

Impact of Adult and Non-Formal Education on Social Inclusion of Rural Women and Out-of-School Youths in Selected Local Government Areas of Oyo State, Nigeria

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Abstract: *The study examined the impact of Adult and Non-Formal Education (ANFE) on social inclusion among rural women and out-of-school youths in selected LGAs of Oyo State, Nigeria, using a descriptive survey. One hundred and fifty participants (75 rural women, 75 out-of-school youths) were selected from six centres via multistage sampling. Data were collected through a validated 4-point Likert ANFESIS questionnaire (reliability = 0.82). Analyses included descriptive statistics, correlations, and t-tests. Results showed high ANFE participation and moderate-to-high social inclusion, with significant positive correlations for both groups. No significant difference in social inclusion was found between the two groups. Findings underscore ANFE's role in enhancing social inclusion. Recommendations include increased government investment in ANFE and facilitators through the NNCAE, as well as broader community mobilisation efforts.*

Keywords: adult education, non-formal education, social inclusion, rural women, out-of-school youths, Oyo state, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Rural women and out-of-school youths in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa, including Nigeria, often experience social exclusion from economic, civic, and social opportunities. Structural constraints, such as poverty, entrenched gender norms, limited access to resources, unemployment,

and inadequate infrastructure, restrict their participation in society (Sen, 2000; World Bank, 2013). In many rural communities, these forms of marginalisation perpetuate cycles of deprivation and limit contributions to national development. In Nigeria, a significant number of adults are illiterate, with rural women and out-of-school youths constituting a large proportion of this population (Yusuff, 2025). In fact, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2022) estimates that Nigeria has approximately 19.7 million out-of-school children across age groups, making it one of the countries with the highest absolute numbers globally. Rural women also face multiple disadvantages due to gender bias, limited education, and restricted economic opportunities. These barriers weaken their social networks and reduce their access to resources, thereby narrowing their participation in community life (Yusuff, 2025). Adult and Non-Formal Education (ANFE) has been widely regarded as a flexible, community-oriented intervention capable of addressing literacy gaps, building vocational and livelihood skills, and promoting empowerment among adults and youths who were excluded from formal schooling (UNESCO, 2016; Rogers, 2004). It is mostly promoted as a mechanism to foster inclusion. For out-of-school youths who have already crossed the threshold of compulsory schooling age, ANFE - particularly vocational and skills-based non-formal programmes - represents the primary pathway to social reintegration and economic inclusion. Adult and non-formal refers to organised learning activities provided for adults outside the formal school system (Coombs & Ahmed, 1974). Social inclusion also refers to the process of improving individuals' ability, opportunities, and dignity (World Bank, 2013). It encompasses access to opportunities, participation in decision-making, and a sense of belonging. Despite its importance, social inclusion remains elusive for many Nigerians in rural communities, particularly women and out-of-school youths. The National Policy on Education states that adult education aims to equip adults and youths who had never had the opportunity for formal education or did not complete it by providing an opportunity to acquire essential knowledge and skills that will enable them to participate meaningfully in society (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013). The extent to which adult education has fulfilled this function is therefore questionable, given the level of inclusion of these groups. Oyo State reflects these broader national challenges despite the various non-formal education programmes offered through agencies such as the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education (NMEC), and the State Agency for Adult and Non-Formal Education (SAAFED). Empirical evidence linking participation in these programmes to measurable social inclusion outcomes is limited (NMEC, 2019). This study, therefore, investigates the impact of ANFE on the social inclusion of rural women and out-of-school youths in selected LGAs of Oyo State, Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW/ THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Adult and Non-Formal Education (ANFE) encompasses a broad spectrum of organised learning activities outside the conventional formal school system, targeting adults and out-of-school youths whom mainstream educational structures have bypassed or excluded (Aderinoye, 2004). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2015) defines adult education as the totality of organised educational processes, regardless of content, level, or method, that develop learners' abilities, enrich their knowledge, and improve their technical or professional

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qualifications, thus enabling them to achieve social, economic, and cultural fulfillment. Non-formal education comprises structured learning outside the formal school system, often tailored to specific needs. In Nigeria, Adult and Non-Formal Education (ANFE) provides structured learning opportunities tailored to the needs of adults and youth, including literacy, vocational skills, and civic competencies (Coombs & Ahmed, 1974). According to them, non-formal education offers flexible and functional learning opportunities tailored to disadvantaged groups, especially those in rural communities. This form of education equips learners with literacy, vocational skills, and life competencies that enable them to function effectively in society.

