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EFL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF TIKTOK FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING IN INDONESIA: A MIXED-METHODS STUDY OF GENDER AND YEAR OF STUDY DIFFERENCES

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ABSTRACT

TikTok has increasingly used as an informal learning resource by EFL students. This study investigated EFL students' perceptions of TikTok for English language learning and examined whether those perceptions differed by gender and years of study. A sequential explanatory mixed-methods design was employed. Quantitative data were collected from 71 undergraduate students using a questionnaire adapted from the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which measured perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, attitude toward use, behavioral intention, and actual system use. Qualitative data were then obtained from four selected participants through semi-structured interviews. The findings showed generally positive perceptions of TikTok, especially in terms of accessibility, ease of use, and usefulness. No statistically significant differences were found by gender ($U = 472.000$, $p = .177$, $r = .16$) or years of study ($H(2) = 2.135$, $p = .344$, $\varepsilon^2 = .002$). Interview findings showed that students valued TikTok for its concise content and support for vocabulary, pronunciation, and speaking, although distraction remained a challenge. These findings suggest that TikTok can serve as a useful supplementary learning tool when used in guided and self-regulated ways. However, the findings are limited to a single institutional context and largely based on self-reported data.

Keywords: *TikTok; English as a Foreign Language (EFL); Language learning; Student perceptions*

INTRODUCTION

In the digital era, social media platforms have increasingly reshaped the landscape of language learning. Among these platforms, TikTok has emerged as one of the most widely used applications, especially among young people, because of its short-form videos, algorithm-driven content delivery, and interactive features (Jung et al., 2025). Its popularity has created new opportunities for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners to access authentic language input beyond traditional classroom settings. This development reflects a broader shift in students' learning preferences, in which entertainment-oriented digital media are increasingly blended with informal educational practices. According to the Digital 2024 Global Overview Report, TikTok had more than 1.5 billion active users globally, with a large proportion aged 16-24, an age group that overlaps with many EFL learners in secondary and tertiary education (We Are Social & Meltwater, 2024). In Indonesia, digital adoption is similarly extensive. *Digital 2024: Indonesia* reported 185.3 million internet users and 139.0 million active social media user identities, while TikTok's advertising reach among users aged 18 and above was estimated at 126.8 million in early 2024 (DataReportal, 2024). These figures indicate that TikTok has become a mainstream platform in Indonesia, including among students who use it not only for entertainment but also for vocabulary learning, pronunciation modeling, and exposure to authentic communicative contexts (Baureh & Neman, 2025).

Recent studies on TikTok in English language learning can be synthesized into three broad themes. First, TikTok appears to support learner engagement and motivation. Previous studies have shown that students often perceive TikTok as enjoyable, accessible, and helpful for sustaining interest in English learning (Efivania et al., 2025; Widiya & Salmiah, 2024). University students have also reported that TikTok makes learning more flexible and less monotonous, thereby encouraging greater participation in informal language learning activities (Himmawan

et al., 2024). Second, TikTok offers several pedagogical affordances for language development. Research has reported its potential to support pronunciation practice, speaking fluency, vocabulary growth, and access to authentic language input, suggesting that the platform can function as a useful supplementary tool for self-directed learning (Aziz & Sabella, 2021; Rahman et al., 2024). However, these affordances are accompanied by notable challenges. Because TikTok is primarily designed for entertainment, students may be distracted by non-educational content, and the quality of user-generated content may vary in terms of accuracy and reliability (Omar & Dequan, 2020; Sulaiman & Khalil, 2025).

A third theme in the literature concerns the role of learner-related factors in shaping technology use and perception. Prior studies suggest that students do not engage with digital platforms in the same way. Gender, for example, has been associated with different patterns of social media use, with some studies indicating that female students are more likely to use social media for academic purposes, whereas male students may use it more for entertainment (Alnjadat et al., 2019; Hashemi et al., 2022). Years of study may also matter, as academic maturity can influence how learners evaluate the usefulness, practicality, and limitations of digital tools. Less experienced students may be more exploratory in adopting new platforms, whereas more advanced students may assess them more critically in relation to academic demands and learning efficiency (Cruz & Cisterna, 2024; Maulia & Bahri, 2025). Although these variables have been discussed in studies of educational technology more broadly, limited attention has been given to whether gender and years of study shape EFL students' perceptions of TikTok in the Indonesian context.

