EVALUATION OF THE UNIVERSITY RESEARCH POLICY: IMPLICATIONS FOR LECTURER RESEARCH OUTPUT

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Abstract: *The purpose of this study was to evaluate a university research policy and its influence on lecturer research output in that university. It was motivated by the observation that, three distinct phases each with its' own poise on research were formulated but both students' and lecturers' research output in the university is still low. The study applied a qualitative historical case study research design. Data were collected from purposive samples of research policies from 2002 to 2014. These were evaluated for policy content with respect to lecturer research skills development. Minutes of research board meetings revealed successes and challenges experienced during research policy implementation. Lecturers' self-reporting questionnaires captured their views and evaluation of the research policies. The study found that, The Research Council of Zimbabwe only captures, markets and archives research from Zimbabwe. It has no control on research in universities. Each university is governed by its own Research Board research policies. The case university research policies are focused on the management of funds. They promote research for lecturers with the skills. The research policies sideline lecturer research skills development thereby limiting lecturer participation in research activities. They are not promoting lecturer research output in the form of published papers or community engagement. The study recommends that, first a baseline lecturer research needs be carried out. Second, training in writing for publication be carried out. Here senior academics can be encouraged to mentor others using Chinamasa's (2014) Conceptual Group-Mentoring lecturer research skills development model.*

Key Words: University research policy, lecturer research output.

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INTRODUCTION

Evaluating the university research policy is an important aspect of research policy formulation and implementation because it affects that university's lecturers' research output. Unfortunately

the majority of textbooks and studies on research rarely include research policy evaluation. They are pre-occupied with research methods content and relegate research policy issues to those interested in the development of lecturers' research skills for publication. In a university, the development of lecturer research skills can be considered a human resources management issue deserving peripheral attention from administration. Its impact is felt by individual lecturers more directly than the university. From this angle, this study on the development of lecturer research skills, regards university research policy evaluation as a critical component in the analysis of the university context. Policy evaluation helps to identify and describe latent factors affecting lecturers' research output in that university.

According to Dye (1987:3) public policy is, "whatever government chooses to do or not to do." If we subscribe to this definition, we regard a university research policy as, whatever the university chooses to do or not to do in regards to research in that university. This is a double pronged inclusive perception in that, action and inaction are equally weighted policies. Zvobgo (1997) justifies this view by stressing that, inaction can have as great an impact on society as the action itself. For example, overlooking the allocation of funds for research is as important as having written statements on allocating research funds, although no discussion or meeting was held to decide not to allocate those research funds. In other words, policy can have a formal and an equally effective informal version.

A formal perspective by Hanekon (1987) regards policy as a comprehensive framework of intent and for inter-action. It is usually documented. This view encompasses university research themes, objectives and research agenda as policies. In fact Hanekon (1987) hinted that, under normal circumstances, policies are not rigid, they are jellylike in nature. They are fragile promises between groups. They are hypothetical and subject to revision, alteration or scrapping if not satisfactory. The assumption here is that, there is consensus between policy formulators and beneficiaries on that policy satisfaction.

Two implications derived from Hanekon's (1987) policy characteristics are: first that formal formative and summative policy evaluation is a necessity for constant feedback into the

policy cycle. Second is that, to capture all changes, research policy evaluation should be done according to the phases corresponding to those changes. For this paper, the research policies can be in three chronological phases corresponding to the three leadership phases' policy that took place from 2002 to 2014. First are research policies from 2002 to 2009, the University Research Board policy. Second is the shot period 2009 to 2011, the Research Capacity Building policy and last but important 2011 to 2014 the Research and Resources Mobilization policy. There are no water tight boundaries between these phases since they are in the same university. Each change that each leadership policy brought to research is evaluated in terms of its influence on lecturer research output through publications.

Verma and Mallick (1999) suggest that, policy impact evaluation is a research process in which researchers and practitioners have dovetailed exchange of ideas and expertise. Implied in this is the fact that, data for policy impact evaluation should be collected from those involved in the policy formulation and implementers. Kapfunde (2004) regards policy impact as an actual change in behavior or attitudes that result from a policy action or inaction. This concept of policy impact evaluation focuses this paper's lenses on lecturers' views, behavior changes and attitudes in response to changes in research policies modifications in the university. Putman (1985) and Anderson (1995) expects evaluative activities to be on the policy formulation, objectives and implementation stages. We need to have a common understanding of the organizational context of Chinhoyi University of Technology for a meaningful evaluation of its' research policies.

