

Effect of Anxiety on Second Language Learning: A Case Study of Public Secondary School Students

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Abstract

Language anxiety can be aroused in many situations. The challenges the undergraduates are faced with while adjusting to a second language ought to be researched by specialists. In Pakistani setting, this contextual analysis will feature the connection of the anxiety with the second language learning. The main aim of the study is to find out the causes of anxiety that affect second language learning at the secondary level. Main objectives of the study are to explore different strategies and how to build confidence level among students of second language learning. Thus, the nature of the study is quantitative survey-based; the population selected by the researchers was the students at government secondary schools of district Peshawar. Through a stratified sampling technique, four schools were selected; 10 students each from class 9th and 10th participated in the study in order to achieve the desired sample size (80 questionnaires). The data was collected personally by the researchers, arranged into tables, and then analyzed using frequencies and percentage. Most of the respondents were of the opinion that they are nervous and face difficulty in comprehending fast speakers, but do not get bored in the class. Most of the students believed that teachers using different techniques helps them tell stories and makes them active and energetic in the class. The main recommendations are that the awareness of students needs to be raised about the causes that influence their second language learning. Taking into consideration the results of this research project, teachers need to use language games to improve students' second language learning. Teachers must try their level best to give rather easy language tests, while all the teacher training institutions should teach the strategies to reduce anxiety of the students.

Keywords: Language Anxiety, Second Language Learning, Confidence Building Strategies

1. Introduction

Globalization is a champion among the main wonders which has made its impact on every walk of life. The things which were once viewed as nearby are presently worldwide in nature and setting. As the world is continuing on, the difficulties of human existence are expanding. It is for the most part accepted that globalization has rendered unfortunate results. A few reports (UN, 1989; UNICEF, 2003) expressed that globalization has fundamentally contributed to varying social statuses. It has additionally advanced and has affected humans in the field of financial aspects and training and has extended the space of language also. Since language is the impression of society, it has additionally contributed to sharing and advancing a worldwide marvel. In a more extensive point of view, language has opened a discussion for individuals to learn, to disperse, and to share information in a worldwide setting so the pool of information can be dissipated over the globe in a fairly limited amount of time. Language is an efficient specialty of correspondence (Goldstein, 2008) to communicate sentiments and verbalization. If we research the chronicled scenery of language, we will find that it has consistently transformed various forms of communication.

Language is the primary instrument, which assists us with speaking with others from one side of the planet to the other. Thus, it can be said that language is one of the most important predictors of belonging to an ethnic group, acculturation, or level of assimilation. In academia, language skills determine a student's success when interacting in the classroom. On the contrary, language deficiencies and gaps are causes of students' failure in interaction and socialization. The language gap has significant potential to lead students to anxiety in the classroom. From an educational and psychological point of view, fear has long been the main obstacle to learning (Mena, 2020).

Many children develop anxiety disorder at a young age, and it is often left untreated, causing symptoms and negative effects to persist and manifest in a variety of ways. Anxiety can also begin in adolescence or young adulthood as interaction with peers becomes increasingly important. Symptoms can get better or worse at different times, and often get worse during periods of stress. (Bisson, 2017)

Anxiety and language learning is a very complicated phenomenon. In the past, many studies on this topic have reported different results in different contexts and sometimes even in the same context. Early studies reported a negative correlation between test anxiety and performance. Many other studies have reported a positive correlation between anxiety and language acquisition. In the 1990s, many researchers began to conduct research in the field of foreign language anxiety, which makes it an interesting field. The results of several studies reported and confirmed that debilitating anxiety has an impact on foreign language learning. Language anxiety was related to students' negative emotional reactions to language acquisition. Studies have shown that there are a number of signs of anxiety that students can display, including apprehension, threat, palpitations, tremors, sweating, frostbite, and lameness during class (Hussain, 2011).

Language anxiety can be aroused in many situations, as Gardner's model of social education describes this inducing anxiety in two situations; the language inside a classroom and outside of the classroom where language can be used. For three decades, L2 anxiety has become a major concern in second language research. In recent cases, many studies have been conducted on anxiety when learning foreign and second languages. (Saranraj, 2016)

The challenges faced by students in adapting to a second language should be examined by researchers. In Pakistani setting, this contextual analysis will feature the connection of the anxiety with the second language learning. Pakistani students often learn English as a second language and frequently experience significant doubts about their abilities. They struggle to articulate their concerns, which can lead to various psychological issues over time. Feelings of anxiety are commonly reported, as students exhibit negative emotional responses toward learning English, such as stress, fear, and other related problems (Bhatti, 2016).

