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Teaching through a pandemic: Challenges of Secondary English teachers in the new normal learning setting

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Chapter I INTRODUCTION

A. Background

The educational system in the Philippines has always been lacking. This can be seen in the quality of education. Despite being seen as 'strict' with 8-9 hours in school when compared to a typical American High School's 6-7 hours a day, the Philippine educational standards have deteriorated to such an extent that Filipino children are ranked the least proficient in *reading* among 87 nationalities evaluated (PISA, 2018). The decline is alarming when even the Department of Education's own National Achievement Test (NAT) 2019 results show that Filipino students fall below the minimum proficiency score of 75 percent. This flawed system has been highlighted even more during the pandemic when schools are forced to open by the government despite having no concrete plan and budget for the institution, the teachers, and the students. Faced with the effects of the pandemic plus topping it off with school responsibilities unprepared, students are not the only faction that suffers from it, the teachers also took the blow—probably even more. Though this is not to compare the struggles of which faction, this is to emphasize that the teachers' roles in this new learning setting are critical in ensuring that students learn successfully, especially, in this context, for English teachers.

Many institutions moved their learning activities online to keep up with the government's back-to-school mandate, however, aside from online learning, most public schools especially in remote areas employed modular instruction through printed self-learning modules. Additionally, most students (Cos et al., 2021; Manlangit et al., 2020; as cited in Agayon et. al., 2022) and parents opted the modular distance learning among other alternative modalities. As a result, teachers' capacity to give high-quality training and preparation for students was challenged. In this new learning setting, teacher/student communication does not have the same effect as face-to-face learning. Teachers can't provide effective washback (feedback needs to be delivered immediately) which is important for English learners. Teachers can't also incorporate activities that could significantly help English learners because it is not conducive for online/module learning. Though there are tens of alternative activities out there, there are still some that can't replace certain activities. These are some of the challenges (English) teachers faced but we can already see how the pandemic really drove teachers with a crucial role in facilitating and monitoring the student's development even in this new learning setting. Dangle and Sumaoang (2020, as cited in Agayon, 2022) also asserted that the key challenges that occurred were the shortage of school finances in the creation and delivery of modules. Moreover, Cardullo et al. (2021) added that teachers were caught off guard for emergency remote instruction owing to a lack of distant education expertise as well as computer literacy.

Most often than not, society subconsciously directs its blame to the teachers whenever there is an issue with education. The society failed to realize that teachers also face different challenges due to the Pandemic and the changes it brought. This is an interest that leads to the researchers' reason for choosing the topic. Exploring deeper and identifying the challenges of English teachers during the pandemic provide solutions to improve and create teaching strategies and alternatives. Moreover, to address the issue of the educational system in the Philippines, exploring these challenges is more productive as the teachers are the ones who teach, and effective teaching comes with effective learning.

B. Problem(s) Statement

Learning through a pandemic isn't providing positive washback. Instead of giving the quality that the children deserve, the teachers are finding a way how to make quality education effective. Pandemic challenged a lot of students and teachers, emotionally, mentally, and physically. To alleviate Secondary level English teachers' challenges, the purpose of this action research is to find solutions and alternatives in the new learning system. And with that, we will be able to practice effective teaching and learning. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the barriers or challenges that Secondary English teachers face during the pandemic?
2. How can we alleviate the burdens Secondary English teachers experience during the pandemic to ensure quality education?

C. Research Objectives

This study examines the concerns and obstacles in teaching in the midst of the pandemic through the experiences of Secondary level English teachers, with the goal of developing strategic actions for teaching continuity. The objectives of this study are the following:

1. Identify the difficulties and barriers to learning that teachers faced during the COVID-19 crisis.
2. Recognize and employ the most effective approaches and modes for learning engagement and motivation of students.
3. Develop emerging themes from the experiences and challenges of teaching amidst the pandemic.

