

Perceptions of secondary school history teachers towards the revised history curriculum: A case study of two schools in the Oshikoto region, Onankali circuit

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Abstract

This qualitative case study, grounded in an interpretive research paradigm, delved into the perceptions of secondary school history teachers in the Onankali circuit, Oshikoto region, Namibia, regarding the revised history curriculum of 2015. The study attempted to fill a significant research gap by shedding light on the underexplored views of teachers within the Namibian context. It investigated the relationship between history curriculum reform and the attitudes of teachers. Data collection employed semi-structured interviews and a focused group discussion with a purposive sample of six teachers and two heads of department. Findings unveiled a negative disposition among secondary school history teachers toward the revised curriculum, reflecting myriads of challenges associated with implementation. Some teachers were optimistic about the curriculum's assessment, fostering critical thinking and discouraging rote memorization. The challenges identified encompassed resource scarcity, inadequate teaching and learning materials, evolving educational trends, performance-related pressures on teachers, and overpopulated classrooms. The study presented practical solutions to address these issues, including the establishment of additional schools to alleviate classroom overcrowding, the organization of subject-based symposiums to assist struggling teachers, and the development of regional guides to facilitate collaborative learning. The study advocates the engagement of professionals to inspire learners to voluntarily choose history as a subject of study in secondary schools, emphasizing the importance of genuine interest over compulsory enrolment, often driven by admission committees. This study contributes to the discourse on curriculum development, educational challenges, and teacher attitudes. The study also offers valuable insights for teachers, policymakers, and educational institutions in Namibia and beyond. The study recommends the provision of continuous professional development, while roping in all stakeholders such as Namibia National Teachers' Union and the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture in the allocation of adequate resources to support teachers during the implementation of the revised history curriculum, and further studies to be conducted on the phenomenon for a greater understanding.

Keywords: curriculum, perceptions implementation, curriculum change, history, teachers

Introduction

Reforming curriculum is critical for enhancing educational systems around the world, but its effectiveness frequently depends on the attitudes and perspectives of the teachers tasked with putting it into practice. Research conducted in the United States, Europe, and India has shown that a key factor in determining the success of curricular modifications is how teachers feel about the changes (Fullan, 2015). According to the studies, teachers in the United States, for instance, who feel underqualified or left out of the curriculum development process frequently oppose new educational reforms, which makes it more difficult for them to be successfully implemented (Fullan, 2015). Similarly, research from Europe shows that the success of curriculum revisions is greatly influenced by teachers' positive perceptions and engagement (Priestley & Biesta, 2013). It was

discovered that the availability of sufficient resources for implementation and the degree of teachers' involvement in the reform process in India affected teachers' views toward curriculum reforms (Nandini, 2018).

Revisions to the curriculum can have an impact on teacher attitudes toward their work, which in turn can have an impact on their motivation, pedagogical approaches, and, eventually, learners' outcomes. According to research, teachers who are not given enough assistance during curricular changes tend to be stressed, unhappy, and lose quality in their instruction, all of which have a detrimental effect on learners' learning (Schleicher, 2018). On the other hand, teachers who embrace curricular changes and believe that they have the tools and training needed to do so often use more creative teaching methods, which boosts

learners' achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Thus, this study was carried out to investigate history teachers' opinions towards the revised history curriculum in Namibia, which was a part of the larger curriculum reform that the Namibian Institute of Educational Development (NIED) introduced in 2016. Namibia has revised its curriculum multiple times since attaining independence in 1990. The most recent amendments were made in 2015 in order to bring the national education system into compliance with both local and international requirements. In particular, the history curriculum was changed to emphasize more inquiry-based learning, critical thinking, and understand the Namibian and African history. But how effectively teachers adjust to the new requirements will determine how successful these improvements are, so it's critical to comprehend their perspectives and experiences.

Statement of the problem

Curriculum revision in general and in history curriculum to be precise is a controversial process. In my experience of teaching the revised history school curriculum, there appears to be a lack of buy-in from the teachers teaching the subject. The lack of buy-in from teachers harms the operationalization of the curriculum. To this effect, it is important to establish perceptions of secondary school history teachers toward the revised history curriculum. This is mainly because teachers usually have a different perspective on curriculum revision, as far as its usefulness, purpose, and existence in education systems is concerned.

