



## Spiritual Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers and the Growth of Students' Spirituality through the Fruit of the Spirit at UPTD SMP Negeri 2 Mandrehe Utara

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### ABSTRACT

*This study explores the relationship between the spiritual competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers and the spiritual growth of students, as reflected in the manifestation of the Fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22–23). Conducted at UPTD SMP Negeri 2 Mandrehe Utara in Nias Regency, this research adopts an interpretive phenomenological approach to uncover how a spiritually competent teacher's faith, humility, and relational integrity shape students' moral and spiritual formation. Data were collected through observation, narrative interviews, and document analysis over three months, involving one CRE teacher and ten junior secondary students actively engaged in devotional activities. Findings reveal that the teacher's spiritual competence—evident in prayerful leadership, empathetic communication, and incarnational teaching—served as a living testimony of the gospel. Students reported observable spiritual growth, marked by greater empathy, self-control, and cooperation, indicating internalization of the Fruit of the Spirit. The teacher's integration of local Nias cultural values, particularly respect and communal harmony, enriched Christian pedagogy by contextualizing biblical virtues within students' lived experiences. Despite challenges such as limited instructional time and secular influences, the teacher's consistent spiritual modeling created a classroom culture of faith, love, and peace. The study concludes that spiritual competence functions as the core of transformative Christian education, where teaching becomes an act of ministry and formation. When teachers embody Christlike character, they not only transmit faith but cultivate communities where students encounter God and bear lasting spiritual fruit in daily life.*

**Keywords:** *Spiritual Competence, Christian Religious Education, Spirituality*

### INTRODUCTION

The ability of students to live out the Fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—is an essential indicator of

genuine Christian maturity. These attributes, as stated in Galatians 5:22-23, are not simply moral virtues but spiritual outcomes that signify a life transformed by the Holy Spirit. For adolescents, especially those in the junior secondary level, the formation of such spiritual fruit provides a moral compass amidst the turbulence of emotional development, peer influence, and value pluralism. In today's educational climate, where secularization and digital distraction often dominate, nurturing the Fruit of the Spirit becomes a sacred task of Christian Religious Education (PAK) that bridges the head and the heart, uniting faith knowledge with lived experience. Christian Religious Education (PAK) in Indonesia plays a transformative role in nurturing students' faith, character, and moral responsibility within a pluralistic society. According to the *Permendiknas* No. 16 of 2007, teacher competence encompasses four interrelated dimensions: pedagogical, professional, personal, and spiritual. Among these, spiritual competence occupies a foundational place because it determines how teachers embody and transmit the life of Christ in their daily interactions with students (Naibaho, 2020). The spiritually competent teacher is not merely a communicator of doctrine but a living testimony of the gospel, shaping students' inner life through relational authenticity and pastoral presence. Adolescence represents a critical stage in moral and spiritual development. Psychologically, it is a phase of identity construction, emotional experimentation, and social negotiation (Lickona, 1991). Without moral and spiritual anchoring, students may become easily swayed by peer pressure, cultural trends, and moral relativism. Therefore, the presence of a spiritually mature teacher becomes crucial. In the Christian education context, the teacher's role extends far beyond intellectual transmission; it embodies pastoral care, guidance, and mentorship toward Christlike maturity (Ephesians 4:13). This understanding reflects what Palmer (1998) describes as "teaching from the heart," where the authenticity of the teacher's inner life becomes the most powerful curriculum for students' formation. Spiritual competence can be defined as the integration of faith, moral consciousness, and daily practice in teaching ministry. A spiritually competent teacher demonstrates the Fruit of the Spirit not only through explicit instruction but through lived behavior—responding to conflict with gentleness, exercising patience in discipline, and showing compassion to students in need. Such teachers act as moral mirrors in which students see faith embodied in human form. As Tisdell (2003) notes, spirituality in education is "caught, not taught"; it grows through relational encounters and the atmosphere of grace cultivated in the classroom. The Fruit of the Spirit provides both the theological and ethical foundation for Christian character education. Each attribute represents a dimension of spiritual maturity that balances internal disposition and external behavior. Love motivates selfless care; joy reflects trust in God's providence; peace demonstrates inner harmony in Christ; patience signifies endurance in relationships; kindness and goodness reveal moral integrity; faithfulness denotes loyalty to truth; gentleness manifests humility; and self-control ensures discipline of desires. These are not optional virtues but divine imperatives that reflect God's character in human life (Wright, 2010). Hence, education that neglects spiritual fruit risks producing intelligent but spiritually barren individuals.