2. Literature Review

The anxiety, as one of the affective factors that have a great impact on foreign language learners has been studied since 1970s. Anxiety is described by psychologists as a “state of apprehension, a vague fear that is only indirectly associated with an object” (Hilgard, Atkinson, & Atkinson, 1971). It has been known to have a serious effect not only on students' language performance but also on their further L2 learning processes. Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope (1986) define anxiety as “The subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system. In fact, anxiety is a complex multidimensional phenomenon, which involves many other independent variables.” It is intertwined with attention, self-esteem, motivation (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986). Psychologists used the term “specific anxiety reaction” to differentiate people who are generally anxious in a variety of situations from those who are anxious only in specific situations (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope 1986).

On the other hand, researchers found out that the kind of anxiety which affects foreign language learners is of a special kind called by Horwitz *et. al.*, (1991) the “Foreign Language Anxiety.” Language anxiety “is seen as a stable personality trait referring to the propensity for an individual to react in a nervous manner when speaking ... in the second language” (Gardner and MacIntyre, 1993; Mitchell & Myles, 2004). Researchers have talked about transitional anxiety and nesting patterns as sorts of anxiety associated with students' moving from one country to another to learn languages, or transferring from a college to another college, or a class to another. This anxiety causes an inability to settle into a new environment. This, of course, leads to students' inability to concentrate. Researchers have also identified anxiety associated with school tasks such as test-taking, speaking English, and working in groups. Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope (1986) described some symptoms that can be observed in anxious students. These include worry, difficulty in concentrating, forgetfulness, sweating, and palpitations. Students frequently exhibit avoidance behavior such as missing classes, avoiding speaking, and postponing homework. Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope (1986) were some of the remarkable pioneers to study the relationship between anxiety and language. They offered an anxiety inventory called “the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)” to measure foreign language anxiety.

According to Horwitz *et al.* (1986), language anxiety comprises three componential sources, especially in relation to various kinds of L2 activities that the learners perform in the classroom:

- Communication apprehension
- Test anxiety
- Fear of negative evaluation

Communication apprehension, which generally refers to a type of anxiety experienced in interpersonal communicative settings, is relevant to second/foreign language learning contexts. The performance of the students is constantly monitored by both their teacher and peers (Horwitz et al., 1986). Some students may get anxious in speaking in class or be reluctant to participate in any task as they might be afraid of being mocked at by their teachers or classmates; this is fear of negative evaluation.

As Gardner and MacIntyre (1993) also noted, such feelings of apprehension can be characterized by “derogatory self-related cognition, feelings of apprehension, and physiological responses such as increased heart rate”. Researchers also identified the following as causes of language anxiety:

- Learners' self-perceptions about others (peers, teachers, interlocutors, etc.), the target language communication situations, his/her beliefs about L2/FL, and insufficient command of the target language (Sparks and Ganschow; cited in Horwitz, 2001).
- L2 learners may find it difficult to acquire the four language skills properly due to the fact that their secondary teachers were not pedagogically professional (Sparks and Ganschow; cited in

Horwitz, 2001)

- Sometimes, such feelings as ethnicity, foreignness, inferiority and superiority (Gardner cited in Horwitz & Young, 1991) may cause anxiety that hinders language learning.
- Gender, social status, and job positions may also cause anxiety. In some countries, the co-educational classes may cause female students to be anxious.
- Lack of adequate exposure to the target language as many colleges and schools may use students' native language and translation in teaching.
- Even in small group discussions, for instance, some learners might feel anxious because of the fear of negative evaluation from their peers, possibly resulting in being quiet and reticent, contrary to their initial intention to participate. Such psychological dilemmas of L2 learners between the willingness to speak up in the classroom and fear of losing their self-esteem in front of others seems to be a ubiquitous phenomenon in second language learning.
- In working with students with anxiety and depression, the physical health symptoms are often reported as the presenting problem because they are the symptoms that are externalized (Dusselier, Dunn, Wang, Shelley, & Whalen, 2005; Hartley, 2011).