Social inclusion is a multidimensional construct that extends beyond economic participation to encompass political voice, access to education and healthcare, cultural belonging, and active engagement in community life (Sen, 2004; Levitas et al., 2007). For marginalized groups such as rural women and out-of-school youths, social inclusion removes structural barriers that block full participation in societal processes. Social inclusion also improves the ability, opportunity, and dignity of individuals disadvantaged by their identity, enabling their participation in society, while social exclusion restricts individuals and groups from participating fully in society due to structural barriers (Sen, 2000). In this study, social inclusion enables individuals to participate fully in economic, civic, social, and cultural life. This includes gaining access to income-generating opportunities, participating in community governance, accessing social services, and experiencing a sense of dignity and belonging. The World Bank (2013) explains that inclusion enhances access to resources, increases participation in decision-making, and integrates people into social and economic life. In Nigeria, however, structural challenges such as poverty, gender inequality, and limited access to education still hinder rural women and out-of-school youths from fully participating in societal development.

Adult and Non-Formal Education (ANFE) has long served as a vital instrument for promoting inclusive development, particularly among populations excluded from formal schooling systems. In contemporary discourse, stakeholders increasingly link ANFE to the broader goal of social inclusion. UNESCO (2016) emphasises that lifelong learning, including adult and non-formal education, forms the foundation of achieving inclusive and equitable quality education for all. These programmes offer individuals who missed out on formal education systems opportunities to improve their socio-economic conditions and to actively participate in societal processes. Studies show that ANFE programmes significantly improve participants' socio-economic conditions. Rogers (2004) notes that adult education programmes that incorporate practical, livelihood-oriented skills deliver more meaningful outcomes in terms of empowerment and participation. Similarly, Aderinoye (2004) argues that adult education in Nigeria acts as a tool for national development by addressing issues of illiteracy, poverty, and social exclusion.

Ojobanikan, Mandah, and Foyewa (2024) noted that ANFE programmes, when properly funded, have substantial potential to bridge the socio-economic divide, particularly for rural and marginalised communities. Sule (2024), as cited by Ojobanikan et al. (2024), argues that ANFE has broadened beyond conventional literacy to include lifelong learning and community empowerment, and its importance lies in enhancing human capital, social justice, and democratic

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participation. Uzoagu (2023) and Uzoagu and Oriji (2022), also cited by Ojobanikan, further demonstrate that adult education significantly reduces resource access disparities among the marginalised, particularly women, in rural areas. Okenwa-Ojo and Adewole (2025) explored the broader role of adult education in achieving socio-economic development in Nigeria and concluded that ANFE contributes to empowerment, social cohesion, and poverty alleviation when programmes integrate relevant skills training. Complementing these national findings, Nwizu and Avoseh (2023) examined adult learning and education for poverty alleviation in Africa, highlighting how such programmes build capabilities, expand social networks, and support women's empowerment across the continent, though challenges such as inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, and limited mobilisation often constrain maximum impact. Collectively, these studies indicate that ANFE programmes incorporating practical livelihood and entrepreneurship components can meaningfully address exclusion for rural women and out-of-school youths, yet they also point to the need for more context-specific research on multidimensional social inclusion outcomes in settings such as Oyo State.

