Factors and Challenges Affecting the Information Seeking for Visual Impaired Students in Maheshwari School of Blind, Belagavi Karnataka: A Study

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Abstract

The study examines challenges and factors affecting the information seeking for visually impaired students in Maheshwari Schoolof Blind Belagavi,Karnataka. For this study, data were collected using both quantitative and qualitative methods of in-depth interviews, survey method, and focus group discussions on collecting data from a sample of 108 visually impaired students. Findings revealed that out of the 108 respondents investigated for this study,there is a lack of awareness, knowledge, and use of assistive devices among visually impaired students in the current electronic environment. The study shows that the awareness and use of assistive devices, software in school is very poor. It highlights some constraints, challenges, and forward suggestions for better information sources and services in the contemporary digital and electronic environment.

Keywords
Information Seeking; Visually impaired Students; Maheshwari School of Blind; Belagavi; Karnataka.

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INTRODUCTION

Assistive devices are external devices made, adapted, or designed to help a person perform a specific task. Many persons with disabilities rely upon assistive technology to carry out day-to-day activities and participate positively, actively and productively in the public sphere. It is envisaged that adequate and appropriate library and information services and sources to the disabled community will significantly enhance information literacy and give them an equal opportunity to develop lifelong learning skills and techniques. The disabled students are known popularly as differently-abled with high potential and will contribute to the development of their host communities. Provision of essential information sources and services to this community of users is, therefore, imperative. It is a matter of fundamental human rights and social justice. Thus, the libraries have to prove that disability is not an inability and does not hinder the teaching and learning process with the adoption of assistive devices.

ABOUT MAHESHWARI SCHOOL OF BLIND BELAGAVI PROFILE

The Belagavi District Association for the Blind, founded in 1973, started the Maheshvari School for the Blind in 1978 in Belagavi. Maheshwari School for Blind was begun on 2nd October 1978. The school offers boarding, hostel, playground facilities, quality education, regular medical checkups, uniforms, and entertainment to all inmates. The students from the first through tenth grades have access to all facilities free of cost in one large family-like ambience.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Namugenyi Aminah and Peter Wamea (2021) The study's primary purpose was to reveal the effects of Information-seeking behaviour on the accessibility of library services by students with visual impairment. The study recommends that the academic libraries, government, non-governmental organizations, and other organizations that serve visually impaired people collaborate on a blueprint to enhance library facilities and information services for blind students. Dodamani, Anand, and Keshava (2020). This paper describes a comparative study in Maharashtra and Karnataka on effective library support for Special Education programs recognized by the Rehabilitation Council of India, New Delhi. The study highlights the special education institutes. The study's findings

indicate that the libraries attached to special education institutes face various infrastructure, finance, collection, and ICT facilities challenges. These issues are critically examined in the study, and appropriate suggestions are made.

Chaputula and Mahapulanga (2016) conducted a study about library services to people with disabilities in Malawi. It describes the Lack of library and information services to disabled people and acknowledged possible barriers. It also pointed to the Lack of equipment to support the disabled users. The study found that most of the libraries do not provide specialized training, such as induction sessions. As a result, they suggest that equipment for people with disabilities is provided and that libraries take the necessary steps to address the accessibility issues that those people face when using the library.In their study, Solanki and Mandaliya (2016) discussed the existing scenarios of the library services for differently-abled students in some university libraries in India. They highlighted that academic library services for differently-abled people are inadequate and that only recently have some university libraries taken steps in this direction. It also discussed the IFLA and UNESCO guidelines for providing equal library services to all, including people with disabilities. It also discussed the guidelines issued by the University Grants Commission and the Government of India.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To find out the challenges faced by visually impaired students while information seeking.
- To know the student participation in learning activities.
- Finally, based on the above, to suggest best practices to be followed in the libraries to provide optimum services to the user community in the era of the ICT.

SCOPE AND LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The current study is limited to factors and challenges affecting visually impaired students' information seeking in Maheshwari School of Blind Belagavi, Karnataka. The data collected is from the Maheshwari School of Blind Belagavi, Karnataka. The study focuses on the visually impaired students in Maheshwari School of Blind Belagavi, Karnataka.