3. Objectives of the Study

3.1. The current study aims

- To investigate the causes associated with the anxiety of secondary school students while learning second language.
- To discuss the role of teachers in improving second language skill among students.
- To explore different strategies on how to build confidence among students of second language learning.

3.2. Hypotheses

- **H01** - There is no significance effect of anxiety on second language learning.
- **H02** - There is no significant role of teachers in improving second language.
- **H03** - There is no significant effect of different strategies on improving second language learning.

3.3. Research Methodology

The current study was quantitative in nature. A self-structured questionnaire was used to collect the data from the respondents. The students were properly guided about the significance of study and the questionnaire.

3.3.1. Population of the Study

The current study focused on second language learning among secondary school students. For this purpose, students from four schools located in university campus Peshawar were taken as the population of the study. Questionnaire was used as data collection tool. Self-structured questionnaire was designed for collection of data regarding anxiety effects on second language learning. The questionnaire was based on 5 points Likert scale ranges; Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. The data collected was analyzed by employing frequencies and percentage using SPSS. The results obtained were interpreted and tabulated.

3.3.2. Sampling and sample of the study

Simple random sampling techniques were used to select students for current study from the targeted population. A sample size of 80 students were selected from the targeted population.

3.3.3. Data collection tool

Questionnaire was used as data collection tool. Self-structured questionnaire was designed for collection of data regarding anxiety effects on second language learning. The questionnaire was based on 5 points Likert scale ranges; Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. The data collected was analyzed by employing frequencies and percentage using SPSS. The results obtained were interpreted and tabulated.

3.3.4. Data Analyses

The data collected was analyzed using SPSS by employing frequencies and percentage. Furthermore, the hypotheses were tested using chi-square test.

Table 1: Causes associated with the anxiety of secondary school students while learning English second language

S. No.	Statement	SDA	DA	N	A	SA	Chi-square P-value
1.	I get nervous and confused when I used to speak in class.	17 (21.3)	14 (17.5)	6 (7.5)	25 (31.3)	18 (22.5)	11.875 ^a (0.018)
2.	I find difficulty in comprehending fast speakers of English.	6 (7.5)	8 (10.0)	8 (10.0)	44 (55.0)	14 (17.5)	63.500 ^a (0.000)
3.	I feel bored when I read in English.	15 (18.8)	39 (48.8)	9 (11.3)	5 (6.3)	12 (15.0)	44.750 ^a (0.000)
4.	I panic when I don't understand what is being taught by English teacher.	9 (11.3)	14 (17.5)	9 (11.3)	22 (27.5)	26 (32.5)	14.875 ^a (0.005)
5.	I worry about the result of failing in English subject.	14 (17.5)	20 (25.0)	8 (10.0)	23 (28.8)	15 (18.8)	16.875 ^a (0.002)
6.	During English class, I find myself thinking about irrelevant things that have nothing to do with the course	13 (16.3)	20 (25.0)	11 (13.8)	20 (25.0)	16 (20.0)	13.625 ^a (0.009)
7.	I feel perplexed during oral exams of English.	16 (20.0)	21 (26.3)	10 (12.5)	20 (25.0)	13 (16.3)	12.750 ^a (0.013)
8.	I get low grades in writing.	6 (7.5)	6 (7.5)	3 (3.8)	31 (38.8)	34 (42.5)	8.375 ^a (0.079)
9.	I find difficulty in understanding lectures, dialogues delivered in English.	6 (7.5)	6 (7.5)	10 (12.5)	37 (46.3)	21 (26.3)	4.125 ^a (0.389)
10.	I get worried when I was asked to write an essay/paragraph in English.	4 (5.0)	10 (12.5)	6 (7.5)	25 (31.3)	35 (43.8)	5.375 ^a (0.251)

Item 1 indicated that 53.8% of the respondents agreed to the statement that they get nervous and confused speaking in class, 38.8% of the respondents disagreed whereas only 7.5% of them were undecided. Item 2 indicated that 72.5% of the respondents agreed to the statement that they find difficulty in comprehending fast speakers of English, 17.5% of the respondents disagreed whereas only 10.0% of them were undecided. Item 3 indicated that 21.3 % of the respondents agreed to the statement that they feel bored when read in English, 67.6 % of the respondents disagreed whereas only 11.3% of them were undecided. Item 4 indicated that 60% of the respondents agreed to the statement that they panic when don't understand what is being taught by English teacher, while 28.8% of the respondents disagreed.