CHINHOYI UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, CONTEXT

Chinhoyi University of Technology (CUT) in Zimbabwe was established as part of the recommendations by Chetsanga Commission (1995) to upgrade Technical Colleges into degree awarding institutions in Zimbabwe. According to Nherera (2001), Chinhoyi University began operations in 1999 under the auspices of the University of Zimbabwe technical degree programme. Chinhoyi University of Technology Act number 15 of 2001 resulted in Chinhoyi Technical Teachers College operating as a fully-fledged university in 2002. Teachers' colleges emphasize teaching more than research hence lecturers recruited from the college into the university did not emphasize research as required by the university.

Chinhoyi University of Technology's (2005 – 2015) strategic and business plan, key result area includes "Quality Action Research". Such an applied research focus was advocated by Chikomba (1988: 6) who announced that Zimbabwe's university research should address escalating problems such as unemployment, food security, natural resources and sustainability. The reflexive dialectical critique and collaborative aspects of action research cited by Chilisa and Preece (2005:104) tallies well with Chinhoyi University of Technology's entrepreneurship focus. Its' 2010 strategic actions linked to action research include:

1. Appointment of a Research Board and Research Director
2. Reviewing and upgrading the quality of teaching, learning and research.
3. Establishment of a feedback system and tracer studies to keep the university informed of the performance of its graduates and employer expectation. (This is a quality control measure).
4. Engaging in market research to maintain relevance of programmes to the needs of the community (entrepreneurship focus).

These action plans on paper provide rich sources of research areas for lecturers. A critical eye can notice that, point (2) above has the order of teaching, learning and research as if to emphasize teaching on the expense of lecturer research. Point (3) justifies the current study which provides feedback to research policy makers. The researcher noted that, the action plan does not include the development of lecturer research skills. Such a research action plan does not promote the development of lecturer research skills and research output. The researcher inferred that the omission of lecturer research competence development programmes on Chinhoyi University of Technology action plans was based on the assumption that all lecturers have the research skills. On the contrary, Chinhoyi University of Technology has not yet appeared on the university ranks based on research. Jingura (2010:1) observed that, "academic productivity is low at Chinhoyi University of Technology, with an output of not more than three papers per year and no major research projects"

STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Although Chinhoyi University of Technology's research policy has been changing since 2002, no formal evaluation has been carried out to provide informative or summative evaluation feedback. The omission may lead to misdirection of resources and sidelining intended beneficiaries of the research policy. This paper on research policy impact evaluation,

examines the influences of changes on research policy on lecturers' research output in the form of research for publication. Besides policy evaluation being a policy requirement for accountability, this paper is an important contribution to the solution of the problem of low lecturer research output in the university.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The paper intents to answer the following pertinent questions:

1. What research policies were formulated at Chinhoyi University of Technology since 2002?
2. How did each of the research policies influence lecturers' research output?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design

This study was guided by a qualitative historical case study research design. It is a case since it is bounded, confined to one university and a single phenomena (evaluation of research policy). Its purpose is not to generalize findings but understand how research policy influences lecturer research outcome. According to Best and Kahn (1999: 101), history is "the meaningful record of human achievement in the past." In this study historical research facilitates the systematic and objective location, evaluation and synthesis of evidence in order to establish facts and draw conclusions (Borg, 1963 in White, 2005:106). In fact, in historical research, the researcher does not interfere with, or intervene in the events. He/She does not observe them directly, but describes, analyses and interprets those events that have already taken place. In this study, research policies have already been formulated, implemented and influenced lecturer research output.

Population and Sampling

The population of this study is composed of research policy documents, main actors in research policy formulation and implementation. Critical for this evaluation study are the intended beneficiaries (lecturers). White (2005: 107) identifies primary sources for historical research as, "those items that have had a direct physical relationship with the events being reconstructed. This includes the written and verbal testimony provided by actual participants in, or witnesses of, an event, but also the participants themselves." The documents are readily available.

