A Study on Constructing an Innovative Theme-based English Teaching Model from the Perspective of Core Literacy

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Abstract: *With the deepening of the core literacy orientation, English classrooms in basic education face three prominent challenges: "focus on knowledge transfer, neglecting literacy development," "focus on language knowledge, weak interdisciplinary integration," and "focus on classroom explanation, lacking real-world application." Existing teaching models struggle to effectively promote the synergistic improvement of students' language proficiency and comprehensive literacy. To this end, this paper constructs an innovative English thematic teaching model that aligns with the core literacy development requirements. Based on authentic thematic contexts such as "Food and Health," "I Can Protect Animals," and "An Interesting Country," this approach integrates information-based teaching methods, designs interdisciplinary-driven tasks, and utilizes multimodal resources such as PowerPoint presentations, multimedia interactions, English film clips, and role-playing. This creates a comprehensive teaching process: "contextual introduction—task exploration—multimodal expression—reflective transfer." Experimental data show that students in the experimental group's learning interest scores increased from 3.10 (±0.58) in the pretest to 4.27 (±0.46) in the posttest. Student feedback indicates a general increase in both practicality and interest in English learning. This core literacy-oriented English thematic teaching model effectively promotes the synergistic development of language skills, thinking quality, and cultural literacy.*

Keywords: *Core Literacy; Theme-Based English Teaching; Model; Interdisciplinary Integration; Multimodal Resources*

1. Introduction

With the continuous deepening of the new curriculum reform, core literacy has become an important orientation of China's basic education curriculum system. The "Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition)" clearly states that the English curriculum should not only cultivate students' language skills, but also comprehensively improve cultural awareness, thinking quality and learning ability, and promote the overall development of students' comprehensive literacy. However, at this stage, primary and secondary school English teaching generally has problems such as "focusing on language knowledge but neglecting comprehensive ability", "focusing on word and sentence practice but lack of real application", "focusing on test training but ignoring literacy cultivation", which leads to students' lack of interest in learning English, weak practical language application ability, and lack of cross-cultural understanding.

Based on this, this paper takes core literacy as the perspective, focuses on constructing an innovative theme-based model of English teaching, integrates real problem drive, interdisciplinary integration and multimodal resource support, and explores the English teaching path for the improvement of comprehensive literacy. Through empirical research, it verifies the comprehensive promotion effect of this model on students' language ability, learning interest and cultural awareness, and strives to provide theoretical support and practical guidance for English teaching reform, and promote the high-quality development of English teaching in primary and secondary education.

2. Literature Review

In recent years, scholars have conducted extensive research on interdisciplinary topic identification,

multimedia-assisted teaching, teacher role transformation, and the application of emerging technologies in English teaching, and have produced relatively rich research results.

