The Relationship between Perceived Teachers' Self-disclosure and Out-of-classroom Communication among Malaysian Undergraduates in a Private Institution of Higher Learning

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ABSTRACT

This quantitative study was conducted to determine whether a significant relationship exists between perceived teachers' self-disclosure and students' out of classroom communication with teachers in a Malaysian private institution of higher learning. A survey consisting of two questionnaires, namely the Perceived Teacher's Self-Disclosure scale designed by Cayanus and Martin (2008) as well as Knapp and Martin's (2002) Out-of-Classroom Communication Scale were collected from 144 final year undergraduates from a Malaysian private institution of higher learning. Using the SPSS, the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient, independent-samples t-test and one-way between-groups ANOVA with post-hoc tests were used to analyze the data. The findings indicated a positive relationship between the dimensions of amount and relevance in perceived teachers' self-disclosure and students' out of classroom communication. There was no significant difference recorded between gender, with perceived teachers' self-disclosure and students' out of classroom communication. Besides, there was also no significant difference recorded between age, with perceived teachers' self-disclosure and students' out of classroom communication. The study

concludes that Malaysian undergraduates' perceptions towards teachers' self-disclosure influences the out of classroom communication with teachers.

Keywords: *Instructional Communication, Out of Classroom Communication, Perceived Teacher Self-disclosure.*

INTRODUCTION

Interpersonal communication is the process of generating meaning through verbal and non-verbal signals between two or more interdependent individuals (De Vito, 2007). In the classroom environment, interpersonal relationship between teachers and students play a pivotal role in contributing towards the students' learning process. Camp (2011) defines teacher-student relationship as the regular interpersonal interaction between an authority and a subordinate. Teaching is a process that requires communication as it involves the dialogical transmitting of messages (verbal and non-verbal) between students and teachers. Liberante (2004) explains that the teacher-student relationship is significant in cultivating a sense of belonging to the teaching and learning environment, which translates into increased involvement in classroom activities. Failure in exchanging these messages may lead to ineffective classroom delivery of course content, feedback and resolving classroom conflicts. When communication is exchanged smoothly, teachers become more accessible; students become willing listeners and engage in course content. Previous researches on interpersonal communication and how it affects classroom learning showed that interpersonal relationship contributed positively towards building a positive classroom atmosphere (Kaufmann, 2011), improving student's acquisition process and examination performance (Babonea & Munteanu, 2012) and boosting students' motivation and persistence in achieving their goals (Da Luz, 2015).

Perceived Teachers' Self-disclosure

According to Mottet, Richmond and McCroskey (2006), in order to understand teaching and learning as a communication process, it is vital to consider communication patterns, characteristics and the context in which its occurs. Instructional communication theorists have asserted that when

teachers establish positive interpersonal relationships, students are effectively engaged and motivated cognitively, emotionally and academically. Thus, it is important for teachers to be aware of communicative traits that could improve students' affective behaviors and enhance their learning outcomes.

Irvin Altman & Dalmas Taylor define Social Penetration Theory as "the process of developing deeper intimacy with another person through mutual self-disclosure" (Griffin (2010, p. 114). Jourard (1971), Cozby (1973), Wheeles and Grotz (1976) on the other hand explain that self-disclosure is the exchange of any messages about the self that a person communicates to one another on the basis of 'trust and solidarity'. According to Altman and Taylor (1973), the variety of topics (breadth) and the intimate details (depth) of the information shared between two or more individuals determines the nature of social relationships. Using the 'onion model' (Altman & Taylor, 1987), Altman and Taylor explain that relationships move gradually with the exchange of personal information, similar to the peeling the layers of an onion. These layers represent personal information that disclosed. The visible layers are general information while the core layers represent intimate ones. The peeling of these layers is usually controlled by cost and reward mechanisms. If the disclosures are mutually beneficial, more information is revealed. If the disclosure is deemed not rewarding, the relationship may be dissolved.

