



Reconstructing Communities through Integrated Adult Education: Theoretical and Practical Aspects of Life-Work-Learning Connections from ODL in Tanzania

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Abstract: *This paper focused on assessing perceptions and experiences adult learners as students at the Open University of Tanzania (OUT). This study was qualitatively designed. The study employed documentary analysis followed by interviews as research methods, influenced by an interpretive theory. Documents subjected to this study were mainly the face to face report from regional centres across the country. 15 Face to face reports as documents were purposefully selected from a list of 30 reports submitted. Findings indicate that, the motives of the adult learners and experiences in ODL as adult education pathway had issue categorised as pre-admission on one hand and post-admission issues on the other. Pre-admission issues are seen as pull factors for adult learners to embark into Open and Distance Learning as opposed to conventional systems. Issues were listed as: entry point and admission assurance, job security, flexibility of studies and affordability while post admission issues are comparability, work-study association, Support technologies, experience and training in one pack, confirmation of prior knowledge and value addition. It is concluded that a carefully packaged ODL as an adult education is an important tool and an entry point if we are to reverse social economic insecurity in addition to professional development and updating. An emphasis on life-work-learning connection as ODL implies is essentially an operational aspect of the lifelong learning as displayed in a contemporary social development setting. It is recommended that a comprehensive ODL policy in the context of adult education need be institutionalized to mark the operations and recognition.*

Keyword: *Adult education, Open University of Tanzania, distance education, open and distance learning, lifelong learning*

1. Introduction

This paper is aims at assessing perceptions, notions and experiences adult learners as students at the Open University of Tanzania (OUT). It focusses on the learners' behavioral changes they are experiencing over time in a course of learning. Briefly, the Open University of Tanzania was established following an Act no 17 of the Open University of Tanzania (OUT). The university became operational in 1994. It started with non-degree and undergraduate degree programmes, then

postgraduate programmes as Postgraduate Diploma, Masters and Doctoral Studies were introduced in 2001. As a Distance Teaching University (DTU), had learners and instructors brought together, as of recent, by a timed test (Main Timed Test- MTT, and an annual examination. To support these assessments learners, have a room to interact with instructors in three session annually namely, orientation weekends set in the beginning of an academic year and a face-to-face session scheduled annually. It is in these sessions where learners discuss with their instructors on learning experiences in addition to getting feedback from their continuous assessments, mainly the

two assignments. This assessment trend has changed from the two assignments, two timed tests and an annual assignment, to be replaced by course journals (learners Portfolio), followed by one timed test and an annual examination. This cutting down from five assessments to only two marked assessments, is seemingly to fit into internationalization trends of assessments (OUT, 2018; OUT, 2019).

2. Literature Review

ODL, Adult Education and Socio-economic trends in Tanzania

Open and Distance learning [education], is a field of education that focuses on the andragogy, technology, and instructional systems design that is effectively incorporated in delivering education to students who are not physically "on delivery site" to receive their education. Pedagogy is deliberately removed from this definition, for the sake of this presentation, as an emphasis that Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is basically an adult education. In this sense, changes over time on ODL have affected adult education. Remarkable trend in ODL is on its evolution into the fifth generation, started with Correspondence Model solely based on delivery of print materials; then Multi-media Model based on print, audio and video technologies; next came the Tele-learning Model which has applications of telecommunications technologies for synchronous communication in a course of learning; and there after the internet supported Flexible Learning Model and finally the interactive flexible learning model. These models are taken in the order of first to fifth generations of ODL respectively. OUT, representing the Tanzanian development in Adult education through ODL, has consistently clinged to first generation mode of distance learning where print media is dominant. While the second generation is also widely used as a support strategy to promote access and equity for special need adults, the third generation is more or less skipped as practices are seen to be inclined toward the fourth-generation mode of ODL (OUT, 2019; Dragičević, Siano & Prabakaran 2019; Mnyanyi and Mbwette, 2009; and Taylor, 1999).

It is in this setting that ODL is seen to have attracted teaching technology support opening yet another avenue of learning as conversation into these aiding technologies is taken as a precursor for the intended learning. Instead, teachers and students may communicate asynchronously (at times of their own choosing) by exchanging printed or electronic media, or through technology that allows them

to communicate in real time (synchronously). This trend in Tanzanian context reflects, what James Taylor would argue as the limitations in technology advancement and resource support to sustain the generational corresponding technologies (Dragičević, Siano & Prabakaran, 2019; Taylor, 1999).

