# DIGITAL READING REFLECTION OF ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: LESSON LEARNED FROM THE PANDEMIC COVID-19

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# Abstract

The teaching of reading during the pandemic Covid-19 has been challenging regarding the use of digital reading. The sudden swifts should be conducted by the teachers and the students to deal with the healthy protocols and the instructional goals. This study is aimed at gathering data about the situation at the digital reading class. A qualitative study focusing on the qualitative ethnographic research design was conducted to reveal the current condition of the digital reading class. The results of the study suggest that consideration on the teaching preparation including needs analysis on digital reading, development of the digital reading instruction, and aspects of improving the students' motivation in digital reading in Islamic university context. The development of the digital reading motivation, higher order thinking skills, and navigation skills.

Keywords: Digital reading, teaching reading EFL, Islamic university students.

# A. Introduction

The language teaching in the context of pandemic Covid-19 has been shifted (Buchholz et al., 2020) in all aspects. Normally, the language teaching was done in face to face language teaching with minimum used of online learning in both blended and full online learning. The language teaching was done in classes with a teaching approach believed by the teacher as the best method to achieve the goals of the teaching and learning. The media of the language teaching were also varied in which the students have more direct communication with the teachers and classmates to deal with the learning activities. Digital media provide interactivity, non-linearity, immediacy of accessing information and convergence of texts (Liu, 2005). It also enables the students to have more experiences in both digital learning and non-digital

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learning. During the pandemic, the language teaching process is done fully online and it changes the students' and teachers' behavior.

The roles of the teachers in the teaching are also different since they are not only expected as learning facilitator but also as developer, controller, evaluator, and manager. During the pandemic, teachers should become engagement facilitator who can engage students in authentic, meaningful, valuables, and enjoyable learning (Egbert, 2020). As developers, teachers are expected to be able to develop the suitable learning process by providing applicable learning materials, learning media, and learning process. The teachers are also as controllers by which they control the students' learning progress and achievements. This is done actually to support the students' self-reflection on their learning process. The teachers evaluate the students' learning achievement that will be used as the students' consideration in their reflection. As managers, teachers are responsible for the organization of the students' learning progress, and evaluation linear with the learning goals. Those roles require commitment and hard works from teachers especially during the pandemic learning.

To be successful in completing the roles of the teachers, there are a number of problems that the teachers should encounter. The main problem is different opportunities for both teachers and students as gaps in the access to education (Shevtsova & InnaKozubai, 2020). This includes the problems with the minimum gadgets and social media services which decrease the quality of the distance education. It changes the teachers' focus on the completion of the language teaching instead of the content and how it is delivered. As a consequence, task management contributes other problems for the students' learning engagement. Teachers follow up by providing more fun, challenging, and time consuming activities to increase learning engagement (Egbert, 2020). Thus, the main problem for teachers is the development and employment of creating engaging language tasks.

Furthermore, the needs of the digital reading skills are crucial for the students as they are required to be more independent learners with the 21<sup>st</sup> century technology as one of the needs in digital literacies. Students should be supported by skills, strategies, and stances which enable the representation and understanding of ideas by using a wide range of modalities through digital tools (Buchholz et al., 2020). Digital reading skills are required to enable the students to be ready with changes and support them to share and criticize ideas freely. In the Pandemic Covid-19, people are not only facing epidemic but also infodemic (Buchholz et al., 2020) that are caught without the critical reading skills. Hundreds of articles inform readers about the pandemic that invalid. Thus, the ability to critically analyze the content of the text is viewed as a major skill needed in the language learning during the pandemic.

The implementation of the digital reading skills is actually as a scaffolding of the educational policy to support the poor condition during the pandemic Covid-19. In Indonesia, the social distancing mandatory has been implemented for the last year and it contributes a number of new regulations of the language teaching in all level of education including university level. The use of any digital platform and social media to support the language learning has been considered by lecturers to facilitate the teaching. During the Covid-19 outbreak, students learn from home through project-based learning activities in online learning (Lie et al., 2020). Lecturers are done through digital learning by having any e-learning websites and digital meeting (e.g. zoom meeting and Google meet) instead of the face to face classroom. The use of digital meeting is to provide more direct and live learning for the students and to tackle the problems of the students' understanding. While the use of e-learning through websites

is as the students' learning enrichment and to control how the students deal with the projects and participations.

