

Challenges of Teaching/ Learning English Language in the Faculty of Islamic Sciences

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Submitted: 06/03/2024 Accepted: 12/06/2025 Published: 25/06/2025

Abstract:

This paper deals with teaching/ learning the English language in the faculty of Islamic Sciences at the University of Algiers and the challenges faced by both teachers and students in their learning/teaching process. English is important in the faculty of Islamic Sciences. It allows the students to master the basic beliefs of Islam in the English language, and the Islamic terminology to preach Islam clearly to non-muslim and Muslims in correct English and proselytize in the best ways in the English language, and also to read and write about Islam in the English language.

We utilized questionnaires to identify the difficulties encountered in teaching and learning English. Our analysis revealed five main challenges faced by English teachers: enhancing student motivation, improving language proficiency, handling overcrowded classrooms, managing time constraints, and coping with insufficient facilities. We also discuss the implications of these findings.

Keywords: Challenge, English, language, teaching, Islamic sciences.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The work deals with teaching of the English language in the faculty of Islamic Sciences at the University of Algiers as an important point; The English language is the first language in the world, it is imposed by the ministry of high education and scientific research from the first year of the Islamic Sciences license till doctorate. Teaching English at the Islamic university allows the students to master the basics of Islam in the English language, and the Islamic terminology in the best way to be able to spread the Islamic speech, to communicate in correct English, and to read and write about Islam in the English language.

There are many challenges in teaching English at the Islamic university from both teacher's and students' points of view. Although the English language is the first language in the world, the majority of Algerian students in Islamic universities have not mastered the English language, the majority do not have a good level, they lack vocabulary, and many do not know how to write, express them self properly or have a conversation in a correct English and few students think that learning English language in Islamic science is a waste of time. So the main challenge from the teacher's point of view is to show the importance of the English language in Islamic sciences; and to help their students to improve their level and deal with Islamic terminology. Also, the English language is taught at random, while it needs ESP courses are specific to Islamic universities, and each field in the Islamic university needs an adequate specific English course specific to the field of study. From the student's point of view, main the challenge is to make more efforts in the English learning process, to deal with English as an opportunity for them to learn "master Islamic science in English", and also, to see the importance and benefits of the English language.

Research Questions

-What are the challenges faced by both teachers and students in learning/teaching the English language at the Algerian Islamic University?

-What are the solutions we can give to enhance with English language in the Algerian Islamic University?

Research Hypothesis:

Our hypotheses are related to the challenges faced by both teachers and students in classes of English at the Algerian Islamic Sciences University.

-There are challenges in teaching the English language in the Algerian Islamic university to enhance and improve the teaching process and show the importance of the English language.

-There are challenges in learning the English language in the Algerian Islamic university to improve and facilitate the learning.

Importance of the Research;

The importance of this research is to show the challenges faced by both the teachers and students in teaching/learning of English language in Algerian Islamic universities and give the appropriate solutions to deal with the English language.

Methodology of the research

To determine the challenges in teaching /learning the English language in the Algerian Islamic university we administered a questionnaire by (moodle) platform to students from first to master two in Islamic sciences in all fields. The questionnaire aims to have the student's point of view about the English language in the field of Islamic science, evaluate their level of English language, and determine the missing problems in the teaching and learning process of the English language.

2. What is a Challenge?

In Oxford Learner's Pocket Dictionary (2003, p.43), a challenge is defined as (1) a difficult or demanding task. (2) Invitation to take part in a game, fight, etc. There are three main challenges for teachers in teaching English as a foreign language. Copland, Garton, and Burns (2014) mentioned that there are three challenges commonly faced by English teachers in teaching, as follows; a) teachers' proficiency; b) classroom management c) government policy and curricula. The first challenge is the teacher's proficiency A high level of proficiency is essential for teachers, particularly English teachers.

2.1 Teaching English Language in Islamic Science

Dealing with the module of English in the Islamic faculty means giving courses that treat Islamic themes in the English language. We need ESP (English for Specific Purposes) to be able to understand the needs of our students and have adequate courses for their specific course of study. ESP is defined by Hutchinson and Water (1989:21) as "... an approach to language teaching which aims to meet the needs of particular learners."

