

Implementation Model of the Independent Learning Block System Learning Policy in Lebak Regency, Banten Province

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Abstract

The implementation of the Independent Learning Block System policy in Vocational High Schools (SMK) exhibits complex and diverse dynamics, particularly in regions with heterogeneous social, economic, and institutional characteristics such as Lebak Regency. These conditions demand a policy implementation approach that is not only normative but also contextual and adaptive. This study aims to examine and formulate an effective and contextual implementation model for the Independent Learning Block System policy in Lebak Regency. This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. This study develops the Van Meter and Van Horn policy implementation model by adding the dimensions of adaptability and innovation in learning implementation as mediating variables between social, economic, and political conditions and policy implementation performance. Theoretically, these findings emphasize the importance of adaptive and innovative dimensions in the implementation of Independent Learning-based vocational education policies. Practically, the resulting model can serve as a reference for policymakers and educational units in optimizing the Block System, particularly in diverse and resource-constrained regional contexts.

Keywords : Policy Implementation, Independent Learning, Block System Learning, SMK, Lebak Regency.

Introduction

According to Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, a curriculum is a set of plans and regulations relating to objectives, content, and teaching materials, as well as methods used as guidelines for the implementation of teaching and learning activities to achieve national education goals (Dhomiri et al., 2025). The intended curriculum is the curriculum used in vocational high schools (SMK), a set of subjects containing content, objectives, teaching materials, and experiences systematically gained in an effort to prepare students to become professionals in the industrial world (Nurcahyono, Retnowati, & Sutisna, 2020).

Learning in Indonesia frequently changes curricula. The fundamental reason for curriculum changes is to improve and perfect the previous curriculum and to adapt to current developments (Anggraini et al., 2022). The Indonesian curriculum adopted the Competency-Based Curriculum (KBK) in 2004, the School Unit Level Curriculum (KTSP) in 2006, and the 2013 Curriculum in 2013. This was revised to the Revised Quartile in 2018. A revised curriculum was introduced in 2021, and the Independent Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka) was introduced in 2021 (Sumarsih et al., 2022).

Limited implementation of the Independent Curriculum began in 2021 at Pioneering Schools in 111 districts/cities. The Independent Curriculum for the Independent Pathway began in 2022 (Yunita

et al., 2023). According to data from the Center for Curriculum and Learning (Puskurjar) of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, nearly 70% of educational institutions across Indonesia have implemented the Independent Curriculum through the School Mover Program, Vocational High School Centers of Excellence, and the Independent Track (Nasution et al., 2023). The Independent Curriculum was established as the new national curriculum in 2024, referring to Regulation of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Permendikbudristek) Number 12 of 2024 concerning Curriculum for Early Childhood Education, Elementary Education, and Secondary Education (Indonesia, 2024).

The Independent Curriculum is a learning design that provides students with opportunities for calm, relaxed, enjoyable, stress-free, and pressure-free learning, allowing them to showcase their natural talents. Independent learning focuses on freedom and creative thinking (Rahayu et al., 2022). The Independent Curriculum is a curriculum approach that offers a variety of intracurricular learning, where the content is structured to provide students with sufficient time to deeply understand concepts and strengthen their competencies. Teachers are given the freedom to choose various learning aids, allowing learning to be tailored to students' learning needs and interests (Tsuraya et al., 2022).

The Block System Learning System is a learning implementation structure that allows for the integration of several competencies in a comprehensive and meaningful way to achieve learning objectives, organized within specific time blocks according to competency characteristics (Budi et al., 2023). The block system has a philosophy of "doing what is said"—meaning "what is said is immediately done," meaning that theoretical learning must be completed and its practical implementation must be carried out thoroughly (Febrina & Syafril, 2023). The block system has several advantages, namely: students can work until completion because the learning time is longer, students can study the material in depth because the time given is sufficient, and with a long block system schedule, teachers have more time to complete the learning materials so that students will be more focused and understand the material given by the teacher because they have complete learning time (Johandi, Hairida & Rasmawan, 2017).