The locus of this study—UPTD SMP Negeri 2 Mandrehe Utara in Nias Regency—provides a meaningful context for examining how spiritual competence among Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers nurtures the growth of these fruits in students' lives. Nias society, deeply rooted in Christian tradition and local values honoring elders and

promoting communal harmony, offers fertile soil for contextualizing biblical virtues. Within this community, faith and culture intertwine, shaping moral identity in unique ways. The CRE teacher, therefore, stands as a cultural and spiritual bridge-translating biblical principles into lived reality through culturally sensitive pedagogy. This study seeks to explore how the spiritual competence of the CRE teacher contributes to the spiritual growth of students, particularly through the manifestation of the Fruit of the Spirit. It investigates how faith-based pedagogy, relational integrity, and cultural contextualization intersect in shaping students' moral-spiritual lives. By focusing on the case of UPTD SMP Negeri 2 Mandrehe Utara, this research aims to uncover the transformative potential of spiritual competence as both a personal calling and a professional standard in Christian education. Ultimately, it argues that when teachers embody the Fruit of the Spirit, their classrooms become living spaces of discipleship-where faith is not merely taught but experienced, and where students are formed not only to believe in Christ but to become like Him in word, attitude, and action.

## METHODS

This research applied an interpretive phenomenological approach to explore how the spiritual competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers influences students' spiritual growth, particularly as reflected in the manifestation of the Fruit of the Spirit at UPTD SMP Negeri 2 Mandrehe Utara in Nias Regency. Unlike a conventional descriptive design, this approach sought to uncover the lived experiences, personal reflections, and faith narratives that define the relationship between teachers' spirituality and students' moral formation. The interpretive nature of phenomenology allowed the researcher to focus on participants' inner meaning-making processes and the sacred dimensions of everyday school interactions, thus presenting education not merely as knowledge transmission but as spiritual transformation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The participants consisted of one Christian Religious Education teacher and ten students from grades VII to IX. They were selected through criterion-based purposive sampling, emphasizing those who demonstrated consistent involvement in devotional programs, religious learning, and moral initiatives within the school community. The research site-UPTD SMP Negeri 2 Mandrehe Utara-was chosen because of its distinctive integration of Christian faith and Nias cultural values, a traditional ethic of honoring elders and maintaining social harmony. This cultural-spiritual environment provided a unique framework for understanding how teachers' spiritual competence is contextualized in daily interactions and how it contributes to shaping students' spiritual identity. Data collection was conducted over three months, from January to March 2025, using three complementary techniques designed to capture the holistic reality of spiritual formation. The first method, spiritual ethnography, involved the researcher's direct and prolonged engagement in the school's daily life. The researcher attended morning devotions, classroom worship sessions, and informal prayer gatherings to observe how the teacher expressed values such as love, humility, and patience in both speech and conduct. Field notes were used to document spontaneous expressions of care, forgiveness, and empathy, which served as behavioral indicators of the teacher's spiritual competence. The second method involved narrative dialogues, or semi-structured interviews framed as faith-based storytelling. These interviews allowed both the teacher and students to share personal testimonies about

