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ASSESSING SECONDARY SCHOOL GRADUATES' ENROLLMENT INTO TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION COURSES IN COLLEGES OF EDUCATION IN ABIA STATE.

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Abstract

The main aim of the study was to assess secondary school graduates enrollment into technical and vocational educations courses offered in Colleges of Education for employment creation in Abia State. Literature was extensively reviewed in relation to technical and vocational education courses of Colleges of Education, youth unemployment in Abia State and its specific objectives. The study made use of descriptive survey research design. Four research questions guided the study while the population for the study was made up of 600 secondary school graduates who participated in the 2023 West African Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination, W.A.S.S.C.E. across the three educational zones of the State. The questionnaire was structured to elicit the opinion of the respondents on the item statement based on a 4-point rating scale. Data collected were analyzed using mean, percentage and standard deviation. The respondents whose age ranged from 13 to 19 years belonged to all the religion in Nigeria. Most of them were not willing to choose any of the TVE courses offered in Colleges of Education as a career. While some students had a positive perception towards TVE course, others didn't. The socio-demographic characteristics and family background, Parental status, background, perception and strategies significantly had a high influence on both the male and female graduates' willingness to choose a TVE course as a career. The study recommended parents and teachers' stimulation of students' interest in TVE courses, provision of scholarship to TVE students, employment and grants to TVE graduates of Colleges of Education for employment creation.

Keywords: Secondary School Graduates, Colleges of Education, vocational and technical courses, Abia State, employment creation.

Introduction

The current prevailing economic realities have shown drastic changes resulting in alarming rise in unemployment, especially among young people. This is worsened by the global economic

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meltdown and the most recent post-COVID-19 realities. The global community has made moves to address the issues of youth unemployment focusing on technical and vocational education for job creation. According to UNESCO (2012), many states that are beset with economic decline and mounting unemployment, are initiating extra efforts to revamp industries, encourage the youths to engage in various vocations and to help business create new job opportunities. UNESCO (2012) further established thus "if vocational education is developing skills for the employment system, the whole system has to be involved in it if this mode of imparting skills is to become a leading actor".

The African European had prioritized vocational courses in its agenda for a long time and it has been one of the three policy areas as being considered by the Lisbon Strategy for creating innovation and entrepreneurship (European Commission, EC 2008). Oyekanmi (2020) had discovered that 27.1% of Nigerian youths are unemployed while several others graduate into the labour market annually unemployed, uncreative and without any saleable skill. EC (2008) strongly upholds vocational courses as essentially necessary for development of lifelong skills for future innovation practices. According to Okwelle and Okeke (2015) and Dike (2009), technical and vocational education should be for productive purpose and also an integral part of National development strategies in many societies due to its impacts on productive and economic development.

According to Uwaifo (2011), vocational programs and courses serve as a catalyst for economic, social and political changes of a nation and ranges from business education, accounting education, marketing, management, welding and fabrication, mechanical/automobile technology, electrical/electronic technology, woodwork, building technology, home economics, agricultural education, fine and applied arts education and computer education among others. For instance, The Kingsley Strategic Institute (KSI) (2019) had posited that gradually increasing the annual intake of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) students from 164,000 in 2013 to 225,000 in 2020 will meet the aspiration of vocational education in creating employment. KSI (2019) had also emphasized that TVET, being a branch of education, cannot be overlooked by any government as it is through TVET that a nation is able to become an industrialized nation, citing great economies such as Australia, Germany, Korea, and Japan as countries that have placed strong emphasis on the development of TVET education. Also, many developing nations including Nigeria, have expedited moves in repositioning vocational education to create jobs.

