Nigeria, Kabir et al. (2022) found that early-literacy teaching and learning materials were often poorly aligned with the primary reading curriculum. This is consistent with the present study, in which inadequate instructional materials were among the most frequently reported barriers (Table 6), and with Marima's (2016) finding that shortages of reading materials and guidelines are common challenges for early-grade teachers. Enighe and Afangideh (2018) also associated ineffective instructional techniques and limited learner involvement in extensive reading with weaker reading competence. Since the present study assessed teachers' reported and observed instructional practices rather than pupils' reading fluency or comprehension, its findings indicate inconsistent implementation of the recommended stages, not pupils' reading outcomes. Nevertheless, supporting teachers to strengthen their use of reading stages is important in pursuing national and global literacy goals, including Sustainable Development Goal 4 (United Nations, 2015).

The findings for Research Question Two indicated that reading instruction was infrequent, occurring mainly monthly or when the need arose. Although teachers reported teaching English content according to the curriculum, the results suggest that reading did not receive regular attention in classroom practice. This finding is consistent with Otache (2020), who linked poor reading culture among Nigerian primary and secondary school pupils to limited exposure to structured reading opportunities in and outside school. Kamanzi and Seni (2024) likewise associated infrequent and inconsistent reading instruction with limited implementation of active-learning methods. These findings highlight the importance of considering how often teachers can prioritize reading within a crowded curriculum and timetable, constraints also identified by teachers in the present study (Table 6).

The findings for Research Question Three showed that teachers attributed inconsistent implementation of the reading stages primarily to inadequate training, insufficient instructional materials, large class sizes and limited reading time on the school timetable. Many also indicated that regular in-service training could support more consistent implementation. These reported constraints help contextualize the findings on teaching practices and frequency: they point to factors that may limit teachers' capacity to apply the recommended stages regularly. Considered

together, teachers' questionnaire responses, classroom observations and accounts of the challenges they face provide a fuller description of reading instruction in the study area.

Conclusion

Reading is essential for participation in a literate society and contributes to language acquisition and pupils' wider educational development. The basic-education years are particularly important for developing the skills needed to understand and apply meaning from texts. This study found that English teachers in Wamakko Educational Zone applied the pre-reading, during-reading and post-reading stages inconsistently, as indicated by both questionnaire responses and classroom observations. Reading instruction was also infrequent, occurring mainly monthly or when the need arose. Teachers attributed these practices primarily to inadequate training, insufficient instructional materials, large class sizes and limited teaching time, rather than to unwillingness to use the stages. Because the study examined instructional practices and did not directly assess pupils' reading fluency or comprehension, it cannot establish the effect of these practices on pupils' reading outcomes. Further research that directly measures pupils' reading performance is needed. Overall, the findings point to the need for more consistent implementation of the reading stages and stronger support for teachers to improve early-grade reading instruction in the zone.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. English teachers should receive structured, ongoing in-service training to strengthen their use of the pre-reading, during-reading and post-reading stages. Training should give particular attention to techniques that teachers reported using less often, including brainstorming, group reading, structured discussion and role-play.
2. Reading instruction should be scheduled more frequently to help develop a reading culture among pupils. School administrators, in collaboration with the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education, should organise regular reading campaigns and review school timetables to provide more time for early-grade reading. Quality assurance committees should also consider the frequency and quality of reading instruction when planning school programmes and evaluating English teaching.

3. School administrators and government should address the barriers identified by teachers by providing adequate reading materials, considering class-size or pupil-grouping strategies that allow for more individual attention, and protecting dedicated reading time in the school timetable.

4. Further research should directly assess pupils' reading fluency and comprehension in the zone. This would help establish how teachers' implementation of the reading stages relates to pupils' reading development.

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