

# ENHANCING ENGLISH VOCABULARY MASTERY IN YOUNG LEARNERS THROUGH WHISPERING GAMES

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## ABSTRACT

The study aimed to enhance students' vocabulary mastery through the use of the Whispering Game. A two-cycle classroom action research was applied in conducting this study, involving twenty-two (22) 4th-grade students of a public elementary school in Denpasar, Bali. Data collection involved administering pre-tests and post-tests to measure improvements in students' vocabulary mastery before and after the intervention. Additionally, a questionnaire was used to explore students' responses to the teaching and learning process. The results of this study indicate that the Whispering Game significantly improved students' vocabulary mastery, as evidenced by the increase in the class mean score from 55 in the pre-cycle to 85 in the second cycle. This improvement was further supported by questionnaire data, which revealed highly positive student responses toward the Whispering Game.

**Keywords:** Whispering Games, Vocabulary Mastery, 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Students

## INTRODUCTION

In the current era of globalization, English has become the main global language that connects different nations, cultures, and technologies. As a global bridge, mastering English gives people wide access to information and helps them communicate well internationally (Astawa & Permana, 2020; Kurniawan, 2024). Introducing English at an early age is a strategic step to ensure that future generations do not just become objects of globalization but become active participants who are ready to compete in a global society (Astawa, 2019; Mayasari, 2024).

Learning English in elementary school is a very important step because young learners at this age can absorb new words and sounds very naturally and quickly (Ndraha et al, 2023). Starting early not only helps their thinking skills and intelligence but also builds their confidence before they become teenagers (Pasaribu et al, 2024). In an interconnected world, early English mastery is a long-term investment that opens doors to knowledge, technology, and better education in the future (Chen et al, 2022).

In the learning process, mastering vocabulary must be the main focus before moving on to harder topics (Sardi, 2022). Without enough vocabulary, young learners will find it challenging to practice speaking or writing (Anistasya, 2022; Rosyada-AS & Apoko, 2023). By building a strong vocabulary through fun methods, they will acquire the necessary linguistic resources to make sentences and express their ideas. This makes learning English as a foreign language skills much easier and more effective.

Teaching vocabulary to elementary school students has its own challenges, especially because simple memorization, usually referred as rote memorization, is often recognized as unengaging (Zhao & Wang, 2025). Young learners at this age are curious but unable to focus for a long period of time. Therefore, repeating words over and over without any pictures or context usually fails to make them interested (Coskun, 2023). As a result, learning the basics of the language feels like a burden because the lessons are not creative enough to trigger their imagination.

The low interest in learning is also connected to students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Zhu et al, 2024). In terms of intrinsic motivation, young learners do not feel the joy of exploring a new language, so they feel disconnected from the words they learn (Mercader-Rubio et al, 2023). Meanwhile, in terms of extrinsic motivation, a lack of a fun and competitive environment makes them lose interest (Kabata, Astawa & Sudiarmika, 2024; Zhou

& Zhang, 2024). Without these two types of motivation, learning vocabulary is perceived merely as a tiring task rather than an engaging achievement.

Another common problem is a classroom atmosphere that is too stiff and monotonous, which creates a gap between the teacher and students (Li, 2023). A classroom that is too formal often puts pressure on young learners (Mesra et al, 2023), even though they are at an age where they love to play (Aminah et al, 2022). It is very important to have a happy atmosphere in every lesson to make students feel relaxed. When they feel comfortable, they are able to accept and understand new vocabulary more easily without feeling forced (Bilqis, 2023).

Thus, teachers need to create strategies that include games, songs, or interactive activities. By changing the idea that language learning is hard into a fun experience, teachers can build students' confidence (Chen et al, 2024). A relaxed but organized environment encourages young learners to try new words without being afraid of making mistakes (Khudaverdiyeva, 2024), allowing their skills to grow naturally.

Based on the primary research and interviews with a fourth-grade teacher, real conditions in a public elementary school in Denpasar showed some big challenges. The main problem is the low level of young learners' vocabulary mastery, which had not yet reached the passing grade of 75. This is especially true for basic topics like body parts, things in the house or school, numbers, and colours. To follow research confidentiality, the name of the school and the students are kept non-disclosed to protect the privacy of those involved.