There are many specialties in the Islamic university, among them Arabic language and Islamic civilization, creed, comparative religions, Islamic jurisprudence, and Quranic studies, so the course of English must be in adequacy with the field of study. Teaching the English language in the field of Islamic jurisprudence needs courses that have a relation to the field of study; dealing with a text which treats usury or jurisprudence of worship in Islam, when you deal with the field of Arabic language and Islamic civilization, we use courses related the Islamic history, related to the specific field of study, and that is a great challenge because the adequacy is not obvious. Also, in courses of grammar, the theme must be deduced from the text treated or treated as a part of the text, so there would be always a link between sharia in the English language and grammar courses.

.2.2 Main Objectives of Teaching Islamic Sciences in the English language

Among the most important objectives of teaching English in Islamic sciences:

- Giving the fundamentals of the Islamic beliefs in the English language like pillars of faith, pillars of Islam, monotheism, and comparative religions in brief and concise courses to make the understanding easier. The students must master the basic beliefs of Islam in the English language, to be able to preach Islam to non-Muslims and read and write in the English language.

- Teachers were challenged to improve students' motivation, in speaking, reading, writing, and listening activities, most students looked less active and not confident to speak English.

- Teachers faced the challenge of motivating students to actively and confidently engage in spoken English. During listening activities, some students showed little interest due to the absence of a language laboratory and poor audio devices. Teachers had to rely on videos brought in by teachers, often related to religious subjects or phonetic courses focusing on pronunciation and transcription, to make the listening activities more engaging. In reading activities, many students appeared shy and fearful of mispronouncing words. Teachers were tasked with providing motivation to boost students' confidence and enthusiasm. Additionally, writing activities were hindered by students' inability to write English paragraphs, as well as their lack of vocabulary and understanding of grammar and semantics.

- Create a communication atmosphere in the class between the students and the teachers and between the students themselves in the English language, to make the students interchange ideas and points of views freely.

- Pushing the students to do some research in the English language, to teach them the basis of the research methodology, so the students would enrich the English class with their research.

- The students must not have any inhibition, they can express their ideas freely in English and without any complexity, and this is an important outcome of the English language classes to be able to preach Islam in English.

- Giving the basis of English grammar with brief courses and exercises, the grammar courses must be linked to Islamic science content.

3- The Questionnaire

A- Perception of English Language Importance :

- Do you believe English is beneficial in your studies?
- Do you think mastering English helps in spreading Islam globally?
- Do you consider English courses a waste of time?

B- Self-Assessment of English Proficiency :

- How would you rate your current level of English? (Good/Not bad/Bad)
- Do you struggle with Islamic terminology in English?
- Do you lack basic English language skills (grammar, vocabulary, writing)?

C- Challenges in Learning English :

- Is the allocated time (1.5 hours/week) sufficient for English classes?
- Do you face difficulties in speaking activities due to time constraints?
- Do you struggle with writing tasks (e.g., composing paragraphs)?
- Are listening activities challenging due to poor audio facilities?
- Does the large class size (50+ students) hinder your participation?

D-Teaching Methods and Resources :

- Are English courses adapted to your field (e.g., Islamic jurisprudence, Quranic studies)?
- Does the faculty provide adequate resources (books, language labs, audio devices)?
- Do teachers use supplementary materials (videos, handouts) effectively?

E- Motivation and Engagement :

- Are you motivated to learn English for Islamic studies?
- Do you actively participate in speaking/listening activities?
- What demotivates you in English classes?

4. Analysis of the questionnaire

4.1 Research Context

The questionnaire was designed for students from the first year to master Two; we spread it via the plate form (moodle) and by paper to increase the number of answers. From 500 supposed students' questionnaires, I received 80, and just 50 from both plate form and written form were complete fully.

4.2 Main Themes Identified

A. Perception and Motivation

- **Positive outlook:** 45 students acknowledged the usefulness of English for spreading Islam and accessing religious texts.
- **Negative outlook:** 5 students believed English was a waste of time; demotivation arose from a perceived disconnect between English and their core Islamic studies.
- **Lack of motivation:** 22 students were uninterested; 8 explicitly did not see the relevance of English.

B. Proficiency Challenges

- Only 25 students rated their English as “good.”
- 24 students cited issues with Islamic terminology.
- 24 had poor general English skills (grammar, vocabulary, writing).
- Many showed low confidence in speaking and fear of mispronunciation.