The block system in vocational high schools (SMK) can be implemented through Teaching Factory (TeFa) learning to improve the quality of learning. Teaching Factory (TeFa) is a learning model that operates like a factory within a school (Diwanggoro, 2020). TeFa offers a practical approach that references actual industrial standards and procedures. According to Government Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 41 of 2015 concerning Industrial Resource Development, a Teaching Factory is defined as a production facility in schools operated according to industrial procedures and standards to produce products in accordance with real industrial conditions, without a profit-oriented orientation. TeFa is a production-oriented learning model that has been tailored to relevant field competencies (Wijaya, 2013).

Various studies have shown that flexible, competency-based education policies, such as Merdeka Belajar (Freedom to Learn), have the potential to increase the relevance of vocational high school curricula to the needs of the industrial world (Li & Pilz, 2017; Sayuti, 2017). Block-based learning is considered effective because it allows students to learn competencies in a gradual, focused, and in-depth manner according to their areas of expertise (Habiba et al., 2020; Ilmi & Rukun, 2020). However, its implementation still faces challenges, particularly in areas with limited infrastructure and human resources, necessitating teacher training and improved supporting facilities (Rohaeni et al., 2021; Budi et al., 2023). Furthermore, the effectiveness of the Independent Learning Block System is largely determined by strong collaboration between vocational schools (SMK) and industry, as well as policy support at the regional level to ensure learning is truly aligned with job market needs (Mujahidah et al., 2022; Sunariah et al., 2023; Wijanarka et al., 2023; Sulistio et al., 2024).

Lebak Regency is home to a significant number of vocational schools (SMKs), with 68 schools, comprising 23 (33.82%) public vocational schools and 45 (66.18%) private vocational schools. In terms of accreditation, only 4 (5.88%) vocational schools (SMK) were accredited A, 25 (36.76%) were accredited B, 28 (41.18%) were accredited C, and 16.18% were not yet accredited. Furthermore, no vocational schools had ISO 9001:2000 or ISO 9001:2008 certification. Meanwhile, the "Merdeka Belajar" (Freedom to Learn) policy, launched by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, including the implementation of the Block System in vocational schools to improve student focus and understanding, still faces various obstacles in Lebak Regency, resulting in suboptimal implementation and failure to fully achieve its intended objectives.

Based on the aforementioned research background, this study aims to develop an effective implementation model for the "Merdeka Belajar" (Freedom to Learn) Block System policy in Lebak Regency, Banten Province. The theoretical usefulness of this research result is expected to contribute to the development of public administration science, particularly the study of the implementation model for the "Merdeka Belajar" (Freedom to Learn) Block System policy in Lebak Regency, Banten Province. The practical use of the research results is expected to contribute ideas and serve as consideration for related parties regarding the implementation model of the Independent Learning Block System Learning policy in Lebak Regency, Banten Province.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach. According to Moleong (2009:3), qualitative research is a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people and observable behavior. The methods and approaches mentioned above were chosen with the consideration that they would yield accurate data and be able to assess the research. The research method used in this study was a case study. According to Rahardjo (2017) and Flyvbjerg (2011), the case study method is a series of scientific activities carried out intensively, in detail, and in-depth on a

program, event, and activity, whether at the individual, group, institution, or organizational level, to gain in-depth knowledge of the event and thus achieve the desired results. The data sources required in this study consist of primary and secondary data sources. Primary data are obtained from the words and actions of observed or interviewed informants, obtained through written notes or through video/audio recordings, photographs, or film (Moleong, 2016). Meanwhile, secondary data is additional material derived from written sources, which can be divided into books, scientific journals, archival sources, personal documents, and official documents (Moleong, 2016). Data collection techniques include observation, interviews, and documentation. The data collected by the researcher in this study is qualitative. The qualitative data processing and analysis process is carried out through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions.

Results and Discussion

The D. S. Van Meter & Van Horn framework views policy standards and objectives as the starting point that guides the entire implementation process. In the case of the Independent Learning Block System (SBMB) at SMK Lebak Regency, success measures, goal formulation, and target clarity are developed in layers, starting with the national Independent Learning policy, its elaboration at the Banten Provincial level, and finally, interpretation and implementation at each vocational high school (SMK).

