

Learning English among Graduates-to-be: What can Motivate the Learners?

Mempelajari Bahasa Inggeris di Kalangan Graduan: Apa yang Dapat Memotivasikan Pelajar?

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Abstract: It is always a concern among graduates-to-be and fresh graduates if they will ever get their dream jobs after graduation. Despite their excellent academic results, English language skills are still required by most employers and these are one of the qualifications the employers look for. Realizing the importance of English language proficiency among graduates-to-be, the present study was conducted with the aim to investigate if the graduates-to-be of UiTM, Cawangan Pulau Pinang feel motivated to learn English for their employability and to examine if they also feel motivated to learn the language for future work use. A questionnaire was distributed randomly to UiTM, Cawangan Pulau Pinang degree students using convenience sampling method and 103 respondents returned it with no missing data. The results showed that most of the respondents believe that they feel motivated to learn English in order to secure good jobs and subsequently for work purposes after getting the jobs. For example, 47.6% of the respondents ($M= 4.36$, $SD= 0.712$) agreed that excellent English skills will guarantee them a better job opportunity, while 63.1% of the respondents ($M= 4.23$, $SD= 0.629$) admitted that learning English will help them to easily adapt themselves when entering the working world. Thus, it is evident that learning English and having linguistic competence and excellent performance in this language will benefit graduates-to-be.

Keywords: English language, motivation, employment;

Abstrak: Sering menjadi kebimbangan dalam kalangan bakal graduan dan graduan baru sama ada mereka akan mendapat pekerjaan impian mereka selepas tamat pengajian. Walaupun mempunyai keputusan akademik yang baik, kemahiran Bahasa Inggeris masih diperlukan oleh kebanyakan majikan dan ini adalah salah satu kelayakan yang dicari oleh majikan. Menyedari betapa pentingnya penguasaan Bahasa Inggeris di kalangan calon siswazah, kajian ini dilakukan dengan tujuan untuk menyiasat apakah bakal graduan UiTM, Cawangan Pulau Pinang merasa bermotivasi untuk belajar bahasa Inggeris untuk pekerjaan mereka dan untuk memeriksa apakah mereka juga merasa terdorong untuk belajar bahasa untuk kegunaan kerja masa depan. Borang soal selidik diedarkan secara rawak kepada pelajar peringkat ijazah UiTM, Cawangan Pulau Pinang menggunakan kaedah persampelan mudah (*convenience sampling*) dan 103 responden mengembalikannya tanpa ada data yang hilang. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa kebanyakan responden percaya bahawa mereka merasa terdorong untuk belajar Bahasa Inggeris untuk mendapatkan pekerjaan yang baik dan seterusnya untuk tujuan kerja-kerja setelah mendapat pekerjaan tersebut. Sebagai contoh, 47.6% responden

($M = 4.36$, $SP = 0.712$) bersetuju bahawa kemahiran berbahasa Inggeris yang sangat baik akan menjamin mereka peluang pekerjaan yang lebih baik, sementara 63.1% responden ($M = 4.23$, $SP = 0.629$) mengakui bahawa belajar bahasa Inggeris akan bantu mereka untuk menyesuaikan diri dengan mudah ketika memasuki dunia pekerjaan. Oleh itu, terbukti bahawa belajar Bahasa Inggeris dan mempunyai kecekapan linguistik dan prestasi cemerlang dalam bahasa ini akan memberi manfaat kepada bakal graduan.

Kata kunci: Bahasa Inggeris, motivasi, pekerjaan;

Introduction

For the past a few decades, the employment market has increasingly required graduates to compete, and they must acquire a range of talents to advertise their abilities and educational credentials (Kamaruddin et al., 2021). English language skill was regarded as a key contributing element to graduate employment in Malaysia, among several other reasons (Hiew et. al, 2021). It was reported in “English Proficiency Still a Big Problem for Many M’sian Grads” (2017) that Malaysia was placed at number 12 out of 72 countries with regard to English skills, based on a proficiency index conducted by Education First, which is a global organization founded in Sweden. Sani (2019) reveals that in its latest Job Outlook report released in January, 2019, an online job portal, Jobstreet.com mentioned that proficiency of English in Malaysia remains an issue of concern, with 64% of employers admitting that poor skills of the language was the second factor of the unemployment of fresh graduates. One of the requirements demanded by companies from their employees is communication skills particularly in English (Shafie & Nayan, 2010). This idea is also shared by Ting et. al (2017) as they claim that poor English command and communication skills are always considered to be the contributing factors for the high unemployment rate among graduates. Realizing how significant English proficiency is especially for jobseekers among fresh graduates, the present study was conducted for the purpose of identifying if graduates-to-be also perceive English proficiency as an important criterion in making them more marketable and desirable for employment. Also, the present study was implemented in order to discover if the graduates-to-be also feel motivated to learn English when they are aware of how English proficiency is needed in their jobs after they manage to secure employment.