Perception is the process by which organisms interpret and organize feelings to generate a meaningful understanding of the world (Pickens, 2005). In other words, when a student is confronted with a situation or stimuli, the student interprets the stimuli into something meaningful to him or her based on prior experiences. Sorenson (1989) clarifies that teachers spend most of their time in the classroom and engage in 'talk' with their students. For example, teachers may voice out their opinions, emotions or feelings and their experiences while explaining course content, important concepts or exemplifications. Teachers' self-disclosure, therefore, is the "teacher statements made in the classroom about oneself that reveals information that would otherwise be inaccessible to students" (Sorenson, 1989, p. 260). When students perceived their teachers' self-disclosures as positive, past studies have indicated that it improved the overall teaching and learning climate(Hartlep , 2001; Deiro, 2005) and classroom outcomes such as teacher-student solidarity (Wheeles, 1978), motivation (Christopel, 1990;

Frisby & Myers, 2008), verbal and non-verbal immediacy (Fusani, 1994; Frymier, Schulman & Houser, 1996), teacher narratives and humor (Downs, Javaldi & Nussbaum, 1994), interest and liking for course content (Chory & McCroskey, 1994), clarity (Chesebro, 2003), classroom participation (Bennasi & Goldstein, 1994) and affect for teacher (Williams- Johnson and Schutz , 2009).

Out of Classroom Communication

Out of classroom communication is defined by Fusani (1994) as the "student initiated visits during office hours, conversations before and after class, and informal meetings on campus between students and instructors," (cited in Knapp, 2008, p. 173). Past studies have indicated that when teachers regularly self-disclosed, they were deemed as approachable by their students. Aylor and Oppliger (2003) opined that students' perceptions of their teachers are important as it increases the likelihood of engaging in out of classroom communication. In their research they discovered students' perceptions of teachers' humor orientations and socio-communicative styles (assertiveness, responsiveness) act as preliminaries to out of classroom communication. In a similar research conducted by Bippus, Kearney, Phlax and Brooks (2003), when students perceived their teachers as accessible and capable mentors, they were more likely to engage in out of classroom communication with them.

Studies on the effects of teacher-student interactions during out of classroom communication have shown that informal meetings with teachers were positively associated with social, personal and overall satisfaction of student experiences (Li, Finley et al, n.d, 2016). This suggests that rather than only participating internally in classroom communication, students gain greater satisfaction towards their educational experiences when they are able to interact with teachers out of the classroom setting.

Garcynski, Sanborn and Reed's (2010) study demonstrated that when out of classroom communication increased, students' performance improved. This is due to an increase in students' determination to improve grades after interactions with teachers had taken place. Frymier (2005) describes effective students often interacted with teachers outside of the classroom setting. They are constantly seeking teachers, regardless of

intent such as revision on class material or advices, are more likely to excel better in class as students feel engaged with their teachers. This is further supported by Hayes, Stephan and Hall (2013) who describe the increase in affective learning to be an important benefit gained from out of classroom communication between teachers and students. The main reason for an increase in affective learning among students can be traced to the strengthening of students' perceptions of positive teacher immediacy behaviors shown while interacting with their teachers informally outside their classrooms.

How teachers communicate, or how students perceive their teachers, also impacts students' motives. Students tend to communicate with their teachers if they are assertive, responsive, immediate, and friendly (Martin, Heisel & Valencic, 2001). In a study conducted by Wang (2015), she identified five instructional motives for students engaging in out of classroom communication with teachers which includes relational, functional, participatory, sycophancy and excuse-making motives. Relational motives occur when students try to develop personal relationships with their teachers. Functional motive includes cases whereby students solely want to acquire more about class options, course requirements, and assignments. Wang's (2015) study also revealed that encouragement is one of the motives students communicated with teachers out of their classrooms. Sycophancy motive occurs when students communicate to derive favour or approval from their teachers (Wang, 2015). Participatory motives include illustrations in which students demonstrate to their teachers on what they are interested in the classroom. Students who are inspired to communicate for participatory motives want to demonstrate that they know the course material in and out (Myers, Martin & Mottet, 2002). The excuse-making motive comprises occasions during which students attempt to clarify why work was overdue and explain their bad grades (Cayanus, Martin & Goodboy, 2009).