A growing body of Nigerian empirical literature documents the linkages between ANFE participation and social inclusion outcomes. Okoji and Ladeji (2023), in a descriptive survey of 203 respondents in Oyo State comprising adult literacy facilitators and rural women participants, found a statistically significant relationship between adult literacy education and women's political participation ($r = 0.148$, $df = 201$, $p < 0.05$) and between adult literacy education and healthy living practices among rural women ($r = 0.052$, $df = 201$, $p < 0.05$). These findings provide direct empirical support for the study's hypothesis that ANFE has a significant impact on social inclusion indicators among rural women in Oyo State. Ojobanikan, Mandah, and Foyewa (2024), using a qualitative methodology in Ekiti State, find that a state-level needs and service-oriented approach to funding ALE programmes resulted in the establishment of 67 adult literacy centres and the enrolment of 5,029 adult learners between 2019 and 2022, demonstrating the feasibility of scaled ANFE delivery when institutional commitment is sustained. Nwoke (2024), from a national perspective and a community-based angle, both establish that adult education programmes in Nigeria have measurable positive effects on participants' socio-economic status, particularly women from marginalised communities. Similar research also links ANFE participation with increased civic engagement and social integration (Mahmud & Danjuma, 2024). In Oyo State, recent evidence suggests that adult education programmes can reduce poverty and improve community participation (Yusuff, 2025). The barriers to inclusion for rural women in the region include early marriage, cultural expectations of domesticity, limited mobility, and low household income, all of which interact to restrict engagement in both formal and non-formal education. Sinwell (2022) demonstrates through South African case studies that Freirean community-based educational practices can effectively connect with social movements to build critical consciousness and challenge oppressive structures, providing an instructive model for ANFE programming in comparable West African contexts. Ebrahimi et al. (2022) demonstrate, in a quantitative non-experimental design in Iran, that vocational education and training (VET) for rural women significantly improves economic empowerment across four measured dimensions, with the quality of educational content and instructor competence emerging as the most influential factors.

Mengistie (2022) similarly demonstrates that agency expansion - a key social inclusion outcome - is achievable through targeted adult education programming, when content is contextually grounded, and programme design incorporates learner voice. These international findings converge on a consistent evidence base: ANFE, when adequately resourced, gender-responsive, and aligned with the lived priorities of marginalised learners, is a reliable instrument for advancing social inclusion.

Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on three theories that provided a complementary lens through which the relationship between Adult and Non-Formal Education (ANFE) and social inclusion among marginalised communities in Oyo State was understood. The theories are;

Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed - it was first published in 1968, and Freire argued that genuinely liberating education must be dialogical, problem-posing, and rooted in the lived realities of learners - particularly the oppressed and marginalised. For Freire (1970), education is never neutral; it either serves to domesticate or to liberate. In relation to the present study, Freire's theory provides the conceptual basis for understanding ANFE not merely as a delivery of literacy skills to rural women and out-of-school youths in Oyo State, but as a critical process of conscientisation - the development of critical consciousness - through which marginalised persons come to recognise, name, and act against the systemic conditions of their exclusion.

Human Capital Theory originated in the work of economists Theodore Shultz (1961) and Gary Becker (1964), and it posits that investment in education and training enhances individuals' productive capacities, thereby increasing their economic value and contributing to broader national development. In this regard, ANFE serves as a strategic investment in human capital - particularly for those bypassed by formal schooling- that equips them with skills, knowledge, and competencies needed to participate in economic life.

Social Exclusion Theory offers a third theoretical perspective, framing disadvantage not merely in terms of income poverty but as a multidimensional process of relational deprivation - encompassing exclusion from labour markets, civic participation, social services, and educational opportunities. For this study, Social Exclusion Theory provides the analytical framework for evaluating whether ANFE participation translates into meaningful social reintegration for rural women and out-of-school youths - across economic, civic, and relational dimensions. The theory also foregrounds the structural and institutional barriers - inadequate funding, policy gaps, cultural norms - that continue to limit the reach and effectiveness of ANFE in Oyo State. Together, these theories conceptualise ANFE as a mechanism that builds skills, enhances awareness, and expands opportunities for inclusion.

