

## Establishing multicultural society: Problems and issues of multicultural education in Indonesia

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### Abstract

Creating a multicultural society that coexists peacefully amidst various kinds of differences is not an easy thing. The fact that multicultural society is still challenging to realize is a serious problem, not only for one or two countries but also for all countries worldwide. This research has three objectives. The first describes the implementation of multicultural education in Indonesia with various obstacles. Second, describe solutions to multiple problems in the implementation of multicultural education in Indonesia. Third, provide recommendations for the implementation of multicultural education in other areas. Based on a qualitative study of several studies on the implementation of multicultural education in Indonesia, The results show that the implementation of multicultural education in Indonesia is carried out in several ways or several approaches. In general, this approach can be divided into two: the approach in terms of learning materials and the approach in terms of learning methods. The multicultural education approach in terms of material means that the values of multiculturalism are given to students through special materials that discuss multiculturalism. Meanwhile, the approach in terms of methods means that the values of multicultural life are given to students by integrating them into various subjects namely the approach in terms of learning materials and approaches in terms of learning methods.

**Keywords:** education; multiculturalism; implementation; Indonesia; teaching and learning process

### Introduction

Creating a multicultural society that coexists peacefully amidst differences is the ideal of all human beings. However, the reality shows that efforts to build this multicultural society are still far from expectations. Small differences can sometimes lead to massive and severe social conflict in the community. The difference in skin color has triggered a serious problem of discrimination in the United States, which led to the Black Lives Matter social movement in 2020 (Azevedo et al., 2022). Differences in beliefs create social problems in the Rohingya area of Myanmar (Mithun, 2018). Ethnic differences have also triggered social conflict between



ethnic groups in Kalimantan, Indonesia (Nakaya, 2018). The same case in other countries, conflicts that occur due to differences in religion, differences in political preferences, differences in culture, and differences in race or nation.

The fact that multicultural society is still challenging to realize is a serious matter, not only for one or two countries but for all countries in the world (Carnoy, 2009; Hassanpour et al., 2022; Ndwandwe, 2022; Reed, 2019). The problem lies in a fundamental philosophical argument. Naturally, humans are born in different and varied conditions, not only in terms of culture but even skin color and character (Khasinah, 2013). Unfortunately, this difference and diversity is often seen as a problem rather than being seen as wealth. One human group sometimes wants to dominate over other human groups, wants uniformity, and eliminates differences. Differences are things that must be accepted, inevitably. This situation has made achieving the dream of peaceful coexistence difficult (Karyadi, 2020).

Building peace in a multicultural society not only important but also urgent. One effort that can be done is to provide education or understanding of this multicultural situation through education. Multicultural values can be conveyed through education, both in the form of learning materials about multiculturalism and in the form of teaching and learning methods based on a multicultural approach. Indonesia has experience about the implementation of this multicultural education. Researchers argue that Indonesia's experience in organizing multicultural education can inspire other countries to create multicultural societies that live side by side peacefully amidst differences and diversity (Ambarudin, 2016; Setyowati & Herianto, 2022).

The Indonesian government recognizes six religions as official religions, and the rest provide opportunities for developing various other kinds of beliefs. From a political perspective, Indonesia is a democracy with a multiparty system that gives its people a broad political preference. In these differences, Indonesia was united under a national ideology, way of life, or the basis of a state philosophy called Pancasila. Pancasila is the five basic principles of state life, one of which teaches to respect and uphold human values (Alami et al., 2022).

Indonesia's experience implementing this multicultural education has inspired many researchers (Ambarudin, 2016; Chotimah et al., 2020). Research on implementing multicultural education at various levels of education is important data in this study. Unfortunately, various research on multicultural education is done partially and separately from one another. Some authors only focus on implementing multicultural education in some countries and do not provide adequate descriptions of how the practices of these countries can inspire other countries. This research differs from previous research because it analyzes several studies on multicultural education, then generalizes or conclusions about the characteristics of implementing multicultural education in Indonesia. The objectives of this study are at least three. The first describes the implementation of multicultural education in Indonesia with various obstacles. Second, describe solutions to various problems in implementing multicultural education in Indonesia. Third, provide recommendations for the implementation of multicultural education in other areas.

