

An Analysis of College English Teachers' Research Anxiety and the Suggestions for Their Sustainable Research Development

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Abstract: With the development and progress of society and colleges and universities and higher research requirements, College English teachers' research anxiety and pressure is increasing day by day. In this paper, the self-compiled survey with questionnaires and interviews of college English teachers' research anxiety were used to investigate the research anxiety of college English teachers in one city in China, and the statistical software SPSS 19 was conducted for the survey and data analysis to find out both the subjective and objective factors leading to their research anxiety, and propose solutions for college English teachers to adapt and resolve their research anxiety: 1) to create conditions for college English teachers to improve their research ability; 2) improve the university research assessment system to make it more scientific and humanistic; 3) college English teachers' own adjustments on their research efforts.

1. Challenges to college English teachers' sustainable research development

The society in China has been developing rapidly, accompanied by breakthroughs in all aspects, including technology and significant growth in economic strength. The demand for higher standards of education and research has resulted in new, diverse requirements for the college English teachers' teaching and research abilities. Currently, the development and progress of society and universities and the further improvement of research requirements have made college English teachers pay more attention to academic research work. As higher education continues to evolve, the universities are facing various professional pressures, amidst the comprehensive promotion of social transformation and higher education reform. College English teachers are no longer confined to the traditional concepts of pure teaching styles, such as "teaching their classes well". Instead, college English teachers play a crucial role in shaping students' language skills and proficiency. Research by college English teachers has become an important part of improving the quality of teaching and advancing the discipline. They are endeavoring to improve their teaching skills and research abilities, to become new "educational experts" with guidance from systematic scientific theories, who can adapt to the requirements of the knowledge economy and the information age, and possess comprehensive qualities and new educational ideas.^{[5][18]}

Meanwhile, In the current higher education system in China, doing research is an important means for university teachers to obtain organizational legitimacy and incentives in the institution.^{[8][15]} The achievements and impacts of their research are closely related to the treatment of teachers, such as title, rank evaluation, salary income, and status. Therefore, research is highly valued. As part of the university teacher research team, English teachers are often actively or passively involved in research endeavors due to this emphasis.^{[13][25][31]}

However, many college English teachers face the problem of research anxiety, which poses challenge to their sustainable research development due to various personal, institutional, and policy-related reasons. Studying the research anxiety of college English teachers helps to understand the psychological condition of teachers in the process of research and teaching, and provides reference for improving the quality of English education. The purpose of this paper is to explore college English teachers' research anxiety and provide theoretical support for the subsequent research, meanwhile, putting forward suggestions for sustainable research development.^{[1][30][31]}

2. Current Research Conducted on college English teachers' research anxiety

Sociologist Hochschild (1983) coined the term "emotional labor" to describe "the regulation of emotions to create facial or bodily displays that have exchange value and are observable by others and used in exchange

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for wages".^[4] Emotional labour is an essential component of work and contributes to work performance, in addition to mental and physical labour.^{[4][7]} College English teachers experience research anxiety, which is a form of emotional labour. Research has demonstrated that emotional labour has both positive and negative effects. Anxiety is a multifaceted emotional response that individuals undergo when encountering challenges, difficulties, or dangers. It encompasses various emotions including tension, restlessness, worry, fear, and unease. Research anxiety, which is the apprehension and fear linked to conducting research, poses a considerable obstacle to the research productivity of English lecturers in higher education institutions.

From a critical emotional sociology and critical-action perspective, studies of college English teachers' research anxiety both domestically and abroad since the 1980s have yet to mature. There has been a dearth of critical exploration into the action conditions and self-liberation of English teachers' emotional labour. There is limited empirical evidence, but the development trajectory and research perspectives and methods exhibit heritability and consistency. Previous research has concentrated on the professional development, specialised training, and qualifications of English teachers to confront both internal and external challenges and enhance their overall qualifications.

Studies have indicated that anxiety can detrimentally impact physical and mental health, reducing personal work productivity, job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behavior, and overall happiness. Meanwhile, the pressure and anxiety associated with research is mounting daily.^{[2][9][10]}

The roots of research anxiety are diverse, varying from inadequate research skills and time constraints to publication pressures. These factors may result in emotions of inadequacy, frustration and stress, making it difficult to meet research targets. Competitive evaluation systems, lack of resources, and keeping pace with educational advancements may also contribute to research anxiety, ultimately impacting the research productivity of college English teachers and posing challenges to their sustainable research development. These challenges can be classified into personal, institutional, and policy and management reasons.