Statement of the Problem

Despite policy support through the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education (NMEC) and state-level agencies in Nigeria, rural women and out-of-school youths frequently face barriers to full participation in economic, civic, and social life. They occupy

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a structurally disadvantaged position shaped by intersecting forces of patriarchal cultural norms, low educational attainment, restricted access to economic resources, and limited civic participation. Rigorous empirical evidence on the relationship between programme participation and social inclusion remains largely scarce. The preponderance of existing studies has tended to concentrate on elite achievement outcomes, with insufficient attention given to more substantive indicators of inclusion such as economic participation, civic engagement, access to social services, and sense of belonging, thereby affecting effective policy formulation and programme design and creating significant gaps in the literature, particularly at the sub-regional and local levels. There is a conspicuous absence of quantitative studies that simultaneously examine the impact of ANFE on both rural women and out-of-school youths as distinct but related marginalised populations within a single study, limiting the comparability of outcomes and the potential for policy recommendations that address both groups. This study, therefore, addresses this gap by providing empirical evidence on the impact of ANFE on the social inclusion of rural women and out-of-school youths in selected local government areas of Oyo State, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective was to examine the impact of ANFE on social inclusion among rural women and out-of-school youths in selected Local Government Areas of Oyo State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Assess the level of participation of rural women and out-of-school youths in ANFE programmes in the selected Local Government Areas of Oyo State,
2. Determine the level of social inclusion experienced by programme participants.
3. Investigate the impact of ANFE participation on the social inclusion of rural women.
4. Explore the impact of ANFE participation on the social inclusion of out-of-school youths.
5. Compare social inclusion outcomes between rural women and out-of-school youths.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of participation of rural women and out-of-school youths in ANFE programmes in the selected LGA of Oyo State?
2. What is the level of social inclusion experienced by rural women and out-of-school youths in the selected LGA of Oyo State?
3. What is the impact of ANFE participation on the social inclusion of rural women?
4. What is the impact of ANFE participation on the social inclusion of out-of-school youths?
5. Is there a significant difference in social inclusion outcomes between rural women and out-of-school youths?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance:

Ho1: ANFE participation has no significant impact on the social inclusion of rural women in the selected LGA of Oyo State.

Ho2: ANFE participation has no significant impact on the social inclusion of out-of-school youths in the selected LGA of Oyo State.

Ho3: There is no significant difference in social inclusion outcomes between rural women and out-of-school youths who participated in ANFE programmes.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey design to investigate the relationship between ANFE participation and social inclusion. The design was suitable because the study aimed to describe existing conditions rather than manipulate variables (Creswell, 2014).

Population, Sample, and Sampling Technique

The target population consisted of rural women and out-of-school youths enrolled in or who had completed ANFE programmes within the preceding 12 months in selected Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Oyo State. Three LGAs were purposively selected: Atiba, Akinyele, and Ogbomoso South. These areas were chosen because they host active non-formal education centres. A multistage sampling technique was used. First, two ANFE centres were randomly selected in each LGA, for a total of six centres. A proportionate sampling technique was used to select 150 respondents across the centres, comprising 75 participants from each group.

Instrument

Data were collected using the Adult and Non-Formal Education and Social Inclusion Scale (ANFESIS), a structured questionnaire that includes sections on demographic variables, ANFE participation, and social inclusion. The instrument was subjected to face and content validity by three experts in Adult Education and Measurement and Evaluation. It is then pilot tested among 20 respondents from a non-sampled LGA, yielding a reliability coefficient of Cronbach's alpha = 0.82.

Data Collection

Trained research assistants administered the questionnaires in person over 4 weeks. Respondents were informed of the study's purpose, assured of confidentiality, and advised of their right to withdraw. A total of 150 questionnaires were administered and returned.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using SPSS version 25. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) answered research questions; Pearson correlation tested hypotheses on the impact of ANFE

participation on social inclusion; and independent samples t-test examined differences between rural women and out-of-school youths at a 0.05 significance level.