The appropriate sampling method for qualitative historical research is purposive sampling. Documents are selected for being rich sources of research policy and available. Participants are selected for being available, having the knowledge of research policy influences and willing to participate in the study. In qualitative research, a small sample is adequate. What is important is that it is a rich source of the variable available.

Instruments

The major instruments for this study are the policy documents. These are available. They reveal the research policy contents, objectives and implementation process. Minutes of research meetings reveal sentiments, successes and challenges experienced during policy implementation.

A self-reporting questionnaire structured by the researcher captured lecturers' views and evaluation of research policy. A questionnaire was ideal considering that, lecturers are literate. They are able to write their views. Individual views are required and kept for analysis later. An interview guide structured by the researcher provided leading questions stimulated by findings from informal discussions and contents of the research policy.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection was initiated by the identification and sourcing of what was pertained to be research policies for each of the periods. These were analyzed for research policy content, objectives and mode of implementation. These were evaluated in respect of their contribution towards lecturer research output. The researcher noted areas that needed clarification from those involved in research policy formulation. These were included in the interview guide. The researcher administered the questionnaire to those lecturers willing to contribute. Data analysis was based on two emerging themes; how the policy issue promoted and how it affected lecturer researching and research output. The evaluation is presented after each policy issue for coherence.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Research Council of Zimbabwe

The Research Council of Zimbabwe (RCZ) is a statutory body established in terms of the Research Act of 1986. It is mandated to:

1. Promote research.
2. Publicize Zimbabwean research at a global scale.

3. Creation of research data base expected to provide an integrated and comprehensive collection of data from Zimbabwe.
4. Supervise research at national level.
5. Advising government on issues of research for sustainable development.

The first point, "promotion of research" does not specify how? What is clear is that, this body is known for organizing research EXPOS at national level. It does not have a significant influence on university research operations. Neither does it organize workshops for lecturer research skills development. Its research policy benefits those who are able to research.

Out of the sixteen universities now (2014) in Zimbabwe, only four are registered as research co operations with the Research Council of Zimbabwe. These are University of Zimbabwe, Harare Institute of Technology, Africa University and National University of Science and Technology. Chinhoyi University of Technology the case for this study is yet to cooperate at national level. Chinhoyi University of Technology research policies are governed at university level by the university research board.

University Research Board Policy (2002 to 2009)

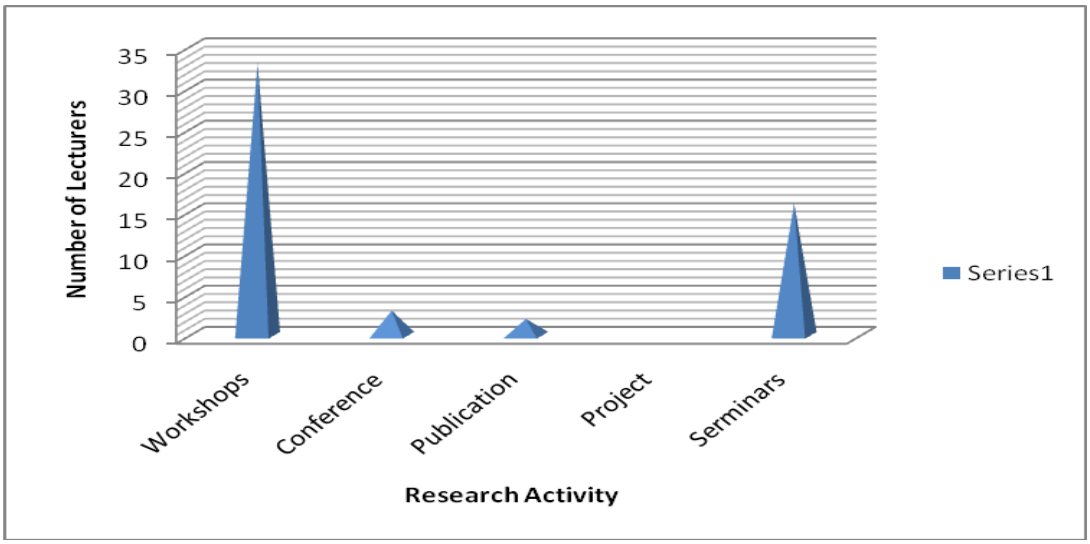
Chinhoyi University Research Board was established in 2002 when the university became a fully fledged university. Its activities were regulated by the Research Board Procedures and Guidelines from the university Research Act of 1986.

