

The effect of film-based shadowing on Iraqi EFL learners' speaking fluency and literature comprehension

Asst. Lec. Fatima Abdul Hussein Jabir

Basra Education Directorate

fatimaahussein7@gmail.com

Abstract

Speaking proficiency and literary understanding are two main goals of EFL teaching, but they are often pursued separately. This study examined how the shadowing technique enhance speaking fluency and literature comprehension together, using the British film *Pride and Prejudice* as the instructional material. A quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test control group was conducted, and 60 sixth-preparatory Iraqi students were divided into an Experimental Group (EG, n = 30) and a Control Group (CG, n = 30). The EG engaged in film-based shadowing activities alongside the usual lessons, and the CG watched the film and participate in discussions with their teacher. Based on the results, the EG achieved significant improvements in speaking fluency. Both groups made remarkable improvements in literature comprehension, but the EG outperformed the CG in the post-intervention literature test. Thus, the findings indicate that the shadowing technique enhanced both oral fluency and literary comprehension.

Keywords: shadowing technique, speaking fluency, literature comprehension, film-based instruction, *Pride and Prejudice*

تأثير تقنية الظل باستخدام الافلام في الطلاقة الكلامية والاستيعاب الأدبي لدى متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية
كلغة أجنبية في العراق
م.م. فاطمة عبدالحسين جابر
مديرية تربية البصرة

المخلص

المحادثة و استيعاب النصوص الأدبية هما مهارتان أساسيتان في تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية. و يتم تدريسهما غالبا كمهارتين منفصلتين. اتجهت هذه الدراسة نحو استكشاف دور «تقنية الظل» في تطوير هاتين المهارتين باستخدام الفيلم البريطاني "كبرياء و تحامل". اعتمد البحث على منهج شبه تجريبي من مجموعتين: مجموعة تجريبية ومجموعة ضابطة. تكونت العينة من 60 طالبا من الصف السادس الاعدادي وتم تقسيمها إلى مجموعة تجريبية (ن = 30) ومجموعة ضابطة (ن = 30). مارس الطلاب في المجموعة التجريبية على أنشطة استخدمت تقنية الظل، بناءً على الفيلم و بما يطابق منهجهم الدراسي. شاهد الطلاب في المجموعة الضابطة ايضا الفيلم وشاركوا في مناقشات تقليدية أدارها المعلم. أظهرت النتائج أن المجموعة التجريبية أظهرت تقدماً ملحوظاً في الطلاقة الشفوية. على الرغم من أن المجموعة الضابطة والمجموعة التجريبية أظهرتا تقدمات ملحوظة في فهم الأدب، فإن المجموعة التجريبية تفوقت

على المجموعة الضابطة في الاختبار البعدي . لذلك، يمكن الاستنتاج أن استخدام تقنية الظل أدى إلى تقدم كبير في كل من الطلاقة الشفوية وفهم النص الأدبي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تقنية الظل، الطلاقة الكلامية، الاستيعاب الأدبي، التعليم القائم على الأفلام، كبرياء و تحامل.

1. Introduction

Developing speaking proficiency a key objective of English Foreign Language (EFL) teaching. However, many EFL learners have difficulties in oral communication because of limited practice of speaking and listening skills in real-life English contexts. Recently, improving learners' speaking skill has become a major concern for language teachers.

One technique that has attracted growing empirical attention is shadowing, which is defined as “a paced, auditory tracking task which involves the immediate vocalization of auditorily presented stimuli” (Lambert, 1992). Through shadowing, learners repeat what they hear- either alongside the speaker or right after- and by regularly listening to natural speech, learners may acquire natural pronunciation patterns, rhythm, stress, and intonation (Hamada, 2015). Studies have found that shadowing can improve speaking skills, particularly pronunciation, fluency, and speech intelligibility (Whitworth et al., 2025; Shaimaa, 2025), although the conditions under which shadowing is most effective remain a subject of ongoing studies.

The study also concerns integrating shadowing into literary instruction. Literature is an important part of the English language syllabus in Iraqi preparatory schools “*Literature Focus*” in the textbook. The main goal of this component is to improve learners' language development and cultural awareness (Sharhan & Janfeshan, 2024). In the 6th preparatory English curriculum, Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is presented through six sections. Each section starts with a summary – the story so far box– and a part driven from the original novel that contains the main events and short dialogues. However, the novel is rooted in early 19th century England, and some of the expressions and implied meanings cannot be decoded by reading a book alone (Bland, 2022).