RESULTS

Table 1: The Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 150)

Variable	Category	Rural Women (n = 75)	Out-of-School Youths (n = 75)	Total (%)
Age	Below 25 years	12 (16.0)	24 (32.0)	36 (24.0)
	25–40 years	48 (64.0)	46 (61.3)	94 (62.7)
	Above 40 years	15 (20.0)	5 (6.7)	20 (13.3)
Duration of ANFE Participation				
	1–3 months	21 (28.0)	27 (36.0)	48 (32.0)
	6+ months	54 (72.0)	48 (64.0)	102 (68.0)

Among the 150 respondents, 75 were rural women (50%), and 75 were out-of-school youths (50%). The majority were aged 25-40 years. Most had participated in ANFE programmes for at least six months.

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Table 2: Level of ANFE Participation

Group	N	M	SD
Rural Women	75	3.02	0.46
Out-of-School Youths	75	3.15	0.42
Overall	150	3.09	0.44

Scale range 1–4; $M \geq 2.50$ indicates high participation

Mean scores for ANFE participation showed high engagement among rural women ($M = 3.02$, $SD = 0.46$) and out-of-school youths ($M = 3.15$, $SD = 0.42$), both above the 2.50 criterion for high participation.

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Moderate-to-high inclusion levels were observed across dimensions.

Table 3: Level of Social Inclusion and Overall Score

Dimension	Rural Women (M ± SD)	Out-of-School Youths (M ± SD)	Overall (M ± SD)
Economic Participation	2.78 ± 0.55	2.85 ± 0.52	2.82 ± 0.53
Civic Engagement	2.91 ± 0.49	2.96 ± 0.47	2.94 ± 0.48
Access to Social Services	2.95 ± 0.46	3.01 ± 0.44	2.98 ± 0.45
Sense of Belonging	2.92 ± 0.50	2.94 ± 0.48	2.93 ± 0.49
Overall Social Inclusion	2.89 ± 0.51	2.94 ± 0.48	2.92 ± 0.49

Scale range 1–4; $M \geq 2.50$ indicates moderate-to-high inclusion.

Participants also reported moderate to high levels of social inclusion across economic participation, civic engagement, access to social services, and sense of belonging - all scores exceeding the 2.50 decision rule.

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Table 4: Relationship between ANFE Participation and Social Inclusion

Pearson Product-Moment Correlations between ANFE Participation and Social Inclusion

Group	N	r	P	Interpretation
Rural Women	75	.53	<.001	Moderate positive, significant
Out-of-School Youths	75	.49	<.001	Moderate positive, significant

Hypotheses H_{01} and H_{02} rejected

Pearson correlation results indicated a significant positive relationship between ANFE participation and social inclusion for rural women ($r = .53$, $p < .001$) and out-of-school youths ($r = .49$, $p < .001$). Thus, H_{01} and H_{02} were rejected.

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Table 5: Comparison of social inclusion outcomes**Independent Samples t-Test for social inclusion outcomes**

Group	N	M	SD	T	Df	p
Rural Women	75	2.89	0.51	1.24	148	.217
Out of School Youths	75	2.94	0.48			

Hypothesis Ho3 not rejected (no significant difference)

An independent-samples t-test revealed no significant difference in social inclusion outcomes between rural women and out-of-school youths ($t = 1.24$, $p > .05$), leading to the failure to reject Ho3.

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the impact of Adult and Non-Formal Education (ANFE) on the social inclusion of rural women and out-of-school youths in the Local Government of Oyo State, Nigeria. The findings revealed a high level of ANFE participation among respondents ($M = 3.09$, $SD = 0.44$), which indicates strong engagement with programme activities across the selected centres. It confirms that ANFE programmes are perceived as relevant and accessible to marginalised populations in the study area. The slightly higher participation among out-of-school youths ($M = 3.15$) compared to rural women ($M = 3.02$) may reflect youths' stronger motivation for skill acquisition and employment opportunities. This finding aligns with previous studies (e.g., Yusuff, 2025), which found that engagement levels are high wherever programmes are functional, skill-oriented, and community-based. It confirms the argument that contextual relevance and flexibility are key factors of participation in non-formal education. This is also in line with Freire's (1970) notion that education becomes meaningful when it is tailored towards learners' real-life experiences.