2.1 The Personal Reasons

Personal reasons encompass the individual characteristics and circumstances that hinder college English teachers' research engagement.

Various studies have been conducted to examine the difficulties faced by Chinese university teachers, such as occupational stress and balancing work and family life. These factors have been linked to physical and psychological health issues.^{[4][12][16][19][23]} The research aims to tackle the internal and external challenges that foreign language educators encounter during their professional growth and development. Moreover, it addresses the present status of research alongside the primary challenges in the field of foreign language

education. College English, as an independent and self-contained emerging discipline, still has ample room for theoretical improvement. According to the studies conducted by Yang, Zhang, et al. (2001), Tao, et al. (2023; 2022; 2020), there are various areas that require exploration and analysis.^{[18][19][23][24]}

The requirement to publish in prestigious journals and to conduct original research amplifies research anxiety among college English teachers. Moreover, the substantial workload of their teaching commitments, limited research time, and limited energy allotted for research create obstacles for most English teachers to continue their research work. This renders it strenuous for teachers to allocate sufficient time and effort for research activities.^{[19][22][24][26][28]}

Research has shown positive and negative motivators in relation to research, as well as a significant correlation between motivation and investment and outcome of individual research.^{[15][25][31]} Li(2016), Wang et al. (2014), Shen, et al. (2022), Yao, et al. (2023) conducted empirical studies on the research fatigue amongst college English teachers in universities and colleges, using the teacher foreign language anxiety scale (TFLAS) proposed by Horwitz (2008) or other composed measurement scales to analyse the current status of anxiety and identified causes among college-level English teachers in China.^{[4][14][17][19][27]} They established the effect of challenging and obstructive research stresses on research performance, identifying complex attitudes and feelings towards research among teachers. Based on this groundwork, more research has been conducted to examine the motivation of foreign language educators in their research, which include a theoretical framework, research content, and methods, as well as the development of a measurement scale to assess research motivation at the tertiary level.^{[17][18][25]} The study also addresses the challenges and opportunities that college English teachers encounter while conducting individual and group research. Constructive suggestions have been made for improving the professional environment of these educators.^{[3][5][11][31]} Focus has been on the interaction between teaching and research, and the positive impact it has on the professional development of foreign language educators and classroom instruction. Focus has been on the interaction between teaching and research, the positive impact that research has on the professional growth of foreign language educators and classroom instruction, and its role in advocating for the work and professional development of such educators, and finally identifying practical strategies and methods to alleviate research anxiety.^{[12][13][25][30]}

Thirdly, the personal circumstances of college English teachers such as marriage, child-rearing, financial pressure for purchasing a house and repayment of loans, are conflicting and hindering the research progress of many college English teachers. This includes a lack of research publications, insufficient research project support, academic stagnation, and the accumulation of teaching and research pressures which significantly impede their research performance. This situation has caused mounting anxiety among college English teachers, eroding their faith in evaluation and

personal growth prospects. The resulting occupational burnout and negative anxiety have had a severe impact on the quality and efficacy of foreign language instruction, and may even contribute to academic misconduct.^{[10][19][22][24][26][28]} These consequences have put the college English teachers' sustainable research development in long-term research and professional survival of college English teachers in jeopardy.

2.2 Institutional Obstacles

Institutional reasons refer to the organizational and structural barriers that impede research development among college English teachers. Institutional obstacles may pertain to organizational and structural hindrances that hamper research progress amongst college English teachers. Reasons such as limited access to research resources, insufficient funding for research, excessive administrative burdens, and a focus on teaching rather than research can reduce teachers' motivation to engage in sustained research activities. Additionally, inadequate research support from the institution and a lack of recognition or incentives for research productivity can demotivate teachers from engaging in substantial research.