From the adult education point of view and in the Tanzanian context, trends and evolution may be seen in terms of primary objective of adult learning. It embarked, for instance, immediately after independence, on adult literacy campaign coupling the Universal Primary Education pioneered by the home-grown educational philosopher, Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere (need I say about him?). At this stage the target aimed at achieving the famous 3Rs. The 3 Rs as you may all know was at that time and in many cases today, contextualised to mean/ represent Reading, wRiting and aRithmetic.

After the Arusha declaration, which aimed at reforming the capitalistic mode of life, Tanzania became a socialistic country at that point in time. Hers was a modified African socialistic – the ujamaa An *Ujamaa* mode of life, where means of productions are collectively owned and the state oversees the organization and management of these means of production. With a vision to have advanced production systems from farms and industries, adult education expanded to cover a little bit more than the 3Rs. It was set to include advanced practical life skills based on what the learner makes life from. In a rural set up, farming and animal husbandry were obvious routes. This was captured as *functional literacy* campaign. This campaign had intentions to support farms productivity for improved rural livelihood. As part of its continuity, this campaign moved to be institutionalized into folk development college, with a support from Swedish government. Folk development colleges were meant to update adult learners on developments on their daily activities. It should be noted that adult education since then was more or less limited to farmers and animal keepers in a rural Tanzania. From colonial rule into independent Tanzania, like many developing countries, school leavers could be easily absorbed into direct employments. This in many ways discouraged these graduates to proceed with studies. Why study further when you have a job and life is much better than farming life. To make thing worse, experience and persistence in work paid better than education level.

All these started to change with 80s economic crises, elites started tasting the bitter side of retrenchment and employments became increasingly limited and mainly for specified profession and highly trained. It was at this time when high schools poured more graduates for further studies making it hard to secure admission in universities and even harder to secure government

financial support for these studies. Un-employment grew formal education became not good enough, profession training mattered more. High school graduate started thinking of going into tertiary partly because of limited opportunities to join university education but also the fact that university education was as well not good enough to give some a job. As a cushion, going through tertiary training helped after university education to get back into work with easy. This caused social pressure and tensions across the country and more so in urban areas where elite were increasingly pouring in from schools with limited jobs in sights.

Pursuing further studies became a fighting strategy for employees to keep their positions and for new employees to elevate their entry point as it seemed that, the higher the education the better the chance to secure employment. Following the global trend, higher education became a necessity, a tool that everyone wanted to ensure it is well placed in a survival kit. The Open University of Tanzania started to avail this tool for adult learners in an open and distance learning mode. It can be argued that establishment of the Open University of Tanzania, by default it was a measure to join the global trend in extending adult education to higher education level. Higher education by any measure was increasing seen as basic level of school for an individual to efficiently participate in global labour market; adults are not exception. Zeleza 2002, in this line, pointed out that under globalisation and knowledge economy, higher education has to be the basic education of today, this point is well supported by many scholars including though not limited to Bloom who said as higher education for a knowledge based economy is as it had been a primary education for agrarian economy and secondary education for industrial economy (Bloom, 2002).

The social turmoil and unrest across the country as result of increasing urban unemployment, as we all see, is accumulating. Inter, as well as, intra- group conflicts are on the increase and counting. These are seen to be a result of feeling of social insecurity, as labour and respective laws are also changing, notably this aspect, contract employment is becoming a common phenomenon. Both employed and unemployed individuals are seemingly unsecured though in a different extent, all in all it is becoming clearer that matters are to be taken at individual level, to start with. The trick seems to be simple *keep yourself floating by training and further learning to ensure that one is always in touch with professional development and demands*. The ultimate goal to members of this group is seen to be greener pastures; the matter is challenged by the notion that pastures are always greener on the other end of the field. Like goats in field, labour forces are in a constant

