

Preschool Teachers' Pedagogical Approaches in Teaching Early Literacy: A Systematic Literature Review

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Received: 28 June 2025 | Accepted: 17 September 2025 | Published: 1 October 2025

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55057/ijares.2025.7.5.15>

Abstract: *This study focused on a systematic literature review (SLR) of preschool teachers' pedagogical approaches in teaching early literacy. This paper methodology referred to Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-analysis (PRISMA) and Population, Interest and Context (PICO). 28 papers were selected in this paper which were published between 2020 and 2024, that are only focused at journal articles in Open-Source format and English-published articles. Result of this paper shows nine themes, namely (i) play-based activities, (ii) reading and story-telling activities, (iii) writing and pre-writing, (iv) fine motor skills and visual activities, (v) language support, (vi) multimodal approach, (vii) collaborative approach, (viii) student-centred activity, (ix) technology and digital appliances application. This paper shows the varieties of teaching early literacy approaches. It is crucial to teachers in understanding and learning the need and suitability of each approach in enhancing students' early literacy skills.*

Keywords: preschool, pedagogy, early literacy, systematic review

1. Introduction

Literacy and numeracy skills are important to the development of students learning. Mastering those skills impacts the student's development and helps them for future learning (Zainiah @ Zainiah & Juppri, 2014; Zainiah et al., 2018). Teachers' ability to deliver effective teaching is related to the knowledge of content and pedagogy. Lack of knowledge and skills in the implementation of content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge in teaching affects the achievement of the objectives (Mohd Jasmy et al., 2020; Osmah, 2020; Roslina et al., 2019), which will also affect students' academic performance (Ismaliah & Azhar, 2022). To ensure the objectives of teaching and learning are reached, selecting and planning a proper pedagogical strategy plays an important role. Therefore, a study related to preschool teachers' pedagogical knowledge in teaching early literacy needs to be conducted to examine the diversity of pedagogical approaches in various aspects of needs and facilities. Systematic literature review method is implemented in accordance with a more structured, focused, and higher trustworthiness review process. This approach encompasses better comprehensive and extensive research search topics (Mohamed Shaffril et al., 2021; Page et al., 2021).

Literacy and numeracy skills proficiency build the basic foundation of students' learning and are critical for their future learning development (Zainiah @ Zainiah & Juppri, 2014; Zainiah et al., 2018). The effectiveness of teaching, however, depends largely on teachers' mastery of

both content knowledge and pedagogical practices. Insufficient knowledge and skills in applying these domains can hinder the attainment of instructional objectives (Mohd Jasmy et al., 2020; Osma, 2020; Roslina et al., 2019), which in turn influences students' academic outcomes (Ismaliah & Azhar, 2022). Thus, achieving teaching and learning goals require careful selection and planning of appropriate pedagogical strategies. Therefore, this study will investigate preschool teachers' pedagogical knowledge in teaching early literacy, besides exploring the variety of approaches used across different contexts and available resources. To examine these diverse pedagogical practices, a systematic literature review (SLR) is employed, as it offers a more structured, focused, and reliable process. This also offers a broader and more comprehensive exploration of research topics (Mohamed Shaffril et al., 2021; Page et al., 2021).

2. Research Objective

This research aims to observe various pedagogical approaches in teaching early preschool literacy.

3. Research Question

The research question in this study is:

What are the pedagogical approaches implemented by preschool teachers in teaching early literacy?

4. The Importance of Research

This study will provide better understanding on how preschool teachers should improve their pedagogical knowledge and skills in teaching early literacy. This is important as it may reflect in achieving the teaching and learning objectives. Besides, this study will help teachers to improve their knowledge and skill along with the current trend.

5. Methodology

5.1 Reference Source

Referring to Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-analysis (PRISMA) by Page et al. (2021), a systematic literature review is conducted. Based on the research objective, an SLR procedure helps in preparing a structured approach, quality-controlled articles and optimizing the search result of the articles. Four stages of SLR are (i) formulation of research question; (ii) systematic search strategy, including identification, screening and eligibility; (iii) quality appraisal; and (iv) data extraction and analysis. These stages are developed according to PRISMA.