METHODOLOGY

For this present study data collected from a sample of 108 visually impaired students. The total strength of the visually impaired students in the Maheshwari School of Blind Belagavi, Karnataka was 116. There are several formulas for calculating the required sample size. This study has followed the formula given by Krejcie and Morgan (1970).

$$n = \frac{X^{2*}N^{*}P^{*}(1-P)}{(ME^{2*}(N-1))+(X^{2*}P^{*}(1-P))}$$

Where:

n = required sample size

x^2 = Chi-square for the desired confidence level at 1 degree of freedom

N = population size

P = population proportion (.50 for this table)

ME = desired margin of error (expressed as a proportion)

Sl.no.	**ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY FOR VISUAL IMPAIRED STUDENTS**
1.	Scanner Reader
2.	Video Magnifiers
3.	Refreshable Braille Dispay
4.	Electronic Text
5.	Talking Calculator
6.	Voice Recorder
7.	Braille Printer
8.	Taped Books (Audio Books)
9.	Tactile Graphics
10.	Speech Synthesizer (Screen reader)
1.	Electronic Braille Note Takers
12.	Electric Braille Writers
13.	PIAF (Pictures In A Flash) and Swell-Touch Paper
14.	Electronic Magnifying Systems
15.	Portable Digital Magnifiers
16.	Braille Interpreter
17.	Voice Stick
18.	Refreshable Device
19.	Braille E-Book
20.	B-Touch Mobile Phone
21.	Digital Talking Book Players (Hardware)
22.	Multi-functional accessible players
23.	Braille Watches/ Smart Watches
24.	Low Vision Smart Glasses for Blind (IrisVision,MyEye2, Jordy,eSight,NuEyes)
25.	Innovative Assistive Tools (Smart Pen, Smart Calculator, etc.)
26.	Electronic Mobility Aids

27.	Audio Format Materials
28.	Electronic Braille Slate and Sylus
29.	Jot a Dot
30.	Typoscope
	Assistive Software
2.	SAFA
3.	JAWS (NVDA)
4.	Window-Eyes
5.	Zoom Text Magnifier (Reader)
6.	Kurzweil (Scan and Read Software)
7.	Multilingual (Bilingual OCR)
8.	Doc Reader
9.	Duxbury (Braille Translator)
10.	Screen Enlargement Software
11.	Open Book
11.	Electronic Dictionary W/Speech
12.	Digital Talking Book Players (Software)
13.	Dictation Software
14.	Intel Reader
15.	Portable Magnifiers
16.	Text to Speech
17.	Speech Input Software
18.	Text Readers
19.	Screen Readers
20.	Talking Dictionary
	Mobile Apps for Visual Impaired Students
1.	Blind-Droid Wallet-To Identify Money
2.	Lazarillo GPS for Blind-For Position
3.	Supersense-Identify and describe objects around the user.
4.	Be My Eyes-Ask help from a volunteer
5.	Dragon Dictation-Dictate your message
6.	Audible- Free Audio books
7.	Vokul- Personal Assistant
8.	Seeing AI- Object Identification

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Data analysis and interpretation is one of the essential part, most crucial, significant step, and it is considered the heart of any research work, analyzing and interpreting the collected data with a vision and mission to solve the research problem.

Data Inference: Table 1 shows the gender of the respondents; among all respondents, 69 number respondents (63.9%) are Male respondents, and 39 number respondents (36.1%) are Female respondents. Surprisingly, most of the students are male, which is higher than their female counterparts. When it comes to analyzing study results, responses based on gender can significantly impact the study.

Table 1: Gender of The respondents

S No	Gender	Frequency	Percent
1.	Male	69	63.9
2.	Female	39	36.1
Total		108	100

Table 2: Hobby/Interest (Multiple Response)

S No	Hobby/Interest	Frequency	Percent
.	Music	86	79.6
.	Games	13	12.0
.	Instruments	13	12.0
.	Others	9	8.3

Data Inference: Table 2 shows the hobby/interest of respondents, majority of the respondents 86 number respondents (79.6%) having the hobby of Music, followed by 13 number respondents (12%) having the hobby of Games, 13 number respondents (12%) having a hobby of Instruments, and whereas 9 number respondents (8.3%) having a hobby of other activities.Hobbies are leisure activities focused on a person's interests and can be enjoyable, engaging, and relaxing. Students frequently engage in hobbies to pass the time and develop new skills. Whether games, Instruments, or Music, Hobbies aid in the efficient use of time and improve physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional development.