D. Research Significances

To ensure quality education in the midst of a pandemic, effective online instruction is needed. Some universities offer modular and some are via virtual interactions, in this way the learning will continue despite the challenges the pandemic brought. The present study will be beneficial to the Philippine government, as this will uncover unseen situations from the teacher's point of view during the new normal setting and new educational processes which they could cite for improving the educational system. Similarly, universities and learning institutions will benefit from this study as they will be aware of the circumstances English teachers faced during the new normal setting, thus helping them provide solutions to the said challenges which in turn could lead to quality education. Most importantly, the results of the present study will be beneficial for teachers as the solutions will give them better teaching experience(s) that alleviate their burdens (e.g. less administrative work, better alternatives). Lastly, the present study will give way to future researchers who wish to explore and/or improve the same area of problem as they could cite and review the challenges discussed in their study.

E. Research Scope

With how the pandemic affects the lives of the Filipino people, it is only natural that many sectors undergo unfavorable changes, one of them is the education sector. In view of this situation, this action research aims to identify the challenges teachers face during the pandemic. To fully analyze and comprehend the issues, the present study limits its scope to 10 Secondary level English teachers from Cagayan de Oro City, Misamis Oriental, wherein their challenges in teaching the English language in the new normal setting is being identified. Data will be gathered through open-ended narrative that allows the participants to share their experiences towards the new normal teaching setting, highlighting two key points 1) challenges encountered 2) alternatives employed. To this end, data gathering is expected to span around one (1) month depending on the availability of the participants. With such limitations, there is a need for further research related to identifying the challenges of teachers as the present study only covers English

teachers and their challenges. The present study do not and could not present the challenges of all the teachers in the secondary level.

F. Operational Definitions

Pandemic - An outbreak of an infectious illness, in this case, COVID-19, that has spread across a broad area, such as multiple continents or the entire world, impacting a significant number of people.

New Normal - It is the state in which an economy, society, or other entity settles after a crisis when this differs from the one that existed before the crisis began.

E-Learning - A learning approach that is based on formalized instruction but uses electronic resources. While teaching can take place in or out of the classroom, E-learning is defined by the use of computers and the Internet.

Virtual Learning Environment - It's a comprehensive software solution that supports and delivers an online learning environment. Digital media are used in the form of videos, chats, audio, and podcasts. The software tool allows users to communicate with one another and submit assignments.

Online Class - A class that is delivered through the Internet. Students can view their class syllabus and academic progress, as well as communicate with their classmates and course teacher, using a learning management system.

Modular Learning - As the name suggests, modular learning employs learning modules that allow students to learn independently. Modular learning is a type of distance learning that uses Self-Learning Modules (SLM) based on the most essential learning skills (MELCS) created by teachers with the assistance of curriculum developers.

Educational System - An education system includes all of the laws, procedures, and regulations that go into educating public-school kids at the federal, state, and local levels. Public financing, resource allocations, and funding mechanisms

Challenges - These are the things that require a lot of mental or physical work to do and hence put a person's abilities to the test.

Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Literature Review

Teaching and Learning in Times of Crisis

The teaching and learning process assumes a different shape in times of crisis. When disasters and crises (man-made and natural) occur, schools and colleges need to be resilient and find new ways to continue the teaching–learning activities (Chang-Richards et al., 2013). One emerging reality as a result of the world health crisis is the migration to online learning modalities to mitigate the risk of face-to-face interaction. Universities are forced to migrate from face-to-face delivery to online modality as a result of the pandemic. In the Philippines, most universities including Cebu Normal University have resorted to online learning during school lockdowns. However, this sudden shift has resulted in problems especially for learners without access to technology. When online learning modality is used as a result of the pandemic, the gap between those who have connectivity and those without widened. The continuing academic engagement has been a challenge for teachers and students due to access and internet connectivity.

Considering the limitation on connectivity, the concept of flexible learning emerged as an option for online learning especially in higher institutions in the Philippines. Flexible learning focuses on giving students choice in the pace, place, and mode of students' learning which can be promoted through appropriate

pedagogical practice (Gordon, 2014). The learners are provided with the option on how he/she will continue with his/her studies, where and when he/she can proceed, and in what ways the learners can comply with the requirements and show evidence of learning outcomes. Flexible learning and teaching span a multitude of approaches that can meet the varied needs of diverse learners. These include “independence in terms of time and location of learning, and the availability of some degree of choice in the curriculum (including content, learning strategies, and assessment) and the use of contemporary information and communication technologies to support a range of learning strategies” (Alexander, 2010).

