

## The Implementation of Differentiated Instruction on English Subject: A Case Study

**Safitri Mariyanti Ningtyas**

Universitas Negeri Surabaya  
[safitriiningtyas@gmail.com](mailto:safitriiningtyas@gmail.com)

**Lies Amin Lestari**

Universitas Negeri Surabaya  
[lieslestari@unesa.ac.id](mailto:lieslestari@unesa.ac.id)

### Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan implementasi pembelajaran berdiferensiasi dalam pengajaran Bahasa Inggris di kelas 7 serta mengidentifikasi tantangan yang dihadapi guru. Latar belakang penelitian ini didasarkan pada kebutuhan akan strategi pengajaran yang mampu mengakomodasi perbedaan individu siswa dalam kemampuan dan gaya belajar, terutama di tingkat pendidikan menengah pertama. Meskipun pembelajaran berdiferensiasi telah banyak dibahas dalam literatur pendidikan, penerapannya dalam konteks spesifik pengajaran Bahasa Inggris di Indonesia masih terbatas. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus yang melibatkan observasi kelas, wawancara dengan guru, dan analisis dokumen. Subjek penelitian ini adalah seorang guru Bahasa Inggris di salah satu SMP Negeri di Lamongan yang telah menerapkan pembelajaran berdiferensiasi selama satu tahun. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa guru memiliki pemahaman yang baik tentang konsep pembelajaran berdiferensiasi. Tahapan yang dilakukan guru meliputi mengidentifikasi kebutuhan belajar siswa melalui asesmen diagnostik, menyesuaikan konten dan proses pembelajaran, mengelompokkan siswa berdasarkan kemampuan dan preferensi belajar, serta memberikan umpan balik yang konstruktif. Tantangan yang dihadapi termasuk kesulitan mengadaptasi materi untuk kelas yang berbeda dan kurangnya waktu untuk menentukan proses diferensiasi. Secara keseluruhan, penelitian ini memberikan wawasan mendalam mengenai praktik implementasi pembelajaran berdiferensiasi di kelas Bahasa Inggris dan tantangan yang dihadapi guru.

**Kata Kunci:** Pembelajaran Berdiferensiasi, Mata Pelajaran Bahasa Inggris, Studi Kasus, Sekolah Menengah Pertama

### Abstract

This study aimed to describe the implementation of differentiated instruction in teaching English to 7th-grade students and to identify the challenges faced by teachers during the process. The background of this research is based on the need for teaching strategies that can accommodate individual differences in students' abilities and learning styles, especially at the junior high school level. Although differentiated instruction has been widely discussed in educational literature, its application in the specific context of teaching English in Indonesia is still limited. This qualitative research uses a case study design involving classroom observations, teacher interviews, and analysis of related documents. The subject of this study is an English teacher at a one of public junior high school in Lamongan who has been implementing differentiated instruction for one year. The results show that the teacher has a good understanding of the concept of differentiated instruction. The steps taken by the teacher include identifying students' learning needs through diagnostic assessments, adjusting the content and process of teaching, grouping students based on their abilities and learning preferences, and providing constructive feedback. The challenges faced include difficulties adapting materials for different classes and the lack of time to determine the differentiation process. Overall, this study provides an in-depth insight into the practice of implementing differentiated instruction in English classes and the challenges faced by teachers.

**Keywords:** Differentiated Instruction, English Subject, Case Study, Junior High School

### INTRODUCTION

Every student is born with uniqueness and diverse learning styles (Suryati, Ratih, & Maryadi, 2023). However, in the education system in Indonesia, teachers often employ a monotonous teaching approach that does not recognize the differences of the students

(Tambunsaribu & Galingging, 2021). Consequently, this leads to a mismatch in the uniqueness and learning styles of each student. Most teachers assume that every child has the same learning style and thinking ability and must achieve the competencies set in the same way (Magableh & Abdullah, 2020). It is because there is still limited knowledge of the teacher in the current ideas and

concepts of teaching English (Sueb, Pusparini, Trisusana, Kurniasih, & Chakim, 2020). In reality, there are many differences in learning styles, especially variations in the learning abilities of the students. Teachers cannot generalize that diversity to achieve competence. Therefore, appropriate learning techniques are needed to accommodate student needs and create effective learning.