Table 3: Assistive Devices Familiarity in Using

S No	Technology	Not at all	Slightly	Moderate	High	Very high
1.	Scanner Reader	108 (100%)	00 (00%)	00 (00%)	00 (00%)	00 (00%)
2	Video Magnifiers	108 (100%)	00 (00%)	00 (00%)	00 (00%)	00 (00%)
3	Refreshable Braille Display	108 (100%)	00 (00%)	00 (00%)	00 (00%)	00 (00%)
4	Electronic Text	16 (14.8%)	34 (31.5%)	16 (14.8%)	42 (38.9%)	00 (00%)
5	Talking Calculator	16 (14.8%)	34 (31.5%)	16 (14.8%)	42 (38.9%)	00 (00%)
6	Voice Recorder	16 (14.8%)	34 (31.5%)	16 (14.8%)	42 (38.9%)	00 (00%)
7	Braille Printer	108 (100%)	00 (00%)	00 (00%)	00 (00%)	00 (00%)
8	Taped	16	34	16	42	00

	Books (Audio Books)	(14.8%)	(31.5%)	(14.8%)	(38.9%)	(00%)
10	Speech Synthesizer (Screen reader)	16 (14.8%)	34 (31.5%)	16 (14.8%)	42 (38.9%)	00 (00%)

Data Inference: Table 3 demonstrates the data relatedto familiarity in using assistive devices. From the above table, it is clear that every respondent (100%) is not at all extent familiarity in using scanner reader, video magnifiers, refreshable braille display, braille printer and whereas, 16 number of respondents (14.8%) not at all extent familiarity in using electronic texts, talking calculator, Voice recorder, Audiobooks, and Speech synthesizer (screen reader).34 respondents(31.5%) slightly extent familiarity in using Electronic texts, Talking Calculator, Voice recorder, audiobooks, and speech synthesizer (screen reader).Sixteen respondents (14.8%) moderately extent familiarity in using Electronic texts, Talking calculator, voice recorder, audiobooks, and speech synthesizer (screen reader).Forty-two respondents (31.5%) highly extent familiarity in using electronic texts, talking calculator, voice recorder, audiobooks, and speech synthesizer (screen reader).Nowadays, effective assistive technology intervention for visually challenged students' self-reliance is necessary. There is a need to establish full-fledged library facilities comprising print resources and Braille resources in academic institutions. Here, the libraries have to establish Learning Resources Centers especially for the visually challenged, equipped with all hardware and software useful for the visually challenged for reading, referencing, and writing purposes. The libraries are treated as the right places as the visually challenged students will access massive holdings of books, journals, theses, and report literature developed by the libraries.

Table 4: Assistive Software Facilities Students Use Frequently For Their Academic Work

S No	Assistive Software	Most frequently	Frequently	Less frequently	Rarely	Not at all
1.	SAFA	00 (00%)	00 (00%)	00 (00%)	00 (00%)	108 (100%)
2	JAWS (NVDA)	42 (38.9%)	34 (31.5%)	16 (14.8%)	16 (14.8%)	00 (00%)
3	Kurzweil (Scan and Read Software)	00 (00%)	00 (00%)	00 (00%)	00 (00%)	108 (100%)
4	Multilingual (Bilingual OCR)	00 (00%)	00 (00%)	00 (00%)	00 (00%)	108 (100%)
5	Doc Reader	42 (38.9%)	34 (31.5%)	16 (14.8%)	16 (14.8%)	00 (00%)
6	Duxbury (Braille Translator	00 (00%)	00 (00%)	00 (00%)	00 (00%)	108 (100%)
7	Screen Enlargement Software	00 (00%)	00 (00%)	00 (00%)	00 (00%)	108 (100%)
8	Open Book	42 (38.9%)	34 (31.5%)	16 (14.8%)	16 (14.8%)	00 (00%)
9	Dragon Naturally Speaking	00 (00%)	00 (00%)	00 (00%)	00 (00%)	108 (100%)
10	DAISYPLAYER	00 (00%)	00 (00%)	00 (00%)	00 (00%)	108 (100%)

