

Quality Management of Islamic Religious Education to Strengthen Students' Moral Character in Elementary Schools

Ayi Nursaleh*, Teti Ratnawulan Surtiati

Nusantara Islamic University, Bandung, Indonesia

*Corresponding Email: nursaleh001@gmail.com

Abstract. This study examines the implementation of quality management in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) as a strategic effort to strengthen students' moral character (*akhlakul karimah*) in elementary schools. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research was conducted at SDN Sirnagalih and SDN Sukamaju in Cianjur Regency, involving school principals, PAI teachers, and students who were directly engaged in learning activities. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, and analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The findings reveal that quality management in PAI learning when applied through systematic planning, consistent implementation, comprehensive evaluation, and collaborative follow-up plays a significant role in improving students' moral behavior. The planning stage emphasizes aligning learning objectives with Islamic values and student needs. The implementation stage integrates religious instruction with daily school culture through programs such as collective prayers, Qur'an recitation, and social service activities. Evaluation combines formative and summative assessments that address cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. Follow-up actions involve professional teacher collaboration and community engagement to sustain continuous improvement. This study concludes that quality management in PAI learning, guided by Deming's PDCA (Plan–Do–Check–Act) framework and supported by Islamic educational philosophy, serves as an effective model for fostering character-based education. The findings underscore the importance of collaborative leadership, cultural integration, and ongoing reflection as key drivers for sustainable quality and moral development in Indonesian elementary education.

Keywords: *Akhlakul Karimah*, Character Education, Elementary School, Islamic Religious Education, Quality management

1 Introduction

In the current landscape of educational reform, elementary schools hold a strategic position in shaping students' moral and spiritual character, known in Islamic terms as *akhlakul karimah*. [1] Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is central to this mission not merely as a curricular requirement but as a moral compass embedded in daily school

life[2]. The effectiveness of PAI, however, depends not only on curriculum content but also on how its implementation is managed in a structured, systematic, and quality-oriented manner.[3], [4]

Quality management in education, particularly in PAI instruction, is crucial to ensuring the alignment between intended learning outcomes and actual student behavior[5], [6]. This management approach emphasizes continuous improvement across planning, implementation, evaluation, and follow-up processes[7]. In the case of PAI, such an approach must integrate cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions to ensure that religious values are internalized meaningfully by students.[8]

Despite policy mandates and curriculum frameworks that emphasize character education, schools often face challenges in translating these goals into practice. Limited instructional time, fragmented moral development efforts, and a lack of affective-oriented assessment tools contribute to a persistent gap between curricular ideals and student conduct. Addressing this issue requires a comprehensive management system capable of bridging policy, pedagogy, and school culture.

One promising model is Deming's Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle, which offers a flexible yet systematic framework for continuous quality improvement [9]–[11]. When applied to PAI learning, this model encourages schools to design responsive lesson plans, deliver values-based instruction, monitor student outcomes holistically, and implement strategic follow-up actions. Such a cycle transforms quality from a compliance measure into a shared culture within the educational community.

Previous studies have shown that quality-oriented PAI instruction can significantly influence students' religious behavior and ethical development. However, existing research tends to emphasize pedagogical methods rather than explore how quality management systems operate holistically across the institutional level particularly in public elementary schools.[7], [12]–[14]

This study addresses that gap by investigating the implementation of quality management in PAI instruction at two public elementary schools SDN Sirnagalih and SDN Sukamaju in Cianjur Regency, West Java. It examines how planning, classroom practice, assessment, and school-wide reflection work together to improve students' *akhlakul karimah*. The findings are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the discourse on values-based education and institutional management in the Indonesian school context.

2 Method

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive case study design. A qualitative approach enables researchers to explore and understand complex phenomena in their natural social settings, focusing on participants' lived experiences and the meaning they assign to those experiences[15]. The case study design was chosen to obtain an in-depth understanding of quality management practices in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) within real school environments, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are blurred [16], [17].

The research was conducted at two public elementary schools SDN Sirnagalih and SDN Sukamaju in Sindangbarang District, Cianjur Regency. These sites were selected through purposive sampling due to their active implementation of character education programs and their commitment to integrating religious values into daily learning. The primary subjects of this research included school principals, PAI teachers, and students who were directly involved in the teaching and learning process.