The African Union in 2007 had also posited that vocational education plays an integral role in the growth and development of human capital and the economy as it provides opportunities for youth to be self-employed and creates an avenue to be self-reliant in development of the

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country while supplying a capable workforce. According to Uwaifo (2010), realizing the potentialities of vocational education is limited by low enrollment of students seeking admission into tertiary institution of learning. This is in addition to large class size of the few existing Technical and Vocational Institutions, the deplorable state of training facilities of vocational institutions, underfunding of vocational education institutions (Aturu, 2010). The constant incidence of low student's enrollment into vocational courses has been a great concern to all stakeholders particularly with the prevailing high rate of unemployment. Oke (2017), observed that there is a general perception that vocational education is meant for the academically dull and never do well students. This is orchestrated by the emphasis on paper qualification rather than skills and has jeopardized the development of vocational courses and programs which have subsequently been relegated for dropouts. Loo (2018) noted that when secondary school graduates enroll in vocational education courses, it does not mean that they would eventually carpenters, masons, typists etc. but rather encourages inventiveness, invocation, innovation and perseverance to its beneficiaries. This misconception about taking up courses in any of the vocational education courses has resulted in low enrollment at tertiary level and evidenced by poor manpower produced in any of the vocational disciplines, particularly in the College of Education System of Nigeria.

Adebesin (2006) had also observed however, that the present state and focus of vocational education in Nigeria as being paper based has also contributed in producing more individuals who lack job skills and aptitudes for employment than those that the economy requires to remain vibrant. This scenario can subsequently discourage secondary school graduates from seeking to enroll into vocational education courses in the Colleges of Education. Aina (2006), had observed that enrollment into Technical and Vocational Education had remained low in Nigeria since its introduction, thereby limiting the technological and national development of Nigeria. Statistical from National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) (2011), show that technical colleges are only able to enroll barely about 9.3% of the expected 800,000 annually while total enrollments into TVE programs in Colleges of Education was less than 3% (Yakubu, 2006). This ugly scenario might be ascribed to assertion of Ozioma (2011) who explained that Nigerian schools including the secondary schools and guidance and counselors who are supposedly to guide secondary school graduates into career choices, pay little or no attention to TVE, teachers and students alike seem not to understand what TVE courses involve and observed contempt and aversion for TVE courses have contributed to low secondary school students enrollment into TVE courses particularly in the Colleges of Education.

Expectedly, while the various courses offered under school of vocational and technical education in Colleges of Education are primarily intended for the preparation of primary school and secondary school teachers, secondary school graduates who enroll in any of these

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vocational courses and are not able to secure teaching jobs or not willing to engage in teaching, can create enterprises including enterprises identified by Okocha, *et al*., (2022) and Okocha, *et al*., (2023). However, a detailed analysis of secondary school graduates' enrollment into Colleges of Education vocational courses in Abia State as an avenue of improving youth employment creation reveals a dismal picture of future youth unemployment rate in the State. It is therefore, on this premise that this study seeks to assess the challenges and identify improvement strategies to increase secondary school graduates enrollment into Colleges of Education vocational courses for employment creation in Abia State.

Statement of the problem

An assessment of the tertiary education admission seekers' choices of courses for Colleges of Education in Abia State, revealed that the students' choice of courses were mostly outside vocational education courses. Muturi (2012) had observed a low number of youths in vocational and technical careers as a reflection of the secondary school graduates' perceptions about enrolling in vocational courses specifically in the Colleges of Education despite its potentials to create employment. Although many studies have explained the causes of students' low enrollment into vocational and technical education programs, there is paucity of information on students perception of vocational courses, challenges of enrollments and the improvement strategies on secondary school graduates' enrollment in Colleges of Education vocational courses for employment in Abia State. There is also paucity of information as it relates to the willingness of secondary school graduates in Abia State in Abia State in enrolling in any of the vocational education courses offered in Colleges of Education for employment creation.

Abia State currently has the 4th highest unemployment rate (31.6%) in Nigeria (NBS, 2018) with the youth unemployment rate almost double that rate with population of 3.7 million people as of 2016. It is worthy to note that more than 55.4% of the youth in the labor force is either unemployed or underemployed as at third quarter 2018 and the challenge of youth unemployment cuts across all categories of youth regardless of their educational attainment.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to assess secondary school graduates' enrollment into Colleges of Education vocational education courses for employment creation in Abia State. Specifically, the objectives of the study were to;

1. Identify the socio-demographic and family background of secondary school graduates in Abia State.

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2. Parental background, status, perceptions and strategies for improving enrollment of secondary school graduates into Colleges of Education vocational courses in Abia State.
3. The perceptions of secondary school graduates on career choices in Abia State.
4. The factors that can influence secondary graduates' choice or willingness to enroll into vocational education courses in Abia State.

