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The future of education: "Freedom" as the foundation of the curriculum

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ABSTRACT

The Merdeka Curriculum is characterized by an innovative approach in the educational context that provides teachers and students with greater freedom to develop and manage learning processes that aim to increase students' creativity, initiative, and responsibility in facing dynamic changes in science. This article encourages further discussion and a deeper understanding of the curriculum to create a more effective and appropriate learning environment for students. This article also discusses the concept of freedom of learning and its relationship to thinking and innovation. The research method used is a literature study to collect and analyze information from previous studies. The findings and discussion relate to the determination of the 2020 independent curriculum, its differences from the previous curriculum, and its impact on teaching staff and students. One important outcome of the self-paced curriculum is the emphasis on developing cultural agility as an important skill for future professionals.

ABSTRAK

Kurikulum Merdeka bercirikan pendekatan inovatif dalam konteks pendidikan yang memberikan kebebasan lebih besar kepada guru dan siswa untuk mengembangkan dan mengelola proses pembelajaran yang bertujuan untuk meningkatkan kreativitas, inisiatif dan tanggung jawab peserta didik dalam menghadapi perubahan dinamis ilmu pengetahuan. Artikel ini mendorong pembahasan lebih lanjut dan pemahaman lebih dalam mengenai kurikulum, dengan tujuan menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang lebih efektif dan sesuai bagi siswa. Artikel ini juga membahas tentang konsep kebebasan belajar dan hubungannya dengan pemikiran dan inovasi. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah studi literatur untuk mengumpulkan dan menganalisis informasi dari penelitian-penelitian sebelumnya. Temuan dan pembahasan terkait dengan penetapan kurikulum mandiri tahun 2020, perbedaannya dengan kurikulum sebelumnya, serta dampaknya terhadap tenaga pengajar dan siswa. Salah satu hasil penting dari kurikulum mandiri adalah penekanan pada pengembangan ketangkasan budaya sebagai keterampilan penting bagi para profesional masa depan.

Kata Kunci: Inovasi; inovasi kurikulum; kurikulum; kurikulum merdeka

INTRODUCTION

The Kurikulum Merdeka characterizes an innovative approach to education that provides greater freedom for teachers and students to develop and manage the learning process. At its core, the Kurikulum Merdeka aims to increase learners' creativity, initiative, and responsibility in facing dynamic changes in science and life's challenges in the modern era. This approach provides greater flexibility and supports diversity in learning approaches so that it can be tailored to each individual's unique needs and potential. By applying this concept, education is hoped to provide a deeper and more relevant understanding while creating a learning environment that motivates and empowers the next generation (Anggadwita et al., 2021; Rahmelia et al., 2022).

Merdeka Belajar, according to Nadiem Anwar Makarim as Minister of Education and Culture, is giving freedom and autonomy to educational institutions and freedom from bureaucratization. In Indonesia, the curriculum has undergone several changes and improvements in various periods, such as in 1947, 1964, 1968, 1973, 1975, 1984, 1994, 1997 (Kurikulum 1994 Revisi), 2004 (Kurikulum Berbasis Kompetensi), and 2006 (Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan). In 2013, through the Ministry of National Education, the government made changes again by introducing the Kurikulum 2013 (Kurtilas). Then, it was revised again in 2018, becoming the Kurikulum 2013 Revisi (Barlian & Iriantara, 2021). The curriculum was changed to a Kurikulum Merdeka in the face of the dynamics of the times that continue to advance and develop.

Curriculum development is one of the instruments to improve the quality of education. Appropriate educational policies will be seen by implementing the applied curriculum because "curriculum is the heart of education," which determines the course of education (Munandar, 2017; Nurliani et al., 2023). The curriculum changes show that the principles of education must be able to adjust to the development of the times without leaving the cultural values of the relevant community and sustainably following existing developments in society (Prasetyo & Hamamami, 2020; Dhani, 2020). Merdeka Belajar is an authority on thought and innovation (Ainia, 2020). By examining the dynamics of the Kurikulum Merdeka in-depth, this article aims to outline the challenges faced and identify innovations that can be implemented to answer the challenges of the future of education. Innovation in the curriculum can provide provisions for various parties to prepare for a better future (Suwandi & Alfat, 2022). This form of innovation is not limited to the use of technology. However, it can take the form of ideas, ideas, implementation, sources, or other things that can influence the sustainability of implementation.