To provide a clearer analytical lens, this study is primarily informed by the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which explains users' acceptance of technology through core constructs such as perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, attitude toward use, behavioral intention, and actual system use (Davis, 1989). These constructs are relevant to the present study because they help explain how students evaluate TikTok as a supplementary tool for English language learning. In addition, the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) offers a complementary perspective by recognizing that user-related characteristics may influence technology acceptance in different contexts (Venkatesh et al., 2003). In this study, gender and years of study were therefore included as comparison variables to examine whether students' perceptions of TikTok differ across demographic and academic groups.

Although previous studies have generally reported positive perceptions of TikTok in language learning, fewer studies have examined these perceptions through a mixed-methods design that combines structured measurement of technology-acceptance constructs with qualitative explanations of why students perceive the platform in particular ways. This gap is especially relevant in the Indonesian EFL context, where TikTok is widely used but often serves as an informal, unstructured learning resource rather than an intentionally integrated instructional medium. Therefore, this study employed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design. The quantitative phase was used to identify overall perception patterns and potential differences by gender and years of study, while the qualitative phase was used to explain and enrich the quantitative findings through students' lived experiences. Accordingly, this study addressed the following research questions: 1. How do EFL students perceive the use of TikTok for English language learning? 2. Are there significant differences in EFL students' perceptions of TikTok for English language learning based on gender? 3. Are there significant differences in EFL students' perceptions of TikTok for English language learning based on years of study?

METHOD

This study employed a mixed-methods research design with a sequential explanatory approach. This design enabled a comprehensive exploration of students' perceptions of using TikTok for English learning by combining quantitative and qualitative data. The research process began with quantitative data collection through a questionnaire and continued with qualitative data collection through semi-structured interviews. The rationale for this sequence was to identify general patterns in students' perceptions first and then provide deeper insights to explain and contextualize the quantitative findings. This design was selected to strengthen interpretation by integrating broad numerical trends with detailed participant accounts, in line with Creswell (2014).

The participants were 71 undergraduate students enrolled in the English Department at a state Islamic institute in Jambi Province, Indonesia. They were selected through purposive sampling, with the inclusion criteria that participants were active students, active TikTok users, and had prior experience using TikTok to

support their English learning. This strategy ensured participants could provide relevant insights from actual use. The sample included students from different genders and years of study (26 male and 45 female students; 39 first-year, 14 second-year, and 18 third-year students). As the study was conducted in a single institution, the findings should be interpreted as context-specific rather than broadly generalizable. However, the selected setting remains relevant because the participants are active EFL learners in an Indonesian higher-education context where TikTok is commonly used in everyday digital practice. Therefore, the study does not aim for statistical generalization, but rather offers context-bound insights that may be analytically transferable to similar EFL settings.

Two primary instruments were used. In the quantitative phase, a questionnaire was adapted from the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) proposed by Davis (1989) and contextualized for TikTok-based English language learning. The questionnaire measured five constructs: perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, attitude toward use, behavioral intention, and actual system use. Several items were retained from previous TAM-based studies, while others were linguistically modified to fit the context of TikTok as a supplementary English-learning platform. Before distribution, the adapted items were reviewed for clarity, wording, and contextual relevance. Although no separate pilot study was conducted, this review process was intended to improve face and content validity. The full questionnaire items are presented in Appendix A. Before the main analysis, item validity was assessed using Corrected Item–Total Correlation, and all items exceeded the minimum threshold (r-table = 0.233). Reliability testing showed excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.948).

In the qualitative phase, semi-structured interviews were used to explore students' experiences in greater depth and to help explain the quantitative findings. The interview questions focused on how students perceived TikTok in terms of ease of use, usefulness, motivation, actual learning practices, and potential challenges. The semi-structured format allowed the researcher to maintain consistency across participants while still permitting follow-up questions when needed. The interview guide is presented in Appendix B.

