



Internalization of Moral Values through Hidden Curriculum in Character Building of Students

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ABSTRACT

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This study aims to examine the strategic implementation of hidden curriculum in internalizing moral (*akhlak*) values and fostering students' character development at MTs Miftahul Jannah. This research employed a descriptive qualitative approach using observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis involving the principal, Islamic Religious Education teachers, homeroom teachers, and students selected through purposive sampling. Data were analyzed using Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's interactive model consisting of data condensation, data display, and verification, while credibility was ensured through triangulation of sources and techniques. The findings show that hidden curriculum is implemented through three main forms: teacher role modeling, religious habituation, and school discipline culture. The internalization process occurs through value transformation, transaction, and transinternalization, which strengthen students' religious commitment, social behavior, discipline, and responsibility. The study concludes that hidden curriculum effectively transforms moral values into daily practices. The implication emphasizes the need to strengthen school culture, teacher exemplarity, and collaboration among stakeholders to develop sustainable Islamic character education in educational institutions.

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic education is fundamentally oriented not only toward developing students' intellectual abilities but also toward nurturing individuals who possess faith, piety, and noble moral character (*akhlak*) (Kosim et al., 2024; Salim et al., 2024). The success of Islamic education should therefore be measured not merely by academic achievement but also by students' ability to internalize and practice moral values in their daily lives (Fahrurrozi et al., 2025; Komala & Sukandar, 2025). This issue has become increasingly important as society experiences rapid technological advancement, globalization, and cultural transformation that significantly influence students' attitudes and behaviors (Galaksi, 2025). Educational institutions are therefore expected to produce graduates who

demonstrate integrity, responsibility, social awareness, and ethical commitment. Muthoharoh (2021) argues that akhlak is the primary indicator of successful Islamic education because it reflects individuals who are faithful, pious, morally responsible, and capable of contributing positively to society (Pelawa et al., 2024; Sayidah & Fatimah, 2025).

Despite the growing emphasis on character education in national education policies and Islamic educational institutions, various moral challenges continue to emerge among students (Apriliani & Gurnadi, 2026). Problems such as declining discipline, limited responsibility, reduced respect for teachers, weak social awareness, and inappropriate behaviors indicate that formal classroom instruction alone has not been sufficient to cultivate students' moral character effectively (Amalia et al., 2025; Fitri & Arief, 2025). These conditions suggest that teaching moral values as cognitive knowledge does not automatically produce consistent moral behavior (Khairani et al., 2024). Instead, moral values must be internalized through continuous educational experiences involving habituation, exemplary role models, meaningful social interaction, and supportive school culture (Arifin et al., 2023). Hidayati (2022) explains that the internalization of akhlak values is a gradual process through which students understand, appreciate, and consistently practice moral principles in their daily lives, thereby strengthening lasting character development (Zuhri et al., 2026).

This phenomenon is also evident in many Islamic junior secondary schools (Madrasah Tsanawiyah), where religious instruction is formally integrated into the curriculum but is not always accompanied by consistent moral behavior among students (Fahlawi et al., 2025; Ma'arif et al., 2024). Daily school life offers numerous opportunities for character development through greeting practices, congregational prayers, classroom discipline, environmental cleanliness, respect for teachers, orderly queuing, and courteous interactions within the school community (Abidin et al., 2024; Sari et al., 2025). These routine activities represent forms of the hidden curriculum operating through school culture rather than officially documented curricular objectives. However, these practices often occur naturally without systematic planning or strategic management (Abidin et al., 2024; Ainiyah et al., 2025). Consequently, the mechanisms through which the hidden curriculum contributes to the internalization of moral values remain insufficiently understood, highlighting the need to examine its strategic implementation in fostering students' character development.