The Research Board was composed of a Chairperson who is an academic staff member elected by the Research Board. The Vice Chairperson was also an academic staff member elected by the Research Board. Other members include; a member of the University Council appointed by council, a representative of each of the schools and the institute. The university bursar was the secretary of the research board. The university librarian, Vice Chancellor and Pro-Vice Chancellor are ex-officio members.

The Research Board's Terms of Reference were:

1. Administration of research grants in the university
2. Support research projects for academic staff members, students and research fellows
3. Fund travel expenses for staff members' participation in national and international conferences
4. Screening research proposals submitted by staff for funding

These terms of reference had nothing on the development of lecturers' research skills. These terms of reference adopted from the mother University of Zimbabwe were not appropriate for a developing university. Minutes of the research board reflected that lecturers did not submit proposals. The only two proposals which the Research Board received in 2005 to 2007 were poorly done. Specifically the statement of the research problem was not discernible. Hence the Research Board funded no research proposal during its' time of office. This study concluded that, lecturers did not submit fundable research proposals because they had no skills to write them. The graph shows the number of lecturers funded and the research activity from 2002 to 2009 inclusive



The graph shows that, the majority of lecturers went for research workshops. This was followed by research seminars. Very few participated in conferences, publications and no research project was funded, although each staff member had a research grant allocated to him/her each year. These findings can be interpreted to mean that, the Research Board policy did not address the actual needs of lectures. They needed research skills first as shown by their participation in seminars and workshops rather than conferences. Only two publications from a staff complement average of 145 lecturers in seven years is an indication of low research output as a result of research policies not addressing the needs of the lectures. The researcher concluded that, although no formal policy evaluation was carried out, the university realized that its' research policy did not address the human development component. It restructured the Research Board by appointing a research director who focused on research capacity building.

Research Capacity Building policy (2009 to 2011)

The Research Director Jingura (2010:1) noted that, academic productivity in the form of lecturer research output at Chinhoyi University of Technology was low. There were no knowledge-driven community activities carried out by academics. As such, his focal point was research capacity building. Jingura's (2010:2) policy was aimed at, "…strengthening research capacity and increasing research outputs of relevance to the country's strategic economic sectors." There were three major outputs expected from this plan:

1. Capacity development in research and establishment of research networks for Chinhoyi University of Technology.
2. Academics trained in scholarly publication and acquire academic engagement skills.
3. Academics acquire community engagement skills and competences.
4. A research plan developed for the University.

The Research Capacity Building policy on paper, addressed lecturers' needs and seemed posed to promote lectures' research output. In fact, lecturer respondents reported that in was the best model for them. It was expected to help lecturers develop two critical components of their promotion namely, research and community service. The unfortunate part was that, The Research Director's term of office was short lived. He was redeployed to quality assurance. His policy did not go beyond marketing for beneficiaries' buy- in and project co-ownership. It was not implemented and id gathering dust in different shelves in the university.

Research and Resources Mobilization policy (2011 to 2014)

University research policy is expressed in the university's mission statement and vision. The vision of Chinhoyi University of Technology 2013 is "to be a world class centre of excellence for technological innovation and entrepreneurship." Its mission is "to produce innovative graduates, create knowledge, enhance entrepreneurship and provide community service through quality teaching, training and technologically oriented research" This vision and mission stress the need for experts in applied research. While the words, "innovative graduates, knowledge creation and entrepreneurship" are a mouthful, Jingura (2010:1) and Mugabe (2013:9) show that there is a low lecturer research output at Chinhoyi University of Technology. The order of quality indicators namely teaching, training and technologically oriented research does not give research a high priority.

The researcher would not have done justice by ignoring the criteria that are used for ranking Universities when defining "world class centre of excellence" as a vision. Ranking of Universities the world over is based on research, teaching, and community engagement hence for a University to become a world class centre it should do extremely well in those three areas especially research. The highest number of points in the ranking is from research and publications (60%). This means that for Chinhoyi University of Technology to climb the ladder it should identify its' research themes in line with its mandate and be engaged in high impact researches that solve various community problems that Zimbabwe as a country is facing. In addition Chinhoyi University needs to alter its priority order from teaching, training and research to research, teaching and training.