Problem Statement

In a study conducted by Nair et. al (2012) on 70 staff from the private sector and 45 staff from the government linked companies (GLC’s), in response to the question, “Does the job market find the overall proficiency level of the new graduates adequate to the working need?”, it was discovered that the job market perceives the general English proficiency level of the new graduates as inadequate to the working need. However, Hiew et. al (2021) based on the results of their study, claim that no conclusive evidence could be ascertained to suggest English Language proficiency as the main determinant affecting employability since the highest number of employed and unemployed graduates were from the Intermediate and Upper Intermediate language proficiency range. Also, it is claimed by Hiew et. al (2021) that no definite association between the science graduates’ employment and their degree of English language competence has been shown in this study, with the correlation being questionable at best. Conversely, the results suggest that other criteria such as geographical area, regional economic rigour, university course programme matching to local career opportunities, personal resilience, and graduate mobility flexibility all play a role in the discussion on employability of graduates (Hiew et. al, 2021). However, Cheong et. al (2018) argue that graduates’ difficulty to find gainful jobs fast had nothing to do with their judgments of job and educational background mismatch, but the actual issues are related to deficiencies in English competency, expertise, and abilities. Clearly, English competency being mandatory for securing a job is still debatable and thus, it is unclear if English proficiency is regarded as an important criterion by university students which can be a motivational source for them to learn English and improve their English. Despite the views of the employers in the study conducted by Nair et. al. (2012) regarding the graduates not having adequate English proficiency, it is unknown whether such inadequacy was the result of the graduates not having any motivation to learn and improve their English for

preparing themselves for the working world or not. Therefore, to bridge this information gap, the present study collected data from some students of UiTM, Cawangan Pulau Pinang regarding their perception towards the importance of English for their employability and work use and to investigate whether these two factors could generate their motivation in learning English. Besides, according to Suhaili and Mohamad (2021), the importance of the English language and its application in the workplace appears to be overlooked by recent graduates. Thus, this idea seems to justify why the present study should be conducted in order for this issue to be extensively discussed.

It was noticed in the Malaysia Employers Federation (MEF) Salary Surveys 2016 that more than 90% of the respondents suggested the need for graduates to develop their English competency in order to become more attractive to employers (“English Proficiency Still a Big Problem for Many M’sian Grads”, 2017). Despite English language proficiency being claimed as an important criterion considered by employers before hiring someone, it is reported by Sani (2019) that Sarah Deverall, the director of the British Council Malaysia, argued that English expertise has never been more significant in the digital age to obtain employment. This idea seems to contradict the many ideas of most employers regarding the importance of English proficiency for local graduates in order to secure jobs (Nair et. al., 2012) and thus this issue should be investigated further for the objective of discovering if English skills are really needed for employment. Therefore, the present study was conducted by collecting responses from graduates-to-be as compared to employers in order to identify if graduates-to-be perceive English proficiency as important for them to get jobs or not.

Research Objectives

The objective of a particular study basically serves as the direction of the study that leads to its destination or more specifically, the study’s outcome. As for the present study, it attempted to achieve the following objectives:

1. to discover if graduates-to-be of UiTM, Cawangan Pulau Pinang are motivated to learn English for their employability.
2. to discover if graduates-to-be of UiTM, Cawangan Pulau Pinang are motivated to learn English for their work use.

Research Questions

A research is incomplete without any issue to

unravel or question to answer that determines what the research revolves around. Thus, the present study intends to seek the answers to the following research questions:

1. Are graduates-to-be of UiTM, Cawangan Pulau Pinang motivated to learn English for their employability?
2. Are graduates-to-be of UiTM, Cawangan Pulau Pinang motivated to learn English for their work use?