Data collection was carried out using methodological triangulation, including in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. In-depth interviews were used to gather rich narratives from school principals and PAI teachers regarding their experiences, strategies, and challenges in implementing quality management. Participant observations were conducted to capture real-time interactions and instructional practices in PAI learning. Document analysis focused on relevant materials such as lesson plans, character education programs, school quality assurance reports, and records of learning outcomes [18], [19].

The researcher functioned as the primary instrument (human instrument) in the qualitative inquiry, meaning that the researcher's presence, interpretation, and interaction with participants formed an integral part of the research process [20], [21]. Supporting instruments such as interview guides, observation sheets, documentation checklists, and analytical frameworks were developed to ensure systematic and consistent data collection.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, the study applied Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was strengthened through triangulation of data sources and member checking. Transferability was addressed by providing detailed contextual descriptions (thick description) of the research setting. Dependability and confirmability were reinforced through the use of audit trails and systematic documentation to trace the entire research process [22].

Data analysis followed the interactive model by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña [23] consisting of three main steps: (1) data reduction, which involved selecting, simplifying, and organizing raw data; (2) data display, through narrative descriptions, matrices, and visual representations to facilitate interpretation; and (3) conclusion drawing and verification, conducted iteratively to ensure the accuracy, coherence, and consistency of findings. The analysis was carried out concurrently with data collection, allowing the researcher to adapt to field dynamics and emerging themes.

This research was conducted between February and July 2025, encompassing the stages of preparation, field data collection, data analysis, and reporting. Through this approach, the study aims to provide substantive contributions to the discourse on quality-based Islamic Religious Education and the development of character education practices in Indonesian elementary schools.

3 Results

3.1 Quality Planning in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) Learning

The planning process for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning at SDN Sirnagalih and SDN Sukamaju demonstrates a deliberate effort to integrate character education (*akhlakul karimah*) into both instructional design and school culture. Although both schools refer to the same national curriculum framework, particularly the *Capaian Pembelajaran* outlined in the *Merdeka Curriculum* their approaches to planning differ in structure and emphasis.

At **SDN Sukamaju**, planning is highly systematic and formally documented. Observations showed that teachers collaboratively develop lesson plans that incorporate scheduled Qur'anic recitation, Islamic storytelling sessions (*kisah teladan*), and specific weekly religious themes. These lesson plans are aligned with both academic competencies and targeted character traits, as outlined in the school's quality documents. Religious extracurricular programs such as *Rohani Islam* (ROHIS), community charity events (*bakti sosial*), and Islamic holiday commemorations are also integrated into the academic calendar and learning goals.

During an interview, the PAI teacher at SDN Sukamaju explained:

"I design each lesson plan by focusing on the moral indicators we want to instill not just academic targets. It's not only about memorizing content, but about helping students love good behavior and practice Islamic values in everyday life" (Teacher Interview, March 2025).

This quote underscores a planning orientation that is values-driven rather than solely cognitive. Documentation analysis supports this claim, revealing the use of character development rubrics embedded within weekly instructional plans.

At **SDN Sirnagalih**, the approach is more flexible and culturally embedded. Observations indicated that although teachers prepare formal lesson plans, many character-building activities are implemented through daily routines, such as communal prayers, greetings with *salam*, and Friday morning reflections. These cultural practices are not always codified in teaching documents but are recognized by the school community as part of a lived curriculum.

The principal emphasized this approach during an interview:

"In our school, lesson planning does not only exist on paper it lives through our daily habits. Our teachers naturally incorporate moral values into all subjects, not just during PAI lessons" (Principal Interview, March 2025).

From document analysis, SDN Sirnagalih maintains a record of lesson plans (*RPP*), teacher journals, and school religious activity logs. However, greater emphasis is placed on *school culture programs*, such as *Jumat Berkah* (Blessed Friday) and *dzikir together*, which serve as informal but consistent platforms for value internalization.