2.3 Policy and Management Factors

Policy and management factors concern the broader education policies, administrative practices, and decision-making processes that impact research involvement among college English teachers. These teachers frequently encounter pressure to fulfil research objectives established by their university or department, resulting in feelings of anxiety as they work to create research that meets their superiors' expectations. Moreover, the system for evaluating and rewarding research accomplishments may foster competitiveness among teachers, thereby aggravating research apprehension. In an objective light, the contest for survival and prosperity between universities is intensifying, and the research proficiency of teachers is commonly regarded as the foundation for competition and gaining access to preferential resource allocation.

To enhance the teaching and research performance of faculty members, universities and relevant authorities have implemented faculty development programs. These aim to enable educators to maximize their potential. As a faculty evaluation and promotion reform, a new performance-based ranking system has been adopted, replacing the long-standing seniority-based system. An extensive analysis was conducted to examine external variables, including research leaders, policies, team dynamics, hardware support, and the internal factors of individual educators, in order to assess the factors that influence research motivation among teachers.^{[12][16][23][26][27][29]} Various universities have established rigorous research evaluation standards, which involve quantitative management of teachers' research successes, shortening evaluation cycles, increasing the number of evaluation tasks, and implementing a strict

appointment system that links research performance with practical interests such as title evaluation and awards. While this approach can motivate teachers to produce high-quality research, it can also lead to a focus on meeting quantitative targets rather than contributing to the overall advancement of knowledge in a given field.

Although this practice may stimulate teachers' research motivation and yield some initial original research findings, it places an excessive burden on university teachers (including college English teachers who are in a disadvantaged research position) to undertake high-quality talent training while enduring long-term, invisible research pressure and a high threshold for foreign language paper publication. All these factors contribute to heightened anxiety levels and negatively impact college English teachers, who are also facing limited living space.^{[21][22]}

2.4 The external challenges brought by the society and the fast developing era

College English teachers' anxiety is a form of emotional labor that affects their work performance. The study also sheds light on the unique circumstances and pressures faced by college English teachers, such as the competition among universities and the increasing demands for research productivity. Furthermore, the challenges generated by society and the rapidly developing era also add to the emotional labor that college English teachers must shoulder, which in turn has an effect on their work performance. The research illuminates the distinct circumstances and pressures that college English teachers encounter, including intense university competition and escalating research output demands. Studies indicate that social expectations and school policies are external factors that contribute to anxiety among college English teachers. The constantly shifting educational milieu and technological advancements also contribute to research-related anxiety for college English teachers. Academic researchers may experience pressure to remain abreast of evolving research trends and integrate novel technologies into their studies.

An investigation into the anxiety experienced by college English teachers during their research process affords a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and factors that contribute to their emotional labour. The study highlights the adverse impact of anxiety on their work performance, job satisfaction, and general well-being. This study explores the occurrence of research anxiety among English lecturers in college and proposes sustainable research development approaches for their sustainable research development.

3. The Present empirical research

3.1 Research questions

In order to verify the precious research already done, This research conducted a questionnaire survey on the college English teachers' research anxiety when facing

external pressure in one province in China in the transitional period. The survey focused on three main questions:

1. What are the reasons for the research anxiety among college English teachers?
2. What are the current attitudes of college English teachers towards research anxiety?
3. How can the research anxiety among college English teachers be transformed and adjusted?

3.2 Data collection and analysis

The questionnaire survey included two types of questions: objective multiple-choice questions corresponding to Likert Scale, and semi-structured interviews with more than 10 teacher representatives of different ages, genders, education levels, and titles, lasting about half an hour, focusing on issues such as their research situation, feelings about external and personal pressure, and factors and measures that promote or hinder their research. Random selection of college English teachers from 11 undergraduate schools in Hangzhou as research subjects, 37 male teachers (22%) and 131 female teachers (77.9%). In terms of their professional titles, 10 were professors (5.9%), 45 were associate professors (26.8%), 93 were lecturers (57.1%), and 20 were assistant lecturers (11.9%). In terms of education level, 13.1% of the teachers had doctoral degrees, 79.3% had master's degrees, and 8.6% had bachelor's degrees. A total of 180 questionnaires were issued, 175 were collected, and 168 valid questionnaires were analyzed using statistical software SPSS 22 for descriptive statistics and correlation analysis.