C. Structural and Logistical Issues

- **Time allocation:** 35 students felt that 1.5 hours per week was insufficient.
- **Class size:** Overcrowding (>50 students) led to limited participation in discussions and assessments.
- **Facilities:** Lack of language labs, books, and audio tools significantly hampered teaching. Teachers often brought their own resources.

D. Pedagogical and Curricular Gaps

- Lack of **ESP (English for Specific Purposes)** adaptation to fields like comparative religion or Islamic jurisprudence.
- English classes did not align with students' academic specializations.
- Teaching methods lacked sufficient speaking, writing, and listening components due to structural limits.

4.3 Case Study Presentation

Here is a presentation of the case study group: A total of 50 students from the Faculty of Islamic Sciences at the University of Algiers participated in a structured questionnaire. Participants were drawn from various academic levels:

1 st	Year	Bachelor's	12	students
2 nd	Year	Bachelor's	15	students
3 rd	Year	Bachelor's	8	students
1 st	Year	Master	10	students
2 nd	Year	Master	5	students

Objective:

To identify challenges in teaching and learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) within the Islamic Sciences context and gather students' perceptions on the importance and effectiveness of English instruction.

Table 1: Key Student Responses (n = 50)

Challenge / Perception	Students Affected
English useful for spreading Islam	45
English considered a waste of time	5
Students unmotivated or uninterested	22
Students with good English level	25
Students struggling with Islamic terminology	24
Students lacking grammar/vocabulary/writing skills	24
Time allocated for English is insufficient	35
Overcrowded classes (>50 students per class)	50
Lack of facilities (books, labs, audio tools)	46

4- Discussion of the Questionnaire's Findings

In English classes, many obstacles face both the English teachers and students also there are challenges in teaching English in Islamic sciences, among the main important obstacles cited by the students in the questionnaires distributed and the challenges we can cite:

-The majority of students (45) from all levels combined are aware that the English language is beneficial in their courses, they know that mastering it allows them to spread Islam all over the world, they can write articles and read about Islam easily, while 5 students think that English language courses are a waste of time, so they want to avoid it and especially those of the first year, they do not recognize that they will miss a lot of information which can hardly be reached again.

-Students want to understand the English courses but many of them said that do not have the level to master it, 25 students said that they have a good level of English language, so they can understand English courses easily, while 20 answered that their level of English language is not bad, those can master their English courses but needed more help; 5 students said that they have a bad level in English language, so we can suppose that these students are lost with the module of English language. We supposed that the students who answered that their English level is good English language are nearly those with baccalaureate options foreign languages or natural sciences or the students who want to study Islamic sciences as a second license, so they are motivated to learn it in all languages, while for 20 students who answered that their level of English is not bad and 5 who said that do not have any level in the English language, we think that they do not make any efforts. Half of the students (24) said that they failed to master the English language in general while the other students (24) answered that they missed Islamic terminology in the English language, and 2 students said that they did not master both terminology and English language basics. These lacks have many reasons among them 20 students said that they do not want to make many efforts to learn the English language, 22 students said that they do not see Islamic English as something important, 8 students do not know the importance of the module or for them English language is a waste of time and they just need to improve their Arabic language.

Challenges of Teaching/ Learning English Language in the Faculty of Islamic Sciences

-Another obstacle is the timing, one hour and a half of English language class per week is not sufficient, 35 students think that one hour and a half per week is not sufficient while 15 think that it can be sufficient. We suppose that those who think that it is sufficient are those who do not care about English language courses and have the worst level in the English language. English learning sessions were restricted to just 90 minutes per meeting, leading to limited teaching time for English. As a result, English teachers faced the challenge of delivering lessons effectively and efficiently within this constrained timeframe. The students' responses indicated that the time allotted for learning English in the faculty was insufficient. For instance, Participant 1 (P1) expressed, "I believe that the time allocated for learning English is inadequate because English is a foreign language, not our native language, so we require more time to grasp it. I always find myself needing more time to comprehend the lessons, and the students also struggle to learn English effectively when time is limited." Similarly, Participant 2 (P2) stated, "I feel that the time designated for learning English here is highly unsuitable because I need more time to engage with the language. We only have one session per week, with each session lasting only 70 to 90 minutes."

