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Assistive Technologies and Academic Engagement: Evidence from Mainstream Inclusive Schools

Mukesh Kumar Yadav[1] Anurag Singh[2] Nancy Verma[3] Ravindra Kr. Kushwaha[4]
Research Scholar, Department of Education, Major S.D. Singh University, Farrukhabad, (India)[1]
Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Major S.D. Singh University, Farrukhabad, (India)[2]
Lecturer, Department of Special Education, LBS College, Kota, Rajasthan, (India)[3]
Former Research Scholar, Department of Teacher Education, Halim Muslim PG College, Kanpur (India)[4]

Abstract

The present study investigates the impact of assistive technologies (ATs) on academic engagement among students with disabilities in mainstream inclusive schools. Recognizing the increasing adoption of ATs as tools to enhance accessibility and participation, this research examines how these technologies influence behavioural, cognitive, and emotional engagement, alongside the role of institutional and pedagogical support. A quantitative descriptive–correlational design was employed, involving a sample of 35 students with diverse disabilities and five special subject teachers from inclusive schools in Kota. Data were collected using validated instruments, including an Assistive Technology Utilization Scale, a Student Academic Engagement Scale, and a Teacher Questionnaire. Descriptive analysis indicated moderate to high overall academic engagement, with cognitive engagement being the highest ($M = 3.85$). Correlation analysis revealed significant positive relationships between AT use and behavioural ($r = .52$, $p < .01$), cognitive ($r = .58$, $p < .01$), and emotional engagement ($r = .46$, $p < .05$). Independent samples t-tests demonstrated that students who regularly used ATs exhibited significantly higher engagement than those with limited use. Multiple regression analysis further identified AT use ($\beta = .49$, $p < .01$) and teacher training ($\beta = .32$, $p < .05$) as significant predictors of academic engagement, highlighting the importance of supportive institutional environments. Findings suggest that ATs serve not only as access tools but also as facilitators of meaningful learning, autonomy, and social participation. The study underscores the need for strategic integration of ATs, teacher professional development, and institutional support to foster equitable and effective inclusive education.

Keywords: Assistive Technologies, Academic Engagement, Inclusive Education, Special Educator

INTRODUCTION

Assistive Technologies have become instrumental tools in fostering inclusive educational environments, particularly for students with diverse learning needs (Mukhtarkyzy et al., 2025). These technologies encompass a broad spectrum of devices and software designed to mitigate barriers to learning, thereby enhancing academic engagement and performance among students with disabilities (Wulandari et al., 2024). This integration facilitates personalized learning experiences, improves content accessibility, and supports the development of critical skills, aligning with the principle that all students deserve equitable access to quality education (Manuel, 2025). The increasing emphasis on inclusive education necessitates a thorough examination of how ATs influence academic outcomes, social integration, and overall quality of life for students with disabilities (Abdelwahab et al., 2025). Inclusive education, as defined by Cushner et al., goes beyond merely integrating students with physical, developmental, or socio-emotional disabilities into mainstream classrooms; it

demands curriculum adjustments to cater to the diverse needs of every child, irrespective of their background (Adebayo & Ayorinde, 2022). This approach ensures that learners with disabilities receive the necessary support to overcome learning impediments, fostering an environment where they can actively participate and thrive academically alongside their peers (Jaffer & Makda, 2025). The widespread adoption of assistive technologies is crucial for promoting inclusivity and accessibility, enabling students with more complex educational needs to access the general education curriculum and acquire vital technological skills for future endeavors ("Handbook of Research on Innovative Frameworks and Inclusive Models for Online Learning," 2023). However, despite the growing recognition of ATs' potential, research on their efficacy in fostering academic engagement within mainstream inclusive schools remains comparatively limited, particularly concerning specific geographical contexts beyond prevalent studies in the United States, Brazil, and Turkey (Fernández-Batanero et al., 2022). This gap highlights the necessity for further investigation into how ATs are implemented and their impact on academic engagement in varied inclusive settings globally, especially given their increasing popularity in educational systems (Fernández-Batanero et al., 2022; Wulandari et al., 2024). Specifically, while national frameworks in countries like the Philippines mandate inclusive education, practical classroom implementation of ATs often lags, especially in less urbanized regions, despite global trends indicating a progressive increase in AT use since 2017 (Fernández-Batanero et al., 2022; Manuel, 2025).