Research has demonstrated that curriculum revision is somewhat distractive and tends to drive teachers out of their comfort zones (Phillips, 2016). This initial debate and understanding failed to consider teachers' perspectives regarding history curriculum revision. If teachers' views are not explored this gap will remain and could widen. Unless the teachers' views are explored to understand the teachers' perspectives, the result, and the intended purpose will remain catastrophically defeated.

Research design

The researcher used a case study research approach which is an example of an exploratory qualitative research Creswell (2014). A case study of the perceptions of secondary school history teachers towards the revised history curriculum was conducted at two schools in Oshikoto region, Onankali circuit. Six history

teachers and two head of departments (four from school A and four from school B) were involved in this research. This was an in-depth, detailed investigative study of teachers' perceptions on the revised history curriculum. This qualitative research was largely an exploratory study because of the nature of the problem. The study sought to increase the understanding of fundamental reasons, opinions, motivations, and attitudes of teachers towards the revised history curriculum.

Research questions

This research was guided by the following three main questions.

1. What are the attitudes of history teachers towards the revised history curriculum?
2. What are the challenges and opportunities experienced in implementing the newly revised history curriculum?
3. How can these challenges be dealt with to improve the smooth operationalisation of the revised history curriculum?

Literature review

Curriculum changes, particularly in subjects like history, frequently elicit different reactions from teachers, contingent on the degree of teachers' involvement in the reform process and the availability of the teaching and learning resources.

Attitudes of teachers towards curriculum reform

Attitudes can be defined as a psychological deviation, a mental and emotional thing that inheres in or portrays an individual (Richard, 2016). According to Allport (1935), attitudes are individual's state of mind that aroused by amongst all one self's dissatisfaction, another person's place, thing, or an event, which in turn influences one's way of perceiving things and react upon them. One can then conclude that attitudes are a way of thinking that may be influenced by external forces such as a change in the curriculum, weather, or employment status. The change can lead to a different way of thinking or behaviour and feeling towards something. Thus, people have resistance to change in many innovations that arise in the workplace or education. And this is not synonymous to some teachers only but it can be applied across the spectrum. Various attitudes are manifested by teachers depending on underlying circumstances, such as changes in the working environment, weather, or working

conditions, and not forgetting the changes in a curriculum. This attributes to the fact that teachers are human just like any other beings and they are prone to errors and can easily be affected by any internal or external effect in their employment spheres. Gourneau (2005) mentioned five most frequently discussed attitudes and actions, which are teachers' genuine caring and kindness; the willingness to share the responsibility involved in a classroom; a sincere sensitivity to the learners' diversity; an enthusiasm aimed at affording meaningful learning experiences for all learners; and enthusiasm for thought-provoking the ingenuity and creativity among the learners. The most discussed is positive attitudes, yet that does not withstand that at some point teachers too can manifest negative attitudes.

It has been established that history teachers' opinions regarding curriculum adjustments are significantly impacted by their involvement in the process of developing the curriculum and their assessment of the improvements' advantages. According to a number of studies, teachers are more likely to see changes to the curriculum favourably if they believe they would increase learners' involvement and meet modern needs (Phillips, 2016; Haydn, 2014). Haydn (2014) stated that history teachers in the United Kingdom valued curriculum changes that promotes critical thinking which includes a wider range of historical viewpoints. However, teachers who feel left out of the growth process frequently show resistance to change. According to Phillips (2016), many history teachers believes that curriculum revisions were frequently implemented top-down, paying little regard to their professional judgment or the realities of the classroom. This lack of participation can breed doubt and resistance to adopting new materials or teaching strategies, particularly if the changes are thought to be overly drastic or unrelated to the day-to-day operations of schools.

They can help steer the new curriculum positively, yet they can also drive it astray in a damaging way. This research will thus help gauge if teachers' attitudes are positive or negative, and pave the way on how best to use them in the best interest of the revised curriculum. The ultimate aims of the curriculum are to bring about good and desired changes in society. However, not considering teachers' attitudes toward the change will not help us arrive at our desired destination of the curriculum.