One of the solutions to accommodate student needs in the teaching-learning process is implementing differentiated instruction. Introduced in 1995 by Carol A. Tomlinson in her book "How to Differentiate Instruction in Mixed Ability Classrooms," this concept continues right now with recognizing differences in each individual. Differentiated instruction reflects a learning approach that understands and responds to the diversity of students in the class without losing focus on the learning objectives that have been set (Suwastini, Rinawati, Jayantini, & Dantes, 2021). It means that this approach recognizes that each student brings his or her own unique characteristics in terms of learning style, level of understanding, and pace of development. Furthermore, Tomlinson (2001) also stated that a differentiated instruction is not just about providing different material for each student, but rather about adapting the learning process to enable each student to achieve learning goals effectively.

The implementation of differentiated instruction in the modern era is closely related to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. One of the principles of Merdeka Curriculum on the Decree of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Number 262/M/2022 is "learning is designed by considering the current stage of development and level of achievement of students, according to learning needs, and reflecting the characteristics and development of diverse students so that learning becomes meaningful and fun." In this context, the connection with the concept of differentiated instruction becomes very important. Differentiated instruction provides an appropriate response to individual student needs, allowing each student to learn according to his or her abilities and learning style (Halimah, Hadiyanto, & Rusdinal, 2023). Furthermore, The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Regulation Number 5 of 2022, states that "every student is given the freedom to learn according to their abilities." This principle is in line with the concept of differentiated instruction and it becomes concrete implementation of these regulations.

Differentiated instruction was also introduced in the "Guru Penggerak" program by The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Faiz, Pratama, & Kurniawaty, 2022). It is a program from The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and

Technology which aims to train teachers to become learning leaders who refer to Pancasila and in accordance with the "Merdeka Belajar" framework (Faiz & Faridah, 2022). The teacher who joins this program would disseminate their knowledge into others about the practice of the implementation of differentiated instruction. Faiz et al. (2022) also explain that differentiated instruction is included in the 2.1 module of "Guru Penggerak" program, that is a learning strategy to analyze students' needs and develop student-centered learning processes. Thus, differentiated instruction is not just an innovation, but rather an urgent need to create an inclusive and empowering learning environment, in accordance with the principles of student-centered learning as promoted by the Merdeka curriculum.

The positive effects of differentiated instruction, especially in this modern learning era, have been extensively researched. For instance, (Magableh & Abdullah, 2020) stated that differentiated instruction helped 8th-grade students in Jordan improve their overall English language proficiency. This aligns with Sitorus, Tumanggor, Sigi, Simanullang, & Laia, (2022) research, which found that differentiated instruction influences the learning outcomes of 8th grade students at SMPN 2 Manduamas. For the challenge in implementing differentiated instruction, Shareefa (2021) stated that the major challenge is on making assessment for the students and teacher's lack of competency and time. Besides that, Suryati et al. (2023) also stated that the challenges faced by the teacher were in designing a learning process that needed more time and the lack of support from other teachers. She added that another challenge was faced by the school in the readiness and also human resources. From some of those studies, there is still limited research that focuses on describing how teachers implemented differentiated instruction on English subjects, especially in Indonesian context. Whereas, research on how differentiated instruction is implemented in English language teaching can improve the quality of English language learning and contribute to educational literature. Therefore, this research titled "The Implementation of Differentiated Instruction on English Subject: A Case Study"

The study aims to address specific research questions through the following objectives. Firstly, it seeks to describe how teachers implement differentiated instruction in the context of English language teaching for 7th-grade students. This involves a detailed examination of the strategies and methods employed by teachers to cater to the diverse learning needs, styles, and paces of their students. Secondly, the study aims to identify the challenges teachers face in implementing differentiated instruction in 7th-grade English

classrooms. By understanding these challenges, the research can provide insights into the obstacles that hinder effective implementation and suggest possible solutions to overcome them.

