

EDUCATIONAL REPORT ON THE EDUCATION OF VISUALLY IMPAIRED AS CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS AT THE ZAMBIA NATIONAL LIBRARY AND CULTURAL CENTRE FOR THE BLIND, LUSAKA

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ABSTRACT

This manuscript gives out the report on the education of children with special educational needs at Zambia Library and Cultural Centre for the Blind, Lusaka. The report established the historical background, mission statement, goals and objectives, organizational structure, roles and functions, range of services, staffing and staff development, material production and distribution, relationship with special schools and units, funding, community and parental involvement, challenges, lesson learnt and best practices. The report includes the background, conclusion and references. The study used qualitative method and the descriptive research design. Then observation checklist and interview schedule were the instruments used for collecting data. Data was analyzed manually. The findings were that the Zambia National Library and Cultural Centre for the Blind and its services were not known by all educators and learners with visual impairment. It was also found that the library is doing a recommendable service which need to be supported or cannot be overemphasized. However, due to financial constraints not all needs are met. The recommendations were that the library should continue sourcing for funds and make its services known to all educators and learners with visual impairment.

Keywords: library, cultural center, Blind and Access Education.

INTRODUCTION:

Education of learners with visual impairment requires the concerted effort of services from different service providers in the communities. One of the service providers is Zambia Library and Cultural Centre for the Blind. Despite this centre being available in a Zambian community very few institutions and educators who are giving education to learners with visual impairment as well as learners themselves are aware of this service. Hence the purpose of the study was to give a report in order to establish the services and assistance available at Zambia Library and Cultural Centre for the Blind which learners with visual impairment can access to better their education achievement with a view of living independent sound economic life after school.

The Problem :

Zambia National Library and Cultural Centre for the Blind train learners with visual impairment in various skills for a certain period of time. Students during this time have the opportunity to learn practical skills needed for their education and life. Knowledge of whether all the learners with visual impairment and educators are aware about these services or not is not known because it has not been reported and documented, the reason this study has been instituted. This study therefore meant to answer the question, “what are the services offered by the Zambia Library and Cultural Centre for the Blind and are they known by all educators and learners with visual impairment?”

Purpose of the study:

The purpose of the study was to generate a report about the services offered by the Zambia Library and Cultural Centre for the Blind and make their services known to all educators and learners with visual impairment. Generating the report is of great importance and it will help learners with visual impairment and educators as key stakeholders to uphold faith in the quality of this library training in the country.

Significance of the study:

This study would help all learners with visual impairment and educators to be aware about the services being offered at the Zambia Library and Cultural Centre for the Blind. It would also act as a review for the library and an appreciation of the services being offered. This will help learners with visual impairment that needs to learn skills in order to be successful academically.

LIMITATIONS:

The study revealed the services being offered by the library and how it operates from the library staff’s point of view. Thus the study was limited to observation comments that could have been made by learners with visual impairment and educators, hence the interpretation is based on what was reported and not all that goes on during the training, for example braille lessons were not reported from educators and learners point of view.

Aim of the study:

The aim of the study was to bring to light the services that are being offered by Zambia Library and Cultural Centre for the Blind to all educators and learners with visual impairment.

Research Objectives:

The study was guided by the following objectives

- To establish the services being offered at Zambia Library and Cultural Centre for the Blind.
- To give the report on the goals, objectives, history, mission, roles and functions of the library.
- To establish the relationship of the library with other educational institutes.
- To report on financial, community and parental support.
- To establish the challenges faced by the library.

Research questions:

The study answered these questions.

- What are the services being offered at Zambia Library and Cultural Centre for the Blind?
- How did the library began and for what purpose?
- What are the roles and functions of the library?
- How is the relationship between the library and other educational institutions
- Are there financial, community and parental support received by Zambia Library and Cultural Centre for the Blind?
- What challenges Zambia Library and Cultural Centre for the Blind is faced with?

LITERATURE REVIEW:

(Smith, 1988) defined a learner with visual impairment as a person who has no vision or whose visual acuity is so limited. In other words a person with visual impairment cannot use the sense of sight or can have a reduced or limited vision.