This low achievement is mostly caused by old-fashioned teaching methods that tend to be monotonous and only focus on the teacher and textbooks. This happens because English is taught by classroom teachers who do not have an English language education background. As a result, they have limited knowledge about creative ways to teach English as a foreign language to young learners. This creates a gap between what the curriculum expects and the actual results in the classroom.

The whispering game is a global tool for teaching communication (Daulay et al, 2021). As a message travels down a line, it usually gets distorted, teaching students the value of careful listening and clear speech. It's an engaging way to build vocabulary while demonstrating how easily information is lost in translation. In this game, students whisper a word or phrase from one person to another until it reaches the last student in line. Based on previous studies, this technique is effective for learning vocabulary because it requires young learners to focus on how to pronounce words correctly so the message does not change (Octaviani et al, 2024).

This technique is very suitable for young learners because it changes memorization into a fun activity. With this method, students become more active without feeling pressured (Al-Muammamah & Zuhriyah, 2024), because they learn through direct experience and social interaction. The relaxed and engaging atmosphere of this game helps them remember and keep new words in their long-term memory more easily (Gaosah & Jumiatusun, 2025).

The main strength of the Whispering Game is the element of play and fair competition, which automatically makes students more involved (Husaini, 2024). The excitement of trying to win and the fun of whispering words create a lively classroom where every student is important to their group's success. Elements like teamwork and speed ensure that learning vocabulary is no longer a monotonous task for young learners, but a fun challenge.

Learning through games is based on the theory that being active and happy can greatly improve a student's memory. According to experts like Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, play is a primary avenue for young learners to learn and understand new concepts. Piaget emphasized the active role of children in constructing their knowledge through interaction with their environment, while Vygotsky highlighted the crucial importance of social interaction and collaboration in learning. In language learning, games create an environment where information is remembered longer because it is learned through real experiences and social interaction, not just passive memorization (Tursunboyeva & Akhmedova, 2025). Thus, the

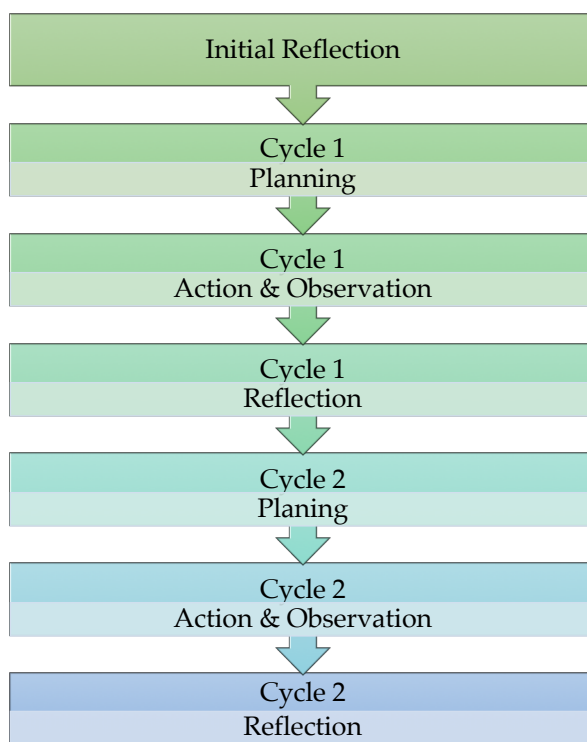
Whispering Game aligns with constructivist principles, where students actively build their understanding through direct experience and negotiation of meaning with peers.

This study worked on the use of the Whispering Game specifically to test how well it worked in a public elementary school in Denpasar. Although many people talk about games in learning, this study focused on real conditions where teachers had limited backgrounds and students had low test scores. Through this focus, this paper aimed to prove that this technique could be a practical solution for teachers to improve the vocabulary mastery of young learners.