Text-based instruction helps students become engaged at the surface level, but the focus is mainly on word-by-word decoding (Beloufa, 2023). Film adaptations can bring literary texts to life and provide reliable spoken English in

the classroom. It works as a vehicle for conceptual scaffolding by providing readers with a vision and setting that supports more depth of understanding character, plot, and culture (Chomchaiya, 2021)

There are two ways to engage film in literary instruction. In passive film viewing students watch scenes to support their comprehension, but does not involve the oral skills. Active shadowing of film dialogue requires the learner to imitate the speech of the actors as simultaneously listening and speaking. This is central to this study since the Experimental Group engaged in structured shadowing while the Control Group only viewed the same film.

Researches have studied the impact of shadowing on speaking and the role of film adaptation in literature teaching separately. There are few studies that have connected these two lines in a single curriculum-based study. Film-based shadowing studies have tended to use a general text rather than a specific one, and studies using film for literature instruction have been more concerned with comprehension than oral production. This study attempts to examine the effect of film-based shadowing on speaking fluency and literature understanding. This is particularly important in the Iraqi secondary EFL field, where research on literary instruction is limited in Iraq at this level (Sharhan & Janfeshan, 2024).

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Shadowing Technique: Background and Definition

Shadowing is a technique used in language learning in which learners listen to spoken language and make instant sounds (Lambert, 1992). The term “shadowing” is based on the metaphor of a shadow closely following a person and copying every movement immediately (Hamada, 2018); unlike traditional repetition drills, in which learners are required to wait for pauses before repeating sentences. Shadowing demonstrated an almost immediate response. This means that learners must do two things at once: listening and producing speech at the same time (Whitworth et al., 2025). This dual cognitive demand gives shadowing its psycholinguistic character.

The task of shadowing was initially developed in cognitive psychology to investigate selective attention, especially by Cherry, in the 1950s. Later, the shadowing task became an important training technique for simultaneous interpretation (Barkov, 2022). Its transfer to second-language pedagogy

followed logically as a technique for developing pronunciation accuracy, speech fluency, etc., among EFL learners (Win, 2024).

The effectiveness of shadowing has been explained through several cognitive theories. Skill Acquisition Theory (DeKeyser, 2007) describes how the repeated practice gradually enhances the language knowledge, thus turning the conscious language processing into an automatic performance. Likewise, Information Processing Theory (Segalowitz, 2010) claims that repeated exposure and production reduce the cognitive load that speech production places on working memory. This leads to a more fluent output. Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 1988) extends this account by claiming that reducing cognitive effort of phonological encoding allows learners to pay more attention to understanding and meaningful use of the language.

All of these approaches agree on the prediction of gradual improvements in oral fluency resulting from sustained shadowing practice. The current research views its sample of Iraqi sixth preparatory students, who have had some experience learning English, as individuals likely to benefit more from automatization.

2.2 Speaking Proficiency and the Shadowing Technique

Speaking tasks are widely considered to be one of the most challenging skills for EFL learners. Speech proficiency requires the learner's ability to produce comprehensible and fluent speech while managing lexical, grammatical encoding, phonological processing, and discourse organization simultaneously (Barkov, 2022). Developing productive language skills remains difficult for many EFL learners due to the lack of opportunities to engage in real communication outside the classroom and levels of speaking anxiety that negatively impact oral performance (Barkov, 2022). There are many factors affecting speaking skills. Among these factors, the focus of the present study is on *utterance fluency*, which plays a significant role in building speaking proficiency.

Fluency has been defined by Segalowitz (2010) as the smooth and natural flow of speech produced without unnecessary interruptions. The idea of fluency describes that language can be processed automatically and easily without needing to think through grammatical checks at every step (Kadota, 2019). Segalowitz (2010) further categorized fluency into three types: *cognitive fluency*, which refers to a speaker's ability to plan and produce L2 speech smoothly and easily; *perceived fluency*, which refers to a native speaker's

subjective impression of a nonnative speaker's ease of producing speech; and *utterance fluency*, which refers to the measurable features of speaking output such as speech rate, number of hesitations, and number and length of pauses. The present study considers utterance fluency through acoustic measurement of speech rate, which is the number of syllables spoken per second, based on the acoustic measurement using PRAAT software (De Jong et al., 2021). Speech rate is one of the most consistently reported and reliably measured of fluency in classroom-based L2 acquisition (Tavakoli, et al., 2020).