Through this in-depth understanding of the curriculum, it is hoped that readers can engage in a discussion about the fundamental changes needed to create a learning environment that is more efficient, relevant, and responsive to the needs of learners in an ever-evolving era. Researchers took a research sample of students in junior high school. The theme of this article is "Challenges and Innovations in Transforming the Learning Curriculum Towards the Future of Education," specifically highlighting the self-contained curriculum approach that has gained significant popularity among current junior high school students and teachers and has become a curriculum that teachers and students widely use.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of "Freedom" in Education

It is important for all parties dealing with the world of education to first understand the concept of "freedom" in this Kurikulum Merdeka, especially for teachers adjusting to the new curriculum concept through training provided to improve competence. The word "freedom" refers to independence, allowing schools and students to learn anywhere and anytime freely, and students can use various learning resources to find information and learning materials (Rosmana et al., 2023). Merdeka here emphasizes the concept of education that is more flexible, adaptive, and relevant to student's needs and the times' challenges (Ramdani & Kusumandari, 2024). The Kurikulum Merdeka is a strategy to improve the quality of education in Indonesia (Retnaningsih & Khairiyah, 2022). The implementation of this curriculum refers to the attitude of independence, namely the ability to take full responsibility for student learning and being able to take the initiative in overcoming problems and challenges in the learning process (Sanova et al., 2022; Mulawarman, 2021).

Innovation in Education Curriculum

The concept of independent learning leads to the ability to contribute well in demanding economic improvement for learners to learn freely (Marisa, 2021). So, what distinguishes it from the application of the previous curriculum is forms of innovation. Among other things, in the Kurikulum Merdeka, if the previous curriculum or the 2013 curriculum, learning still depends on educators. Students are important in implementing learning (Albirru, 2023; Zidan & Komariah, 2023). Through a different approach from the traditional curriculum, the Kurikulum Merdeka seeks to create a more dynamic and challenging learning environment (Anwar et al., 2023; Syahbana et al., 2024; Anwar et al., 2023; Zaini & Wahib, 2022), through enlivened freedom. The Kurikulum Merdeka presents learning that encourages students to think critically, analyze information, evaluate evidence, make conclusions, and link different concepts (Wahyuni et al., 2023). The Kurikulum Merdeka should be implemented appropriately and improve the 2013 Curriculum, which must be accompanied by appropriate policies (Ishak, 2021; Angga et al., 2022).

Implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka

Every curriculum always contains goals inspired by the field of education, namely student learning outcomes (Anggraini et al., 2022). In the Kurikulum Merdeka, differentiated learning is one of the efforts in a series of lessons that pay attention to the needs of students in terms of learning readiness, student learning profiles, interests, and talents (Aprima & Sari, 2022). Changing the curriculum is difficult and requires readiness and thorough socialization from various parties (Krishnapatria, 2021; Mayasari & Rahmattullah, 2023). Various applicative actions hold teachers and students normalization the journey as a pilgrimage of the Kurikulum 2013 to the Kurikulum Merdeka; there is learning that supports student creativity because the Kurikulum 2013 is included in the current curriculum, namely the Kurikulum Merdeka (Kristiani et al., 2023). So that both are still equally intersecting. Furthermore, some factors hinder the implementation of this curriculum, for example, the lack of implementor capabilities (Redana & Suprapta, 2023), the problematic application of

technology in schools in terms of costs, limited teaching materials, and teacher abilities in the IT field (Iskandar et al., 2023), constraints on the preparation of the operational curriculum (Ardianti & Amalia, 2022), resource readiness, teacher understanding and readiness, limited time and space (Maharani et al., 2023).

