

## Hard and Soft Skills Needed for the Production of Fabric Bags by Technology and Vocational Education Graduates for Self-Reliance in Lagos State Nigeria

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**Abstract**

This study explored the skills needed in the production of Fabric bags by Technology and Vocational Education Graduates in Tertiary Institutions for Self-Reliance in Lagos State Nigeria. It examined the explicit knowledge, soft skills, and hard skills that Technology and Vocational Education graduates require to succeed as fabric bag producers. A survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised of three tertiary institutions offering related Technology and Vocational Education Programme in Lagos State Nigeria. The sample size was 100 respondents selected from the 3 institutions. The research instrument used for the collection of data was a Researcher-made structured questionnaire. The survey covered a cross section of relevant skills and knowledge that successful and self-dependent Fabric bag producer required to become successful in the textile and apparel industry. The data collected was subjected to descriptive analysis using frequency tables and mean score. The results of the findings show that high percentage of the respondents do not have knowledge of the various stages and processes in fabric bag production. It was also revealed that the respondents still require professional training on the necessary skills and experience in fabric bag marketing before they can become successful and self-sufficient. Based on the findings, it was recommended that Bag production unit should be established in technology and vocational institution where production and marketing skills will be learnt and practiced.

## **Background to the Study**

Fabric bag is any type of bag made from varying materials or fabric that can be carried either by hand or over the shoulder. Also known as a sack in some parts of the world, it is a popular non-rigid container. Bags have been used since before recorded history, with the oldest bags being little more than lengths of animal skin, cotton, or woven plant fibers folded up at the edges and fastened in that shape by strings of the same fabric. Used by both genders, fabric bags may be traced back to ancient Egypt. Also, the 14th century recorded the use of drawstring bags by many who were wary of thieves and pickpockets. Self-reliance indicates a state of independence and good standing. Baumeister (1987), defined self-reliance as the reliance on internal resources to provide life with coherence (meaning) and fulfillment. The question of how best to prepare Technology and Vocational Education students in tertiary institutions for self-reliance and financial independence in the fast-paced and ever-changing clothing and textiles industry is very important because graduates face an increasingly competitive job market in Lagos state and Nigeria as a whole. According to Abusomwan (2019), Home Economics as a related area in Technology and Vocational Education, is a course taught at primary, secondary and tertiary levels, is one aimed at helping students develop desirable social attitudes and skills necessary for the world of work, resourcefulness and ability to adapt to life changing situations for self - reliance. She however highlights that the Nigerian education system is yet to achieve the national goal of producing individuals with high entrepreneurial competencies that can work independently and globally as well as creatively impact sustainable livelihood at micro and aggregate levels. With a significant gap in graduate employment and unemployment rates, the economy of Nigeria continues to suffer little or no positive impact, instead, poverty thrives, forcing the educated and non-educated alike to venture into criminal activities just to make ends meet Oluseyi, (2012).

According to the National Bureau of Statistics, Nigeria's unemployment rate as of the Fourth quarter of 2020 totaled at 33.3% indicating that about 33.3 million Nigerians remained unemployed, with youth unemployment highlighting at 42.5%. Records also show that tertiary institutions in Nigeria admit close to 2 million students each academic year, producing an estimate of 600,000 graduates annually – what then happens when 70% of these able-bodied graduates cannot find jobs in the workforce – thus, a case of too many qualified graduates struggling for too few jobs/employment opportunities. The Corona Virus (COVID-19) pandemic that struck the world back in 2019/2020 also exacerbated the country's economic situation, making it even more difficult for employers to create new employment. To reduce expenses and stay financially afloat, the private sector resorted to job slashes, camouflaged as downsizing and right-sizing; again, rendering graduates helpless on high waters. Hence, colleges, universities and polytechnics should not sit back and watch as danger looms in society - the need for students entering the workforce to learn essential skills that stimulate self-sufficiency and financial independence should be emphasized Nwankwo, et al (2014). Fabric bag production industry is an industry that continues to expand, as its products are forever in demand; both male and female, young and old make use of bags for various purposes. With most of its consumers being women, the textile industry has worked hard in ensuring steady production of fabric bags for its buyers, with varying creative techniques, stylish designs, and up-to-date trends every season Andrew, (2011).