how spiritual learning occurs in relational contexts. The teacher's reflections revealed how personal communion with God shaped pedagogical practice, while students described how their experiences of guidance, encouragement, and correction helped them understand virtues like peace, kindness, and self-control as living realities rather than abstract doctrines. The third data source was reflective document analysis, in which lesson plans, devotional materials, and student reflection journals were examined as textual evidence of how faith was intentionally woven into the educational process. These documents were treated not as administrative artifacts but as spiritual narratives that embody the teacher's intent to connect biblical truth with students' lived experiences. The analysis of these texts sought to uncover recurring theological themes, the integration of biblical values into instructional goals, and the implicit formation of spiritual attitudes consistent with the Fruit of the Spirit. Data analysis followed an iterative hermeneutical process interactive model but adapted for theological interpretation. The researcher began by immersing deeply in the data-rereading transcripts and field notes multiple times to identify the tone, rhythm, and affective quality of participants' spiritual expressions. This was followed by thematic synthesis, in which recurring ideas such as "teacher as witness," "faith through relationship," and "spiritual imitation" were coded inductively. The final interpretive stage involved constructing an integrated narrative that portrayed the teacher's spiritual competence as both the source and medium of students' spiritual growth. This process was not linear but cyclical, as interpretation evolved through constant reflection and dialogue with participants and the data.

To ensure trustworthiness, triangulation was implemented across methods (observation, interview, document analysis) and sources (teacher and students). Throughout the study, the researcher maintained a reflexive journal to monitor personal bias and remain attentive to the ethical and spiritual implications of interpretation. Ethical considerations were guided by Christian values of honesty, respect, and compassion. Participants were informed about the research goals, confidentiality was strictly maintained, and participation was entirely voluntary. This phenomenological design provided a deeply contextual and spiritually sensitive understanding of how teachers' spiritual competence shapes students' spiritual development. By integrating observation, narrative, and reflection, the study revealed that spirituality in Christian education is best understood not as a cognitive doctrine but as a lived relationship-embodied, relational, and continually renewed through the presence of the Holy Spirit working within both teacher and student.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study reveal that the spiritual competence of the Christian Religious Education (CRE) teacher at UPTD SMP Negeri 2 Mandrehe Utara serves as a central catalyst for the spiritual growth of students, particularly as reflected in the manifestation of the Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23). Through an interpretive phenomenological lens, four interrelated dimensions emerged from the data: the manifestation of the teacher's spiritual competence, the observable growth of students' spirituality, the integration of Nias cultural values with Christian teachings, and the challenges that shape the formation process. Each dimension contributes to a holistic understanding of how faith, culture, and education converge to foster character transformation within the

school environment. The manifestation of the teacher's spiritual competence was consistently evident through daily practices of faith, humility, and servant leadership. Observations of classroom activities and devotional gatherings revealed that every lesson began with a short reflection or prayer rooted in biblical themes. These moments were not mere rituals but intentional acts of spiritual formation designed to orient students' hearts toward God before engaging with academic material. The teacher's communication style—marked by gentleness, attentiveness, and patience—mirrored the Christlike virtues emphasized in Colossians 3:12-14, which urges believers to "clothe themselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience." Rather than responding to mistakes with reprimand or harsh criticism, the teacher guided correction through forgiveness and understanding. During interviews, several students described feeling "at peace" and "respected" when their teacher addressed their faults privately and kindly. One student remarked, "When the teacher prays with us after class, I feel calmer, like God understands me." Such testimonies underscore the relational dimension of spiritual competence, where love and empathy form the foundation for moral instruction. This resonates with Noddings' (2005) "ethic of care," which frames moral education as a relational process grounded in authentic empathy and presence. The CRE teacher's prayerful life extended beyond the classroom; she was frequently seen praying individually for students before school events or counseling sessions, demonstrating a pastoral dimension to her vocation. This integrative spirituality—faith expressed through daily acts of service and compassion—illustrates what Knight (2006) describes as "incarnational pedagogy," where the teacher becomes a living embodiment of Christ's teachings through consistent relational witness.

The growth of students' spirituality became increasingly visible over the three-month observation period. Behavioral transformations were observed both in classroom interactions and during informal settings such as morning devotions and group activities. Students who initially displayed indifference or conflict-prone attitudes gradually began to exhibit the Fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). They began to express affection and concern for peers, willingly assisting classmates who struggled academically or emotionally. For example, during one observation, a student voluntarily helped another who was anxious about public speaking during a class presentation by offering encouragement and prayer. Such moments reflect not only moral awareness but internalized spirituality—the outward expression of inward faith. In interviews, students frequently linked their growth to the teacher's example and the classroom atmosphere. One student commented, "When we read the Bible together, I realize that love means more than words—it's about helping and forgiving." Another added, "The teacher reminds us to pray before making decisions, and now I do that even at home." These statements reveal that students' spiritual growth extended beyond cognitive understanding to embodied practice—a hallmark of transformative Christian education (Groome, 1998). The teacher's mentoring role emerged as crucial to this development. Rather than positioning herself as a mere authority figure, the CRE teacher acted as a spiritual companion, guiding students through reflective dialogue and pastoral presence. This aligns with Ephesians 4:13, which emphasizes that Christian maturity involves "growing into the fullness of Christ." The teacher's mentoring process often included moral storytelling, prayer