The concept of the hidden curriculum, first introduced by Jackson (1968), refers to the implicit values, norms, expectations, and social experiences that students acquire through everyday interactions and school culture rather than through the formal curriculum (Homsiyah et al., 2026; Rahayu et al., 2023). Since its introduction, numerous studies have demonstrated its significant contribution to character education. Rahmawati (2021) found that habituation and teachers' exemplary behavior play crucial roles in shaping students' character through the

hidden curriculum (Malahati & Rokhimawan, 2024; Manik, 2023). Similarly, Fauzan (2022) reported that integrating religious values into Islamic Religious Education strengthens the internalization of moral values during learning activities (Litaay et al., 2025). Furthermore, Saputra (2024) concluded that a religious school culture positively influences students' character formation through continuous moral habituation and routine religious activities (Ishomuddin & Aziz, 2025). Collectively, these studies confirm the hidden curriculum as an essential instrument for moral education.

Although previous studies have enriched discussions on character education and the hidden curriculum, several important limitations remain. Most studies primarily describe the existence of the hidden curriculum as part of school culture without explaining the specific strategies used to facilitate the internalization of moral values (Warsah et al., 2024; Zaini, 2023). Other studies mainly emphasize classroom-based Islamic Religious Education while overlooking the broader influence of school culture, teacher role modeling, habitual practices, and informal social interactions as mechanisms for character development (Sahrandi et al., 2026). In addition, previous research generally focuses on program implementation rather than examining how moral values are internalized and ultimately shape students' character. Consequently, an important research gap remains regarding the integration of hidden curriculum strategies, moral value internalization, and character formation within a comprehensive analytical framework.

Based on these gaps, this study offers a novel perspective by examining the strategic implementation of the hidden curriculum as a systematic approach to internalizing moral values and fostering students' character development. Unlike previous studies emphasizing either school culture or moral education independently, this research integrates three interconnected dimensions: hidden curriculum implementation, moral value internalization, and students' character formation. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, the study provides an in-depth understanding of how moral values are transmitted through school culture, teacher role modeling, habituation, religious practices, and everyday social interactions. This integrated perspective represents the study's state of the art by explaining the mechanisms through which the hidden curriculum contributes to character education while providing practical guidance for strengthening sustainable character education in Islamic schools.

Based on the preceding discussion, this study seeks to answer the following central question: How is the hidden curriculum strategically implemented to internalize moral values and foster students' character development? Specifically, the research examines three interrelated aspects: the forms and strategies of hidden curriculum implementation, the process through which students internalize moral values, and the resulting impact on their character formation. This study is grounded in the argument that successful

character education depends not only on the formal curriculum but also on students' daily experiences embedded within school culture, teacher role modeling, religious habituation, informal interactions, and unwritten institutional norms. Accordingly, systematic and consistent implementation of the hidden curriculum is expected to strengthen moral value internalization and contribute to sustainable character development while enriching theoretical and practical perspectives within Islamic education.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to explore the implementation of the hidden curriculum in internalizing moral (*akhlak*) values and fostering students' character development. A qualitative approach was selected because the research focused on understanding social phenomena, participants' experiences, and educational processes within their natural setting rather than measuring variables quantitatively. Descriptive qualitative research enables researchers to provide a comprehensive account of events, interactions, and meanings constructed by participants, thereby producing an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. This design was considered appropriate because the internalization of moral values through the hidden curriculum occurs implicitly through daily interactions, school culture, religious habituation, and teachers' exemplary behavior, all of which require contextual interpretation rather than statistical analysis.

The research was conducted at MTs Miftahul Jannah Gading, Probolinggo, Indonesia. This madrasah was purposively selected because it consistently integrates religious values into students' daily activities through various hidden curriculum practices, including congregational prayers, Qur'an recitation, teacher role modeling, disciplinary routines, and religious habituation programs. In addition, the school has developed a learning environment emphasizing character education alongside academic achievement, making it an appropriate setting for investigating the process of moral value internalization. The accessibility of the research site and the willingness of school administrators to facilitate data collection also supported the selection of this location.

Data were collected from the principal, three Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers who also served as homeroom teachers, and ten students selected through purposive sampling because of their direct involvement in implementing and experiencing the hidden curriculum. Data collection was conducted from January to March 2026 using three techniques: observation, interviews, and documentation. Participant observation examined religious habituation, classroom interactions, teacher role modeling, disciplinary practices, and students' daily behavior. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews explored participants' perceptions of hidden curriculum implementation, moral value internalization, and character development. Document analysis included school

profiles, regulations, character education programs, activity schedules, and related institutional records. Combining these three techniques enabled comprehensive data collection and strengthened the credibility of the findings through methodological triangulation.