5.2 Research Question Formulation

Formulation of the research question was referred to 'PICO' by Lockwood et al. (2015), which refers to 'P' for population, 'I' for interest, 'Co' for context. As for this study, 'P' refers to preschool teachers, 'I' refers to pedagogical knowledge and 'Co' refers to early literacy instruction. Thus, based on the mnemonic, the research question is to explore the pedagogical approaches implemented by preschool teachers in teaching early literacy?

5.2.1 Identification

Identification refers to process of finding appropriate keywords based on formulated research question. Keywords used in this study are “pedagogy”, “teaching”, “pedagogics”, “didactics”, “instruction”, “tutoring”, “awareness”, “knowledge”, “literacy”, “acquaintance”, “know-how”, “proficient”, “familiar”, “nursery”, “preschool”, “kindergarten”, “early childhood”, “teacher”, “educator”, “instructor”, “schoolteacher”, “educationist”, “early literacy”, “emergent literacy”, and “early language literacy”. These keywords consist of synonyms, related words, and variations of the words. The articles searched was conducted based on four main data sources, namely Scopus, Web of Science, Science Direct and ERIC. Search strings were created through advanced search methods, compromise of field codes, Boolean operators, truncation, wildcards, and phrase searching. These combined keywords were combined into single search strings as shown in Table 1. A total of 3,434 articles were retrieved at the end of this process.

Table 1: Search String Based on Data Source

Data source	Search string
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (("pedagogy*" OR "teaching" OR "pedagogics" OR "didactics" OR "instruction*" OR "tutoring") AND ("awareness" OR "knowledge" OR "literacy*" OR "acquaintance*" OR "know-how" OR "proficient*" OR "familiar*")) AND ("nursery*" OR "preschool*" OR "kindergarten*" OR "early childhood*") AND ("teacher*" OR "educator*" OR "instructor*" OR "schoolteacher*" OR "educationist*") AND ("early literacy*" OR "emergent literacy" OR "early language* literacy*"))
Web of Science	TS= (("pedagogy*" OR "teaching" OR "pedagogics" OR "didactics" OR "instruction*" OR "tutoring") AND ("awareness" OR "knowledge" OR "literacy*" OR "acquaintance*" OR "know-how" OR "proficient*" OR "familiar*")) AND ("nursery*" OR "preschool*" OR "kindergarten*" OR "early childhood*") AND ("teacher*" OR "educator*" OR "instructor*" OR "schoolteacher*" OR "educationist*") AND ("early literacy*" OR "emergent literacy" OR "early language* literacy*"))
Science Direct	((("pedagogy" OR "instruction" OR "didactics") AND ("awareness" OR "knowledge")) AND ("preschool teacher" OR "early childhood teacher") AND ("early literacy" OR "emergent literacy"))
ERIC	((("pedagogy*" OR "teaching" OR "pedagogics" OR "didactics" OR "instruction*" OR "tutoring") AND ("awareness" OR "knowledge" OR "literacy*" OR "acquaintance*" OR "know-how" OR "proficient*" OR "familiar*")) AND ("nursery*" OR "preschool*" OR "kindergarten*" OR "early childhood*") AND ("teacher*" OR "educator*" OR "instructor*" OR "schoolteacher*" OR "educationist*") AND ("early literacy*" OR "emergent literacy" OR "early language* literacy*"))

5.2.2 Screening

The second process in this article search strategy, is the screening process, which refers to criteria of selecting article. This include (i) publication years of less than five years, which is between 2020 and 2024; (ii) publication types which focused at articles in Open-Source format, journal articles and Englis-published articles. This resulted 285 articles were accepted for the eligibility process, while 3,149 articles were excluded.

5.2.3 Eligibility

Eligibility process focused on reviewing selected articles based on research objective and research question of this study. Throughout this process, 51 articles were accepted to the quality control process, while 234 articles were excluded.

