



**ТЕОРІЯ І МЕТОДИКА ПРОФЕСІЙНОЇ ОСВІТИ**

УДК 378.147:373.2-051]:316.77

**DOI** <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20535340>

**Internship as a Factor of Forming Communicative Self-Efficacy of Future  
Preschool Specialists in the U. S. Higher Education**

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**Accepted: 09.05.2026 | Published: 30.05.2026**

***Abstract.** The aim of the article is to provide a theoretical analysis of internship as a factor contributing to the development of communicative self-efficacy among future early childhood education professionals in U.S. higher education..*

***Methods.** Analysis and synthesis are used to examine scholarly sources on communicative self-efficacy, internship practice, and the training of preschool teachers in the USA, followed by the generalization of the obtained information. Generalization, induction, and deduction ensure the formation of overall conclusions based on individual studies and the verification of theoretical statements within the scope of the topic. The systemic approach allows viewing internship practice as part of an integrated system of professional training for future specialists. **Results.** The relevance of the study is substantiated by the growing demands for the professional training of early childhood educators in the context of contemporary sociocultural transformations and the transition to a competency-based educational paradigm. It is emphasized that communicative self-efficacy is a key component of the professional*



*readiness of future educators, ensuring effective interaction with preschool children, their parents, and colleagues, as well as contributing to the creation of a safe and developmentally supportive educational environment. The study analyzes the specific features of organizing internship in the U.S. higher education institutions, where it functions as an integrated and continuous component of professional training for future early childhood specialists. The role of partnership between universities and early childhood education institutions, mentoring, reflective practice, and the gradual involvement of students in real teaching processes is highlighted in the formation of communicative skills in general and communicative self-efficacy in particular. The importance of reflection and modern assessment tools, particularly e-portfolios, is revealed for the development of both professional and communicative competence of future early childhood educators. It is established that clinical practice in the United States serves not only as a means of gaining experience but also as a systemic factor in shaping the professional identity of future preschool teachers. **Conclusions.** The article concludes that despite significant scholarly interest in the issue, the development of communicative self-efficacy among future early childhood specialists in the United States during internship requires further theoretical and empirical research.*

**Keywords:** *internship, communicative self-efficacy, future early childhood specialists, teacher education, U. S. higher education, professional competence, reflection.*



**Виробнича практика як чинник формування комунікативної  
самоефективності майбутніх фахівців дошкільної галузі  
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***Анотація.** Метою статті є теоретичний аналіз виробничої практики як чинника формування комунікативної самоефективності майбутніх фахівців дошкільної освіти у системі вищої школи США. **Методи.** Аналіз і синтез використовуються для вивчення наукових джерел щодо комунікативної самоефективності, виробничої практики та підготовки вихователів у США з подальшим узагальненням отриманої інформації. Узагальнення, індукція та дедукція забезпечують формування загальних висновків на основі окремих досліджень і перевірку теоретичних положень у межах теми. **Результати.** Обґрунтовано актуальність дослідження у зв'язку зі зростанням вимог до професійної підготовки педагогів раннього та дошкільного віку в умовах сучасних соціокультурних трансформацій та переходу до компетентнісної освітньої парадигми. Зазначено, що комунікативна самоефективність є ключовим компонентом професійної готовності майбутнього вихователя, який забезпечує ефективну взаємодію з дітьми дошкільного віку, їхніми батьками та колегами, а також сприяє створенню безпечного й розвивального освітнього середовища. Проаналізовано особливості організації виробничої практики у закладах вищої освіти США, де вона виступає інтегрованим і безперервним*



компонентом професійної підготовки майбутніх фахівців дошкільної галузі. Підкреслено роль партнерської взаємодії між університетами та закладами дошкільної освіти, наставництва, рефлексивної діяльності та поступового залучення студентів до реального педагогічного процесу у формуванні комунікативних умінь загалом і комунікативної самоефективності зокрема. Розкрито значення рефлексії та сучасних інструментів оцінювання, зокрема електронного портфоліо, для розвитку професійної і комунікативної компетентності майбутніх педагогів дошкільної галузі. Встановлено, що виробнича практика у США є не лише засобом набуття досвіду, а й системним чинником формування професійної ідентичності майбутнього педагога дошкільної галузі. **Висновки.** Зроблено висновок про те, що попри значний науковий інтерес до проблеми, формування комунікативної самоефективності майбутніх фахівців дошкільної галузі в США у процесі виробничої практики потребує подальшого теоретичного й емпіричного дослідження.