English teachers faced challenges in time management, particularly concerning teaching speaking, reading, and writing skills. Further details on the time management challenges in teaching these skills will be discussed below.

-In speaking activities, teachers faced the challenge of balancing their own speaking time with that of the students within the allocated time frame. They needed to deliver the lesson effectively and efficiently. Thirty-seven students mentioned that in speaking classes, some of them didn't get a chance to speak because the allotted time ran out. As a result, some students were unable to speak in front of the class, and this carried over to the next session, leading to time wastage. In summary, teachers encountered the challenge of managing speaking activities within the designated time.

Regarding writing activities, teachers struggled to manage time when assigning writing tasks to students. The students' responses revealed that as the writing activity neared its end, only 20 students managed to write some paragraphs out of the required two, while the rest couldn't even complete a single paragraph in English. This indicates that students were unsure about writing essays, and some resorted to cheating. This could be attributed to their poor writing skills, as writing essays correctly requires a longer period. This posed a significant challenge for teachers, who had to manage time effectively and improve students' writing abilities.

-The challenge of managing limited time was also present in the reading activity. The reading materials used were quite challenging, and despite most students having an average reading level, 38 students expressed difficulty in reading English texts. They appeared confused, particularly in understanding the reading comprehension exercises given by the teacher.

Another challenge related to managing limited time was evident in listening activities. There was insufficient time allocated for practicing listening comprehension. The lack of adequate materials, such as a language laboratory, meant that listening activities were conducted using videos, typically lasting a maximum of 15 minutes and repeated twice during a session. However, this was not enough for students, who required more time to comprehend the listening material. Due to the session's short duration of just an hour and a half, many students struggled to understand the listening exercises, often needing the video to be stopped, explained, and replayed multiple times. Additionally, some students sat at the back and requested the repetition of recordings, further challenging the teacher to manage each listening comprehension session effectively.

-Teaching in overcrowded classes with more than 50 students per group presents challenges, particularly in conducting speaking activities where students often pay little attention. During speaking activities, many students engage in off-topic conversations with their friends instead of focusing on the teacher's instructions. The large class size makes it difficult for teachers to monitor each student individually, posing a challenge in ensuring student engagement during speaking activities.

Challenges of Teaching/ Learning English Language in the Faculty of Islamic Sciences

In reading activities, 30 students reported not having the opportunity to read texts due to the large class size. Teaching English in such a setting requires effective time management to ensure that each student gets a chance to read. Managing reading activities in large classes is a challenging task for teachers, but it is crucial to ensure effective learning outcomes.

Similarly, teaching listening skills in a large class presents challenges, as 38 students expressed difficulties in understanding the listening materials despite being given limited time for repetition. The students often requested additional repetitions, but the time constraints made it challenging to accommodate their needs. This lack of conducive learning environments hinders effective teaching and learning in listening activities.

In writing activities, managing a large class poses challenges in being attentive and assertive with students. Forty-four students indicated that they struggled to follow writing activities, with many students being noisy and some resorting to cheating. The pressure of delivering a comprehensive lesson in a limited amount of time, coupled with the lack of active student engagement, can be frustrating for teachers.

-Based on the questionnaire responses, the lack of facilities in Algerian faculties poses a significant challenge for English teachers. Many essential resources for the teaching-learning process, such as books, language laboratories, and audio devices, were unavailable. The interview data further revealed that teachers encountered difficulties in utilizing the limited facilities for teaching. For instance, one student noted, "The facilities in the faculties were very limited, which has become a challenge for our teachers. Almost every class lacks essential facilities like electronic media." Another student remarked, "I believe the facilities in this faculty are insufficient."

Teachers faced specific obstacles in teaching listening skills due to the absence of supportive facilities provided by the faculty. There were no laboratories for teaching listening or pronunciation, nor were there any audio devices available. As a result, 25 students expressed disinterest in learning during listening activities, citing poor audio devices as the reason. Confronted with inadequate facilities for teaching listening, teachers had to

resort to using the poor-quality speakers provided or bringing their own speakers to facilitate listening lessons.