3.3 Research analysis

Of the surveyed teachers, 82.1% of them believe that college English plays a relatively large role in serving the national development strategy, promoting economic and social development, and improving the overall quality of the nation (Table 1). This is consistent with the status of college English courses in the overall talent training plan and class schedule of various universities. The current situation and teaching results of foreign language teaching have brought a certain degree of professional satisfaction to college English teachers overall (Table 2). However, 36.9% of college English teachers still feel that compared with the situation of large projects, high-level papers, or huge benefits brought to the country and economy in the field of science and engineering, the status of college English in the university curriculum system is embarrassing, the subject is niche, research is weak, papers are difficult to publish, research projects are few, funding is inadequate, and the value of research results is limited

Table 1: Contributions of English subjects to the nation and its people

	Frequency	Percentage	effective percentage	Cumulative ratio
really positive	17	10.1	10.1	10.1

Quite positive	65	38.7	38.7	48.8
Average	62	36.9	36.9	85.7
Quite negative	18	10.7	10.7	96.4
Really negative	6	3.6	3.6	100.0
total	168	100.0	100.0	

Table 2: Current social attitudes towards English teaching

	frequency	percent age	effective percentage	Cumulative ratio
Really positive	5	3.0	3.0	3.0
Quite positive	55	32.7	32.7	35.7
Average	78	46.4	46.4	82.1
Quite negative	15	8.9	8.9	91.1
Really negative	15	8.9	8.9	100.0
total	168	100.0	100.0	

Table 3: Attitudes of relevant departments towards English research

	Frequency	Percentage	effective percentage	Cumulative ratio
really positive	78	46.4	46.4	46.4
Quite positive	63	37.5	37.5	83.9
Average	19	11.3	11.3	95.2
Quite negative	8	4.8	4.8	100.0
total	168	100.0	100.0	

College English teachers are responsible for cultivating talents and face various life pressures. 50% of the teachers believe that the functional positioning of college English teachers as "teacher craftsmen" with a single teaching function is becoming more obvious. Compared to other disciplines, the research output of college English teachers is relatively less competitive. They are subject to long-term academic pressure in terms of publishing and research, research projects and awards, and are in a disadvantaged position in terms of professional titles and evaluations. This embarrassing situation caused 95.2% of the teachers surveyed to feel severe research and survival pressure (Table 3). However, according to the analysis of the attitudes of the relevant departments and schools towards English research and the research anxiety of the interviewed teachers, the Pearson correlation coefficient is -0.125 and the two-tailed test probability $p=0.102 > 0.05$, which indicates that the external environment and research anxiety are not significantly related. Most teachers can still control their research anxiety within their controllable range and will not let it affect their research too much. In theory, research should have a positive interaction with teaching. From Table 4, it can be seen that 52.8% of the surveyed

teachers believe that research is helpful for their teaching, which confirms the results of Liu's (2013) survey result.^[13] As for the attitude of the surveyed teachers' schools towards English research and the research pressure of English teachers, the Pearson correlation coefficient is 0.123 and the two-tailed test probability $p=0.112>0.05$, indicating that the surveyed teachers have a positive attitude towards research. Although the conflict between teaching and research causes inner conflict and anxiety to college English teachers, they still have full enthusiasm for teaching, love for students and unlimited loyalty to the country.

The challenging research conditions, assessment systems, and research rewards have a more significant incentive effect on the research motivation of interviewed teachers. Universities should take advantage of the situation and formulate reasonable research performance evaluation standards to better stimulate teachers' achievement motivation, turn anxiety into motivation, actively conduct research, and improve the level of research performance.^[19] By conducting research, publishing papers at a certain level, leading research projects at a certain level, and having relevant research experience, we evaluate and hire professional titles to meet the research requirements of the school, confirm their research capabilities and achievements, and safeguard the interests of all aspects of their profession^[26], thereby enhancing the research strength of the discipline. The analysis of interview results shows that college English teachers generally exhibit high levels of research anxiety; Especially for teachers who have higher research requirements, lower professional titles, fewer published papers, have not led or participated in relevant research projects, and are closer to the deadline for professional title evaluation and recruitment, but still do not meet the relevant conditions, the anxiety level is higher.