**Ключові слова:** виробнича практика, комунікативна самоефективність, майбутні фахівці дошкільної галузі, професійна підготовка педагогів, вища освіта США, професійна компетентність, рефлексія.

**Introduction.** The current stage of development of early childhood education is characterized by increasing demands on the professional training of future specialists, driven by the need to ensure high-quality pedagogical interaction in the context of dynamic sociocultural changes. In this regard, particular importance is attached to the development of teachers' ability to communicate effectively, as communicative activity constitutes the foundation of interaction with preschool children, their parents, and colleagues, and serves as a key factor in creating a supportive educational environment.

The relevance of this study is determined by several interrelated factors. Firstly, the contemporary educational paradigm is oriented toward learner-centered and



competence-based approaches, which require not only the acquisition of knowledge but also the development of the ability of future teachers to act confidently in professional situations, communicate effectively, and make successful pedagogical decisions. Within this framework, communicative self-efficacy emerges as an important integrative characteristic of professional readiness. Secondly, the practical component of early childhood teacher education is gaining increasing significance. Internship is viewed as a crucial element of professional development, ensuring the integration of theoretical knowledge with real pedagogical experience. It is within the context of practical activity that future educators are able to test communicative strategies, develop professional confidence, and shape their individual style of professional interaction. Thirdly in the context of the globalization of education, there is a growing need to examine international experience in teacher education, particularly the organization of teaching practice in the U. S. higher education institutions. Such experience is valuable for improving national systems of teacher education, as it allows for the identification of effective approaches to developing both professional and communicative competence in future specialists.

Special attention should also be paid to the psychological dimension of professional training, particularly the phenomenon of self-efficacy, which reflects an individual's belief in their ability to successfully perform professional tasks. In pedagogical practice, a high level of self-efficacy contributes to improved communication, stronger professional motivation, and greater resilience to stress, which is especially important in working with young children.

Despite the substantial body of research, the issue of developing communicative self-efficacy in future early childhood education professionals during teaching practice remains insufficiently explored. In particular, further theoretical substantiation and empirical investigation are needed regarding the pedagogical conditions, content, and technologies of organizing practical training that ensure the effective development of this quality.



Thus, the U. S. pedagogical experience offers significant sociocultural potential, including the development of alternative approaches to social perception, the promotion of critical thinking, and the transformation of traditional hierarchical structures in education [5, p. 27]. Its adaptation and creative application within the Ukrainian educational context can facilitate the introduction of innovative methodological strategies in teacher training, enhance the effectiveness of educational programs, and ensure their alignment with contemporary educational and sociocultural demands.

**Analysis of recent research and publications.** The issue of developing communicative self-efficacy in future early childhood education teachers is highly relevant in contemporary psychological and pedagogical discourse. The theoretical foundation of this study is grounded in social cognitive theory, according to which self-efficacy is defined as an individual's belief in their ability to organize and execute the actions required to achieve desired outcomes [8].

In international scholarly literature, teacher self-efficacy is considered a key factor influencing professional effectiveness, motivation, and the quality of pedagogical interaction. It has been demonstrated that a high level of self-efficacy positively affects both student learning outcomes and teachers' professional behavior [6; 17; 22].

Considerable attention in research is given to the role of practical training (internship/practicum) in the development of future teachers' professional competence. In particular, it has been established that well-organized teaching practice ensures the integration of theoretical knowledge and practical experience, and promotes the development of professional confidence and communicative skills [14; 20]. Within the framework of the social cognitive approach, it is emphasized that mastery experiences – successful performance of professional tasks – serve as the primary source of self-efficacy development. Reflection also plays a crucial role in this process, as it enables the awareness and reinterpretation of professional experience [21].