Data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), consisting of four interconnected stages (Sutisman & Mardiana, 2026). The first stage was data condensation, in which interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents were organized, simplified, coded, and categorized according to the research objectives while preserving their essential meanings. The second stage was data display, where the condensed data were systematically presented in narrative descriptions, thematic matrices, and summary tables to facilitate interpretation and identify relationships among emerging themes. The third stage involved drawing conclusions, during which patterns, themes, and meanings related to hidden curriculum implementation, moral value internalization, and character development were interpreted. The final stage was verification, in which preliminary conclusions were continuously reviewed, compared across data sources, and refined throughout the research process to ensure that the interpretations accurately reflected participants' experiences and the empirical evidence.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Teacher Role Modeling (*Uswatun Hasanah*)

Teacher role modeling emerged as the most prominent form of the hidden curriculum implemented at MTs Miftahul Jannah. In this study, teacher role modeling is operationally defined as teachers' consistent demonstration of moral values through everyday attitudes, behaviors, communication, appearance, discipline, and interpersonal interactions that implicitly become learning experiences for students. Rather than being formally stated in lesson plans or curriculum documents, these values are transmitted through teachers' daily practices within the school environment. The findings indicate that teacher role modeling functions as an informal educational mechanism through which students observe, imitate, and gradually internalize desirable moral behaviors. Consequently, teachers serve not only as instructors who deliver academic content but also as living examples whose daily conduct continuously reinforces the school's efforts to cultivate students' moral character.

Interview and observation data reveal that teacher role modeling serves as the foundation of character education and represents the primary mechanism of hidden curriculum implementation at MTs Miftahul Jannah. The principal emphasized that teachers are expected to become role models because students learn more from teachers' actions than from verbal instruction. Similarly, Islamic

Religious Education teachers acknowledged that their daily behaviors, including greeting students politely, participating in religious activities, using respectful language, demonstrating responsibility, and maintaining discipline, function as educational instruments for shaping students' moral development. The researcher interprets these findings as evidence that teacher role modeling is not merely an individual practice but has developed into a shared professional culture. Through consistent examples provided by educators, students continuously encounter and experience Islamic moral values in authentic social contexts.

Observation results further strengthened the interview findings by demonstrating that teachers consistently practiced behaviors aligned with the moral values promoted by the madrasah. Teachers were observed greeting students with salam, communicating respectfully, arriving on time, dressing according to Islamic values, maintaining cleanliness, and guiding students through direct examples of responsible behavior. These practices indicate that teacher role modeling operates as an implicit educational process in which moral values are transmitted through repeated observation, interaction, and imitation. The researcher concludes that teacher role modeling forms a systematic pattern of moral value transmission, where teachers function not only as knowledge providers but also as moral references. Therefore, the effectiveness of character education depends on the ability of educators to embody the values they seek to instill, transforming moral principles into students' daily habits and character.

Table 1 Forms of Hidden Curriculum and Internalized Moral Values

Forms of Hidden Curriculum		Examples of Activities	Moral Values Developed
Teacher Role Modeling		Greeting with <i>salam</i> , dressing neatly and modestly, arriving on time, and using polite language	Moral values toward Allah; moral values toward others
Religious Habituation		<i>Shalat dhuha</i> (morning prayer), Qur'an recitation, congregational <i>dzuhur</i> prayer, and weekly <i>istighatsah</i> activities	Moral values toward Allah (discipline in religious practices)
School Discipline Culture		Greeting and shaking hands with teachers, maintaining cleanliness, orderly behavior in corridors, and reminding one another	Moral values toward oneself; moral values toward others

Source: Processed primary research data, 2026

Table 1 illustrates that the hidden curriculum at MTs Miftahul Jannah operates through three interconnected forms: teacher role modeling, religious habituation, and school discipline culture. These three forms demonstrate that moral (*akhlak*) values are not only transmitted through formal religious instruction but also developed through students' continuous experiences within the school environment. Teacher role modeling contributes to the formation of

moral values by providing concrete examples of Islamic attitudes and behaviors, such as politeness, discipline, and responsibility. Religious habituation strengthens students' spiritual awareness by encouraging consistent engagement in worship practices, thereby developing discipline and commitment toward Allah. Meanwhile, school discipline culture shapes students' personal and social morality through daily practices that promote responsibility, cleanliness, respect, and cooperation. The pattern shown in the table indicates that the hidden curriculum functions as an integrated mechanism in which repeated practices, social interactions, and environmental influences collectively facilitate the internalization of moral values. Therefore, the development of students' character at MTs Miftahul Jannah is achieved not merely through explicit teaching but through a sustained school culture that continuously reinforces Islamic moral principles.