Data Inference: Table 4 presents the data on the assistive software facilities students frequently use for their academic work,42 number of respondents (38.9%) most frequently use JAWS (NVDA), Doc Reader, open Book assistive software facilities for their academic works, 34 respondents (31.5%) frequently use JAWS (NVDA), doc reader, open book assistive software facilities for their academic works, 16 number of respondents (14.8%) less frequently use JAWS (NVDA), Doc Reader, Open Book assistive software

facilities for their academic works, 16 number of respondents (14.8%) rarely use JAWS (NVDA), Doc reader, Open book assistive software facilities for their academic works.Assistive Technology is a boon for the visually challenged because they can use information sources to read independently. Also, these students can access online information sources anytime and anywhere without much reliance on others. Academic colleges and residential institutions that offer admission to visually challenged students have to establish appropriate infrastructure facilities encompassing assistive technology more comprehensively so that higher learning will be accessible for those who are served. However, budget is not a constraint because both central and state governments provide the required grants to implement the projects and proposals projected by the institutions servingthe educational needs of visually challenged students.

Table 5: Student Participation in Academic Activities

S.No	Student Participation	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
1.	Work thoroughly and well rather than just trying to get by	43 (39.8)	52 (48.1)	8 (7.4)	1 (.9)	4 (3.7)
2	Do more than the assigned work	28 (25.9)	45 (41.7)	11 (10.2)	8 (7.4)	16 (14.8
3	Ask questions to get more information	35 (32.4)	33 (30.6)	10 (9.3)	10 (9.3)	20 (18.5)
4	Raise hand to answer a question or volunteer Information	29 (26.9)	51 (47.2)	15 (13.9)	5 (4.6)	8 (7.4)
5	Go to a dictionary, encyclopedia or another reference source on own to seek Information	36 (33.3)	49 (45.4)	18 (16.7)	1 (.9)	4 (3.7)
6	Engage teacher in conversation about the subject matter outside of class	35 (32.4)	33 (30.6)	10 (9.3)	10 (9.3)	20 (18.5)
7	Participate actively in class discussions	50 (46.3)	45 (41.7)	8 (7.4)	1 (.9)	4 (3.7)

Data Inference:T able 5 provides crucial data on student participation in academic activities. Among all respondents, 43 number respondents (39.8%) strongly agree that work thoroughly and well rather than just trying to get by, 52 number respondents (48.1%) Somewhat agree that work thoroughly and well rather than just trying to get by, 8 number respondents (7.4%) neither agree nor disagree that work thoroughly and well rather than just trying to get by, 4 number respondents (3.7%) strongly disagree that work thoroughly and well rather than just trying to get by, Among all respondents, 28 number respondents (25.9%) strongly agree that do more than the assigned work, 45 number respondents (41.7%) somewhat agree thatdo more than the assigned work, 11 number respondents (10.2%) neither agree nor disagree that do more than the assigned work, 16 number respondents ((14.8%) strongly disagree that do more than the assigned work, among all respondents, 35 number respondents (32.4%) strongly agree that ask questions to get more information, 33 number respondents (30.6%) somewhat agree that ask questions to get more information, 10 number respondents (9.3%) neither agree nor disagree that ask questions to get more information, 20 number respondents (18.5%) strongly disagree that ask questions to get more information, among all respondents, 29 number respondents (26.9%) strongly agree that raise hand to answer a question or volunteer Information, 51 number respondents (47.2%) somewhat agree that raise hand to answer a question or volunteer Information, 15 number respondents (13.9%) neither agree nor disagree that raise hand to answer a question or volunteer Information, 8 number respondents (7.4%) strongly disagree that raise hand to answer a question or volunteer Information, among all respondents, 36 number respondents (33.3%) strongly agree that go to a dictionary, encyclopedia or other reference source on own to seek information, 49 number respondents (45.4%) somewhat agree that go to a dictionary, encyclopedia or other reference source on own to seek information, 18 number respondents (16.7%) neither agree nor disagree that Go to a dictionary,