## **METHODS**

This research is qualitative research, which adopts a case study research design. Qualitative research aims to comprehend a phenomenon by concentrating on the complete context rather than dissecting it into individual variables (Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, & Razavieh, 2010). A case study is a type of ethnographic research focusing on a single unit, such as an individual or organization, to provide a detailed understanding of the case. It can generate data for generalizing theories and often involves various methods like interviews and observation. A case study was chosen because it was in line with the researcher's objective, which is to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of Differentiated Instruction in teaching English to grade 7 students. Through this approach, the research provided a profound insight into how to implement differentiated instructions and the challenges the teacher faces in English language teaching.

The subject of this research was an English teacher at a state junior high school in Lamongan. The researcher selected her because she already implemented Differentiated Instruction for about a year. She has also been teaching English for almost five years. Therefore, the researcher selected this teacher as the participant, which allowed for an in-depth analysis of differentiated instruction through classroom observations and interviews. She taught two classes in 7<sup>th</sup> Grade; those are 7A and 7B, but the researcher just observed one class that is 7B.

The study utilized three research instruments: an observation checklist, interview guidelines, and documentation. The observation checklist comprised 18 statements across six indicators to evaluate how teachers implement differentiated instruction in the classroom. It was validated by an experienced English teacher and received high ratings for clarity, content alignment, and language use. The interview guidelines, designed to explore teachers' understanding and practices of differentiated instruction, included 16 questions under nine indicators. These guidelines were also validated and found effective in collecting relevant information on implementation and challenges. Documentation involved collecting images, notes, videos, and lesson plans related to the research, capturing the differentiated instruction techniques applied during English lessons. This comprehensive approach ensured a thorough analysis of

differentiated instruction practices and challenges in the study.

Data collection involved classroom observations, interviews with the teacher using the Indonesian language, and documentation. Data collection was carried out in several stages. First, classroom observation was conducted to observe differentiated instruction implementation practices directly. Observations of the English class were used to learn about the real implementation of differentiated instruction. The researcher did class observation two times by adjusting the number of meetings held by the teacher in implementing differentiated instruction on describing people's material. Second, interview English teacher to obtain detailed information about their differentiated instruction strategies and techniques. The interviews are semi-structured because they used questions that were prepared before. However, the researcher also has the flexibility to adjust questions and dig deeper into information based on participant responses. Finally, documents related to differentiated instruction, such as lesson plans, teaching notes, and evaluation results, were analyzed to provide additional context and supported findings from interviews and observations.

Data analysis is a crucial stage in the research process that enables researchers to understand and interpret the results. According to Miles & Huberman (1994) there are three data analysis techniques: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The first step done by the researcher was data reduction. In data reduction, the researcher summarised, chose the main things, focused on the important things, and looked for themes and patterns. The second step was data display. In data display, the researcher presents the data in two forms: table and narrative text. The researcher displays the data in the table before explaining it in narrative text. The final step was to draw conclusions and verify where the researcher made interpretations from the data analysis. The researcher identified differences and similarities between the found data and existing theories. Verification is conducted to ensure that the analysis remains consistent with the fundamental concepts used, thus producing more accurate and objective data.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Implementation of Differentiated Instruction in the context of teaching English to 7th-grade students**

Differentiated instruction is a learning approach that is customized to the needs, interests, and abilities of each student in the class. This includes planning and delivering learning materials and activities that can be adjusted to suit students' level of understanding and learning styles.

The teacher said that this approach made the teacher plan and deliver learning materials and activities that can be changed and adapted to suit the student's level of understanding, learning style, interests or needs. In the real implementation of differentiated instruction, the teacher explained,

*"In practice, this can mean using a variety of teaching resources and strategies, such as a variety of reading materials, projects that allow students to express themselves in various ways, and assessments that include a variety of formats and levels of difficulty. Differentiated instruction also involves using flexible workgroups, adapting assignments, and providing additional support to students who need it to achieve their learning goals."*

The teacher understands well what differentiated instruction is and how to implement it in the classroom.