The objectives outlined at the policy level then take on new forms when they reach the schools. At SMK Negeri 1 Rangkasbitung and SMK Negeri 2 Rangkasbitung, SBMB is understood as a way to consolidate productive learning to make it more focused, intensive, and more similar to industrial workflows. The principal and vice principal of the curriculum view success as measured not only by report card grades but also by students' ability to complete a complete set of tasks, their level of independence in practice, and their readiness to enter industrial work experience. A different situation is evident at SMK Setia Budhi Rangkasbitung. School leaders welcome SBMB as an opportunity to improve the quality of the learning process, but facility and staffing limitations necessitate adjustments. The focus was directed at the goals deemed most achievable: more effective practice time, more meaningful learning experiences for students, and utilizing external support to address resource deficiencies.

The Van Meter and Van Horn framework in this study was operationalized through a series of indicators formulated in an operational research table. These were then used as the basis for developing in-depth interview guides with the Head of the Banten Provincial Education and Culture Office, the Head of the Vocational High School Division, the Head of the Lebak Regional Office Branch, the principals of public and private vocational high schools, and the vice principal for curriculum. The key informants' responses illustrate how the six implementation variables operate in practice, both as driving forces and as major obstacles.

Based on this framework, the research results and discussion in this sub-chapter are systematically described through six main aspects: (1) Policy Standards and Targets, (2) Resources, (3) Characteristics of Implementing Agents, (4) Inter-Organizational Relationships, (5) Social, Economic, and Political Conditions, and (6) Implementor Dispositions. Each aspect was analyzed by referring to field findings and relevant interview excerpts to assess the level of implementation of the Independent Learning Block System policy at vocational schools in Lebak Regency.

1. Policy Standards and Targets

Van Meter and Van Horn's policy implementation perspective emphasizes the importance of clear standards and targets so that implementers understand the objectives and how to achieve them. The research results indicate that the objectives of the Independent Learning Block System (SBMB) at vocational schools in Lebak Regency have been formulated quite clearly at the provincial level and are relatively uniformly understood at the school level. This policy is seen as an effort to create more flexible, effective, and relevant learning to meet the needs of the workforce, reduce the intensive learning load, and strengthen students' vocational competencies. At the school level, this policy is also interpreted as an opportunity to improve graduate quality through more focused, intensive learning tailored to interests, talents, and industry demands.

Furthermore, the SBMB targets have been linked to specific and measurable indicators, such as improved exam scores, successful industrial work experience, and increased student competency. Evaluation of success assesses not only learning outcomes but also the learning process, such as effective time use, student engagement, and the relevance of the material to industry needs. Schools also have clear time limits for curriculum development, learning implementation, and evaluation, so that policy implementation has a structured direction, stages, and measures of success.

2. Resources

The resource dimension in the implementation of the Independent Learning Block System (SBMB) in vocational schools in Lebak Regency shows a gap between policy demands and actual capacity in the field. The block system requires adequate practice facilities, sustainable practice materials, structured learning modules, and competent teachers. The provincial government has provided support through various programs such as the School Operational Assistance (BOS), Special Allocation Fund (DAK), equipment assistance, and the Teaching Factory. However, this support has not fully met the needs of all schools, especially in areas with limited economic conditions. Many vocational schools still lack laboratories, workshops, and other learning support facilities, preventing optimal implementation of the block system.

Furthermore, limitations also exist in human resources, particularly the number and competence of teachers. Many teachers still lack specific training on the block system and are not fully prepared to manage intensive, practice-based learning integrated with industry needs. Budget and facility limitations also pose obstacles, despite schools' efforts to manage resources transparently and

accountably. Overall, based on the perspective of Van Meter and Van Horn, resources to support the implementation of SBMB in Lebak Regency remain inadequate, impacting the effectiveness of implementation and the achievement of policy objectives.

3. Characteristics of Implementing Agents

The characteristics of implementing agents in the implementation of the Independent Learning Block System (SBMB) at vocational schools in Lebak Regency indicate that structurally, the policy flow and hierarchy of command from the department to the school are clear and easy to understand. Curriculum regulations serve as the primary guideline for implementation, helping schools organize learning, divide tasks, and coordinate between parties. Organizational norms are also deemed to align with SBMB policies, and at the school level, they are implemented through agreements regarding learning time management, evaluation, and communication between principals, teachers, students, and parents. This indicates that institutionally, efforts are being made to adjust work norms to ensure a more structured and effective block system.