Alzahrani and Kozar (2017) evaluated the skills and competencies required for female graduates to succeed in the Saudi Arabian apparel production and retail sector; this is the first known study to have been carried out in a developing nation. There has been little emphasis on preparing graduates for the role of fabric bag production in the global textile business. The absence of empirical data regarding the skills and knowledge necessary for graduates to succeed as fabric bag producers in Nigeria warrants research in this field as the labor market issues in Lagos State intensify and the quest for self-sufficiency among young graduates grows stronger. To succeed as fabric bag producer, Technology and Vocational Education graduates need specific abilities that comprise relevant knowledge and skills. Skills are the ability, aptitude, or competency to perform a certain task or work in a standardized way. Skills can be learned or developed through instruction or experience. According to Yorke and Knight (2003), core skills are referred to as profession-specific talents, whereas generic or transferable skills refer to skills that may be applied in a variety of workplace settings, such as communication skills.

Soft skills are character traits or desirable qualities that are transferable from one work or industry context to another. Soft skills are generic skills; they relate more to “who we are than what we know” (Robles, 2012). Soft skills form the basis of people-related skills (interpersonal) and personal attributes (intrapersonal) (Andrews and Higson, 2008; Yorke and Knight, 2003). Scholars have proposed various types of soft skills as essential for professional success. For example, Robles (2012) identified ten types of soft skills consisting of various dimensions important for business executives in the 21st century: communication, courtesy, flexibility, integrity, interpersonal skills, positive attitude, professionalism, responsibility, teamwork, and work ethic. According to Javidan, Teagarden and Bowen (2010), people working in global industries should also have intercultural awareness and diplomacy. Jackson (2013) confirmed the soft skills proposed by Robles (2012) and Javidan et al. (2010) but also added leadership, organizational skills, and self-management and self-evaluation. Soft Skills in the production Context When Muhammad and Ha-Brookshire (2011) examined the responsibilities of producers, they discovered that communication and teamwork were crucial qualities. Due to the reliance on cross-functional and even virtual teamwork, communication is essential for marketing professionals because, marketing is next to production, (Clokje & Fourie, 2016). Goworek (2010) suggested that “vital talents for production sector include the ability to write reports, detailed specifications, budgeting, record keeping, business letters and emails, run meetings, and provide oral presentations. Forging partnerships in the global textile sector across organizational, cultural, and time zone barriers requires effective communication and teamwork (Karpova et al., 2011b). Frazier and Cheek (2016) added that professional conduct, upholding ethics, and leadership were crucial soft skills for production professions. According to an analysis of the available research, the soft skills needed in the general business environment are similar to those needed by specialists in production. Interpersonal and intrapersonal soft skill categories were established. The interpersonal or intrapersonal skill category was then used to group together various soft skills Jacops, (2018).

Dimensions of Soft Skills include, Interpersonal category, Communication, Courtesy, verbal, written, presentation, listening, polite, respectful, considerate, Diplomacy, Leadership negotiation, discretion, resolve conflict, motivates others, coaches/mentors, monitors performance, functions in diverse settings, goal-oriented Professionalism, Social businesslike, well-dressed, pleasant, friendly, sense of humor, intercultural awareness, Teamwork cooperative, collaborative, supportive, helpful, trusts others. Intrapersonal category Flexibility Integrity adaptability, willingness to change, acceptance of new things, honesty, ethical, high morals, does the right thing, Organizational Positive attitude, project management, time management, multi-tasking, prioritizing optimistic, enthusiastic, encouraging Responsibility, Self-management, accountable, reliable, gets the job done disciplined, stress tolerance, work-life balance, independent Self-evaluation, Work ethic, self-efficacy, realistic judgement of abilities, values, and beliefs hardworking, loyal, self-motivated, punctuality, good attendance.

Hard skills According to Robles (2012), are associated with a person's aptitude for technical and cognitive tasks. Robles further pointed out that hard skills can be divided into two groups: thinking or conceptual skills, and technical skills (such as technology use or numeracy). Higher order thinking talents like critical thinking, problem-solving, and information organization for decision-making are related to thinking or conceptual capabilities (Danskin et al., 2005). Thinking or conceptual abilities are hence generic and cross-disciplinary. While some technical abilities, like numeracy or the use of universal software (e.g. Microsoft Office), are equally transferrable, some technical talents are discipline specific. Use of specialist software for patternmaking, bag design drafting and grading, as well as virtual selling, are examples.