-The same lack of facilities is evident in the teaching of speaking activities, as the faculty did not supply teachers with any book resources. According to responses to the questionnaire regarding speaking classes, the majority of students (42) stated that their teachers instructed speaking by having students perform dialogues in front of the class. Consequently, teachers were challenged to use alternative media not provided by the faculty, such as handouts and videos.

Insufficient facilities also affected the teaching of reading. Teachers relied solely on the texts they brought or their own books for teaching reading, as the faculty library lacked books on Islamic religions. According to the majority of students (46), there were no new books on Islamic sciences in the library, with one student noting, "In the library of the faculty, there are no books about our specialty in the English language, and those that do exist are too old and not suitable for our field of study." This lack of resources hinders students' understanding. The questionnaire responses also indicated that teachers only used books in teaching reading, without incorporating additional media due to inadequate facilities provided by the faculty. However, using additional media could enhance student comprehension. Therefore, teachers faced the challenge of either using the inadequate facilities provided by the faculty or bringing in and using additional media not provided by the faculty.

-Similarly to the previous point, the absence of English-language documentation on Islamic sciences in Algerian Islamic faculties presents another issue. All students expressed the need for English books in their field of study for research or reading about Islam or religions in English. Due to the limited availability of documentation, students must resort to searching the internet, where they can find a wealth of information. However, the accuracy of information on the internet is not always reliable, so students need to exercise caution, gather multiple sources, and select the most precise and reliable information.

5. Some Results from the Questionnaire

After analyzing the questionnaire, it was evident that English teachers and their students encountered several challenges. One such challenge was the students' lack of motivation. According to Dörnyei (2012), motivation plays a crucial role in determining human behavior and provides direction to achieve goals. He identifies motivational components that are classified into three main dimensions. Similarly, Küpers (2011) defines demotivation as a decrease in the driving force for thinking, feeling, and acting, resulting in a lack of activity. Students with low motivation were seen as a challenge for English teachers, who needed to work hard to boost their motivation by employing methods that highlight the benefits of learning the English language. Teachers faced the challenge of encouraging students to be more active and engaged in learning speaking, reading, listening, and writing.

Additionally, we observed that teachers faced challenges in teaching English when their students lacked language competence and background. Consequently, when teachers explained lessons, students struggled with vocabulary mastery, often requiring explanations of the words used. This finding aligns with Songbatumis's (2017) research, which identified students' lack of vocabulary mastery as a major challenge in English teaching, impeding their comprehension. Many students lack mastery of vocabulary, leading to their limited participation in class, particularly when encountering new Islamic terminology, which is unfamiliar to them.

Moreover, teachers encountered the challenge of students' poor pronunciation skills. Some students struggled to pronounce English words correctly, particularly challenging terms like "ablution," "monotheism," and "pilgrimage." This result mirrors Songbatumis's (2017) findings, which highlighted widespread errors in word pronunciation among students.

In writing activities, many students lacked ideas and grammatical training, making it difficult for them to organize paragraphs correctly in essays. Fatiloro (2015) suggests that dictionaries, grammar guides, and the internet should be used as tools for consultation in teaching and learning English.

Additionally, teachers faced challenges due to overcrowded classrooms, which hindered the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process. This finding is consistent with Gultom's (2015) research in Indonesia, which highlighted class size as a significant problem in English language teaching. Regardless of the teaching method used, achieving satisfactory results in English teaching and learning is difficult in overcrowded classrooms. Al-Amarat (2011) also noted that overcrowded classrooms could hinder the implementation of effective classroom management strategies.

Furthermore, inadequate time allocation was another challenge encountered by teachers in teaching English. Lynch (2008) identified insufficient time, resources, and materials as problems in teaching and learning the English language, which require a longer duration. Teachers struggled to manage time effectively, especially as they only had 90 minutes per week to teach English. This challenge aligns with the findings of Habibi et al. (2018), who emphasized the importance of time management in teaching. Teachers often found it challenging to cover all the necessary material within the limited time, leading to the omission of some activities.

Moreover, the lack of facilities and resources, such as books on Islamic sciences in English or English grammar books, posed another challenge for teachers. Ajibola (2010) highlighted the difficulty in ensuring the availability of sufficient books, listening devices, and other teaching instruments, indicating that this was a challenging task.

