



TOWARDS THE INTEGRATION OF CULTURE INTO TEACHING ENGLISH IN UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOLS: TEACHERS' CONCERNS AND EXPECTATIONS

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Abstract. As a part of educational reform in upper secondary education, intercultural competence has been identified as a goal of foreign language teaching to enable the Vietnamese young people to work and study in globalized environment. In fact, culture has been incorporated in the expected English teaching curriculum for general education. Prior the change of curriculum at national scale, this study aimed to explore teachers' perceptions of integrating intercultural competence into teaching English at upper secondary level. The quantitative and qualitative data collected from 101 teachers of English in a province of the Mekong Delta, indicated that they took the four aspects into considerations, namely learners' learning strategies and motivations, teachers' intercultural instructions, course books and curriculum, and management aspects. For better practice of intercultural integration, the teachers had high expectation for pedagogical training to enhance their intercultural competence and intercultural integrating pedagogies. From the findings, some pedagogical implications were made to foster the feasibility of intercultural integration in teaching English in upper secondary level.

Keywords. educational reform, intercultural competence, intercultural integration, teachers' perceptions, upper secondary education

1. Introduction

Culture is defined and classified differently in the literature. From the view of social psychology, Hofstede (1984) defines, "[c]ulture is the *collective programming of the mind* which distinguishes the members of one category of people from another" (p. 51). Viewing culture statically, Brooks (1997) conceptualizes culture as the literature or civilization of a country and culture, so culture comprises "big C" culture and "small c" culture or visible and invisible culture. In a dynamic and socially interactive manner, Liddicoat, Papademetre, Scarino, and Kohler (2003) consider culture in relation to the process of socialization and language as a means of culture transmission. In fact, Liddicoat (2002) approves the mutual connection between language and culture because "culture shapes what we say, when we say it, and how we say it" (p.5). For this intricate relationship, culture is an integral part of language teaching.

When culture is viewed dynamically, building (inter)cultural competence must be an active process of social engagement. In fact, cultural competence is defined as language-culture

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ability acquires within native societies and intercultural competence (IC) denotes a set of abilities facilitating effective and appropriate cross-cultural communication (Fantini, Arias-Galicia and Guay, 2001). Together with communicative competence (CC), language learners need to develop IC to perform effective and appropriate interaction with people of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds and this complex competence is coined in the term of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) (Fantini, 2006). In this view, Fantini et al. (2001), Liddicoat (2002), and Liddicoat et al. (2003) propose that culture should be included in language lesson to facilitate learners' communication. However, Krashen (1988) argue that language classroom is not a good place to acquire either language or culture. Guest (2002) and Baker (2015) claim that the inclusion of overt cultural facts and ignorance of dynamic feature of culture in foreign language classrooms are likely the roots of stereotyping and even racism due to simplification, over-generalization, misconception, and exaggeration of the differences. As discussed, scholars have different views of intercultural integration, but in light of dynamic culture, culture should be integrated as an integral part of language lessons with specific cultural input and intercultural language activities to build learners' ICC.

In response to this trend, teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) in upper secondary education has aimed to enable learners to communicate with people of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. As a matter of fact, one of the objectives of the new curriculum for teaching EFL was to enable the students to communicate independently and confidently in multilingual and multicultural environment (MOET, 2012). To achieve this goal, a variety of cultural input from foreign and home cultures was added in the pilot course book series of Tieng Anh 10, 11, and 12 (Hoanget al., 2014). In an evaluation of intercultural input in an English pilot course book (Tieng Anh 10, Volume 1), Lai (2016) proved the proportion of home, target and international culture was 51%, 31% and 18% respectively.

Prior the change in EFL teaching curriculum, it was important to study teachers' concerns and expectations in terms of integrating intercultural contents into their teaching, which are specified in two research questions:

1. What were the English teachers in upper secondary schools concerned about the integration of culture into their teaching?
2. What were their expectations for the better practice of integrating culture into their teaching?

In this study, teachers' concerns and expectations meant what the teachers perceived as the constraints of and suggestions for the intercultural integration into EFL teaching on the basis of their professional contexts.

The fact that teachers faced many constraints in integrating culture in language teaching have been proven. The two striking constraints were the limitation of curriculum and teachers' instruction (Lázár, 2007; Zhou, 2011; Nilmanee&Soontornwipast, 2014; andKarabinar&Guler,

2015). Regarding to curricular factors, course objectives, time distribution, and teaching materials were noticeable and typical for top-down educational system. The other limitation was teachers' intercultural instruction, which was specified as teachers' intercultural integrating pedagogy, intercultural knowledge, and intercultural experience (Lázár, 2007; Ho, 2011; Zhou, 2011; Nguyen, 2013; and Nilmanee&Soontornwipast, 2014). Besides, learner aspects, namely the lack of motivation and low language proficiency to take part in intercultural language activities to develop ICC should also be considered (Lázár, 2007; Ho, 2011; Zhou, 2011; and Nguyen, 2013).