One key component in migrating to flexible modality is to consider how flexibility is integrated into the key dimensions of teaching and learning. One major consideration is leveraging flexibility in the curriculum. The curriculum encompasses the recommended, written, taught or implemented, assessed, and learned curriculum (Glatthorn, 2000). Curriculum pertains to the curricular programs, the teaching, and learning design, learning resources as assessment, and teaching and learning environment. Adjustment in the types of assessment measures is a major factor amid the pandemic. There is a need to limit requirements and focus on the major essential projects that measure the enduring learning outcomes like case scenarios, problem-based activities, and capstone projects. Authentic assessments have to be intensified to ensure that competencies are acquired by the learners. In the process of modifying the curriculum amid the pandemic, it must be remembered that initiatives and evaluation tasks must be anchored on what the learners need including their safety and well-being.

Curriculum recalibration is not just about the content of what is to be learned and taught but how it is to be learned, taught, and assessed in the context of the challenges brought about by the pandemic. A flexible curriculum design should be learner-centered; take into account the demographic profile and circumstances of learners—such as access to technology, technological literacies, different learning styles and capabilities, different knowledge backgrounds and experiences - and

ensure varied and flexible forms of assessment (Ryan and Tilbury, 2013; Gachago et al., 2018). The challenge during the pandemic is how to create a balance between relevant basic competencies for the students to acquire and the teachers' desire to achieve the intended outcomes of the curriculum.

The learners' engagement in the teaching-learning process needs to be taken into consideration in the context of flexibility. This is about the design and development of productive learning experiences so that each learner is exposed to most of the learning opportunities. Considering that face-to-face modality is not feasible during the pandemic, teachers may consider flexible distant learning options like correspondence teaching, module-based learning, project-based, and television broadcast. For learners with internet connectivity, computer-assisted instruction, synchronous online learning, asynchronous online learning, collaborative e-learning may be considered.

The Role of Technology in Learning Continuity

Technology provides innovative and resilient solutions in times of crisis to combat disruption and helps people to communicate and even work virtually without the need for face-to-face interaction. This leads to many system changes in organizations as they adopt new technology for interacting and working (Mark and Semaan, 2008). However, technological challenges like internet connectivity especially for places without signals can be the greatest obstacle to teaching and learning continuity, especially for academic institutions that have opted for online learning as a teaching modality. Thus, the alternative models of learning during the pandemic should be supported by a well-designed technical and logistical implementation plan (Edizon, 2020).

The nationwide closure of educational institutions in an attempt to contain the spread of the virus has impacted 90% of the world's student population (UNESCO, 2020). It is the intent of this study to look into the challenges in teaching and learning continuity amidst the pandemic. The need to mitigate the immediate impact of school closures on the continuity of learning among learners from their perspectives is an important consideration (Edizon, 2020; Hijazi, 2020; UNESCO,

2020). Moreover, the teachers' perspectives are equally as important as the learners since they are the ones providing and sustaining the learning process. Teachers should effectively approach these current challenges to facilitate learning among learners, learner differentiation, and learner-centeredness and be ready to assume the role of facilitators on the remote learning platforms (Chi-Kin Lee, 2020; Edizon, 2020; Hijazi, 2020).

In De Villa & Manalo (2020), one of their participant mentioned that financial constraint hampers the preparation for online distance learning. There are required specifications of mobile phones, laptops, desktops, and other gadgets. And so, the upgrade entails finances. Teachers do not have the most appropriate devices to run an online distance learning since there is no provision for additional budget. Instruction-related challenge in online distance learning is rooted in financial difficulties. This hinders an effective and balanced teaching and learning system

Wolfinger(2016) researched the characteristics of adolescent online learners in Pennsylvania . The study focused on achieving entirely online virtual learning through the middle school years. Academics, social support, learner traits, and educational support were all investigated. The findings demonstrated the relevance of teachers in virtual learning, as well as how parents' engagement may help their children attain academic success. The International Association of Universities 2020 performed a survey on the impact of COVID19 on higher education institutions around the world. The study's findings revealed that the COIVD-19 issue had an impact on all of the participating institutes' activities. The findings also revealed a negative impact on activity quality and inequity in educational chances.