RESEARCH PROBLEM

Students look up to their teachers as professionals in their field of study as well as role models in and outside the classroom. In most universities, students need to meet teachers outside their classrooms for project discussion, assignments consultation and academic advice. Students visit

teachers during office hours, conversing before and after class and have informal meetings on campus (Knapp, 2008). Communicating with teachers outside the formal teaching context or contact hours is referred to as "Out of Classroom Communication" (OCC) and is a critical factor for students in establishing interpersonal contact with their teachers outside their classrooms. Georgakopoulos and Guerrero (2010) mention that students are more likely to engage in out of classroom communication with teachers whom they perceive they are close to. If students don't perceive teachers as friendly, approachable or authoritarian, they would not be able to maximize their learning experiences outside the classroom. In Asian culture, teachers are often seen as authoritative figures placed in a higher social hierarchy and power relation in communities and the classroom (Anwarul Kabir, 2010). As such, many undergraduates from Malaysian private universities find it difficult to approach their teachers outside the classroom due to fear, respect for authority, cultural rules and norms, feelings of inadequacy, or shyness. Thus, the researcher in this study, aimed to determine if the socio-communicative factor, and Perceived Teachers Self- disclosure (PTSD) have a positive relationship with Out- of- Classroom Communication (OCC) between teachers and Malaysian undergraduates.

Specifically, this research would like to answer the following questions:

RQ1: Is there a significant relationship between PTSD (amount, relevance and negativity) and out of classroom communication?

RQ2: Is there a significant difference between PTSD (amount, relevance and negativity) and gender?

RQ3: Is there a significant difference between gender and out of classroom communication?

RQ4: Is there a significant difference between age and out of classroom communication?

The research hypotheses are as follows:-

H_1: There is a significant relationship between amount and out of classroom communication among undergraduates from a private university.

H_2: There is a significant relationship between relevance and out of classroom communication among undergraduates from a private university.

H_3: There is a significant relationship between negativity and out of classroom communication among undergraduates from a private university.

H_4: There is a significant difference between PTSD (amount, relevance and negativity) and gender among undergraduates from a private university.

H_5: There is a significant difference between gender and out of classroom communication among undergraduates from a private university.

H_6: There is a significant difference between age and out of classroom communication among undergraduates from a private university.

METHODS

A survey was conducted to gather quantitative data in this study. 160 final year Malaysian undergraduates enrolled in an Arts and Social Science program at a private institution of higher learning were selected through random sampling. The final year undergraduates are deemed suitable in this study as they are required to constantly hold meetings with their project supervisors, academic advisors, lecturers and tutors to complete coursework, assignments and final year projects. A total of 150 questionnaires were returned, however, six questionnaires were deemed unusable. Hence, the final sample comprised of 144 respondents comprising 77 male respondents (53.5%) and 67 female respondents (46.5%), ranging from age 21 to 24. These responses were recorded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) Version 23.

Research Instrument

The data was collected through two questionnaires in the survey. Perceived teachers' self-disclosure was measured by adopting the Perceived

Teachers' Self-Disclosure Scale (Cayanus & Martin, 2008). The Perceived Teacher Self-Disclosure scale is a 14-items instrument consisting of the items of dimensions, amount (items 1-4), relevance (items 5-9) and negativity (items 10-14). The reliability of the scale is, $\alpha = 0.80$ for amount, $\alpha = 0.88$ for relevance and $\alpha = 0.84$ for negativity (Cayanus & Martin, 2008). A seven-point Likert Scale, ranging from completely disagree (1) to completely agree (7) is used to measure students' responses. The Out of Classroom Communication Scale (Knapp, 2008) was used to measure the frequency of students' engagement in out of classroom communication with their teachers. This scale has a reliability, $\alpha = 0.81$ and students were required to indicate the frequency with which they engage in out of classroom communication with their teachers using a five-point Likert Scale, varying from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

Data Analyses

After the questionnaires had been collected, the data in the survey was analyzed by using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 23 in order to determine the relationship between Malaysian undergraduates' perceived teacher self-disclosure and out-of-classroom communication. Three types of testswere conducted in this study which was the Pearson Correlation test, independent-samples t-test and one-way between-groups ANOVA with post-hoc tests.

