

## EXPLORING JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM ANXIETY

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### ABSTRACT

Students' foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA), in the last four decades, has been discussed by many researchers regarding to its impact toward students' learning and achievement. Since "anxiety prevents some people from performing successfully in foreign language learning" (Horwitz et al. (1986 p.125), it is necessary to explore in order to gain success. This present research implements survey study which was conducted among 194 junior high school students in order to find the levels of FLCA, and interview was given to 11 students who are classified as students with High Level of Anxiety in order to explore the factors contributing students' FLCA. Findings show that there are 63 (32%) students classified in Low Level of Anxiety, 120 (62%) Moderate Level of Anxiety and 11 (6%) High Level of Anxiety, and there are two major factors contributing FLCA which relate to cognitive anxiety and psychological anxiety.

**Keywords:** Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety, Junior High School Students

### INTRODUCTION

Anxiety is a factor which can cause several negative effects towards EFL students. As stated by Spielberg as cited by Horwitz (1986), "anxiety is the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system" (p.125). More specifically, Awan et al. (2010 p.34) contend, "the anxiety experienced in a classroom is called Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA)". The foreign language classroom anxiety was constructed and proposed by Horwitz et al. (1986). It is defined as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from uniqueness of the language learning process" (p.128).

Commonly, anxiety effects to students' speaking and performance in front of the class. Tiono et al. (2004) argue that "to speak or to perform something using foreign language in a classroom situation can cause students' anxiety because they have to perform unfamiliar sounds in front of an audience, or because teacher and other students ask questions and give corrections or comments excessively" (p.30) In addition, Horwitz et al. (1986, p.125) claim that "anxiety prevents some people from performing successfully in foreign language learning". Therefore, this needs to be handled soon.

In other countries, researchers have found that foreign language anxiety has a wide range of potential negative effects on foreign language learning (Han, 2013, p.442). And the similar result is obtained by Abdullah et al. (2010 p.5), that "there are a number of students who thought that they feel nervous when they have to speak without preparation and felt very conscious about speaking in English in front of other students". Those reveal that anxiety contributes the negative effects, especially in students' oral performance in front of EFL Classroom.

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The phenomenon alike was found in one Junior High School in Tasikmalaya. When the students were asked to speak or perform in front of students, they rejected. They say "No sir, I cannot do it, I'm fear to get wrong!" As stated by (Tiono et al. 2004) "an anxious learner may avoid delivering difficult messages, avoid being involved in class discussion, reduce their performance in public communication, et cetera. (p.30). And when they are forced one to stand in front of the class, he/she did nothing and got blank. If the anxiety still exists and still gives some negative effects, the goal of the study cannot be achieved. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct the research related to the problem, in order to minimize the failure of students' achievement in learning foreign language.

This research seeks two research questions, the first is aimed to seek the levels of students' FLCA, and the second is to find out the factors contributing FLCA. In order to find out the levels of FLCA, a survey study is implemtened to an EFL classroom of Junior High School in Tasikmalaya and to explore the factors causing students anxious. The differences between this research and the previous research studies are; the first research is aimed at giving a comprehensive review of studies on language anxiety and the second research is aimed to find out the types of Communication Strategies used and mostly used by university students with high and low levels of anxiety.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1. *Language Anxiety*

Language anxiety has been found as a factor giving negative effects toward students and teachers of Foreign Language (FL) Classroom. "It has long been the major discussion issue for the language researchers such as Krashen, Horwitz, Oxford, etc. in the aspect of language teaching" (Di, 2010, p.1). It is an emotion or feeling which affects every person, including FL learners. In FL learning, attention has been given to anxiety because of its effects on FL learners. English language learners, as students who are learning a foreign language, experience anxiety when it comes to such classroom activities as speaking in front of a group of their fellow students, or taking a test in a language other than their first language. Speaking in the foreign language in front of others heightened students' levels of anxiety (Awan et al. 2010, p.33).

