

An Exploration of Learning Strategies for Speaking Skills in A Basic-Level English Classroom: A Case Study

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Abstract: Speaking remains one of the most challenging skills for beginner-level English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in Indonesia. Limited exposure to native speakers and the predominance of traditional teaching methods often result in pronunciation errors, insufficient vocabulary, speaking anxiety, and low fluency. This single-case study investigated the language learning strategies used by eight beginner EFL students in the Discover 1 class at FL Haus Indonesia. Data were collected through four non-participatory classroom observations (90 minutes each) and semi-structured interviews (15–20 minutes each). The data were analyzed using thematic analysis in NVivo software, following Miles et al.'s (2014) framework of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Triangulation was applied to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings. The results revealed that compensatory strategies (e.g., gestures) and social strategies (e.g., peer support) were the most frequently used and were perceived as highly effective in promoting practice, reducing anxiety, and increasing engagement. The main challenges faced by the learners were emotional (e.g., fear of making mistakes) and linguistic (e.g., forgetting words), which were primarily managed through compensatory and affective strategies. These findings are consistent with Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL, 1990) and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, underscoring the importance of strategy instruction to foster learner autonomy. The study acknowledges the limitation of its small sample size. Pedagogical implications include integrating technology and group activities in beginner EFL classrooms. The Future research may explore the long-term effects of strategy use on speaking development.



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INTRODUCTION

Speaking ability is a crucial aspect, but it continues to be a problem in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, especially for learners at the basic level. Basic EFL learners usually experience problems including errors in pronunciation, limited vocabulary for everyday conversation, anxiety when speaking, and lack of fluency since curricula frequently place a higher priority on receptive abilities like reading and listening than active production (Rao, 2019). For English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners speaking is sometimes regarded as the most difficult language skill since it needs quick thinking, confidence, cultural awareness and real-time reactions in addition to linguistic understanding. Beginner learners in informal settings-like English conversation schools-experience particular difficulties in Indonesia where English is taught as a

foreign language. These include nervousness related to oral expressiveness and little exposure to native speakers. This is especially noticeable in areas like Banten where English conversation schools serve as supplemental education for students seeking to develop foundational abilities for everyday communication and future studies (Nazri, 2025).

These three research questions will help this study to investigate in detail the strategies used in the Discover 1 class (basic level) at FL Haus Indonesia to acquire speaking skills: 1. What learning strategies do English language students at the basic level use to improve their speaking skills? 2. How do students at the basic level perceive the effectiveness of the learning strategies they use to improve their speaking skills? 3. What challenges or difficulties do students at the basic level face when trying to learn English, and what learning strategies do they use to get over these difficulties? This study aims to emphasize specific contextual perspectives and provide helpful insights for EF practitioners in similar circumstances with limited resources through in-depth case studies.

Due to research beginning EFL learners frequently have low conversational skills, which could hinder language growth overall. These traits include hesitation a small vocabulary and pronunciation mistakes. Learners use a variety of learning strategies-intentional acts to improve language performance and acquisition-to solve this problem. By empowering students to take charge of their education, these techniques help them transition from passive reception to active engagement. However there is still a dearth of research that focuses on the speaking abilities of beginning students in Indonesian English classes despite the fact that many studies have examined general EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learning methodologies (Robah & Anggrisia. 2023). By analyzing the tactics used in a case study of an English course in Banten this study seeks to close this gap and offer guidance for instructional methods for beginning students.

Recent results indicating the application of successful strategies can considerably improve outcomes in speaking skills-such as fluency and motivation to communicate-even in settings with limited resources highlight the significance of this research (Derakhsan. et al. 2024). In Indonesia EFL education often emphasizes grammar and reading comprehension over speaking skills. Consequently, beginner learners benefit from strategies that promote autonomy and address barriers such as fear of making mistakes. By exploring these elements this case study contributes to broader discussions on EFL pedagogy and aligns with national efforts to enhance English proficiency amid advancing economic integration in Southeast Asia. (Lamusu et al. 2025).