In Ukrainian pedagogical scholarship, the issues of professional training of future early childhood educators and the development of their competence have been addressed in the works of S. Sysoieva [4] who emphasizes the importance of pedagogical creativity in professional development, and A. Bohush [1], who substantiates the role of speech development as the foundation of pedagogical interaction. Some studies [2; 3] highlight the importance of teaching practice as a key factor in the formation of professional competence in future educators. In particular, it has been proven that participation in practical activities contributes to developing communicative skills, professional confidence, and readiness for effective pedagogical interaction.

At the same time, the analysis of scholarly sources indicates that the issue of developing communicative self-efficacy in future early childhood education professionals during teaching practice remains insufficiently explored. This necessitates further research into the pedagogical conditions and mechanisms of its development in higher education institutions, particularly in the context of international experience.

**Identification of unresolved aspects of the problem.** Despite the substantial body of scholarly research devoted to teacher self-efficacy, professional preparation, and the significance of teaching practice, several important dimensions of this issue remain insufficiently explored. In particular, although communicative self-efficacy is widely recognized as a fundamental component of professional competence in early childhood teacher education, its purposeful development during pedagogical internship has not yet been comprehensively conceptualized in contemporary academic discourse.

Although international studies emphasize the importance of mastery experiences and reflection as key mechanisms underlying the formation of self-efficacy, there remains a lack of systematic analysis of how these mechanisms operate specifically within communicative interaction during teaching practice. Moreover, the relationship between the organization of internship programs and the development of



communicative self-efficacy among prospective preschool teachers remains underexplored.

In Ukrainian pedagogical discourse, scholarly attention has primarily focused on general professional competence, speech development, and the overall role of teaching practice. However, communicative self-efficacy as an independent construct, as well as the pedagogical conditions that facilitate its development during internship, has not received sufficient scholarly attention.

Furthermore, there is a need for a deeper examination of international experience, particularly that of the United States, in order to identify effective models and strategies for fostering communicative self-efficacy in higher education. Therefore, the issue of developing communicative self-efficacy among future early childhood education professionals during internship requires further theoretical substantiation and empirical investigation.

**Formulation of the objectives of article (setting the task).** The purpose of the article is to provide a theoretical substantiation and analysis of teaching internship as a key factor in the development of communicative self-efficacy among prospective early childhood education professionals. To achieve this purpose, the study addresses the following objectives: to examine the role of internship in the development of this professional quality; to analyze the organization and implementation of practical training for prospective early childhood education professionals in U.S. higher education institutions; and to identify the pedagogical conditions that facilitate the development of communicative self-efficacy among future preschool educators during internship.

**Presentation of the main research material.** The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) (<https://www.chea.org/national-council-accreditation-teacher-education>) includes practical experience as one of the six main criteria for measuring the effectiveness of educational programs for the training of future teachers, including future early childhood educators [19]. Therefore, the so-



called clinical practice is an important component of the professional training of future preschool specialists in the USA.

It should be noted that the English name for pedagogical practice, clinical practice, is similar in its logic to the training of doctors, where clinical practice plays a key role under the supervision of experienced specialists [19]. As for the meaning of the words, in the English term “clinical practice”, the word “clinical”, firstly, acting as an adjective, means “unbiased, objective”, and secondly, it comes from the noun “clinic”, which is used to denote the process of learning in a certain field [11]. Obviously, the context of the definition reflects the practically-oriented nature of this term. In Ukrainian academic discourse, its functional counterpart is the term “internship”, which also reflects the idea of learning through direct participation in professional activity. That is why in further research we will use the term “internship” as a conceptual analogue of the English “clinical practice”.

The so-called clinical model of professional training of pedagogical personnel was conceptually formulated and institutionally supported after 2010. Its emergence is associated with the need to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge acquired at the university and the real conditions of professional pedagogical activity [19]. This problem has been repeatedly noted by researchers as one of the key reasons for the lack of readiness of graduates of pedagogical programs for practical work [14; 15].

Within the clinical model of training of early childhood teachers, practice is not considered as the final stage of training, but acts as its permanent integrated component. Future specialists are systematically involved in the process of education and upbringing in preschool educational institutions, observe the activities of experienced educators, gradually participate in the organization of children’s play, cognitive and communicative activities, planning the educational environment, conducting classes, as well as in interaction with parents and other participants in the educational process. This approach contributes to the formation of future teachers not only professional knowledge, but also professional thinking, pedagogical reflection,



empathy and the ability to flexibly respond to the individual needs and developmental characteristics of early and preschool children.