## Methods

The design of this research is library research or literature study on the research results of implementing multicultural education in Indonesia. This library research model was chosen because many researchers in Indonesia have researched multicultural education. These studies have varied objects and objectives. In this case, researchers choose the object of research that discusses the implementation of multicultural education at the early childhood education level, the basic education level, the upper secondary education level, and the higher education level. These research studies are important data as material for analysis in this study. The researchers used several research databases to find literature on multicultural education in Indonesia, both international and national databases. The databases used include Garuda portal, Mendeley Library, and Scopus.com. The author chooses literature published between 2012 – 2022 to meet the criteria for updating sources or references.

The research was carried out in three steps: data collection, classification, and analysis. Data collection in this study was carried out by tracing research relevant to implementing multicultural education in Indonesia. Researchers found 23 pieces of relevant literature that discuss the implementation of multicultural education in Indonesia.

The second step is classifying the data by applying the categories following the research objectives. Researchers classified the data into six categories. The first is data that is relevant to the implementation of multicultural education at the early childhood level. The second is data that is relevant to the implementation of multicultural education at the basic education level. Third, data relevant to implementing multicultural education at the senior secondary level. Fourth, data relevant to implementing multicultural education at the higher education level. Finally, some data discusses multicultural education in general. The results of the classification of the research data can be seen in the following table.

The third step of the research is data analysis. Data analysis in this study uses a hermeneutic approach which generally aims to interpret the data that has been obtained. Several other analysis methods are also used in this research, including deduction, induction, synthesis, analysis, and abstraction. These methods are used to support the interpretation or interpretation carried out.

Data interpretation aims to obtain answers to three research questions. The first is a question about the obstacles in implementing multicultural education at every level of education in Indonesia. Second, questions about solutions to overcome these various obstacles. Third, recommendations for the implementation of multicultural education as an effort to create a multicultural society.

## Result and Discussion

Researchers conducted data analysis on data about the implementation of multicultural education at various levels of education in Indonesia. Twenty-three research results are used as data in this study, as mentioned in the bibliography of this manuscript. From the 23 research results, the next researcher classified the data and classified them into four main categories. *First* is data related to the implementation of multicultural education in general. *Second* is data associated with implementing multicultural education at the basic education level. The *third* is data related to implementing multicultural education at the secondary-upper education level. *Fourth*, data related to implementing multicultural education at the higher education level.

Table 1  
*Categorization of Research Data*

No.	Research Data Category	Amount
1.	Implementation of Multicultural Education	8
2.	Implementation of Multicultural Education at the primary school level	5
3.	Implementation of Multicultural Education at the high school level	5
4.	Implementation of Multicultural Education in higher education	5
Number of Research		23

Based on these data, the authors obtained several research findings on implementing multicultural education in these schools. The results of this study relate to three areas: the implementation of multicultural education in general, obstacles in the implementation of multicultural education, and solutions for overcoming various kinds of obstacles in the implementation of multicultural education. These findings will be discussed one by one in this section.

### The Implementation of Multicultural Education

Based on the research data that has been collected, the implementation of multicultural education at various levels of education in Indonesia is carried out by two methods. First is to provide multicultural education material at various levels of education, and second is to apply learning methods based on values of multiculturalism. Both methods have their respective advantages and disadvantages.

Implementing multicultural education by teaching content or materials related to multiculturalism is one of the ways educators, in this case, teachers or lecturers, choose to build a multicultural society in schools. The real form of this method is by including multicultural content directly in the teaching and learning process, especially in teaching the values of living together. The values taught by each school are relatively varied, depending on the educational institution that organizes the teaching and learning process. One piece of information about this can be listened to in Nurhalim's research which discusses the portrait of multicultural education in Purwokerto, one of the cities in Central Java Province, Indonesia (Nurhalim, 2014). Nurhalim researched implementing multicultural education in three different schools and found that multicultural education at the basic education level aims to instill the values of respect, care, respect for others, cooperation, and prayer according to their respective beliefs or religions (Nurhalim, 2014). Different things are found in implementing multicultural learning at the middle or junior high levels. At the junior high school level, multicultural values instilled in students are the values of peace, love of freedom, and discussion and collaboration with groups. Finally, at the senior secondary level, the values of multiculturalism that are instilled are the values of humility, discussion, and cooperation.