The persons with visual impairment are composed of two groups or types. To start with one of the groups is composed of the partially sighted those with low vision and secondly, the other group comprised of those who are totally blind those with no sight at all. This means that when learning the partially sighted depend heavily on large print materials while those who are totally blind depend totally on braille materials as mode of communication. This is supported by Rosenberg et al (2011) stated that, intervention in the life of a blind child requires the use of braille material to a blind learner and large print to a partially sighted learner. In addition, Bruce et al (1997) purports that to learn much better the learners whether partially sighted or totally blind depend heavily on the use of the remaining senses of hearing, touch, smell and kinesthetic. This implies that the sense of hearing act as a compensatory sense to the sense of sight being lost when using the required materials. The sense of hearing is used by learners with visual impairment to interpret what is taught in classrooms using learning materials. Penda et al (2015) stated that by using the sense of hearing the learner with visual impairment can make use of or listen to audiotaped text books, using a live reader, CDs, and MP3 players, voice recorders, speech synthesizer and acquire academic knowledge and skills. Then the sense of touch is used for tactile activities such as reading of braille materials and noticing other objects especially to the learners who are blind. As stipulated by (Akinobu, 2000) that, learners can use hands and fingers as searching tools to acquire information and skills. Learners with visual impairment can as well acquire academic information and skills about objects by holding, examining and exploring real objects. Then the sense of smell is used for noticing different items or materials such as chemicals in the classroom. This is supported by Penda et al (2015) that by using the sense of smell learners with visual impairment can know names of some chemicals for science subject such as chemistry even after a long period of time. Then, kinesthetic help learners with visual impairment in terms of movement, walking, skipping and participation in classroom activities according to the type of materials being used. This is because creativity help learners with visual impairment do things practically and imaginatively. Like (Sternberg, 1988) (Kennedy, 2003) who found that learners with visual impairment can do things practically in the following ways; by using their imaginations and ideas and put them into practice or make new things. For example, by using their imaginations and ideas learners with visual impairment can use computers, type using the key board, write and read braille, use cell phones, orient themselves and move in environment alone or with minimal help from others, compose braille, stories, songs, play musical instruments. Evidence for creativity can be seen in the work of Louis Braille. For example Louis Braille was a blind person who invented braille we use today.

It should be known that human beings have a centre in the brain that deals with space, shape and form (Henshaw, 2012). This centre can be reached through touch and vision. If a person has no vision, he or she can reach this centre by using other senses, perception, touch and creativity. Furthermore, (Axel, 2003) discovered in her study that, better method needed for best possible academic participation and achievement for the learners with visual impairment, is the use of the skills such as touch, cognitive, creativity and perception crucial to their education.

The large print and braille materials are scarce in schools where these learners are found. Despite the effort by the Ministry of Education to provide these materials they are still not adequate. As a result the Zambia Library and Cultural Centre for the Blind in Lusaka offer this service to both the learners with partial sight and those who are totally blind and these cannot be overemphasized (Constitution, 2004).

In this manner the Zambia Library and Cultural Centre for the Blind is vital in the education of the learners with visual impairment because of the service it renders to help these learners to have relevant materials and skills for their effective education which leads to their independence and self-reliance.

METHODOLOGY:

This section presents the methodology employed in this study. Qualitative method was used in order to satisfy the main objective of the study and to obtain answers to the research questions.

RESEARCH DESIGN:

Since the study sought to establish the services being offered at Zambia Library and Cultural Centre for the Blind a descriptive research design was used. According to (Mukul & Deepa, 2013) descriptive research deals with the description of the state of affairs as it exists at present. The study used descriptive research design and fitted well

with the study because it describes the study of particular situation at particular time. It also fitted well because the study used qualitative method which is mainly concerned with the description research findings.

Population Target:

The study targeted all 27 library staff at Zambia Library and Cultural Centre for the Blind

Study Sample:

The total sample composed of 10 staff at Zambia Library and Cultural Centre for the Blind.

Data collection tools and Techniques:

Data was collected using interview and observation checklist. This was done in order to collect data which was reliable and valid.

DATA ANALYSIS:

Analysis was done manually. Interview analysis was used to analyze the data collected from library staff. The observation checklist was also studied and analyzed to examine their adequacy to fully assess the services being offered at the library.