Item 5 indicated that 47.6% of the respondents agreed to the statement that they get worried about the result of failing in English subject, 42.5 % of the respondents disagreed whereas only 10.0 of them were undecided. Item 6 indicated that 45% of the respondents agreed to the statement that during English class, they find themselves thinking about irrelevant things that have nothing to do with the course, 41.3% of the respondents disagreed whereas only 13.8% of them were undecided. Item 7 indicated that 41.3% of the respondents agreed to the statement that they feel perplexed during oral exams of English, 46.3% of the respondents disagreed whereas only 12.5% of them were undecided. Item 8 indicated that 81.3% of the respondents agreed to the statement that they get low grades in writing, 15% of the respondents disagreed, whereas only 3.8% of them were undecided. Item 9 indicated that 72.6 % of the respondents agreed to the statement that they find difficulty in understanding lectures, news, speeches and dialogues delivered in English, 15% of the respondents disagreed whereas only 12.5 of them were undecided. Item 10 indicated that 75.1% of the respondents agreed to the statement that they get worried when asked to write an essay/paragraph in English, 17.5% of the respondents disagreed whereas only 7.5% of them were undecided.

Table 2: Role of teachers in improving second language skills among the students

S. No.	Statement	SDA	DA	N	A	SA	Chi-square P-value
11.	The teacher develops activities that help to practice the language in a class.	0 (0)	2 (2.5)	7 (8.8)	42 (52.5)	29 (36.3)	57.375 ^a (0.000)
12.	My teacher gives such environment that is conducive for learning English language.	9 (11.3)	26 (32.5)	5 (6.3)	31 (38.8)	9 (11.3)	43.875 ^a (0.000)
13.	I usually enjoy interactive classes.	8 (10.0)	18 (22.5)	11 (13.8)	26 (32.5)	17 (21.3)	45.125 ^a (0.000)
14.	When I speak in a class and made mistakes, my teachers correct me.	2 (2.5)	0 (0)	10 (12.5)	37 (46.3)	31 (38.8)	52.900 ^a (0.000)
15.	I can write a paragraph in English without having grammatical mistakes.	3 (3.8)	10 (12.5)	9 (11.3)	39 (48.8)	19 (23.8)	34.000 ^a (0.000)
16.	The teacher discourages when students ridicule each other by not speaking.	4 (5.0)	7 (8.8)	2 (2.5)	31 (38.8)	36 (45.0)	12.125 ^a (0.016)
17.	To comprehend the lecture easier, teacher modifies the speech.	12 (15.0)	7 (8.8)	5 (6.3)	35 (43.8)	21 (26.3)	41.700 ^a (0.000)

18.	Teacher uses non-verbal's (gestures, visuals, drawings, pointing, and models) to teach meaning of new vocabulary.	11 (13.8)	16 (20.0)	5 (6.3)	28 (35.0)	20 (25.0)	49.500 ^a (0.000)
19.	Teachers encourage students to ask questions.	7 (8.8)	8 (10.0)	18 (22.5)	25 (31.3)	22 (27.5)	65.375 ^a (0.000)
20.	Teachers give time and space to practice useful phrases and expressions to the students.	7 (8.8)	9 (11.3)	17 (21.3)	31 (38.8)	16 (20.0)	37.750 ^a (0.000)

Item 11 indicated that 88.8% of the respondents agreed to the statement that *The teacher develops activities that help to practice the language in a class*, 2.5% of the respondents were disagreed whereas only 8.8% of them were undecided. Item 12 indicated that 50.1% of the respondents agreed to the statement that *My teacher gives such environment that is conducive for learning English language*, 43.8% of the respondents disagreed whereas only 6.3% of them were undecided. Item 13 indicated that 53.8% of the respondents agreed to the statement that *I usually enjoy interactive class*. 32.5 % of the respondents disagreed whereas only 13.8% of them were undecided. Item 14 indicated that 85.1% of the respondents agreed to the statement that *When I speak in a class and made mistakes, my teachers correct me*, 2.5% of the respondents disagreed whereas only 12.5% of them were undecided.