Significance of the Study

This study expects to offer supplementary knowledge to the literature of the concept of motivation in the field of English language learning. The responses provided by the respondents can be the evidence if English language proficiency is viewed as an important indicator of graduates-to-be’s marketability and ability to work efficiently after they graduate. The insights of the research are also expected to guide graduates-to-be in terms of the use of English at workplaces after they successfully secure jobs. Besides, the educators especially university instructors can also benefit from the present study with respect to assisting their students or graduates with preparatory courses for workplace, language proficiency courses, industrial training and so on.

Literature Review

English Proficiency of Graduates for Employability

Shivakumar and Sharma (2017) state that several workplace surveys indicate that communication in English continues to be one of the employers’ most requested skills and employers expect the students completing their higher education in India to have high level of communicative competency. The findings of a study conducted by Zainuddin et. al (2019) suggest that employers believe that the ability to communicate in English fluently is crucial for graduates to be hired as indicated by the result that all the employers interviewed regarded English as an entry to employment. Also, it was discovered in this research that for the industry staff interviewed, they reported that because the abilities of workers represent the organization’s image, job applicants who can speak in comprehensible English are perceived more employable. English proficiency would enhance the employability of job seekers, specifically for fresh graduates (Sani, 2019). It was reported by Sani (2019) that the manager of Jobstreet.com Malaysia, Gan Bock Herm admitted that communicative skills are among the most important five criteria employers pay attention

to, and that by enhancing those skills and having excellent proficiency of English, it would improve a jobseeker's employability chances, particularly for fresh graduates.

English Proficiency of Graduates for Work Use

In terms of the need for English proficiency for work use, a study that investigated the employers' opinions on the significance of English competence and communicative skills for graduates to be considered for employment in the Malaysian private sector was conducted by Ting et. al (2017). It was discovered that there are three reasons why English proficiency is important; 1) for companies that practice English as a working language, especially for the globally-oriented ones, 2) for certain categories of job such as marketing, customer service, bank frontline and insurance jobs, and 3) for job promotion and career advancement. Regarding the use of English in the workplace, it was also highlighted by an employer interviewed in the study by Zainuddin et. al (2019) that due to the fact that they deal with a global client base, English is the medium of communication in multinational corporations. Besides, in the same study, a human resource manager clarified that during presentations or discussions, English is important for staff to interact, debate and share their ideas. Besides, the nature of work has evolved significantly, even in a professional area like engineering, and it was therefore highlighted that today's engineers cannot just sit behind a desk to create a product (Zainuddin et. al, 2019). Rather, they also, generally have to communicate in English, in order to be able to launch and promote their ideas and products (Zainuddin et. al, 2019). It is concluded that if workers have a poor understanding of the language, it would be challenging for them to work efficiently in their job (Zainuddin et. al, 2019).

Employment as a Motivational Drive for Learning English

Among the pioneers of the field, motivation and second language learning, Gardner and Lambert (1972) differentiate "instrumental motivation" from other types of motivation which refers to when a language learner has a practical aim, such as to get a job, pass a test, to meet educational requirements, to use a language in the learner's job, to use the language on a vacation in a country, and to read useful materials in the target language. Azar and Mohd Sahar (2020) propose that English proficiency is an important tool in Malaysia for gaining jobs. It is for this justification that

students are educated to have sufficient communication skills in English and motivation can play a crucial role in pushing students to become competent speakers of English (Azar & Mohd Sahar, 2020). A study conducted by Daif-Allah and Aljumah (2020) on 247 Saudi university students, it was discovered that the respondents in majority, 82.93% agreed with this statement in the questionnaire, "Learning English is a requirement in most good jobs" (item 11) and 89.04% of them agreed with item 12, "People who know English will have a better chance of getting a good job."

Methodology

Research Design

For descriptive research method, survey research is frequently performed, and surveys are used for sampling data from respondents that represent a population (Williams, 2007). The survey, which is commonly utilized in the social sciences includes using either a closed ended instrument or an open-ended one (Williams, 2007). As for the present study, a descriptive method was used which involved a close-ended questionnaire, designed by the researchers based on the information gathered from the literature regarding English proficiency requirement for employability and work use.