THE FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION:

Historical Background:

The finding as reported by one respondent was that, the Zambia National Library and Cultural Centre for the Blind was born out of the initiative of one Zambian man called James Mwitwa who is a founder. The same respondent went on to say that, He generated this idea at the time he went for studies in 1990 under the Finish Federation of Visual Handicapped in America at Academy Minnesota State. The other respondent explained that, Mwitwa was inspired by the work of the man called Mr. Arvokavinine who founded the similar type of library of which they held a centenary celebration for it. The same respondent indicated that, during the celebration there was a pledge to give 5, 000 United States dollars equivalent to Finish Mark worth 10, 000.00 to any developing country to start the same type of library. The respondent further stated that, this was a coincidence with Mwitwa's interest and his presence during the celebration thus the pledge was given to Zambia through him. One respondent narrated that, money was given for the construction of the Zambia Library and Cultural Centre for the Blind in Lusaka and was approved by the Foreign Affairs for Finish as a result construction of the Zambia Library and Cultural Centre for the Blind in Lusaka was done in 1991.

Another respondent said that, on 21st August in 1993 the Library was opened and was called the National Zambia Library and Cultural Centre for the Blind and is still of its kind. The other response from two respondents was that, the library facilities became a gift to the Zambia National Federation of the blind as a mother board.

The study also revealed through one respondent that, the Zambia National Library and Cultural Centre for the Blind works with other libraries, institutions such as units, schools, colleges, universities and organizations dealing with visually impaired persons.

These findings concerning the background of the Library according to the research was a response to a particular need of effective and equitable education for learners with visual impairment and need to be highly valued.

Mission Statement:

The mission statement for the Zambia National Library and Cultural Centre for the Blind was reported by one respondent to aim at promoting literacy and the reading culture among the persons with visual impairment. Another response from one respondent was that, the main aim behind this statement is to ensure that the persons with visual impairment access education.

The researcher's point of view while embarking on these research results concerning the mission statement equally supports it because of its aim of promoting literacy however not all learners with visual impairment are aware of this statement and they need to be aware of it to yield results in their lives.

Goals and Objectives:

One respondentsaid that, the goals and objectives of the Zambia National Library and Cultural Centre for the Blind were as follows; Firstly, the library aim at producing and providing educational material and other reading and information material for the visually impaired such as braille material, audio material, large-print or electronic format. Secondly, another respondent indicated that, the library aims at offering Braille literacy course to the newly visually impaired. Thirdly, another respondent stated that, the library aim at promoting and providing cultural activities such as music, literature, theatre, handcrafts to the visually impaired. Fourth response from one respondent was that, the library aim at networking with other libraries and related institutions

at national and international levels to minimize exchange of information and other resources. Lastly, the respondent explained that, the library aim at advocating and lobbying the government and other related organization to enable the visually impaired access educational information. These findings were similar to what was discovered by Bruce et al (1997) who purports that to learn much better the learners whether partially sighted or totally blind depend heavily on the use of the remaining senses of hearing, touch, smell and kinesthetic. These senses were taken into account at the library.

Depending on these research results concerning the goal and objectives of the library, the researcher feels that, the library promote education for the visually impaired through the production and provision of academic information, materials, and technical skills such as computer literacy, music skills, and recording of music at the studio found at the library which need to be made aware to all these learners.

Organizational Structure:

During the time of study it was discovered that, the organizational structure at the Zambia National Library and Cultural Centre for the Blind was reported to consist of the Director who sees to it that the library function well and source for funds from donors for the library. The other response was that, the finance officer is part of the structure and is accountable for the institute funds and work in liaison with the Director in financial matters for the smooth running of the institution. Then the other respondent revealed that, the structure as well consists of the head for sections such as the studio, transcription, main library, music, computer and literacy and the head at the studio keep and maintain the equipment found at the studio and see to it that there is instilling of the recording skill into the persons with visual impairment at the studio. The respondent further said that, at the transcription section the head see to it that material is produced or transcribed from ink into Braille material and distributed into the established centers throughout the country where the persons with visual impairment can accesses them. The other response by another staff was that, the head of the library is accountable for library material such as braille, audio, large-print or electronic format and make sure that reading service is given to the learners or persons with visual impairment. Then one staff stated that, the head at music section is the custodian of musical instrument and instill the skill of playing musical instruments and the head of computer literacy see to it that computer skills are given to the persons with visual impairment.