Research questions

Because of the significance of a secondary school graduates' choice of course of study and his/her employment prospects, it is therefore needful to assess these relevant questions which would guide this study. These questions include;

- What are the socio-demographic characteristics and family background of secondary school graduates in Abia State.
- What are the parental background, status, perceptions and strategies to be adopted by parents of secondary school graduates to increase enrollments into vocation education courses in Abia State.
- What are the perceptions of secondary school graduates on career choices related to vocational education courses.
- What are the factors that can influence secondary school graduates' willingness to enroll into vocational educational courses.

Methodology

Study design

The study adopted descriptive survey research design. This was used because it pooled the opinions of a representative sample of respondents, using its findings to generalize on the entire population. Aniekwe and Ozigbo (2002) had stated that descriptive survey is the collection of data using questionnaire for the purpose of describing and interpreting existing conditions or qualities regarding a population.

Population of the study

The study was conducted in the three educational zones of Abia State, made up of Aba Zone, Umuahia Zone and Ohafia Zone. A total of thirty secondary schools made up of 15 public and 15 private secondary schools (i.e. 10 secondary schools from each educational zone in the ratio of 5 public schools:5 private secondary schools) were randomly selected. From each selected school, twenty senior secondary school students (10 males) and (10 females) who were participating in the 2023 West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) as

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their terminal exit examination from the secondary school education system in line with the 6:3:3:4 system of education as recommended in the National Policy on Education NPE (2013).

This gave a total sample size of 600 students (300 males and 300 females) from the 30 secondary schools used for the study.

Area of the study

The study was carried out in Abia State. Abia State is one of the five States in South East Nigeria and has 17 Local Government Areas. It has a high number of secondary schools, public and privately owned. The State is bordered to the northwest by Anambra State and northeast by the States of Enugu, and Ebonyi, Imo State to the west, Cross River State to the east, Akwa Ibom State to the southeast, and River State to the South. Its capital is Umuahia. Abia State occupies about 4,902 square kilometers. The population is 4,143,100 (NBS, 2022) and the people are mainly Igbos. The State is delineated into three educational zones consisting of Aba Education Zone, Umuahia Education Zone and Ohafia Education Zone.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

Purposive sampling techniques was used for this study. Final year senior secondary school students participating in the 2023 W.A.S.SC.E. in the selected schools were selected for the study.

Instrument for data collection

The instrument used for data collection in this study was a structured questionnaire titled "**Assessing Secondary School Graduates' Enrollment into Colleges Education Technical and Vocational Courses For Employment Creation in Abia State**" (ASSGECETVCECAS). The questionnaire comprised close-ended items were respondents were asked to respond to items measuring their perception about agriculture and their willingness to study any of the technical and vocational education courses offered by the Colleges of Education in Nigeria. This questionnaire was developed based on extensive review of related literature and on the purpose of the study. The instrument was divided into four sections, A, B, C and D. Section A elicits information on the socio-demographic and family background of secondary school graduates in Abia State, section B contains items relating to their parents' educational background, status, perception and strategies that can increase secondary school graduates' enrollment in Colleges of Education Technical and Vocational courses, section C contained itemized questions on the perceptions of secondary school graduates on choosing a career in the technical and vocational courses offered in Colleges of Education while section D contained itemized questions about factors that can influence secondary school graduates choice or

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willingness to enroll into technical and vocational courses offered by Colleges of Education. The respondents were to tick against the desired response category based on his or her opinion. The questionnaire was structured to elicit the opinion of the respondents on the item statement based on a 4-point rating scale assigned four point numerical values describing items being measured. Thus;

Scale items	Numerical Points
Strongly agree (SA)	4
Agree (A)	3
Disagree (D)	2
Strongly Disagree (SD)	1

Therefore, items with means= score of 2.50 and above were accepted as agreed while items with mean score below 2.50 meant disagreed.