This research holds practical and theoretical significance. From a practical point of view this provides educators in Indonesian English classes with useful teaching practices that could result in improved curricula that enhance speaking abilities from the start. Self-directed learning is improved for students when they comprehend effective strategies. In theory this advances our understanding of language acquisition techniques in the context of EFL, especially for novices and could inspire more studies in comparable Southeast Asian contexts. In the end this study helps the creation of more thorough EFL education policy by highlighting findings unique to the Banten environment (Alsarairh. 2022).

THEORETICAL SUPPORT

In order to control transformational speaking ability, the theoretical framework supporting the learning of English as a foreign language (EFL) is a complex structure that smoothly combines basic paradigms with actual developments.

Overview of Language Learning Strategies

Language learning strategies (LLS) are defined as specific behaviors or techniques that individuals use to enhance their comprehension, retention and application of a new language (Malini. 2022). These strategies are essential for EFL learners as they promote autonomy and efficiency in skill development. LLS can be roughly divided into two categories based on foundational research: direct strategies, which entail mental processing of the language, and indirect strategies, which facilitate learning without directly interacting with the target language (Oxford, 1990). According to recent EFL research, the approach described in Oxford's *Language Learning Strategies: What Every Teacher Should Know* is still relevant and validated (Saez-zevallos & Cunza-aranzábal, 2025).

Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) provides a practical tool for assessing these strategies dividing them into six categories: memory (e.g. associating new words with images) cognitive (e.g., practicing sounds) compensation (e.g. using gestures to convey meaning) metacognitive (e.g. planning learning goals) affective (e.g. managing anxiety through relaxation) and social (e.g. seeking practice with peers) (Zou & Lertlit 2022). Recent research has confirmed that these categories are highly relevant to conversational competence which requires learners to engage in direct interaction. For beginner learners compensatory strategies and social strategies are often prioritized to compensate for limited vocabulary and build confidence. (Lengkanawati & Wirza. 2020).

Theories of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) Relevant to Speaking Skills

Speaking development in SLA is underpinned by several theories. Swayne's output hypothesis which is incorporated into modern second language acquisition (SLA) texts asserts that while intelligible input is essential for acquisition output practice is as critical for speaking in order to complete production (Krashen's input hypothesis). In *Theories in Second Language Acquisition: An Introduction* (Vanpatten & Williams. n.d.) skill acquisition theory emphasizes that speaking evolves from declarative knowledge (rules) to procedural knowledge (automatic use) through repeated practice. This aligns with usage-based approaches where exposure and interaction shape fluency.

In the EFL context sociocultural theory (discussed in the 4th edition of *Second Language Learning Theories* by Vygotsky. Mitchell. et al.) emphasizes the role of social interaction in teaching conversational skills through pair work and teacher feedback. For beginner learners these theories indicate that strategies such as repetition and asking for help are key to transitioning from controlled production to free production (Mitchell. Myles & Emma Marsden. n.d.).

Challenges in Speaking for Basic-Level EFL Learners

Despite the emphasis on speaking ability beginners learning English in Indonesia often encounter difficulties that slow their progress. Key challenges include linguistic barriers (e.g. limited vocabulary and grammatical accuracy) psychological factors (e.g. anxiety when speaking and lack of confidence) and environmental limitations (e.g. insufficient opportunities to practice outside of class). (Purwati et al. 2023). This issue becomes even more significant in informal English courses where class sizes fluctuate and resources are often limited. Learners may intuitively adopt strategies to address this problem but empirical evidence regarding the most common or effective strategies at this level remains limited. This lack of understanding can lead to ineffective instruction and perpetuate a negative cycle of insufficient speaking ability.

METHOD

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative single-case study design, which is particularly suitable for investigating complex context-bound phenomena within realistic educational settings, as described by Yin (2018). The study holistically examines the Discover 6 class for intermediate learners at FL Haus Indonesia a deliberately selected bounded system consisting of only four students. This approach allows for a nuanced triangulation of teacher practices and student experiences with specific adaptations for the micro-scale of the setting such as iterative member checking to increase transferability in accordance with the guidelines of Creswell and Poth (2018). Throughout the process ethical protocols were strictly followed, including obtaining institutional approval, informed consent from all participants and robust guarantees of anonymity.