Wang et al. proposed an interdisciplinary topic identification and evolution analysis framework based on BERTopic, which covered four steps: topic extraction, invalid topic filtering, interdisciplinary topic identification, and evolution analysis. An empirical study on the Web of Science data set found that the growth points of the field were mainly concentrated in interdisciplinary topics, complex problems require the integration of more external knowledge, and different types of topics showed different evolution characteristics [1]. Tuhuteru et al. used a phenomenological method to explore the effectiveness of multimedia in making up for learning lag in primary school post-epidemic era through literature analysis. The results showed that multimedia application can effectively alleviate the learning loss caused by the epidemic [2]. Rita et al. analyzed the role of teachers in achieving basic education goals through literature review. The results showed that teachers play an important role through innovative teaching, attention to individual differences, positive feedback, and home-school cooperation [3]. Diquito explored the reform of science curriculum in basic education in the Philippines through literature analysis. The results showed that the reasons for the reform included poor student evaluation, too much coursework, insufficient teaching time, and inappropriate skills connection [4]. Wang investigated the burnout of 216 Chinese EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers during online teaching during the pandemic and found that online teaching was more likely to cause teacher burnout than offline teaching. The causes and countermeasures of burnout mainly involved students, tasks, technology, and teachers' own factors, among which technology factors and teacher self-regulation were the most prominent [5]. Ramzan et al. explored the difficulties faced by Pakistani teachers in teaching English through interviews, mainly including language barriers, teaching adjustments, and lack of institutional support. Teachers need to simplify teaching, balance subject and language teaching, and lack training and resources [6]. Maja investigated the views of English teachers in rural primary schools in Limpopo, South Africa on technology integration. The results showed that despite obstacles such as lack of time, electricity, facilities, and skills, teachers generally recognized the positive role of technology in teaching. It is recommended to improve teachers' ability to apply technology through on-the-job training to improve teaching effectiveness and alleviate resource constraints [7]. Annamalai et al. interviewed 23 Malaysian secondary school English teachers to explore their views on AR (Augmented Reality) and VR (Virtual Reality) in English teaching. The results showed that teachers recognized its positive effects on learning outcomes, student participation and active learning, but were also concerned about its time-consuming and health issues [8]. Kusuma et al. interviewed 8 English teacher trainees in Indonesia to explore the application of ChatGPT in teaching practice. The results showed that ChatGPT can be used for teaching content creation, collaborative teaching strategies, assessment design and language ability improvement, helping teachers' professional growth [9]. Nazari and Molana interviewed 13 English teachers in Iranian private language schools to explore the impact of school evaluation policies on teachers' emotional labor. The results showed that the evaluation policy dominated by superiors brought emotional conflicts, but also inspired teachers to engage in evaluation practices that better met their own and students' needs [10]. Djamdjuri et al. analyzed "The Application of Islamic Education in English Teaching" through a systematic literature review and selected 12 eligible papers in the past three years, covering different grades from elementary school to university. The study found that integrating English learning with Islamic values can help promote the coordinated development of students' language ability and religious identity [11]. Existing studies have mostly focused on single teaching elements or specific technology applications, and lack a systematic exploration of integration paths for the overall improvement of English core literacy in the basic education stage.

3. Constructing an Innovative Model for English Teaching

3.1 Design Driving Questions Based on Situations and Goals

Driving questions are the core clues throughout the entire English teaching process, which can stimulate students' interest in exploration and promote the development of comprehensive subject literacy. The design of driving questions should be based on real life scenarios and combined with specific teaching goals. By guiding students to solve practical problems close to their own lives, the integration of language knowledge and life experience can be promoted. For example, in the teaching of the "Food and Health" theme unit, in response to the common phenomenon of unhealthy diet among students, teachers can raise the driving question of "how to make a healthy diet plan". Students need to combine what they have learned in science courses, understand nutritional components, use

mathematical tools to measure height and weight, evaluate physical condition based on BMI indicators, and further develop personal diet plans in combination with English language output. Through interdisciplinary integration, students actively think, collaborate and communicate under the drive of real tasks, and achieve the teaching goal of "forming healthy eating habits and improving comprehensive literacy".

3.2 Integration Strategies for Theme Units Primary School English

3.2.1 Establishing Themes of Large Unit English Teaching

Theme selection is the key starting point for English large unit teaching, which directly affects learning motivation and teaching effectiveness. The establishment of the theme should follow the cognitive characteristics of students in the basic education stage, and revolve around the four core qualities of language ability, cultural awareness, thinking quality and learning ability proposed in the "Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards". High-quality themes must have interdisciplinary and cross-cultural attributes, be close to students' interests, guide them to construct knowledge in a real context, and improve their language application ability. For example, the theme of "I can protect animals" not only focuses on the cultivation of English language skills, but also involves knowledge in multiple fields such as science and humanities, which can stimulate students' emotional resonance and promote all-round development.

3.2.2 Deconstructing Teaching Objectives Systematically

After the theme is determined, it is necessary to refine it into hierarchical objectives for each class based on the overall teaching objectives. Teachers should follow the design principle of "gradual progress, from shallow to deep", logically connect the knowledge points of each class, and ensure the coherence and progression between classes. For example, the "I can protect animals" unit can be set up with four stages: "understanding the current situation of animals-mastering the expression of protecting animals-formulating specific action plans-carrying out oral reports and presentations". The setting of hierarchical goals helps students gradually deepen their understanding of the topic and promote their transformation from knowledge mastery to practical application.