Like Nurhalim's research, other data also show the implementation of multicultural education by providing content or materials related to multicultural education in general. This information was obtained from Kartikawati's research which analyzed the implementation of multicultural education through educational communication (D. Kartikawati et al., 2018). The information that can be obtained from Kartikawati's research is that the performance of multicultural education can be carried out by providing multiculturalism materials such as pluralism, humanism, democracy, and justice. The values taught in education are closely related to the values of Pancasila, namely the five basic principles that form the basis of the state, ideology, worldview, and the basis of the philosophy of the Indonesian state.

Apart from instilling multicultural values directly in learning material at school, other ways of implementing multicultural education can be seen from other data, namely from research data conducted by Ningsih (2017). Ningsih researches the multicultural education strategy carried out in elementary schools. The interesting thing is, Ningsih observes that the role model of adults, in this case is the teacher, is a determining factor in supporting the successful implementation of multicultural education. The examples shown by the teachers also vary. The first is by taking the time to greet students upon arrival at school. Second, by making it a habit to give smiles, greetings, and greetings to fellow school members. Third, by teaching solidarity among school members. Kartikawati's research provides important information about the role of exemplary factors from adults which is an important factor in the implementation of multicultural education in schools.

Different things can be seen in the second multicultural education implementation method, namely the implementation of multicultural education by applying learning methods that adopt a multicultural relationship pattern. This method is different from the first way. In the first way, students are immediately taught the values of multiculturalism through a variety of learning materials. While in the second way, students are taught with a multicultural method or approach.

Implementing multicultural education by applying this multicultural method can be seen from some of the data that researchers have collected. One example is the research from Syahril et al. (2019), provides essential data about some of the strategies used by teachers in fostering a multicultural learning atmosphere. These strategies include introducing students to each other, getting into the habit of interviewing, changing or randomizing seats, holding discussion forums, and familiarizing mutually beneficial cooperation among students. In contrast to the first method, these multicultural values are taught in an integrated manner in various other subjects. In other words, there are no specific subjects that discuss multiculturalism, but the values of multiculturalism are integrated directly through various kinds of learning approaches.

Two ways or two approaches in implementing multicultural education are applied differently in schools. Some schools specifically provide material on multiculturalism, but not a few schools try to integrate these multicultural values into various subjects. The effectiveness of these two implementations varies widely and depends on several other factors, such as teacher readiness, student readiness, school learning facilities, etc.

#### The Implementation of Multicultural Education in Indonesia

The issue of multicultural education has become one of the most exciting themes for researchers in Indonesia. Based on the results of the literature search, it was found that several important research results on multicultural education in Indonesia, both at the early childhood education level, basic education, secondary education, and higher education level. The themes raised in these studies are very diverse, ranging from problems of methods, learning materials to issues of the effectiveness of implementing multicultural education at various levels of education in Indonesia. The same phenomenon can be found in terms of the interest of foreign researchers in this multicultural education problem. Based on the researcher's search on the Scopus database, more than eight were found.

The large number of studies that take the theme of multicultural education provides some important information. First, researchers' high level of awareness about the importance of building multicultural community awareness. A large number of studies on multicultural education shows human awareness that there are serious problems in human life that must be resolved by ending the conflicts that have occurred so far. Second, studies on multicultural education also show the confidence or optimism of researchers toward the contribution of education in realizing a multicultural society. Humans are tired of fighting, so humans want to end or break the chain of conflict through education so that they are not passed on to the next generation. The problem is how multicultural education will be carried out. Should multicultural education focus on learning materials, methods, or both?

The issue of multicultural education then culminates in a discussion about the implementation and objectives of multicultural education. Some researchers have indeed explained what multicultural education means. Among several researchers, JA Banks' opinion is one that has been widely quoted by the authors (Banks, 2015). There are several keywords in the understanding of multicultural education put forward by Banks. First, multicultural education is a process. Second, the purpose of the process is to shape an educational environment. Third, the educational environment that wants to be realized is one that allows everyone with different conditions to get the same education (Banks, 2015). In Banks's point of view, multicultural education is therefore more understood as a condition when there is no discrimination in education.