METHODS

This article applies the literature study method, which involves collecting, understanding, and learning theories from various literature relevant to the article's topic. In the research context, there are four stages of literature study: equipment preparation, bibliography preparation, time organization, and reading or recording research literature. Data collection in this study was done through search and construction methods from various sources, such as books, articles, and previous research. Literature from multiple references must be critically analyzed to support propositions and ideas.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The Kurikulum Merdeka was established in 2020, accompanied by Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Nomor 3 Tahun 2020 concerning Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM). In this Kurikulum Merdeka, there are many significant differences when compared to the 2013 and 2006 curricula. This is due to the educational vision and mission, which is increasingly developing as time goes by. However, this rapid development of innovation has led to the emergence of new issues or new challenges faced by teaching staff and students. The impact of this curriculum includes the development of cultural agility, which is considered the main ability prospective professionals must have in the 21st-century era.

The effect of the spread of Covid-19 in 2020 - 2021 caused children's learning motivation to decrease. Apart from reducing the effectiveness of student learning, changes in the curriculum and studying technological developments due to the distance learning process during corona have made many students in Indonesia lose their motivation to continue their studies. Barriers or constraints to Distance Learning have 3 group classifications: obstacles related to learning activities, barriers related to technology, and student's personal and environmental obstacles (Octaberlina & Muslimin, 2020; Yudhistira & Murdiani, 2020). Not only developing the educational vision and mission, the government must also pay attention to the major related efforts that should be made to overcome problems that arise as the Kurikulum Merdeka progresses in 2023.

Some issues or challenges that are often faced and so far no policy addresses. Achieving Indonesia's vision and mission in 2030 will be hampered if quality human resources and adequate facilities and infrastructure do not support it. According to IMF predictions, in 2040, Indonesia will not yet enter the top 10 world economies. This is different from China, where the IMF's forecasts in 2006 are getting closer to reality, and can even be achieved more quickly because China currently occupies the second position after the US (see: https://www.imf.org/-/media/Files/Publications/CR/2024/English/1CHNEA2024002.ashx). This situation is not following Indonesia's updated vision, which targets becoming the fifth

largest country in the world with a focus on GDP per capita reaching 23,199 USD, indicating the need for more intensive acceleration efforts.

Conversely, the Industrial Revolution caused a low interest in reading in society. The education system related to this problem can give rise to new issues, such as the younger generation being unprepared and lacking skills in various fields. Results-based education, or Outcome-based Education (OBE), is important in education management. It is related to decreasing the community's literacy level (Faustyna, 2023). Based on a 2012 UNESCO survey, Indonesia is said to have the lowest interest in reading in Southeast Asia, only reaching 0.001%. This situation is a major issue that could hinder the achievement of the vision and mission of Indonesian education in the 2030-2045 period.

Based on Law Number 12 of 2012 concerning Higher Education, universities have the right to plan their implementation. However, Article 35, paragraph (1) emphasizes that the curriculum must follow national standards. The curriculum consists of four elements: learning objectives, learning materials, learning processes to achieve the goals, and assessment. The Graduate Learning Outcomes (CPL) formulation uses the Indonesian National Qualifications Framework (KKNI) descriptors for the specific Knowledge and Skills category. At the same time, the National Higher Education Standards (SN-Dikti) can be applied to the General Attitudes and Skills category. However, this curriculum is based on eight (8) National Education Standards, eight (8) National Research Standards, and eight (8) National Community Service Standards.

National Education Standards

In Indonesia, the Standar Nasional Pendidikan (SNP) are a reference framework for developing curricula, learning processes, and assessments at all levels of education. In the Indonesian context, there are eight national education standards which cover the following aspects:

1. Content Standards (SI): Presents information regarding the qualifications required by students at each level of education, including subjects, local content, and additional.
2. Process Standards (SP): Provide guidelines for implementing the learning process involving teachers, students, and learning resources.
3. Graduate Competency Standards (SKL): Determine the minimum level of competency that students in various educational levels, including knowledge, skills, and attitudes, must possess.
4. Standards for Educators and Education Personnel (SPTK): Establish criteria, competencies, and work procedures for educators and education personnel.
5. Facilities and Infrastructure Standards (SSP): Establish requirements for facilities and infrastructure that support the learning process.
6. Management Standards (SP): Establish guidelines for managing educational institutions at the academic unit level.
7. Financing Standards (SPM): Establish guidelines regarding sources of education financing, both from the government and other parties.
8. Assessment Standards (SNP): Provides information about the principles, procedures, and assessment tools used to assess student competency achievement.