The response from one respondent was that, the structure also consists of librarians who give library services to the blind and partially sighted and there are general workers and these are security officers, the secretary and gardener. ‘The security officer sees to it that the library is kept safely and thus attend to all visitors and direct them according to their needs’ as reported by one respondent. The other response was that, these secretary attends to all visitors who wish to see the director and keep all records of the instructions and the gardener keeps the area clean by sweeping, slashing and making gardens for the library. This finding was in line with what (Penda, 2015) discovered in her study that there is need for authority structure and hierarchical structure in order to have effective organization and management in the modern institutions.

Depending on these findings the researcher’s point of view was that the library was found to be well organized due to its organizational structure and is of great help to assist in the smooth running of the institute.

Roles and Functions:

The roles and functions of the Zambia National Library and Cultural Centre for the Blind were reported that they fulfill the goals and objectives set for the library in the following manner.

It was observed that, the Library produces and provides educational materials and reading and information materials. For instance braille and large print materials are produced at the transcription section, audio materials are produced at the studio and electronic format are produced at the computer literacy section. The finding is similar to the what Rosenberg et al (2011) discovered and it states that, intervention in the life of a visually impaired child requires the use of braille material to a blind learner and large print to a partially sighted learner. The two respondents reported that, these materials are distributed into different centers established such as units, special schools and other selected centers to be accessed by the persons who are blind and partially sighted. Another respondent indicated that, apart from educational material production and distribution other necessary materials such as draft constitution are as well produced and distributed.

The other finding was that, the library offer braille literacy course to the newly visually impaired persons. This is done at the main library section.

It was also reviewed that, the library provides and promotes cultural activities to all persons with visual impairment such as music, theatre and handcrafts at the music section. For instance the persons with visual impairment were observed being trained at this music section on how to play musical instruments and how to compose songs. Musical instruments played were piano, guitars, accordion and many more. The finding was similar to Sternberg (1988) Kennedy (2003) who found that learners with visual impairment can do things

practically by using their imaginations and ideas such as play musical instruments.

Furthermore, it was narrated that, those found singing in the streets, doing nothing after completing school were picked and were given this skill so that they could compose songs, record and sell the tapes as a starting point and serve some money for their future training.

To a researcher this was evident enough to show that, probably some learners with visual impairment were not aware about the services being offered at the library.

The other finding was that, the library networks with other libraries and related institutions at national and international levels to maximize exchange of information and other resources. For example, one respondent said that, these institutions were special schools, units, colleges and universities and institutions that deal with education of the learners with visual impairment or specialist for these learners at national and international levels. The study also revealed that, the library do advocate and lobbying of the government and other related organization, through asking for assistance such as financially, information to make it easy for the persons with visual impairment to access the information.

Thus depending on the research results the researcher feels that the roles and functions being played were the core-business of the library and should be beneficial to all beneficiaries who are the learners with visual impairment in the country.

Range of Services:

During the time of study it was reported by some respondents that, the services at the Zambia National Library and Cultural Centre for the Blind ranges from reading skills, computer literacy, production and distribution of education material such as braille, audio, large-print and electronic type, braille literacy courses, provision of cultural activities such as music, theatre and handcraft. The other response was stated that, the library staffs were also lobbying and advocating government and related organization to enable the child access education. The other service reported by one respondent was that of offering of recording skills at the studio. Another respondent stated that all these skills are given free of charge to all individuals with visual impairment from grade one up to university.

It is with this background of empirical finding that the researcher similarly feels that the range of services being offered at the library are suitable for learners with visual impairment and are to be made known to all of them in the country.

Staffing and Staff Development:

The response of one respondent was that, the library had the total of 27 staff this was the number of the staff during the time of the study. The respondent further stated that, of the 27 staff two were working in the computer room, two at the studio, six at the library, one was working as a secretary, two were gardeners, two were financial officers, seven were at the transcription section, two were at music department and there was one director. The finding is similar to the "selection of an officer by technical qualification on entry and promotion level (Kilcullen, 2007, p. 1)", which brought about performing work more effectively concerning the organization and management of professionals.

When the library opened the staffing was fine up to 2003 in December when the Finish government pulled out. From that time staffing has been erratic due to inadequate funds as a response from one respondent.