The study found moderate to high levels of social inclusion (overall $M = 2.92$, $SD = 0.49$), with comparatively higher scores in civic engagement, access to social services, and sense of belonging, with slightly lower scores in economic participation. This reveals that ANFE is effective in enhancing awareness, participation, and social integration (Coombs & Ahmed, 1974), but its effect on economic outcomes is comparatively weaker (Levitas et al., 2007). This, according to Sen (2004), can be associated with barriers such as limited access to capital, labour market barriers, and poverty. The finding also corroborates Social Exclusion Theory (Sen, 2000), which views inclusion as multidimensional and transcends beyond income to access, participation, and belonging. The study found a significant relationship between ANFE participation and social inclusion among rural women ($r = .53$, $p < .001$). This is a notable effect size, indicating that ANFE accounts for a considerable proportion of the variation in women's inclusion outcomes. This

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corroborates the findings of Okoji and Ladeji (2023), who linked literacy to political participation and further explained that ANFE improves access to opportunities, supports social reintegration, and enhances agency and voice. The findings are in line with Human Capital Theory because ANFE equips women with literacy and vocational skills, socio-economic participation, and improves productivity. It also aligns with Freire's Pedagogy because it promotes conscientisation, enabling women to question and navigate structural inequalities such as gender norms. Thus, ANFE functions not only as an educational tool but as a transformative empowerment mechanism.

Regarding the relationship between ANFE and Social Inclusion among Out-of-School Youths, a moderate and significant positive relationship was found ($r = .49, p < .001$). Although it is slightly lower than that of rural women, the strength of the relationship remains practically meaningful, indicating that ANFE plays a critical role in youth inclusion. This finding supports Nwoke (2024), who expresses that ANFE reintegrates out-of-school youths. It also supports Anowor et al.'s (2025) view that ANFE prepares youth for employability through skills development. Similarly, Yusuff (2025) also maintains that ANFE reduces poverty. The implication is that ANFE serves as a second-chance education pathway that enables youths to acquire skills, improve employability, and reconnect socially (Coombs & Ahmed, 1974). This aligns strongly with Social Exclusion Theory, as ANFE expands participation pathways, opportunities, and capabilities.

In comparing Rural Women and Out-of-School Youths, the study found no significant difference in social inclusion outcomes between rural women and out-of-school youths ($t(148) = 1.24, p = .217$). This suggests that ANFE programmes provide equitable benefits across different marginalised groups. The finding extends existing literature by demonstrating that ANFE is not group-specific but rather a broad-based inclusion strategy. It also implies that programme design may not need heavy differentiation but should instead focus on quality, access, and relevance.

In summary, the correlations ($r \approx .50$) are moderate rather than strong; they are highly meaningful in social science research, especially in complex real-world contexts where multiple factors influence outcomes. This indicates that ANFE significantly contributes to social inclusion, but other factors, such as culture, infrastructure, poverty levels, and policy implementation, also influence it. Thus, ANFE should not be viewed as the only condition for full social inclusion.

Policy Implications

- Repositioning ANFE as a central pillar of inclusive development policy in the National Development Frameworks
- Aligning ANFE with Labour Market and Livelihood Needs
- Decentralisation of ANFE delivery systems and establishment of more community-based learning centres
- Improved coordination between federal, state, and local agencies
- Policies should encourage collaboration with non-governmental organisations (NGOs)

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that adult and non-formal education significantly contribute to social inclusion among rural women and out-of-school youths in Oyo State. The findings demonstrate that participation in ANFE programmes goes a long way in improving access to opportunities, civic engagement, and overall social integration. Though the relationship is moderate, it is statistically significant and practically meaningful. Based on the findings, the following recommendations are offered:

- Government at all levels should prioritise funding of adult and non-formal education
- Non-formal education should be expanded
- Community mobilisation and sensitization should be done through NNCAE to encourage participation.
- Curriculum should be reviewed from time to time to integrate livelihood and entrepreneurship education
- Establish monitoring frameworks focusing on inclusion outcomes.
- Foster partnerships with NGOs

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