In conclusion, being a teacher is challenging due to the numerous obstacles encountered in teaching. These challenges stem from both students and universities. It is crucial for the government to play a significant role in improving teaching and learning at faculties and universities by providing the necessary facilities and support.

6-Pedagogical Implications and Recommendations

In this part, we will give some guidelines and pedagogical implications to ameliorate and make the English language class in the best way:

- Showing the value of the English language as an international language, a language of communication, proselytizing, and relation, when a student masters the English language he/she can communicate with the whole world and use it to spread Islam all over the world. Also, motivating the students to learn, use, and improve their level of speaking, reading, and writing in English language

- Motivating the students to use the English language to communicate with them by dealing with communication classes or videos about religion or Islam in the English language, to enrich their vocabulary and remove the shame of speaking the English language;

- Trying to have two English classes of one hour and a half per week: one section of grammar with courses and exercises of grammar and practice with videos to work on listening and understanding with religions videos and the other classes would be about Islam terminology and working on texts about religions in English language in different skills with videos to explain more the lesson and work on the pronunciation, listening skill.

- Teaching in small groups of a maximum of 20 students to have a better exchange, better communication, and a much more coherent atmosphere between the students and between the teachers and the students.

- Having a laboratory will be best to give some courses on phonetics and the correct pronunciation of the language; also listening is the first step of learning a language, so it can help the teaching process to take place easily.

- Enriching the libraries with books on the English language in grammar, Islamic sciences, and religions to help the students prepare for their courses and their exposure on the one hand and grammar books, on the other hand, to allow the students to enrich their knowledge about Islamic sciences and religions in the English language.

- Sending the students after their baccalaureate degree according to their convictions and their envies, to make them more attracted to their courses

and give the best of them, when the students want to learn about a field they have and need to learn and deal with it in all the languages.

- Helping the young teachers of the English language by giving them some pedagogical courses and ESP lessons to give them keys to be able to teach in Islamic universities or faculties and make them in the "bath" of teaching Islamic sciences with the best tools.

- Trying to have a common course in terms of content from the first year until the end of the license, to have students with a rich knowledge of Islam in the English language, with the same level, who can have a conversation with a non- muslim, to spread the Islam in the non- muslim hearts.

- There must be added communication classes or speaking sections in the English classes at high school to give the students the means to express themselves freely and without any shame or lack of confidence, dealing with grammar is good but having grammar plus oral expression is better.

- Developing the English program according to the fields of study of the students and their needs. When dealing with the first year, all the students must master at least the pillars of faith and the pillars of Islam with the most important grammatical lessons like the grammatical parts of speech, but in the specialties, English courses must be the specialty e.g.: when we deal with the history of the religions or Islamic creed, the students must master the major parts of the religions with the Islam in the English language, or when we deal with Quran and Sunnah, the students must master some verses and hadiths with their meaning in English to be able to preach with some arguments.

- Developing English for Islamic Studies (EIS) is a kind of English for Academic Purposes that should be taken into consideration by all the students, mostly with multilingual backgrounds, at the higher educational institutions run by the government in Algeria. One of the main objectives of EIS is to help students improve their reading skills so to be able to handle a variety of English-written texts on Islamic sciences-related studies. To enable both lecturers and students to achieve this objective, therefore, an appropriate syllabus and material development should be searched for and designed comprehensively.

6- CONCLUSION

In this paper, we tried to give an overview of teaching English as an important module in the Islamic faculty at the Algerian university¹; after seeing the definition of sciences and Islamic sciences, we have seen teaching English in the Islamic faculty by dealing with the objectives behind these courses, the way of teaching English, some obstacle in the teaching process, some challenges faced by both the teachers and the students, some results from the teaching and we gave few solutions for the obstacles and the problems faced by both the teachers and the students.

Through a case study approach, this research sheds light on the difficulties encountered by English teachers in Algerian Islamic faculties and universities. The study reveals several challenging factors faced by these teachers, including enhancing student motivation, improving students' language competence, managing overcrowded classes, handling limited teaching time, and coping with the lack of supporting facilities. It is important to note that this study solely focused on identifying challenges in teaching English. Future research could explore additional challenges not addressed in this study.

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Challenges of Teaching/ Learning English Language in the Faculty of Islamic Sciences

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