Validation of the instrument

The instrument was face-validated by three experts from Departments of Curriculum Development, Agricultural Education and Business Education, all of the Federal College of Education, Eha-Amufu, Enugu State. Corrections were made on appropriateness of language, relevance to subject matter, precision of items and ambiguity of statement. Reliability coefficient using the Cronbach Alpha reliability test was 0.79.

Data collection techniques and analysis

Distribution and collection of the instrument was done by hand through the co-ordination of the researchers. About 90 per cent of the copies of the questionnaires were retrieved and analyzed. Data collected were analyzed using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS version 16.0). Frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviations were used to summarize and analyze the data.

The following decision guided the interpretation of the results of the analysis. Any item with a mean score of ≥ 2.5 was regarded as agreed, while any mean score of less than 2.50 was regarded as not agreed or disagreed.

Results/discussion

Research question 1: *What are the socio-demographic characteristics and family background of secondary school graduates in Abia State.*

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Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics and family background of secondary school graduates in Abia State.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics	Male Frequency	Male Percentage	Female Frequency	Female Percentage
Age				
15-16	99.00	33.00	98.00	32.67
16-17	84.00	28.00	81.00	27.00
17-18	63.00	21.00	65.00	21.66
18-19	54.00	18.00	56.00	18.67
Total	300.00	100.00	300.00	100.00
School type				
Public school	129.00	43.00	121.00	40.33
Private school	171.00	57.00	179.00	59.67
Total	300.00	100.00	300.00	100.00
School location				
Urban area	129.00	68.00	214.00	71.33
Rural area	171.00	32.00	86.00	28.67
Religion				
Christianity	286.00	95.33	289.00	96.33
Islamic	2.00	0.67	3.00	1.00
Traditional	12.00	4.00	8.00	2.67
Total	300.00	100.00	300.00	100
Parent's occupation				
Farming	57.00	19.00	59.00	19.67
Civil servant	52.00	17.33	51.00	17.00
Trading	102.00	34.00	111.00	37.00
Artisan	89.00	29.67	79.00	26.33
Total	300.00	100.00	300.00	100.00
Exposure to vocational skills				
Highly exposed	55.00	18.33	43.00	14.33
Moderately exposed	115.00	38.33	108.00	36.00
Not exposed	130.00	43.33	149.00	49.67

Source: Field Survey, 2023

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Research question 2: *What are the perceptions of secondary school graduates on career choice in TVE courses offered in Colleges of Education in Abia State.*

Table 2: Perceptions of secondary school graduates on career choices in TVE courses offered in Colleges of Education in Abia.

Perceptions: SD	X1	SD1	X2	SD2	Pooled
TVE courses are not lucrative	2.50	0.86	2.66	1.75	1.31
TVE courses are lucrative	2.50	1.08	2.16	0.64	0.86
TVE courses are for the less privileged	2.50	0.86	2.60	1.08	0.97
TVE courses are for the elite's children	2.77	0.86	3.00	1.30	0.97
TVE courses are for academically-bright students	2.27	0.64	2.61	0.42	0.53
TVE courses are for less academically bright students	2.88	0.86	3.05	2.19	1.53
TVE course would guarantee employment after graduation	2.88	0.86	3.05	2.19	1.53
TVE courses would not guarantee employment after graduation	2.72	0.86	2.94	1.75	1.30
TVE courses would enhance national development	2.61	1.08	1.77	0.43	0.76
TVE courses would not enhance national development	2.16	0.86	3.22	2.19	1.53
TVE courses are for rural dwellers	2.22	0.86	2.16	0.86	0.86
TVE courses are for urban dwellers	2.77	1.08	2.83	0.86	0.97
TVE course are for students with low aspirations	2.67	1.07	2.85	0.89	0.98
TVE courses are not for students with low aspirations	2.61	1.08	3.26	2.23	1.57