Concerning staff development the director stated that, if funds are available the staff of the library is sponsored by the institution to further their studies and knowledge for the betterment of the institution.

The researcher's understanding was that, it might be that experiencing erratic staffing and staff development could be the reason why the library services were not reaching every individual with visual impairment and different institutions.

Material Production and Distribution:

The study reported that, material production and distribution at the Zambia National Library and Cultural Centre for the Blind has not been done adequately due to inadequate funds. But when the library was opened it was well equipped with all the equipment for production of material such as thermaform, perkinsbrailler, computers, studio machines due to donor funding from the Finish government as reported by one respondent. Thus distribution of the produced materials was relatively easy. Then another respondent pointed out that, the problem came in when Finish government pulled out. However, according to the report given by one respondent was that, for instance the director tried by all means to source for help and procured abraille printer and 5 computers to assist in the production of the material at the library.

It was further revealed by one respondent that, educational materials produced such as text books for different subjects together with other current relevant document such as draft constitution, audio material and electronic material these were reported to have been sent to approximately 35 library centers identified throughout the

country such as units, special schools and other areas where the persons who are blind access them from. This finding has revealed that, perhaps some learners with visual impairment could have been aware about the presence of the materials and not the library and its other services as viewed by the researcher.

Relationship with Special Schools and Units:

The study revealed that, the relationship of the Zambia National Library and Cultural Centre for the Blind with units was sound and the service is free of charge according to the report obtained from a respondent during the time of study. It was further reported by the same respondent that, the reason for this sound relationship is that units are not well developed, thus the institution has given first priority to it. However, special schools on the contrary were reported to receive the services from the library at a cost and it was paid by the Ministry of Education upon the school making awareness of their needs to the library. Another respondent narrated that, where the Ministry does not pay, the production and distribution of these materials to special schools from the library fail to take place.

Then another finding from two respondents was that, individuals who are visually impaired from special school, colleges and universities who approached the library for help or make their needs available to the library are given the services in terms of education and is done freely.

The findings of this study is similar to the findings of (Muzata, 2011) who stated that, some of the continuum of services for learners with disabilities which are suitable for their education are special units and special schools with the availability of the teaching and learning materials where the provision of the teaching and learning using these materials play a vital role in making them succeed academically.

The researcher's understanding of the study finding concerning sound relationship between the library and special units and schools as well as individuals who are visually impaired was that, the sound relationship was making the library achieve its aim of educating some learners with visual impairment in these settings where the materials were made available.

FUNDING:

Two respondents revealed that, the Zambia National Library and Cultural Centre for the Blind was well funded by the Finish government until the time they pulled out. Then one respondent added on to say that, from 2004 the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services has taken over. It was further reported that the Ministry was paying 12 million Zambian kwacha per month though not enough looking at the number of activities requiring funds. One respondent cited some example of payments such as those for workers, payment for electricity bill and other services offered to the individual with visual impairment. It was also furthermore reported by one respondent that they had a critical moment in terms of the funds despite the government paying them. However, on the other hand it was reported that, the Director was in forefront finding ways and means of addressing the financial crisis by sources funds from donors.

The research findings on the issue of funding is in line with what (Kausa, 2014) discovered that, funds in an institute contribute greatly to the successful running of the institute on the other hand if funds are not adequate the aim of institutions are not fully realized.

The researcher's point of view was that, the finding concerning funding would make beneficiaries understand the reason why some services may not be offered to them accordingly.

Community and Parental Involvement:

It was reported by one respondent that, there is community involvement at the Zambia National Library and Cultural Centre for the Blind. Another response from another respondent was that, the community was said to be composed of a well-established board which comprises the following representatives; 'ne representative from the Ministry of Community development and social services, another one from the Ministry of Education, two from Zambia National Federation for the Blind, one from cooperating partners, one from learning institutions for learners with visual impairment, one from Zambia Library Service, one from Zambia Library Association, one from Zambia Agency for persons with disabilities then lastly two from the community with interest of the persons with visual impairment'.