Item 15 indicated that 32.6% of the respondents were agreed to the statement that *I can write a paragraph in English without having grammatical mistakes*. 16.3% of the respondents disagreed whereas only 11.3% of them were undecided. Item 16 indicated that 83.8% of the respondents agreed to the statement that *The teacher discourages when students ridicule each other by not speaking*, 13.8% of the respondents disagreed whereas only 2.5% of them were undecided. Item 17 indicated that 70.1% of the respondents agreed to the statement that *To comprehend the lecture easier, teacher modifies the speech*, 23.8 % of the respondents disagreed whereas only 6.3% of them were undecided. Item 18 indicated that 60% of the respondents agreed to the statement that *Teacher uses non-verbal's (gestures, visuals, drawings, pointing, and models) to teach meaning of new vocabulary*. 33.8% of the respondents disagreed whereas only 6.3% of them were undecided. Item 19 indicated that 58.8 % of the respondents agreed to the statement that *Teachers encourage students to ask questions*. 18.8% of the respondents disagreed whereas only 22.5% of them were undecided. Item 20 indicated that 58.8% of the respondents agreed to the statement that *Teachers give time and space to practice useful phrases and expressions to the students*, 20.1% of the respondents disagreed whereas only 21.3% of them were undecided.

Table 3: To explore different strategies to build confidence level among students of second language learning.

S. No.	Statement	SDA	DA	N	A	SA	Chi-square P-value
21.	Students reflect the model behavior of their teacher.	17 (21.3)	17 (21.3)	7 (8.8)	19 (23.8)	20 (25.0)	19.125 ^a (0.001)
22.	Taking care of appearance can boost the confidence level.	2 (2.5)	12 (15.0)	5 (6.3)	28 (35.0)	33 (41.3)	16.625 ^a (0.002)
23.	Teachers usually persuade the students in such a way that it engages them.	1 (1.3)	11 (13.8)	5 (6.3)	40 (50.0)	23 (28.8)	22.250 ^a (0.000)

24.	Teacher does not belittle or humiliate her students when the students make mistakes.	9 (11.3)	16 (20.0)	12 (15.0)	24 (30.0)	19 (23.8)	6.750 ^a (0.150)
25.	Broadening student's vocabulary bank increases their reading comprehension.	5 (6.3)	14 (17.5)	2 (2.5)	37 (46.3)	22 (27.5)	47.875 ^a (0.000)
26.	Give students useful and feedback.	16 (20.0)	15 (18.8)	12 (15.0)	25 (31.3)	12 (15.0)	62.250 ^a (0.000)
27.	Techniques that can help students tell stories on their own.	9 (11.3)	26 (32.5)	5 (6.3)	31 (38.8)	9 (11.3)	8.625 ^a (0.071)
28.	Being prepared to teach can make the students active and energetic that resultantly helps them boosting their confidence level.	8 (10.0)	18 (22.5)	11 (13.8)	26 (32.5)	17 (21.3)	49.875 ^a (0.000)
29.	Avoid correcting every word in free speech.	2 (2.5)	0 (0.0)	10 (12.5)	37 (46.3)	31 (38.8)	7.125 ^a (0.129)

Item 21 indicated that 48.8% of the respondents agreed to the statement that *Students reflect the model behavior of their teacher*, 42.6% of the respondents disagreed whereas only 8.8% of them were undecided. Item 22 indicated that 76.3% of the respondents agreed to the statement that they *Taking care of appearance can boost the confidence level*, 17.5 % of the respondents disagreed whereas only 6.3% of them were undecided. Item 23 indicated that 78.8% of the respondents agreed to the statement that *Teachers usually persuade the students in such a way that it engages them*. 15.1 % of the respondents disagreed whereas only 6.3% of them were undecided. Item 24 indicated that 53.8% of the respondents agreed to the statement that *Teacher does not belittle or humiliates her students when the students make mistakes*. 31.3% of the respondents disagreed whereas only 15.0% of them were undecided.