Language anxiety is known as a negative feeling which damages language learners. According to Horwitz et al. (1986), language anxiety is recognized as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (p. 128). It contributes some negative effects, and it has been the challenge in language learning. Stated by Di (2010, p.1), that anxiety plays a significant role in language learning and communication and is a real challenge in second and foreign teaching and learning. It also can give negative impact to the achievement of language learners if it is not handled. Saito & Samimy (1996) argued that "anxiety has a significant impact on language learning and achievement" (cited in Wu, 2010, p. 174).

Anxiety is also well-known as a fear which usually arises in language learning regarding to the activity of performing or using foreign language in front of the class. According to Gardner and Macintyre (1993), that language anxiety is a fear or apprehension occurring when a learner is expected to perform in the second or foreign language (p.2). Supported by Tiono et al. (2004), "to speak or to perform something using foreign language in a classroom situation can cause students' anxiety because they have to perform unfamiliar sounds in front of an audience, or because teacher and other students ask questions and give corrections or comments excessively" (p.30). Its correlation with language learning needs to be decreased in order to enhance learners' improvement in their foreign or second language learning. Macintyre (1995) suggests that affective factors, especially anxiety, are the obstacle

in the process of language learning (as cited in Di, 2010, p.2). Based on the argument, anxiety, in this case is FLCA, is really urgent to get solved.

## 2. *Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety*

Anxiety which exists in language learning, especially in foreign language classroom has been discussed by researchers and linguists. According to Awan et al. (2010) ,“the anxiety experienced in a classroom is called Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA)” (p.34). It arises at the class when the teaching learning process is being done. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991a) and Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) consider FLCA to be a situational anxiety which learners experience in the well-defined situation of a foreign language classroom (as cited in Awan et al., 2010, p.34).

Each student has different level of anxiety, and one of them is caused by the lack of self-efficacy, which is simply defined as the beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments (Bandura as cited in Cinkara, 2009, p. 16). Students having low self-efficacy automatically have high level of anxiety. Cubukcu (2008) argues that “the students with low self-efficacy have a higher level of anxiety than students with high self-efficacy” (p.156). It is hugely affects the performance of the students while speaking or doing conversation in the classroom. A research conducted by Kim (2009), suggests that second language students reported more anxiety in conversation activities, than while engaging in reading activities (as cited in Synder, 2011, p. 5). Awan et al. (2010) also states that speaking in the foreign language in front of others heightened students' levels of anxiety (p.33).

## 3. *Components of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety*

Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety consists of several components. As stated by Horwitz et al. (1986) that there are three major components, (1) Communication Apprehension, (2) Test Anxiety, and (3) Fear of Negative Evaluation. The first component of FLCA is Communication Apprehension which refers to anxiety in doing communication in front of the class. As defined by (McCroskey as cited by Namsang, 2011) that communication apprehension is an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person (p.6). And Daly (1991) also stated that it is “the fear or anxiety an individual feels about orally communicating” (as cited in Tiono et al. 2004, p.31)

The second component is Test Anxiety which also plays role in foreign language classroom anxiety. According to Horwitz et al. (1986), test anxiety “refers to a type of performance anxiety stemming from a fear of failure” (p.127). This happens when the anxious learner is taking formal test or other evaluative situation. This becomes unpleasant feeling or emotional state that has both physiological and behavioral concomitants” (Nimat, 2013, p.22).

The last component of FLCA is Fear of Negative Evaluation. It is defined as an “apprehension about other's evaluation, avoidance of evaluative situations, and the expectation that others would evaluate oneself negatively” (Horwitz et al., 1986, p.128). This evaluation does not refer to personal only, but also refes to academic activity. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) added, that “evaluation in this case refers to both academic and personal evaluations made of students on the basis of their performance and competence in the target language” (as cited in Namsang, 2011, p.8).

