The Role of Civics and Ethical Education for the Development of Democratic Governance in Ethiopia: Achievements and Challenges

Endalcachew Bayeh
Ambo University

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the role of civics and ethical education in building the good behavior of citizens and making them active participants for the development of democratic governance in Ethiopia. To achieve this purpose, the researcher employed qualitative methodology. Accordingly, secondary sources like books, journal articles, government documents, reports and internet sources were used. To substantiate the data gathered through secondary sources, the researcher also used primary sources where data were collected mainly via key informant interview. Based on the data analyzed, findings of the study show that the present civic and ethical education is progressive as compared to its predecessors. It has helped to introduce the youth with the values of democracy and human rights which had never existed in the country's modern history. Its role in building the good behavior of citizens is an undeniable fact. It has brought awareness on the society about what actions and behaviors are expected from one good citizen. It has also certain practical effect on the ground. However, the changes brought by delivering the course are not satisfactory in the sense that not effectively achieving the expected level of outcome. The findings of the research outlined the following as major reasons for the said limitations: content and context related problems, lack of civil societies' engagement, lack of democratic school administration, improper method of delivery, pressure from external environment, weak democracy, limited geographical reach of the course, and lack of role model teachers. Thus, the research concludes that due to several factors delivering civics and ethical education is not adequately meeting its objectives. Thus, for the practical realization of words on the course, the study calls for the strong commitment of all stakeholders, and thereby to be a role model to others and create a conducive environment to practically build the behavior and skills needed in the subject. In this connection, the study calls for the strong and integrated commitment of the government in the aforementioned areas of drawbacks.

Keywords*: civics and ethical education, democratic governance, active citizen, good behavior*

1. Introduction

It is obvious that democracy cannot be achieved in the absence of citizens' participation. Democracies in Europe faced a problem of sustaining themselves. As a remedy for this problem, all the democracies have been convinced of the importance of having active and informed citizens who will sustain democracy (Deth, 2013). Creating active citizenship is instrumental for the flourishing of democracy. Active citizenship in this sense is the ability of the people "to exercise and defend their democratic rights and responsibilities in the society, to value diversity and to play an active part in democratic life" (ibid). Citizens to be active and thereby undertake these activities, they need to have the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values (ibid). To this end, citizenship education has been provided in many countries of the world. Through the help of Civic Education, people's participation will bring and sustain democracy. After all, "democracy does not deserve its name without citizens' participation" (ibid).

The current government of Ethiopia has introduced and is working towards effective realization of Civic Education to inculcate democratic culture on its citizens (FDRE, 2004). The subject has been given in Ethiopia at different levels of schools with the intention of creating good citizens who are equipped with virtuous characters and active participant in the overall affairs of their country. However, there is no comprehensive study conducted on the role of Civic and Ethical Education in achieving such objective. The studies conducted are not insufficient in addressing the roles and constraints of the subject. Thus, to substantiate such limited studies, the researcher

undertaken this research. The central objective of this study is, therefore, to examine the achievements and challenges of Civic and Ethical Education in bringing the development of democratic governance in Ethiopia. To achieve this objective, the researcher employed qualitative methodology due to the nature of the study. Besides, secondary sources like books, journal articles, government documents, reports and internet sources were utilized. To substantiate the data gathered from secondary sources, the researcher also used primary sources where data were collected mainly via key informant interview.

2. Definitions of Civic and Ethical Education

Etymologically, the word *civics* has been derived from a Latin word *civitas*, which means citizen, or of citizen. This, in turn, takes civics to mean a discipline of knowledge dealing with day-to-day affairs of the state and its citizens (Meron, 2006). In its later use, the term Civic and Ethical Education has different nomenclatures in different countries (like civic education, citizenship education, civic engagement, education for democratic citizenship, civic culture, political education, moral education etc.) (Vasiljevi, 2009) with no significant difference in their essence and purpose as can be inferred from the definitions and purposes stated herein under. Like other social science concepts, Civic and Ethical Education is subject to different definitions by different scholars, but with considerable commonalities.