There are a number of reasons why Chinhoyi University of Technology has not done as much as it should have done in terms of research. Mugabe (2013: 9) highlighted three major factors. The first factor is that there have not been academic pillars to support research in the University. The second factor is that there has not been enough laboratory equipment in the University and also lack of knowledge of what to purchase because of lack of knowledge of the appropriate equipment in the various Departments. The third but equally important is that the funds that are allocated for research are limited given that almost all the research taking place in the University is funded by the University. Most of the research in most highly ranked Universities is funded by international donors, industry and well wishers – which is missing right now (2013) at Chinhoyi University of Technology. Chinhoyi University of Technology suffers from very high competition in applying for international funds from donors especially when there are no distinguished senior researchers with the requisite Curriculum Vitas reflecting wide post doctoral research experience in the university.

Although it is clear that, the three factors are dependent on the human factor, there are no initiatives to develop lecturer research skills yet. Such a gap calls for the current study seeking ways of developing lecturer research competencies.

However, the university has gone on a massive recruitment of senior academics (those with Ph Ds) since 2010. This move implied that, the university research policy abandoned the development of lectures research skills for doctorate degree holders. These are the people who will be driving the University research agenda (through the various clusters that have

been formed) as the university moves from being a teaching and research university to a research and teaching university. Mugabe (2013: 11) expects these senior academics to mentor/supervise post-graduate students who are expected to play an important role in a University's research and the community development. This perception focuses senior academics' role to that of developing students' research skills at masters' level rather than lecturers' research skills. One can conclude that, Chinhoyi University research policy aims to develop students' research skills and has nothing for the development of lecturer research competency. One wonders how the university expects to attain world class status by more quality research from students rather than lecturers who teach them research methods.

Although Chinhoyi University of Technology calls for its' lecturers to work for PhDs, it is not funding them and not doing much beyond marginalizing them through the implementation of its' Senate Research Committee (SERC) resolutions reflected in the next paragraphs.

Senate Research Committee Terms of Reference

The Directorate of Research and Resource Mobilization is responsible for the administration, management and co-ordination of research and resource mobilization in the University. The goal of the Research wing of the Research and Resource Mobilization Directorate is to organize, implement and promote the University's research and knowledge exchange strategies through the Senate Research Committee's terms of reference shown in (Box 1)

Box 1: SERC terms of reference

1. Development and implementation of the Universities' research policy
2. Allocating the University research budget to Schools/Institutes
3. Supervising and monitoring the use of research funds by Schools/Institutes
4. Mobilization of resources for all matters related to funding and material requirements for research
5. Managing and allocating any funds as trusts, endowments and other such funds bequeathed to the University for research purposes
6. Assessing all proposed researches by Schools/Institutes and individuals for research ability and fundability and conformity with set standards and University code of best practice
7. Reporting to Senate on the research outputs through standard deliverables such as annual reports

8. Oversight of all central issues related to research
9. Providing necessary support to create an enabling environment for all research activities in the University pertaining to such issues as, research contracts, and budgets.

These terms of reference are silent on the development of lecturer research skills. They can not promote lecturer research output. Assessing all proposed researches (point 6) assumes that lecturers know how to write a research proposal. The terms of reference are focusing more on material resources management on the expense of human resources development. The implementation of SERC's terms of references, brought several changes in the research arena at Chinhoyi University of Technology. Implemented corrective measures are evaluated below in terms of their developing lecturer research skills.