5.4 Quality Appraisal

51 selected articles were assessed through quality appraisal process by two other co-researchers. Six criteria were highlighted in this process as suggested by Abouzahra et al., (2020) such as follows:

- QA1. Is the objective of the study explicit?
QA2. Is the significance of the study clearly stated?
QA3. Is the research methodology clearly mentioned?
QA4. Is the fundamental elements of the approach clearly mentioned?
QA5. Is the work compared and measured with other similar work?
QA6. Are the limitations of the study clearly stated?

The assessment provides three answer options, which are ‘Yes’ (1.0 points), ‘Partly/ Not Fully’ (0.5 points), and ‘No’ (0 point). The articles selected achieved the total score above 3.0. The selected answer for each criterion is based on the evaluators' mutual agreement. Table 2 shows the result of this process.

Table 2: Quality Appraisal Checklist

Article	QA1	QA2	QA3	QA4	QA5	QA6	Total
A1	P	Y	Y	Y	N	N	3.5
A2	P	Y	Y	Y	P	Y	5
A3	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6
A4	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	5
A5	P	N	Y	P	N	Y	3
A6	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	5
A7	Y	P	Y	Y	Y	Y	5.5
A8	Y	P	Y	Y	Y	Y	5.5
A9	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6
A10	Y	P	Y	Y	Y	Y	5.5
A11	Y	P	Y	Y	Y	Y	5.5
A12	Y	N	Y	Y	P	P	4
A13	Y	P	Y	Y	Y	Y	5.5
A14	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	5
A15	P	N	N	N	Y	N	1.5
A16	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6
A17	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6
A18	P	P	Y	Y	Y	Y	5
A19	Y	N	N	P	P	Y	3
A20	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6
A21	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6
A22	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6
A23	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6
A24	Y	N	N	P	Y	P	3
A25	Y	P	Y	Y	Y	Y	5.5
A27	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6
A28	Y	P	Y	Y	Y	Y	5.5
A29	Y	P	Y	Y	P	Y	5
A30	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	5
A31	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	N	4
A32	Y	Y	P	P	Y	N	4
A33	Y	P	P	Y	Y	P	4.5
A34	Y	N	P	Y	N	N	2.5

The systematic searching strategies and quality appraisal process are explained in Figure 1.

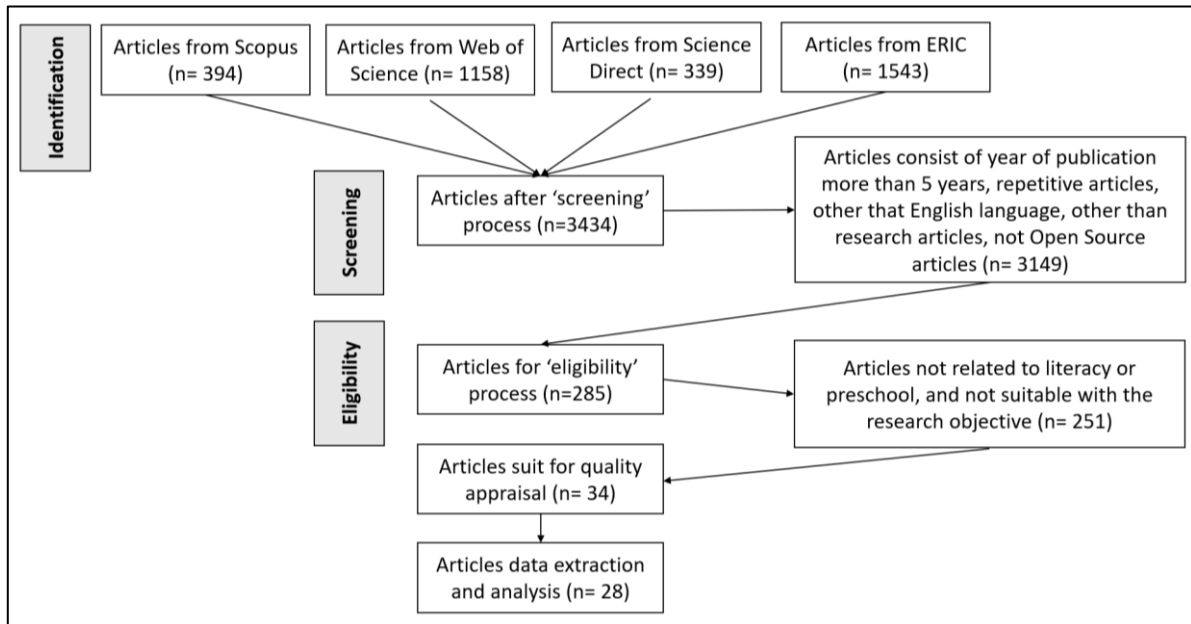


Figure 1: The process of systematic searching strategies and quality appraisal process