Ali (2017) investigated the use of Blackboard as a motivator in English language learning and teaching. The study discovered that some students were inspired to work more in their English classes utilizing the Blackboard platform, while others were demotivated to use it. At Qassim University in Saudi Arabia, Alturise (2020) did a study on learner and instructor satisfaction in an online learning paradigm utilizing the Blackboard platform. The study found that while e-

learning is a step forward in education, more effort is needed to develop online learning applications. During COVID-19, some researchers explore the challenges and obstacles in e-learning in relation to their educational environment and the facilities supplied by various institutes. The goal of this research is to identify the challenges faced by university students during the present global crisis, as well as potential solutions that can help students improve their performance and overcome these issues in the future.

Challenges of Teachers during the pandemic

Teachers encountered numerous challenges posed by the COVID-19 outbreak. Agayon et.al. (2022) employed a qualitative inquiry to determine the challenges encountered and coping mechanisms employed by teachers amid modular instruction. Themed findings showed that these teachers are greatly challenged in terms of learning quality transfer, module distribution and retrieval, students' difficulties in following instruction, power disruption, internet connection, and health risks posed by the pandemic. Nevertheless, these teachers dealt with these difficulties by employing their own coping techniques.

Another study (Gurung, 2021) present the various challenges faced by teachers in online teaching during Covid-19 pandemic and also present how this Covid-19 pandemic has changed the teaching methodology of the teachers. It was found that teachers faced a number of challenges but among all - reaching the students in the remote area and teaching numerical subjects was the biggest challenge. The reason was there is unavailability of strong internet access, no continuous supply of electricity, lack of income source of parents who cannot afford to buy a laptop or android mobile for their children.

De Villa & Manalo (2020) explored the lived experiences of secondary teachers in the Division of San Pablo City in the pre-implementation of distance learning in the new normal. Findings revealed that as education migrates to a New Normal, teachers make necessary preparations to equip themselves with distance learning. Though they face challenges which may hamper their work, they still

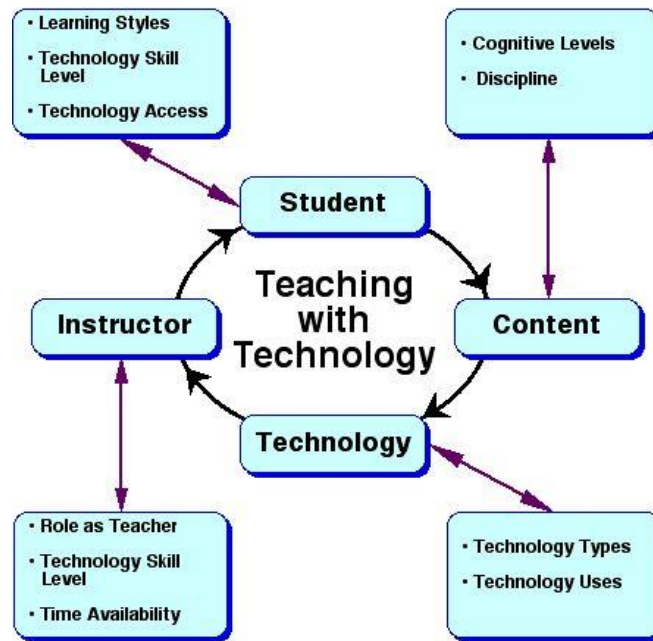
manage to cope with the new normal to continue their tasks. The higher offices and school authorities should work with teachers at the pre-implementation of distance learning to address their needs in resources and training to effectively facilitate the delivery of quality education for students.

B. Conceptual Framework

This study focuses on the impact of the pandemic to English Teacher's performance. The perspective of this study is to find solutions and ways on how effectively a teacher must do a class interaction during the pandemic.

The study used Bloom's Taxonomy (1956) is a hierarchical model of learning objectives. The model organizes individual educational tasks, such as comparing concepts and defining words, into six distinct educational categories: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. The six categories are organized in order of complexity. Bloom's Taxonomy gives educators a common language to communicate about learning and helps teachers establish clear learning goals for students.

Moreover, Piaget's theory of constructivism (1936-1950) which states that individuals construct meaning through action and experience, plays a major role in schools today. A constructivist classroom is one in which students learn by doing, rather than by passively absorbing knowledge. Constructivism plays out in many early childhood education programs, where children spend their days engaged in hands-on activities.