National Research Standards:

National Research Standards refer to the basic criteria that regulate the research system in all universities in all jurisdictions of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia Azan et al. In their book titled "*Teknik Penulisan Karya Tulis Ilmiah: Panduan Praktis untuk Dosen, Guru dan Mahasiswa*". There are eight main aspects of this national research standard.

1. Research Results Standards
   Research result standards cover important aspects of research. Research results refer to all findings discovered during research activities carried out following applicable protocols and standards. The study's main aim is to contribute to the progress of science and technology and improve the welfare of society. Research results should be publicized unless they have a negative impact, are detrimental, or are confidential. Publication methods can be in the form of seminars, publications, patents, and so on. All efforts that help disseminate research results to the wider community must be prioritized.

2. Research Content Standards
   The second research standard covers aspects of research topics, which involve two types of research: basic and applied. In terms of research content, the research content must meet the specified requirements. Basic research is oriented toward research results, such as explanations or discoveries that can anticipate new symptoms, phenomena, rules, models, or postulates. The main focus of basic research is the depth and breadth of research content. Both basic and applied research should include research material of a specific nature of national interest, which must consider the general public's interests. Applied research is expected to focus on innovation or development of science and technology. The research results or output produced can then be used or implemented easily.

3. National Research Standards
   National Research Standards involve aspects of the research process, which means that each stage or research process must comply with certain standards: a) Research activities include planning, implementation, and reporting b) Research must systematically comply with scientific principles and methodology that are adapted to academic and scientific autonomy. c) quality, work safety, health, comfort, and security for researchers, society, and the environment must be considered.

4. Research Assessment Standards
   Comprehensive evaluation of research activities includes quality, suitability of procedures, sustainability of results with criteria, and other factors. Assessment of the research process and results must at least meet the following requirements: a) educational, to motivate researchers to continue to improve the quality of research; b) objective in nature, measured based on criteria that are free from the influence of subjectivity, c) accountable, carried out using criteria and procedures that are clear and understood by researchers, and d) transparent, where all stakeholders can access procedures and assessment results.

5. Researcher Standards

Not all university lecturers are permitted to research because national research standards also consider the researcher's aspects. These criteria involve the lecturer's compliance with national standards, which includes the ability to a) participate in research activities, b) understand research methods relevant to the scientific field in which the lecturer is engaged, and c) have the authority to carry out research activities following the guidelines set by Deputy for Strengthening Research and Development.

6. Standards for Research Facilities and Infrastructure
   The next standard covers all facilities and infrastructure required to implement research activities. The facilities universities use to support research are at least related to the study program disciplines and can also be used for learning activities and community service. All facilities available and provided by universities to support research activities are included in the scope of this standard. The infrastructure and facilities used must comply with quality and safety standards for work, security, comfort, health, and security, both for researchers and the community, as well as the surrounding environment.

7. Research Management Standards
   Next, research management standards emphasize that each university needs a team to implement research activities. This management is expected to be parallel or equivalent to research governance in other institutions. The responsibilities of teams or work units involved in research management include planning, implementing, controlling, monitoring, evaluating research activities, and reporting the results.

8. Research Funding and Financing Standards
   The next standard concerns the source and management of funds for research. Therefore, a minimum amount of funding has been determined that must be prepared to support the implementation of research activities. Funding sources can come from internal funds from universities, industry, government, and research partner institutions. Having standards for minimum funding limits helps ensure that researchers can conduct research without concerns about funding limitations. Allocation of research funds includes planning, implementation, control, monitoring and evaluation, reporting research results, and research dissemination.

National Standards for Community Service

1. Standards for Community Service Results
   The first national standard for implementing community service is the achievement of program results. Program results are expected to meet established standards to ensure successful implementation and benefit target communities significantly. Various forms of community service outcomes can follow this standard, including a) Helping communities overcome problems by utilizing relevant research results and academic expertise, b) Using appropriate technology to meet community needs and problems, c) Distributing resources and learning activities such as mentoring, skills training, and the like, by utilizing science, technology, learning modules, and learning materials.