According to UNDP (2004):

> *"**Civic Education** is learning for effective participation in democratic and development processes at both local and national levels. It is an important means for capacity development on the societal level by empowering people for effective civic engagement. It is an essential dimension in strengthening a society's ability to manage its own affairs and is complementary to capacity development on the individual and institutional levels."*

It is also stated that "***Civic education** is the process of creating awareness and provision of information and learning experiences to equip and empower citizens to participate positively in the democratic processes of their community, country and the outside world*" (UPIMAC, 2014). This shows the tremendous role Civic Education can play in the democratization process of a given country by actively involving citizens in the political affairs at different levels of their country, even beyond.

 "***Citizenship education** is also defined to deal with the relationship between the individual and political society, between the self and others*" (Ross, 2012). Here, it tells one's membership to and role in the society at large. It gives learners with a clear picture of the political environment they are placed in.

Moreover, Meron (2006) noted that "*Within any given political or moral tradition, **civics** refers to education in the obligations and rights of citizens enshrined under that tradition*". It gives awareness as to the rights of citizens to participate in the political, social, economic and cultural aspects of their country and the corresponding obligations they should discharge. Likewise, Beni Prasad (cited in Edo, 2009) wrote that "*in the context of social relationship there are many duties to be performed and correspondingly many rights to be respected. It is with them that civics is concerned*". Thus, Civic Education is a subject which basically deals with rights and duties of citizens.

3. Historical Development of Civic and Ethical Education

The origin and development of civic and ethical education dated back to the ancient Greek city-state - Athens, with the aim to create active and participant citizen for the then Athenian direct democracy (Meron, 2006; Birhanu, 2012). Civic education has a parallel development with democracy. Hence, it is fair to say that Athens served as a foundation for the modern Civic and

Ethical Education. Subsequently, the outbreak of revolutions in Britain (1688), America (1776) and France (1789) contributed a lot for the development of civic education (ibid). This is explained by the reason that those revolutions brought new democratic concepts and principles which, in turn, paved the way for advancement of civic education in Europe and the world.

However, Civic education became very popular in the 1990s, as an instrument for promoting democracy (Browne, 2013). A number of factors necessitated the delivery of civic education; such as the emergence of democratic states and multi-cultural societies, global injustice and inequality, concern about civic and political engagement and the anti-democratic and racist movements (Birhanu, 2012). Similarly, major factors that initiate interest in the teaching of ethical education include: rapid changes in scientific output, increased cross cultural contacts, and weakening of national boundaries due to expansion of internet, satellite TV and other media (ibid).

Modern Civic Education was first practiced in the educational system of the United States of America in the beginning of the 20th century (Vasiljevi, 2009). Later, it expanded throughout the world, including Ethiopia.

4. Historical Development of Civic and Ethical Education in Ethiopia

The name, contents and methods of civic education have been changing from regime to regime being influenced by the deep-rooted religious and cultural values of the country and nature and orientation of the political philosophy of a particular political system (Meron, 2006). Notwithstanding such changes, the concept of civic and ethical education in Ethiopia is not a 1990s phenomenon. As Tesfaye et al (2013) noted, its' historical existence can be traced back to the beginning of indigenous education that parallels the introduction of Christianity in the 4th century B.C. From that time on, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church was devoted to offer moral education, primarily intended to create the unconditional acceptance of, and loyalty to the ruling class. It continued to be used in the modern education of the country until the end of the Imperial regime in 1974 (ibid). Hence, the subject with the name *moral education* was given formally in Ethiopian schools during the Hailesellassie regime (Birhanu, 2012; Meron, 2006; Tekeste, 2006; Tesfaye et al, 2013). However, the very purpose of the subject was to shape the character of students in line with the Orthodox Christian faith to inculcate the sense of obedience in the younger generation so that they could remain submissive to the prevailing political, social and economic order (ibid). In the 1970s, civic education had been offered as a component part of the history course at grade eight under the chapter entitled 'civics', but with the same purpose (Meron, 2006). Generally, the Emperor used the subject as a means to sustain his power, but later suspended with the collapse of the regime.