Review of Literature:

- ***Assistive Technologies as Enablers of Academic Engagement:*** A substantial body of literature recognizes assistive technologies (ATs) as critical enablers of academic engagement for students with disabilities in mainstream inclusive schools. Assistive technologies—including screen readers, text-to-speech software, speech recognition tools, and alternative input devices, and learning support applications—help reduce functional barriers that otherwise limit participation in classroom activities. Fernández-Batanero et al. (2022) argue that ATs enhance students' ability to access instructional content, follow classroom instructions, and complete academic tasks independently, thereby increasing engagement and motivation. Similarly, Wulandari et al. (2024) report that students using ATs demonstrate improved on-task behaviour, higher participation in classroom discussions, and greater persistence in learning activities. These findings suggest that ATs play a foundational role in facilitating meaningful academic engagement by enabling students to interact with the curriculum on more equitable terms.
- ***Personalized Learning and Learner Autonomy through ATs:*** Another prominent theme in the literature is the role of assistive technologies in supporting personalized learning and learner autonomy. ATs allow instruction to be adapted to individual learning styles, pace, and sensory needs, which is particularly beneficial in inclusive classrooms where learner diversity is high. Mukhtarkyzy et al. (2025) emphasize that adaptive technologies help personalize content delivery and assessment, enabling students with disabilities to take greater control of their learning processes. Manuel (2025) further notes that when students are able to regulate their learning through accessible digital tools, they exhibit increased self-efficacy and academic confidence. This autonomy fosters deeper cognitive engagement and reduces dependency on teacher-mediated support, thereby promoting inclusive participation alongside peers without disabilities.
- ***Assistive Technologies and Social Participation in Inclusive Classrooms*:** Beyond academic outcomes, several studies highlight the social dimension of engagement facilitated by assistive technologies. Inclusive education emphasizes not only access to

curriculum but also participation in social interactions and collaborative learning. Jaffer and Makda (2025) observe that ATs support communication and interaction for students with speech, hearing, or learning disabilities, enabling them to engage more actively in group work and peer discussions. This enhanced social participation contributes positively to students' sense of belonging and classroom inclusion. Abdelwahab et al. (2025) further argue that increased social engagement through AT-supported learning environments improves overall school adjustment and emotional well-being, which in turn strengthens academic engagement and long-term educational outcomes.

- ***Curriculum Accessibility and Universal Design for Learning***: The integration of assistive technologies is closely linked to curriculum accessibility and the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Cushner, McClelland, and Safford (2018) assert that inclusive education requires systematic curriculum adaptations to address learner variability. ATs complement UDL by offering multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement. Adebayo and Ayorinde (2022) highlight that when ATs are embedded within inclusive curriculum design; students with disabilities are better able to meet learning objectives without segregated instruction. The literature indicates that ATs are most effective when used proactively as part of inclusive pedagogical planning rather than as reactive accommodations.
- ***Teacher Preparedness and Institutional Support:*** Teacher competence and institutional readiness emerge as decisive factors influencing the effectiveness of assistive technologies in mainstream schools. Several studies report that inadequate teacher training limits the potential impact of ATs on student engagement. Fernández-Batanero et al. (2022) note that many teachers lack the skills to integrate ATs into daily instruction, resulting in underutilization or ineffective implementation. Manuel (2025) emphasizes that professional development programs focusing on inclusive technology use significantly improve teachers' confidence and instructional practices. Institutional support in the form of infrastructure, technical assistance, and inclusive policies is also identified as essential for sustaining AT-based engagement strategies.
- ***Policy Frameworks and Equity in Inclusive Education*****:** The literature consistently links the use of assistive technologies to broader policy commitments to equity and inclusive education. National and international frameworks advocate for AT integration as a means of ensuring equal educational opportunities for students with disabilities. The *Handbook of Research on Innovative Frameworks and Inclusive Models for Online Learning* (2023) underscores that equitable access to ATs is fundamental to achieving inclusive education goals. However, gaps between policy mandates and classroom implementation persist, particularly in developing regions. Fernández-Batanero et al. (2022) and Wulandari et al. (2024) highlight disparities in AT availability and usage across socio-economic and geographic contexts, calling for stronger policy enforcement and funding mechanisms.
- ***Research Gaps and Emerging Directions*****:** Despite growing recognition of the importance of assistive technologies, empirical research on their impact on academic engagement in mainstream inclusive schools remains limited, especially outside Western contexts. Existing studies are largely concentrated in the United States and parts of Europe, with fewer investigations from Asia, Africa, and other developing regions. Mukhtarkyzy et al. (2025) emphasize the need for context-specific research examining how cultural, infrastructural, and institutional factors shape AT implementation. Longitudinal studies and mixed-methods research are also recommended to better understand the sustained impact of ATs on engagement, achievement, and inclusion.