These findings align with the **Plan** phase in the PDCA (Plan–Do–Check–Act) cycle of quality management (Deming, 1986), where both schools conduct needs analysis, set moral development objectives, and design learning strategies tailored to students' contexts. While SDN Sukamaju reflects a more top-down administrative model, SDN

Sirnagalih adopts a grassroots cultural model both illustrating functional approaches to strategic planning in character education.

The planning practices also resonate with **Islamic educational philosophy**, particularly the views of Al-Ghazali, who emphasized that noble character is formed through both deliberate teaching and habituation (Al-Ghazali, as cited in Ridwan, 2019). At SDN Sukamaju, structured repetition supports moral learning; at SDN Sirnagalih, teacher modeling and school traditions play a dominant role.

In terms of policy alignment, both schools apply principles from **Permendikbudristek No. 56/M/2022** by integrating differentiated instruction and character education into planning. SDN Sukamaju's lesson templates explicitly map moral goals to student outcomes, while SDN Sirnagalih integrates them contextually through school life and local wisdom.

In conclusion, both schools demonstrate that effective planning for PAI learning goes beyond technical curriculum compliance. It requires an understanding of student needs, cultural realities, and moral aspirations. Whether through formal structures or organic practices, quality planning must be intentional, inclusive, and grounded in shared values to effectively develop students' *akhlakul karimah*.

3.2 Implementation of Quality Learning in Islamic Religious Education (PAI)

The implementation of PAI learning at SDN Sirnagalih and SDN Sukamaju reveals distinct strategies shaped by each school's vision, resources, and pedagogical culture. While both schools aim to integrate Islamic values into students' daily lives, their methods reflect different operational interpretations of value-based education.

At **SDN Sukamaju**, PAI instruction is delivered through both classroom teaching and extracurricular programs that reinforce religious knowledge and practice. Observations showed that classroom sessions involve not only lectures and memorization but also interactive methods such as group discussions, role-plays, and moral storytelling. Outside the classroom, students regularly participate in structured activities like Qur'an recitation contests, Islamic art exhibitions, and peer-led *Rohis* (Islamic Spiritual Organization) sessions. These programs are scheduled weekly and are directly aligned with character development targets in the school's annual plan.

The PAI teacher at SDN Sukamaju stated:

"We believe that PAI should go beyond the textbook. That's why we design programs that allow students to practice what they learn through social action, reflection, and community service. Faith without practice is not enough" (Teacher Interview, March 2025).

Documentation supported this approach. Activity logs and photos archived in the school's quality assurance system confirm that PAI values are not confined to the curriculum but are also reinforced through co-curricular initiatives such as Islamic camps and Friday prayer routines, all of which are evaluated monthly.

In contrast, **SDN Sirnagalih** adopts a more integrative approach, where PAI learning is embedded within the school's cultural norms. Observation data revealed that religious values are consistently promoted through daily rituals, such as reciting short surahs before class, performing *shalat dhuha* in congregation, and implementing a

"Friday Charity Jar" managed by students. These activities are not positioned as separate programs but as part of the school's rhythm and climate.

The principal explained:

"Rather than creating separate religious events, we try to make Islamic values part of everyday life here. That way, students see Islam not just as a subject, but as a way of behaving and being" (Principal Interview, March 2025).

Documentation from SDN Sirnagalih includes teacher reflection journals and a "Daily Akhlak Checklist" used informally to track student behavior. Although less formalized than at SDN Sukamaju, the system is consistent and trusted by both staff and students. One notable program is the "One Good Deed a Day" initiative, where each student writes down one positive action they have done and reflects on it with their peers during homeroom discussions.

Both schools implement the **Do** phase of Deming's PDCA cycle (Deming, 1986) in different ways. SDN Sukamaju's approach centers on program execution and activity-based learning, while SDN Sirnagalih focuses on value habituation and role modeling. Despite the differences, both schools ensure that learning is not passive or purely cognitive but actively encourages students to engage with moral content in real contexts.

The findings also align with Al-Ghazali's educational philosophy, which asserts that moral development must be cultivated through practice and example, not just instruction (Ridwan, 2019). At SDN Sukamaju, structured programs create practice opportunities; at SDN Sirnagalih, teachers and peer environments serve as the primary moral models.