As shown in the previous studies, common hindrances to intercultural integration are related to teachers' instructions, learners' learning, and curriculum. Curriculum is a broad aspect; it is necessary to specify what it means in this research. Course objectives, content, teachers' instructions, and evaluation are often considered as curricular elements (Hassan, 2013). However, to shift the focus on teachers' instructions and the roles of the course books, it is necessary to recategorize the four curricular aspects as (1) teachers' instructions which relate teachers' IC and intercultural teaching pedagogies, (2) curriculum and course books which specify the language and culture content and how to exploit it, (3) management aspects which cover educational and social factors, namely testing, time distribution, class size, language and culture environment, and so forth. Lastly but importantly, teachers' perceptions of the negative effects of intercultural integration as Krashen (1988), Guest (2002), and Baker (2015) suggested should be considered especially at the early time of intercultural incorporation.

2. Methodology

Considering the methods applied in the previous studies and accessibility of data resources, this research used a Likert 5-point-scale questionnaire of 23 items with two open-ended questions. Of them, 15 items addressing five areas of teachers' concerns were classified as (1) curriculum and course books, (2) teachers' instructions, (3) learners' learning, (4) management aspects, and (5) negative influence of intercultural integration. The last 8 items described teachers' expectations in terms of (1) curriculum and course books, (2) teachers' instructions, and (3) management aspects. Two open-ended questions explored more insightful information about the concerns and expectations of the teachers to back up and modify quantitative data from the questionnaire.

3. Data collection and analysis

The questionnaire was piloted by 52 teachers in the Mekong Delta with positive reliability for teachers' concerns and expectations ($\alpha = .772$ and $.816$ respectively). The final questionnaire was delivered to 190 upper secondary English teachers in Tra Vinh, a rural province of the Me-

kong Delta, via emails and got qualified responses from 101 teachers. A reliability analysis was applied with positive results for both sections ($\alpha = .739$ and $.783$). For quantitative data analysis, simple statistics for reliability, frequency, percentages, mean score of each item, and average mean score of each cluster were applied with the use of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.

Open-ended responses were analysed deductively and inductively. Screened data were put into the predetermined categories which were relevant to clusters in the questionnaire. New categories were added for out-of-category responses. Any of teachers' ideas which restated items in the questionnaire were marked as *redundant* and reported optionally to clarify or complement quantitative data. One time each response was coded, it made an *entry*. Entries of the same category or sub-category was accumulated for frequency (*Freq.*). Examples of qualitative data coding for the teachers' concerns are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Examples of coding data for teachers' concerns from the open-ended question

Evidence/responses	Categorized	Sub-categorized	Coding	Evaluated
T46. The (intercultural) content in the course books is not diversified. Students' level of language proficiency is low.	Course books	Lack of intercultural contents	1 CiC	Redundant
	Learners' learning	Low language proficiency	1 LLP	Redundant
T50. The cultural content in the course book was rare.	Course books	Lack of intercultural contents	2 CiC	Redundant
T23. I don't know to choose what cultures to teach. (Vietnam or foreign cultures)	Teachers' instructions	Teachers' IC teaching pedagogy	1 PiC	Pre-determined categorized
T4. Conventional attitudes of parents in favour for language learning for testing will discourage the implementation of intercultural integration.	Disregard from social members		1 SDs	New category
<i>Total: 4 responses</i>			<i>5 entries</i>	

4. Findings

This part presents the findings regarding teachers' concerns and expectations in intercultural integration into teaching English in upper secondary schools based on their responses to the questionnaire with open-ended questions.

5. Teachers' Concerns

Quantitative data from teachers' questionnaire confirmed that teachers were concerned about learners' learning, curriculum and course books, management aspects, and teachers' instructions ($M = 3.67$; $M = 3.63$; $M = 3.43$; and $M = 3.10$ respectively), and they did not take the negative influence of intercultural integration into account ($M = 2.35$) (see Table 2).