Challenges and opportunities in implementing a revised curriculum

A number of challenges emerge frequently upon the implementation of the revised history curricula. These include insufficient resources, inadequate training, and assessment systems that are out of step with the updated materials. Lack of professional growth has been identified as a significant barrier in a number of studies (Nygren et al., 2016; Scott & Dixon, 2018), Moodley and Adam (2015) claim that limited in-service training, particularly in areas like inquiry-based learning and the integration of technology in the classroom, presented major implementation issues for South African history teachers while implementing the updated curriculum. The lack of revised materials that meet the requirements of the redesigned curriculum has emerged as another difficulty.

According to Nygren et al. (2016), funding for new resources is constrained, and historical textbooks and other teaching aids are frequently out-of-date in many developing nations. This creates a gap between the curriculum's aims and the actual resources accessible to teachers, resulting in frustration and reduced efficacy. However, there are a lot of chances for improving teaching and learning with curricular change. According to research by Scott and Dixon (2018), updated curriculum frequently include more learner-centered strategies that promote critical thinking and provide opportunities for interdisciplinary linkages. This can boost learner engagement with historical knowledge, particularly when the curriculum contains contemporary topics or local histories that learners can relate to. Reforming the curriculum also gives teachers the chance to advance their careers by promoting pedagogical creativity and adaptation.

Dealing with challenges affecting the implementation of curriculum change

The successful implementation of the revised history curricula depends on resolving issues raised by adequate institutional support and policies. Comprehensive and continuous teacher professional development is one of the main tactics that academics advise in order to enable teachers to adjust to new teaching materials, pedagogical approaches, and evaluation techniques. Mandukwini (2016) contend that effective implementation of the curriculum necessitates both initial training and on-going professional development. Teachers can exchange experiences and strategies for

addressing the issues presented by the changed curriculum in workshops and collaborative learning environments, which are beneficial to them. Providing sufficient resources remains another important element. This is in accordance with van Hover and Hicks (2015) who stated that provision of updated teaching resources, such as textbooks and digital resources, should go hand in hand with curriculum improvements in order to make sure that teachers are not left to themselves.

In terms of supplies, governments and educational authorities should set aside money for the creation and dissemination of updated teaching resources. Mandukwini (2016) further advises that availing of adequate and appropriate resources for effective teaching and learning to transpire was another possible practice to deal with. Reducing resistance to change has also been found to be possible when teachers are involved in the process of developing and reviewing curricula. When teachers feel a sense of ownership over the reforms, they are more likely to embrace the changes and implement them with enthusiasm. Oruc (2017) asserts that teacher participation in curriculum designing strengthens their commitment to the reform's success and cultivates a sense of professional autonomy. In relation to the new curriculum, it can be first piloted through pilot programs prior to its full deployment. As stated by Lee and Shemilt (2011), this strategy makes it possible to change the curriculum in response to feedback from teachers, which facilitates a more seamless and effective implementation of the new curriculum.

Additionally, effective communication between legislators, teachers, and educational institutions guarantees that all parties participating in the process are aware of the objectives and pedagogies of the new curriculum. The perspectives of secondary school history teachers about revised curriculum differ upon their participation in the creation process, the quality of their training, and the accessibility of teaching and learning materials. While difficulties such as inadequate professional development and lack of resources present substantial impediments, possibilities for boosting learner involvement and teacher professional growth exist. The seamless operationalization of altered history curricula can be enhanced by addressing these issues through on-going teacher training, sufficient resource provision, teacher involvement in

curriculum development, and pilot projects (Oruc, 2017). The implementation of educational reforms in history classrooms can result in improved teaching and learning results by guaranteeing that teachers have enough preparation and support.

Theoretical framework

Kurt Lewin's theory and curriculum change

This study focused on curriculum change, the words change and revision can be used interchangeably, although one might see them different. Revision mainly focused on amending; and removing some aspects of a major system like the curriculum. In the history curriculum of 2016, some topics were removed, others shifted to the next grade, and so on. Change can be characterized as removing, adding, subtracting, or entirely bringing up something new. However, they all seem to arrive at something similar, which is to remove, replace, modify, or alter something.