Shadowing trains automaticity in spoken language by the nature of its central requirement to continuously imitate native speech. By sustained practice, learners will be able to subconsciously acquire pronunciation patterns, word stress, connected speech, and overall rhythm (Tamai, 1997). As speech becomes more automatic, cognitive resources in working memory are liberated for higher level processing, such as comprehending meanings, and creating coherent speech (Segalowitz, 2010). The students who practice shadowing have been found to produce fewer silent pauses in speech and articulate closer to native speaker norms (Hamada, 2021). However, what makes shadowing unique is that learners can acquire not only the mechanical aspects of language but the emotional speech, speaker intention, and tone as well (Lee et al., 2010).

Recent empirical research has found that shadowing can be effective for speech instruction. For example, shadowing has been shown to improve pronunciation, speech understanding, morphology, suprasegmental features, and student confidence in speaking (Whitworth et al., 2025; Shaimaa, 2025).

2.3 Film-Based Approaches and Shadowing in Literature classroom

In the modern context of learning EFLs, literature is no longer taught only for grammatical analysis or vocabulary memorization. Instead, the role of literature becomes much wider and includes enhancing critical thinking skills, broadening cultural experience, developing interpretation skills, and communicative competence (Chomchaiya, 2021). However, classical English literature often poses several difficulties for foreign language learners due to the use of ancient vocabulary, complex syntactic structures, figurative language, irony, and satire, which could affect comprehension (Bland, 2022). When instruction depends only on printed texts, learners will spend much time on word-by-word translation rather than interpreting literary ideas (Beloufa, 2023).

To deal with this problem, the use of audio visual asids has become an increasingly important tool in literature classrooms. The film adaptation of literary work provides students with a multimodal learning environment that includes visual, auditory, emotional, and contextual information simultaneously (Herron, 2022). The multimodal support can assist students in understanding through images, such as facial expressions, gestures, tone of voice, and context, which help them in understanding the meaning beyond words. Mixing literature and films reshapes the way literature is taught in EFL classrooms and appeared a new approach in EFL pedagogy called *literary adaptation*. This “marriage” enables learners to develop their language skills and widen their knowledge of literature, as Beloufa (2023) noted.

As a literary adaptation of Jane Austen's novel, 'Pride and Prejudice' provides authentic British pronunciation, historically grounded dialog, and culturally rich communication. With film instruction and shadowing, students will move from passive observation to active language production. Instead of watching scenes silently, they produce the language by repeating dialogues and trying to imitate the acting styles of pronunciation, pace, intonation, and expression (Saito et al., 2011). This approach may help students become more aware of how language can convey meaning in specific literary or social contexts.

By shadowing emotional exchanges between characters, for example Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy, student can learn to use stress, pitch, and tone to communicate meaning and character. Imagining their spoken words in a picture also allows them to connect words to their context (Martinsen et al., 2017). When applied to dramatic texts, , this process enables them to connect more deeply with the text. Shadowing with film instruction not only increases speaking proficiency, but also furthers a student’s ability to interpret and understand.

This connection between oral production and reading literary texts reflects the relationship between language and meaning in literature classrooms (Chomchaiya, 2021). Language instruction often separates speaking practice from literary analysis, but shadowing with movies allows both processes to take place simultaneously. Since literary dialogue has a richness of emotional, cultural, and social value, students understand the intentions of characters and the environment they are shadowing, to mimic speech naturally (Bland, 2022).

Supporting students' visual interpretation through the adaptation of films helps them make sense of sarcasm, irony, emotions, and social hierarchy with facial expressions, body language, and vocal delivery as context for how meaning is made known through spoken action (Herron, 2022). As a result, students learn to bridge the gap between the abstract language of textual content and expressive performances.