The first step that the teacher took in implementing differentiated instruction was to identify students' learning needs. The teacher explained that identifying students' individual differences in readiness, interest, and learning profile begins with applying a psychological test at the beginning of the admission. Although this only provides an overall picture, the test results are quite helpful for the teacher in determining students' initial abilities. To understand students' needs deeper, the teacher designed a diagnostic assessment sheet covering various aspects, such as self-identity and students' learning preferences and interests. This non-cognitive diagnostic assessment sheet allows teacher to determine the students' learning styles and interests from the beginning. She stated that,

*"At the beginning of admission, there was a psychological test. However, it only assessed their overall abilities, so at the first meeting, I made a diagnostic assessment sheet, and I will show you later. From there, I got to know what each student likes, their interests, and their learning style is."*

The teacher also showed the diagnostic assessment results that she gave to the students. She wrote the question using the Indonesian language to make the students understand well. She added that the students give a variety of answers and let her know what they like and dislike. The question included:

- Full name
- Nickname
- Class
- The most favorite lesson
- The most favorite activity at school
- Ambition
- The most favorite learning style
- Past experience in study

Seeing from the observation results, in the first observation, the researcher could not see the teacher gave pre-test to the students before starting the lesson for

identifying students learning needs. The teacher directly starts the class and just make informal conversation without any connection with the lesson/material. She just talked about what happens in the classroom. But the teacher observed the students' need from the interaction in the classroom and in the pre-activities using brainstorming question. The teacher asked some questions related to the material to know the students' prior knowledges. As written in the teaching module, some question that the teacher asked to the students are:

- What is family?
- Who is your family member that you love the most?
- What does she/he look like?

The teacher also assessed the students' learning needs from the task she gave. She gave a task, and the students' answers were seen by her to recognize whether they needed additional explanation or they already understood the lesson. The task was identifying some adjectives to describe people from watching a YouTube video. Then, the teacher also asked students to group the phrases of physical features and personality traits into the table. It is shown in the teaching module made by the teacher.

Identifying the student's learning needs in the first step is in line with the research done by Heningjakti & Surono (2023) that stated ensuring the learning materials are relevant to the student's needs, it is essential to begin by identifying their needs before starting the differentiation process by giving surveys or by asking questions before the lesson starts. It can be concluded that identifying students' learning needs through psychological test, self-diagnostic assessments, and brainstorming questions is part of the steps in implementing differentiated instruction.

The second step that the teacher took in implementing differentiated instruction is adjusting the content to students' learning needs. In the first meeting, the teacher presented material to the students about describing people. It can be seen that the teacher did not provide learning materials that are diverse and accessible to the students' differences. The learning material was the same for every student. However, she applied various learning media such as written text, YouTube Videos, and also audio. She explained that,

*"I usually don't use the lecture method monotonously because children are different. Some like to be told stories, and some prefer to write, so I usually use a variety of media. I plan and create learning materials using different resources such as text, YouTube videos, or sometimes audio."*

She added that adjustments to content or learning materials were carried out by considering the diversity of students in the class. Teacher create a variety of learning

materials, such as text, games, and video, to provide learning experiences that are relevant and accessible to all students. As she mentioned,

*"For example, in yesterday's lesson, I adjusted the learning material to their learning style, so the learning content, firstly, I provided descriptive text so that those who like reading can understand better; secondly, I made a game, so that those with a kinesthetic learning style can be affected. Finally, I use YouTube videos so that those who like listening will understand from studying the video. So, students can understand concepts in a way that suits their respective learning styles."*

Adjusting the content in differentiated instruction by using a variety of learning media is in line with the theory by Tomlinson (2001), which states that differentiating content based on learning profiles means providing students with approaches to materials and ideas that align with their preferred learning styles.

Besides the content, the teacher also adjusts the process of learning. The teacher uses a variety of learning activities according to the student's learning preferences. She uses the lecture method, question and answer, games, and written tasks. She stated that,

*"I create different activities, sometimes going one by one writing on the board, sometimes working on their own, and usually at the end there is a group project so that they can learn according to their needs and diversity."*

She also involves various senses in delivering the learning material, such as bringing real objects to class to make students understand better. This is done to ensure that all students can understand the material better. Sometimes, the teacher adjusts the instruction or tasks for the students who still do not understand the material well.

According to Tomlinson (2001), one example of adjusting the process is by encouraging the students to learn in the way they prefer. Therefore, the teacher provides various learning activities in her teaching process. Adjusting the instruction or task for students is also in line with the way to adjust the process from the students' readiness mentioned by Tomlinson in her book *How to Differentiate Instruction in Mixed-Ability Classroom*. In conclusion, the teacher adjusting the learning process based on the student's readiness and learning style is one step in differentiated instruction.