Furthermore, working relationships between implementers are generally cooperative, with principals acting as leaders, teachers as facilitators, and students as active participants in learning. A good relationship between these roles is a crucial factor in supporting policy implementation. However, in practice, internal conflicts and adaptation challenges persist, although these are generally resolved through communication and mutual understanding. Based on Van Meter and Van Horn's perspective, this situation indicates that the characteristics of the SBMB implementing agencies in Lebak Regency are quite supportive in terms of structure, norms, and work relationships. However, successful implementation is still influenced by the quality of leadership, the understanding of implementers, and the organization's ability to manage change.

4. Inter-Organizational Relationships

Inter-organizational relationships in the implementation of the Independent Learning Block System (SBMB) in vocational high schools (SMK) in Lebak Regency involve various parties, such as the Banten Provincial Education Office, branch offices, schools, teachers, and business and industry partners. This coordination encompasses curriculum planning, learning implementation, and industrial work practices. The Office acts as a policy director and support provider, schools as implementers, teachers as learning implementers, and industry and other institutions as supporting partners. Furthermore, institutions such as the Education Quality Assurance Center (BPMP) and local governments also play a role in assisting in the development of operational curricula and ensuring that learning aligns with regional and workplace needs. This collaboration is generally strengthened through formal agreements such as Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) and industrial work practice partnerships.

However, challenges remain in implementation, such as potential overlapping roles and differences in implementation between schools due to policy flexibility and differing capacities of each

institution. Successful implementation depends not only on clear regulations, but also on effective communication, resource availability, and strong coordination between parties. Some schools with strong industry networks can implement the block system more optimally, while others require greater support. Therefore, strengthened coordination, clear technical guidelines, and more consistent collaboration are needed to ensure effective and equitable implementation of the SBMB.

5. Social, Economic, and Political Conditions

Social, economic, and political conditions in Lebak Regency influence the implementation of the Independent Learning Block System (SBMB) in vocational schools. Socially, not all members of the community understand and support this policy due to differences in education levels and economic conditions. Therefore, more intensive outreach is needed to ensure that parents and the community understand the benefits of the block system for improving student competency. Nevertheless, the relationship between policy implementers, schools, and the community is generally quite close and mutually supportive. Politically, the region remains relatively stable and there are no political conflicts that hinder policy implementation, thus providing a conducive environment for SBMB implementation.

However, economically, limitations remain, affecting policy implementation, both in terms of the economic capacity of students' families and the limited resources of schools to provide practical facilities. This presents a challenge because the block system requires greater support and funding. Nevertheless, SBMB also has long-term potential to improve graduate quality, strengthen workforce competitiveness, and support regional economic development. Therefore, based on Van Meter and Van Horn's perspective, the social, economic, and political conditions in Lebak Regency generally support policy implementation, but require strengthening economic support and increasing public understanding to optimally achieve policy objectives.

6. Implementer Disposition

The disposition of implementers regarding the Independent Learning Block System (SBMB) policy at vocational schools in Lebak Regency shows a relatively positive trend, both at the agency and educational unit levels. Policymakers and implementers at schools understand the SBMB's goal as an effort to improve graduate competency, learning flexibility, and the relevance of vocational education to the needs of the workforce. The attitudes expressed are generally supportive and enthusiastic, as this policy is seen as a space for innovation and strengthening competency-based learning. The values espoused by implementers, such as an orientation toward graduate quality, character development, 21st-century skills, and integrity and professionalism, appear to align with the spirit of Independent Learning. However, the level of commitment and readiness of implementers varies, depending on the understanding, support, and adaptability of each party.

On the other hand, although the willingness to implement the policy is relatively high, implementers also face limited facilities and infrastructure, as well as inadequate technical readiness. This situation creates a gap between willingness and ability, leading some implementers to be more

cautious, not because they reject the policy, but because they are aware of the actual challenges in the field. Overall, the disposition of implementers can be a crucial asset for the sustainability of SBMB implementation, as long as it is supported by strengthening resources, ongoing development, and leadership capable of maintaining a commitment and positive culture towards change.