3.2.3 Integrating and Optimizing Teaching Content

The integration of teaching content is not limited to the textbook, but should be combined with subject integration and real life to broaden students' horizons. By introducing relevant subject knowledge such as science, morality and rule of law, the content of language output is enriched, and students' ability to solve practical problems is cultivated. For example, in the theme of "Caring for stray animals", students understand the living conditions of stray animals through information retrieval, master the basic needs of animals in combination with scientific knowledge, use English to express specific action plans for caring for animals, and promote knowledge transfer and internalization through language practice. The optimized teaching content can achieve the simultaneous improvement of language knowledge and comprehensive literacy.

3.3 Integrating Interdisciplinary Knowledge Based on Real Tasks

Real tasks inject life into English classes and can improve the authenticity and effectiveness of students' language learning. In the basic education stage, tasks are set around hot issues in real social life, so that students can "learn by doing and learn by using" to achieve dual cultivation of language skills and key abilities. For example, under the theme of "I can do my part for animals!", teachers can set the task of "designing an action plan to care for stray animals in the community", collect information in combination with information technology, integrate science, morality and rule of law across disciplines, and guide students to form a feasible plan. Through group discussions, mutual evaluation of plans and actual participation, help students apply English language skills to real life, enhance social responsibility and interdisciplinary comprehensive ability.

3.4 Cultivate Cultural Awareness Based on English Movies

Cultural awareness is an important dimension of English core literacy. Using English movies for thematic teaching is an effective way to cultivate students' cross-cultural understanding. In the primary school stage, age-appropriate English movie clips can be selected in combination with the curriculum theme and students' interests to guide students to understand foreign cultures through watching movies.

For example, in the "An interesting country" unit, teachers can use clips from animated films such as "Finding Nemo" and "Zootopia" to help students understand the geographical features, living habits and values of different countries. Through task guidance, such as "group discussion of cultural differences encountered by the protagonist" and "simulated dialogue between movie characters", students' cultural horizons can be expanded; their understanding and respect for diverse cultures can be enhanced; their cross-cultural communication skills can be improved.

3.5 Prepare Rich and Diverse Teaching Resource

In order to improve classroom participation and interactivity, teachers need to integrate teaching resources through multiple channels to create a three-dimensional learning environment. Specific teaching aids such as picture cards, situational props, and role-playing costumes can enhance students' immersion. For example, in the "A Lucky Day" story teaching, teachers use props to simulate the situation of lost items, allowing students to conduct English dialogue training and improve their oral expression skills. At the same time, multimedia technology is used, combined with animation, video, interactive PPT and other means to strengthen students' perception and understanding of language knowledge. In addition, teachers can also use interactive learning platforms to design small games such as word spelling and situational dialogue matching to achieve integrated learning inside and outside the classroom. The effective integration of teaching resources helps to achieve classroom efficiency and interesting learning, and comprehensively helps improve students' core literacy.

3.6 Construct Theme Story Lines to Improve Classroom Coherence

In order to improve the integrity and logic of English theme teaching, various activities and resources can be organically connected by constructing a complete theme story line. For example, around the theme of "Protecting the environment", the design takes "Little Green Environmental Protection Guard" as the main story line, and through the introduction of scenarios, role-playing, poster making, environmental protection initiatives and other links within the unit, it is promoted layer by layer to achieve the unity of "knowledge-emotion-action". The setting of the story line can not only improve the fun of the classroom and the immersion of students, but also facilitate students to gradually accumulate knowledge in continuous tasks, exercise language output and comprehensive expression ability, and ultimately promote the overall development of students' core literacy.

4. Research design

4.1 Research Subjects and Grouping Method

This study selects 76 students from two parallel classes in the fourth grade of a public primary school in a certain city as the research subjects. The teaching foundation of the class is similar to the academic level of the students. One of the classes is randomly designated as the experimental group (38 people), and the innovative English teaching model of "theme integration + core literacy orientation" is implemented; the other class is the control group (38 people), which adopts the regular textbook progress and traditional teaching methods.

4.2 Teaching Intervention Content and Cycle Arrangement

The experimental cycle is set to 8 weeks, with the three theme units of "Food and Health", "I can protect animals" and "An interesting country" as the core content, and the teaching intervention is implemented in stages:

Phase 1 (week 1-2): designing real-driving questions (such as "How to make a healthy meal plan?" "What can we do for stray animals?") to stimulate students' interest in exploration.

Phase 2 (week 3-5): carrying out interdisciplinary tasks, combining science, morality, and information technology knowledge, and guiding students to cooperate in formulating plans and complete English expressions.