2. Content Standards for Community Service

The second National Standard for Community Service stipulates that service programs must utilize technology and scientific knowledge to provide solutions and convenience to the community within the scope of its program material. This program introduces technology and science, which is expected to be relevant and provide real benefits. The main goal is to improve the community's quality of life and welfare and serve as an example or tool for overcoming community problems. Apart from that, this program is also expected to provide policy recommendations that benefit society.

3. Community Service Process Standards

   Process standards involve criteria for activities' planning, implementation, and reporting stages. The aim is that this process standard can guide lecturers in organizing service activities in a structured, measurable, and programmed manner. It is hoped that the existence of this process standard can provide clarity in the flow of activities, including the initial stages, types of resources used, materials involved, and other relevant elements.

4. Community Service Assessment Standards

   An element in the assessment is the next National Standard for Community Service. The success of a service program can be measured if the program assessment meets national standards. These assessment standards determine the minimum level lecturers must meet when managing service programs. Lecturers are expected to be able to carry out their service with an educational approach and objective, accountable, and transparent assessment.

5. Standards for Implementing Community Service

   To fulfill this requirement, implementers, both teams and lecturers, must master methods of applying knowledge appropriate to their expertise, type of activity, and the complexity and depth of the activity's objectives. This implementation standard stipulates that implementers, lecturers, and teams must understand methods of applying knowledge following specifications, including areas of expertise, types of activities, and the complexity and depth of activity targets.

6. Facilities and Infrastructure Standards

   The university will support providing facilities and infrastructure that lecturers can use. Its existence is not only required to ensure the smooth running of service programs. The facilities and infrastructure provided by universities must also meet predetermined quality standards. This quality is equally important to ensure the service program runs smoothly and produces results according to expectations.

7. Management Standards

   Governance in community service programs must also comply with national standards that have been determined. This management covers the entire process, from planning, implementation, control, monitoring, and evaluation to reporting on community service

activities. The guide explains the various obligations that community service institutions must carry out, including:

- Prepare and develop community service program plans following the strategic plan.
- Prepare and develop regulations, guidelines, and internal quality assurance systems for community service activities.
- Facilitate the implementation of community service activities.
- Carry out monitoring, evaluation of implementation, and dissemination of service results to the community.
- Give awards to community service providers who excel.
- Utilize community service facilities and infrastructure at other institutions through collaboration.
- Conduct a needs analysis regarding the number, type, and specifications of community service facilities and infrastructure.
- Compile and submit reports on community service activities managed by him to the higher education database.

8. Funding and Financing Standards

The final standard relates to funding aspects, which must meet several criteria. The funding source for the program can come from internal university funds, can also be obtained from the government, and other institutions, both domestic and foreign institutions, and from funds from the community.

Discussion

However, even though there are issues/challenges experienced, there are solutions or innovations that can be a way out of the problems mentioned in the results. Several strategic solutions are needed to overcome discrepancies between efforts to achieve Indonesia's vision and mission in 2030 with IMF predictions and increase economic competitiveness so that Indonesia can enter the top 10 world economies by 2040.

Increasing Human Resources to improve the quality of education by focusing on developing skills in line with future industry needs. Encouraging innovation and research in higher education and supporting the development of expertise in various economic sectors (Chankseliani et al., 2021). Encourage training and lifelong learning programs to ensure employees can continue to follow developments in technology and knowledge. Besides that, Indonesia needs infrastructure development to develop long-term development plans to ensure adequate facilities and infrastructure (Sebayang & Sebayang, 2020). Accelerate key infrastructure projects such as roads, ports, airports, and telecommunications, and use modern technology to build efficient and sustainable infrastructure.

Indonesia needs to strengthen its industrial sector. Encourage economic diversification by developing industrial sectors that have high growth potential. Also, providing support to creative industries, information technology, high manufacturing, and other innovative sectors, and integrate technology and automation to increase productivity (Anantrasirichai & Bull, 2022). International Collaboration was important, too; Indonesia can cooperate with developed and developing countries to support technology and knowledge transfer and establish strategic partnerships with multinational companies to access global markets and

obtain foreign direct investment. Government reform is no less important to carry out government policy and governance reforms to increase efficiency, reduce corruption, and use information technology to improve public services and reduce bureaucracy (Chen & Aklikokou, 2021).