2.4 Research Question

Based on the theoretical framework and identified research gap, this study addresses the following research questions:

Research Question 1: Speaking Fluency

Can shadowing through films make a statistically significant difference in improving utterance fluency — measured as speech rate — among Iraqi sixth-preparatory EFL students compared with passive film viewing combined with teacher-led literary instruction over a six-week period?

Research Question 2: Literature Understanding

Can the integration of shadowing with film-based literary instruction cause a significant increase in the understanding of *Pride and Prejudice* compared with the control group?

Research Question 3: Within-Group Development

To what extent do both groups improve in speaking fluency and literature understanding within each group over time from pre-test to post-test?

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants and Research Design

This study used a quasi-experimental pre-test and post-test control group design. Pre-tests for both outcomes were administered and baseline equivalence between groups was verified to interpret the differences in post-intervention.

Participants were 60 sixth-grade students from an Iraqi preparatory school. They had been studying English as a foreign language since primary school according to the national curriculum. This sample was chosen because: first, the content of sixth-grade curriculum, includes "Pride and Prejudice" as a required text, making it directly relevant to the study's aims. Second, this age group has

sufficient exposure to English instruction to be able to shadow (Hamada, 2015). The sample was divided into two equal groups of 30. The Experimental Group (EG) received film-based shadowing instruction in the a literature class. On the other hand, the Control Group (CG) was exposed to the same film and textbook materials without shadowing. Both groups had the same teacher, material, and amount of class time over the six weeks.

3.2 Instructional Materials

The main audio-visual material was short clips selected from the 2005 British film adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* (directed by Joe Wright). The clips were carefully selected to match the four remaining curriculum sections of the novel to create a direct link between the film content and the prescribed textbooks. The clips provide authentic British English pronunciations for shadowing models. Second, the students' prescribed literature textbooks were used for reading, comprehension, allowing the learners to follow the written text while listening to and shadowing.

3.3 Assessment Measures and Instruments

3.3.1 Speaking Fluency

Speaking fluency was assessed using both the pre-test and post-test tests. The pre-test task required students to make an oral summary of a section of the novel. Responses were analyzed for speech rate (number of syllables per second of the total spoken time) using PRAAT.

3.3.2 Literature Understanding:

To evaluate the students' understanding of *Pride and Prejudice* the study used the school's standard achievement tests. The tests were validated and reviewed by experienced English teachers and they were designed to test the understanding of events in the novel, characters, and vocabulary from the sections of the textbook. Each test has a maximum score of 15 points. Both pre- and post-intervention scores were recorded for both groups.

3.4 Procedure

Experimental Group. In each class the teacher started with introducing the section and explaining the events and characters. Then, students watched the film clips and followed the script in their book. After that, students listened to the clip again and imitated it simultaneously, paying attention to pronunciation

and fluency. At the end of the class, students completed guided comprehension exercises in their text-book.

Control Group. The students watched the same film clips and used the same textbook as the experimental group, only without shadowing. The teacher explained the plot, relationships between characters, and key words. The students completed the same tasks from the textbook through reading and writing. The control group received passive film-assisted literary instruction, and the film was used to assist comprehension.

4. Results

Paired-samples t-tests used to compare pre-test from post-test for each group performance (Research Question 3). Independent-samples t-test used to analyze the differences between the two groups at baseline and post-test (Research Questions 1 & 2), with significance levels $\alpha = .05$ for all tests. The results are reported by following abbreviations: means (M), standard deviation (SD), t-values, degrees of freedom (df), and p values

4.1 Baseline Equivalence — Pre-Test Results

An independent samples t-test was run before the intervention to determine if the two groups had similar baseline oral fluency in terms of speech rate. It is clear from Table 1. that there is no significant difference between the two groups, which confirms their equivalence at the beginning of the study. Considering literary text, a parallel comparison of pre-test scores also indicates equivalent baselines across both groups: (EG: M = 9.12, SD = 1.25; CG: M = 9.20, SD = 1.20).