## 4. *Factors Causing Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety*

Young (1991) categorized several factors causing foreign language classroom anxiety into three general factors: factors associated with the learner, the instructor,

and instructional practices (p.427). Learner characteristic is one of the most influential factors which relates to Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety. According to Horwitz et al. as cited in Namsang (2011), Learners Characteristics related to foreign language anxiety include low self-esteem, self-perceived low level of ability, and communication; competitiveness, lack of group membership with peers; and beliefs about language learning apprehension (p.8). Nimat (2013) added that "learner characteristics can cause language anxiety which includes inability to comprehend, self-perceived low level of anxiety, competitiveness, perfectionism, self-awareness, speaking activities, test anxiety, fluent speakers' presence, students' beliefs about language learning, lack of group membership with peers, fear of negative evaluation, negative classroom experiences, etc" (p.23).

Instructor factors include a judgmental teaching attitude and manner of teaching. Some characteristics of the instructor are also linked to students' anxiety, for example, absence of instructor support, unsympathetic personality, lack of time for personal attention, favoritism, a sense that the class does not provide students with the tools necessary to match up with the instructor's expectations, and the sense of being judged by the instructor or wanting to impress the instructor (Palacios as cited in Nimat, 2013, p.26).

Instructional practices include the classroom activities methods, most classroom activities, like listening comprehension, oral presentations, reading and writing (Namsang, 2011. p.9). Speaking in front of the class, feeling like seen by everyone, and feels evaluated negatively can be the most factors which contribute anxiety. Palacios as cited by Nimat (2013) found the following classroom characteristics to be anxiety producing factors; demands of oral production, feeling of being put on the spot, the pace of the class, and the feeling of being evaluated (p.29).

##### 5. *Effects Caused by Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety*

There are three major effects which are caused by Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety. Foreign language learning anxiety has been associated with a large number of negative outcomes that can be classified as physical, psychological, or social (Bailey et. al. as cited in Andrade, 2009, p.24). Physical symptoms can include rapid heartbeat, muscle tension, dry mouth, and excessive perspiration. Psychological symptoms include embarrassment, feelings of helplessness, fear of going blank, and poor memory recall and retention among others. Negative social behavior may be manifested as inappropriate silence, unwillingness to participate, absenteeism, and withdrawal from the course (Andrade, 2009, p.24).

## RESEARCH METHOD

The design used in this research is a survey study, one of typical descriptive study designs. Survey method is frequently used to collect descriptive data to find out "what is" (Borg and Gall as cited in Elaldi, 2016, p.221). This survey adopts a questionnaire called the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) arranged by Horwitz et al. (1986) and an oral survey method which is adapted from Worde (2003). The FLCAS was a 33-item self-report measuring instrument, which was scored on a five-point Likert Scale. The five points ranged from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree", and was developed to capture the specific essence of foreign language anxiety in a classroom setting, and to provide investigators with a standard measure (Worde, 2003 p.2). After giving the FLCAS, the oral interview is delivered to the students.

The participants of the research are students of junior high school in Tasikmalaya. The population is all of 8th grade classes which consist of 390 students and the sample is 194 students based on the calculation of Checkmarket Sample Size Calculator (<https://www.checkmarket.com/sample-size-calculator/>) with 5% of Margin of Error. According to Sukamolson (2010), "survey research requires that respondents are

randomly sampled, that means that each person in the population has a known probability of being sampled" (p.4). The reason basically makes me decide to collect the data from them is because they are my students who are easy to meet and to ask, so I do not need any procedures for getting permission from them.

The data were gathered using questionnaire (FLCAS) and interview. At the first, FLCAS which consists of 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Agree" (SA), "Agree" (A), "Neither Agree or Disagree" (N), "Disagree" (D), and "Strongly Disagree" (SD) is given in order to find the high, low, and moderate level of anxiety existing in the class. After getting the result, interview arranged by Worde (2003) is given to students who have high level of anxiety in order to recognize what factors contributing to the foreign language anxiety.