Participant

This study includes the six students from the Discover 1 group, who are all at a level of basic skills. These participants are totally into a program that focuses on speaking skills giving them a chance to share their experiences in this specific educational setting.

Data Collection

The data are collected using two complementary instruments: non-participatory observations and semi-structured interviews. For the observations the researcher conducted 3 to 4 sessions of 90 minutes each. These were strategically planned during the key phases of the semester—beginning, middle and end—to capture the evolving patterns in classroom dynamics. The process was guided by structured protocols with timestamps detailed descriptive field notes and where permission was granted, audiovisual recordings. The emphasis was on spoken segments such as activity types scaffolding techniques and feedback mechanisms always placing these in the broader context of entire lessons to maintain factual accuracy without real-time bias.

To complement the observation semi-structured interviews lasting 15 to 20 minutes per student were conducted to answer the research questions. These interviews used eight specific guiding questions. Conducted immediately after the last observation to optimize memory accuracy these interviews produced approximately two hours of audio data which was then transcribed in full. The overall procedure began with curriculum adjustment and obtaining permissions followed by progressive observations interspersed with debriefing sessions and ended with the interviews after which the transcripts were sent back to the participants for validation.

Data Analysis

For this small-scale study analytical accuracy was achieved through a simple manual reflexive thematic analysis closely following the six-step iterative process described by Braun and Clarke (2021). To analyze the data software applications like NVivo will be used to assist researcher in analyzing the data so that more accurate results can be obtained from the keywords contained in the data.

After collecting the data that will be analyzed, there are several stages in analyzing data in a qualitative case study approach using data analysis techniques (Miles. 2014) as follows: **1). Data condensation:** Data condensation is the process of selecting concentrating, simplifying, abstracting and/or modifying the data included in the entire corpus (body) of written-up field notes, interview transcripts, papers and other practical

materials. **2). Data Display:** The second main component of analysis work is data display. A display is a structured compacted collection of information that allows for conclusion drawing and action. Historically expanded writing was the most common method of displaying qualitative data. The presentations include multiple matrices, charts, graphs and networks. All are intended to compress organized information into an easily accessible compact style so that the analyst can understand what is currently going on and either draw appropriate conclusions or pursue the next level of analysis that the display indicates would be useful. **3). Drawing and Verifying Conclusion:** The final stage involves drawing conclusions from the analyzed data. These conclusions should be based on the patterns correlations or findings discovered during the investigation. In addition, conclusions must be verified to ensure their reliability and accuracy. From the beginning of data collection, the qualitative analyst assesses what the findings mean by noticing patterns, explanations, causal flows and assertions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study are derived from a thematic analysis conducted using NVivo software, which facilitated the coding and organization of data from four classroom observation sessions and semi-structured interviews at FL Haus Indonesia. The analysis followed Miles et al.'s (2014) framework: data condensation (selecting and coding relevant excerpts into nodes based on Oxford's (1990) strategy categories), data display (matrices and charts for pattern visualization), and drawing/verifying conclusions (triangulating findings across sources for reliability). Three research questions emerged from the main theme, which revealed patterns in the use of strategies, perceptions of their effectiveness, challenges, and adaptive reactions. Participant quotes, observations, and visual aids (such as frequency matrices and thematic graphs) are used to support the results, which are presented conceptually. These findings are incorporated into the theoretical framework that was developed from the literature in the discussion.

Learning Strategies Do Basic-Level English Students Use to Improve Their Speaking Skills.

NVivo analysis identified six categories of primary strategies from the Oxford SILL framework (1990) with a total of 68 coded references. The most common techniques are compensatory (28% and 25% of codes, respectively), followed by cognitive (20%), memory (15%), affective (8%), and metacognitive (4%). This evidence Both independent practice (based on interviews) and classroom behavior (based on observations).

Based on the interviews, students used a variety of outside of class self-study strategies, including repetition and media imitating. For instance, FT used online games to converse with strangers (social strategy), whereas NY mentioned viewing movies and pausing temporarily to repeat sentences (cognitive approach). Strategies centered on facilitation were used in pair and group work, such as AW requesting for assistance ("please help me" – Social) or AZ using brief sentences (Compensation). This was verified by observations that demonstrated repetition during vocabulary work (e.g. Session 1: "Students quietly or aloud repeated new hobby words" - Memory/Cognitive) and movements during role-playing exercises (e.g. Session 2: mirroring actions - Compensation).