The condition of the Pandemic Covid-19 forces not only teachers but also students to have fully online learning to avoid crowd or physical contact. Indonesia as a developing country faces a number of new paradigm in the implementation of the online learning and the employment of digital reading. The limitation of internet facility and its devices contribute problems before, while, and after teaching periods. The position of English a foreign language, does not support the whole class members to be ready with the online learning and thus, the students and teachers are expected to have more activities on digital reading. Reading one page of hypertext may share different understanding from the readers since they might have different position of the text from similar page. Thus, the hyper-reading can decrease the sustained attention and come to the more fragmented reading. As a consequence, the writer's concept might be not the similar to the reader's.

Hyper-reading may also reduce the sustained attention to any textual source and lead to more fragmented reading, since each page on the Web has to compete with many other pages for the user's attention. In terms of hypertext linking, the author's conception of the connection's relevance may not be the same as the reader's. The students should be skillful in digital navigation to make them easily understand the content of the text and get similar topic texts to support their understanding.

As observed before, the students' of Unimma have varied reading comprehension level. This is due to a number of reasons. First, the students do not have high motivation to read. Then, the students also do not have sufficient opportunities to use the target language. In relation to the instructional process, the students stated that they felt bored during their reading classes due to irrelevant reading texts and learning media. Whether the students have got English course per semester in around four semester, they still found it difficult to have good reading comprehension.

Several previous research have been aimed at the digital reading, learning reflection, and reading instruction towards general subjects. In digital reading, Cull (2015) found that there are three modes of digital reading including reading for pleasure, study and information. An action research has been done by Suprivadi et al. (2020) in critical reflection on the process of reading especially hadith. The data show that the reflection actions and the technological integration increased the literacy (54.33%), technological literacy (63.07%), and hadith literacy (93.59%). Moreover, the digital reading promotes the students learning autonomy as the main purpose of reflective teaching that it was supported by Pasaribu (2020) in his research that reader response tasks stimulate the students motivation and autonomy. For specific subject, research on digital reading literacy in Islamic education shares good analytics through the students critical thinking skills in their digital reading process (Hafidzi, 2020). In addition to the research on the digital education during the pandemic Covid-19, La Velle et al. (2020) suggest there is a need to collaborate equity and pedagogy reflected from the idea that experiences supported by sufficient condition for both teachers and students.

For that background, the analysis of the students' reflection on their digital reading as consequences of online learning during the pandemic Covid-19. It begins with gathering information on the students' level of digital reading mastery and their efforts to deal with the switch of printed reading to digital reading as their main process of language learning. It is a need to get the sort of knowledge about the use of

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their navigation skills and reading strategies to enable the development of applicable and appropriate teaching and learning instructions.

## B. Method

This study was a qualitative ethnographic research design establishing the validity of naturalistic qualitative approaches to research. It is selecting an approach that could focus on the culture of an ESL classroom. One of the motivating factors behind this study was to examine the impact and rapid change which was taking place in English as a foreign language classroom associated with digital reading and the increased use of online learning. The data were gathered to get the core discussion on the students' digital reading during the pandemic Covid-19.

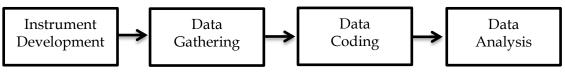


Figure 1. The Research Design

The study was designed to enable online survey in their experiences of having digital reading classrooms. The process of the study began with the development of the instrument, gathering the data from the respondents, coding the data, and analyzing the data. This initial study was conducted in Universitas Muhammadiyah Magelang. The data collection was done through questionnaires shared in Google Form. There are 281 respondents who filled the questionnaires the respond to their current perspectives and condition of their digital reading. The questions addressed are to answer the research focus on the students' digital reading skill mastery, the students' reading purposes, students' reading modes, digital reading activities and their digital reading motivation. The data were then analyzed and presented in a number of detailed discussion through in-depth analysis.