Some Indonesian researchers have different perspectives in seeing this multicultural education. For example, Supriatin & Nasution (2017) sees that multicultural education is not only an issue related to the field of education alone but even has strong roots in social life and is even understood as a social movement. Multicultural education, in Supriatin's view is an effort to provide understanding to the community, in this case as the subject of education, about the values of multiculturalism, such as mutual respect, solidarity, peaceful coexistence, and respect for differences. The same thing can be found in Junaidi (2018), Kartikawati et al. (2018), and Sutarto (2019) research, who understands multicultural education as education that is directed to provide an understanding and appreciation of differences in humans, whether related to skin color, religion, race, political preferences, gender, and so on. Multicultural education, in the view of Indonesian researchers, is understood as an educational process to instill multicultural values in students or students.

The different points of view that appear in some of the research results of Indonesian researchers are interesting for further discussion. Why multicultural education is better understood as a process to instill multicultural values in students and not understood as an effort to create an education system that is friendly and without discrimination is strongly influenced by the cultural background that exists in Indonesia. Historically and culturally,

Indonesia is a country that consists of various kinds of different cultures. The level of diversity of people in this country is very high. The condition of Indonesia, which is in the form of an archipelago, has major implications in the socio-cultural life of the community. Indonesia has a very large cultural diversity. The potential for conflict is also tremendous.

Several incidents can be used as examples to show that conflicts due to these differences often occur in Indonesia. In 2016-2017, the Indonesian media was busy talking about the alleged religious insult committed by the Governor of DKI Jakarta at that time, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, often called Ahok. Ahok, a Christian, is considered insulting Islam in one of his statements. This case generated a large wave of protests among adherents of the Muslim faith in Indonesia and resulted in the imprisonment of Ahok (BBC News Indonesia, 2017). Another case occurred in 2019, namely the alleged racism case involving two different ethnic groups in Indonesia, namely Javanese, and Papuans. This incident took place in Surabaya, one of the major cities in Indonesia. It became news in various national media (Nasution & Wiranto, 2020; The Jakarta Post, 2019). Apart from these two cases, many conflicts in Indonesia are triggered by differences in society. These conflicts show how vulnerable Indonesia's pluralistic or heterogeneous society is.

Conflicts and various problems that arise due to differences in Indonesian society trigger many parties to seek solutions, so these conflicts can be eliminated or at least reduced. One way this is done is by teaching the values of Pancasila, which can unite these differences in one unit. Pancasila is the national ideology of the Indonesian state. Pancasila consists of five basic principles, which in general consist of five main values, namely belief in God, humanity, unity, populism or democracy, and justice (Subaidi, 2020). These five Pancasila principles act as the unifying philosophy of all the differences between the Indonesian people. Pancasila is socialized to every Indonesian citizen through education. Each curriculum in education level is thus obliged to contain material about Pancasila, starting from basic education to higher education (Nurizka et al., 2020). However, the implementation of Pancasila ideology education seems still not effective enough to reduce the occurrence of conflict and build a multicultural society as expected.

Another strategy pursued to build a multicultural society is also carried out by changing the orientation of education in Indonesia towards character education for the community. This issue has also attracted the attention of researchers in the field of education to develop appropriate methods of character education. Some of the studies try to formulate the right character education to build a strong and resilient Indonesian nation in the era of globalization (Abdullah et al., 2019; Arfani & Nakaya, 2020; Baequni et al., 2019; Rihatno et al., 2020; Sarkadi et al., 2020).

The multicultural education discussed in this study is an inseparable part of the character education carried out by Indonesia since the last two decades. Like research on character education, many Indonesian researchers have also carried out research on multicultural education. Research on multicultural education can be categorized into two groups. The first is research that seeks to formulate multicultural education regarding content or learning materials. Some studies that discuss this subject, for example, Ningsih (2017), Supriatin & Nasution (2017), and Herlina (2017). This research is of the same type, which discusses the importance of preparing learning content about multiculturalism, for example the values of humanism, respect for differences, and so on.

Apart from the research above, there is also research on multicultural education that focuses on formulating appropriate methods for multicultural education. These studies try to integrate the values of multiculturalism into teaching and learning methods carried out by teachers or lecturers at various levels of education. Examples of research with this model, for example, were conducted by Sada (2013), Syahrial et al. (2019); Utami (2019); and Riyadi (2013) provide meaningful information about the development of studies on multicultural education by researchers.