In alignment with **Law No. 20/2003 on the National Education System**, both schools demonstrate that effective PAI instruction must address the holistic development of students intellectually, spiritually, and socially. Students at both schools were observed to show behavioral progress, including improved discipline, increased empathy during community activities, and greater participation in religious rituals.

In conclusion, the implementation of quality PAI learning at both schools underscores the importance of consistency between instructional goals and daily school practices. Whether through formal programs or organic school culture, the consistent exposure to Islamic values allows students to internalize moral principles in meaningful and sustainable ways.

3.3 Evaluation of Quality in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) Learning

Evaluation practices in both SDN Sukamaju and SDN Sirnagalih demonstrate a shift from purely academic assessment toward more holistic, character-based evaluation in Islamic Religious Education (PAI). Both schools conduct regular assessments of students' understanding, behavior, and spiritual engagement, though each uses different approaches to capture these dimensions.

At **SDN Sukamaju**, evaluation is conducted through a combination of formative and summative tools. Teachers administer written tests and oral examinations to assess students' comprehension of religious concepts, Qur'anic verses, and moral values. In

addition to cognitive measures, behavioral assessment tools such as behavior checklists and attitude rubrics are used during religious activities. These tools are documented systematically in student portfolios.

The vice principal of curriculum noted:

“Our assessments are designed to reflect not only what students know, but how they behave. If a student scores high on theory but fails to show Islamic character in daily life, we consider that a gap we must address” (Vice Principal Interview, March 2025).

Observations supported this. During Friday religious sessions, teachers observed students’ punctuality, participation, and conduct, and documented these in behavioral logbooks. The results were discussed during monthly teacher coordination meetings and followed up with student mentoring when necessary. Evaluation data were also used to inform school-wide programs such as character awards and student counseling plans.

At **SDN Sirnagalih**, the evaluation approach is more practical and contextual. While formal assessments like written quizzes and oral recitation still occur, the school emphasizes **authentic performance-based evaluation**. For instance, teachers record students’ actions during daily rituals such as prayer preparation, cleanliness, and respect for others as indicators of their moral development.

The PAI teacher explained:

“We evaluate through observation how students behave when no one is instructing them, how they treat their peers, how sincerely they participate in religious practices. These things speak louder than scores” (Teacher Interview, March 2025).

Document analysis revealed that the school uses a “Daily Moral Behavior Sheet,” which is filled out by teachers weekly and shared with parents during regular feedback sessions. In some cases, students are asked to write personal reflections about their moral choices, which are then reviewed during mentoring sessions.

Both schools also implement evaluation activities that involve **peer and self-assessment**, encouraging students to reflect on their own behavior and give feedback to classmates in structured formats. These activities promote accountability and allow students to internalize moral concepts as part of their personal growth. SDN Sukamaju integrates this into its formal mentoring program, while SDN Sirnagalih embeds it into daily routines, such as after-prayer reflections.

These practices reflect the **Check** phase in Deming’s PDCA cycle, wherein institutions evaluate the effectiveness of their plans and execution strategies through both qualitative and quantitative measures. Rather than treating assessment as a one-time event, both schools incorporate continuous monitoring and feedback into the learning cycle.

The schools’ approaches are also in line with **Permendikbudristek No. 53/2023** on educational assessment standards, which emphasize the need for character and competency-based evaluation. While SDN Sukamaju’s method ensures measurable accountability, SDN Sirnagalih’s model allows for greater depth and authenticity in moral evaluation.

Despite different levels of formalization, both approaches effectively monitor not just what students learn, but who they are becoming. Teachers from both schools reported that consistent evaluation of moral behavior contributed to improved discipline, honesty, and empathy among students.

In conclusion, evaluation in PAI learning at SDN Sukamaju and SDN Sirnagalih illustrates a balanced use of academic and affective assessments. Through formal tools, observational data, and reflective practices, both schools ensure that the values of Islamic education are not only taught but lived, tracked, and continuously nurtured.

3.4 Follow-up Actions for Quality Improvement in PAI Learning

The follow-up phase in quality management is critical to ensuring that evaluations lead to meaningful improvements. Both SDN Sukamaju and SDN Sirnagalih exhibit structured efforts to close the feedback loop by using evaluation results to refine their teaching strategies, strengthen character education, and engage stakeholders in ongoing development.