Data collection occurred in two stages. In the first stage, quantitative data were gathered through an online questionnaire administered via Google Forms. Prior to distribution, formal permission was obtained from the Head of the English Department and relevant lecturers. The questionnaire link was then shared via WhatsApp groups among class coordinators and student representatives. Participants were informed about the study's purpose, confidentiality, and their rights, including the right to participate voluntarily. A digitally informed consent form was placed at the beginning of the questionnaire, and only those who agreed could proceed. The survey remained open for two weeks, with periodic reminders sent to encourage participation.

In the second stage, four participants were selected for semi-structured interviews after the quantitative analysis. To capture diverse perspectives, participants were chosen based on their questionnaire results by identifying the two highest and two lowest average scores, representing more favorable and more critical perceptions of TikTok as a learning tool. Selection also considered differences in gender and years of study. Interviews were conducted via WhatsApp chat during the university holiday break, when participants were more available through text-based communication. All participants gave informed consent, and the WhatsApp chat responses were compiled and prepared for analysis. This stage was intended to deepen the interpretation of the survey findings and support triangulation across the two data sources.

This study followed the ethical procedures for educational research at the researchers' institution. Prior to data collection, permission was obtained from the Head of the English Department and the relevant lecturers. All participants were informed of the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, their right to withdraw at any time without penalty, and the confidentiality of their responses. Digital informed consent was obtained before participants accessed the questionnaire, and additional consent was obtained from interview participants prior to the WhatsApp-based interviews. All identifying information was removed from the dataset, and the data were stored securely and used solely for academic research purposes.

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 25. Descriptive statistics were used to examine overall trends in students' perceptions, including mean scores and standard deviations for each questionnaire item. To facilitate interpretation, a class-interval approach for a five-point Likert scale was applied following Sugiyono (2017): very low (1.00–1.80), low (1.81–2.60), moderate (2.61–3.40), high (3.41–4.20), and very

high (4.21–5.00). Normality was assessed using the Shapiro–Wilk test, which indicated a non-normal distribution ($p < .001$). Therefore, non-parametric tests were used: the Mann–Whitney U test examined gender-based differences, while the Kruskal–Wallis test examined differences across years of study. The significance level for inferential analysis was set at $p < .05$, and effect sizes were also reported to indicate the magnitude of both significant and non-significant findings. Because the study involved a limited number of pre-specified comparisons, no formal correction for multiple testing was applied.

Qualitative interview data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive model, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. First, the WhatsApp interview responses were compiled and read repeatedly to achieve familiarity with the data. Second, meaningful statements about students' experiences with TikTok for English learning were inductively coded. Third, similar codes were grouped into broader categories and then organized into themes. Fourth, the resulting themes were compared with the quantitative findings and interpreted in relation to the TAM constructs to support integrated analysis. To strengthen trustworthiness, the coding framework was reviewed repeatedly, and the themes were checked against the original interview excerpts to ensure consistency of interpretation. Integration was conducted through a narrative joint display by aligning each TAM-related quantitative result with corresponding qualitative themes and representative participant excerpts. A summary of the coding framework is presented in Appendix C.

FINDINGS

Students' Perceptions of TikTok for English Language Learning

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of students' responses to the questionnaire items. The results show that most items were categorized as high, particularly those related to ease of use, accessibility of English learning content, enjoyment, and vocabulary development. The highest mean score was observed for the item on vocabulary improvement (Mean = 4.13), followed by items on listening and speaking practice and ease of accessing learning materials. Several items related to intensive engagement and writing skills obtained relatively lower mean scores and were categorized as moderate, indicating that TikTok is perceived more as a supplementary learning tool rather than a comprehensive medium for all language skills.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Questionnaire Items on TikTok Use for English Language Learning