The contribution of this study to the teaching of reading of English as a Foreign Language is expected to aid in resolving issues and providing opportunities for the students and teachers. Teachers should pit their best efforts to construct and implement more engaging digital teaching of reading from education authorities and widening digital divide. This study can provide contribution to the perspective of teaching digital reading in university level on the perspectives of challenges and dilemmas by the lecturers and students.

# C. Findings and Discussion

#### 1. Findings

## Students' reflection on their reading comprehension mastery

It is interconnected between the printed reading comprehension mastery and the digital reading mastery. The initial findings of the research go to the state of students' reading comprehension. This is in accordance with the research findings in reflective teaching in reading comprehension that positively influences the student's; understanding, processing, and evaluating the texts they read (Oo & Habók, 2020). The current condition of the students' reading mastery is gathered from the students' own reflection. As shown in Figure 2, the students' reflection on their reading performance lies on the third level of reading mastery, adequate. It is around 56.9% of the respondents who justified that their reading mastery is on adequate level. In the second place, the students' reading comprehension is on the good level in 26.3%. The students' level of reading comprehension in low level is around 12.1%. Surprisingly,

the students' comprehension at very good level lies on 4.6%. The lowest level of the students' reading comprehension is 1.1% in poor level. The data show that the students find problems with their self-confidence in their reading comprehension. It can also because of the students' low motivation to read. It is as one reflection on the students' reading performance.

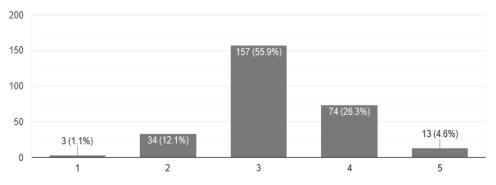


Figure 2. Students' reflection on their reading mastery

The students' reading comprehension is mostly under the influence of their reading motivation that responds to the types of texts the students read. The types of texts and the contents of the texts may motivate the students to have more both digital and printed reading activities. They also affect the process of extensive and intensive reading processes. To deal with the enourmous articles the students can read, genres can be an alternatives of social development. This is proven by by Astika (2014) the teaching through reflective approach involves personal and social aspects of teaching and learning. thus, the consideration of texts types should be emphazised.

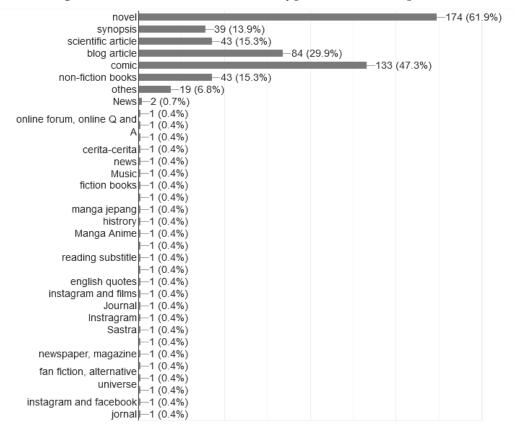


Figure 3 Digital texts preferred by students

The data about the students' reading interest proves that the use of novel as the main reading sources. Following novel, reading comic and blog articles are also preferred by the students when they have the digital reading. It can be inferred that the mastery of the extensive reading skills are trained during the students' digital reading. Novel, comic and blog article tend to have longer texts that required the student have extensive reading skills. Thus, the reading will also influence the students' performance in terms of their physical condition since contacting eyes to the screen may decrease the eyes' health. The extensive reading mastery starts with the mastery of the intensive reading skills with the combination of both skimming and scanning. The combination of the extensive and intensive reading links the diverse range of reading motivation and text types they read (Mcgeown et al., 2020).

It has been notified that becoming critical readers requires a number of sub skills. Critical readers should be able to pay attention on the characteristics of the source texts. They also need to be able to evaluate the quality of the information of the document they read. Then, critical readers are expected to be able to consider the general idea or conclusion of the texts as credible information from the biased sources. Those are supported by the research findings on critical reading on multiple webpages conducted by (Mason, 2020). One crucial skill determining the readers' ability to follow reliable sources is the sourcing skills. Sourcing skills form integrated and coherent representations of varied documents. Thus, critical readers are required to be skillful in sourcing. It is in line with the challenging found by Pangrazio (2016) in cultivating the critical reading skills through technical proficiency in digital era.