Phase 3 (Week 6-7): multimodal display and cultural expansion, such as poster making, English skit performance, cultural difference comparison and other activities to improve comprehensive language application ability.

Phase 4 (Week 8): organizing learning achievement display and reflection report to evaluate students' performance in language ability, thinking quality and cultural awareness.

The control group is taught according to the regular teaching syllabus, without involving interdisciplinary integration, driving problem guidance and multimodal resource use.

4.3 Research Tools and Data Collection

This study adopts a multi-dimensional data collection method to ensure that the results are comprehensive and reliable:

Quantitative tools:

English comprehensive ability test: independently compiled according to the curriculum standards and teaching content, including listening comprehension, reading comprehension, oral expression and task writing, pre-test and post-test once;

English learning interest and cultural awareness questionnaire: the Likert five-level scale is adopted, covering learning motivation, classroom participation, cross-cultural cognition and expression confidence, etc., and is tested once before and after the experiment.

Qualitative materials:

Classroom observation record form: the teacher's guidance method, students' interactive behavior, group cooperation status, etc., are observed;

Student interview: 6 students are randomly selected from each group for semi-structured interviews to understand their learning experience, emotional attitudes and ability perception;

Teacher teaching reflection record: experimental teachers fill out reflection logs every week to analyze the feasibility and improvement space of teaching practice.

5. Results and Discussion

Quantitative data analysis: SPSS is used to conduct paired sample t-test and independent sample t-test on the pre- and post-test scores to compare the differences between the experimental group and the control group in comprehensive English ability, learning interest and cultural awareness;

Qualitative data analysis: the interview, observation and reflection data are sorted out through content analysis to extract the changes in students' learning behavior and classroom performance characteristics, and to assist in verifying the effectiveness and scalability of the teaching model.
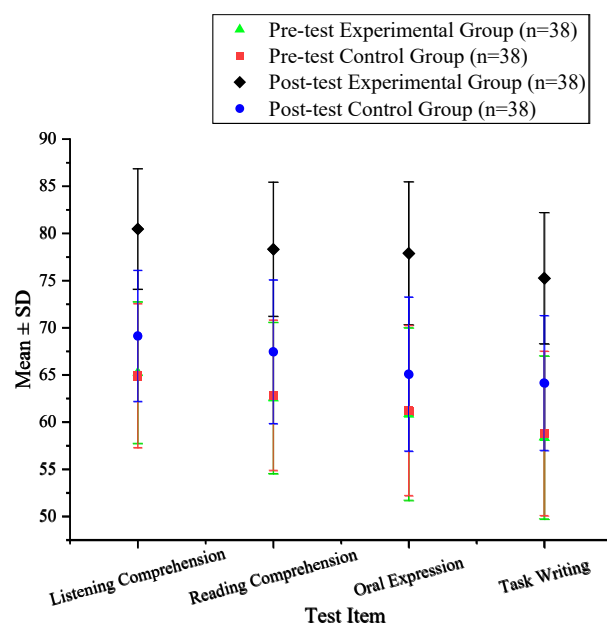

Figure 1: Pre- and post-test scores of comprehensive English ability (M±SD)

From the pre- and post-test scores of comprehensive English ability (Figure 1), it can be seen that the experimental group has achieved significant improvements in the four abilities of listening comprehension, reading comprehension, oral expression and task writing. Specifically, the listening comprehension of the experimental group students increases from the pre-test mean of 65.24 (±7.51) to the post-test 80.47 (±6.39); reading comprehension increases from 62.55 (±8.02) to 78.32 (±7.11); oral expression increases from 60.84 (±9.15) to 77.89 (±7.58); task writing increases from 58.36 (±8.64) to 75.25 (±6.96). The average increase in each ability is more than 15 points, and all show a low standard deviation, indicating that the improvement effect is universal and stable.