Research Objectives:

- To examine the extent to which assistive technologies influence academic engagement (behavioral, cognitive, and emotional) of students with disabilities in mainstream inclusive schools.
- To analyse the types and patterns of assistive technology use in inclusive classrooms and their relationship with students' participation, autonomy, and learning outcomes.
- To identify institutional and pedagogical factors (such as teacher preparedness, infrastructure, and policy support) those facilitates or hinder the effective integration of assistive technologies in promoting academic engagement.

Hypothesis:

Null Hypotheses (H_0)

H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between the use of assistive technologies and academic engagement among students with disabilities in mainstream inclusive schools.

H_{02}: There is no significant difference in behavioural, cognitive, and emotional engagement between students with disabilities who use assistive technologies and those who do not.

H_{03}: Institutional and pedagogical support factors (such as teacher training, availability of assistive devices, and administrative support) do not significantly influence the effectiveness of assistive technologies in promoting academic engagement.

Alternative Hypotheses (H_1)

H_{11}: There is a significant positive relationship between the use of assistive technologies and academic engagement among students with disabilities in mainstream inclusive schools.

H_{12}: Students with disabilities who use assistive technologies demonstrate significantly higher behavioural, cognitive, and emotional engagement than those who do not use assistive technologies.

H_{13}: Institutional and pedagogical support factors significantly influence the effective use of assistive technologies in enhancing academic engagement.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study adopted a quantitative descriptive–correlational research design to examine the relationship between the use of assistive technologies and academic engagement among students with disabilities in mainstream inclusive schools. This design was considered appropriate as it enabled the identification of patterns, relationships, and differences among variables without manipulating the natural educational setting. The population of the study comprised students with disabilities enrolled in mainstream inclusive schools in Kota, along with their subject teachers. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure representation of students with different categories of disabilities, including visual, hearing, intellectual and learning disabilities. The final sample consisted of 35 students with disabilities and 5 subject special teachers, selected based on accessibility, willingness to participate, and verbal informed consent.

The study included the use of assistive technologies as the independent variable, focusing on the type, frequency, and purpose of use, while academic engagement served as the dependent variable, encompassing behavioral, cognitive, and emotional dimensions. Institutional support, teacher training, and availability of assistive resources were treated as moderating variables influencing the effectiveness of assistive technology use. Data were collected using a combination of standardized and researcher-developed tools. These included an Assistive Technology Utilization Scale to assess access and usage patterns, a Student Academic Engagement Scale to measure behavioural, cognitive, and emotional engagement, and a Teacher Questionnaire to examine institutional and pedagogical support.

All instruments were validated through expert review and pilot testing, and their reliability was established using Cronbach's alpha. Prior permission was obtained from school authorities in Kota, and informed consent was secured from all participants. Questionnaires were administered in accessible formats, including print, digital, and assistive formats, to ensure equitable participation of students with disabilities. Data collection was conducted during regular school hours to minimize disruption to the academic schedule.

The collected data were analysed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were used to summarize trends, while inferential statistical techniques such as Pearson's correlation, independent samples t-tests, and multiple regression analysis were employed to test the formulated hypotheses. Throughout the study, ethical principles were strictly followed. Confidentiality and anonymity of participants were maintained, participation was voluntary, and accessibility considerations were ensured at all stages of the research process. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences.