A special role within the clinical model of training early childhood educators is played by partnerships between universities and preschool educational institutions, which function as basic institutions for the practical training of future specialists. Such institutions cease to be just a place for practical training, and become full-fledged participants in the process of professional development of future educators. Universities and early childhood education institutions jointly develop educational programs, determine the goals of practical training, coordinate the activities of mentors and teachers, and also carry out joint assessment of student learning outcomes [19]. Within the framework of such partnerships, experienced early childhood educators play the role of mentors who accompany students in the process of their professional development. They not only demonstrate examples of effective interaction with children of early and preschool age, but also help future teachers analyze their own pedagogical actions, realize typical difficulties, find optimal solutions in complex educational situations, and form an individual style of professional activity. In parallel, university teachers provide theoretical support, contributing to a deeper understanding of students' practical experience and its integration with scientific approaches to the development and education of children [14].

Thus, the clinical model of teacher training in the United States is a holistic system that combines theory and practice, university education and the reality of the professional field, academic knowledge and professional experience. Its main goal is to form a competent, reflective and adaptive teacher who is able to work effectively in a modern educational institution.

In the system of training early childhood teachers in the United States, two main forms of practical training play an important role: field experience and clinical practice, which, despite their common focus on the formation of professional competence of future specialists, have different functional characteristics [10;13; 15; 18]. In particular,



the accreditation standards of the National Association for the Education of Early Childhood [18] specify that field experiences and work practices should be combined and consistently structured in educational programs to ensure the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and professional qualities necessary to effectively support the development and learning of early childhood children in different age groups and types of educational settings (Standard 7: Early Childhood Field Experiences).

Field experience is usually integrated into the educational process at the early stages of training and has an introductory and adaptive nature, aimed at forming initial ideas about professional activity, developing reflective skills and establishing a connection between theoretical knowledge and practice. Field experience is acquired during: structured or open observations; conducting mini-lessons approved by a university lecturer and a teacher of a preschool educational institution; using the case study method, etc.

In contrast, clinical practice is the final stage of professional training and is characterized by a long, intensive and systematic immersion of the student in a real educational environment with a gradual transition to the independent performance of professional functions, which meets the requirements of the standards of the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP (<https://caepnet.org/>)) regarding the practical training of pedagogical candidates. It is aimed at forming a holistic professional identity, developing autonomy, responsibility and readiness for full-fledged pedagogical activity.

Thus, field experience serves primarily an orientation and preparatory function, while clinical practice provides the final professional development of the future teacher.

According to the standard for training early childhood teachers in the United States, developed with the support of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC (<http://www.naeyc.org/>)), the main goal of organizing the work practice of students in American universities and colleges is the formation of



professional and pedagogical competence, which involves the acquisition of skills and abilities of caring for children (caregiver) and the ability to organize the education of children (teacher) [18].

As a result of the teaching practice, future early childhood educators are expected to demonstrate knowledge and skills in the following three main domains: 1) planning and preparation of the educational process; 2) organization of the educational process; and 3) professional responsibilities [18].

In particular, in the area of “Planning and preparation of the education and training process”, the future early childhood educator must demonstrate: knowledge of the features of the physical and mental development of children of different ages; program tasks in the areas of education and training in a childcare facility or in a preschool education institution, as well as diagnostic criteria for identifying the level of formation of certain skills in children; possession of appropriate methodological techniques; the ability to select didactic material and organize play, artistic and cognitive activities, draw up lesson notes, develop and select valid diagnostic tools. Regarding the creation of a favorable emotional, developmental and safe environment in a group of preschoolers, the student must demonstrate his ability to organize effective interaction with pupils (through words and activities) during practice. Moreover, the student must master the ability to monitor the behavior of children and, if necessary, competently correct their abnormal behavior.

During the internship, great importance is attached to the organization of the process of raising and teaching children, which is manifested in: effective use of didactic material and electronic resources selected in accordance with the age and individual characteristics of the pupils; the ability to draw up an individual development plan for children of different categories (e.g., children with special educational needs, etc.) and apply valid diagnostic tools.