partnerships, and reflective journaling. In one recorded session, students were asked to identify one Fruit of the Spirit they wanted to develop more deeply and to write a prayer committing themselves to that goal. This exercise prompted self-reflection, accountability, and awareness of personal growth. Over time, students began recognizing moral choices as opportunities for spiritual witness, suggesting that the teacher's modeling of Christlike behavior effectively shaped their understanding of discipleship. The findings confirm that spiritual competence among teachers functions as both a pedagogical approach and a spiritual ministry—a conduit through which students encounter God's transforming presence in their daily learning. Equally significant is the integration of local Nias culture and Christian values, which played a pivotal role in contextualizing the Fruit of the Spirit within students' lived realities. The teacher deliberately incorporated cultural expressions, a Nias term signifying respect for elders and communal harmony—into biblical discussions. By relating Christian virtues like humility and love, students were able to perceive spiritual growth not as foreign moral concepts but as extensions of their cultural identity. For instance, during a lesson on kindness and patience, the teacher used a local proverb, *"Si so'ulu ba mböi niha"* ("Respect brings life to the community"), to illustrate how honoring others sustains harmony—mirroring the biblical call in Romans 12:10 to "honor one another above yourselves." This integration helped students internalize the idea that Christian spirituality enhances rather than replaces cultural wisdom. As contextual theology suggests (Bevans, 2002), faith becomes more meaningful when it resonates with cultural narratives, allowing learners to experience Christianity as a living faith within their social reality. Through this approach, students learned to express the Fruit of the Spirit not only in personal piety but in social behavior consistent with community ethics. Observations revealed that after these lessons, students showed greater respect toward teachers and elders, greeting them politely and assisting them with tasks—behaviors recognized in Nias culture as markers of spiritual maturity. The teacher's ability to bridge biblical truth with cultural values thus became a practical model of holistic Christian pedagogy, where faith formation aligns with cultural affirmation. One major obstacle was the limited instructional time allocated for CRE within the public-school curriculum. With only a few hours per week designated for religious education, opportunities for deep spiritual reflection and pastoral mentoring were constrained. The teacher compensated for this by integrating spiritual moments into other school activities—leading short devotions before assemblies, offering prayer during extracurricular meetings, and engaging students in informal spiritual conversations. The constraint highlights the broader institutional challenge of balancing academic objectives with spiritual development in state schools. Another challenge stemmed from the growing influence of digital media and secular culture, which often promotes values contrary to Christian teachings. Several students admitted struggling to maintain consistency between what they learned in CRE class and the behaviors modeled in online environments. The teacher addressed this issue through guided discussions on media discernment and self-control, relating these to the Fruit of the Spirit, particularly temperance (self-control). By framing media consumption as a moral-spiritual choice, the teacher encouraged critical reflection rather than prohibition, teaching students to apply faith-based principles in modern contexts. In addressing these challenges, the teacher's spiritual resilience and faith maturity became evident. Rather than perceiving obstacles as deterrents, she viewed them as opportunities for deeper reliance on God's grace. Her