This paper wants to provide a different perspective or point of view in looking at multicultural education, namely, to show obstacles in the implementation of multicultural education, solutions to overcome these obstacles, and to provide recommendations for efforts to realize better multicultural education. Researchers see that studies on multicultural education still have weaknesses or shortcomings, namely that studies are still separate from one another. This paper wants to summarize the various kinds of research on multicultural education into one article that outlines the three problems above: constraints, solutions, and recommendations that can be applied not only in Indonesia but also in other countries around the world.

### **The Constraints in the Implementation of Multicultural Education in Indonesia**

As an effort to solve the problem, the implementation of multicultural education in Indonesia also faces many obstacles. Several studies that were used as data in this study found obstacles in the implementation of multicultural education, including research conducted by Riyadi on the multicultural education approach in sociology (Riyadi, 2013), and research by Rahmawati on teacher attitudes towards multicultural education (Nurzarahmawati, 2019). Researchers summarize the constraints in implementing multicultural education into three main categories, namely constraints related to students, constraints related to teachers, and constraints related to facilities at school.

There are several obstacles in the implementation of multicultural education related to students. Some obstacles to students that can be mentioned include the lack of student concentration and the lack of student interest in student learning (Riyadi, 2013). The lack of student concentration in learning with a multicultural approach can be seen as an indication of the difficulty in focusing on the learning atmosphere in the classroom. The students seemed to have difficulty understanding the lessons presented, and sometimes this atmosphere overwhelmed the teacher because the learning situation in the classroom was out of control. Meanwhile, the lack of student interest in learning is influenced by the level of student motivation. This level of learning motivation in discussions about education has indeed been understood as one of the influencing factors in supporting student success in learning. The lack of student interest in learning in multicultural education-based learning is due to the lack of awareness of the level of importance of learning for students.

The second obstacle in implementing multicultural education is the obstacle related to teachers' readiness in implementing multicultural education. Researchers found several significant barriers hindering the implementation of multicultural education from the teacher's point of view. Teachers are important figures in supporting the success of multicultural education. However, some researchers found that some teachers were still unable to carry out their roles in the teaching and learning process optimally. Some of the obstacles researchers find from research data on the implementation of multicultural education are the lack of teacher awareness and the lack of development of multiculturalism-based learning methods and programs.

First, the teacher awareness factor is a major inhibiting factor in implementing multicultural education. Compared to other factors, this awareness factor is relatively complicated because it relates to the psychological condition of the teacher in carrying out tasks. Teachers are one of the professional choices in public life. However, in Indonesian society, teachers are known or understood as a noble profession. The teacher not only acts as a teacher but also as an educator. The teacher's role plays a role in shaping smart and smart students, while the teacher's role as an educator plays a role in shaping good and polite students. The dual role of the teacher is sometimes not understood, and therefore some teachers do not have sufficient awareness to carry out this sacred task.

Apart from the teacher awareness factor, the next obstacle is related to the quality of teachers as one of the main figures in the education process. These constraints are in the form of developing multiculturalism-based learning methods and programs that are still lacking. The multicultural approach is a teaching and learning process with a special approach, and of course

requires the availability of adequate learning media and learning programs. This is still an obstacle for some teachers. As a result, teachers do not have media and learning programs that support implementing multiculturalism education in schools (Riyadi, 2013). The research data shows that the teaching and learning process of multicultural education-based teachers still experiences obstacles regarding the availability of this learning media.

In terms of facilities and facilities, other obstacles that are felt in the multicultural education process are constraints in the form of a lack of meeting time allocation and the unavailability of learning media. The lack of time allocation is especially felt when teachers must integrate multicultural learning into the teaching and learning process. Constraints of this kind are added to the lack of effective learning media for students. As a result, education based on a multicultural approach cannot take place as expected.

### **Solutions for Problems in the Implementation of Multicultural Education**

Despite several obstacles faced by schools, students and teachers in implementing multicultural education, several solutions can be learned from this situation. First, students' lack or low interest in taking multicultural-based lessons can be overcome by providing various variations in learning methods. Such variations can be seen, for example, in implementing multicultural education integrated with other subjects (Riyadi, 2013). Integrating multicultural learning materials in various subjects will save time and make learning more enjoyable.