To overcome the problem of a weak reading culture and improve the quality of education to suit the demands of the Industrial Revolution, here are several solutions that can be implemented, especially with Outcome-Based Education (OBE). Curriculum reform means adopting an Outcome-Based Education (OBE) approach in curriculum preparation, focusing on achieving clear and measurable learning outcomes and developing a curriculum relevant to industry needs and technological developments, emphasizing 21st-century skills such as communication, collaboration, and problem-solving skills (Setia et al., 2023) and reading literacy development important to encourage reading literacy activities from an early age, both in the school environment and in the community (Komara & Hadiapurwa, 2023). Develop literacy programs that are interesting and relevant to students' interests and involve libraries and supporting technology.

Teacher training has a significant effect in training teachers regarding teaching strategies that can increase students' reading interest and integrate innovative learning methods and technology in teaching to make learning more interesting and relevant. Technology in education in the digital era is important by using educational technology such as e-learning, online learning platforms, and digital resources to improve the accessibility and quality of learning (König et al., 2020; Sarker et al., 2019). Digital resources encourage using interactive and engaging learning software to motivate students. Competency-based evaluation is important to develop an evaluation system to measure competency, achieve learning outcomes, and provide feedback to students to help them understand their progress and areas for improvement.

To overcome the problem of declining public literacy in Indonesia, especially with data showing low interest in reading need to improve the library development and access to reading materials. The library can increase the number and quality of libraries at all levels, including schools, public, and digital libraries, and ensure easy and free access to reading materials by promoting book donation campaigns and providing mobile libraries. Integrating literacy into the education curriculum can improve the educational curriculum by including integrated literacy programs at all levels, including learning to read, write, and speak effectively (Zhang et al., 2020). Develop learning activities that encourage reflection and deep understanding of reading material. Digital literacy campaign develops a digital literacy campaign to increase public understanding of the importance of literacy in the digital era. They are organizing digital literacy training for the community so they can use information technology and gain access to digital reading sources.

They involve the private sector and non-governmental organizations in supporting literacy programs, including funding, reading materials, and infrastructure support and building partnerships with media companies to disseminate literacy information through various platforms. Teacher empowerment provides training to teachers and literacy facilitators to teach using interesting and effective methods (Dahal, 2023). Encourage using project-based learning methods, discussions, and active involvement of students in literacy activities. Strengthening collaboration between universities and industry can make collaboration between universities and industry in the curriculum formulation process, to ensure that the

curriculum reflects the needs and demands of the world of work so that graduates can be better prepared to enter the job market.

They are seeing the complexity of the tertiary curriculum structure based on Undang-undang Nomor 12 Tahun 2012 Tentang Pendidikan Tinggi, especially the various national standards that must be followed. Integrating standards and reducing excessive standards encourage integrating national standards that have similarities or relevance to reduce the number of standards that must be met and conduct an in-depth evaluation of eight national standards for education, research, and community service to identify areas that can be integrated or simplified. It opens opportunities for universities to have flexibility in compiling their curriculum while complying with established national standards to provide creative space for universities to develop programs and learning methods that are innovative and responsive to the developing needs of society and industry.

CONCLUSION

This research explores the challenges and innovations in formulating the learning curriculum to meet the future of education in Indonesia. Over time, the country's curriculum has undergone several significant transformations and improvements. This research focuses mainly on the self-directed curriculum approach, which has gained wide acceptance among junior secondary school students and teachers. Curriculum development is considered a crucial instrument in improving the quality of education.

The discussion and research findings reflect the standalone curriculum implemented in 2020, which is substantially different from the previous curriculum in 2013 and 2006. The vision and mission of education have evolved in line with the changing times, resulting in rapid innovation. However, these developments have also brought new challenges for teachers and students. One impact of the standalone curriculum is the growth of cultural agility, considered a key competency for future professionals.

In conclusion, this research paper highlights the challenges and innovations in designing learning curricula for the future of education in Indonesia. The researcher aims to create a more optimal learning environment to prepare students for future challenges by focusing on the self-directed curriculum approach and in-depth analysis of its dynamics. The research findings emphasize the importance of Merdeka Belajar and innovation in shaping a generation ready to face the constant changes in this world. The research methodology uses a qualitative literature study approach, collecting information from various sources and critically analyzing the materials obtained.

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