Table 2. Means of teachers' concerns about intercultural integration

Teachers' concerns	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean
Learners' learning						3.67
C7. Students' language proficiency is not good enough to participate in intercultural language activities.	1 1.0%	8 7.9%	11 10.9%	64 63.4%	17 16.8%	3.87
C8. Students lack motivation to participate in intercultural language activities because they have to focus on their language learning.	5 5.0%	19 18.8%	10 9.9%	58 57.4%	9 8.9%	3.46
Curriculum and course books						3.63
C1. Cultural contents in English course books are not rich enough.	2 2.0%	13 12.9%	14 13.9%	61 60.4%	11 10.9%	3.66
C2. Course book activities are designed to practice language skills.	1 1.0%	8 7.9%	10 9.9%	78 77.2%	4 4.0%	3.76
C3. Course book activities do not focus on building students' ICC.	3 3.0%	13 12.9%	23 22.8%	57 56.4%	5 5.0%	3.48
Management aspects						3.43
C9. Students lack intercultural resources and environment to practise intercultural skills.	1 1.0%	3 3.0%	2 2.0%	60 59.4%	35 34.7%	4.24
C10. Integrating culture into teaching English requires more teaching time.	2 2.0%	20 19.8%	7 6.9%	64 63.4%	8 7.9%	3.55
C11. Integrating culture into teaching English doesn't contribute to test scores.	6 5.9%	52 51.5%	16 15.8%	23 22.8%	4 4.0%	2.74
C15. ICC testing can hardly be done.	4 4.0%	17 16.8%	31 30.7%	48 47.5%	1 1.0%	3.24
Teachers' instructions						3.10

C4. Teachers are not confident with their intercultural knowledge and experience.	3 3.0%	25 24.8%	24 23.8%	44 43.6%	5 5.0%	3.23
C5. Teachers are not confident with their teaching method in integrating culture into teaching English.	3 3.0%	26 25.7%	27 26.7%	41 40.6%	4 4.0%	3.17
C6. Teachers do not accept the new workload in their teaching.	7 6.9%	41 40.6%	12 11.9%	39 38.6%	2 2.0%	2.88
Negative influence of intercultural integration						2.35
C12. Intercultural teaching hinders students' linguistic accuracy like grammar and pronunciation.	6 5.9%	55 54.5%	20 19.8%	19 18.8%	1 1.0%	2.54
C13. Intercultural teaching causes bias, stereotypes, ethnocentrism, or xenocentrism.	7 6.9%	59 58.4%	21 20.8%	14 13.9%		2.42
C14. Intercultural teaching contributes to the student's loss of cultural identity.	14 13.9%	73 72.3%	5 5.0%	8 7.9%	1 1.0%	2.10

As presented above, of the four aspects, learner's learning and curriculum were of teachers' considerable concerns. In terms of learner constraints, the teachers thought that learners' low level of language proficiency would hinder teachers from intercultural teaching (M C7 = 3.87). Also, learners were not willing to participate in intercultural language activities because they had to focus on their language learning (M C8 = 3.46). Second to learner aspect, curriculum aspect received great consideration from teachers (M = 3.63). Indeed, teachers were concerned about the lack of intercultural contents (M C1 = 3.66) and intercultural activities (M C2 = 3.76) or kinds of activities building students' ICC (M C3 = 3.48).

The third consideration, addressing issue of management, obtained a positive mean score (M = 3.43). For testing, with a rather low mean score on the non-impact of intercultural integration on language testing (M C11 = 2.74), 57.4 % of teachers did not believe in its negative effects on students' test scores. Besides, teachers had rather neutral attitude to the feasibility of IC testing (M C15 = 3.24). Regarding the two other management factors, intercultural environment and class size, the teachers thought that the former was a bigger issue (M C9 = 4.24) than the latter (M C15 = 3.24).

As the last aspect, teachers did not find themselves had many difficulties with intercultural teaching (M = 3.10). Interestingly, the teachers were not likely to deny their responsibility of intercultural integration (M C6 = 2.88). They had rather ambivalent attitudes of self-assessing their own IC (M C4 = 3.23) and intercultural teaching pedagogies (M C5 = 3.17).

For the qualitative data, seven of teachers' responses are selected and categorized for analysis as in Table 3.

Table 3. Summary of teachers' concerns in terms of intercultural integration

Category	Sub-categories	Freq.	Examples teachers' responses
Curriculum and course books	Supplementary materials	2	"I am not provided with any materials related to intercultural integration, so how can I add culture to my lessons."
			"Intercultural contents in the course books are not rich and I don't have any access to any materials for culture integration."
Teachers' instructions	Teachers' pedagogy	1	"I don't know for sure what aspects of culture and whose culture should be added into my English lessons."
Learners' learning	Students' language	1	"Mixed-ability class is a big problem."
	Students' IC	1	"Most of intercultural contents are unfamiliar to my students, so they are not motivated to learn."
	Students' learning	1	"My students are not used to self-studying and exploring cultures."
Others	Parents' expectations	1	"Parents may oppose to intercultural integration because they believe it is time-consuming and useless to students' language learning and testing."