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Note: X1= mean for respondents (male secondary school graduates)
X2= mean for respondents (female secondary school graduates)
SD1= Standard deviation for respondents (male secondary school graduates)
SD2= Standard deviation for respondents (female secondary school graduates)

Research question 3: *What are the parental background, educational status, perceptions and suggested strategies to increase enrollment of secondary school graduates into technical and vocational courses offered in Colleges of Education in Abia State.*

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Table3: Parental background, educational status, perceptions and suggested strategies to increase enrollment of secondary school graduates into TVE courses offered in Colleges of Education in Abia State.

Questionnaire items	**Male**		**Female**		
	X1	**SD1**	**X2**	**SD2**	**Pooled SD**
Educated parents support students' enrollment in TVE into TVE	2.52	0.86	2.65	0.91	0.88
Educated parents do not support students' enrollment	2.87	0.84	2.61	0.85	0.85
Parents' occupation influence students' choice for TVE	3.40	1.77	2.99	1.45	1.56
Parents' occupation does not influence students' choice for TVE	2.67	0.87	3.00	0.97	1.54
High income parents are interested in TVE for their children	2.22	0.64	2.98	0.65	0.65
High income parents are not interested in TVE for their children	2.78	0.84	3.11	0.74	0.89
Parents should explain the benefits of TVE to their children	3.22	1.50	3.26	1.15	1.32
Parents should help their children discover their career path	3.45	1.89	3.57	1.56	1.72
Parent should help their children get informed about TVE	3.10	1.07	2.78	1.00	1.35
Parents should help their children discover their latent potentials	2.78	0.81	2.79	0.97	0.88
Parents should encourage their children to visit skill centers	2.98	0.98	2.88	0.97	0.98
Parents should identify laudable vocations within their communities.	2.87	0.91	3.01	0.96	0.93

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Note:

X1= mean for respondents (male secondary school graduates)

X2= mean for respondents (female secondary school graduates)

SD1= Standard deviation for respondents (male secondary school graduates)

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Research question 4: *What are the factors that can increase enrollment of secondary school graduates into TVE courses offered in Colleges of Education in Abia State.*

Table 4: Factors that can increase enrollment of secondary school graduates into TVE courses offered in Colleges of Education in Abia State.

Questionnaire items	Male		Female		
	X1	SD1	X2	SD2	Pooled SD
Teachers' influence	2.67	0.88	3.11	1.07	0.96
Peer pressure influence	2.58	0.78	2.54	0.98	0.80
Parental background	3.01	1.02	2.99	0.99	1.00
Students' parental influence	3.45	1.17	3.45	1.17	1.17
Personal interest of the student	3.02	0.98	2.99	0.99	0.98
Perceived Prospective economic benefits	2.78	0.67	3.01	1.01	0.80
Career guidance	2.99	0.78	3.01	1.01	0.83
Quest to be self-employed	3.07	1.08	3.11	1.03	1.05
Academic performance	3.56	1.27	3.43	1.20	1.22
Parents' occupation	3.76	1.34	3.88	1.39	1.36
Societal influence	2.78	1.01	3.02	1.01	1.01
Pre-vocational experience	3.07	0.98	3.18	1.02	0.99
Accessibility/proximity to TVE courses	3.17	0.99	3.23	1.12	1.08
Availability of TVE Scholarship Schemes	3.56	1.11	3.70	1.23	1.15
Employment prospects	3.66	1.15	3.61	1.07	1.11

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Note:

X1= mean for respondents (male secondary school graduates)

X2= mean for respondents (female secondary school graduates)

SD1= Standard deviation for respondents (male secondary school graduates)

SD2= Standard deviation for respondents (female secondary school graduates)