The distribution of techniques across various sources of data is displayed as a frequency matrix in the table below. In order to close communication gaps in real time this matrix emphasizes how compensation dominates interactive actions.

Table 1. Frequency Matrix of Learning Strategies by Data Source

No.	Strategy Category	Interviews (Coded References)	Observations (Coded References)	Total	Examples
1	Memory	6	5	11	Repeating words (AL, session 1)
2	Cognitive	8	6	14	Practicing sentence aloud (AW, session 3)
3	Compensation	9	10	19	Gesture, miming (AJ, session 4)
4	Metacognitive	2	4	6	Planning sentence in head (FT, session 2)
5	Affective	4	7	11	Deep breathing for anxiety (AW, Session 1)
6	Social	10	7	17	Asking for help (NY, session 3)

Dominant phrases like "repeat" "gesture" and "ask" are displayed in the chart below emphasizing useful and resource-efficient techniques appropriate for beginning learners.

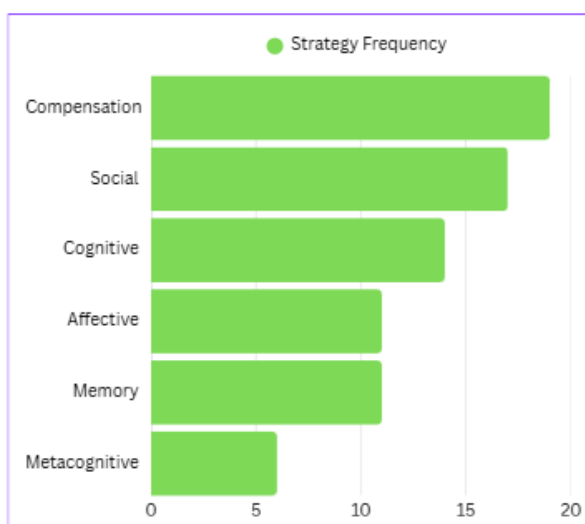


Figure 1. Bar Graph of Strategy Frequencies

Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) (1990) a foundational framework in second language acquisition (SLA) that divides strategies into direct type (Memory Cognitive and Compensation) and indirect types (Metacognitive Affective and Social) is exactly in line with this finding. The frequent use of compensation methods in this study such as using gestures or word repetition to fill in lexical gaps illustrates how beginning learners deal with the constraints of their abilities by assessing meaning a crucial SLA strategy for maintaining communicative flow.

Direct Strategies	Memory Strategies	Creating mental links
		Applying images and sounds
		Reviewing well
		Employing action
	Cognitive Strategies	Practising
		Receiving and sending messages strategies
		Analysing and reasoning
		Creating structure for input and output
	Compensation Strategies	Guessing intelligently
Overcoming limitations in speaking and writing		
Indirect Strategies	Metacognitive Strategies	Creating your learning
		Arranging and planning your learning
		Evaluating your learning
	Affective Strategies	Lowering your anxiety
		Encouraging yourself
		Taking your emotional temperature
	Social Strategies	Asking questions
		Cooperating with others
		Empathising with others