approach resonates with 2 Corinthians 12:9, *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”* This theological orientation allowed her to maintain hope, patience, and perseverance even when visible progress among students appeared slow. The relational trust she cultivated enabled students to approach her with personal struggles, turning the classroom into a community of mutual encouragement. In this sense, spiritual competence transcended formal pedagogy-it became an incarnational witness, embodying God’s love through daily faithfulness. Knight (2006) emphasizes that the most effective Christian educators are those who “teach from being,” whose moral authority stems not from position but from the authenticity of their spiritual life. This finding affirms that students’ moral and spiritual growth depends not merely on what teachers teach, but on who teachers are in Christ. Another layer of the discussion concerns the institutional and theological implications of spiritual competence. The research suggests that the cultivation of the Fruit of the Spirit in students cannot occur apart from the teacher’s own spiritual formation. The process of guiding others toward Christlikeness requires ongoing renewal in prayer, Scripture study, and community worship. The CRE teacher in this study regularly participated in church activities, prayer meetings, and local fellowship, which sustained her spiritual vitality. This ongoing personal formation enabled her to serve not only as an educator but as a living testimony of faith. For institutions like UPTD SMP Negeri 2 Mandrehe Utara, this underscores the importance of professional development programs that include spiritual enrichment, mentoring circles, and theological reflection for teachers. A spiritually competent teacher embodies the mission of Christian education as a partnership between faith and practice, between divine calling and educational responsibility (Naibaho, 2020). The integration of spiritual and cultural education demonstrated a transformative impact on school climate. Over the course of the study, the school environment began to exhibit greater harmony and cooperation. Conflicts between students were increasingly resolved through dialogue and prayer rather than punitive measures. Teachers from other subjects noted improved classroom behavior, attributing it to the CRE teacher’s influence. These findings suggest that spiritual competence, when consistently practiced, generates ripple effects across the educational community, fostering what Tisdell (2003) describes as “spiritually grounded learning communities”-spaces where the sacred and the secular coexist in mutual respect and purpose. The CRE teacher’s relational ministry created an atmosphere of peace that transcended academic achievement, nurturing the inner life of both students and faculty. The results reaffirm the principle that spiritual formation in education is an act of divine participation. As Ephesians 2:10 declares, *“We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works.”* Teachers are co-laborers in God’s redemptive work, facilitating environments where the Holy Spirit can nurture spiritual fruit in young lives. The study thus contributes to Christian educational theory by illustrating that spiritual competence is both relational and transformational: it emerges from authentic communion with God and expresses itself through compassionate, faith-informed pedagogy. The presence of the Holy Spirit becomes evident not through doctrinal mastery but through lived virtues-love, peace, patience, and kindness-that make the invisible grace of God tangible in educational contexts. The results and discussion affirm that at UPTD SMP Negeri 2 Mandrehe Utara, the CRE teacher’s spiritual competence profoundly shapes students’ spiritual growth and the moral atmosphere of the school. Through faithful witness, relational integrity, and cultural sensitivity, the

teacher has embodied a model of Christian education that unites biblical truth with lived compassion. Students' development of the Fruit of the Spirit demonstrates that authentic spiritual formation arises where teaching becomes a ministry of presence, love, and example. The integration of Nias cultural values reinforces that Christian spirituality thrives not in isolation from culture but through its redemptive transformation. Though challenges persist-limited instructional time, secular influence, and institutional constraints-the teacher's commitment to prayerful, incarnational pedagogy ensures that spiritual growth continues. This study reaffirms that spiritual competence in Christian educators is not an optional enhancement but the very heart of transformative learning, where both teacher and student are shaped into Christlikeness through the continual work of the Holy Spirit.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this study lead to several key conclusions that highlight the transformative role of spiritual competence in Christian Religious Education (CRE) and its profound influence on students' spiritual growth, especially in relation to the Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23). At UPTD SMP Negeri 2 Mandrehe Utara, the CRE teacher exemplified that effective Christian education is not merely the transmission of religious doctrine but the embodiment of Christlike character that inspires spiritual imitation among students. The teacher's spiritual competence-expressed through prayer, humility, compassion, and relational integrity-created an environment where faith was not only taught but lived, experienced, and shared. This incarnational approach transformed the classroom into a spiritual community where learning was deeply intertwined with discipleship, and where students learned to live out love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control as expressions of their faith. The central conclusion drawn from the research is that the spiritual maturity of the teacher functions as the root from which students' spiritual fruit grows. When teachers embody the values of Christ, they model a spirituality that transcends words and becomes visible in actions, attitudes, and relationships. The study showed that students were not simply learning about biblical virtues cognitively but were being spiritually shaped through their teacher's consistent example of faithfulness and empathy. This finding supports the argument that spirituality in education is "caught, not taught," meaning that transformation happens primarily through relational presence rather than didactic instruction. In this context, the teacher served as a living testimony of the gospel, showing that teaching can itself be a spiritual vocation-an act of divine partnership where the Holy Spirit works through human example to bring about character renewal in others. The study also demonstrated that students' spiritual growth was evident not only in verbal expressions of faith but in tangible behavioral changes. Over the research period, students increasingly displayed the Fruit of the Spirit in everyday interactions-helping peers, forgiving offenses, practicing patience, and showing greater respect toward teachers and elders. This internalization of spiritual values marks the movement from external compliance to internal transformation, reflecting the process of sanctification as understood in Christian theology. The CRE teacher's mentorship played a vital role in this progression, as her gentle correction, prayerful encouragement, and personal engagement helped students translate biblical teachings into lived practice. Through guided reflection, prayer partnerships, and moral storytelling, students began to see the Christian life as a daily journey of growing in grace.