Table 1. Independent-Samples t-Test for Baseline Speech Rate (Pre-Test)

Group	N	M (syll/sec)	SD	t(58)	p
Experimental	30	1.42	0.22	-0.337	.737
Control	30	1.44	0.24		

4.2 Within- Group Development in Speaking Fluency

Paired-samples t-tests were used to examine changes in the speech rate within each group. As indicated in Table 2, the Experimental Group significantly increased its speech rate from M = 1.42 syllables/second (SD = 0.22) at pre-test

to $M = 2.11$ syllables/second ($SD = 0.28$) at post-test, $t(29) = -11.500$, $p < .001$, a gain of 0.69 syllables per second, or 48.6% from baseline. The Control Group had no statistically significant change between the pre-test mean $M = 1.44$ ($SD = 0.24$) and a mean of $M = 1.52$ ($SD = 0.25$), $t(29) = -1.350$, $p = .188$, representing a gain of only 0.08 syllables per second (5.6%).

Table 2. Paired-Samples t-Tests for Within-Group Speech Rate Change

Group	phase	M (syll/sec)	SD	t(29)	p
Experimental	Pre-test	1.42	0.22	-11.500	< .001
	Post-test	2.11	0.28		
Control	Pre-test	1.44	0.24	-1.350	.188
	Post-test	1.52	0.25		

4.3 Post-Intervention Comparative Analysis

An independent-samples t-test was conducted on post-test speech rate results which revealed a statistically significant between-group difference: the Experimental Group ($M = 2.11$, $SD = 0.28$) substantially outperformed the Control Group ($M = 1.52$, $SD = 0.25$), $t(58) = 8.610$, $p < .001$ (Table 3). The results are directly related to Research Question 1: film-based shadowing produced significantly greater gains than passive film-based instructions.

Table 3. Independent-Samples t-Test for Post-Test Speech Rate

Group	N	M(syll/sec)	SD	Mean difference	t(58)	p
Experimental	30	2.11	0.28	0.59	8.610	< .001
Control	30	1.52				

4.4 Within-Group Development in Literature Understanding

The study used paired-samples t-tests on literature achievement test scores (maximum = 15 points) to assess the within-group change from pre-intervention to post-intervention testing. As shown in Table 4, both groups showed significant improvements. The Experimental Group increased from $M = 9.12$ ($SD = 1.25$) to $M = 12.98$ ($SD = 1.10$), a gain of 3.86 points, $t(29) = -12.150$, $p < .001$. The Control Group increased from $M = 9.20$ ($SD = 1.20$) to $M = 12.30$

(SD = 1.15), a gain of 3.10 points, $t(29) = -9.950$, $p < .001$. The significant difference in both groups suggests that film instruction, even passive viewing, provided a means of helping students with understanding of literary texts.

Table 4. Paired-Samples t-Tests for Within-Group Literature Score Change

Group	phase	M (/15)	SD	Gain	t(29)	p
Experimental	Pre-test	9.12	1.25	3.86 pts	-12.150	< .001
	Post-test	12.98	1.10			
Control	Pre-test	9.20	1.20	3.10 pts	-9.950	< .001
	Post-test	12.30	1.15			

Note. . Maximum score = 15 points. Gain = post-test minus pre-test mean.

4.5 Between-Group Comparison of Post-Test Literature Scores

To determine the impact of shadowing in literature comprehension, the study conducted an independent-samples t-test of post-test literature scores. The results indicate a statistically significant difference between groups with the Experimental group scoring higher than the Control group ($M = 12.98$, $SD = 1.10$), $t(58) = 2.340$, $p = .023$; Table 5). While the difference in score between groups is small, the difference is statistically significant, and trending towards the point gap between groups. Therefore, the null hypothesis for Research Question 2 is rejected.

Table 5. Independent-Samples t-Test for Post-Test Literature Scores

Group	N	M(/15)	SD	Mean difference	t(58)	p
Experimental	30	12.98	1.10	0.68	2.340	.023
Control	30	12.30				
			1.15			

5. Discussion

5.1 Effect of Shadowing on Speaking Fluency

The results of speaking fluency are obviously clear. The Experimental Group had an increase of 0.69 syllables per second (48.6%) from baseline. The Control Group only had an increase of 0.08 syllables per second (5.6%) and this indicates that passive film viewing and teacher-led instruction had no

meaningful improvement in speech fluency over six weeks. This comparison between groups post-test measures suggests that active shadowing authentic film dialogue was the main factor that affected speech rate.