5.5 Data Extraction and Analysis

This study used inductive thematic analysis to determine an appropriate theme. This analysis refers to the method based on the results of past studies (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which comprises five steps, as follows:

5.5.1 Data Extraction for Thematic Analysis

The method used for theme analysis is data extraction, which is based on the research question and purpose and is derived from the data results in the articles' results and discussion sections.

5.5.2 Code Determination

Code determination describes the data extraction's commonalities. The retrieved data will be coded for familiarity.

5.5.3 Determination of Themes and Sub-Themes

The process of finding themes and sub-themes are based on significance, which data similarity is classified and categorized. Nine themes have been found in this investigation.

5.5.4 Validation of Themes and Sub-Themes

Validation is a process of determining if themes and sub-themes are appropriate, with at least two specialists in the field of expertise relevant to the study carry out this approach. The goals and questions of the study are also agreed upon.

5.5.5 Reporting Themes

The final stage of presenting the study's findings is reporting themes. Based on themes and sub-themes, this section will go into depth detail about the themes from the chosen articles.

6. Findings

Based on 28 selected articles, nine themes have been identified, which are; (i) play-based activities; (ii) reading and story-telling activities; (iii) writing and pre-writing, (iv) fine motor skills and visual activities, (v) language support, (vi) multimodal approach, (vii) collaborative approach, (viii) student-centered activity, and (ix) implementation of technology and digital tools.

6.1 Play-based Activities

Play-based learning, which includes activities such as puppetry and educational games, provides meaningful cognitive and physical experiences for children (Engel de Abreu et al., 2020; Khadijah et al., 2022; Strauss & Bipath, 2020). It supports literacy through narrative understanding, vocabulary development, and print awareness (Rand & Morrow, 2021). Play can be in the form of physical, social, constructive, fantasy, or rule-based activities, each enhancing children's social interaction, cognitive growth, and literacy skills (Sharifah Nor Puteh & Aliza, 2011). Auditory and visual awareness strengthen during play enables student to process and respond effectively to information (Excell & Linington, 2011). Play also nurtures communication, creativity, decision-making, and self-reflection, while linking experiences to real-life situations (Osei et al., 2016; Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2008; Hansen, 2020). Overall, play-based learning activates multiple senses, encourages focus, and promotes both verbal and non-verbal language development.

6.2 Reading and Story-Telling Activities

Reading and story-telling activities include read-aloud sessions (Alatalo et al., 2024; Alatalo & Westlund, 2021; McMahon-Morin et al., 2023) as well as shared, interactive, and dialogical reading approaches (Albuquerque & Martins, 2021; Chen et al., 2024; Islam & Park, 2016; Van Dijken, 2023; Zucker et al., 2021), significantly enhance children's literacy development. Environmental print exposure shows that print carries meaning and is composed of letters with distinct names and sounds (Neumann et al., 2009). Reading activities strengthen vocabulary and story comprehension while supporting memory recall and familiarization with words and contexts. Question-and-answer interactions during reading encourage deeper understanding and analytical thinking (Dickinson & Smith, 1994; McLachlan, 2019). Moreover, reading cultivates communication skills, critical thinking, and the ability to generate ideas through engagement with text (Islam & Park, 2016; Mason et al., 1989). Pre-reading activities and literacy games also play a vital role in sparking children's interest and improving comprehension (Nurul Aqidah & Zainiah, 2022; Osei et al., 2016).