Respondents

This research was conducted with the voluntary participation of 103 undergraduate students from UiTM, Cawangan Pulau Pinang who contributed to the data of the study. This number of respondents for this research was decided upon after evaluating the responses received from the students to the questionnaire. Incomplete responses were deemed disqualified for the research. Besides, due to time constraints, the returned questionnaires were collected within the data collection period of two weeks only which could limit the returning of responses.

Sampling Method

The sampling method employed was convenience sampling, a method which belongs to the category of non-probability sampling technique. After the execution of the convenience sampling for the first stage of the sampling method, the respondents were requested to share the questionnaire sent using a Google form link with their fellow undergraduates from other classes for snowballing sampling to take place.

Instrument

There was one questionnaire designed for the present study which consisted of 20 items. Each item was measured mainly in the form of percentages in terms of

the respondents' levels of agreement or disagreement with the self-reporting statements included in the questionnaire. The levels were represented by a 5-point Likert scale as follows: Strongly Disagree = 1; Disagree = 2; Undecided / Unsure = 3; Agree = 4 and Strongly Agree = 5.

Data Collection Method

The questionnaire was distributed through WhatsApp and Telegram applications to the students. The respondents were given two weeks to answer the questionnaire through the Google form link shared on the messaging applications. Using an online questionnaire, the respondents could answer the questionnaire anytime and anywhere. Upon completion of the questionnaire, the data from the respondents was gathered and the data was collected in one stage only which means there was no pre-test or post-test involved in this study.

Data Analysis Method

The data from the Google form completed by the respondents was collected and compiled in the Excel template generated from the form. The data was analyzed and converted from frequency counts on Google form into percentages using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Descriptive, numerical analysis was also performed using this software and data such as mean and standard deviation scores were extracted. Then, the data was transformed into charts using Google Spreadsheet and Microsoft Word.

Findings And Discussion

Internal Consistency of the Questionnaire for Reliability Coefficient for the Instrument Items

A pilot study was conducted for testing the reliability of the items in the questionnaire with 30 respondents. The reliability of the instrument measured was based on Bobko (2001) and Sekaran and Bougie (2010) who propose the criterion of 0.70 as a minimally acceptable alpha value. For the present study, the Cronbach's alpha value of 0.946 was generated from the test and this value represented an acceptable and reliable value that suggested the questionnaire was reliable to be utilized for the present study.

Table 1. Cronbach's Alpha

Cronbach's Alpha	Number of items
0.946	20

Respondents' Demographic Details

Chart 1, 2 and 3 present the respondents' demographic data with respect to their gender, age and program. The majority of the respondents were female which accounted for 58.3% of the respondents, while male respondents were represented by 41.7% as shown in Chart 1. Based on Chart 2, the respondents aged between 21-23 years old dominated the sample with 70.9% respondents, while only 1% of the respondents were in the age category of 24-26 years old. As for the respondents' programs, 35.9%, 33%, 18.4%, 7.8% and 4.9% belong to Electrical Engineering, Hotel Management, Mechanical Engineering, Civil Engineering and Chemical Engineering respectively (see Chart 3).

Chart 1. Respondents' gender

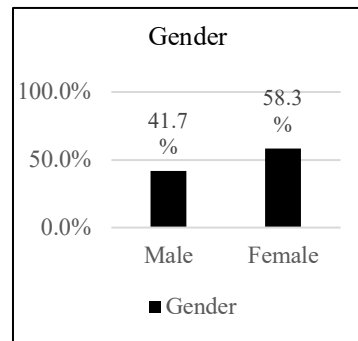


Chart 2. Respondents' age

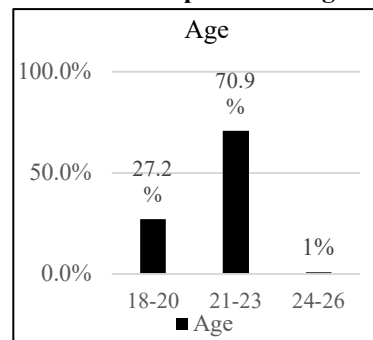
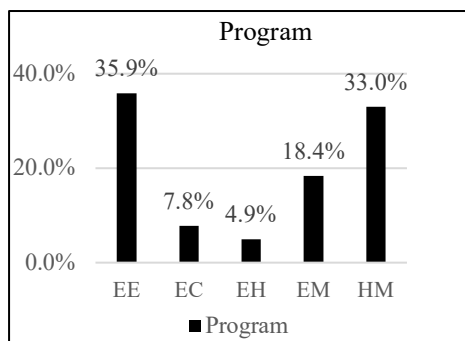


Chart 3. Respondents' program



Research Question 1: Are graduates-to-be of UiTM, Cawangan Pulau Pinang motivated to learn English for their employability?