#### 2. Discussion

#### **Digital Dictionary in Digital Reading Comprehension**

To deal with the problems in the students' vocabulary mastery, the students mostly used the Google Translate to help them finding the meaning of difficult words. It is because the students find it easy for them to operate the Google translate by only connecting their devices to the internet and browse the unknown words. In spite of Google Translate, the students prefer to use u-dictionary to find the unknown words. Based on the students' responses, the use of digital media support them to deal with unknown words than finding it in the printed dictionary.

In relation to the use of digital dictionary, it is proven that the students prefer to have digital texts for their reading instead of the use of printed books. As previously discussed, multimedia in dictionary support the language and literacy for students (Korat et al., 2014). It is slightly shown that the digital texts are preferable than printed texts (51,25% and 48.75%). A number of reasons for this finding is highlighted by the students. Most of the ereaders assume that the use of digital reading is flexible, simple, and accessed anytime and anywhere without having troubles with the books size and weight. Having less effort to bring the books, the students feel it is fun to have digital reading.

The main reason for having digital dictionary is to save the ereaders time to read a document. It is time saving for the students to search the unknown words by typing the words on the digital dictionary. Different from printed dictionary in which the ereaders need to move from one page to another ones to get the words they try to find. Readers spent 16% more time to read by having printed dictionary than the digital dictionary (Flynn, 2007). Spending less time in reading for Indonesian readers may improve their motivation to read since it is possible for them to read other texts which have similar topic of discussion. Digital dictionary seems to be more appropriate to enhance the ereaders' comprehension of the etexts. It is obvious that digital dictionary is easily operated by the digital readers while reading the etext. The ereaders can implement their skills in accessing multiple web-pages during their ereading. Digital skilful ereaders can open more than two or three webpages in one time and this enables them to have more input to support their comprehension. The ereaders can compare pages from its relevance and quality of the pages (Mason, 2020) The use of Google translate tool which has a number of beneficial tools such as translation, microphone, and direct copy and paste the text input in translation become positive tools for the ereaders.

In addition, the use of digital dictionary is better used to help ereaders get more reading comprehension than the printed dictionary. The data present the practicality of the digital dictionary help the readers to read better through a number of different dictionary as proven by similar study on the same topic of interest (ter Beek et al., 2018). The use of VT (Virtual Thesaurus), MWO (Merriam Webster-Online dictionary) and pop-up dictionary positively influence the ereaders comprehension. In conclusion, by regarding the practicality and speed of having digital dictionary, ereaders have bigger chance to improve their comprehension.

## Digital texts as a Solution of Pandemic TEFL

Digital texts are viewed as better solution for the implementation of teaching reading during the pandemic Covid-19 in which it is getting harder for the students to come up with the school requirements. The internet data and the devices to get the class access are costly for students in Indonesian context and having free accessed of digital reading texts can reduce tuition fee. It is proven by the students that the data show one reason for having digital texts is due to its cost-effectiveness. They do not need to buy printed books that are more expensive. This is practical answer for the economic crisis during the pandemic faced by many Indonesian learners.

The use of online texts seems to be the best solution in the time of pandemic crisis. Teachers provide texts to the students in online class by having both formal elearning and also social media as a means of communication. It is very possible for teachers and students to do things and prepare tomorrow. The use of online texts also focuses the learners to keep on in the correct lane during the crisis (Dutta, 2020). While staying at home, the students access millions of texts that share information to support their understanding to the topic discussed in their class.

To have the benefits of having digital texts, readers should be supported by sufficient technologies such as good internet connection and mobile phones or laptops. For the students who are in low-level of economics status tend to have big problems with the online class because of their limitation on the devices. Moreover, the unequal development of the digital infrastructure also contributes meaningful problems of employment of the digital texts as the e-readers need to access the e-texts from good internet connection. As a consequence of closed schools, the digital texts used in digital class emerged in rural schools in economically disadvantage contexts (Starkey et al., 2021).

Moreover, digital texts connect readers to linked sources of texts that facilitate the readers to have more texts. Readers are able to engage in digital texts through multiple interactions both digital and analogue (Jandric, 2020). More texts accessed by readers will not only help them improve their reading comprehension but also their ability to construct ideas and find solution on their learning problems. Readers will of course be able to stay at home and access more texts to support their learning and have limited physical contact to others during their self-isolation.