The control group's score improvement is limited, and the improvement in the four abilities is less than 7 points. The overall post-test score is still significantly lower than that of the experimental group. For example, the listening comprehension of the control group increases from 64.92 (±7.63) to 69.13 (±6.95), and the task writing increases from 58.79 (±8.72) to 64.14 (±7.15), indicating that conventional teaching has a weak effect on improving comprehensive language ability in a short period of time. Comprehensive analysis shows that the core literacy-oriented teaching model of theme integration and multimodal fusion can significantly promote the comprehensive development of students' English listening, speaking, reading and writing, and improve their comprehensive language application ability.
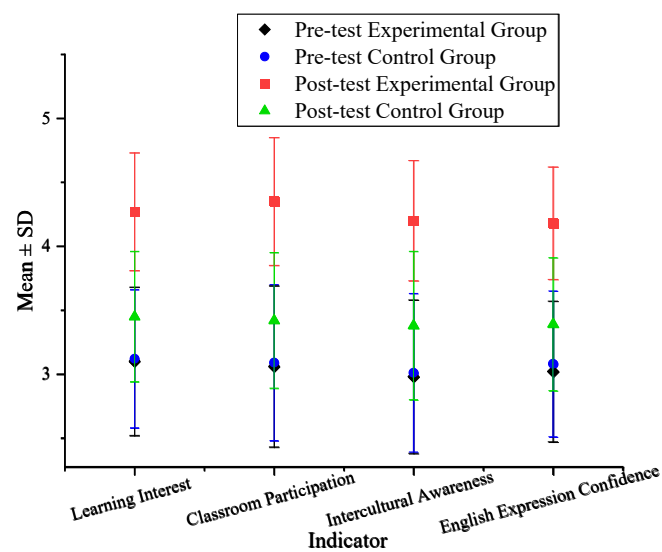

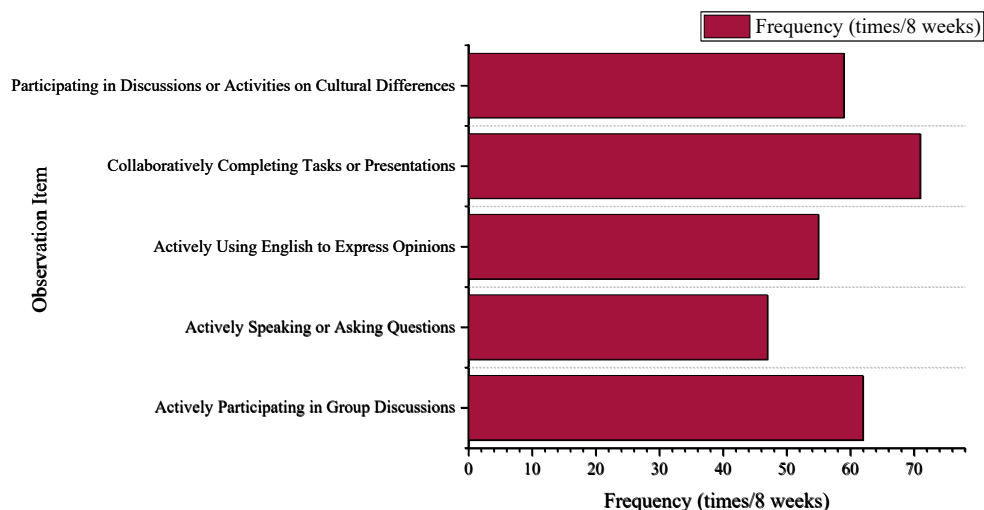*Figure 2: English learning interest and cultural awareness questionnaire scores (M±SD)*

Figure 3: Classroom observation frequency statistics (experimental group)

From the scores of the English learning interest and cultural awareness questionnaire (Figure 2), it can be seen that the experimental group has achieved significant improvements in all indicators. The learning interest scores of the experimental group students increases from 3.10 (±0.58) in the pre-test to 4.27 (±0.46) in the post-test; the class participation increases from 3.06 (±0.63) to 4.35 (±0.50); the

cross-cultural cognition increases from 2.98 (±0.60) to 4.20 (±0.47); the confidence in English expression increases from 3.02 (±0.55) to 4.18 (±0.44). The overall improvement range is between 1.1 and 1.3 points, and the standard deviation decreases, indicating that the improvement effect is highly universal and stable among the students in the class.