Discussion

The socio-demographic characteristics and family background of the secondary school students are shown in Table 1. It shows that the age of the respondents ranged from 15 to 20 years of age. Higher percentage of both male and female graduates attends private secondary schools located mostly in the urban areas (57.33% and 59.67%) respectively. Their religions cut across the three religious groups in the country with the largest proportion (male: 95.33% and female: 96.33%) being Christians. Their parents are mostly traders, artisans, farmers and civil servants. 49.67% of them were not exposed to vocational skills. The implication of these findings align with the opinions of Sanditov and Verspagen (2011), who stated that socio-demographic

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factors an encouraging or impeding effect on the intentions of individuals to choose a career path. They further explained that factors such as family background, education, work experience mostly acquired from involvement in parents' occupation, risk attitude, over-optimism, preference for independence and the norms and values of a society influence the choice of individual's life career. Also variables such as age, gender, education, work experience, role models and family background have been found to predict whether an individual will venture into technical and vocational courses (hatak, Harms and Fink, 2015).
Table 2 shows the perception of secondary school graduates (i.e male and female) towards TVE courses offered in Colleges of Education. The data indicates that there was no significant difference on both positive and negative perceptions about the career prospects of the TVE courses offered in Colleges of Education. However, the result in table 2 can confirm the observations of Isiwu and Nwakpadolu (2013), who reported that most students seeking entry into universities for instance in South East, Nigeria preferred to study general management, physical sciences, medicine, engineering and other professional courses to vocational and technical educational courses like Agricultural education, home economics, business education, fine and applied arts education etc.

This suggests that Pre-vocational subjects' curriculum should be improved on at the secondary school level so as to expose and capture the conception and view of both the male and female students to tally with respect to the TVE courses offered in Colleges of Education. This is very important because having a fairly good perception of TVE courses will encourage enrollment and subsequently create employment in the technical and vocational sectors. This will equally influence their perception, attitude and choice towards pursuing higher degree in TVE disciplines. This is in line with the report of Ogunremi et al (2012) who asserts that students' willingness to study TVE courses is dependent on the level of perception of students about the courses.

The data in Table 3 reflects the findings of Kim (2002) who studied the relationship between parents financial and human capital in a sampled low-income minority families, found that mothers with higher education had higher expectations for their children's academic achievement and that these expectations were related to their children's career choices in particular and academic achievement in general. The family of secondary school student or its graduate and the parents in particular are therefore, the most important support system available to the students. According to Coleman (2008), a family's socio-economic status correlates with academic choices and achievement at secondary school level. Ibalaoro (2012) indicated that the socio-economic status of a student is based on family income, parental educational level and parental occupation. All the factors presented in Table 4 had a positive influence on the

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students willingness to choose any of the TVE courses offered in Colleges of Education as a career.

Conclusion

Assessing secondary school graduates enrollment into Colleges of Education TVE courses is imperative in addressing the challenges of unemployment in Abia in particular and Nigeria in general. Ideally, vocational education entails scholars being skillfully developed for industrial, economic and social progress for national development. It offers the requisite skills, technical and professional manpower needed for national development. Being that there has been a continued low enrollment into these TVE course and faced with unprecedented youth unemployment rate arising from the Post-COVID-19 realities, economic crisis and school disruptions due to insecurities; stakeholders in education should make concerted efforts at reversing this ugly trend as this will ensure technical and vocational education in the Colleges of Education will contribute maximally in job creation and national development.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that:

i. Considering the prospects of TVE courses offered in Colleges of Education, parents and teachers should play a key role of influencing students to choose career in any of the TVE courses.
ii. Vocational educators should increase their capacity, skill and competence in the TVE courses as it will help to increase and sustain the interest of students in choosing any TVE course.
iii. Pre-vocational subjects' curriculum should be improved to meet up with the current trend in the sector. This will help to erase the negative mindsets people have about TVE courses as professions.
iv. Government of various levels should introduce programmes such as scholarship schemes, graduate employment, provision of loans, grants and subsidy to graduate students. This will attract and sustain the interest of the youths towards the study of any of the TVE courses offered in Colleges of Education.

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