Following the collapse of the Imperial regime in 1974, the country was succumbed into a military rule with a completely different ideology (Tekeste, 2006; Tesfaye et al, 2013). The military regime was allied to the socialist ideology so that education of the time was a means of cultivating such ideology into the society thereby to enable the revolution to move forward (Tekeste, 2006; Meron, 2006; Birhanu, 2012; Tesfaye et al, 2013). To this end, the socialist regime introduced *political education* to better indoctrinate Ethiopian students with Marxist-Leninist politico-economic ideology and Myths of indivisible Ethiopian nationalism (Tekeste, 2006; Mehari, Birhanu, 2012). It is obvious that the educational system was not successful due to the reason, *inter alia*, that it ignored the inculcation of values that keep society cohesive and forward looking (Tekeste et al, 2006). Most importantly, political education turned out to be discredited for its devotion to the ideology of the then ruling party and consequently lost its relevance in later years of the 1980s (Birhanu, 2012) and finally eliminated from school curriculum (Tesfaye et al, 2013).

To conclude, neither the Imperial regime`s nor the military junta`s homogeneity driven education policies as instruments of nation building brought stability, democracy, and unity in multi-cultural Ethiopia (Mehari, n.d). Putting otherwise, the *moral* and *political* education of the time were serving as instruments of propagating the regimes' respective ideology (Meron, 2006) and perpetuating inequality and oppression (Tesfaye et al, 2013) thereby producing no genuinely active and participant citizen in the democratization of the country. Even it is argued to the extent that "both the Imperial period's Moral Education and the Derg period's Political Education cannot be taken as Civic Education; for both of them did not fundamentally deal with the rights, freedoms and duties of Ethiopian citizens" (Meron, 2006). Thus, in both regimes, the role of the subject in creating active and participant citizens to the democratization of the country was too negligible.

In Ethiopia, as it is true elsewhere in the world, it was as of the 1990s that citizenship education with the name of civic and ethical education given considerable attention (Mulugeta, 2015). After nearly two decades of military dictatorship, democratic civic education has been incorporated into the Ethiopian Educational System along with the introduction of the 1994 Education and Training Policy (Tesfaye et al, 2013; Meron, 2006). Post-1991 Ethiopian education policy is developed to meet new national political, economic and social objectives. The incumbent government has enormously worked to make education compatible with the new quest for democratic national unity (Mehari, n.d). In line with this, Meron, (2006) asserted that the current civic education came up with a major departure from the previous curricula in terms of objective, content and methodology.

The process of developing the new school curriculum, and the subject of civic education had started even before the official inauguration of the FDRE (Yamada, 2011). In 1993, after two years of discussion, the first curriculum on civic education was introduced. At first, the subject was called Civic Education, but was then renamed Civic and Ethical Education after a curricular reform in 2000 (ibid). The subject Civic and Ethical Education has been regarded as an important means to inculcate the ideas of democracy among citizens all over the country (ibid). With this understanding, Civic and Ethical Education has started to be taught at the primary, secondary and higher education levels (Gosa and Desta, 2014; Tesfaye et al, 2013), drawing its contents heavily from political science, economics, philosophy, law, ethics and other related disciplines (Ethiopian National Agency for UNESCO, 2001).

5. The Purpose of Civic and Ethical Education

To begin with, Civic and Ethical Education is a multi-purpose package of school curriculum (Meron, 2006). It has several and interrelated purposes. Despite significant similarity, a number of authorities have expressed the purpose of delivering the subject in different ways. Some of the prominent ideas are illustrated herein under. It is obvious that Civic and Ethical Education is aimed at creating active and participant citizen. In line with this idea, it is asserted that:

> "**Civic Education** aims at creating individuals with the capacity to go beyond citizens, who are passive subjects of the state, to those who are well informed and responsible. It should equip citizens with skills to participate and contribute to the development of and maintenance of democratic governance and citizenship which eventually leads to the establishment of a stable democratic political system" (EU, 2011).

This shows that Civic Education has a paramount role in the development of democratic governance through promoting popular participation, which is one basic pillar of democracy. Similarly, it is stated that "*Civic Education is a critical and effective empowerment tool for promoting citizen participation in democratic and development processes*" (UNDP, 2004). Likewise, it is asserted that Civic Education helps to create a citizen who is determined to the values and principles of democracy (Tovmasyan and Thoma, 2008). It enables to work toward the establishment and maintenance of a democratic political system by equipping citizens with political knowledge (ibid).