The Process of Moral Value Internalization through Hidden Curriculum

The internalization of moral (akhlak) values through the hidden curriculum at MTs Miftahul Jannah is operationally defined in this study as a gradual process through which students acquire, experience, practice, and embody Islamic moral values through implicit educational experiences embedded in school culture. This process does not occur merely through direct moral instruction but develops through continuous interaction between teachers, students, institutional practices, and the surrounding educational environment. Based on the findings, the internalization process follows three interconnected stages: value transformation, value transaction, and transinternalization. The transformation stage involves the delivery of moral messages through verbal communication, the transaction stage occurs through reciprocal interaction and practical examples, while the transinternalization stage represents the integration of values into students' personalities and daily behaviors. These stages demonstrate that hidden curriculum functions as a continuous mechanism for transforming moral knowledge into lived character.

Table 2. The Process of Moral Value Internalization through Hidden Curriculum

Interview Excerpt	Indicator of Moral Value Internalization	Informant
<i>"We always insert moral messages during learning activities, provide advice when students make mistakes, and remind them about discipline, respect, and religious responsibility."</i>	Value Transformation – Moral values are introduced through verbal instruction, advice, and reinforcement during classroom learning activities.	Islamic Religious Education (PAI) Teacher
<i>"Students do not only need to hear about good behavior, but they must see examples from teachers. Therefore, teachers must demonstrate discipline, politeness, and responsibility in their"</i>	Value Transaction – Moral values are strengthened through teacher role modeling, daily interaction, and exemplary behavior that encourages students to imitate positive conduct.	Principal of the Madrasah

<i>daily actions."</i>		
<i>"At first, we followed religious activities because teachers instructed us, but now we perform them because we feel they are important and have become our habits."</i>	Transinternalization – Moral values are internalized as students develop personal awareness, intrinsic motivation, and habitual practice without external coercion.	Student
<i>"I still greet teachers, maintain cleanliness, and pray even when no teacher is watching because these actions have become part of my routine."</i>	Behavioral Internalization – Internalized moral values are reflected in autonomous, consistent, and self-regulated behavior in everyday school life.	Student

Table 2 show indicate that the internalization of moral values through hidden curriculum occurs through a progressive developmental process rather than an instant change in student behavior. The statement from the PAI teacher reflects the transformation stage, where moral values are initially introduced through verbal explanation, advice, and reminders. Although this stage appears instructional, it provides students with conceptual understanding regarding desirable behaviors and Islamic principles. The researcher interprets this finding as evidence that cognitive awareness remains an essential foundation in moral education because students need to recognize and understand the meaning of values before they can practice them. However, the data also show that verbal communication alone is insufficient; therefore, the internalization process continues through direct experience and interaction within the school environment.

The second and third stages shown in Table 2 reveal that moral value internalization becomes stronger when students are involved in direct experiences and gradually develop personal awareness. The transaction stage represents the core mechanism of hidden curriculum because values are not merely communicated but embodied through teachers' daily practices, making educators concrete references through which students learn discipline, responsibility, respect, and religious commitment. Meanwhile, students' responses indicate the achievement of the transinternalization stage, where moral values are no longer practiced solely because of external supervision or institutional demands but because they have developed internal awareness and personal commitment. Observation results further confirm these findings, showing that students routinely performed *shalat dhuha*, participated in Qur'an recitation, greeted teachers, maintained cleanliness, communicated respectfully, and reminded peers to uphold discipline without direct instruction. These findings demonstrate that hidden curriculum facilitates a continuous process of moral formation through knowledge acquisition, behavioral practice, and value integration. Thus, effective moral internalization depends on the consistency of moral communication, authentic role modeling, and repeated opportunities for practice, enabling students to transform Islamic values into stable character and everyday behavior.