The research results indicate that the implementation of the Independent Learning Block System (SBMB) policy at vocational schools in Lebak Regency can be understood through a process model consisting of input, process, output, outcome, and feedback components, in accordance with the six Van Meter and Van Horn variables: policy standards and objectives, resources, implementer characteristics, inter-organizational relationships, environmental conditions, and implementer dispositions. At the input stage, national policies, such as the Independent Curriculum, serve as the primary basis, which are then translated by the Education Office and its branch offices into operational guidelines. Available resources include teachers, principals, education personnel, and practical facilities such as laboratories and workshops. Furthermore, the characteristics of the school organization, coordination patterns with the office and industry, as well as social and economic conditions and the attitudes of implementers also influence implementation readiness.

The process stage begins with the office's dissemination of the policy to schools through meetings, training, and mentoring, aimed at improving implementer understanding. Next, schools conduct planning by developing the Educational Unit Operational Curriculum, a block-based academic calendar, and scheduling practical activities. The implementation of the block system learning system is the core stage, where students learn more focused on a single competency within a specific timeframe through practice, projects, and Teaching Factory activities. The next stage is monitoring and evaluation conducted by schools and education offices to assess program implementation and make improvements if necessary.

The output of this implementation is evident in the development of a block-based curriculum, increased practice activities, and the development of collaboration with businesses and industry. The expected outcomes are improved graduate competency, job readiness, and stronger relationships between vocational schools and industry. However, these results remain uneven due to limited resources, facilities, and varying school readiness.

Feedback mechanisms are crucial for improving policy implementation, both through internal school evaluations and coordination with education offices. Issues such as a shortage of productive teachers, limited facilities, and other technical obstacles are reported and addressed through program adjustments, training, and assistance with facilities. The expected implementation model emphasizes the need for strengthened outreach, improved human resource quality, improved practice facilities, and stronger collaboration with industry. With this strengthening, the implementation of the SBMB (Student Vocational High School) is expected to run more optimally, improve the quality of graduates,

and strengthen the role of vocational high schools (SMK) in supporting the needs of the workforce and regional development.

The Van Meter & Van Horn policy implementation theory has long been a dominant analytical framework for explaining the success or failure of public policy implementation. Its primary strength lies in its ability to explain the relationship between policy structure, the characteristics of implementing actors, resource availability, inter-organizational communication patterns, and the influence of the social, economic, and political environment on policy implementation performance. In the context of administrative and bureaucratic public policy, this framework has proven effective and relevant.

When applied to the context of vocational education policy, particularly to the implementation of the Independent Learning Block System in Vocational High Schools (SMK), the VMVH theory exhibits analytical limitations. These limitations lie in the lack of explicit capture of the dimensions of pedagogical adaptation and alignment of learning with the needs of the workforce and industry, which are the very essence of the Independent Learning policy and vocational education. The implementation of the Block System in vocational schools (SMK) is not solely related to compliance with policy standards or administrative arrangements, but rather involves substantive transformations in learning design, curriculum and schedule engineering, the integration of industrial culture into the learning process, and competency-based pedagogical flexibility.

In this context, this study proposes the addition of dimensions of adaptability and innovation in learning implementation as a conceptual development of the VMVH model. These dimensions are considered most relevant for bridging the gap between the structural-administrative policy implementation framework and vocational learning practices, which demand flexibility, creativity, and a high level of responsiveness to the dynamics of the workplace. The addition of these dimensions is not intended to negate or replace the dimensions of the VMVH, but rather to expand the explanatory power of the theory to make it more contextual and applicable to vocational education policies based on the Freedom to Learn (Merdeka Belajar) approach.

Based on empirical findings, this study proposes the addition of dimensions of adaptability and innovation in learning implementation as an extension of the VMVH model. This dimension is positioned as a mechanism that bridges the influence of social, economic, and political conditions on policy implementation performance through the capacity of implementing actors to make adjustments, reflective learning, and innovation based on local contexts. The addition of this dimension does not negate the VMVH framework, but rather expands its explanatory power to the pedagogical and vocational realms. Thus, the novelty of this research lies in the integration of policy implementation perspectives with vocational learning innovation practices, resulting in a more contextual, adaptive, and relevant model of policy implementation for vocational high schools (SMK), particularly in areas with limited and diverse local contexts.