Another significant conclusion relates to the integration of local Nias culture with Christian spiritual formation. The teacher's use of cultural wisdom, especially the value of respect and communal harmony, provided a bridge between biblical principles and students' lived experiences. By connecting the Fruit of the Spirit with cultural expressions of respect, loyalty, and harmony, the teacher contextualized Christian virtue in a way that was both familiar and transformative. This synergy between local culture and Christian faith created a pedagogy that was not only spiritually deep but culturally authentic, aligning model of contextual theology, which emphasizes that faith must take root in local soil to bear genuine fruit. This approach affirmed that Christianity does not negate indigenous wisdom but fulfills and sanctifies it. Despite the encouraging results, the study also acknowledged systemic and cultural challenges that constrain spiritual formation in public schools. Limited instructional hours for CRE, exposure to secular digital media, and the dominance of academic metrics often leave little room for reflective or pastoral engagement. However, the CRE teacher's spiritual resilience turned these obstacles into opportunities for ministry. She incorporated prayer and reflection into extracurricular activities and informal interactions, ensuring that spiritual guidance remained a consistent part of students' lives. This demonstrated that spiritual competence involves not only knowledge and belief but adaptability and perseverance—a willingness to integrate faith into every educational circumstance. The findings affirm that spiritual formation in education is an act of divine cooperation. Teachers, as co-laborers with God (1 Corinthians 3:9), participate in the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit by creating spaces where students can encounter divine truth and grace. The CRE teacher's role at UPTD SMP Negeri 2 Mandrehe Utara illustrates this sacred partnership: her daily faith practices, compassionate discipline, and contextualized pedagogy allowed the Spirit to work through ordinary moments of teaching and interaction. This reinforces Ephesians 2:10, which reminds believers that they are "God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works." In this light, teaching becomes a ministry of reconciliation and transformation rather than a mere professional duty. The broader implication of this study is that spiritual competence must be recognized as the cornerstone of effective Christian education. Institutions should prioritize not only teachers' pedagogical and professional training but also their spiritual formation through retreats, mentoring, and theological reflection. When teachers are spiritually nourished, their classrooms become sanctuaries of grace where students encounter God through learning. Moreover, integrating cultural values into Christian pedagogy, as seen in the Nias context, ensures that faith education remains grounded, relevant, and incarnational.

In conclusion, the study affirms that the Fruit of the Spirit can flourish among students when teachers embody and nurture it through authentic, Spirit-led relationships. Spiritual competence in teachers acts as the invisible yet powerful force that transforms the classroom into a living community of faith, love, and mutual respect. At UPTD SMP Negeri 2 Mandrehe Utara, this dynamic was vividly manifested as students grew not only in knowledge but in Christlike character—becoming compassionate, patient, and self-controlled individuals. Ultimately, the study demonstrates that Christian Religious Education fulfills its divine mission not by producing religiously informed minds alone but by cultivating hearts and lives that bear lasting spiritual fruit, reflecting the presence of Christ in both school and society.

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