It can be assumed that these results have theoretical relevance to the cognitive theories introduced in section 2: Skill Acquisition Theory (DeKeyser, 2007), by providing repetitive practice, the declarative knowledge transform into automatic performance, reducing attention to basic sound production. The extent of the speech rate improvement in the Experimental Group is also consistent with this automation. Information Processing Theory (Segalowitz, 2010) predicts that repetitions of sounds reduce the working-memory burden of phonological patterns, freeing up available memory for fluent speech. The Cognitive Load Theory concern — that simultaneous listening and speaking might overload learners — is obvious in the results as well.

5.2 Effect of Shadowing on Literature Understanding

Obviously, both groups showed statistically significant improvements in literature understanding in post-test. Significant improvement of the Control Group ($M = 9.20$ to $M = 12.30$, $t(29) = -9.950$, $p < .001$) proves that film viewing served as a powerful comprehension scaffold for *Pride and Prejudice*, even if there was no shadowing activities. This finding is consistent with the theoretical claims of multimodal learning theory (Herron, 2022) and literary adaptation pedagogy (Beloufa, 2023; Chomchaiya, 2021) which suggested that students could gain additional information through film to help them grasp the deeper meanings of historical and lingua texts that books alone cannot provide.

Post-test superiority of the Experiment Group ($t(58) = 2.340$, $p = .023$) indicates that shadowing was an additional benefit to literary comprehension. The students pay more attention to the language in characters' dialogue. By repeating Elizabeth Bennet's or Mr. Darcy's words, learners internalized the sound surface of the dialogue but the message and social meaning. Thus, they got a deeper understanding of the characters and plot.

A moderately different group performance on reading difference (with raw difference = 0.68 out of 15 points) and a significantly difference on fluency (0.59), which was anticipated and informative as well, were noted. Both groups had been exposed to similar texts and films, hence making it clear why both groups made progress in reading comprehension. Reading fluency, on the other hand, is a production outcome since that cannot be developed without practice.

5.3 Alternative Explanations and Recommendation for Further Studies

There may be several alternative reasons for the differences observed among the groups. For example, the motivation factor and novel nature of the task of film shadowing may have resulted in higher level of engagement of the Experimental Group which proved hard to control in a classroom-based setting. Additionally, concerning the literature measure, although the school-based achievement tests have a high degree of validity, they were not checked for reliability in this study. In future studies reliability should be checked together with verified instruments of literature comprehension.

5.4 Pedagogical Implications

These findings have important implications for English language teachers at the Iraqi secondary schools and beyond for EFL context where literature is part of the curriculum. Firstly, the results showed that film adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* (in the curriculum) was ready-made and suitable material for shadowing. Secondly, since such a significant improvement in comprehension was demonstrated by both groups, film adaptation is a great approach to be applied as a means of facilitating teaching of literature. Thirdly, the additional benefits of literature acquisition due to shadowing gives the integrated approach its value in language learning.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of a film-based shadowing intervention on students' speaking fluency and literature understanding for six-grade Iraqi EFL students in terms of British adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* over six weeks. This quasi-experimental pre-/post-test control group compared the Experimental Group who shadowed the movie dialogues with the Control Group who watched the movie in silence and received teacher-led literature instructions.

Findings showed that film-based shadowing had an impact on the English Language Learners' speaking fluency. Speech rate was significantly greater in the Experimental Group (from 1.42 to 2.11 syllables per second, an improvement of 48.6%), while the Control Group had no significant effect on the fluency. These results suggest, repeated oral rehearsal of film dialogue improves fluency by promoting automatic speech production and build a closer connection between listening and speaking.

Moreover, both groups had developed in literature understanding. This fact highlights the effectiveness of film adaptation as a scaffold to learn a text from the perspective of literary work. But, the Experimental Group performed better than the Control Group in their ability on the post-intervention literature test ($t(58) = 2.340, p = .023$), showing the role of the shadowing strategy as an additional value along with film viewing.

In conclusion, this study proves the positive impact of shadowing and film-based techniques within the context of EFL classroom studies. Audio and oral practice enables students to gain communication competence and literary understanding at the same time. Furthermore, this study proved that literature as part of the syllabus of preparatory school provides a useful tool to develop language skills by shadowing.

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