Figure 2. Oxford's (1990 p. 17) taxonomy of LLSs

This is in line with the findings of Lengkanawati and Wirza (2020) who noted that due to their limited vocabulary beginner-level English as a foreign language (EFL) learners in Indonesia prefer compensatory and social strategies because they allow learners to take benefit of the immediate social context for support. Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory which holds that learning happens through social mediation and collaboration transforming individual effort into communal knowledge building is reflected in social techniques that involve engagement with peers or native speakers (for example through online games). Unlike Zou and Lertlit's (2022) study, which found that advanced Chinese students frequently used metacognitive strategies such as planning and self-assessment, the present study recorded very limited use of these strategies (less than 4% of the coded data). This low occurrence is likely due to the participants' young age (13–14 years old) and beginner proficiency level, which constrained their ability to engage in higher-order reflection. The preference of younger learners for immediate, concrete assistance rather than abstract preparation highlights how developmental stage influences the use of learning strategies. Additionally, Robah and Anggrisia (2023) emphasize the importance of progressive teacher support in Indonesia's non-formal educational settings. This aligns closely with our findings on the benefits of role-playing and guided repetition, which effectively support cognitive and memory processes. These results are further corroborated by recent research on the challenges of learning English as a foreign language in Indonesia, which highlights how socioeconomic factors shape access to learning strategies. In resource-limited contexts, learners tend to rely more on social and compensatory approaches rather than technology-dependent methods. Theoretically this pattern expands on Krashen's (1985) input hypothesis in second language acquisition by including Oxford's emphasis on learner agency in the selection of methods which holds that intelligible information through social contact improves acquisition.

How The Basic-Level Students Perceive the Effectiveness of the Learning Strategies They Use to Improve Speaking Skills

The analysis identified 32 references ranked according to their perceived effectiveness which were divided into three sub-themes: practice-based improvement (45%) anxiety reduction (30%) and engagement/enjoyment (25%). All participants (100%) reported a positive perception, with 7 out of 8 noting a gradual improvement ("yes" response).

The data from the interviews highlight the reasons why these strategies are effective. For example, AZ believes that singing is particularly useful because “melodies stimulate memory” (memory/engagement). For his part FZ praises cartoons such as “Peppa Pig” because “they are fun and slow” which as the teacher pointed out, improves clarity of speech. The perception of improvement is linked to concrete results such as “gradual improvement” observed by AL after recording. Observations corroborate this conclusion with increased participation throughout the sessions (e.g. session 4: “Students use integration strategies more frequently” which shows the effects felt through the progress made).

A cross-tab matrix (Table 2) shows perceptions linked to strategy types revealing that Cognitive strategies were seen as most effective for skill-building.

Table 2. Cross-Tab Matrix – Perceptions of Effectiveness by Strategy Category

No.	Perception Sub-Theme	Cognitive	Compensation	Social	Other (Memory/Affective /Metacognitive)	Total
1	Practice-Based Improvement	6	3	2	4	15
2	Anxiety Reduction	1	2	3	4	10
3	Engagement/Fun	3	1	2	2	8

As stated by Malini (2022) on autonomy in oral expression in EFL this demonstrates that students value approachable and entertaining tactics. According to Lamusu et al. (2025) the trend of digital natives among Indonesian adolescents where the integration of technology increases motivation and perceived effectiveness is consistent with the favorable perception of using self-directed media (e.g. TikTok games) for engagement and enjoyment. Unlike Derakhshan et al. (2024) who emphasize teacher-guided strategies in a formal context our results highlight a learner-initiated approach reflecting Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory in second language learning where successful use of strategies increases self-confidence and perception of progress. The perception of improvement based on practice is related to Oxford's (1990) cognitive strategies which involve direct manipulation of the language (e.g. repetition) promoting procedural knowledge.

Anxiety reduction through emotional strategies such as deep breathing aligns with Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis. This hypothesis states that the lower the anxiety the more facilitated the processing of input and production of output. Recent research on flipped learning issues in Indonesia (Pilu et al. 2025) further supports this idea, showing that enjoyable technology-supported strategies can reduce emotional barriers in the EFL classroom and encourage sustained engagement. This aligns with the sociocultural perspective which states that learning is mediated by cultural tools such as media and suggests a pedagogical shift toward hybrid models that integrate technology and social interaction to enhance perceived effectiveness.

Challenges or Difficulties Basic-Level Students Face When Trying to Speak English and The Way They Use to Overcome These Challenges

NVivo identified 24 references to challenges primarily affective/psychological (58% e.g. fear of ridicule) and linguistic (42% e.g. forgetting words). Overcoming strategies drew from Compensation (50%) and Affective (30%) categories.

The interviews revealed common challenges: fear of being laughed at or making mistakes (AL PT AJ) forgetting words (NY AZ) shyness (AW) pronunciation (FT) and grammar (FZ). To address these learners adopted coping strategies such as using gestures (AJ: “using body hands and facial expressions”) or simplifying language (FZ: “using simple sentences”). Similar tendencies were observed during sessions. For instance, even when faces turned red during presentations (Session 3: Emotional aspect) encouragement from peers (Session 4: Social aspect) helped overcome this. The following theme map links challenges to strategies showing adaptive pairings.