Dimension of Hard Skills Technical Category Numeracy Technology mathematical, budgeting, costing, use of information and communication technology, Thinking/Conceptual Category, Critical thinking, Decision making pattern recognition, conceptualization, evaluation, interpretation lateral thinking, information management Innovation creativity, original ideas, resourcefulness, implementation of ideas Metacognition Problem solving self-awareness, lifelong learning, reflection on experiences, analytical reasoning, diagnosing Strategic thinking, planning, visioning Knowledge. The term "knowledge" relates to cognizance, "consciousness, or understanding earned by experience or study". Knowledge is separated into explicit and tacit categories (Nonaka et al., 2000). While tacit knowledge is acquired informally from human experiences through observations and practice, explicit knowledge is obtained formally through scientific labor and findings (Nonaka et al., 2000). Knowledge can be further understood as: (a) how simple or complex it is to codify (how easily it can be shared, communicated, or learned); (b) the degree of simplicity or complexity (amount of information needed to communicate knowledge); and (c) the degree of dependency (dependent/systemic knowledge depends on how fixed it is in the organization/context, whereas independent knowledge can be explained on its own). Explicit knowledge is easy to share and teach (Danskin et al., 2005). It is what graduates have formally learned in a discipline field: the structure or organization of the discipline, the truth criteria of the discipline, and the methods and application used in the discipline (Donald,

1986). Chida & Brown (2011) also stressed the importance of discipline-specific knowledge in the textile industry. Glock et al. (2005) also emphasized the importance of including foundational knowledge about apparel products in all retail programs. These topics include textile science, quality assurance, and apparel construction. The content and subject matter of textiles and apparel were clarified in the 1990s by Kaiser and Damhorst, who made a distinction between three main areas: (a) textile product evaluation (the relationship between the physical properties of the product and consumers' responses to those properties); (b) appearance and social realities (how meaning is created through consumers' interaction with other consumers and products); (c) textile and apparel distribution systems (processes and systems involved in manufacturing, merchandising and distribution of products within a global economy). Therefore, Technology and Vocational Education graduates in Lagos State, when equipped with the necessary skills to operate as fabric bag producers, will not only overcome unemployment barriers but will also enter the Nigerian workforce as self-sufficient and financially independent professionals who will eventually become employers of labour.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study aims to identify fabric bag production and marketing skills needed by Home Economics graduates in tertiary institutions for self-reliance in Lagos state. Specifically, the study will:

1. Determine the Explicit knowledge required for Technology and Vocational Education graduates to succeed as fabric bag producers.
2. Identify the soft skills required by Technology and Vocational Education graduates for fabric bag production in Lagos State.
3. Examine the hard skills required by Technology and Vocational Education graduates for fabric bag production in Lagos State.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the Explicit knowledge required for Technology and Vocational Education graduates to succeed as fabric bag producers?
2. What are the soft skills required by Technology and Vocational Education graduates for fabric bag production in Lagos State?
3. What are the hard skills required by Technology and Vocational Education graduates for fabric bag production in Lagos State?

### **Methodology**

Survey research design was adopted for the study. The study covered Lagos Mainland Local Government of Lagos State. The target population for this study comprised of all the final-year Technology and Vocational Education students in tertiary institutions in Lagos state. A sample of 100 students were proportionally selected for this study. The institutions sampled include Yaba College of Technology, Federal College of Technical Education Akoka and University of Lagos, Akoka. The research instrument that was used for this study was a structured questionnaire. The Questionnaire consists of a series of 40 closed response items that cover three research questions. The response format used is the Rating scale with the response options; Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree. The



instrument was validated by three experts, one from university of Nigeria Nnsuka, one from Yaba College of Technology and one from bag production industry. Necessary modifications were then made before distributing to the study participants. The questionnaire was prepared and distributed using an online survey form. The data collected was analyzed using the mean and percentage score.

## Results

**Research Question One (1):** What Explicit knowledge do Technology and Vocational Education graduates require for Fabric Bag production in Lagos State?