Factors accounting for low research output at CUT and corrective measures

Factor for limited research	Corrective measure being implemented
Shortage of senior researchers (in 2010)	The University had 1 Professor and 2 PhD holders in 2009 and the number has since grown up to 6 Professors and 25 PhD holders by 2013
Lack of international collaboration (in 2010)	CUT has hired a number of PhD holders and Professors who are expected to have connections all over the world which is expected to improve international collaboration
Lack of proper research mentoring	The senior academics in the various departments should mentor junior academics
Lack of adequate financial resources	The University now has the critical mass of senior academics so it should be able to compete and write good quality proposals for donor funding which can improve on funding for research and buying equipment
Inadequate research facilities	The university is buying research equipment to equip laboratories – that are being refurbished.
Poor remuneration and Incentives for research	Though at 40% of the region, government salaries for universities have improved and this has managed to retain and attract staff from outside the country, incentives for research are still low.
Increasing demand for higher education (at the expense of post graduate training)	CUT has started postgraduate degrees in its areas of mandate namely Masters degrees in Post harvest and Strategic Management. The

	University has also initiated a number of MPhils and DPhils.
Lack of the Directorate of research and resource mobilization	University research agenda has been defined and the directorate is co-coordinating proposal development for donor funded research to improve financial resources for research.
Lack of the Quality assurance and postgraduate studies	To assure quality of degree programmes and co-ordinate postgraduate training

Although lack of research mentoring is mentioned here, it is not clear whether it is for lecturers or students at masters' level. Its' corrective measure, "The senior academics in the various departments *should* mentor junior academics" sounds wishful thinking. It contradicts Klasen (2002:7) who proposed that, the mentor is not necessarily a more senior nor mentor supposed to be more powerful than the learner. The word "should" though carrying a mandatory connotation has no force to monitor its implementation. The employment contract for PhD holders does not include mentoring of junior lecturers as one of its' key result areas.

Lecturer respondents also reported that, mentoring of lecturers' for research output by holders of doctorate degrees could have been a good move. Unfortunately, the preferential treatment given to those with doctorate degrees such as: having a different dinning-hall for them with subsidized special meals, car and free housing separated them from those they were to help. A social gap was created between lecturers with doctorate degrees and those with masters' degrees. The researcher concluded that, massive recruitment of doctors did not promote lecturer research output by mentoring at Chinhoyi University of Technology.

Megginson and Clutterbuck (2009) regards a mentor as someone who has experienced a great deal and is willing and able to effectively share some of this learning with others. Unfortunately, some of the PhD holders are not published researchers. No training workshop was held to sensitize PhD holders on their assumed function of mentoring others and developing their skills for mentorship. Since none of them offered him/her self as a mentor, the researcher assumed that they did not have the will to mentor others. In fact one of them interviewed reported that, although he was willing to mentor others in research for publication, he was overloaded. He taught 456 undergraduate students, 143 masters' students and supervised 10 students at masters' level.

What is coming out clear is the fact that, Chinhoyi University of Technology's strategies for being a world class university through improved lecturer research publications in journals with high impact factors, is silent on the development of those lecturers' research competencies. Even the research themes below say nothing about mentoring lecturers for research and publications.

The role of research contribution for lecturer tenure cannot be overlooked. At Chuinhoyi University of Technology, a publication is considered for tenure if it has an impact factor of 0.5. This requirement compelled lectures to subscribe to online journal which have high impact factors. This move threatened local journals which are not yet online. The need to acquire a doctorate forced lecturers to concentrate on doctoral studies on the expense of research for publication.

Chinhoyi University of Technology Research Themes

Chinhoyi University of Technology Senate Research Committee has come up with six research themes which will focus its' research. These themes fall within both the mandate of the University and the national research priority areas. The research themes are (1) Information and Communication Technology and manufacturing engineering (2) energy and water (3) biotechnology and food security (4) entrepreneurship and community development (5) environmental systems, hospitality and tourism and (6) art and indigenous knowledge systems.

The university is appealing to both industry and commerce to come forward and collaborate as a partner with it in researching any one of these themes to address problems that the communities are facing. There are specialist and research clusters within the University to spearhead research within these research themes. It is clear that the research themes given here are silent on the development of lecturer research skills which necessitates the study research problem.

RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of these findings, this study recommends the following action plan for the development of lecturer research skills which can lead to an increase in their participation in research and research output in the form of publishable papers.

1. Lecturer research needs analysis by administration of questionnaires.

2. Formation of research themes and lecturer research teams according to lecturer research interest.
3. Lecturer workshops on writing for publication. The application of, "Conceptual Group-Mentoring Lecturer Research skills development model"(Chinamasa, 2014) is encouraged. Activities can be dominated by presentations.
4. Lecturers' workshops on research proposal writing for funding.

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