6.3 Writing and Pre-writing

Teachers support pre-writing development through emergent and pretend writing practices (Alatalo et al., 2024; DeBaryshe, 2023; Engel de Abreu et al., 2020; Weadman et al., 2023). The aim of children's writing activities is to help them produce meaningful words, phrases, or short texts that serve as tools for communication (Alatalo et al., 2024). To strengthen writing abilities, teachers often adopt multisensory strategies for letter formation (Alatalo et al., 2024; Nurul Nabila Amirah et al., 2020). Four stages of emergent writing include (i) awareness, exploration, and scribbling; (ii) emergent or experimental writing; (iii) transitional or early writing; and (iv) conventional writing. These stages enhance children's skill from drawing and scribbling, to inventive spelling, and eventually to writing names and words accurately (Byington & Kim, 2014). Emergent writing, which integrates phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, and early composition skills, plays important role in shaping classroom writing environments and supports both literacy and communication development (DeBaryshe,

2023; Hall, 2019). Letter recognition and identification develop visual knowledge, grapheme-sound connections, and fine motor development (Alatalo et al., 2024; Hall, 2019). Writing activities also involve observation and social interaction with peers and teachers, allowing children to strengthen reading, writing, listening, and pronunciation skills simultaneously (Hall, 2019).

6.4 Fine Motor Skills and Visual Activities

Well-developed fine motor skills, encompasses with developmental dan cognitive abilities play an important role in reading development (Gidion, 2020; Juppri, 2019; Suggate et al., 2019). Fine motor skills were often practiced through the use of tools such as crayons and coloured pencils (Juppri, 2019; Yean et al., 2023). Children who are exposed to structured pre-reading programs, acquire knowledge of letter names and sounds, which later promotes perceptual-motor abilities, number concepts and language (Lonigan & Shanahan, 2008), besides help children to distinguish between letters and pictures (KilinçCi & Bayraktar, 2021). Writing also requires eye–hand coordination, integrating motor perception with fine motor abilities, which are essential for developing strong writing skills (Juppri, 2019; Gidion, 2020; Özkür, 2020; Genc-Ersoy, 2021; KilinçCi & Bayraktar, 2021), while visual activities involve recognizing and differentiating symbols and letters, a process that allows children to translate these recognitions into meaningful written communication (Saydam & Baştuğ, 2021).

6.5 Language Support

Child language development is strongly shaped by surrounding language development (Gilkerson et al., 2017; McKechnie et al., 2024; Nyberg, 2022), which reflects children’s socioeconomic background (Gilkerson et al., 2017). Parent-child interactions at home helps to support children’s skills in processing familiar words and enhance their vocabulary. This exposure improves vocabulary growth, critical language skills, lexical processing and language acquisition (McKechnie et al., 2024; Weisleder & Fernald, 2013). Children’s language development also inclined by opportunities in using language and competence level (Christopher, 2012). Environment which provides rich language nurtures phonological awareness and familiarity with letters through printed materials (Strickland & Riley-Ayers, 2006). Through storytelling activity, narrative skills also contribute to children’s language competency, which also ensure the proficiency aligns with developmental expectations (Puspitasari et al., 2023; Rungrojsuwan, 2023). Storytelling activity also strengthens students’ ability to retell stories, expand vocabulary and extract key ideas. These skills will improve students’ communication skills, and later providing students with better opportunities in practicing language, construct stories, develop sophisticated linguistic structures and express creativity (Spencer, 2012).

6.6 Multimodal Approach

Children’s literacy development is supported by sociodramatic play which integrate with vocabulary, narrative structures, story comprehension and print concepts that develop interest in book handling, reading and writing (Bernstein et al., 2024; Rand & Morrow, 2021). Children strengthen communication skills through multimodal learning experiences, either in verbally and non-verbally expression. Drama-based approach also encourages children in storytelling creativity and expressing their ideas in imaginative ways (Martello, 2001; Tombak, 2014; Aden & Theodotou, 2019), besides promoting teamwork and spatial awareness (Martello, 2001; Tombak, 2014), independence, imaginative thinking, and development of social and cooperative awareness (Martello, 2001; Tombak, 2014). In this process, children move beyond simple retelling and actively adopt and adapt characters—demonstrating understanding of

emotions, facial expressions, gestures, and the storyline itself (Barton & Baguley, 2014; Crane-Deklerk, 2020; Hansen, 2020; Martello, 2001; Tombak, 2014).