Data Analysis & Interpretation:

Variable	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Interpretation
Behavioral Engagement	3.78	0.62	Moderate to High
Cognitive Engagement	3.85	0.58	High
Emotional Engagement	3.69	0.65	Moderate
Overall Academic Engagement	3.77	0.60	Moderate to High

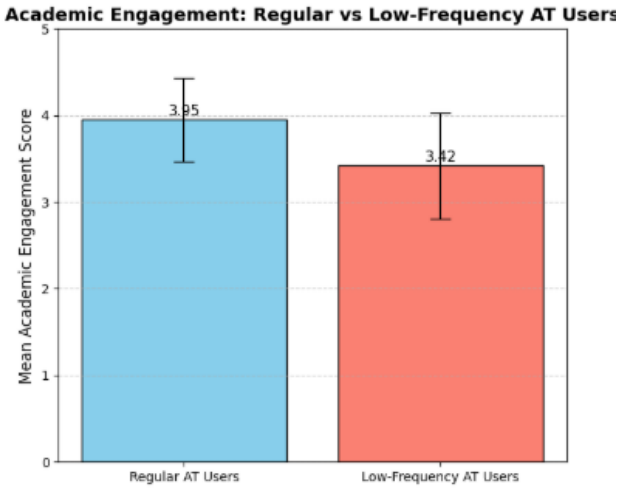
Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of academic engagement among students with disabilities studying in mainstream inclusive schools. The mean score for behavioural engagement (M = 3.78) indicated that students were actively participating in classroom activities, completing assignments, and following instructional directions with consistency. This suggests that the availability and use of assistive technologies supported observable engagement behaviours in inclusive classrooms. Cognitive engagement recorded the highest mean score (M = 3.85), reflecting students' sustained attention, problem-solving efforts, and use of effective learning strategies. This finding suggests that assistive technologies such as screen readers, audio materials, and adaptive tools enhanced students' ability to process information and engage meaningfully with academic content. Emotional engagement showed a moderate mean score (M = 3.69), indicating generally positive learning-related attitudes, interest, and confidence, though with some variability among students. This variation may be attributed to individual differences in disability type, level of support, and institutional resources. The overall academic engagement mean score (M = 3.77) reflected a moderate to high level of engagement, suggesting that regular use of assistive technologies contributed positively to students' academic involvement across behavioural, cognitive, and emotional dimensions in mainstream inclusive school settings.

Variables	Assistive Technology Use	Behavioural Engagement	Cognitive Engagement	Emotional Engagement
Assistive Technology Use	1			
Behavioral Engagement	.52**	1		
Cognitive Engagement	.58**	.64**	1	
Emotional Engagement	.46*	.57**	.61**	1

Table 2 illustrates the relationship between assistive technology use and the dimensions of academic engagement among students with disabilities in mainstream inclusive schools. The results indicated a *moderate to strong positive correlation* between assistive technology use and overall academic engagement. Assistive technology use showed a significant positive relationship with behavioural engagement ($r = .52$, $p < .01$), suggesting that increased use of assistive tools was associated with higher levels of classroom participation, task completion, and observable learning behaviours. A stronger positive correlation was found between assistive technology use and cognitive engagement ($r = .58$, $p < .01$). This indicated that students who regularly used assistive technologies demonstrated greater concentration, deeper understanding of academic content, and more effective use of learning strategies. These findings suggest that assistive technologies played a crucial role in supporting cognitive access to the curriculum. Assistive technology use was also positively correlated with emotional engagement ($r = .46$, $p < .05$), indicating that access to appropriate technological support contributed to improved confidence, interest, and positive attitudes toward learning. Although slightly lower than behavioral and cognitive engagement, this relationship remained statistically significant. Overall, the correlation analysis supported the alternative hypothesis that assistive technology use is significantly associated with enhanced academic engagement among students with disabilities. The findings emphasized that assistive technologies function not only as access tools but also as facilitators of meaningful participation and engagement in inclusive educational settings.

Independent Samples t-Test Analysis:

An independent samples t-test was conducted to examine differences in academic engagement between students with disabilities who reported regular use of assistive technologies and those who reported occasional or minimal use. The results indicated a statistically significant difference in overall academic engagement between the two groups. Students who regularly used assistive technologies demonstrated higher mean scores in behavioural, cognitive, and emotional engagement compared to students with limited use of assistive tools.