The main goal of this research is to fix the problem of low vocabulary mastery using a clear and measurable method. By using the Classroom Action Research (CAR) method, the researcher tried to improve the lessons in cycles to see the real progress in the classroom. This method allowed the researcher to see changes in student ability directly after using the game. Based on this, the study aimed to describe how the Whispering Game improved vocabulary skills for young learners at a public elementary school in Denpasar. Therefore, the main objectives of this research are: (1) to analyze the improvement of fourth-grade students' English vocabulary mastery through the implementation of the Whispering Game, and (2) to explore students' perceptions of using the Whispering Game in vocabulary learning.

## METHOD

This study employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) conducted over two distinct cycles. The participants consisted of 22 fourth-grade students at a public elementary school located in Denpasar. To ensure participant confidentiality, the names of the school and the individual students have been anonymized. The researcher utilized a pre-test and post-test as the primary instruments for data collection. These scores were analyzed quantitatively to determine the impact of "Whispering Games" on students' vocabulary mastery before and after the intervention. In this study, the researcher was also administered questionnaires. This instrument was designed to evaluate the utilization of Whispering Games within the classroom learning activities.



**Chart 1.** Classroom Action Research Design

The above chart outlines the specific methods and cycles implemented during the research (Chart 1). The CAR conducted in this study is divided into two cycles, consisting of four main activities: planning, action, observation, and reflection. As a starting point, the researcher conducted an initial reflection to determine the young learners' prior knowledge of vocabulary mastery by administering a pre-test. This pre-test, which covered basic vocabulary identification on topics such as body parts, household/school items, numbers, and colors, was used to identify specific areas of student difficulty and establish a baseline class mean score of 55, well below the passing grade of 75.

Following the initial phase, the researcher proceeded to the planning stage of Cycle 1. This stage is a vital part of the entire study. During planning, the researcher identified specific problems based on the results of the initial reflection. For example, given the low pre-test scores indicating difficulty with spelling and pronunciation, the lesson plans for Cycle 1 were focused on introducing vocabulary through clear pronunciation and guided repetition. Additionally, the researcher prepared the necessary logistics for the teaching process, such as lesson plans, media (e.g., flashcards with pictures), and other learning tools. The researcher also prepared the pre-test and post-test to be used in Cycle 1.

Once the preparations were complete, the researcher, acting as the teacher, implemented the teaching treatment using the Whispering Game during the action stage. Each cycle followed the same instructional sequence, which was divided into three parts: pre-activity, whilst-activity, and post-activity.

In the pre-activity, the researcher conducted a brainstorming session. The goal was to create a bridge between the students' prior knowledge and the material to be studied in Cycle 1. During this stage, the researcher engaged in an interactive Q&A session with the students. The questions were related to the day's topic and served as a warm-up to prepare the students for the lesson.

The Whispering Game itself was implemented during the whilst-activity. Before starting the game, the researcher asked the students to read a text related to the current curriculum. For the game, students were divided into four groups, with each group consisting of five to six members. Each group formed a line, and one student stood at the front to write down the results of the whispered words in a marathon style. The researcher and research assistants then began the game. The assistants stood at the back of the class and whispered a word, which gradually escalated into sentences prepared in the previous stage. After the student wrote down what they heard, they returned to the back of the line to become the first listener, and the process continued. This activity was repeated until the 15-minute time limit ended.

During the observation stage, the researcher distributed questionnaires to the young learners to collect qualitative data regarding their personal experiences with the Whispering Game. This process was conducted to gain a deeper understanding of student interest and engagement. Analyzing these responses allowed the researcher to identify not only the level of engagement but also areas where students might still need support, such as difficulties with spelling or word retention. These subjective findings were essential for evaluating the overall success of the method and helped the researcher refine the instructional approach for future cycles.

To accurately measure the progress of the students, the researcher administered a post-test at the conclusion of Cycle 1 to assess their vocabulary achievement. This evaluative procedure was then repeated in Cycle 2 to monitor further development and compare the scores across both stages of the study. These testing phases are essential for the reflection process, as they provide concrete data to identify whether the instructional goals have been met. By analyzing these results, the researcher can objectively determine if the Whispering Game is an effective method for enhancing students' vocabulary mastery in a real classroom setting.