Table 3. Theme Matrix – Challenges and Overcoming Strategies

No.	Challenge Type	Frequency (References)	Linked Overcoming Strategies (Examples)	Data Source
1	Fear of Mistakes/Laughter	12	Smile/apologize (AL), Peer encouragement (session 4)	Interviews/ Observations
2	Forgetting words	5	Pointing (NY,AZ)	Interviews
3	Shyness/Anxiety	4	Breathing (AW), Pretend confident (AJ)	Interviews/ Observations
4	Pronunciation/Grammar	3	Typing first (FT), Simplification (FZ)	Interviews

The effectiveness of this approach is demonstrated by progress over several sessions (e.g., taking more chances in Session 4). This is in line with Purwati et al.'s (2023) study on obstacles to EFL in Indonesia, which further develops the result that anxiety is common in professional contexts and that young learners frequently rely on nonverbal compensation (Alsaraireh, 2022). Peers and social techniques are referred to as scaffolding in the zone of proximal development (ZPD) in Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, as explained by Mitchell et al. (1978). In order to facilitate the shift from interpersonal (social) to intrapersonal (personal) functioning, learners can do more with both help and their own efforts.

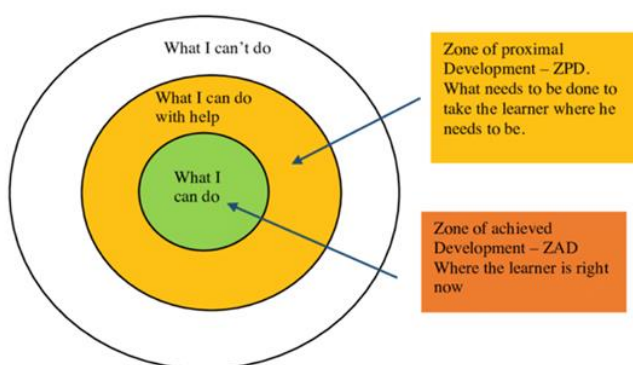


Figure 3. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development and Scaffolding

Since English is spoken as a second language, this shows up as anxiety being lessened through peer support, which is consistent with individual and group discussions as a way to control oneself. Our findings about adaptive compensation are supported by recent study on difficulties speaking English as a foreign language (2025), which highlights methods like using strategies and interactions to get over linguistic barriers. Based on Nazri (2025) group-based education can lessen this which is consistent with Vygotsky's theory of mediated learning. In theory this is consistent with Gardner's (1985)

socioeducational model which shows how integrative motivation overcomes emotional obstacles through social methods.

In summary the results demonstrate that basic-level learners employ practical context-adapted strategies perceiving them as effective for gradual improvement despite challenges. Discussion highlights alignment with SLA theories emphasizing strategy training in Indonesian EFL courses to foster autonomy and reduce anxiety. Limitations include the small sample future research could quantify strategy impacts longitudinally.

CONCLUSION

The results of this research show that young students use realistic situation-appropriate techniques and think these are useful for steady progress even in the face of difficulties. The discussion highlights adherence to SLA theory pointing out that strategy instruction in Indonesian EFL classes fosters independence and lowers fear. Theoretically this study enriches the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) framework by examining how beginner learners develop speaking skills through combining direct and indirect strategies in an informal Indonesian context emphasizing the roles of social mediation and learner agency. Practically it offers insights for EFL educators to incorporate strategy training, skill integration (e.g. online games) and group-based activities to foster confidence and autonomy potentially aiding curriculum reform in similar Southeast Asian settings (Lamusu et al. 2025). The future research may adopt longitudinal designs to quantify the impact of strategies on speaking ability, expand to larger and more diverse samples (e.g., including rural and urban learners), or compare formal and informal EFL settings. Ultimately, providing adaptive strategies to young learners will bridge speaking skill gaps and contribute to broader English proficiency goals in Indonesia.

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