**Table 1.**

| S/N | General Textile Knowledge Category   | SD         | D          | N           | A           | SA          | Total |
|-----|--|------------|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------|
| 1.  | I'm good at styling outfits to suit different occasions<br>(Fashion)   | 2          | 4          | 18          | 19          | 57          | 100   |
| 2.  | I have basic knowledge on how to operate mechanical machineries like sewing and leathermaking machines, using appropriate construction techniques<br>(Manufacturing) | 8          | 0          | 20          | 28          | 44          | 100   |
| 3.  | I can distinguish between different types of fibers, yarns, and dyes (Textile)   | 4          | 2          | 24          | 33          | 37          | 100   |
| 4.  | If I was to design a new fabric product, I'd be able to apply the principles and elements of design like contrast, balance and forms.<br>(Aesthetics)                | 2          | 4          | 17          | 33          | 44          | 100   |
| 5.  | I have a strong attention to detail and will be able to identify any non-conformity between an original product and pre-production samples (Textile product)         | 5          | 3          | 19          | 41          | 32          | 100   |
| 6.  | I know how to attach a symbolic meaning to a product through identity creation (Social Cultural Impact)  | 4          | 4          | 20          | 39          | 33          | 100   |
| 7.  | I always avoid excessive waste of materials, littering and the use of unrecyclable products. whenever I engage in creative work (Sustainability)                     | 0          | 2          | 15          | 46          | 37          | 100   |
|     | <b>Merchandising knowledge Category</b>  |            |            |             |             |             |       |
| 8.  | If given the opportunity, I'd be able to formulate solid marketing strategies for branding and advertisements<br>(Marketing)   | 2          | 7          | 20          | 37          | 33          | 100   |
| 9.  | I'll be able to effectively plan and implement strategies to deal with the suppliers who may not be willing to partner with me (Sourcing)                            | 2          | 2          | 26          | 37          | 33          | 100   |
| 10. | It will be easy for me to manage sales and maintain healthy competition among competitors within the textile industry (Business)                                     | 0          | 9          | 16          | 43          | 32          | 100   |
|     | <b>Mean score</b>  | <b>2.9</b> | <b>3.7</b> | <b>19.5</b> | <b>37.6</b> | <b>38.4</b> |       |

The data gotten from this table indicates that a greater percentage of students with the mean score of total value **76**, agree to possessing the relevant Explicit knowledge that will enable them to become self-reliant fabric bag producers. The mean scores for the students who fell under the “Neutral”, “Disagree”, and “Strongly disagree” categories were significantly lower totaling at **26.1**. This means that a handful of students have little or no knowledge regarding textiles and bag production.

**Research Question Two (2):** What Soft Skills do Technology and Vocational graduates require for Fabric Bag production in Lagos State?

**Table 2.**

| S/N | Interpersonal Category   | SD         | D          | N           | A           | SA          | Total |
|-----|--|------------|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------|
| 1.  | <b>Good Communication skill</b>  | 2          | 2          | 7           | 39          | 50          | 100   |
| 2.  | I'm likely say please and thank you when asking for assistance from colleagues and subordinates<br><b>(Courtesy)</b>   | 2          | 0          | 2           | 26          | 70          | 100   |
| 3.  | I know how to initiate conversations with customers and have a strong sense of humor<br><b>(Social)</b>  | 0          | 0          | 13          | 37          | 50          | 100   |
| 4.  | I am able to cooperate and work well with entrepreneurs from different backgrounds to achieve a common goal<br><b>(Diplomacy)</b>                              | 2          | 2          | 17          | 33          | 46          | 100   |
| 5.  | As a businessman/woman, I would feel a strong sense of responsibility towards the society<br><b>(Professionalism)</b>  | 2          | 3          | 15          | 30          | 50          | 100   |
|     | <b>Intrapersonal Category</b>  |            |            |             |             |             |       |
| 6.  | To keep myself accountable, I like to share my business targets and goals with others<br><b>(self-management)</b>  | 11         | 11         | 22          | 30          | 26          | 100   |
| 7.  | If a proffered solution doesn't work, I would seek an alternative rather than give up quickly<br><b>(Flexibility)</b>  | 4          | 0          | 7           | 35          | 54          | 100   |
| 8.  | People can count on me to deliver on my promises and to follow through on my commitments<br><b>(Integrity)</b>   | 4          | 0          | 6           | 32          | 59          | 100   |
| 9.  | I will rather take responsibility for my mistakes as well as my teams' and proactively try to fix/learn from them than point blame.<br><b>(Responsibility)</b> | 0          | 0          | 5           | 32          | 63          | 100   |
| 10. | I know how to stay organized working on multiple business projects<br><b>(Organizational)</b>  | 2          | 0          | 20          | 37          | 41          | 100   |
|     | <b>Mean Score</b>  | <b>2.9</b> | <b>1.8</b> | <b>11.4</b> | <b>35.1</b> | <b>50.9</b> |       |