RESULTS

Research question 1
Is there a significant relationship between PTSD (amount, relevance and negativity) and out of classroom communication?

Amount of PTSD and Out of Classroom Communication

Table 1: Pearson Product-moment Correlation Coefficient of the Relationship between Amount of PTSD and Out of Classroom Communication

Variable		PTSD Amount	OCC
PTSD Amount	Pearson Correlation	1	.247**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.003
	N	144	144

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 1 shows the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient conducted to determine the relationship between amount of perceived teachers' self-disclosure and out of classroom communication, in which, the correlation coefficient value obtained was .247. Therefore, there is a positive and a very significant relationship between amount and out of classroom communication. However, there is only a weak correlation between amount and out of classroom communication ($r = .247$, $n = 144$, p significant at the 0.01 level). This suggests that students' perception of their teachers is positive because teachers are self-disclosing more in class; hence, students engaged in more out of classroom communication with their teachers. The first hypothesis, "H_1: There is a significant relationship between amount and out of classroom communication between teachers and undergraduates from private universities," is therefore accepted.

Relevance of PTSD and Out-of-Classroom Communication

Table 2: Pearson Product-moment Correlation Coefficient of the Relationship between Relevance of PTSD and Out of Classroom Communication

Variable		PTSD Relevance	OCC
PTSD Relevance	Pearson Correlation	1	.217**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.009
	N	144	144

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 shows the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient conducted to find out the relationship between relevance of perceived teachers' self-disclosure and out of classroom communication, in which, the correlation coefficient value obtained was .217. Therefore, there is a positive and a very significant relationship between relevance and out of classroom communication. However, there is only a weak positive correlation between relevance and out of classroom communication ($r = .217$, $n = 144$, p significant at the 0.01 level). This shows that students' perception of their teachers is positive because their disclosures are relevant to the course content; hence, the students' out of classroom communication with teachers has increased. The second hypothesis, "H_2: There is a significant relationship between relevance and out of classroom communication between teachers and undergraduates from private universities," is therefore accepted.

Negativity and Out-of-Classroom Communication

Table 3: Pearson Product-moment Correlation Coefficient of the Relationship between Negativity of PTSD and Out of Classroom Communication

Variable		PTSD Negativity	OCC
PTSD Negativity	Pearson Correlation	1	-.203[*]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.015
	N	144	144

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 shows the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient conducted to investigate the relationship between negativity of perceived teachers' self-disclosure and out of classroom communication, in which, the correlation coefficient value obtained was -.203. Therefore, there is a negative and significant relationship between negativity and out of classroom communication. Nevertheless, there is only a weak correlation between negativity and out of classroom communication ($r = -.203$, $n = 144$, p significant at the 0.05 level). This indicates that students perceived that their teachers disclose negative information will affect the students in their out of classroom communication with teachers. The third hypothesis, "H_3: There is a significant relationship between negativity and out of classroom communication between teachers and undergraduates from

private universities," is therefore accepted.

Research Question 2
Is there a significant difference between PTSD (amount, relevance and negativity) and gender?

Table 4: Independent-samples t-test of Difference between Gender and Perceived Teachers' Self-disclosure

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
PTSD	Equal variances assumed	.218	.642	.850	142	.397	.09283	10917

Table 4 shows the independent-samples t-test conducted to compare the male and female students' perceived teachers' self-disclosure, in which, the significance value obtained was .397. There is no significant difference between male students (M = 4.27, SD = 0.685) and female students (M = 4.18, SD = 0.614; t (142) = .850, p = .397, two-tailed) in their perception towards teachers' self-disclosure. The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = .093, 95% *CI*: -.12 to .31) was very small (eta squared = .005). Therefore, there is no significant difference between male and female students in their perception towards teachers' self-disclosure. The fourth hypothesis, "H$_4$: There is a significant difference between PTSD (amount, relevance and negativity) and gender of undergraduates from a private university," is therefore rejected.