The teaching and research activities of teachers are related to their survival, quality of life, and sense of happiness. Obtaining relevant rewards through research can reduce the stress of their lives, reduce the anxiety caused by external factors, and promote their motivation to strengthen research. More than 62.5% of teachers are not very satisfied with the economic income they have received from their teaching and research work (Table 4). Young teachers with short working years and limited research experience have a high level of dissatisfaction and research anxiety; Professors, associate professors, and doctoral teachers with higher professional titles, accumulated research achievements, and strong research abilities who can receive higher research awards according to the research reward standards of universities have higher satisfaction, higher sense of achievement, and relatively lower anxiety (Table 5).

Teachers' research motivation and anxiety are also influenced by their family and personal environmental factors.^{[8][23]} It is necessary to balance the relationship between work, family, and life, so that there are no obstacles in the process of work and research, and to avoid being distracted by trivial matters. The correlation analysis of the impact of family factors on research and the level of research anxiety among teachers shows that Pearson correlation coefficient is 0.011, and the

probability of double tailed test is $p=0.882>0.05$. It shows that these factors are not significantly correlated with their research anxiety level, indicating that they can better handle the relationship between family and career, reduce the negative impact of family and life factors on research and teaching, and reduce research anxiety.

Table 4: Teacher's degree of satisfaction with economic income from teaching and research work

	Frequency	Percentage	effective percentage	Cumulative ratio
really satisfied	17	10.1	10.1	10.1
null	46	27.4	27.4	37.5
not satisfied	74	44.0	44.0	81.5
really dissatisfied	31	18.5	18.5	100.0
total	168	100.0	100.0	

Table 5: The relationship between research conditions and the level of published academic papers

		The highest level of academic publication					total
		Super	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	None	
research conditions	really good	0	0	0	5	0	5
	quite good	0	2	3	3	9	17
	average	2	6	30	36	15	89
	quite poor	0	5	11	13	13	42
	really poor	1	1	3	4	6	15
total		4	14	47	60	43	168

Although the conflict between teaching and research brings inner conflict and anxiety to college English teachers, they still have full enthusiasm for teaching, love for students, and unlimited loyalty to the country. and they recognise research ability as a crucial component of a teacher's comprehensive competency (Table 6). However, a significant challenge lies in the practical work of most English lecturers in colleges, who are primarily involved in front-line teaching. Due to their limited research capabilities and external research environment, their selected topics and research choices have not sufficiently advanced teaching effectiveness. However, their research papers do not receive preferential treatment or selection by professional journals, and the social advantages are not apparent. This is a drawback for teachers' enthusiasm and drive in theoretical and teaching research, as shown in Table 6 and Table 7. These findings are in line with Tao's (2019) study on the general motivation for research and four distinct research motivations of English lecturers at universities and colleges.

Table 6: The effect of research anxiety on teaching

	Frequency	Percentage	effective percentage	Cumulative ratio
Really positive	4	2.4	2.4	2.4
quite positive	52	31.0	31.0	33.3
average	32	19.0	19.0	52.4
quite negative	67	39.9	39.9	92.3
really negative	13	7.7	7.7	100.0
total	168	100.0	100.0	

Table 7: Teachers' attitudes towards research

	Frequency	Percentage	effective percentage	Cumulative ratio
really interested in	7	4.2	4.2	4.2
quite interested in	90	53.6	53.6	57.7
neutral	50	29.8	29.8	87.5
quite dislike	15	8.9	8.9	96.4
Really dislike	6	3.6	3.6	100.0
total	168	100.0	100.0	

Table 8: The main motivation of college English teachers to do research

	Frequency	Percentage	effective percentage	Cumulative ratio
really interested in	19	11.3	11.3	11.3
appraise the title	92	54.8	54.8	66.1
get a reward	3	1.8	1.8	67.9
self-esteem need	9	5.4	5.4	73.2
compelled by the situation	45	26.8	26.8	100.0
total	168	100.0	100.0	

For the teachers' motivation, research is ultimately a matter for teachers themselves. The motivation of teachers in research presents subjectivity^[6]. Exploring the motivation of college English teachers in research must pay attention to their needs. The value identification, research investment, and self-efficacy of college English teachers in research all have motivational characteristics. The biggest demand for most college English teachers comes from the demand for professional titles and research awards (Table 8). The pressure of job title evaluation and research anxiety are mutually causal.^{[1][5][8][10][19]}

4. Proposed measures for change and management improvement

To address these challenges and promote sustainable research development, proposed suggestions for improvement and practical strategies have been put forward for college English teachers for change or adaptations.^{[1][25][30]} The goal is to equip teachers with the tools, environment and emotional support needed to overcome anxiety and sustainably advance their research. By providing the necessary resources, support, and fostering a conducive research environment, college English teachers can overcome research anxiety and contribute to the advancement of their field.