During Cycle 2, the researcher repeated the four fundamental stages of planning, action, observation, and reflection to determine if there was a significant improvement in the young learners' vocabulary skills compared to the previous results. Based on Cycle 1 results, which showed improvement but had not fully met the 80% success criterion, the strategies in Cycle 2 were optimized. Specific instructional changes included: (1) increased emphasis on more explicit corrective feedback for spelling and pronunciation, (2) the use of more diverse visuals and contextual cues during the game to reinforce word understanding, and (3) modifications to the game rules to encourage students to independently identify and correct their errors. This second iteration served as a critical phase to verify the consistency of the whispering games technique and to address any pedagogical challenges identified during the first cycle. Each cycle was conducted over two academic lesson hours, which provided a total of 70 minutes to fully implement the planned instructional activities and interventions. This specific time allocation ensured that the students had sufficient opportunity to engage in social interaction through the game while allowing the researcher to collect comprehensive data on their progress.

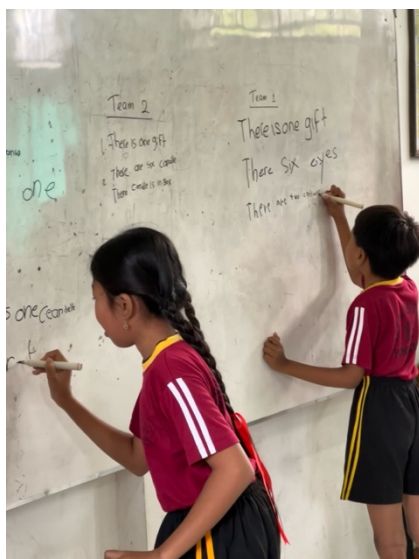
## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study commenced with an initial reflection phase to determine the students' prior achievement. This was followed by the standard cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection. The Whispering Games were implemented during the action stage of the cycle. The research was conducted over two sessions across two weeks, spanning two complete cycles. Figure 1 illustrates the game procedure, depicting participants relaying words and sentences through whispering. The results from each reflection stage were utilized to refine the teaching strategy and address specific learning challenges identified in the subsequent cycle.



**Figure 1.** Whispering Games Implementation

The identical strategy detailed in the preceding section was replicated during the second week to coincide with the implementation of the second cycle. Figure 2 illustrates the students engaged in the 'whispering games' activity. The student positioned at the end of the relay was tasked with transcribing the final message they had received from their peers. This step served as a critical assessment point to evaluate the accuracy of information transmission and linguistic retention among the participants.



**Figure 2.** Students on Whispering Games

The researcher utilized pre-tests and post-tests as the primary instruments for data collection in this study. These datasets were subsequently compared to evaluate the extent of improvement in the students' vocabulary proficiency. Improvement was calculated by comparing the class mean scores from the pre-cycle, Cycle 1, and Cycle 2. Mean scores were calculated using the formula  $\Sigma x/N$ , where  $\Sigma x$  is the sum of all scores and  $N$  is the number of students. The percentage of students who achieved the minimum passing score (75) was calculated as (Number of successful students / Total number of students) x 100%. This assessment protocol was systematically implemented across both Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 to ensure a comprehensive analysis of the intervention's impact. Furthermore, the mean scores from each testing phase were subjected to statistical comparison to determine the significance of the observed learning gains. This approach allowed the researchers to verify the consistency of the results throughout the instructional period.

Furthermore, a questionnaire was utilized to capture qualitative insights into the students' learning using whispering games. By integrating these diverse data sources, the study achieved a comprehensive triangulation of findings, thereby enhancing the overall validity and depth of the research outcomes. The questionnaire was administered in 10 questions and using 5 Likert Scale.

**Tabel 1. Mean Score during Pre-Cycle, Cycle 1, & Cycle 2**

	Pre-Cycle	Cycle 1	Cycle 2
Mean Score	55	73.18	85

Initial findings from the pre-cycle pre-test revealed a low average vocabulary achievement of 55. This indicates that prior to the Whispering Game intervention, students possessed a very limited level of vocabulary mastery, confirming the need for a more effective and engaging teaching method. These results are consistent with previous research by Anistasya (2022), which highlighted that inadequate vocabulary is a primary hindrance for young learners in language skills, particularly speaking and writing. Among the 22 students, only four participants (18%) secured scores above the required score. These baseline results underscore a significant disparity between the students' current vocabulary achievement and

the expected academic standards. Consequently, these data served as a diagnostic justification for the implementation of the whispering games intervention in the subsequent cycles.