Gender and Amount

Table 5: Independent-samples t-test of Difference between Gender and Amount

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
PTSD Amount	Equal variances assumed	1.409	.237	.142	142	.887	.02500	.17618

Table 5 shows the independent-samples t-test conducted to compare gender and amount, in which, the significance value obtained was .887. There is no significant difference between male students (M = 5.03, SD = 1.16) and female students (M = 5.01, SD = .92; t (142) = .142, p = .887, two-tailed) in amount. The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = .025, 95% CI: -.32 to .37) was very small (eta squared = .0001). Therefore, there is no significant difference in the perception towards teachers' self-disclosure between male and female students for amount.

Gender and Relevance

Table 6: Independent-samples t-test of Difference between Gender and Relevance

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
PTSD Relevance	Equal variances assumed	.538	.465	-.041	142	.967	-.00702	.17007

Table 6 shows the independent-samples t-test conducted to compare gender and relevance, in which, the significance value obtained was .967. There is no significant difference between male students (M = 5.19, SD = .96) and female students (M = 5.19, SD = 1.08; t (142) = -.041, p = .967, two-tailed) in relevance. The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = -.007, 95% CI: -.34 to .33) was very small (eta squared = .00001). Therefore, there is no significant difference in the perception towards teachers' self-disclosure between male and female students for relevance.

Gender and Negativity

Table 7: Independent-samples t-test of Difference between Gender and Negativity

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
PTSD Negativity	Equal variances assumed	3.142	.078	1.258	142	.211	.24695	.19636

Table 7 shows the independent-samples t-test conducted to compare gender and negativity, in which, the significance value obtained was .211. There is no significant difference between male students (M = 2.75, SD = 1.27) and female students (M = 2.50, SD = 1.06; t (142) = 1.258, p = .211, two-tailed) in negativity. The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = .25, 95% CI: -.14 to .64) was small (eta squared = 0.01). Hence, there is no significant difference in the perception towards teachers' self-disclosure between male and female students for negativity.

Research question 3
Is there a significant difference between gender and out of classroom communication?

Table 8: Independent Samples t-test of Difference between Gender and Out of Classroom Communication

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
OCC	Equal variances assumed	.045	.833	-1.597	142	.113	-.08968	.05616

Table 8 shows the independent-samples t-test conducted to compare gender and out of classroom communication, in which, the significance value obtained was .113. There is no significant difference between male students (M = 2.91, SD = .33) and female students (M = 3.00, SD = .34; t (142) = -1.597, p = .113, two-tailed) in their out of classroom communication with teachers. The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = -.09, 95% CI: -.20 to .02) was small (eta squared = 0.02). Therefore, it can be surmised that both male and female students have similar approaches when communication with their teachers outside the formal classroom. This could be contributed to the factor that out-of classroom consultations could relate to objective academic reasons such as assignments and project queries. Therefore the fifth hypothesis, "H_5: There is a significant difference between gender and out of classroom communication between teachers and undergraduates from private universities," is therefore rejected.

Research question 4
Is there a significant difference between age and out of classroom communication?

Table 9: One-way between-groups ANOVA of Difference between Age and Out of Classroom Communication

OCC	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.205	3	.068	.592	.621
Within Groups	16.129	140	.115		
Total	16.333	143			

Table 9 shows the one-way between-groups analysis of variance conducted to observe the difference between age and out of classroom communication, in which, the significance value obtained was .621. Respondents were divided into four groups according to their age (Group 1: 21 years old; Group 2: 22 years old; Group 3: 23 years old; Group 4: 24 years old). There is no statistically significant difference among the four age groups towards out of classroom communication whereby F (3, 140) = .592, p = .621. The actual difference in mean scores between groups was small. The effect size, calculated using eta squared, was .01. Thus, it can be surmised that age difference did not significantly affect students out of classroom communication with their teachers. The sixth hypothesis, "H_6: There is a significant difference between age and out of classroom communication between teachers and undergraduates from private universities," is rejected.