move, competition is getting rough and in a rule of the jungle. When the going gets tough, the question of "who to blame" pops up, at this level social classification takes place, with liberalization, in Tanzania it is very much about the *haves* and *the have-not*. Tanzanians have joined the global trend by looking at skin colour (race) as a threat to our job security. You are all aware of the increasing Chinese presence in Africa, and Tanzania is no exception. This case can be used to represent the social turmoil scenario, the country is getting into. Briefly, note that, Indian had been in Tanzania long time for long time, for socio- economic reasons, however, their race had not posed such a threat as China is. In many standards, Tanzania is considered democratic with smooth transfer of power between regimes, towards its independence and all times through. Changes in political landscape-from multiparty- single party –multiparty had arguably not divided the Tanzanians as one would expect. There arguments that use of Kiswahili as national language had served as a coercive force for Tanzanians, the question is what makes them so united against Chinese who even speak Kiswahili after a short while as opposed to Indians who lived in for decades with limited use of Kiswahili. Employment opportunities seem to be the core issues, and especially for young adults who are susceptible to unemployment. As such, no society is proving immune to these phenomena and especially so when migration is out of control and necessary in one way or the other. It is this perspective that this paper aimed at looking on the role of ODL studies offered by the open university of Tanzania as higher education package at higher education level in breaking social forces that are likely to fuel social insecurity for adults both employed and unemployed. To establish this understanding the article limits itself to professional development programmed perspective.

3. Methodology

This study was qualitatively designed. Padgett, 2016; Lincoln, 2017; Kozleski. 2017; Denzin, 2017; and Maarouf, 2019) are in agreement that qualitative research is empirical, stemming from experience and/or observation and its particularly suited to produces knowledge about perspectives, experience, settings, and techniques. Qualitative research is about individual lives, experiences, actions, and feelings as well as interactions, institutional functioning, and perceptions. The philosophy behind this study design is stationing it on the pragmatic paradigm, as it aims at looking on how the world real work (Maarouf, 2019). The study employed a documentary analysis as a method, influenced by an interpretive theory. Documents subjected to this study were mainly the face to face report from regional centres across the country. 15 Face to face reports as documents where purposefully selected from a list of 30 reports

submitted. The criteria for selection (of these reports) based on quality of reports in terms details, extract on learners' history and experiences in ODL. Follow up interviews were also conducted to expand understanding and for triangulation purposes for clarity. Interest in report extracts and interviews was mainly on learners in a professional development programmes, especially on learners' experiences and perception on learning, work, and social life integration. Thematic areas identified in these reports guided the focus of discussion as seen in part 4 of this article.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Face to Face Interview and Outcome: A matter of Discussion

In the context of this paper it is interesting to note a phenomenon that the trend at the Open University of Tanzania (OUT) is changing towards the lower age group across the decade, as in the first 5 years more learners were in the 46-55 group. At the time of this survey more learners fall under the 19-35 years of age. Key common factors noticeable across the learners includes, though not limited to, a combination of the following; employment, family and financial resources commitments. From these factors, one can establish how important the adult learning package is serving as a backup system in all level including higher education. These observations fairly follow a global trend in many aspects (Mnyanyi and Mbwette, 2009; Omolewa, 2008; OUT, 2019)

Putting the survey in the context of this paper, the motives of the adult learners and experiences in ODL as adult education pathway had issue categorised as pre-admission on one hand and post-admission issues on the other. Starting with pre-admission issues, these be considered as pull factors for adult learners to embark into Open and Distance Learning as opposed to conventional systems. The issues in this pre-admission category are:

Entry point and admission assurance: Respondents pointed out that its entry point was friendly and reliable at the OUT than in other universities in the country, especially on cut off points. Admission assurance was noted to be a result of distance learning setting where class were wall less there nothing like a class is full. This motivated a number of learners, some of whom have minimum required credentials but were turned down in other universities, on the "class is full" grounds. Under ODL, as long as you got minimum qualification, you are assured of being admitted (de Oliveira, Penedo, & Pereira, 2018; Pangani, 2016 & Peter 2017).

Job security: While it was noted that there was pressure at individual level to pursue further training if they needed to keep the job or climb up the ladder, securing study leave was a difficult task all together. It became obvious that ODL approach to studies was a viable choice for building a secure professional foundation both within their job setting and wider labour market (Curcuruto, 2017).