To answer Research Question 1, the data from item 1-10 was examined. Based on Table 2, the majority of the respondents, 52.4% (M= 4.38, SD= 0.702) admitted that they are motivated to learn English because good English will assist them in obtaining a job (item 1). Also, most of the respondents, 51.5% agreed with item 2 that most companies are very concerned about the English language of the candidates during job interviews and this fact motivates them to learn English (item 2). 47.6% and 45.6% of the respondents agreed with items, 3 and 4 respectively that excellent English skills will ensure them a better job opportunity and poor communication skills in English will limit the chances of recruitment during job interviews. Items, 5, 6 and 7 are represented by 50.5%, 55.35 and 56.3% of the respondents respectively and these percentages indicate that most of the respondents believe that English proficiency is compulsory for finding a high-paid job, college education system should place an emphasis on English skills required for graduates' employability and English competency is vital for graduates to get hired quicker. The biggest percentage, 60.2% for the response option, "agree" belongs to item 9 ("I need to focus more on learning English as most companies use it in the employment sector") and this implies that the majority of the respondents are motivated to learn English to prepare themselves for their working world.

Table 2. Motivation in Learning English for Employability

No	Items	Mean (M)	Std. Dev (SD)	Response options				
				SD	D	U	A	SA
Feeling motivated to learn English for job employability				%	%	%	%	%
1	I think I need to learn English because good English will help me get a job.	4.38	0.702	1.9	0	1.0	52.4	44.7
2	Most of the companies are very concerned about the English language of the candidates during job interviews, so I must learn English.	4.43	0.620	1.0	0	1.0	51.5	46.6
3	Excellent English skills will ensure me a better job opportunity.	4.36	0.712	1.0	1.0	4.9	47.6	45.6
4	Poor communication skills in English will limit the chances of recruitment during job interviews.	3.78	0.989	1.9	10.7	18.4	45.6	23.3
5	I think good English language skills are mandatory for finding a high paid job.	4.11	0.815	0	5.8	10.7	50.5	33.0
6	I think the college education system must focus on English skills required for graduates' employability.	4.23	0.675	0	1.9	7.8	55.3	35.0
7	I think the proficiency of English language is important for graduates to get employed quicker.	4.06	0.777	1.0	2.9	12.6	56.3	27.2
8	Competition in getting a job is really high, thus having good English is very important for employability.	4.31	0.792	1.9	1.0	5.8	46.6	44.7
9	I need to focus more on learning English as most companies use it in the employment sector.	4.26	0.641	1.0	0	4.9	60.2	34.0
10	Being good at English will increase my confidence during interviews.	4.41	0.648	1.0	0	2.9	49.5	46.6

Research Question 2: Are graduates-to-be of UiTM, Cawangan Pulau Pinang motivated to learn English for their work use?

For Research Question 2, the data from item 11-20 was analysed (see Table 3). Based on the results, 99.1% (response options: agree, 64.1% + strongly agree, 35%) of the respondents agreed that they get motivated to

learn English in order to get a lot of benefits such as communication smoothness with people when working after they graduate (item 11). A similar percentage, 63.1% is represented by both items, 12 and 13 as the respondents selected the response option, “agree” to these items and this indicate that they believe that learning English will help them to easily adapt themselves when entering the work field and English is very important in order for them to acquire effective work experience. 58.3% and 51.5% of the respondents agreed with items, 14 and 15 and these figures show that the respondents in majority admit that they need to learn English because understanding English language well can help them to get their job done easily after entering the working world and when a company runs a meeting in English, it will be easy for them to understand the content of the meeting. The smallest percentage, 49.5% for the response option, “agree” belongs to item, 16 where this percentage still represents the majority of the respondents who believe that they must learn English due to the fact that most paperwork and tutorial manuals at the workplace are in English. 54.4%, 51.5% and 56.3% are the percentages of most of the respondents who agreed with items, 17, 18 and 19 respectively and they obviously admit that they must learn English because lack of understanding of English can lead to misunderstandings about work, mastering English well will make them more qualified to be promoted at their company when they enter the working world, and for being proficient in English at work. The biggest percentage, 65.0% (M= 4.27, SD= 0.597) for the response option, “agree” belongs to item 20 which proves that the respondents mostly believe that having English language skills can improve their career in the working world.