encyclopedia or other reference source on own to seek information, 4 number respondents (3.7%) strongly disagree that go to a dictionary, encyclopedia or other reference source on own to seek information, among all respondents, 35 number respondents (32.4%) strongly agree that engage teacher in conversation about subject matter outside of class, 33 number respondents (30.6%) somewhat agree that engage teacher in conversation about subject matter outside of class, 10 number respondents (9.3%) neither agree nor disagree that engage teacher in conversation about subject matter outside of class, 20 number respondents (18.5%) strongly disagree that engage teacher in conversation about subject matter outside of class, among all respondents, 50 number respondents (46.3%) strongly agree that participate actively in class discussions, 45 number respondents (41.7%) somewhat agree that participate actively in class discussions, 8 number respondents (7.4%) neither agree nor disagree that participate actively in class discussions, 4 number respondents (3.7%) strongly disagree that participate actively in class discussions.

Table 6: Challenges Faced By Students

S No	Challenges	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
1.	Difficulty to interpret Braille language	46 (42.6)	15 (13.9)	5 (4.6)	1 (.9)	41 (38.0)
2.	Mobility problem	108 (100)	00 (00)	00 (00)	00 (00)	00 (00)
3.	Dictation- they are slow	00 (00)	00 (00)	00 (00)	00 (00)	108 (100)
4.	Lack of machines like laptops, computers, and Braille machines	108 (100)	00 00)	00 00)	00 00)	00 00)
5.	Quite Slow	26 (24.1)	15 (13.9)	16 (14.8)	5 (4.6)	46 (42.6)
6.	Over reliance on buddies	8 (7.4)	39 (36.1)	26 (24.1)	35 (32.4)	00 (00)
7.	Deprived attention/no attention	12 (11.1)	40 (37.0)	1 (.9)	8 (7.4)	47 (43.5)
8.	Usually under looked	12 (11.1)	39 (36.1)	1 (.9)	12 (11.1)	44 (40.7)
9.	Negative attitude	17 (15.7)	29 (26.9)	6 (5.6)	56 (51.9)	00 (00)
10.	Reading problems	24 (22.2)	18 (16.7)	3 (2.8)	63 (58.3)	00 (00)
11.	Difficulty grasping	30 (27.8)	23 (21.3)	4 (3.7)	51 (47.2)	00 (00)

Data Inference: Table 6 shows the responses collected from the students on challenges faced by students, among all respondents, 46 number respondents (42.6%) strongly agree that it is difficult to interpret braille language, 15 number respondents (13.9%) somewhat agree that it is difficult to interpret braille language, 5 number respondents (4.6%),neither agree nor disagree that it is difficult to interpret braille language, 1 number respondent (0.9%) somewhat disagree that it is difficult to interpret braille language, 41 number respondents (38%) strongly disagree that it is difficult to interpret braille language, among all respondents, 108 number respondents (100%) strongly disagree that there is noise from Braille machines, among all respondents, 108 number respondents (100%) strongly agree that there is mobility problem, among all respondents, 108 number respondents (100%) strongly disagree that there is Lack of hand out, among all respondents, 108 number respondents (100%) strongly disagree that there is slow dictation. among all respondents, 108 number respondents (100%) strongly agree that there is Lack of machines like laptops, computers and braille machines, among all respondents, 26 number respondents (24.1%) strongly agree that there is quite slow, 15 number