Branson (cited in Birhanu, 2012) also noted that *a good civic education enables students to enjoy their rights and freedom, makes them to respect the freedom of others, enables them consciously discharge their duty and responsibility, respect the rule of law, and try to solve the problem of the society*. Hence, Civic and Ethical Education helps students to find out what rights they are endowed with and responsibilities they are entrusted with as members of a country. As a result, they can properly exercise their rights and discharge their responsibilities so that contribute for democratic governance as well as development of a country.

The ultimate purpose of Civic Education is creating a good citizen who has an intellectual capacity to critically analyze ideas, actively participates in civic life, including political life, has an admirable character, and genuinely cares about the wellbeing of other citizens (Shon, 2015). According to Vasiljevi (2009) the good citizen is the one who is equipped with appropriate knowledge, skills and traits of character which are instrumental for the good of the public. The whole idea is that Civic and Ethical Education makes citizens active and participant thereby being vital assets for the peace, development and democratic governance in a country.

The same is true for Civic and Ethical Education in Ethiopia. It is with all these envision that the paper is treated. Therefore, this paper analyses the role of Civic and Ethical Education in achieving the aforementioned purposes and most importantly in creating active and participant citizen who contributes to the development of good governance in Ethiopia.

6. Achievements of Civic and Ethical Education

As far as its role is concerned, it is averred that the present civic and ethical education curricula is progressive as compared to its predecessors (Tesfaye et al, 2013). As some literatures argue, Civic and Ethical Education has been contributing in creating good citizens as it is working with other countries in the world (Gosa and Desta, 2014). Some studies conducted at the university level showed that Civic and Ethical Education is developing and promoting civic skills, knowledge and disposition to affirm both changes in behavior and attitude of the learners. It has contributed to the creation of good and ethical behaviors among citizens. Studies conducted on the area affirmed that the subject is also creating a favorable environment to the learners to co-exist with other socio-cultural groups and have a culture of respect for one another's view (ibid). Such tolerance is one essential element of democracy and civic disposition expected from a virtuous citizen.

The subject is creating, perhaps the notable contribution, awareness on the citizens as to their rights and duties as well as the overall political life of the state. Besides, Tesfaye et al (2013) noted that the existing civic education curriculum has contributed to introduce the youth with the values of democracy, and human rights which had never existed in the country's modern history. This shows that the subject is playing a role in informing citizens with the worth of having quality good governance contrasting the previous undemocratic tradition.

7. Challenges

Despite its positive contribution in building good behavior and creating active and participant citizens, the changes brought are not satisfactory. There are a number of factors which limit the proper realization of the purpose of Civic and Ethical Education. The following are some of the major factors. Certain factors discussed herein under are prevalent at the country level; some of them are at university level; while others are at elementary and secondary school levels.

8. Content and Context Related Problems

The contents of the subject have some deformity. The subject gives much emphasis on the domestic legal frameworks. It is clearly outlined that "*the lessons devote much time to inform*

students about the constitution, laws of the land, and policies of the government while international laws and issues generally received very limited time" (Tesfaye et al, 2013). This demonstrates that the subject is dedicated much for inculcating into students' mind the government ideology, program and policies, thereby lacking international context.

There is no question that the subject deals with several enlightened concepts. However, the context in which they are incorporated is reprehensible. In view of this, it is argued that democracy, human rights, and other related concepts are customized to fit Ethiopian national perspectives, its own political agenda, and social issues (Yamada, 2011). This makes citizens to look into those democratic values with a distorted lens. Putting otherwise, it abuses citizens understanding of those values. Thus, it can be inferred that the government is using Civic and Ethical Education as an instrument of maintaining legitimacy (ibid).

9. Lack of Civil Societies' Engagement

Educating Civic and Ethical Education by government institutions alone will not be sufficient to create good citizen equipped with ethical values and democratic culture. Instead, it should also be corroborated by the teachings of other stakeholders, namely the family, religious institutions, civil society organizations, the media and other institutions (Mulugeta, 2015). In this regard, the role of civil societies will not be underestimated. The role of civil societies in promoting good governance by engaging in civic education activities is well known across the world (EU, 2011). However, the place of civil societies in Ethiopia is deteriorated (Smith, 2007). Specially, their role in advocating the tenets of Civic Education is too negligible. It is noted that "the EPRDF would like to see NGOs limited to social service and development, as opposed to civic education and human rights activities" (ibid). This could negatively affect democratic development in the country (ibid). Therefore, civil societies should be given the opportunity to propagate Civic Education for the subject to serve its purpose. This assertion is emanated out of the conviction that civil society organizations can complement government interventions, limit the risks of manipulation and indoctrination by certain dominant actors, perceived to be more independent as compared to government institutions and are sometimes more trusted by the local population, and are often locally rooted and have better access to local communities (EU, 2011).