From the above data, it can be deduced that the **Strongly agree** category has the highest mean score with a value of **50.9** followed closely by the **Agree** category with a value of **35.1**, indicating a high level of self-perceived competence in the possession of relevant soft skills among majority of the students. A relatively smaller subset of students with a total mean value of **16.1**, however expressed their uncertainty or disagreement with their possession of the relevant soft skills.

**Research Question Three (3):** What Hard Skills do Technology and Vocational Education graduates require for Fabric Bag Production in Lagos State?

**Table 3.**

| S/N                                 | Technical Category  | SD         | D          | N           | A           | SA          | Total |
|-------------------------------------|---|------------|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------|
| 1.                                  | I can do solid calculations that involve costing and budgeting ( <b>Numeracy</b> )  | 4          | 0          | 11          | 41          | 44          | 100   |
| 2.                                  | I know how to make use of the internet to source information without assistance ( <b>Technology</b> )   | 1          | 2          | 2           | 26          | 69          | 100   |
| 3.                                  | I am skilled in the use of Microsoft Word, Excel and spreadsheets and will be able to incorporate it for data analysis in my business ( <b>Technology</b> ) | 7          | 5          | 15          | 30          | 43          | 100   |
| <b>Thinking/Conceptual Category</b> |   |            |            |             |             |             |       |
| 4.                                  | I apply foresight in planning and anticipate problems before they occur ( <b>Strategic thinking</b> )   | 2          | 4          | 9           | 46          | 39          | 100   |
| 5.                                  | I figure out original ways to do things as well as actively adapt and improve on existing ideas ( <b>Innovation</b> )                                       | 0          | 0          | 11          | 37          | 52          | 100   |
| 6.                                  | I often draw vision boards so that I am able to visualize and achieve my set goals ( <b>Strategic thinking</b> )  | 3          | 0          | 17          | 37          | 43          | 100   |
| 7.                                  | I constantly reflect on past experiences to evaluate my strengths and weaknesses ( <b>Metacognition</b> )   | 2          | 0          | 13          | 50          | 35          | 100   |
| 8.                                  | I have an inquiring mind and am eager to learn from those who are more knowledgeable than I am ( <b>Metacognition</b> )                                     | 2          | 4          | 11          | 35          | 48          | 100   |
| 9.                                  | If I was a team head, it would be easy for me to identify and deploy members who will contribute effectively to certain tasks ( <b>Decision making</b> )    | 0          | 2          | 11          | 37          | 50          | 100   |
| 10.                                 | When faced with a complex situation, I know how to identify the problem and make justifiable evaluation ( <b>Critical thinking</b> )                        | 2          | 0          | 11          | 43          | 44          | 100   |
| <b>Mean score</b>                   |   | <b>2.3</b> | <b>1.7</b> | <b>11.1</b> | <b>38.2</b> | <b>46.7</b> |       |

Findings from the above data, shows that the **Strongly agree** category has the highest mean score with a value of **46.7** and the **Agree** category has a mean value of **38.2**, indicating that majority of the students are confident in their possession of relevant hard skills needed for fabric bag merchandising and autonomy in Lagos state. A smaller subset of students with a total mean value of **15.1**, however expressed their uncertainty or disagreement with their possession of the relevant hard skills.