In Cycle 1, a measurable improvement in vocabulary attainment was observed, with the class mean score increasing to 73.18 points. This increase suggests that the initial intervention began to demonstrate effectiveness, though it had not fully met the target yet. However, only eight students (36.36%) succeeded in exceeding the minimum proficiency threshold. Given that these results fell short of the predetermined 80% success criterion, the researcher concluded that a second cycle was required to achieve the study's objectives. This aligns with findings from Daulay et al. (2021), who found that the Whispering Game can improve communication skills, but also requires repeated application to achieve optimal impact. The first cycle improved student scores, but the collective success rate remained below the passing score. As a result, the subsequent phase focused on optimizing the instructional delivery to ensure a higher percentage of students reached the required passing grade.

Student achievement in the second cycle showed positive development, with the class mean reaching 85 points. In this cycle, more than 80% of the students (19 individuals) successfully met the minimum proficiency standard. The significant increase from 18% in the pre-cycle to 86% in the second cycle underscores the remarkable effectiveness of the Whispering Game in improving vocabulary mastery. This is further supported by the findings of Husaini (2024) and Octaviani et al. (2024), who also demonstrated the effectiveness of similar games in enhancing vocabulary mastery among young learners. The method proved successful in overcoming the challenges of traditional rote learning and increasing student engagement. Based on these results, the whispering games proved effective in improving the vocabulary mastery of fourth-grade elementary students. Since the success criteria were met, the researcher concluded the study and terminated the research cycles.

In addition to utilizing pre-test and post-test results to evaluate the effectiveness of whispering games in improving student proficiency, the researcher administered a questionnaire to examine the students' learning process. The questionnaire employed a five-point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1). By analyzing these responses, the study aimed to ensure that the improvement in test scores was supported by a positive and engaging classroom environment.

Tables 2 and 3 present the questionnaire results, which corroborate the findings regarding the students' vocabulary mastery. The researcher employed a 10-item Likert scale instrument, ranging from 1 to 5, to investigate the students' learning experiences during the whispering games intervention. The questionnaire assessed ten specific dimensions: comprehension, spelling, pronunciation, memory retention, sound identification, lexical richness, contextual usage, cognitive processing speed, self-correction, and learning motivation. The integration of these diverse metrics allowed for a multidimensional analysis of how game-based learning influences linguistic development.

**Tabel 2. Presentation of Questionnaire Answer at Cycle 1**

No	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
1	59,09%	9,09%	31,82%	0%	0%
2	36,36%	22,73%	22,73%	9,09%	9,09%
3	31,82%	36,36%	18,18%	13,64%	0%
4	40,91%	31,82%	22,73%	22,73%	0%
5	27,27%	54,55%	18,18%	0%	0%
6	68,18%	22,73%	9,09%	0%	0%
7	77,27%	22,73%	0%	0%	0%
8	36,36%	27,27%	22,73%	13,64%	0%
9	27,27%	36,36%	9,09%	18,18%	9,09%

10	81,82%	18,18%	0%	0%	0%
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In the first cycle questionnaire, the highest score was recorded for item 10, with 81.82% of the 22 students responding with 'strongly agree.' This item addressed how the whispering games motivated students to engage in the learning process. The second-highest score was observed in item 7, which concerned the effectiveness of the games in enhancing students' understanding of word usage in context. For this item, 77.27% of the participants selected 'strongly agree.' Such high levels of positive feedback suggest that the game-based approach effectively reduced learning anxiety while strengthening the students' interest in the subject matter.

However, certain items in the first cycle questionnaire yielded less favorable results. Regarding item 2, which addressed the accuracy of word and sentence spelling, 9.09% of the students (two individuals) responded with 'strongly disagree'. Similarly, item 9 revealed that 9.09% of the participants were unaware of their errors while whispering words during the activity. These specific findings highlight that while the game increased motivation, some students still struggled with the technical precision of the target language. This lack of error awareness suggests a need for more explicit feedback or corrective modeling by the teacher in the subsequent cycle.