1.1 Diagram of teaching in a pandemic situation

The diagram shows strategies and ways on how effectively learning can be successful using technology. Since the learning ways are virtual and limited face-to-face, pertaining to use different alternatives to effective learning that is helpful to teacher's and student's point of view. Namely: Technology applications that will be used, styles, the teacher's function and to fit technology skill level.

The study analyze the possibilities of having a successful class despite the pandemic situation. Using Bloom's (1956) & Piaget's (1950) theories, in reflection to teaching and learning situation.

Also the diagram showing, connections and relationship that may use and build throughout the process. This framework, explains real life situation to teacher and student's situation in learning under a pandemic.

C. Action Hypothesis

The improvement and modification can be done through the cooperation of the student to the teacher's option. B.F. Skinner (1974), suggests that all behavior is a response to an external stimulus. In the classroom, behaviorism is the theory

that students' learning and behavior will improve in response to positive reinforcement like rewards, praise, and bonuses.

If teachers' challenges are resolved, effective online learning will be achieved.

If the teachers are given enough time to be prepared and adjust for the new normal setting, teachers' challenges will decrease.

If the internet connection in the Philippines are upgraded, online learning will be successful.

If alternative learning assessment that will suit the students' capability during the new normal setting are used, the students' learning performance will be effective.

If students are led to choose the assessment they prefer, the students' learning performance will be more motivated and active.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

The present study is action research that uses qualitative design to determine the challenges encountered and coping mechanisms employed by the teacher-participants; in this method, the researchers will gather findings in an interview format. The study deemed it necessary that an in-depth inquiry is appropriate to record the teachers' challenges and coping mechanisms as the pandemic continually posed shifts in the educational system. In addition, a qualitative approach is essential with the limited number of participants who are available and willing to share their stories.

B. Research Locale and Respondents of the Study

The respondents of this study are ten (10) randomly selected secondary-level English teachers who teach their classes online. To compare situations and expect different lapses and reasons and find solutions to effective learning. This study will be conducted in Cagayan de Oro City and is expected to span around one (1) month depending on the availability of the participants and situational circumstances.

C. Action Plan

Considering the nature of the present action research, the action plan will have to be implemented from the teacher's experiences—after the researchers gather their responses. Their recorded experiences and challenges will be the main driving force on how the government and learning institutions address the issue and what actions they take and implement. However, the present study will use the data of the existing related literature to know, understand, and prepare what actions to take regarding the challenges of English teacher during the new normal setting.

Teachers' preparation for distance learning modality

Effective command in distance learning requires a range of equipment which include computers, laptops, webcams, and internet modem (Brown, 2020 as cited in De Villa & Manalo, 2020). According to De Villa & Manalo (2020), teachers do not have complete devices to facilitate teaching in distance learning. Generally, the common devices and tools that the participants are preparing limits only to laptop, desktop, and pocket WIFI. In the current situation, electronic means and digital tools are considered essential to keep the constant communication among students and teachers, distribute educational materials, and access online platforms. The government will have to implement a plan in which teachers can access these materials. Moreover, aside from these devices, the internet connection of the country will have to be upgraded. It is one of the main reasons

why online learning in the Philippines was considered unsuccessful. Most of the plans will be futile if the internet connection will not be fixed.

Instructional delivery

The strategies which were commonly used in face-to-face classes are not applicable in distance learning. For the new normal, focusing on student-centered activities using inquiry based learning is difficult to implement in distance learning. Teachers cannot guide the students in their undertaking. Therefore, we have to reframe contextualization to fit in the context of the current modality. At this time of pandemic where learners will learn remotely, teachers should contextualize learning based on the adversity of times, availability of resources at home, and mastering the most essential competencies.

The teachers will have to modify the activities to suit the learner's needs. They will have to craft activities aligned with the most essential learning competencies when problems during classes occurs. Agayon, et.al (2022) states that if there is an internet connection problem, making simple activity sheets that are aligned with the competencies of the subject is necessary.

Although this is not the entirety of the challenges the teachers faced during their online teaching experience, it is enough to understand that most of their challenges are something they alone could not settle. With that said, for these plans to be successfully implemented, the researchers, teachers, students, and learning institutions will have to rely on the Philippines government. Their plans on the Philippine education will be the most effective and immediate action.