10. Lack of Democratic School Administration

It is common to see an authoritarian tendency in Ethiopian schools administrations. School principals are one stakeholders of the implementation of Civic Education. As one pillars of Civic Education implementer, their behavior and activity should be democratic as can play a great role in shaping the students' behavior either negatively or positively (Ghory cited in Tovmasyan and Thoma, 2008). Al-Hedhiri (n.d) also interestingly stated the adverse effect of undemocratic school administration on the students' character building as follows:

> *Achieving these civic education goals requires a democratic, participatory school climate and a student-centered learning environment. Teaching democratic principles to students living with authoritarian structures and cultures at school is not effective. Indeed, it is counterproductive. Students see the glaring contrast between what they read in the textbooks and what they experience in class and outside school.*

Likewise, it is also stated that it is difficult to achieve the objectives of Civic Education in "the schools that are dominated by a culture that does not promote dialogue, tolerance, acceptance of and respect for differences, freedom of opinion and expression, equality, cooperation, or social responsibility" (Abdulhameed, n.d). It is further stated that "a school climate characterized by a rigid, centralized bureaucracy and authoritarian administrators and teachers will hinder the development of independent, responsible, and critical-thinking citizens" (ibid).

However, the prevalence of democratic school administration and work culture is yet immature in some Ethiopian schools (Mulugeta, 2015). There exists a weak relationship between teachers and directors; authoritarian system and top-down approaches prevail in certain schools of Ethiopia (Sarton et al, n.d). Some studies conducted on the issue underscore that the leaders themselves misbehave and abuse their power. They did not demonstrate the basic principles of democracy in their day-to-day activities and decisions like equality, transparency, etc (Mulugeta, 2015). The manner school leaders treat staffs and students are adversely affecting the students' personal development and attitude of their future.

Therefore, to achieve the purpose of civic and ethical education, students should not be exposed to a huge gap between the democratic and ethical values they are learning and the realities in the school, which they are living with. Thus, school principals should be exemplary for students by actually practicing the values in the text.

11. Improper Mode of Delivery

Improper mode of delivery of Civic and Ethical Education is hampering the effort of building good behavior and creating active and participant citizen who can play a role in the democratization process of the country. To be precise, using plasma as a method of delivery is affecting learners from acquiring the required knowledge and skill from the subject (Tesfaye et al, 2013). This problem is prevalent at the primary and high school levels where plasma is being employed. It is true to say that the method does not appropriately fit the very nature of the subject. Civic Education needs to be repeated often, interactive, participatory (Browne, 2013). Similarly, it is noted that participatory and interactive methods like role plays, problem- solving activities, and mock political or judicial activities are best-received and appear to deliver better and long-term results **(**Browne, 2013; EU, 2011**)**. The fact that plasma education is too fast, beamed only once, highly dependent on an uninterrupted flow of electric power, delivered in English with no local language support (Tekeste, 2006) compromises the goal of education at large, let alone Civic and Ethical Education which is interactive in nature. Thus, allowing students to gain a face-to-face interaction with their teachers will enable them to internalize democratic and ethical values and to exercise them in the classroom.

12. External Environment

The behavior of students is not built exclusively from the school. The influence of their peers, neighbors, families, and the society as a whole has significant role. Peers are important socialization agents greatly determining the decisions, attitudes and behaviors of students (Korir and Kipkemboi, 2014). This is also affirmed by the key informant interviewees. Accordingly, students whose friends engage in harmful activities such as use of drugs, sneaking out of school and being absent from school chronically are likely to have lower academic performance (ibid). The same is the case for students' behavioral development. A study conducted on the matter revealed that though students are taught the good traits of a citizen like tolerance, honesty, civic mindedness, compassion, their exposure to corrupted persons, smokers, drunkard, drug users, etc. is eroding the traits they learnt (Birhanu, 2012). Hence, the whole external environment needs to be enabling to better realize the goals of Civic and Ethical Education.