In the domain “Professional Responsibilities”, the future teacher must: demonstrate the ability to carefully and reliably study the results of the diagnostics and



record them; be friendly in communicating with colleagues and parents, if necessary, involve them in educational work; protect and defend the interests of children of all categories; be capable of making decisions and self-analysis of their pedagogical activities; carry out pedagogical activities in accordance with the current laws of the state and the country in general; strive to expand knowledge and improve their pedagogical abilities.

Let us briefly consider the content of industrial pedagogical practice in some higher education institutions in the USA.

At Central Michigan University, practical professional training of future specialists in the field of preschool education includes two main parts [12]:

– clinical apprenticeship/pre-student teaching, which precedes industrial practice, based on kindergartens within the educational component “Leading Teaching Methods in Early Childhood (Science and Social Studies)” (HDF 409 Lead Teaching Methods in Early Childhood (Science and Social Studies)) – the future teacher observes the professional activities of the teacher-mentor at the early stages of acquiring his own pedagogical experience and gradually assumes responsibility for various aspects of the educational practice of the teacher-mentor, an employee of a particular preschool educational institution;

– clinical practice/student teaching “Practical experience in early childhood special education” (SPE 558 Early Childhood Special Education Clinical Experience).

In turn, the University of Illinois, which is among the top ten institutions of higher education of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE (<https://aacte.org/>)), which prepares teachers for all levels of education, has introduced the following two main types of practice within the scope of “Preschool Education”: clinical apprenticeship and clinical practice. As a result of these two types of practical training, future early childhood teachers are supposed to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in the following areas [16]: domain 1: Planning and Preparation;



domain 2: The Classroom Environment; domain 3: Instruction; domain 4: Professional Responsibilities.

An important component of the clinical model is reflection. Students are taught to systematically analyze their own actions, evaluate their effectiveness, and relate theoretical concepts to real pedagogical situations. This approach contributes to the formation of professional autonomy, responsibility, and the ability for continuous professional development.

In general, practical training is aimed at developing professionally oriented skills and abilities, the assessment of which requires the use of various methods, for example, the portfolio method. This method allows each student to see their own learning outcomes integrated into the final product. The portfolio contains all the student's work completed during practical training at a higher education institution and is presented as a single package. Most often, an electronic portfolio is used in the practice of American higher education. It can be available both on the Internet (then the student has access to it from anywhere in the world, saving, modifying and exporting information). An e-portfolio contributes to the formation of students' skills of reflection on educational and cognitive activities, self-organization, self-control, self-assessment, ensures the development of motivation for academic achievements, and also allows students to build a trajectory of self-development [7]. Creating an e-portfolio directs them to self-knowledge and understanding the dynamics of their educational achievements.

Compared to a paper portfolio, an e-portfolio is distinguished by mobility, flexibility and variability of information design (it is easy to make changes to the structure and content of materials; wide possibilities of using graphic editors, animation, audio and video information) and makes it possible to significantly simplify the task of maintaining, storing and providing information about one's own educational achievements.

In addition, it should be noted that professional and pedagogical portfolios make it possible to comprehensively assess the level of training of a student, his readiness to



carry out professional pedagogical activities. After graduating from a higher education institution, graduates use a portfolio when starting work in child care centers or preschool education institutions. When observing students' learning activities during practical training, the teacher can be guided by the concept of assessment based on levels of thinking and understanding, proposed by the U. S. educators J. Biggs and K. Collis [9]. This concept, known as the “Structure of Observed Learning Outcomes” (SOLO), aims at analyzing the quality of learning outcomes not only in terms of the amount of information learned, but also in terms of the depth of its understanding and the ability to apply it in practical activities. According to this concept, the process of forming knowledge and skills occurs gradually and covers five main levels of understanding [9]:

1. Prestructural level – characterized by the lack of a holistic understanding of the educational material. At this stage, the student either does not possess the necessary knowledge, or uses it fragmentarily, without realizing the connections between individual elements. In the process of production practice, this may manifest itself in the random reproduction of individual actions without understanding their pedagogical content. For instance, the student: conducts a game without taking into account the age characteristics of children; does not understand how the game affects speech, sensory or social development; copies the actions of the mentor, without realizing their content.