Flexibility of studies: Study package and delivery seem to have attracted adults as they pointed out that under ODL studies are flexibly planned with enough space for assessments and evaluation (face to face, tests and exams). Depending on how much workload one has, it is easy to plan on how much study load one can take. This is not possible in conventional system as studies are fixed in semesters and packed annually (Dragičević, Siano & Prabaharan, 2019; Curcuruto, 2017).

Affordability: ODL is seen to be affordable to many average income households. Though there are some who cannot afford it, tuition fee at the Open University is by far cheaper than ordinary secondary school fees, even the lower levels of schooling, in a number of cases. The current rate is 60,000/- per unit for bachelor degree levels (for a long-time fee was charged at 360,000/- raised from earlier rate of 300,000/- TZS annually). In addition, its payment schedule is user friendly, represented in two instalments with first instalment paid at registration and the rest paid any time before the annual examination (OUT, 2018 & OUT, 2019). These fee arrangements are *à la carte* arrangements where only units studied and services used are paid for as opposed to semester or annual fees. This is motivating many professionals at different cadres to enroll as schooling is affordable.

Issues in a *Post-admission* category included the experiences of learners in course of studying. These issues, may as well, to a larger extent, be considered as retention issues for the registered learners as opposed to access and equity issues in the previous category (Mnyanyi and Mbwette, 2009; Magagula and Ngwenya, 2004; Oduaran, 2018; Omolewa, 2008; Prinsloo, 2017; Quintero, Baldiris-Navarro, Rubira, Cerón, & Velez, 2019; Issues in this category are briefly presented as:-

Comparability: Learners are happy to confirm the comparability of their degree programmes at the Open University of Tanzania with their counterparts in conventional universities. In areas where other universities operate and especially so in Dar es Salaam, learners reported to have attended lectures unnoticed, as classes in these universities are too large for any person to notice the intruders. The tendency of conventional learners constantly using study materials from OUT,

further confirmed the comparability of these degree programme making adult learner more confident on their study outcome and their professional future.

Practicability (work-study association): For a professional working to build their career they seemed happy to see the connection of their professional life to studies. This motivates them and puts the learners at a position to expect answers to many of their difficult questions on their professions. It is this element that keeps instructors on their toes in face-to-face session whenever mismatches are highlighted between academic setting and professional practice. Learners have pointed that they at times take an extra mile, by involving others in their learning, such as practitioners and even other members of academic to their satisfaction. Academics missing the practical understanding, the bookish, so to speak, find it difficult to handle issues and are likely, more often than not, to disappoint the learners. This poses a challenge of its own to life-work-learning connection in academic world.

Support technologies: With developments in ODL, learners find themselves with no option other than mastering study support technologies. Computerized learning management systems such as Moodle platforms at the Open University of Tanzania, have proved to be the better learners' support option, for students at a distance (which is majority of them). It is evident that without at least basic knowledge of ICT, life as ODL student is proving difficult. Understanding computer applications at different levels has proven useful in both studies and professional lives. It was recorded that learners found themselves conversant with a range of computer applications and expecting to graduate with better computer skills in addition, this makes the learners appreciate the processes and especially so, when they look at their counterparts who are seen be struggling to build computer literacy after their graduations (Rumble, 2019; Simpson, 2018; Simonson, Zvacek, & Smaldino, 2019; Teixeira, Bates & Mota, 2019).

Experience and training in one pack: There was a feeling that ODL students are getting training while on the job, hence at the end of their studies, graduates will have received a training and equally accumulated experience equivalent to the training period in addition to what they had before admissions. This means that after graduation these adults enter the job market with an added advantage against their counterparts. Lack of experience is recorded as one of the main hindrances for fresh graduates in the labour market. This is attributed by the fact there is a mismatch between theory of training and reality on the ground, making it necessary to conduct thorough induction session, a cost that employers wish to

avoid (de Oliveira, Penedo & Pereira,2018; Pangeni, 2016 & Peter 2017).