D. Data Collection Instrument and Technique

A consent form will be secured from the participating teachers and they will be oriented about the purpose of the study. To maintain anonymity, the names of the teachers who participated will be kept unknown all throughout the study. Having complied with all the required preliminaries, data will be gathered from Day 1 to 30. Face-to-face interview is not possible as the participants lived in the area where COVID-19 protocols are strict i.e. lockdown/ limited interactions, thus data

will be gathered through a recorded online interview using ZOOM. The interview will be an open-ended narrative that allows the participants to share their experiences with the new normal teaching setting, highlighting two key points 1) challenges encountered and 2) alternatives employed.

E. Data Analysis Technique

The researchers will use descriptive–correlational analysis to explain, display, or constructively summarize data points for patterns to emerge that fulfill all of the data's requirements. The researchers will define their goals, gather data, and analyze the outcomes. It is a critical phase in the statistical data analysis process. The researchers will analyze the data from the observation, pre, and post-assessments to see if the teacher's situation improved throughout the new-normal setting.

F. Data Triangulation

The researchers will gather data multiple times, in different circumstances, and from diverse samples to ensure data validity. First, the researchers will collect data from instructors' perspectives during the new usual setting to confirm the study's conclusions and boost its credibility. The former will not apply strategies, but the latter will employ procedures through activities based on Attention tactics. Data collection at several periods is required since instructors' adjustment experiences vary during the mentioned evaluations, which is critical for the validity of this study.

Second, the researchers will gather information in several scenarios within the same area. Because instructors' modifications are rarely static for a particular environment, the various classroom circumstances help justify the study. This means that different contexts overlap for the processes of each assessment, whether pre-assessment or post-assessment, that need to be considered that affect teachers' experiences and evaluating these findings of the research would help researchers validate further their results and improve their validity.

Finally, the researchers will gather data from several samples to guarantee the study's conclusions. This approach will be utilized for both the pre and post-assessment. The researchers will broaden the scope of their research to ensure that the theory is generalizable to other methods.

The researchers will use these strategies to evaluate the outcomes of the study questions in terms of their authenticity and reliability. These include data cross-checking, a thorough understanding of the study topic, and the correctness of the outcomes.

G. Success Indicator

This study will create a positive change, which can include all the success indicators. This study and its impacts will be shared with the community, and it is planned so that there is a lasting impact, institutionalization, or potential to scale, when possible. The following are the examples success indicators. The study will explore deeper and identifying the challenges of English teachers during the pandemic provide solutions to improve and create teaching strategies and alternatives. Exploring these problems is more beneficial in addressing the issue of the Philippine educational system since teachers are the ones who educate, and effective teaching leads to effective learning. The teachers will find ways on how to make quality education effective and with that we will be able to practice effective teaching and learning even if there's a pandemic. If this plans will be successful then there will be a big possible that 78% of the students can learn effectively and with that we can achieve the goal of having a developed strategic actions for teaching continuity and will be able to justify the objectives of this study.

H. Research Procedure

The initial stage in conducting this action study will be to provide the consent letter form to the respondents. The researchers will conduct their research by giving the respondents a pre-assessment before conducting the actual observation, with the goal of examining the concerns and obstacles in teaching in the midst of the pandemic through the experiences of Secondary level English

teachers, with the goal of developing strategic actions for teaching continuity. Following that, following the observation or class, the researchers will deliver post-assessments to the respondents in order to collect adequate data and test the validity of the collected data.

The researchers will analyze the information to see what challenges and barriers to learning teachers faced during the COVID-19 crisis. Recognize and use the most effective ways and modalities for student motivation and learning engagement. The researchers will see if the attention model of instructional design is appropriate and can be used by instructors as a learning technique to support and develop emerging themes from the pandemic's experiences and obstacles.

I. Ethical Considerations

The researchers will obtain consent from the respondents by distributing a consent letter form that assures the respondents that all personal information, such as name, age, birthday, nationality, answers to questionnaires, and interviews, will be considered confidential and used at the researchers' discretion to conduct valuable and valid research data. The consent letter form will secure the respondent's identity at all times, preventing issues like bias and discrimination in society.

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