To ease the students participating in this research, both instruments are translated into Bahasa Indonesia in order to make the respondents understand because they are still junior high school students. The FLCAS also has negative and positive statements which are placed randomly, so it is arranged to reduce misunderstanding of students in filling it. Therefore, there are negative statements started from 1 – 24, and positive statements started from 25 – 33. FLCAS consists of three main types of language anxiety in its item, those are: (1) Communication Apprehension: 1, 9, 14, 18, etc., (2) Test Anxiety: 2, 8, 10, 19, 21, etc., and (3) Fear of Negative Evaluation: 3, 7, 13, 15, etc.

The questionnaire (FLCAS) which consists of 33 Likert Scale items ranging from 5 – 1 (for negative statement) and 1 – 5 (for positive statement) are calculated manually with the scores ranging from 33 until 165 for each person. After all data from students are obtained, the data are categorized using 3 categories; High Level of Anxiety, Moderate Level of Anxiety, and Low Level of Anxiety. Adopted from Un (as cited in Debreli and Demirkan, 2016, p.54), that a learner who has score ranging 132 - 165 gets "High Level of Anxiety", learner who has score ranging 99 - 132 gets "Moderate Level of Anxiety", and learner who has score ranging 33 - 99 gets "Low Level of Anxiety".

Table 3.1 FLCAS Scoring

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Negative	5	4	3	2	1
Positive	1	2	3	4	5

The interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis adopted from Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.6). There are several steps in thematic analysis;

#### 1. Familiarizing yourself with the data

In this phase, I did the transcription from the verbal data which are obtained from the interview recorded in order to make me easy to identify what are said by students. Then the transcripts were translated from *Bahasa Indonesia* (sometimes *Sundanese Language*) into English. Then, familiarizing with the data from the interview transcripts was conducted by reading an amount of time, again and again, until the data were really recognized. Finally, the important points were highlighted to be coded.

#### 2. Generating initial codes

This phase is used to code some points or unique data (phrase, sentence, or paragraph) in order to ease in sorting the data required. The codes were the phrase, sentence, or paragraph which related to the factors contributing students' foreign language classroom anxiety.

Finally, I have got the codes which are relevant with the factors contributing students' foreign language classroom anxiety, and I also put the initial codes of

students after each code in order to make the readers recognize what is the factor that is almost happening in the class.

*Table 3.2 List of Codes*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Codes</b>
Student 1	IR
Student 2	F
Student 3	B
Student 4	R
Student 5	S
Student 6	A
Student 7	I
Student 8	MD
Student 9	D
Student 10	AM
Student 11	J

### 3. Searching for themes, reviewing, and defining and naming the themes

This phase to start gathering all codes into several themes, and it is found two themes coming from Cognitive Aspect and Psychological Aspect regarding to Young (1991), Learners Characteristics, Instructor Factors, and Instructional Practice. This phase, which re-focuses the analysis at the broader level of themes, rather than codes, involves sorting the different codes into potential themes, and collating all the relevant coded data extracts within the identified themes (Braun and Clarke, 2016, p.19). There is also a factor which does not exist in Young (1991), there is factor related with environment, and it is named as Environmental Factors which is caused by bad environment, such as full of noise, uncomfortable condition/time, etc.

### 4. Producing the report

This phase is used to report in details all findings which are needed by this research. The previous chapter explained about the research procedure, including research method, instrument, data analyzing, etc. This chapter will report the result of this research which has been collected from 11 classes of 8<sup>th</sup> grade of Junior High School in Tasikmalaya whose participants are 194 (16 – 20 participants each class). The result comes from the Questionnaire (FLCAS) in order to find the levels of students' Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) and interview is aimed to find out the reasons contributing students' Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA). These are the more specific explanation.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 1. Levels of Students' Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety

The first research question is answered by this questionnaire named Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), proposed by Horwitz et al. (1986).