Category	No	Statement	Mean	SD
Perceived Ease of Use (PEU)	1	I can easily use TikTok to learn English.	3.96	.901
	2	I do not experience difficulties in finding or using TikTok content for English learning.	3.83	.985
	3	It is easy for me to find English learning content on TikTok.	4.08	.906
Perceived Usefulness (PU)	4	TikTok allows me to explore English learning resources.	4.03	.910
	5	TikTok encourages creativity and productivity in learning English.	3.65	.795
	6	TikTok helps me find solutions to English learning problems more quickly.	3.61	.948
	7	When I do not fully understand English materials, I seek help from TikTok content.	3.21	1.041
	8	TikTok provides useful content that supports my vocabulary and pronunciation learning.	3.87	.940
Attitude Toward Use (ATU)	9	I find TikTok beneficial for practicing listening and speaking in English.	4.10	.864
	10	I enjoy learning English using TikTok.	3.79	.893
	11	Thanks to TikTok, I feel more motivated to study English further.	3.54	.998
	12	I believe that using TikTok is a good idea for learning English outside the classroom.	3.65	.880
Behavioral Intention (BI)	13	I think using TikTok makes English learning more interesting and fun.	3.85	.889
	14	I want to use TikTok more often in my English learning activities.	3.49	.924
	15	I want to learn more about TikTok to improve my English skills.	3.38	.900
	16	I recommend using TikTok to other students for learning English.	3.48	1.026
Actual System Use (ASU)	17	I spend time daily watching English learning content on TikTok.	3.37	.975
	18	I actively engage (like, comment, or share) with TikTok videos related to English.	3.23	1.085
	19	I use TikTok to improve my writing skills in English.	3.27	1.068
	20	I use TikTok to practice my reading comprehension in English.	3.68	1.011
	21	I use TikTok to enhance my speaking ability in English.	3.76	.948
	22	I use TikTok to develop my listening skills in English.	3.82	.931
	23	I use TikTok to strengthen my understanding of English grammar.	3.63	.882
	24	I use TikTok to expand my English vocabulary.	4.13	.970

Table 2 presents the mean score for each category and shows how students perceive the use of TikTok for English learning. The overall mean across categories (M = 3.68) indicates that students

rated TikTok positively, with Perceived Ease of Use (PEU), Perceived Usefulness (PU), and Attitude Toward Use (ATU), ranging from 3.45 to 3.96. This suggests that students find TikTok easy to use, useful for learning English, and have a positive attitude toward its integration into their educational practices. The Behavioral Intention (BI) category scored slightly lower (mean = 3.45), indicating that while students are motivated to use TikTok, their intention to use it regularly is more moderate.

Table 2. Mean Score by Category

Category	Mean	Interpretation
PEU	3.96	High
PU	3.74	High
ATU	3.70	High
BI	3.45	High
ASU	3.61	High
Mean Total	3.68	High

The qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews provided additional insights into students' experiences with TikTok as a learning tool. Regarding Perceived Ease of Use, students described TikTok as accessible, practical, and easy to use, especially because of its short-form videos and personalized content on the For You Page (FYP). This supports the high mean score for perceived ease of use. As one participant stated, *"The FYP always gives me relevant content that helps me improve my English"* (Kenzo).

In terms of Perceived Usefulness, students reported that TikTok helped them improve vocabulary, pronunciation, speaking, listening, grammar, pronouns, and daily expressions. This finding is consistent with the high quantitative scores for vocabulary development, speaking and listening practice, and access to English learning resources. For example, Eric explained, *"I use TikTok to find content related to public speaking, grammar, and pronouns because it's more concise and easy to understand."*

Regarding Attitude Toward Use, students generally expressed positive feelings toward learning English through TikTok. They described it as enjoyable, flexible, and less stressful than more conventional learning methods. Julia noted, *"Using TikTok helped me speak more freely in English because I was exposed to various English-language content."* This suggests that repeated exposure to authentic language input contributed to greater confidence and a more positive attitude toward learning.

For Behavioral Intention and Actual System Use, students indicated that they were willing to continue using TikTok for English learning, but mostly as a supplementary tool rather than a replacement for formal instruction. They tended to use the platform in short and flexible learning sessions alongside other resources. At the same time, the interviews also revealed some challenges, particularly distraction from non-educational content and occasional concerns about content accuracy. However, these limitations were not always seen as major barriers. As Valerie stated, *"There are no major drawbacks for me; TikTok helps me a lot with learning."* Overall, the qualitative findings support the quantitative results by showing that TikTok was perceived as easy to use, useful, enjoyable, and valuable as a supplementary learning resource.