Confirmation of Prior Knowledge and Value addition: It is said that experience is the best teacher, and professional have learned so much in practicing, short courses, meetings, conferences and workshop and many formal and informal interactions within the profession. To many adult learners their knowledge is just packed as experience, so using that same knowledge by reproducing in a course of studies, looks like a confirmation, recognition and above all an upgrading of their prior learning as part of the degree programme, in addition to embarking into new concepts (de Oliveira, Penedo, & Pereira,2018; Pangeni, 2016 & Peter 2017)

4.2 Reflection on Social setting and Re-organization

This part of the paper builds on post admission features extracted from ODL adult learner. We have looked into the reflection of these issues linking to changing phenomenon in the societies, in Tanzanian and beyond on a global landscape. Across this paper, we have considered ODL learners based on the Teichler labels of clientele in which three categories. The first category are the *Postponers* who could not access the higher education after completing their secondary education, in qualitative terms, due to personal and carrier challenges. The second category are the *returners* are those who are coming back into the higher education through ODL with an objective to improve their socio-economic well-being – ODL as ladder into greener pastures. Finally, are the *second chancers* a third category which includee adult learners who either had no chance to proceed academically through formal learning system or somehow did not bridge well the secondary education into higher education (Dragičević, Siano & Prabakaran, 2019; Jung, 2019).

An integration of these three categories' of ODL learners into a day to day work and living conditions had contributed both directly and indirectly to socio-economic transformations in the society. Some of the transformations includes though not limited to the following issues: -

Content assessment: Quality assurance and Controlling

With a growing demand and an increasing practice in line with Open and distance learning came a concern for quality in education delivery through this mode. Conventional mode of learning, has for some time served as a reference point in this dimension. At university level

for instance, a need to control quality of ODL programmes has rekindled a concern on quality control measures, not only within the ODL setting but also in conventional programmes which were initially taken for granted (de Oliveira, Penedo, & Pereira, 2018; Pangeni, 2016 & Peter 2017)

It can arguably be pointed out that the increased concern on quality aimed at first on ODL, following the wave of shoddy degrees and diploma mills across the globe. The wave has equally affected the conventional universities as it did on the Distance Teaching Universities (DTU). As we speak, at least on African context and Tanzania in particular, universities are still struggling on the positioning of quality assurance units with some placing it under the Deputy Vice Chancellor responsible for academic affairs while other are arguing on placing the unit on a Vice Chancellor's Table as a CEO. The phenomenon qualifies an argument that quality assurance is a reformed concept.

ICT into e-learning across universities

The history of ODL started with distance learning exercise with print materials dominating as a major support delivered to learners through correspondence. Since then efforts have been oriented towards adding value on these print materials in line with advancing technologies, cases of scan print materials, electronic materials (such as e books, etc) followed this line of action. Central to incorporating these technologies into ODL, was and will remain to be the need to improve delivery speed to as low cost as possible. In practical terms the move meant, efforts to make support material readily available, where possible, in real time and space. Developments in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has played along these needs as communication gadgets are strategically placed between the learners and the facilitators. Computers and mobile phones are taken as examples of these gadgets and are being widely adopted in conventional systems as well to broaden the learning base through e-learning (Rumble, 2019; Simonson, Zvacek, & Smaldino, 2019; Teixeira, Bates & Mota, 2019). A challenge to learning and teaching management system, as the traditional approaches can be taken wholesome to fit into the new settings influenced by, among other things, ICT and e-learning (Dragičević, Sian & Prabaharan, 2019).

Facilitation in a learning process over teaching process

Open and distance learning has in its practice a learner at the center. This follows an understanding that to the core of ODL characteristic there is a separation of the learner and the teacher in time, space and in most cases, both

time and space. The phenomenon explicitly means that the learner is physically absent at the knowledge delivering cite. Learning from the distance, scattered, with varying learning needs incline the support towards facilitation as capacity building in a learning as opposed to teaching (Jung, 2019; Rumble, 2019; and Simpson, 2018). While the latter features a teacher in a driving seat in a learning trip, the former involves molding the learner's potentials in information analysis as part of learning. Without necessarily replacing the teacher in a learning process, ODL in this angle lowers an autonomy that a teacher has enjoyed all along. Diversity of learners, however, challenges the facilitator to add more skills in this supportive role other than subject matters and pedagogical skills.

Employers' interest on ready-made human Resources

With knowledge floating in the air, as reflected through the rising unemployment rates, employers are increasingly seen to incline towards searching the best skilled and experienced on the market. Long term training plans, for capacity building purposes are discouraged by sky rocketing running costs. On top of this phenomenon there is a "legalized" poaching tendency as means of acquiring staff, where one employer negotiates for desired skills and experience, in line with a polished price tag. Despite its negative impact in long terms, the phenomenon takes away the responsibility of an employer to in capacity building, relocating that role to the employee, given its interest to add own value over time (Rumble, 2019; and Simonson, Zvacek, & Smaldino, 2019).