The other study findings as reported by two respondents was that, the board meets quarterly and their responsibilities are as follows; to formulate, monitor and evaluate the policy, to approve long term and short term plans for the library, to appoint sub-committees as need may arise, to approve annual budget, to appoint the director and senior officers such as heads of sections, to approve the engagement and dismissal of staff, to appoint the auditor, to advice the government through the responsible ministry and other stakeholders on matters concerning the needs of the library, to advice the director on matters of policy on library concerning the persons with visual impairment and to attend to any matter that needs attention. This was highly recommended

by the researcher because community involvement impacted positively to the running of the library. This is in line with finding of (Kausa, 2014) that, community involved in the education of learners with visual impairment yields positive results.

It was also reported by some respondents that parents are not involved in the running of the library the reason was that most of them were not well educated to fully understand the need of these materials or services for their children offered at the library and then others were not even aware about the library. However, parents needed to be fully involved as supported by (Ndhlovu, 2004) that, parental involvement is cardinal for the academic development of a learner with visual impairment of which the researcher is in agreement.

Concerning the finding about community and parental participation in the library services the researcher was with a view that, it was probably an indication that, not everyone new about these services being offered.

Lesson Learnt:

This study has revealed that, since the Zambia National Library and Cultural Centre for the Blind was opened there has been a lot of progress clearly noticed. These are the developments of the studio, production and distribution of Braille, large-print and audio materials as well as electronic format. The other development is the procurements of modern equipment such as computers and braille printers. There is also the development of imparting of technical skills into the learners with visual impairment such as computer literacy. There is also the development of musical section and imparting of skills such as playing of musical instruments and composing of songs and recording. These developments are in line with what (Axel, 2003) discovered in her study that, better method needed for best possible academic participation and achievement for the learners with visual impairment, is the use of the skills such as touch, cognitive, creativity and perception crucial to their education. Another development was to make education available to persons with visual impairment. The library management's ability to move forward despite the inadequate funding from the government is also another development.

To a researcher an explanation concerning the lesson learnt was that, the progress being noticed could be a clear indication that the staff have been working hard in order to achieve their aim of educating learners with visual impairment and that some of these learners have benefited from their efforts.

The Challenges Faced by the Library:

It was reported by one respondent that the Zambia National Library and Cultural Centre for the Blind faces the following challenges or teething problems; there is lack of adequate funds which make the services at the library become slow at times such as in terms of production and distribution of educational material, the payments for the running costs are not done as expected for instance salaries for workers are a bit low, electricity bills are not paid on time because of being too high because of the use of a lot of electrical appliances or equipment. Thus not all needs are met when they are made available at the library from units, schools, colleges, universities and individuals with visual impairment due to financial constraints.

The researcher's point of view was that, challenges being faced with might be the reason why the library services are not known to all people concerned.

Best Practices:

The response from one respondent was that, the best way they think of to do their services at the Zambia National Library and Cultural Centre for the Blind if funds are made available enough was to have branches throughout the country in order to offer effective library services to its potential users.

The researcher's view was that, this perhaps was the best way of addressing the problem of having some people such as learners with visual impairment and other institutions dealing with these learners not knowing the services offered by the library.

CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, the Zambia National Library and Cultural Centre for the Blind is doing a recommendable service which need to be supported or not to be overemphasized. It has helped greatly in helping persons with visual impairment access education. This is because the skills offered such as composing and recording of songs, computer literacy, cultural activities skills, reading skills are very vital in the education of persons with visual impairment in the sense that the skills help them fit in the society and contribute positively and greatly to it. The materials which are distributed to different stations throughout the country enable the persons with visual impairment to have access to education. It's my hope and trust that this piece of writing will make learners with visual impairment access education as their right.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Zambia National Library and Cultural Centre for the Blind should continue sourcing for funds in a variety of ways such as the use of fund raising ventures and asking from donors so that its service should not come to a standstill. It should make its service known through the use of public media because their services are not known by most people in the country such as potential users or persons with visual impairment, parents and some institutional leaders. The initiative of the Zambia National Library and Cultural Centre for the Blind of networking with other libraries and institutions serving persons with visual impairment and lobbying of government and other institutions is a good sign of cooperation and need to be continued. The government is encouraged to continue giving enough funds for the running of the Zambia National Library and Cultural Centre for the Blind so that the library can achieve its best practices. The individuals and institutions as well as donor agents are encouraged to come on board and support this highly recommendable noble course or service for persons with visual impairment for it to continue.

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