Differences in Students' Perceptions Based on Gender

To assess whether gender influenced students' perceptions of TikTok, a Mann–Whitney U test was performed. The analysis revealed no statistically significant gender difference in the overall perceptions of TikTok for learning English, U = 472.000, Z = -1.350, p = .177 (see Table 3). The corresponding effect size was r = .16, indicating a small effect. This suggests that male and female students had broadly similar perceptions of TikTok for English language learning.

Table 3. TikTok Use in Learning English Based on Gender

Group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	Z	p-value
Male	26	31.65	823.00	472.000	-1.350	0.177
Female	45	38.51	1733.00			

Note. U, Z, and p-value refer to the overall test statistic; blank cells do not indicate missing data.

Differences in Students' Perceptions Based on Years of Study

A Kruskal–Wallis test was conducted to investigate whether students' perceptions of TikTok differed by years of study. The test did not reveal a statistically significant difference among the groups, H(2) = 2.135, p = .344 (see Table 4). The corresponding effect size was ε^2 = .002, indicating a negligible effect. This suggests that students' perceptions of TikTok for learning English were relatively consistent across different years of study.

Table 4. TikTok Use in Learning English Based on Years of Study

Years of Study	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	H	p-value
1st	39	39.18	1529.00	2.135	0.344
2nd	14	33.29	466.00		
3rd	18	31.22	562.00		

Note. H and p-value refer to the overall test statistic; blank cells do not indicate missing data.

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings indicates that TikTok was perceived positively as a supplementary tool for English language learning in this EFL context. The survey results showed high ratings across all TAM-related categories, especially perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness, while the interviews clarified that these ratings were grounded in students' experiences of accessible content, repeated exposure to authentic English input, and flexible support for vocabulary, pronunciation, and speaking. At the same time, the qualitative data also explained why some learning behaviors received comparatively lower ratings, particularly because students tended to use TikTok in short sessions and remained aware of distraction from non-educational content. Finally, the non-significant differences by gender and years of study suggest that these positive perceptions were shared relatively consistently across groups in this sample.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide important insights into EFL students' perceptions of TikTok as a tool for English language learning. In line with the preceding findings, this discussion first examines students' overall perceptions of TikTok and then considers whether these perceptions differ by gender and year of study. Using a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, the study found that students generally perceived TikTok positively as a supplementary learning tool. In particular, TikTok was viewed as an engaging and accessible medium that supported language development, especially in vocabulary, pronunciation, and speaking. This is consistent with previous studies that have highlighted TikTok's potential for microlearning, learner engagement, and informal language development in EFL contexts (Abdullah et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2025).

From a theoretical perspective, the results support the relevance of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) in explaining students' responses to TikTok for English learning. The high score for Perceived Ease of Use (PEU = 3.96) suggests that students found TikTok easy to access, simple to navigate, and manageable for learning. According to TAM, technologies perceived as easy to use are more likely to elicit favourable attitudes and continued use (Davis, 1989). This pattern was also evident in the present study, where students reported positive attitudes toward using TikTok for English learning. Likewise, the high score for Perceived Usefulness (PU = 3.74) indicates that students did not regard TikTok merely as a platform for entertainment, but also as a practical resource that could support their language development. The qualitative findings reinforced this interpretation by showing that students used TikTok to improve vocabulary, pronunciation, speaking confidence, grammar, pronoun use, and everyday expressions through concise, easily accessible content. These findings align with previous research suggesting that TikTok-based learning can support oral-skill development and vocabulary growth when learners engage with the platform purposefully (Gao et al., 2023; Usman et al., 2024).