Lifelong learning a leap into a learning society

Practices and principles of an Open and Distance Learning in Tanzania, as it is elsewhere, have resurfaced the need to organise information floating in the air into desirable and meaningful knowledge pattern(learning) (Jung, 2019). This phenomenon rekindles the spirit to search for more information and hence wider room to establish knowledge patterns with ODL certifying them into corresponding levels. It is, actually, this information search for knowledge purposes that is labeled as learning. It adds, to the fact that ODL participation is intensified with the learners' age, underlining its lifelong tendency as it discriminates not on age basis.

4.3 ODL Potentials and challenges: A tip

This experience of adult learners reflects the potentials on which ODL can build. There is a global trend on

interest inclined towards the access and equity parameter of education developments and reforms. On this, it is important therefore to ensure that the ODL system is emphasized, if country have medium- and long-term targets of updating workforce skills and professionals to higher levels hence expanding the national base of graduate. Expansion takes benefits of the pre-admission category of issues at hand.

ODL is well positioned to blur, in practical terms, the line between academic and professional training. The line is featured through re-training of graduates for practical skills as professional induction. It therefore fills the gaps left by academic training and prepares the graduate for the 'world of job'. At time this gap is not only a result of curricula shortcomings, it may as well be a subject of fast changing professional related technologies (Jung, 2019). Through ODL, the learner brings the two worlds (academic and profession) together, in real time and space. The counterparts on the other hand are likely to face, at least, the technological gap, accounting for their absence in the field as a result of studies.

The list of ODL advantages over the conventional learning is long, but not without the challenges. Some of which, with respect to the mentioned advantages, include: -

Limited support system, in terms of library services across the country. Libraries, at least in theoretical terms, are expected to provide a reliable source of reference materials as a learning support. This challenge builds on the understanding that ODL is essentially a self-study mechanism, as opposed to a spoon-feeding possibility under conventional.

A need for ODL institutions to spread wide enough to cover the demographic needs. The challenge is complicated by need to bring an instructional support to as closer as possible to the learner. Mind you there are varying and changing needs of learners in one hand and limited human resources on the other. ODL as an ODL institution, has managed to provide a quantitative support to regional level, and some cases to district level. Qualitative support, in this context will mean, provision of qualified staff to cover all learning needs in these centres, it is next to impossible to meet this requirement at least at the moment. The decreasing at an increasing rate of financial support from the government and other stakeholders, in addition to limited supply of qualified personnel in a labour market, makes it even harder to tackle this challenge (Jung, 2019).

The limited attention that ODL as a Distance Teaching University gets from stakeholders especially the

government in resources allocation, for instance, which is, more often than not, less than what is given to other conventional universities, impacts negatively on ODL value. A closer examination on ODL in the operational context of ODL, would have meant more resources allocation not only because of the operational cost across the country, but also as result of the growing enrollment. How can this phenomenon be reversed? This is a matter of discussion.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Putting Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in context, it can be argued that, participation in learning brings the sense of being needed, adds value of a learner and lessens the fear of rejection and displaced by the incoming groups, which could be the newly trained and /or migrants, regardless of the age. This is based on feeling that adults have a possibility to be pushed out of the socio-economic centre as a result declining productivity and more so outdated skills. This means a carefully packaged ODL as an adult education is an important tool and an entry point if we are to reverse social economic insecurity in addition to professional development and updating. An emphasis on life-work-learning connection as ODL implies is essentially an operational aspect of the lifelong learning as displayed in a contemporary social development setting (globalisation, led into knowledge economy and characterized by the learning attitude) (Rumble, 2019; Simpson, 2018; Teixeira, Bates & Mota, 2019).

This paper recommends that in order to ensure this operationalization is institutionalized, a comprehensive ODL policy in the context of adult education cannot be over emphasized. The policy is important to mark the operations as recognition to ODL, bring all ODL institutions under one umbrella in addition to controlling the provision and certification of ODL based programmes.

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