Item 25 indicated that 73.8% of the respondents agreed to the statement that *Broadening student's vocabulary bank increases their reading comprehension*. 23.8% of the respondents disagreed whereas only 2.5% of them were undecided. Item 26 indicated that 46.3% of the respondents agreed to the statement that they *Give students useful and positive feedback*. 38.8% of the respondents disagreed whereas only 15.0% of them were undecided. Item 27 indicated that 50.1% of the respondents agreed to the statement that *Techniques that can help students tell stories on their own*. 43.8 % of the respondents disagreed whereas only 6.3% of them were undecided. Item 28 indicated that 53.8 % of the respondents agreed to the statement that *Being prepared to teach can make the students active and energetic that resultantly helps them boosting their confidence level.*, 32.5% of the respondents disagreed whereas only 13.8% of them were undecided. Item 29 indicated that 85.1% of the respondents agreed to the statement that they *Avoid correcting every word in free speech*, 2.5% of the respondents disagreed whereas only 12.5 % of them were undecided.

Table 4: Summary of Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses	Test/Model	P-value	Decision
H₀₁ - There is no significance effect of anxiety on second language learning.	χ^2	0.000	H₀₁ Rejected
H₀₂ - There is no significant role of teachers in improving second language.	χ^2	0.000	H₀₂ Rejected
H₀₃ - There is no significant effect of different strategies on improving second language learning	χ^2	0.000	H₀₃ Rejected

4. Discussion

This study was conducted to expand our knowledge regarding the anxiety of second language learning among students at secondary age. It seems clear that high levels of language anxiety are associated with low levels of academic achievement in second/foreign language learning. Students were of the opinion that they find difficulty in understanding the lecture due to different factors. Findings of the study were in correlation with a similar study by Crystal *et al.*, (2013).

When we learn new dialects, we feel anxiety much of the time which is depicted by a diffuse, obnoxious, hazy sensation of dread, consistently joined through autonomic impacts, for instance, migraine, sweat, palpitations, snugness in the chest, and moderate stomach trouble (Kaplan, 1996). These encounters are every now and again associated with the opinion strain, dread, and stress (Spielberger, 1983). When we are restless, we feel stressed and face various pressures, such as shuddering. Simple nervousness is said to be related to unsavory sentiments. (Lader, 1975).

So, this study is aligned with the existing literature, which indicates that most students panic when they do not understand what is being taught by their English teacher.

5. Conclusion

Although most of the respondents were of the opinion that they are nervous, face difficulty in comprehending fast speakers, but do not get bored in class. Most of the students panic when they do not understand what is being taught by the English teacher. Moreover, most of the respondents get worried about failing English course. Most of the respondents anticipated getting low grades in writing but are not perplexed about taking oral exams. Most of the respondents were of the opinion that students enjoy interactive classes with activities that help them practice the language in class. Respondents also agreed that they enjoy a class environment that is more inclusive and discourages students when they ridicule each other. It was also revealed that the students like classes in which the teacher encourages them to ask questions and gives time and space to the students to practice phrases and expressions.

Most of the respondents believed that the students reflect the model behavior of their teacher. The teachers' appearance helps in boosting the confidence levels of the students. A majority of respondents believed that the teachers avoid situations that humiliate their students. Moreover, students believed that feedback from the teachers helps improve their vocabulary and comprehension. Most of the respondents believed that teachers use different techniques that help them tell stories and make them active and energetic in the classroom. Moreover, students believed that the teacher should discourage the use of certain words while still promoting free speech in the class.

6. Recommendations

- The research suggests strong intervention by the second language teachers to provide effective teaching to the students.
- The teachers must try their level best to give easy language tests; and all the teacher training

institutions should teach strategies to reduce the anxiety of the students.

- The teachers need to create a conducive environment in which students feel more comfortable communicating in and practicing the second language. There should be activity-based learning in which students enjoy themselves rather than getting involved in conflicts with their peers and creating uncomfortable situations in the class.
- Based on the findings of this research, teachers are recommended to use language games to improve students' second language skills.
- Awareness of students needs to be raised about the causes of anxiety that influence their second language learning. Moreover, further investigation of each factor in depth is also recommended.

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