2. Unistructural level – involves focusing on one aspect of the educational task. The student is able to recognize a separate element of pedagogical activity, but is not yet aware of its connections with other components of the educational process. For example, a future teacher can correctly perform individual actions (organization of the game, explanation of the task), without understanding their complex impact on the development of the child.

3. Multistructural level – characterized by the assimilation of several elements of educational content, which, however, are perceived as isolated. The student can name or reproduce several components of pedagogical activity, but does not yet



integrate them into a holistic system. At this stage, knowledge is quantitatively broader, but not interconnected. For example, the student: knows that play develops speech, sensory sensations and social skills, but considers these areas separately; can name different types of games (mobile, didactic, role-playing), but does not understand how they interact; organizes classes, but does not connect its goal with the long-term development of the child.

4. Relational level – means the transition to a holistic understanding: the student sees the relationships between different components of pedagogical activity: the student sees the relationships between different components of pedagogical activity. The student is able to establish connections between different components of the educational process, explain their interdependence and understand the logic of pedagogical decisions. Within the framework of production practice, this is manifested in the ability to justify the choice of methods, adapt the activity to the needs of children and analyze its results. For example, a student: realizes how the game simultaneously affects speech, emotions, socialization and cognitive development; is able to explain why he chose a particular game for a particular child or group; adapts tasks to the individual needs of children; analyzes how his actions affect the behavior and development of the child

5. Extended abstract level – the highest level at which the student not only understands the educational material, but is also able to generalize, transfer knowledge to new contexts, create their own pedagogical strategies and innovative approaches. At this level, the future teacher demonstrates the ability to creative thinking, predict educational results and independent professional development. For example, the student: develops his own game methods for the development of speech or social skills; integrates sensory, speech and emotional components into unified pedagogical scenarios; predicts the development of children and adjusts the educational environment according to their needs; demonstrates reflection and the ability to independent professional growth.



The use of the above-mentioned taxonomy of observed educational achievements in the process of assessing the results of practical training allows the teacher not only to record the correctness of individual actions, but also to analyze the depth of students' professional thinking, their readiness to work independently with children, as well as the ability to reflect and creatively solve pedagogical tasks.

**Conclusions.** All of the above provides grounds for asserting that internship constitutes a system-forming component of the professional education of future preschool educators in the USA. It is regarded not as the final stage of training, but as a continuous and integrated process combining theoretical preparation with authentic professional practice. The clinical model of teacher education, institutionalized after 2010, is aimed at bridging the gap between university-based education and professional practice in preschool educational settings. Its key characteristics include the systematic and long-term nature of practical experience, the gradual immersion of students into professional activity, the development of reflective skills, and the formation of professional identity.

The study has demonstrated that the effectiveness of practical training is ensured through a combination of two complementary forms: field experience and clinical practice. The former performs an orientational and adaptive function, whereas the latter facilitates the in-depth professional development of future preschool educators, fostering their autonomy, responsibility, and readiness for independent professional activity. An important element of the clinical model is the partnership between higher education institutions and internship sites, within which practitioner-mentors act as facilitators of students' professional development, while university instructors provide scientific and theoretical support. Such cooperation contributes to the alignment of training objectives, enhances the quality of the educational process, and ensures the integrity of professional competence development.

The findings indicate that the outcome of practical training is the formation of professional pedagogical competence, encompassing the ability to plan the educational



process, organize learning activities, and fulfil professional responsibilities. An important role in this process is played by assessment tools, particularly electronic portfolios and the SOLO taxonomy, which make it possible to assess not only the scope of knowledge acquired, but also the depth of understanding and the ability to apply knowledge in practice.

Therefore, the clinical model of preparing future educators in the USA represents an effective system for developing competent, reflective, and adaptable professionals capable of continuous professional growth and effective work in a contemporary educational environment.

Promising directions for further research include a comparative analysis of the implementation of the clinical model of preschool teacher education in different countries and the possibilities for its adaptation within the Ukrainian system of teacher education; an examination of the role of mentoring and professional support models during internships in the formation of students' professional identity; and the development of criteria and indicators for assessing the quality of practical training for future early childhood education professionals in accordance with international standards. Such research may contribute to the improvement of teacher education systems and enhance their alignment with contemporary educational requirements.

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