At **SDN Sukamaju**, follow-up actions are largely formal and involve multiple stakeholders. Based on evaluation findings, the school conducts monthly curriculum review meetings attended by teachers, the vice principal, and school counselors. These meetings serve as a platform to discuss students' learning progress and character development and to redesign interventions for those who show behavioral gaps or require moral reinforcement.

The school principal stated:

“Every month, we sit down to analyze not just academic outcomes, but also which students need further mentoring in character. Our follow-up plans often involve collaboration with parents, the school mosque committee, and even local religious leaders” (Principal Interview, March 2025).

Documentation confirmed this practice. Meeting minutes and mentoring plans indicated a clear system for tracking and responding to students' moral and behavioral needs. For example, students identified with low participation in religious practices were invited to one-on-one discussions and assigned to mentoring groups led by more mature peers.

In contrast, **SDN Sirnagalih** conducts follow-up through informal yet continuous feedback loops embedded in its school culture. Teachers share observations with one another during regular homeroom briefings and adjust learning activities on the spot based on students' behavior and engagement. Rather than issuing formal referrals or interventions, the school emphasizes relationship-building and reflective dialogue.

One PAI teacher explained:

“Sometimes all it takes is a small conversation after prayer. If a student is struggling, we don't wait until the end of the month we address it immediately with care and attention” (Teacher Interview, March 2025).

Observational data supported this statement. Teachers were seen giving direct feedback to students in real-time, such as reminding them to help a peer or encouraging them to lead a prayer. These interactions were not framed as punishments or formal interventions, but as part of everyday moral coaching.

Both schools also integrate **teacher professional collaboration** as part of the follow-up process. SDN Sukamaju holds structured Professional Learning Community (PLC) sessions every semester, where teachers present case studies of student progress and share teaching strategies. Meanwhile, SDN Sirnagalih's teachers engage in informal reflective discussions during religious gatherings and teacher prayer groups.

These collaborative efforts align with the **Act** phase in Deming's PDCA cycle (Deming, 1986), where organizations take informed action based on evaluation findings and reflection. In both schools, action is not only taken for individual students but also for curriculum refinement, enrichment program development, and strengthening teacher capacity.

In terms of policy, the schools' follow-up practices support the principles of **School-Based Management (SBM)**, particularly in their responsiveness to internal evaluation and their emphasis on school–family–community partnerships (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2023). SDN Sukamaju leverages these partnerships formally through scheduled meetings, while SDN Sirnagalih builds them through daily trust and communication.

Importantly, both schools reflect an understanding that moral education cannot be “corrected” solely through punishment or rules; it must be cultivated through continuous support. Teachers act not just as instructors but as moral mentors, facilitators of change, and companions in students' character journeys.

In conclusion, follow-up in PAI quality management is not a one-size-fits-all process. Whether through structured mentoring systems or culture-embedded dialogue, both schools demonstrate that sustained character development requires consistent reflection, timely action, and collaborative responsibility among educators, families, and the wider community.

4 Discussion

The findings of this study show that the processes of planning, implementation, evaluation, and follow-up in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at two elementary schools (SDN Sirnagalih and SDN Sukamaju) follow two distinct models: one is more formal/structured, the other is more organic/integrated with school culture. The structured model aligns with general educational quality-management approaches, whereas the culture-school model is more context-specific. This aligns with prior research indicating that quality management in faith-based education involves continuous improvement across planning, control, and refinement phases[24].

Moreover, the analysis shows that both schools successfully link PAI instruction with character development (*akhlakul karimah*). This finding is consistent with Saepudin[25] study, which found that Islamic-value-based learning in Islamic education has a positive effect on students' moral development. With this in mind, the “what” of learning (PAI content) is complemented by the “how” of instruction and management to achieve character outcomes.

The theoretical framework of quality management especially the PDCA (Plan–Do–Check–Act) cycle proposed by Deming helps explain how these two schools

implemented their approaches. Our findings show the 'Plan' phase was well-executed (albeit differently between schools); 'Do' (implementation) was strong; 'Check' (evaluation) was done though with varying tools; and 'Act' (follow-up) was present, via structured mentoring in one school and via school culture in the other. This suggests that quality management models can apply in PAI settings, but must be adapted to local school context for effectiveness.