13. Weak Democracy

UNDP (2011) has revealed the paramount role to be played by the government for Civic Education to meet its goals. It stated that "it is important that government is seen not just as one of a number of potential partners but as the pivotal actor, the disposition of which will have a major impact on the ability of Civic Education programs to function and produce results" (ibid). In line with this premise, it argued that government should make sure that necessary rights of

assembly, expression, association and others are recognized and protected; active interests from a variety of stakeholders, particularly civil society are duly considered; provision of resources to enable longer-term Civic Education initiatives to be undertaken. These pre-conditions of Civic Education are better satisfied in a state having a democratic government. However, Ethiopia has no matured democracy (Birhanu, 2012). Those pre-conditions are almost nonexistent (or severely repressed), thereby hindering the proper realization of the aim of Civic and Ethical Education (Smith, 2007).

Civic education teaches students about their rights and duties. It theoretically empowers them to actively participate in the political, economic, social and cultural affairs. It also acquaints them with the nature as well as power and duties of the government. But, to exercise such rights and to participate in politics and question the government when it deviates from its functions and duties, the political system needs to be democratic and enabling. To practically involve in the democratization process of their country based on the knowledge they have, the political environment should be participatory in the sense that allowing different stakeholders to participate. However, this is not the case in Ethiopia. Thus, Civic and Ethical Education will remain to have only a limited role.

14. Limited Geographical Reach

Ethiopia is one of the ten countries with the highest rates of illiteracy (Wolf et al, 2014). Over half of the entire population is illiterate (ibid). As such, education is seen as a serious issue in the country. However, its reach in the remote areas is limited. In the remote rural areas, we find huge percentage of illiterate persons as compared to the urban population. Education in general and Civic and Ethical Education in particular is not reaching some rural areas of the country. All levels of schools are almost urban-centered while the overwhelming portion of the population is located in remote and inaccessible rural areas (ibid). About 84 percent of the population inhabits rural areas (Federal Ministry of Education, 2010). As a result, it is common to see a significant number of the population with no knowledge of their rights and duties, the duties of the government officials, and their role in the overall quality of governance. It follows therefore that, the citizens in the said areas are not acquiring the necessary knowledge and are submissive to local government officials. To rectify this problem, the importance of having civil societies working at local and grass-root levels cannot be underestimated. Thus, there is a need for government to work much on rural areas and allow the operation of civil societies engaging in the promotion of democracy so that they can save a significant number of illiterates from being manipulated by local government officials.

15. Lack of Role Model Teachers

It is rightly noted that "teacher quality is therefore crucial and has been globally accepted to be significantly associated with the quality of education in general and students' learning outcomes in particular" (Puhan et al, 2014). To further enhance the idea, it is asserted that "no system can rise above the status of its teacher" (ibid). Therefore, to better transmit knowledge and help in developing students' understanding, attitudes, skills, learning, and core values, teachers should have the competence. It is also affirmed that "they are role models within themselves for their students who, consciously or subconsciously, emulate their behavior" (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012). Therefore, teachers should show good behavior to their students. However, it is common to see demotivation and low morale among Ethiopian teachers due to inadequate salaries, low respect and status of teachers, poor management and leadership (Sarton et al, n.d). This, in turn, adversely affects the proper role that teachers should play in delivering quality education and building good character (ibid). This is also validated by an interview with key informants. Good traits taught by the subject must be first reflected in the day-to-day activities of the teachers so that students take a lesson from them.

16. Concluding Remarks

The subject civic and ethical education is too crucial in the creation of active and participant citizen who contributes to the development of democratic governance. However, in Ethiopia, civic and ethical education with the name moral and political education did not serve to create active participant citizen in the pre-1991 era. Rather, the subject used to make the young generation of the time submissive to the government. Following the coming into power of the current regime, civic and ethical education has contributed in building ethical behavior and creating active citizens who are aware of their rights and duties, duties of the government, and the overall political life of their country. However, content and context related problems, lack of civil societies' engagement, lack of democratic school administration, improper method of delivery, pressure from external environment, weak democracy, limited geographical reach of the course, and lack of role model teachers are factors constraining from effectively achieving the purpose of the subject. To effectively realize its purpose, the researcher recommended a strong commitment from all stakeholders, mainly teachers, school principals, government, and other socializing agents.

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