### Discussion of the Findings

Based on the presented analyzed and interpreted data, the researcher was able to gather the following result. The findings reveal that majority of final year students in the selected tertiary institutions in Lagos state have acquired a reasonable amount of the necessary soft skills, hard skills and explicit knowledge that will enable them to become self-reliant fabric producers in Lagos state. In line with Arnold and Forney (1998), graduates need specific abilities that comprise relevant skills and knowledge to succeed as Fabric bag producers. However, only a handful of these students have secured the professional experience/tacit knowledge that will equip them with valuable insight and expertise to be successful.



Results from research question 2 and 3, indicated a high level of self-perceived competence in the possession of relevant soft skills and hard among majority of the students with a mean value of **35.1** and **38.2** respectively. A relatively smaller subset of students with a total mean value of **16.1** and **15.1** respectively, however expressed their uncertainty or disagreement with their possession of the relevant soft and hard skills. Such skills and information cannot be gotten from theoretical application or textbooks, instead is taught through observation and apprenticeship. Self-management being a necessary skill for professional success in Fabric bag production which will play a significant role in impacting the students and enforcing discipline amongst them. This is confirmed by Jackson (2013) who emphasized the addition of leadership, organizational, self-management and self-evaluation skills to the proposed soft skills required of business executives in the 21st century by Robles (2012) and Javidan et al. (2010). Finally, Chida & Brown (2011) accentuated the importance of discipline-specific knowledge in the textile industry.

### **Conclusion**

This study was carried out to identify and analyze the fabric bag production skills needed by Technology and Vocational Education graduates in tertiary institutions for self-reliance in Lagos state. It examined the soft skills, hard skills and explicit knowledge that Technology and Vocational Education graduates require to succeed as fabric bag producers. It can be deduced that the respondents still require professional training on the prerequisite skills and experience in fabric bag production before they can become successful and self-sufficient graduates. In conclusion, this research highlights the importance of equipping Technology and Vocational Education graduates with the necessary skills to succeed in the fabric bag production industry. The findings of this research underscore the potential for self-reliance and entrepreneurship within the fabric bag sector, particularly in a densely populated and economically vibrant region like Lagos State. By providing Technology and Vocational Education graduates with the relevant skills, knowledge, and resources, they can tap into this growing market and create sustainable livelihoods for themselves. The study identifies key areas where these graduates can enhance their skills, such as designing, marketing, sourcing materials, production techniques, and business management. It emphasizes the need for practical training, internships, and mentorship programs to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world application. By addressing the skills gap in fabric bag production, the research suggests that tertiary institutions in Lagos State can play a crucial role in empowering graduates to pursue self-employment and contribute to the local economy. Furthermore, it highlights the significance of collaborations between educational institutions, industry stakeholders, and government agencies to establish supportive frameworks and initiatives that foster entrepreneurial success. Overall, this research provides valuable insights into the fabric bag production industry and the skills required for Technology and Vocational Education graduates to become self-reliant. By investing in the development of these skills and creating an enabling environment, we can empower graduates to thrive in the business world, promote sustainability through eco-friendly alternatives, and contribute to the economic growth of Lagos State.

## Recommendations

Institutions should advocate for the inclusion of fabrics bag production textbooks and integration of entrepreneurship education in the Technology and Vocational Education curriculum.

1. To effectively address the challenges that may be encountered by Technology and Vocational Education graduates in setting up their Fabric bag production businesses, the government should make provision for mentorship programs and business incubation centers.
2. Compulsory internships in bag production should be included in the required course work for Home Economics students who is interested and want to specialize in this aspect.
3. Collaboration of educational institutions, industry stakeholders, and government agencies is encouraged to establish supportive frameworks, funding and initiatives that foster entrepreneurial success among Home Economics graduates.
4. Business agencies like SMEDAN (Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria), NEPC (Nigerian Export Promotion Council), Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN), should set up and implement policies that promote a conducive environment for Fabric bag production and merchandising among graduates with little or no capital.
5. Digital educational training bodies like Coursera, Jobber man, Udacity, and Udemy are encouraged to collaborate with institutions to bring about the training of students in vital soft skills and hard skills through online or physical mentorships.
6. Bi-annual training programs should be organized to enhance fabric bag production skills among Technology and Vocational Education graduates.



Samples of Ankara Fabrics Bags - 1



Samples of Ankara Fabrics Bags - 2

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