From the policy side, regulations such as Permendikbudristek No. 56/M/2022 on curriculum implementation and the National Education System Law No. 20/2003 emphasize that religious education and character development must be holistic (intellectual, affective, psychomotor). The findings show both schools were responsive: SDN Sukamaju via formal documentation, SDN Sirnagalih via integration of values into daily culture. This underscores that regulation provides a framework, but actual success depends on how schools implement it in practice.

A more in-depth analysis shows that the more flexible, culture-embedded approach (SDN Sirnagalih) offers an advantage in internalising values: students perceive Islamic values as part of daily life, not just a subject. This supports prior research that habit formation and teacher modelling are key factors in Islamic character education. IJSoc+1 On the other hand, the formal/structured approach (SDN Sukamaju) offers advantages in monitoring, documentation, and accountability vital aspects in quality management.

Furthermore, the literature emphasises that assessment instruments must incorporate affective and psychomotor domains (not just cognitive) for character education in PAI to be effective. Our findings align: both schools made steps toward this with tools like a "Daily Moral Behavior Sheet" (SDN Sirnagalih) and character rubrics (SDN Sukamaju). This echoes claims that character education in Islam must cover knowing, doing and being.[26]

Nevertheless, challenges remain: variation in evaluation instruments, limited teacher time, differing levels of formality across schools. These issues mirror earlier studies identifying internal factors (teacher competence, parental support) as main barriers to value-based Islamic education. IJSoc+1 Thus, while quality management and character education are advancing, careful attention to field implementation is critical.

Another key point: collaboration between school, teachers, parents and community is essential for sustainable quality-managed PAI learning. Research shows that integrating character values into the school requires community support so values become part of culture, not just curriculum. Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan Sosial In our context, SDN Sukamaju used structured collaboration (parent meetings, mentoring), while SDN Sirnagalih used daily trust and informal communication to engage stakeholders.

Theoretically, the school approaches integrating quality management and Islamic character education can be seen as an application of the "school culture alignment" concept and instructional leadership of principals. Effective leadership facilitates value integration, monitoring, and reflection all elements seen in the findings. This supports literature emphasizing principals as change-agents in character education.[27], [28]

From a regulatory and policy perspective, the findings show that even though the legal framework is present, real success depends on how schools contextualise and

implement it. For example, the “habituation of values” found at SDN Sirnagalih shows that regulation must be interpreted within local culture to become effective.

Practically, the implications are significant: schools must develop continuous documentation and monitoring systems for character values, establish evaluation instruments that capture affective/psychomotor domains, and strengthen collaboration with parents and community. Furthermore, teachers and principals need training in quality management and character education.

In conclusion, the analysis shows that successful quality management of PAI learning is not merely about applying technical procedures but about a systemic integration of quality management and Islamic character education. The two schools illustrate two valid paths formal structure and school culture that each have strengths and challenges. This study contributes empirical evidence that quality-management approaches can be applied in religious and character education, but with contextually appropriate adaptation.

5 Conclusion

This study concludes that quality management in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning when applied systematically and contextually can significantly contribute to the development of students' noble character (*akhlakul karimah*). Both schools in the study, SDN Sirnagalih and SDN Sukamaju, demonstrated successful implementation of the PDCA (Plan–Do–Check–Act) model, albeit through different approaches. SDN Sukamaju employed a more structured and formal model, while SDN Sirnagalih adopted a culture-based, integrative model. These variations highlight that effective quality management in religious education must be responsive to institutional culture, student context, and the broader school environment.

The findings further reinforce that character education in PAI is most effective when supported by strategic planning, consistent practice, reflective evaluation, and collaborative follow-up. The integration of religious values into both academic and non-academic school life supported by professional collaboration, school leadership, and community involvement proves essential for sustainability. Therefore, schools are encouraged to contextualize quality management frameworks and align them with Islamic pedagogical principles to ensure that moral values are not only taught, but internalized and practiced in everyday student behavior.

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