The alteration can be made entirely or partly. A curriculum can be modified by scraping it entirely or parts like the aims, objectives or content can be the change to serve the specific needs of the designers or the implementers. This study is grounded in Kurt Lewin's Change Management Model, which serves as the theoretical framework for analyzing organizational change, including in educational settings. Lewin's model, developed in the 1940s, introduces the concept of 'unfreezing-change-refreezing', a three-step process designed to facilitate and manage transitions (Hussain, 2018). Although the model was initially developed for business environments, it has since become a cornerstone of change management strategies and equally relevant in various sectors, including education sector where schools must adapt to curriculum changes, policy shifts, and evolving educational demands.

The unfreezing phase prepares individuals and systems for change by challenging existing mindsets; the change phase involves introducing new processes or practices; and the refreezing phase solidifies these changes, ensuring they become part of the organizational culture (Syed et al., 2016). The model's structured approach to managing change is especially applicable when guiding schools through the implementation of new curricula, as it helps ensure a smooth transition and sustainable adoption of new practices.

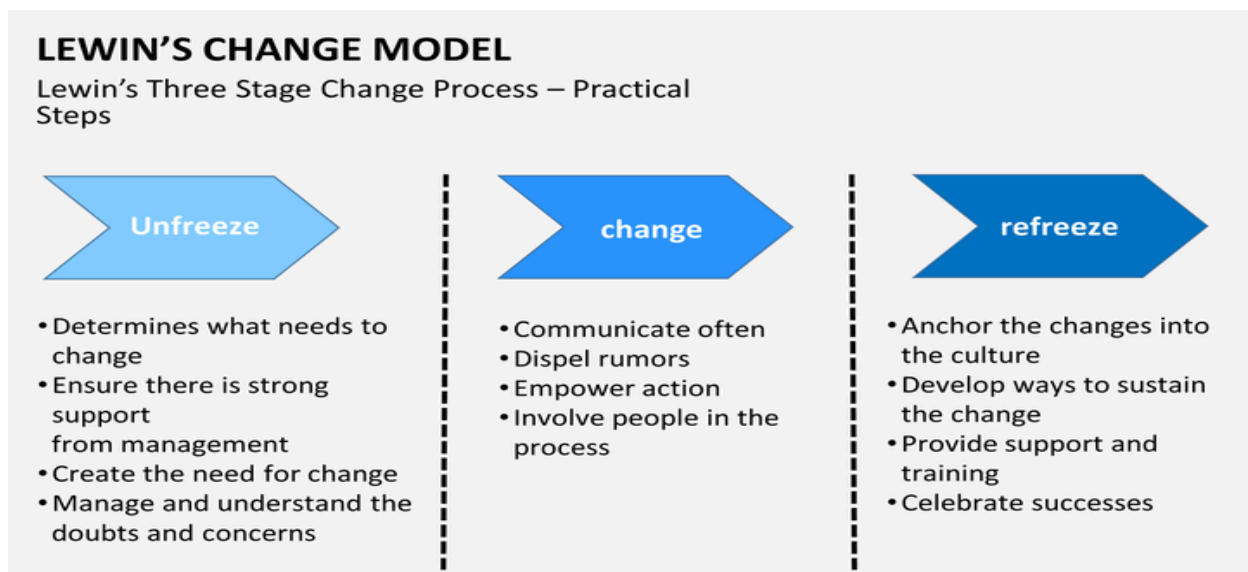


Figure 1: Lewin's Change Model (Syed et al., 2016)

The first stage of Kurt's theory deals with unfreezing. The unfreezing stage calls for a curriculum change to prepare people such as learners, the teachers, and all stakeholders to accept change. Stage two of Kurt's model is the change stage. This stage has to do with a change in affection itself. It is the implementation of the planned change in the curriculum. In Namibia, this would have been the stage from 2015 to 2021 which was the timeframe when the changes were implemented. The change might include a change in behaviour, way of doing things, feelings, and thoughts all that in some way or other is more productive and effective towards the desired outcome of the curriculum.

The change can only take the course if teachers have opened up to accept it after being unfrozen to such change. The third stage of Lewin's theory is refreezing. According to Hussain (2018), once the change has been implemented, for it to become fully successful, the new situation should be frozen so that one can ensure sustainability forever. This step is vital in ensuring that the new change is not short-lived, and teachers do not revert to the previous evenness. In terms of the curriculum, the teacher tends to be affixed to the old curriculum in many ways. In ways where there is a lack of textbooks, they may revert to using old textbooks which in some ways might not be aligned to the new curriculum. In this way they are winding back to their old ways of doing things, and this can easily distort change.