respondents (13.9%) somewhat agree that there is quite slow, 16 number respondents (14.8%) neither agree nor disagree that there is quite Slow, 5 number respondents (4.6%) somewhat disagree that there is quite slow, 46 number respondents (42.6%) strongly disagree that there is quite slow, among all respondents, 8 number respondents (7.4%) strongly agree that there is over reliance on buddies, 39 number respondents (36.1%) somewhat agree that there is over reliance on buddies, 26 number respondents (24.1%) neither agree nor disagree that there is over reliance on buddies, 35 number respondents (32.4%) somewhat disagree that there is Over reliance on buddies, among all respondents, 108 number respondents (100%) strongly disagree that there is Isolation, among all respondents, 12 number respondents (11.1%) Strongly agree that there is deprived attention/no attention, 40 number respondents (37%) somewhat agree that there is deprived attention/no attention, 1 number respondents (0.9%) neither agree nor disagree that there is deprived attention/no attention, 8 number respondents (7.4%) somewhat disagree that there is deprived attention/no attention, 47 number respondents (43.5%) strongly disagree that there is deprived attention/no attention, among all respondents, 12 number respondents (11.1%),strongly agree that there is usually under looked, 39 number respondents (36.1%),somewhat agree that there is usually under looked, 1 number respondents (0.9%) Neither agree nor disagree that there is usually under looked, 12 number respondents (11.1%),somewhat disagree that there is usually under looked, 44 number respondents (40.7%),strongly disagree that there is usually under looked, among all respondents, 17 number respondents (15.7%),strongly agree that there is negative attitude, 29 number respondents (26.9%) somewhat agree that there is Negative attitude, 6 number respondents (5.6%) neither agree nor disagree that there is negative attitude, 56 number respondents (51.9%) Somewhat disagree that there is Negative attitude, among all respondents, 24 number respondents (22.2%) strongly agree that there is reading problems, 18 number respondents (16.7%) somewhat agree that there is reading problems, 3 number respondents (2.8%) neither agree nor disagree that there is reading problems, 63 number respondents (58.3%) somewhat disagree that there is reading problems, among all respondents, 30 number respondents (27.8%) strongly agree that there is difficulty grasping, 23 number respondents (21.3%) somewhat agree that there is difficulty grasping, 4 number respondents (3.7%) neither agree nor disagree that there is difficulty grasping, 51 number respondents (47.2%) somewhat disagree that there is difficulty grasping.

MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

- It is pretty clear that the most of the students are male, which is higher than their female counterparts.
- The study shows that majority of the respondents 86 number respondents (79.6%) having the hobby of Music, followed by 13 number respondents (12%) having the hobby of Games, 13 number respondents (12%) having a hobby of Instruments, and whereas 9 number respondents (8.3%) having a hobby of other activities.
- Among all respondents, 30 number respondents (27.8%) strongly agree that there is difficulty grasping, 23 number respondents (21.3%) somewhat agree that there is difficulty grasping, 4 number respondents (3.7%) neither agree nor disagree that there is difficulty grasping, 51 number respondents (47.2%) somewhat disagree that there is difficulty grasping.
- 108 respondents (100%) in the study strongly agree that there is a mobility problem among all respondents.
- The awareness and use of assistive devices, software in school is very poor.
- The study pointed out that there is no qualified librarian and library professions in the library, library maintained by teacher's in-charge.
- No library policies implemented in school library.

SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- There is a need to establish full-fledged library facilities comprising print resources braille resources, electronic resources including modern updated assistive devices and software's.
- The appointment of a qualified, skilled, and trained librarian and library staff is essential.
- The study strongly recommended that the institutions' authorities keep a proper database of users and services to serve them to meet their changing needs.
- Induction programs. /Orientations programs may be done at regular intervals.
- Latest Information and Communication Technology /Assistive Technology for visually impaired students may be provided effectively for their information support.

- Specially trained staff to be employed to assist the visually impaired students in school.
- The infrastructural facilities should be done based on Universal Design Principals, keeping these people's needs in mind
- Institutional policies should be implemented in school. The authorities should need to implement the policies whether any improvement need, do it properly.
- Like NGO s proper computer training should give these people which will reduce the barrier to information.
- A provision of funds should be made available from the central/state/local government to school related to this field that provides services and Assistive Technologies to these people.
- School students should be made available in assistive forms like conventional braille or audio books like "from the first to the tenth standard when printing textbooks for regular students.
- All the information resources details will be made available online.
- Usage of advanced technology and audiovisual aids should be implemented during the teaching-learning process for these people.
- Libraries of such institutes should be provided with advanced learning materials like talking books.
- Technical, skills and vocational training should be given.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to point out the factors and challenges affecting information seeking for visually impaired students. As information technology has its dimension on every individual's life, it greatly benefits visually impaired students. So, the outcome of Information communication technology, i.e., assistive technology, is the core part of this study, and how it supports the visually impaired student's information needs is analyzed here.

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