6.7 Collaborative Approach

Collaborative skill helps children' developing key competencies of 21-st century education, which includes problem solving, creativity, critical thinking, communication and collaboration. This approach allowed children to express ideas creatively and at the same time enhance the cooperative skills (Abu Al Rub, 2017; Yliverronen et al., 2018; Albuquerque & Martins, 2021; Martin, 2021; Piasta et al., 2021; Oktaviani et al., 2023). This will also play vital role in developing social identity and interpersonal skills, awareness of surrounding, resilience to criticism, and empathies (Tal, 2018; Yliverronen et al., 2018). These vital roles develop children's communication skills and thinking abilities (Hansen, 2020). Collaborative learning also enhances multiple benefits, including emotional, creative skills, cognitive skill, stimulating interest, building self-confidence, encourage active participation and promoting independence in idea generation and expression Oktaviani (2023). Besides that, according to Yliverronen et al., (2018), collaborative learning involves three cognitive processes, which are sharing and expressing ideas, develop verbal and non-verbal communication skills, and planning activities.

6.8 Student-Centred Activity

Child-centered teaching approaches increase literacy development through active participation of children in language activities which align to their needs and interests (Andiema & Kitainge, 2016; Nicholas et al., 2021). Children will be able to explore, experience and learn from the environment which are close to their interest (Cade et al., 2022). Throughout this approach, children will self-learn as well as developing self-inquiry skill, acquire children's senses in exploring and learning. The process of learning through this approach helps to develop children's literacy skills, either verbally or non-verbally. This will give children better experience and knowledge, by engaging with the environment themselves. Besides, this approach also aligns with constructivism theory which encourage children to gain better learning experience (Cade et al., 2022).

6.9 Technology and Digital Appliances Application

Application of technology and digital tools as an approach in teaching early literacy will attract children's learning (Hoque, 2005; Shifflet et al., 2020; DeBaryshe, 2023; Van Dijken, 2023). Active learning gives opportunities to children in developing literacy skills, including pre-writing skill (Hoque, 2005; National Association for the Education of Young Children & Fred Rogers Center, 2012; DeBaryshe, 2023). The existence of digital technologies helps children to self-explore their interests (Cerrone et al., 2019), compromise of communication, spelling and reading skills. This approach encourages the learning process based on children's needs and development. McLachlan (2019) stated that through implementation of technology in teaching early literacy, children should be able to foster story reading and writing skills.

7. Conclusion

The results from each theme, the study's limits, suggestions for additional research, and the study's implications for other studies can all be used to summarize this systematic literature review.

7.1 Conclusion of the Study Result

The nine themes show that teachers use different teaching approaches to improve children's literacy skills. Each method has its own effects and requires specific skills, which need teachers to be knowledgeable about different ways of teaching. Since every student has unique interests, abilities, and learning needs, different approaches should be applied. At the same time, the use of these approaches should consider teachers' readiness and the facilities available to implement them.

7.2 Limitation

This study is constrained in early literacy pedagogical teaching approach solely. Besides, the study was also limited to studies conducted within the five-year study period from 2020 to 2024. This is only applicable to the majority of research conducted during the epidemic period and post-pandemic era. Since the methods used to teach literacy during the pandemic were probably conducted virtually, there may be differences between the methods used then and now.

7.3 Recommendation

Future study on subject teaching approaches which in line with children's need and interest, such as science and maths, are suggested in light of this study. In addition, these subjects are among the subjects that plays important role in future learning. Besides that, study on literacy teaching strategies for different student levels in elementary and secondary education should also be conducted. Different experience and environment are some of the elements that play a role in developing language proficiency.

7.4 Implication

This paper demonstrates the importance of teachers to master skills of teaching literacy in align with children's development. Different approaches give different impact to children learning progress, depends on their interest. Thus, it is important for teachers to be competence in pedagogical knowledge especially in teaching early literacy. This also reflects to the environmental facilities readiness in ensuring teachers' knowledge, skills and approaches are aligned and well-integrated.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to thank University Sains Malaysia for providing the supports for this study.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this study.

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