DISCUSSION

The results indicated that the dimension had a weak correlation of amount (.247) with out of classroom communication. The data indicated that when teachers self-disclosed more information about themselves on a frequent basis, students perceived their teachers more positively. This is in accordance to literature that amount, the array of topics and the frequency with which they are shared inculcated curiosity. Students are also able to identify these teachers' self-disclosure topics, such as socio-emotional issues that pertain to home, peer-communication as well as academic struggles (Cayanus, 2004). It can be concluded that when students perceived their teachers as frequently disclosing positively about themselves, the more they were motivated to communicate with their teachers.

The results indicated that the dimension of relevance was also weakly (.217) highly correlated with out of classroom communication. Self-disclosures related to course content and materials also impacted students' perceptions of their teachers. This conversational trait had probably encouraged functional motives and affinity seeking behaviours which led students to perceive teachers as knowledgeable, resourceful and credible affecting them in approaching their teachers through out of classroom communication. Relevance in perceived teachers' self-disclosure

also showed that students perceived their teachers' statements are related to clarity. This means that teachers used personalized examples when explaining concepts of course content material. Through out of classroom communication, teachers' self-disclosures were comprehensible, with relevant examples and explanations. This assistance given by teachers in helping students in grasping of concepts, understanding are translated as efficient teaching strategies. According to Cayanus, Martin and Goodboy (2009) and Knapp (2008), relevance is significant in functional and participatory reasons. Students who are eager to get more understanding and clarifications find it easier to learn when teachers' self-disclosed information linked to their course content. If students do not perceive their teacher's way of conveying information through relevant self-disclosures, they are less likely to engage in out of classroom communication with them.

Results obtained also suggest that age played no significant role in influencing students' out of classroom communication. This finding is parallel with the findings from Ogunleye et al (2013), Sloane & Kelly (2003) and Joan and Henry, (2015) which suggest that both male and female students were receptive and responded to the same messages alike or the teachers' self-disclosures were not gender-biased. The finding is also supported in a similar study by Matthew and Scott (2006) who state that cognitively, both male and female students are able to adapt to new situations. Interacting with instructors outside the classroom is considered an unusual event if students are not cognitively flexible. Cognitively flexible individuals have greater self-efficacy and self-monitoring skills than individuals who are not cognitively flexible. Students with high cognitive flexibility may be able to engage in the appropriate communication motives needed during out of classroom communication.

CONCLUSION

Every teacher plays a vital role in helping to educate students in school. According to Farley-Lucas and Sargent (2012) teachers have a responsibility to encourage or entice their students to meet them on face-to-face contact sessions. This study is a substantial endeavour in encouraging Malaysian teachers to engage with their students in out of classroom communication through positive teacher self-disclosures. Out of classroom communication

is vital for Malaysian students to tap into greater teacher resources that may not be readily available in the formal classroom. Establishing an open student-teacher relationship through teacher self-disclosure could contribute positively to student's learning. During consultation periods, students will be more eager to meet their teachers for project discussion, assignments consultation, academic advice and seeking clarity on course content. By understanding the lack of out of classroom communication between students and teachers, teachers could engage in self-disclosures which will lead to the changing of student's perception towards the teacher. Through a personalised approach to classroom communication, teacher self-disclosure could help teachers to be more assertive, responsive, immediate and friendly in the classroom to encourage out of classroom engagement with their students. This study has its limitations as it had focussed only on the relationship between teacher self-disclosure and out of classroom communication through a survey. Further studies should be conducted to study the effect of consultation hours on undergraduates' academic performance in relation to teacher self-disclosure and out of classroom communication. Future studies should also investigate how advances in technology impact out of classroom communication through teacher's self-disclosures in online teaching platforms as well as social media such as Facebook.

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