The control group shows little change in various indicators during the same period, with learning interest increasing from 3.12 (±0.54) to 3.45 (±0.51), classroom participation increasing from 3.09 (±0.61) to 3.42 (±0.53), cross-cultural cognition increasing from 3.01 (±0.62) to 3.38 (±0.58), and English expression confidence increasing from 3.08 (±0.57) to 3.39 (±0.52), all with an increase of less than 0.5 points. The comparison results show that the innovative teaching model of thematic teaching and multimodal integration has a significant promoting effect on improving students' interest in English learning, classroom participation enthusiasm, cross-cultural cognition and English expression confidence, further verifying the effectiveness of this model in cultivating core literacy in various dimensions.

From the classroom observation frequency statistics (Figure 3), it can be seen that the students in the experimental group show a high degree of active participation and comprehensive practical ability in English class. During the 8-week teaching cycle, students actively participate in group discussions 62 times, speak or ask questions 47 times, actively uses English to express their opinions 55 times, cooperates to complete tasks or presentations 71 times, and participates in cultural difference discussions or comparison activities 59 times. Overall, the classroom shows strong interactivity, diverse forms of participation, and frequent language output. This data result reflects that the core literacy-oriented thematic teaching model effectively stimulated students' interest in participation and promoted the improvement of students' actual use of English, especially in group cooperation and multimodal presentation. In addition, students' active participation in cross-cultural theme activities shows that this model can effectively guide students to pay attention to cultural differences and improve cross-cultural communication skills, providing strong support for the implementation of the core literacy of the English subject.

Table 1: Summary of themes of student interview feedback

Theme Category	Feedback Frequency (n=24)	Typical Student Feedback
Like Interdisciplinary Thematic Tasks	21	"The tasks are interesting and helped me understand why I learn English."
Significant Improvement in Cultural Awareness	19	"I learned about food, customs, and festivals of other countries."
More Confident in Spoken English	18	"I used to be afraid to speak, now I can say complete sentences."
Like Multimedia and Activity-based Classes	22	"Making posters and performing short plays made English fun."
Looking Forward to More Real-life Task-based Learning	20	"I hope to do more English tasks related to real life in the future."

From the summary of themes in the student interview feedback (Table 1), it can be seen that the students in the experimental group generally have a positive attitude towards the core literacy-oriented thematic teaching model. Among the 24 interviewed students, 21 clearly state that they like interdisciplinary thematic tasks, and think that the tasks are interesting and can help them understand the practical significance of learning English. 19 people report that their cultural awareness has been significantly improved, and they can actively pay attention to the cultural background, eating habits and festival customs of different countries. 18 people say that they are more confident in oral English expression and have overcome the psychological barrier of being afraid to speak. The proportion of students who like multimedia and activity-based classrooms is the highest, reaching 22 people. They generally reflect that activities such as role-playing and poster making make English classes more interesting and participatory. Another 20 people look forward to continuing to participate in more real task-based learning, and believe that life-oriented English learning content is more attractive and practical.

The interview results show that the core literacy-oriented thematic teaching not only effectively stimulates students' learning interest and classroom participation, but also significantly promotes the development of students' cross-cultural cognition and practical language application ability. The positive feedback from students further verifies the practical value and promotion significance of this teaching model.

6. Conclusion

Based on the cultivation of core literacy, this paper systematically studies the innovative model of theme-based English teaching in the basic education stage. By constructing the teaching path of "real problem driven-interdisciplinary integration-multimodal resource support", the design covers the theme units such as "Food and Health", "I can protect animals" and "An interesting country", and comprehensively explores the application effect of theme teaching in the cultivation of language ability, cultural awareness and thinking quality. Through randomized controlled experiments, the results show that this innovative model can significantly improve students' comprehensive English listening, speaking, reading and writing abilities, enhance learning interest and classroom participation, promote the synchronous development of cross-cultural cognition and practical application ability, and effectively promote the overall improvement of students' core literacy. At the same time, classroom observations and student interviews further confirm the positive role of this model in stimulating students' enthusiasm and cultivating cooperative inquiry ability. However, this study still has certain limitations. Due to the number of samples and the length of the cycle, the wide applicability of the research results still needs to be verified on a larger scale; in addition, the specific depth of interdisciplinary integration and cultural awareness cultivation still has room for further expansion. Future research can continue to expand the sample size, enrich the subject types, and deepen the integration of multimodal resources and subject knowledge to provide more sufficient empirical support for the continuous optimization of English teaching in basic education.

Acknowledgements

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