First, Considering emotional difficulties as an opportunity for change and self-liberation, creating favorable conditions through emotional labor, achieving educational goals, promoting professional development, for college English teachers, they must constantly improve their professional knowledge and interdisciplinary knowledge structure, and strive to improve their research abilities, establish a professional development perspective and a sense of survival crisis, and fully leverage personal initiative, strengthen their research awareness and confidence, pay attention to the accumulation and investment of research, master diverse emotional regulation strategies, and actively and effectively reduce research anxiety. Actively adapting to the environment of foreign language teaching and research innovation in the era of big data and new information technology, fully utilizing research teams, resources, and cooperation platforms that are suitable for one's own research direction and interest, enhancing research capabilities in an academic atmosphere of joint research,^{[24][28]} achieving linkage and mutual promotion of teaching and research, and comprehensively improving.

Second, It is necessary for the management to coordinate and fully mobilize various positive factors, optimize the macro factors such as the research environment, research conditions, research assessment and reward system of college English teachers, and strive to promote the diversified development of college English teachers by refining relevant research regulations and reward policies, establishing a development platform, linking research with excellence evaluation, professional title evaluation, and study abroad visits, reward outstanding research achievements, and effectively support college English teachers' research in terms of policies, actions, and emotions, and eliminate unfair phenomena in research assessment.^{[19][20]} Meanwhile, universities and foreign language departments (university English departments) need to persistently cultivate and continuously strengthen the research awareness of college English teachers, and form a strong research atmosphere through different channels. Enrich and enrich academic resources, encourage, guide, and support college English teachers to achieve joint improvement and positive interaction in teaching quality and research level.

Additionally, college English teachers emphasize the importance of a supportive and collaborative research culture within the institution by fostering a sense of community and provide a support system for teachers; and integrating college English teachers into an academic team composed of professors, associate professors, and doctoral students with strong research abilities, and form a cooperative operating mechanism in research direction, research ideas, research methods, and paper writing; highlighting the key points in teaching and research, benchmark the forefront, and carry out basic, systematic, and long-term research cooperation; and encouraging college English teachers to apply for various research projects at all levels and among their research backbone; Actively involving students in related research, innovation, and entrepreneurship projects, and achieve a win-win situation by guiding students to improve their research awareness and abilities, as well as their own research abilities. This can help alleviate research anxiety and encourage collaboration and innovation.

In addition, schools and the government should strengthen the support and incentives for research and establish relevant policies and management mechanisms to provide teachers with better research environments and conditions^[20]. The importance of providing training and support in research methods and skills are also emphasized. By creating opportunities for college English teachers to continuously research and recharge, support their participation in domestic and international academic seminars, encourage teachers to take postgraduate and doctoral courses and various types of further education. By equipping teachers with the necessary tools and knowledge, they can feel more confident in their research abilities and reduce anxiety. A more balanced workload will allow teachers dedicate their time and resources for research, which involves reducing teaching responsibilities or providing dedicated research periods to ensure teachers have sufficient time and energy to focus on their research projects.

5. Conclusion

Research anxiety among college English teachers poses certain challenges to their sustainable research development. Through the theoretical research and empirical analysis of college English teachers' research anxiety, it has provided a theoretical support and practical guidance for improving the quality of English education; it has provided teachers with effective psychological adjustment strategies to improve their psychological health and teaching level. Finally, this study can provide reference for the formulation of relevant policies and measures.

College English teachers themselves must face the urgent situation and challenges of comprehensive transformation, keep up with the forefront of international research in this field, more comprehensively enrich and integrate their knowledge structure, continuously strengthen their research awareness, improve their research ability, and effectively transform themselves into a new type of college English teacher

with excellent comprehensive qualities that is scholar oriented, adaptable to the needs of the knowledge economy era, and their sustainable research development can be promoted by strengthening teachers' research training, rationalizing teaching duties and administrative work, and increasing support and incentives for research.

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