Table 4.1 Levels of Students' Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety

<b>CLASS</b>	<b>LOW</b>	<b>MODERATE</b>	<b>HIGH</b>	<b>RESULT</b>
<b>8A</b>	2	12	3	<b>17</b>
<b>8B</b>	7	9	2	<b>18</b>
<b>8C</b>	8	9	-	<b>17</b>
<b>8D</b>	8	9	-	<b>17</b>
<b>8E</b>	11	6	-	<b>17</b>
<b>8F</b>	7	8	1	<b>16</b>
<b>8G</b>	3	14	-	<b>17</b>
<b>8H</b>	3	16	-	<b>19</b>

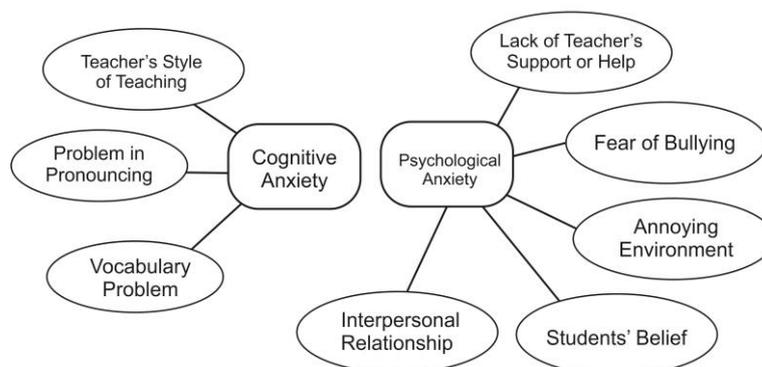
<b>8I</b>	5	12	2	<b>19</b>
<b>8J</b>	6	14	-	<b>20</b>
<b>8K</b>	3	11	3	<b>17</b>
<b>RESULT</b>	<b>63 (32%)</b>	<b>120 (62%)</b>	<b>11 (6%)</b>	<b>194</b>

From the findings above, it can be concluded that there are 63 (32%) students who are classified as students with low level of anxiety. There are also 120 (62%) students who are classified as students with moderate level of anxiety. And there are 11 (6%) students who are classified as students with high level of anxiety. High level of anxiety is associated with low level of academic achievement in foreign language learning, and learners with high level of anxiety have tendency to avoid interpersonal communication more often than learners with low level of anxiety (Zheng, 2008, p.5). Most of the studies reveal that high-anxious learners either expect or receive lower grades than their less anxious peers, and are likely to be reticent or unwilling to communicate in the classroom (Wu, 2010, p.174).

## 2. Factors Contributing Students' Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety

The interview has been given to 11 students with high level of anxiety in order to find out the factors contributing their anxiety. The data of the interview are thematically analyzed using Braun and Clarke (2006). The results show that there are two themes, cognitive anxiety and psychological anxiety which are related to learners characteristics, instructor factors, instructional practices, and environmental factors. The following figure manifests all factors found which are grouped into two macro themes;

Figure 4.1 Factors Contributing Anxiety  
Factors Contributing Anxiety



### a. Cognitive Anxiety

Cognitive anxiety is a fear related to students' intelligence or language competence which includes vocabulary problem, fear in pronouncing, and teacher's style of teaching. The first factor appears in learners characteristics which is related to **Vocabulary Problem**, which means the lack of vocabulary itself and also the lack of ability to guess the meaning based on the vocabularies which have been recognized by themselves. It is proved by the statements below;

- 00:49 (S)      *The meaning of the words are not recognized well by me.*  
 04:00 (A)      *Sometimes, I'm not able to guess the meaning, forget the meaning, don't know the meaning. (February, 2017, Author's Translation)*

According to Horwitz et al. as cited in Namsang (2011), "Learners Characteristics is related to foreign language anxiety include low self-esteem, self-perceived, low level of ability...(p.8)."