The third step done by the teacher in implementing differentiated instruction is student' grouping. The teacher made heterogeneous groups with different levels of ability and also interest. The results of the

task given by the teacher become the guidance to create a group in which every member has a different level of ability. It is also supported by a self-diagnostic assessment that shows what students are interested in and their learning styles. So, in a group, the students have different abilities and learning styles that allow them to learn from their friends and help each other. The teacher also uses flexible grouping that can be changed whenever needed to give the students different learning experiences. As she stated,

*"I also use flexible groups that can be changed according to needs. When dividing groups, I usually change them. It does not have to be A to meet B to C. The goal is for students with a higher level of understanding to help other students."*

Grouping students with different interests and learning styles and making them learn collaboratively is in line with one of the strategies for implementing differentiated instruction mentioned by Tomlinson (2001) It means that students' grouping becomes an inseparable part of implementing differentiated instruction.

For the product made by the students, the teacher gives freedom to the students to choose the model for the result but still achieve the target from the teacher. The students freely choose the product's shape, material, or style but must fulfil the teacher's target: a product, video blog, and presentation video. The heterogeneous group makes the students work with their own capabilities but still work in a group with different jobs and help each other.

*"Yes, various adjustments can be made in the products produced by students to meet various student needs. The final project is not just one form. There is a manufacturing process in the form of video; there is writing, a manuscript, and there is also a presentation of results. I also released the project, including what kind of model was made, according to their creativity. Sometimes they asked "Can I write it up like this, ma'am? Can I stick it? or Can I have three dimensions" so, I answer like "It's okay but if three dimensions can you carry it? Well, that is that. So they can express their final products according to their needs. It can also express products that fit their interests or learning styles."*

The way the teacher adjusts the product is in line with Tomlinson (2001), who gives tips for adjusting the product of differentiated instruction by giving clear guidance to the students but still giving them the freedom to create innovation and express their thoughts.

The learning environment created by the teacher in the class is fun and interactive. The class starts with ice-breaking activities and chants that motivate the students to learn. The teacher wants to make the students happy in learning English because, according to the students, this lesson is very difficult. Therefore, the teacher wants them to be happy and motivated first by building a fun learning environment. She explained,

*"I usually have an ice breaking at the beginning of the learning first, miss. Yesterday you saw it right, in that class they had yells. I want the children to like English first. Happy first with English lessons, so they are comfortable learning English. The problem is that at the beginning of learning English, according to children, the subjects are considered the most difficult. So every time they entered at the beginning of the learning year, when meeting with English, they said, 'Ma'am it is hard Ma'am, I can't do it.' or, 'Ma'am. I can't do it.' Well, from this it is how to let the child be happy first. That is the beginning. The earliest step that I apply is usually like that. The child is to love this subject first. Then I will do the process later."*

The teacher also adjusts the distribution of classroom seats according to the classroom needs for classroom needs. Sometimes, the teacher also gives freedom to the students to choose wherever they want to do the task or take a video for the final product. It allows the students to find their most comfortable environment. The learning environment created by the teacher is in line with the principle mentioned by Tomlinson (2001) that differentiated instruction needs a learning environment that responds to students' affective and cognitive needs.

In implementing differentiated instruction, the teacher also gives feedback and corrections individually and in groups. For the individual, the teacher directly gives feedback by approaching the students in their seats. The teacher also corrects students' mistakes by complimenting and correcting them without blaming them. Then, she tells the students what is the correct answer and explains using the simpler word. For the group correction, the teacher gives comments on the project made by the student by giving clear instructions on what to do and what not to do. It makes the students know well what they must do. In every meeting, the teacher always reflects on what they have learned at the end of the lesson. The teacher asks the students what they have learned and what they have gained. The teacher also motivates the students to keep learning English and shows appreciation by clapping. Feedback, correction, and

reflection are also some ways how the teacher and the students grow better. It is in line with the research done by Purnawanto (2023) that stated feedback, correction, and reflection is an important part of implementing differentiated instruction to think about whether the strategies applied are done successfully or not and to think about what to do in the future.