In terms of teachers, obstacles in the form of a lack of instructional media and multicultural education-based learning programs can be overcome by providing training for developing teacher skills in compiling various kinds of learning media for students. Another way to do this is by providing incentives or rewards for teachers who excel in developing multicultural education. Apart from these two methods, other methods that can be applied to overcome the problem of lack of learning media can be pursued by holding a kind of grant or a competition to compile a multicultural-based educational curriculum. This kind of program will be a driving force and motivation for teachers and school members to create a comfortable environment for implementing multicultural learning in schools.

### **Holistic Multicultural Education**

Multicultural education is a big challenge in the world of education. It is not only a challenge for one or two countries but a challenge for all mankind. One of the reasons why the challenge of realizing multicultural education is so formidable is because in everyday life, conflicts and disputes are things that always accompany human life. The differences that exist in humans always trigger disputes or disagreements. The more heterogeneous or, the higher the level of differences in humans, the greater the threat of conflict. This social phenomenon also occurs in Indonesia. As a country with a very high level of diversity and diversity, Indonesia is one country prone to conflict.

Talking about the context of multicultural education in Indonesia, of course it cannot be separated from the existence of Pancasila as an identity, view of life, the basis of state philosophy, and Indonesia's national ideology. Pancasila is a source of value, a measure of truth for the social life of Indonesian society. In the context of multicultural education, Pancasila also occupies a very important position, namely as the basis for implementing multicultural education in Indonesia. The Government of the Republic of Indonesia has obliged all citizens to take moral education based on the values of Pancasila. This education is called Pancasila education, which is sometimes combined with civic education. The implementation of Pancasila learning has been carried out at various levels of education in Indonesia. However, the effectiveness of implementing Pancasila education is still being debated. The implementation of multicultural-based education is, therefore, a complement to the character learning efforts based on the Indonesian state ideology, Pancasila.

Based on the research results described above, it is known that to operate effectively, multicultural education must be carried out holistically or thoroughly. Comprehensive here is in the sense of touching various aspects in implementing education in schools. Not only



teachers and students, but this multicultural-based education must also be supported by the role models of adults in schools. In addition, the process of internalizing the values of multiculturalism is also carried out with two approaches at once, namely an approach from the subject matter side and the second an approach in terms of methods. These two approaches can be a holistic way to realize the values of multicultural education, towards a multicultural society.

There are various kinds of obstacles faced in the implementation of multiculturalism education in schools is a natural thing. These constraints are part of the dynamics that occur in the educational process. In addition, the obstacles in realizing this multicultural education also arise because of the adjustment process of various elements in schools. Sometimes in terms of learning media, it is very lacking in supporting the educational process. Sometimes these obstacles arise from the teacher or from students. Constraints like these have become commonplace in the delivery of education in various parts of the world.

As a reflection material, the implementation of multicultural education in Indonesia can be material for reflections on how the multicultural education process is carried out. Indonesia, as a country with a very diverse culture and society has been able to overcome various obstacles and realize the ideals of a multicultural society. This Indonesian experience can be used as learning material for other countries to realize the ideals of a multicultural society, namely, people who live side by side peacefully in diversity.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the research conducted, the following results were obtained. First, the implementation of multicultural education in Indonesia is carried out in several ways or in several approaches. In general, this approach can be divided into two: the approach in terms of learning materials and the approach in terms of learning methods. The multicultural education approach in terms of material means that the values of multiculturalism are given to students through special materials that discuss multiculturalism. Meanwhile, the approach in terms of methods means that the values of multicultural life are given to students by integrating them into various subjects. These approaches have their own drawbacks and strengths. Various obstacles in implementing multicultural education can also be encountered, including constraints on the teacher side, obstacles from the student side, and constraints in terms of the availability of learning facilities. One way to overcome these obstacles can be done by providing self-development training for teachers, leading to multicultural-based education. In addition, teachers should also be given incentives and rewards so that teachers get motivation to realize this multicultural learning. Although this study attempts to provide a comprehensive overview of the implementation of multicultural education, it has limitations. The first is the limitation in terms of literature selection. Issues about multicultural education are often discussed, so it needs to be supplemented with the latest research on this issue. Second, there is a limitation in terms of research location selection. The references selected in this literature study are those on implementing multicultural education in Indonesia. Practices in Indonesia may not necessarily be relevant to other regions in the world.

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