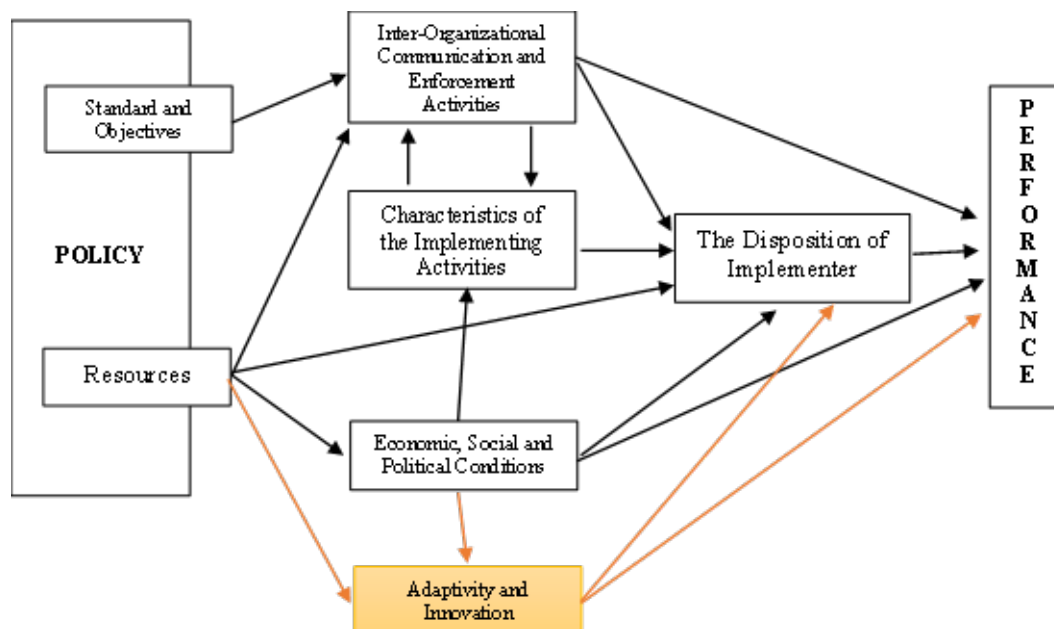


Figure 1 Policy Implementation Model.

Conclusion

The policy implementation model developed by Van Meter and Van Horn has proven relevant as a solution framework for implementing the Independent Learning Block System (SBMB) in vocational high schools (SMK) in Lebak Regency, Banten Province. In terms of policy standards and targets, the objectives of the SBMB have been clearly formulated at the provincial level and are generally understood and accepted by educational institutions, although there are still differences in translating them into daily learning practices. In terms of resources, significant limitations remain, such as the unequal availability of practical facilities and infrastructure, a less-than-ideal ratio of competent teachers, and the limited number of teachers who have participated in specific training related to the block system, indicating a mismatch between policy demands and actual capacity in the field.

The characteristics of implementing agents indicate that policy implementation involves a long chain of implementation, from the provincial education office down to the school and classroom levels, with a relatively clear and interdependent authority structure. Inter-organizational relationships are also crucial, as the success of the SBMB is heavily influenced by coordination and collaboration between ministries, education offices, branch offices, schools, and the business and industrial sectors, particularly in supporting learning practices and the development of Teaching Factories. Furthermore, social, economic, and political conditions influence implementation. Public support and understanding of the SBMB are uneven due to differences in educational background and family economic conditions. Meanwhile, implementers' dispositions indicate a generally positive and supportive attitude toward the policy, although concerns remain regarding limited facilities and technical readiness for implementation.

Furthermore, the Van Meter and Van Horn framework for SBMB implementation needs to be complemented by the dimensions of adaptability and innovation as a mechanism to bridge policy demands with real-world conditions. Successful implementation is determined not only by adherence to policy standards but also by the implementer's ability to adapt, evaluate, and develop learning innovations according to the local context and existing limitations. This will ensure that the resulting implementation model is more dynamic, contextual, and relevant, and can provide direction for improvements in the implementation of vocational education policies, particularly in regions with specific characteristics and limited resources, such as Lebak Regency.

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