The second factor appears from instructional practices which is related to demands in the class, such as demand of oral production, demand of writing, etc. The statements below are related to the demand of oral production, especially in pronouncing the words which affects students' anxiety in cognitive aspect. It can be seen from the statements below;

- 00:30 (IR) *I don't know, there are so many words, I mean, I don't know. like "other, order", that is different in pronouncing it, I cannot pronounce it.*
- 00:37 and 00:43 (S) *So many words which are really hard to read, I mean to pronounce. (February, 2017, Author's Translation)*

Palacios as cited by Nimat (2013) found the following classroom characteristics to be anxiety producing factors; demands of oral production, ... (p.29). The statements above prove that the students have **Problem in Pronouncing**.

The last factors in cognitive anxiety is related to instructor factors. Every teacher has his/her own style of teaching. Sometimes he/she explains the material too fast although the students have not understood what is explained. It seems like he/she does not care whether the students understand or not what he/she explained, and also he/she gives lacks of time for personal attention. The following statements inform how the teacher contributes students' anxiety in cognitive aspect, especially in **Teacher's Style of Teaching**.

- 02:23 (IR) *Sometimes, teacher is too fast in explaining the material, so I cannot understand. It's so fast, sir!*
- 02:34 (F) *Sometimes teacher is too fast in explaining!*
- 03:29 (I) *Sometimes teacher's explanation is not understandable because her speaking is too fast. (February, 2017, Author's Translation)*

According to Palacios as cited in Nimat (2013) "some characteristics of the instructor are also linked to students' anxiety, for example, ..., unsympathetic personality, lack of time for personal attention,...(p.26).

#### b. Psychological Anxiety

The second theme is psychological anxiety which relates to students' psychological aspect, such as feeling, mood, belief, etc. It includes fear of bullying, interpersonal relationship, students' belief, lacks of teacher's help or support, and annoying environment. **Fear of Bullying** is the first factor in psychological anxiety which is related to learners characteristics. The statements below show that students have negative experiences in classroom, especially concerning in bullying. It is found in these statements;

- 01:31 and 03:12 (IR) *Nervous, my friends bully me.*
- 01:01 (F) *When I'm in front of the class, my friends bully and laugh at me!*
- 01:36 (F) *Certain boy laughs and bullies me when I'm mistaken in pronouncing. (February, 2017, Author's Translation)*

Nimat (2013) argued "learner characteristics can cause language anxiety which includes ..., negative classroom experiences, etc."(p.23) There is also a factor in learners characteristics which is regarding to the lack of group membership with peers, particularly in **Interpersonal Relationship**. This factor relates students'



These factors need to get handled by the teachers in order to minimize students' anxiety. Students with high level of anxiety mostly obtain worse achievement in learning than students with low level of anxiety. High level of anxiety is associated with low level of academic achievement in foreign language learning, and learners with high level of anxiety have tendency to avoid interpersonal communication more often than learners with low level of anxiety (Zheng, 2008, p.5). Supported by Wu (2010), "Most of the studies reveal that high-anxious learners either expect or receive lower grades than their less anxious peers, and are likely to be reticent or unwilling to communicate in the classroom" (p.174).

## CONCLUSION

This research addressed two research questions. The first is aimed to seek the levels of students' Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety. The data from FLCAS questionnaire reported that they are 63 (32%) students who are classified as students with low level of anxiety, 120 (62%) students who are classified as students with moderate level of anxiety, and 11 (6%) students who are classified as High Level of Anxiety.

Students classified as High Level of Anxiety were interviewed in order to answer the second research question regarding to the factors contributing students' Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety. The result showed that there are 2 Factors, Cognitive Anxiety and Psychological Anxiety which relate to Learners' Characteristics, Instructor Factors, Instructional Practices, and Environmental Factors. Based on the findings, we can conclude that the most part of students are in moderate level, and there are also students in high level of anxiety which means they are really not able to handle their anxiety.

This research seeks only two research questions regarding to the levels and factors contributing students' Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety. I suggest for the further research to seek the strategy used by students with low level of anxiety. It is also better if the next research is aimed to seek the relation between anxiety and gender. It is even greater if there is a research regarding to teachers' anxiety and how teacher overcomes students and teacher's anxiety.

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