No	Items	Mean (M)	Std. Dev (SD)	Response options					
				SD	D	U	A	SA	
	Feeling motivated to learn English for work use					%	%	%	%
11	I learn English in order to get a lot of benefits such as ease of communication with people when working after I graduate.	4.32	0.581	1.0	0	0	64.1	35.0	
12	I think learning English will help me to easily adapt myself when entering the work field.	4.23	0.629	1.0	0	4.9	63.1	31.1	
13	I think learning English is very important in order to	4.19	0.643	1.0	0	6.8	63.1	29.1	

	get effective work experience.							
14	I think I need to learn English because when I understand English language well, it can help me to get my job done easily after entering the working world.	4.28	0.648	1.0	0	4.9	58.3	35.9
15	After I get a job, when a company runs a meeting in English, it will be easy for me to understand the content of the meeting, and because of this I need to learn English.	4.37	0.714	1.9	0	1.9	51.5	44.7
16	Most paperwork and tutorial manuals at the workplace are in English, so I must learn English.	4.45	0.622	1.0	0	1.0	49.5	48.5
17	Lack of understanding of English can lead to misunderstandings about work, and thus, I must learn English to prepare myself for the working world.	4.40	0.616	1.0	0	1.0	54.4	43.7
18	Mastering English well will make me more qualified to be promoted at my company when I enter the working world, thus I must learn English.	4.27	0.703	1.0	0	8.7	51.5	38.8
19	To be proficient in English at work, I think I should learn English since I have started my studies at the university because learning takes time.	4.16	0.814	1.9	2.9	5.8	56.3	33.0
20	I think having English language skills can improve my career in the working world.	4.27	0.597	1.0	0	1.9	65.0	32.0

Conclusion

To conclude, most of the respondents are motivated to learn English in order to prepare themselves before entering the working world in terms of making themselves marketable with their English proficiency before getting jobs and making themselves efficient for their jobs after they manage to secure employment. The respondents in majority apparently believe that English proficiency is important, and they realize why English skills are needed for their jobs after they graduate. Besides, in terms of equipping themselves with English competency for securing jobs, the respondents are aware of the needs and

requirements by most companies and organizations in hiring employees, and thus, they are willing to learn English to meet the needs and requirements. Obviously, the respondents in majority have positive views towards learning English and mastering it for their benefits later after they graduate from the university. As claimed by Yusof et. al (2018), graduates who are unable to speak in English may struggle to sell themselves, since relying on technical capabilities only are inadequate, especially if they are seeking an international market. It is evident that English skills can open more job opportunities for graduates by not limiting them to their own locality only and this idea is parallel with the majority opinion of the present study's respondents.

Since most respondents believe that in order to be proficient in English at work, they should learn English since the beginning of their studies at the university because learning takes time, it is therefore reasonable to propose that the English curriculum at the universities is designed to for the purpose of making their graduates more desirable to their future employers. Ting et. al (2017) argue that it is essential to use English in the curriculum to offer an English-speaking atmosphere for Malaysian university graduates who have the tendency to speak their ethnic languages to each other. Also, it is suggested by Ting et. al (2017) that for the development of good communication skills, English proficiency is required, and this issue needs to be studied for better comprehension of the reasonable areas for students to learn in order for them to be capable of using the language for necessary communicative purposes in the working world. Obviously, based on the data of the present study, the students are motivated to learn English with respect to their future employment and thus the university should take actions in assisting them to achieve their aims at being proficient in English by providing the students the necessary sources, materials, tools and so on for them to become more motivated to learn English. As suggested by Kamaruddin et al. (2021) continuous enhancement of graduate employability programmes is required to guarantee that they can continue to be a powerful tool for resolving graduate employability difficulties in the future.

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