**Table 3. Presentation of Questionnaire Answer at Cycle 2**

No	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
1	72,73%	18,18%	9,09%	0%	0%
2	54,55%	22,73%	22,73%	0%	0%
3	45,45%	36,36%	18,18%	0%	0%
4	50,00%	31,82%	22,73%	4,55%	0%
5	54,55%	36,36%	9,09%	0%	0%
6	90,91%	9,09%	0%	0%	0%
7	95,45%	4,55%	0%	0%	0%
8	59,09%	36,36%	4,55%	0%	0%
9	45,45%	40,91%	4,55%	9,09%	9,09%
10	100,00%	0%	0%	0%	0%

The highest scores were recorded for the same questionnaire items during the second cycle. All 22 participants (100%) agreed that the implementation of whispering games in the classroom significantly enhanced their ability to comprehend specific vocabulary. These results confirm that the changes implemented in Cycle 2 effectively overcame the challenges students faced in the previous stage. Furthermore, the consistency of these positive responses confirms that the game-based intervention served as a reliable catalyst for improving student lexical proficiency.

Another significant 'strongly agree' rating was observed in item 7, where 95.45% of the students (21 individuals) strongly agreed that their competence and understanding of word context had improved. The remaining student responded with 'agree,' resulting in a total positive consensus for this item. This high percentage demonstrates that the intervention was particularly effective in helping students transition from rote memorization to a more nuanced understanding of how words function within sentences. Such progress suggests that the interactive nature of the whispering games encouraged students to pay closer attention to the practical application of the target vocabulary.

Despite the overall progress, some students continued to encounter difficulties with self-correction during the whispering games activities. Specifically, two out of the 22 participants (9.09%) responded with 'strongly disagree' regarding their ability to identify and fix their own errors. This suggests that while the game improved general vocabulary knowledge, the skill of autonomous error detection requires more time and individualized

guidance to develop fully. Therefore, these results show that future lessons should include clearer feedback to help students who have trouble correcting their own mistakes.

In conclusion, the utilization of whispering games in the classroom effectively improves students' vocabulary mastery. Furthermore, the application of this method has proven to be beneficial in supporting the overall student learning process. These findings suggest that incorporating game-based learning can create a more dynamic and interactive environment for language acquisition. As a result, this study provides a practical pedagogical framework for educators seeking to enhance vocabulary mastery through engaging and collaborative activities.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the classroom action research conducted, it can be concluded that the implementation of the Whispering Game significantly improves the English vocabulary mastery of fourth-grade students at a public elementary school in Denpasar. This achievement is evident from the gradual increase in the class mean scores, starting from an initial score of 55, rising to 73.18 in the first cycle, and reaching 85 in the second cycle. Quantitatively, student learning completion surged from only 18% during the pre-cycle phase to 86% by the end of the study, thereby exceeding the predetermined 80% success target. Beyond academic aspects, the use of this game proved capable of creating a more dynamic learning environment and increasing learning motivation. Through social interaction and enjoyable competitive elements, students were no longer burdened by traditional rote memorization methods. Instead, they found it easier to absorb and retain new vocabulary in their long-term memory.

In relation to these findings, several suggestions can be considered to improve the quality of English language learning at the elementary level. A key pedagogical implication of this study is that the Whispering Game is a viable and effective teaching strategy for enhancing vocabulary mastery. Teachers are encouraged to adopt game-based learning techniques such as the Whispering Game as a practical solution to address student boredom and the limitations of non-English educational backgrounds among instructors. Furthermore, teachers should provide more explicit feedback, particularly for students who struggle with independent error detection in pronunciation or spelling. Teacher training in the implementation of interactive and game-based learning strategies is also highly recommended. For school authorities, supporting the provision of creative learning media is highly recommended to bridge the gap between curriculum demands and the actual classroom capabilities of the students. However, this study has limitations, namely a relatively small sample size and a focus on one type of game. Therefore, for future researchers, it is suggested to explore variations of whispering games in other language skills, such as speaking skills or listening comprehension, with a broader scope of research subjects to strengthen the overall validity and effectiveness of this learning method. Future research could also compare the effectiveness of the Whispering Game with other technology-based vocabulary learning games or methods.

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