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## Digital Reading to Develop Students' Reading Motivation

In addition, the students' reading motivation is improved because of their reading comprehension from their positive view of the digital reading. The students state that they can improve their reading comprehension when they have high motivation to read and easily find the unknown words by surfing on the internet. It is helpful for the students to experience the digital reading with the supports of various applications for improving reading comprehension. The use of Google translation and U-dictionary enable the students to solve their problems in vocabulary. The more words the students understand, the more comprehension they will have.

The use of e-texts presented in web pages can positively impact the students' learning retention. The use of multimodality in the texts can stimulate the student to spend more time in their reading. This will increase their reading motivation that they cannot have during their printed reading. The multimodality of the webpage shares variations in the texts visualization to improve the readability of the texts. Students have strong confidence in using computers and internet to communicate (Hsu & Wang, 2010) that will influence their learning motivation. The computer skill also enables the students to have more multimodal texts to improve their reading comprehension.

The core understanding of digital texts refers to the ability of the readers to explore texts and construct their own story which suits to the readers' motivation. It is clear that digital texts are different from printed texts in which they are structured that enable readers navigate from the original texts to an infinite documents (Barzillai et al., 2018). Readers can be engaged to the literary and expository texts structured as hypertext novels by selecting from alternative story lines. With varied possibilities of accessing hypertexts as reading choices, readers can have extensive digital reading as they are connected and highly motivated in the reading.

Regarding the development of information and communication technology, readers spend more time in their digital activities. Readers access digital activities by having social media communication both in spoken and written texts. adolescents engage in digital texts longer than traditional texts (McGeown et al., 2015). In daily activity, they have both the short digital texts that require intensive reading and longer digital texts that requires extensive reading. The more time they spend in digital reading, the more experience of intensive and extensive reading they have.

It is confirmed that the e-readers motivation in digital reading closely associate with their reading skills and reading engagement. The reading skill has interconnected with the expectancy in reading while the engagement in reading activities deals with the value of the reading (McGeown et al., 2015). The students' engagement in reading extend in reading activities such as books that requires the readers' extensive reading skill and the shorter activities conducted both in traditional and digital texts. The reading skills mastery and reading engagement will justify the students' reading motivation. To deal with that, the activities employed during the teaching are aimed at developing the reading skills and reading engagement. The activities should consider the aspects of students' interest, perceived control, collaboration, involvement and efficacy and al are combined with appropriate text genres and both specific and general context sof the texts (Mohammad Reza Ahmadi, 2013). The use of more professional context texts that are beneficial for the readers' career/ working context increases the students' reading engagement for university students level (Guthrie et al., 2018).

#### The Purposes of Digital Reading

The consideration of the students' reading comprehension mastery cannot be separated from the students' reading purposes. Commonly, the purposes of reading are to get information and to get pleasure experience. The university students as digital readers agree that their main purpose of conducting digital reading is to get information across the websites to support their academic purposes. Reading in EFL context is actually for all meaning gathering activities (Cahyono & Widiati, 2006). This supports the main purpose of reading that is to get information by constructing meaning from the texts.

Digital readers may have different purposes of reading. They tend to have around three main purposes of reading which are seeking specific information, acquiring general knowledge, and being entertained (Zhang & Duke, 2008). Digital readers browse on the internet to read a certain recipe which belongs to reading for seeking specific information. Reading for general knowledge is closely related to their purpose of getting information to support their academic purposes for their professional life. Finally, the digital reader purpose in reading is to be entertained such as reading digital comics and novels in blogs or other free websites accessed.

Moreover, the students do recognize their purpose of digital reading. They have digital reading to have speedy access of accurate information across countries in everyday life. They can access different reading materials such as journal articles, final project reports, and e-books. They experience digital reading better than the printed reading since they can directly browse the missing information to support their comprehension which cannot be done in printed reading. In addition, the use of digital reading supports the students to have clearer reading materials due to the use of multimodality of the texts. Therefore, the students prefer to have digital reading to have better reading comprehension especially to get information.