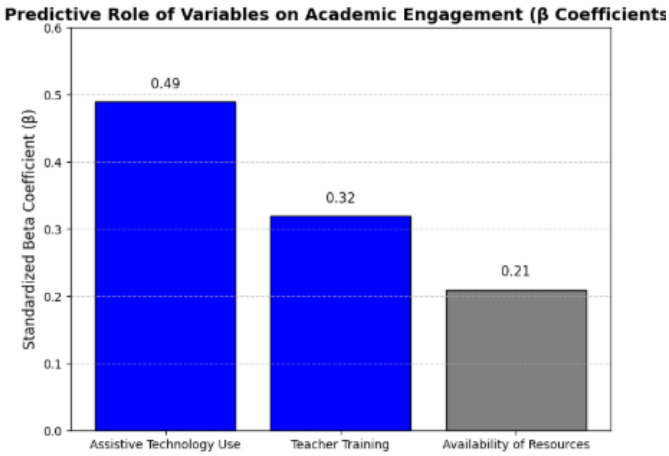


Specifically, the mean academic engagement score of regular assistive technology users was tentatively higher ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 0.48$) than that of low-frequency users ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 0.61$). The difference was found to be statistically significant, $t(33) = 2.74$, $p < .01$. This result suggested that consistent use of assistive technologies contributed positively to students' active participation, sustained attention, and emotional involvement in classroom learning. The findings supported the alternative hypothesis that students with disabilities who use

assistive technologies demonstrate significantly higher academic engagement than those who do not.

Multiple Regression Analysis:

Multiple regression analysis was performed to examine the predictive role of assistive technology use and institutional support variables on academic engagement. Assistive technology use, teacher training, and availability of assistive resources were entered as predictor variables, while overall academic engagement served as the dependent variable.



The regression model was found to be statistically significant, $F(3, 31) = 6.42$, $p < .01$, explaining approximately 41% of the variance ($R^2 = .41$) in academic engagement. Assistive technology use emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = .49$, $p < .01$), indicating that increased frequency and effective use of assistive technologies significantly enhanced academic engagement. Teacher training also showed a significant contribution ($\beta = .32$, $p < .05$), highlighting the importance of teacher preparedness in facilitating meaningful technology integration. Availability of assistive resources demonstrated a positive but comparatively weaker effect ($\beta = .21$, $p > .05$), suggesting that mere availability without effective implementation may not sufficiently influence engagement outcomes.

Interpretation of Inferential Findings:

The inferential analyses collectively indicated that assistive technologies played a significant role in enhancing academic engagement among students with disabilities in mainstream inclusive schools. The t-test results confirmed that students with regular access to assistive technologies were more actively engaged than those with limited access. The regression analysis further emphasized that institutional and pedagogical support, particularly teacher training, strengthened the impact of assistive technologies on engagement. These findings underscored that assistive technologies functioned most effectively when integrated within supportive institutional environments. The results supported all alternative hypotheses and rejected the corresponding null hypotheses, reinforcing the argument that assistive technologies, combined with trained teachers and adequate support systems, are critical for fostering meaningful academic engagement in inclusive educational settings.

Discussion of Findings:

The present study explored the relationship between the use of assistive technologies (AT) and academic engagement among students with disabilities in mainstream inclusive schools. The findings revealed several critical insights:

1. ***Academic Engagement Levels**:* The descriptive analysis indicated that students with disabilities exhibited moderate to high overall academic engagement (M = 3.77). Cognitive engagement (M = 3.85) was the highest, followed by behavioural engagement (M = 3.78), and emotional engagement (M = 3.69). These findings suggest that students were generally attentive, participative, and motivated, though emotional engagement showed some variability. The slightly lower emotional engagement may reflect individual differences in self-confidence, peer interaction, and familiarity with assistive technologies.
2. ***Correlation between Assistive Technology and Engagement**:* The correlation results indicated a moderate to strong positive relationship between assistive technology use and academic engagement, with the strongest association observed with cognitive engagement ($r = .58$, $p < .01$). This highlights the role of AT in supporting students' comprehension, problem-solving skills, and effective learning strategies. Behavioural engagement ($r = .52$, $p < .01$) and emotional engagement ($r = .46$, $p < .05$) were also positively correlated, suggesting that AT not only facilitates participation and task completion but also enhances students' confidence and motivation.
3. ***Differences in Engagement Based on AT Usage**:* The independent samples t-test confirmed that students who used assistive technologies regularly exhibited significantly higher engagement levels (M = 3.95) compared to those with limited or occasional use (M = 3.42), $t(33) = 2.74$, $p < .01$. This supports the notion that consistent access to and use of AT enhances observable learning behaviours, sustained attention, and positive emotional attitudes toward learning.
4. ***Predictive Role of AT and Institutional Support**:* Multiple regression analysis showed that assistive technology use was the strongest predictor of academic engagement ($\beta = .49$, $p < .01$), followed by teacher training ($\beta = .32$, $p < .05$). Availability of resources ($\beta = .21$, $p > .05$) had a positive but weaker influence. This finding underscores that AT effectiveness is maximized in an environment where teachers are trained to support its integration and where institutional support is present. Mere availability of AT without structured implementation is insufficient to produce optimal engagement outcomes.
5. ***Implications for Inclusive Education**:* Collectively, these results highlight that assistive technologies are not merely tools for access but are pivotal in fostering active participation, cognitive growth, and emotional well-being in inclusive classrooms. The interplay between AT use, teacher preparedness, and institutional support emerges as a critical factor in ensuring meaningful learning experiences for students with disabilities.

Suggestions:

Based on the findings, the following recommendations can be proposed:

1. ***Enhanced Integration of Assistive Technologies**:* Schools should ensure regular and structured use of AT, aligning tools with specific learning goals and student needs. This includes personalized support for different disability categories.
2. ***Teacher Training and Professional Development**:* Teachers should receive continuous training on AT functionalities, pedagogical strategies, and effective integration into lessons. This will strengthen engagement outcomes and build teacher confidence in inclusive settings.
3. ***Institutional Support and Resource Management**:* Schools should invest not only in procuring assistive technologies but also in creating a supportive environment—adequate technical support, accessible formats, and time allocation for AT use in classrooms.
4. ***Fostering Emotional Engagement**:* Programs aimed at building students' self-efficacy, peer collaboration, and motivation should accompany AT use to enhance emotional engagement, which showed slightly lower scores.

5. ***Monitoring and Feedback Systems****:* Periodic assessment of AT effectiveness and student engagement should be conducted to identify areas for improvement and ensure equitable learning opportunities.
6. ***Policy and Inclusive Practices***: Education policymakers should formulate guidelines for the integration of AT in mainstream schools, emphasizing teacher preparedness, resource allocation, and accessible curriculum adaptation.

CONCLUSION

The study provides robust evidence that assistive technologies significantly enhance academic engagement among students with disabilities in mainstream inclusive schools. Regular and effective use of AT positively influences behavioural, cognitive, and emotional dimensions of engagement, with cognitive engagement benefiting the most. The findings also highlight the essential role of teacher training and institutional support in maximizing the impact of AT. Overall, the study reinforces that inclusive education extends beyond physical integration; it requires strategic technological, pedagogical, and institutional interventions. Assistive technologies, when effectively implemented within supportive environments, serve as powerful enablers of meaningful participation, deeper cognitive engagement, and improved learning experiences for students with disabilities. These results advocate for sustained investment in AT, teacher capacity-building and inclusive practices to ensure equitable educational opportunities in mainstream schools.

The novelty of this study lies in its empirical focus on assistive technologies as active pedagogical enablers of academic engagement within mainstream inclusive school settings, rather than as auxiliary tools for accommodation. Unlike prior studies that predominantly assess assistive technologies in special education or segregated contexts, this research critically examines how their integration into regular classrooms influences multidimensional academic engagement—behavioral, cognitive, and emotional—among learners with diverse needs. By situating the analysis within inclusive schooling environments, the study addresses a key gap in the literature concerning everyday instructional practices and teacher–student interactions mediated by assistive technologies. This contribution advances theoretical understanding of engagement in inclusive education and provides practical evidence to inform inclusive pedagogy, technology adoption, and policy implementation aimed at fostering equitable participation and learning outcomes.

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