Findings

It is worth noting that the heads of departments' responses are presented as HoD A and HoD B;

whereas, for teachers, are presented as Teacher 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6.

Attitudes towards the revised curriculum

The study found that teachers' perceptions of the revised curriculum were largely negative which severely hindered its effective implementation. The HoD A asserted that: *"The lack of proper piloting and consultation with us as stakeholders makes it hard to embrace the changes"*. Teachers echoed the same feeling, with Teacher 2 remarks that: *"We're working twice as hard, but without proper guidance or adequate resources. It feels like we're set up to fail"*. In addition, Teacher 4 stated that: *"The curriculum was introduced too quickly, and we weren't given enough time or support to adapt"*.

Teachers found it difficult to fully engage with and apply the altered curriculum as a result of these sentiments of exclusion and inadequate preparation and resources which seemed to contribute to the general low teachers' morale.

Challenges and opportunities experienced in implementing the revised history curriculum

The results from the two schools pointed to a number of important issues that make it difficult to carry out the history curriculum as intended. In support, HoD B indicated that: *"We are facing a serious lack of teaching and learning materials, and without these, it's nearly impossible to teach effectively"*. In addition, HoD A emphasised the problem of crowded classrooms by saying that: *"Classrooms are overcrowded, and we cannot give individual attention to learners when we have 50 or more learners in one room"*. Teachers had expressed similar worries, with Teacher 3 said that: *"It's*

hard to reinforce what we teach when parents aren't involved enough in their children's education". Teachers further voiced their displeasures with the swiftly evolving trends in education, with Teacher 1 complained that: "We're expected to adapt without proper piloting and the curriculum changes too quickly. We seemed to be rushing into something without being completely ready".

Similarly, teachers brought attention to the amount of administrative work that consumes their teaching time. Teacher 6 put it that: "We're overburdened with so many responsibilities, from lesson planning to administration that it becomes difficult to focus on just teaching". There is a lot of pressure to perform well in history, but there aren't enough tools or supports to make it easy. Teacher 5 asserted that: "There's a big gap in how we assess lower grades compared to grades 10, 11, and 12, and it's affecting how learners transition between the levels".

The study also found that there are discrepancies in assessment between Grades 8 and 9 as compared to the senior secondary grades. Teachers are unable to properly and successfully apply the history curriculum because of these discrepancies.

How to overcome challenges on implementing the revised history curriculum?

To address the challenges that teachers encountered when putting the new curriculum into practice, six teachers from the two schools stressed the need for additional in-service training. To this, Teacher 3 indicated that: "To fully understand the curriculum and keep up with its demands, both novice and experienced teachers need on-going training. Without the training, we're left in the dark". Similarly, Teacher 1 alluded that: "We need symposiums where history teachers can come together to share ideas, strategies, and experiences. In this manner, our community of teachers can flourish and support one another".

According to the teachers, these kinds of professional development opportunities would help them become more skilled and knowledgeable. Beyond providing training, teachers emphasized the significance of creating and disseminating instructional resources. This is what Teacher 6 proposed: "Experienced teachers should take the lead in creating notes, videos, and assessment guides that can be shared with everyone, especially new teachers". In order to relieve the strain of overcrowding classrooms, teachers brought up

the matter and urged the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture to fund the construction of additional schools. To this, Teacher 1 said that: "If we're serious about improving education, we need more schools because effective teaching is impossible in overcrowded classrooms". Another significant consideration raised by teachers was the unavailability of sufficient teaching materials. Teacher 4 said that: "We're struggling with a lack of resources, and without proper materials. It's difficult to deliver the curriculum properly". To overcome the current obstacles, professional growth and resource support are crucial.

Kurt Lewin's theory on the revised curriculum

The study's conclusion is consistent with Lewin's Change Theory, which highlights three essential phases for successfully managing organizational change: unfreezing, altering, and refreezing. While the research proved that these steps are recognized within the educational setting, they are not always fully adhered to, resulting to partial or inconsistent implementation. Participants drew reference to process weaknesses, especially in the refreezing phase, which is critical for stabilizing changes after they are implemented.