It seems that the use of digital reading is regarded to several positive impacts of the media used. The use of Wattpad can improve the students' reading skill with its practicality and simplicity. The multimodality offers by digital media increase the complete ideas shared by the writing as the texts are presented clearly and easy to understand. Digital reading is viewed as practical activity for students for its orientation, physicality, visual features, interaction, navigation, and modification. Finally, e-texts are also more comprehensive and detailed with borderless access. It means that e-texts can connect to other e-texts that have close relation for e-readers to navigate. E-readers are free to access similar e-texts that have linear ideas and deal with the problems of unkown words. This will directly influence the e-readers reading comprehension.

#### **Digital Reading Activities**

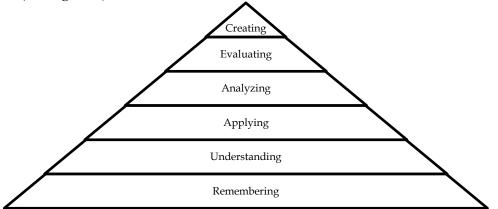
To support the students' digital reading, there are several activities that can be done by the readers with the help of the teachers as gathered from the data. First, students may have not only reading comprehension but also analytical reading through applying critical reading skills during their digital reading. It can be done by providing questions that address the higher order thinking skills. Second, the students expect to have more discussion during their reading. It is believed that the discussion can lead them to better comprehension by having shared ideas from their classmates. Third, the teachers can also support the students by having more creative works after their reading such as making a poster from the texts that have read and displayed it in a public space. Fourth, it is also suggested that the teachers may conduct more fun learning process by providing games during the online learning. By having both synchronous and asynchronous games, the students have more possibilities to improve their reading comprehension. Lastly, the employment of next level of reading, writing is expected to be done in reading class. Students wish that they can have writing

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activities to train their academic writing skills and digital reading skills. From this, the students are conscious that the need of reading is to support writing skills, and this will influence the success of their studying period. Those varied learning activities contribute to the success of digital reading mastery.

Digital reading activities are expected to be more students' friendly that can motivate them to study. As mentioned earlier, the students' current interest on digital reading is professional related texts that may provide contextual field context. The students can double their benefits in learning the target language. First, they get the knowledge about the language including the vocabulary mastery and sentence construction. Second, they get the knowledge about the world that support their sufficient professional skills.

Moreover, the employment of higher order thinking skills in the digital reading activities can support the students to get better learning and achievement. The higher order thinking skills include a few domains as proposed by Bloom and Anderson. Each domain has different learning achievement and activities as the baseline for the upper domain (see Figure 4).





The first domain of the HOTs is remembering that can be done by using memory to produce definitions, facts, or lists of materials. In understanding, the students construct meaning from different types of functions that can be written or graphic messages. Then, applying domain stimulate students to apply related information and skills and refer to situation where learned material used through products like models, presentation, interviews, or simulations. In analyzing, the students break the learning materials or concepts into parts, determine how the parts related or interrelate to one another or to an overall structure or purpose. Next, evaluating deals with the process of giving critiques, recommendations, and reports of the information they have got. Finally, creating provides opportunities for the students to create a new way or synthesis parts into something new or different to form a coherent or functional whole. Those domains should be conducted hierarchically.

#### D. Conclusion

The process of teaching digital reading is not simple as the process of teaching reading. There are several considerations that both the teachers and students need to recognize before, while, and after the teaching and learning process. The mastery of language skills, digital skills, navigation skills, reading skills, and digital reading skills influence the activities and learning media used during the teaching of digital reading. From all the aspects mentioned, it is notable that the students' learning motivation play crucial aspect to success the teaching of digital reading. Both the intrinsic and extrinsic

motivation should be developed through the possibility of the multimodality of the learning media used in digital reading. The more professional-related texts are better used to engage the students to have extensive and intensive reading activities through bottom-up and top-down reading processes.

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## F. Author Contributions Statement

The authors consists of two researchers who had their own roles. Umi Rachmawati was the initiator of the study and propose the research together with the partner. Santi Andreyani worked collaboratively to develop the research instruments and data gathering. Rimajon participated as collaborator in conducting the research. All authors worked together in gathering data, analysing data, dan reporting the research.

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