The Impact of Moral Value Internalization on Students' Behavior

The impact of moral (*akhlak*) value internalization through the hidden curriculum at MTs Miftahul Jannah is operationally defined in this study as the observable transformation of students' attitudes, behaviors, and daily practices resulting from continuous exposure to moral values embedded within the madrasah environment. This impact refers to changes in three dimensions of Islamic morality: morality toward Allah (*akhlak kepada Allah*), morality toward others (*akhlak kepada sesama*), and morality toward oneself (*akhlak kepada diri sendiri*). The findings indicate that the implementation of hidden curriculum contributes to behavioral changes reflected in students' increased religious commitment, improved social interactions, and stronger personal discipline. These changes are not merely the result of formal moral instruction but emerge through repeated experiences, habituation, teacher modeling, and school culture that encourage students to practice Islamic values consistently in their everyday lives.

Table 3. The Impact of Moral Value Internalization on Three Dimensions of *Akhlak*

Dimensions of <i>Akhlak</i>	Indicators of Change	Data Sources
Morality toward Allah (<i>Akhlak kepada Allah</i>)	85–90% attendance in congregational prayers; increased enthusiasm for Qur'an recitation activities	Observation; homeroom teacher reports
Morality toward Others (<i>Akhlak kepada Sesama</i>)	Decreased social misconduct; increased politeness, respect, and concern for others	Teacher interviews; observation
Morality toward Oneself (<i>Akhlak kepada Diri Sendiri</i>)	Reduction in student lateness from approximately 15% to below 5%; increased responsibility and self-discipline	Principal's reports; documentation

Source: Processed primary research data, 2026

Table 3 demonstrates that the internalization of moral values through the hidden curriculum at MTs Miftahul Jannah has contributed to positive changes across three dimensions of *akhlak*: morality toward Allah, morality toward others, and morality toward oneself. The high participation of students in congregational prayers and Qur'an recitation reflects the development of stronger religious awareness and commitment. Improvements in social behavior, including increased politeness, respect, and concern for others, indicate that hidden curriculum practices strengthen students' interpersonal morality through continuous interaction and habituation. Furthermore, the reduction in student lateness and the improvement of responsibility and self-discipline show that moral internalization also influences students' personal character. These findings suggest that hidden curriculum functions as an effective mechanism for transforming moral values from knowledge into consistent behaviors through repeated practices, supportive school culture, and meaningful daily experiences.

The success of moral value internalization through the hidden curriculum at MTs Miftahul Jannah is supported by several key factors, including the

consistency and commitment of educators in demonstrating moral values, strong madrasah leadership in establishing a supportive school culture, the surrounding pesantren environment that strengthens the religious atmosphere, and active parental involvement in reinforcing habituation programs at home. However, the implementation also faces several challenges, such as negative influences from social media and external peer environments that may contradict the values promoted by the madrasah, limited consistency among some educators in modeling moral values, particularly punctuality, and inadequate religious facilities that restrict the optimal implementation of congregational worship activities. These findings indicate that effective hidden curriculum implementation requires collaboration among school stakeholders, family support, and continuous efforts to overcome contextual barriers.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the hidden curriculum at MTs Miftahul Jannah plays a significant role in internalizing moral values through teacher role modeling, religious habituation, and school discipline culture (Said et al., 2025). This finding is consistent with Jackson's (1968) concept of hidden curriculum, which emphasizes that students acquire values, norms, and behaviors through implicit educational experiences beyond the formal curriculum (Ainiyah et al., 2025; Wawan & Wasliman, 2026). The present study also supports Rahmawati (2021), who found that teacher exemplary behavior and habituation practices contribute significantly to character formation (Abidin et al., 2024). However, this study extends previous research by demonstrating how hidden curriculum operates as an integrated system involving institutional commitment, daily interactions, and cultural practices rather than as isolated character education activities (Rahayu et al., 2023; Sari et al., 2025). Thus, the findings provide theoretical reinforcement that moral education requires both explicit instruction and implicit cultural mechanisms.