At the same time, the findings also show that positive evaluations of a platform do not automatically translate into frequent or sustained use. Although students rated TikTok highly in terms of accessibility and usefulness, Behavioral Intention and some aspects of Actual System Use were comparatively lower. This mixed-method pattern is theoretically meaningful. It suggests that students accepted TikTok as useful and enjoyable, but mainly as a supplementary tool rather than a full replacement for structured learning. In other words, students appeared to value TikTok for flexible, short, and targeted learning episodes, particularly for oral practice and vocabulary exposure, rather than as a comprehensive platform for all English skills. This finding extends TAM-based interpretation by showing that acceptance may be high even when actual learning use remains selective and bounded by learners' study habits, perceived limitations, and self-regulation.

A notable finding of this study is the absence of statistically significant differences in students' perceptions based on gender and years of study. The Mann–Whitney U test showed no significant gender difference, with only a small effect size ($r = .16$), while the Kruskal–Wallis test also showed no significant difference across years of study, with a negligible effect size ($\varepsilon^2 = .002$). These results suggest that TikTok's perceived accessibility and usefulness were shared relatively consistently across groups in this sample. This finding can be interpreted in relation to UTAUT, which recognizes gender and experience as possible moderators of technology acceptance but does not assume that such differences will appear in all contexts (Venkatesh et al., 2003). In the present study, TikTok may already be so familiar and embedded in students' everyday digital lives that acceptance patterns become relatively stable across demographic and academic groups. Thus, the findings add nuance to UTAUT-related expectations by suggesting that when a platform is already widely normalized, differences by gender or academic maturity may become less pronounced.

Despite the generally positive results, the qualitative findings also revealed important tensions that should be considered critically. Students acknowledged that TikTok could expose them to distraction from non-educational content and, in some cases, to content of uncertain accuracy. This indicates that positive attitudes and perceived usefulness do not eliminate the risks associated with algorithm-driven and entertainment-oriented platforms. The finding is consistent with previous research showing that short-form video platforms can support learning while also encouraging fragmented attention, excessive scrolling, and superficial engagement when learners do not carefully regulate their use (Hidayah, 2024; Li et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2023). Therefore, TikTok's educational value should not be understood as inherent in the platform itself, but as dependent on how learners select content, manage time, and integrate the platform into more purposeful study routines.

These findings have several practical implications. For curriculum designers, TikTok may be incorporated as a supplementary digital resource in blended or out-of-class learning, especially for vocabulary enrichment, pronunciation modelling, speaking prompts, and exposure to authentic expressions. For teacher professional development, teachers may need support in selecting reliable content, designing guided TikTok-based tasks, and helping students critically evaluate language input from social media. For students, the results highlight the importance of self-regulation strategies, such as setting time limits, intentionally following educational creators, saving or noting useful content, and combining TikTok with more structured learning materials. In this way, TikTok's strengths in accessibility and engagement can be used more productively while reducing the risk of distraction and passive consumption.

The findings should also be interpreted in light of several limitations. First, the study was conducted in a single institutional context, which limits broad generalizability and means that the results are better understood as context-specific. Second, the study relied heavily on self-reported perceptions, which may not always align with actual learning outcomes or long-term patterns of use. Third, the qualitative phase involved only four interview participants, and the interviews were conducted through WhatsApp chat, a practical mode of data collection but one that may have limited spontaneity, depth, and opportunities for follow-up probing. These limitations do not diminish the value of the findings, but they do temper claims about transferability and suggest caution when extending the conclusions to other contexts. Future research could involve multiple institutions, more diverse samples, longitudinal designs, and additional data sources such as classroom observation or performance-based measures.

CONCLUSION

This study contributes to the growing literature on social media-assisted language learning by showing, through a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, that EFL students in this Indonesian context generally perceived TikTok positively as a supplementary tool for English language learning. The findings highlight TikTok's value in for accessibility, perceived usefulness, and support for vocabulary, pronunciation, and speaking, and show that these positive perceptions were relatively consistent across gender and years of study. By integrating survey and interview data, the study adds a more nuanced understanding of how students experience TikTok not as a replacement for formal instruction, but as a flexible and engaging complement to it. At the same time, the study underscores the need for guided and self-regulated use, given the continuing challenges of distraction and uneven content quality.

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