### **The Challenges in Implementing Differentiated Instruction**

From the teacher, the researcher knows that there are some challenges faced in implementing differentiated instruction. The teacher emphasized that one of the main challenges is adapting learning materials to diverse class conditions. By teaching in several classes with different student conditions, the teacher must plan and adapt learning materials to suit the abilities of each class. She stated that,

*"In my opinion, the main challenge is adapting the material to class conditions. I teach in several classes, and in each class, the conditions of the students are different. I could plan an ABC material model for class B, but I have to adapt it again to class A, whose abilities are slightly different."*

This statement underscores the complexity of creating and adjusting lesson plans that are effective for different groups of students. The variability in student abilities necessitates continuous assessment and adaptation, which can be overwhelming for the teacher, particularly those managing multiple classes.

Another significant challenge is the limited time the teacher has to plan and implement differentiated instruction. Besides teaching, the teacher has numerous other responsibilities, including administrative tasks, extracurricular activities, and professional development. These additional duties reduce the time that the teacher can dedicate to customizing learning experiences for their students. The teacher expressed this concern:

*"There is also a lot that a teacher has to do, not just teaching, so I also sometimes get overwhelmed when I have to decide what model to teach in the class and what activities to do next."*

When the researcher observed the class during one of the meetings, the teacher had to leave the class for a while because she had received additional tasks from the principal to organize preparations for school assessment. The time-intensive nature of differentiated instruction, coupled with the extensive workload of the teacher, makes it difficult to consistently apply this approach effectively across all classes.

Regarding support from the school, the teacher revealed that although the school had implemented an independent curriculum and encouraged differentiated instruction, not all the teacher, especially those with long experience, implemented this approach. However, the teacher feel they have received sufficient support from the very supportive principal who advocates the implementation of differentiated instruction. As she mentioned,

*“This school has implemented the Merdeka curriculum for around two years, but not all teachers have implemented differentiated instruction, especially older teachers. So, the only ones who implement differentiated instruction are teachers who want to. However, the principal actually really supports and encourages the implementation of differentiated instruction.”*

The challenge of investing time in formulating and organizing the educational process is well-documented in the research literature. For instance, a study by Suryati et al. (2023) highlights similar issues, emphasizing the significant time investment required for effective differentiated instruction. This research also found that the teacher faced challenges in the effort of formulating and organizing the educational process. However, while Suryati et al. (2023) also identified challenges related to school support, this particular research did not encounter such issues. In this school, the environment and the principal fully support the implementation of differentiated instruction. This supportive atmosphere significantly reduces one of the potential barriers to effective teaching and allows the teacher to focus more on addressing the needs of their students.

In conclusion, while the teacher faces considerable challenges in implementing differentiated instruction, particularly in adapting materials and managing time constraints, the supportive school environment mitigates some of these difficulties. The principal's backing plays a vital role in enabling the teacher to focus on customizing instruction to meet the diverse needs of students. Addressing these challenges requires ongoing effort, flexibility, and a supportive school culture that values and promotes differentiated instruction.

## CONCLUSION

This research explains the implementation of differentiated instruction in English at the junior high school level. The implementation of differentiated instruction in English at the junior high school level effectively addresses the diverse learning needs of the students. The process begins with identifying students' learning needs through psychological test and self-diagnostic assessments. Teachers then adjust the content and learning process to match students' diverse learning

styles, using various materials and activities. Students are grouped heterogeneously based on their abilities and interests, and they can choose different formats for their assignments, such as products, vlogs, or presentation videos. An interactive and enjoyable learning environment is created with ice-breakers and chants. Feedback and corrections are given both individually and in groups, and reflection is encouraged at the end of each lesson. Challenges include adapting materials for every class and managing time constraints, as teachers often need to simplify content for lower-ability students and balance other responsibilities besides teaching.

This research on differentiated instruction in teaching English to 7th-grade students has limitations. It uses a single sample, an English teacher at a public junior high school in Lamongan, making the results not widely generalizable. The case study method also limits understanding of various dynamics and variables that may affect implementation in other schools. Future research should include more teachers and schools from different regions to gather comprehensive and representative data. Additionally, using mixed-method research, combining qualitative and quantitative methods, is recommended to provide a fuller picture of the effectiveness and challenges in implementing differentiated instruction.

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