Teacher 2 allude that: "We start the process of change with good intentions, but once the initial phase is over, there is rarely follow-up or support. We feel as though we are left on our own". The lack of on-going in-service training that guarantees the "refreezing" of novel techniques in the educational system is reflected. Furthermore, due to insufficient stakeholder consultation and involvement, unfreezing—which entails preparing stakeholders for change is not regularly executed. Teacher 6 said that: "We often hear about changes after they are made, without any input from us. The fact that we must put them into practice makes it frustrating".

This suggests that early on in the process, teachers and other important stakeholders were not properly engaged, which limited their sense of ownership and readiness for change. The changing stage, where new practices are introduced, also faces challenges. Although participants acknowledged that changes are necessary and often beneficial, they pointed out that insufficient funding compromise the quality of training and resources provided. The HoD B explained that: "We understand the need for change, but we are not given the tools or time to adapt. Budget cuts mean no proper training, and we are expected to figure it out on

our own". This lack of comprehensive in-service training resulted in missed opportunities for reinforcing the changes, leading to incomplete implementation. Despite these challenges, the study also identified potential for improvement. Participants expressed optimism that the process could be fully implemented with the right resources and commitment. The HoD A put it that: *"We've seen glimpses of how the process could work when everything is in place. We just need the support and the funding to make it happen"*.

These statements underscore the opportunity that exists to fully execute Lewin's change processes, provided that issues like funding and stakeholders' involvement are addressed. Although the system acknowledges the process of unfreezing, modifying, and refreezing, the process is not fully put into practice. Funding limitations are the main cause of these major obstacles, which also include insufficient stakeholder consultations and inconsistent trainings. Nevertheless, the analysis indicates that there is still potential for process improvement. To this, Teacher 4 said that: *"We know the way forward, we just need to learn how to follow it properly"*. The education sector may fully utilize Lewin's change process if resources are allocated appropriately and stakeholder engagements are prioritised.

Conclusion

This study revealed that the overall attitudes of history teachers towards the revised history curriculum were predominantly negative, stemming from multiple challenges related to its implementation. The teachers expressed frustration with the lack of a structured approach in enacting the curriculum changes, which aligns with Kurt Lewin's Change Management Model. Lewin's model emphasizes the need for thorough stages of unfreezing, changing, and refreezing to successfully implement change, yet the study found that these stages were not fully followed.

In particular, there was an absence of continuous support, such as comprehensive in-service training, which is essential to stabilize and solidify the changes in the teaching environment. The study also identified several systemic challenges hindering the proper implementation of the revised history curriculum. These included a lack of teaching and learning resources, overcrowded classrooms, and insufficient parental involvement, which collectively exacerbated

the difficulties teachers faced in delivering quality education. Additionally, the rapid rollout of the curriculum without adequate piloting led to further frustration, as teachers felt unprepared for the changes. Moreover, the study highlights the excessive workload placed on teachers, who are burdened with administrative duties, extramural activities, and fundraising tasks, leaving them with little time to focus on effective curriculum delivery. This overload negatively impacted their ability to engage fully with the revised history curriculum, reinforcing the need for better management and support systems.

Without addressing these key issues, the implementation of educational reforms will continue to struggle, as teacher burnout and disengagement undermine the goals of such revisions. Addressing these challenges through proper planning, resource allocation, and professional development might foster positive teacher attitudes and improving educational outcomes in the future.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the study recommends that the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture should:

- Ensure that teachers receive comprehensive and continuous in-service training tailored to the specific needs of implementing the revised history curriculum.
- Allocate adequate funds specifically for teachers' in-service professional development as not all the teachers were trained during the initial workshop and the novice teachers might misunderstand the curriculum and ultimately implement it wrongly.
- Collaborate with the Namibia National Teachers' Union and other teachers' unions to enabling them advocate and show their commitment for the provision of continuous professional development to the teachers.
- Develop modern online platforms to facilitate on-going communication, resource sharing, and peer-support. This would allow teachers to connect with other teachers for assistance and access up-to-date teaching materials, thereby promoting a culture of continuous learning and adaptation.
- Provide the history policy guidelines to the schools and order real equipment, resources, and materials that contain videos for stimulations (on real events or dramas on history) and distribute them to schools

through chief education officers in the regions.

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