The findings regarding teacher role modeling confirm previous studies emphasizing the central position of educators in character development. Saputra (2024) reported that teacher exemplary behavior represents one of the most effective components of hidden curriculum in strengthening students' religious character (Homsiyah et al., 2026; Malahati & Rokhimawan, 2024). Similarly, the present study found that teachers at MTs Miftahul Jannah function as moral references through their discipline, communication, religious practices, and interpersonal behavior. Nevertheless, this study provides a deeper explanation by revealing that teacher role modeling becomes effective when supported by institutional consistency and shared professional awareness among educators (Litaay et al., 2025; Manik, 2023). Theoretically, this finding strengthens social learning perspectives by showing that students internalize moral values through observation, imitation, and continuous interaction with significant figures. Practically, it highlights the importance of developing teacher professionalism as a foundation for sustainable character education (Ishomuddin & Aziz, 2025; Zaini, 2023).

The process of moral value internalization identified in this study, consisting of transformation, transaction, and transinternalization stages, supports Muhaimin's (2020) model of value internalization in Islamic education (Warsah et al., 2024). The findings demonstrate that moral values initially introduced through verbal communication become meaningful when reinforced through direct experience, habituation, and personal awareness. This result is consistent with Suryani (2023), who emphasized that experiential learning contributes more effectively to value internalization than one-way moral instruction (Sutisman & Mardiana, 2026). However, this study contributes further by showing that hidden curriculum provides the social environment necessary for moving students from externally controlled behavior toward internally motivated moral action. Theoretically, the findings strengthen the understanding that character formation is a gradual process involving cognitive understanding, behavioral practice, and personal integration (Aimi, 2026; Nursobah et al., 2025). Practically, schools should design environments that facilitate continuous moral experiences.

The impact of hidden curriculum on students' behavior confirms that moral internalization influences multiple dimensions of *akhlak*, including morality toward Allah, others, and oneself (Acetylena & Zaironi, 2026). These findings are aligned with Rifai (2021), who stated that consistent religious habituation strengthens students' spiritual discipline, and Hadi (2024), who found that hidden curriculum contributes to students' social character formation (Al-Mujahid & Hussain, 2025; Wasehudin et al., 2024). Unlike previous studies that mainly focused on specific aspects of religious practice or social behavior, this research demonstrates the interconnected influence of hidden curriculum on spiritual commitment, interpersonal morality, and self-discipline simultaneously (Nurhidayati et al., 2024; Suhermanto et al., 2024). Theoretically, this finding expands hidden curriculum studies by positioning school culture as an integrated mechanism for holistic character development. Practically, the findings encourage Islamic schools to strengthen religious routines, social interactions, and disciplinary systems as interconnected educational strategies.

The supporting and inhibiting factors identified in this study indicate that the effectiveness of hidden curriculum implementation depends on collaboration among school leaders, teachers, families, and the surrounding community (Wahyu & Inayati, 2025). This finding supports the ecological perspective of character education, which views students' moral development as influenced by multiple social environments. The study confirms that leadership support, teacher commitment, parental involvement, and religious surroundings strengthen moral internalization, while social media influences, inconsistent role modeling, and limited facilities become significant challenges. Theoretically, this research contributes a contextual understanding of hidden curriculum implementation within Islamic educational institutions by emphasizing organizational and environmental dimensions (Sihite et al., 2025). Practically, the findings suggest that madrasahs should develop comprehensive character education strategies involving institutional management, teacher development,

family partnerships, and continuous evaluation of supporting conditions.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the hidden curriculum at MTs Miftahul Jannah provides an important lesson that moral education is most effective when values are not only taught but also experienced through consistent role modeling, habituation, and supportive school culture. The main contribution of this research lies in strengthening theoretical understanding of hidden curriculum as an integrated mechanism for internalizing Islamic moral values through the interaction of teachers, students, and institutional practices. This study enriches Islamic education literature by explaining the process from value transmission to character formation within a madrasah context. However, this research is limited by its single-site qualitative design, which restricts broader generalization. Future studies should involve multiple madrasahs, comparative approaches, and longitudinal designs to examine the sustainability of moral development.

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