From the responses, it could be said that teachers had difficulties with intercultural teaching materials, intercultural instructions, learners' and parents' expectations. First, for the curriculum and course books, they claimed that they did not have access to materials that supported intercultural integration. Secondly, in terms of pedagogy, one teacher could not define the cultural input to incorporate in EFL lessons. Thirdly, of learner constraints, some teachers raised the issue of mixed-ability class, students' unfamiliarity to foreign cultures and poor self-study habits. Finally, teachers were worried about parents' disapproval to intercultural integration because they did not think it contributed to testing scores and language learning.

6. Teachers' Expectations

Mean scores of teachers' expectations of curriculum, teachers' instructions, and management aspects are presented in Table 4. Teachers had high expectations regarding to

improve their own instructions, curriculum and course books, and management aspects (M = 4.08, 3.90, and 3.88 respectively).

Table 4. Means of teachers' expectations for intercultural integration

Items	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean
Teachers' instructions						4.08
E3. Teachers should be trained to develop their IC.	2 2%		8 7.9%	65 64.4%	26 25.7%	4.12
E4. Teachers should be trained to develop their intercultural integrating skills.	3 3%	5 3%	5 3%	61 60.4%	27 26.7%	4.03
E5. Teachers should be helped to explore intercultural teaching materials.	3 3%	4 4%	3 3%	62 61.4%	29 28.7%	4.09
Curriculum and course books						3.90
E1. More intercultural activities should be introduced in the course books.	2 2%	3 3%	7 6.9%	71 70.3%	18 17.8%	3.99
E2. Intercultural activities should be integrated with language skill activities.		1 1%	11 10.9%	77 76.2%	12 11.9%	3.99
E6. Intercultural objectives should be officially recognized.		6 5.9%	24 23.8%	62 61.4%	9 8.9%	3.73
Management aspects						3.88
E7. Class size should be reduced to involve the students more.	2 2%	7 6.9%	7 6.9%	50 49.5%	35 34.7%	4.08
E8. ICC should be a part of language testing.		10 9.9%	20 19.8%	63 62.4%	8 7.9%	3.68

As shown in Table 4, the teachers had the highest expectations for professional development, teachers expected to improve their IC, intercultural integrating skills, and ability to explore intercultural teaching materials (M E3 = 4.12, M E4 = 4.03, and M E5 = 4.09 respectively). In terms of curriculum, the teachers expected more intercultural input (M E1 = 3.99) and intercultural language teaching activities (M E2 = 3.99) provided in the course books. More importantly, they approved that intercultural objectives should be officially recognized (M E6 = 3.73). It was too early to discuss about ICC testing, but teachers had rather positive

attitudes towards the feasibility of ICC testing ($M E8 = 3.68$). Lastly, most of the teachers expected for smaller class size to enhance the engagement of everyone in classes ($M E7 = 4.08$).

As for IC teaching expectations, 24 teachers gave their responses, which are categorized and presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Teachers' expectations from the open-ended questions

Category	Sub-categories	Freq	Examples teachers' responses
Intercultural environment	Intercultural activities	9	"Students should participate in culture exchange programs."
	Foreign teachers	6	"We should invite foreign teachers to share class teaching to create intercultural environment."
Intercultural teaching	When	3	"We must include culture in teaching right now." "Intercultural integration should be included since students are in primary schools."
	What	1	"Issues causing cultural conflicts should be introduced first."
	How	5	"Intercultural integration should be brief and natural." "Intercultural integration should be adjusted to students' levels." "Intercultural integration must include intercultural practices." "ICC testing is a must because without testing the students are not motivated to study."

As presented in Table 5, 15 teachers called for creating intercultural environment for the students to achieve IC through extracurricular activities such as joining cultural exchange programs, celebrating intercultural events and having foreign teachers to teach in their classes. In addition, they agreed that intercultural integration should be an integral part of EFL curriculum even for young learners in primary schools. They also suggested some tips for IC teaching. For example, culture integration should be short, natural, and suitable to the students' levels. Moreover, intercultural integration should involve practicing and testing for its best efficacy. It was also noticeable that teachers stressed on the practicality of intercultural teaching by prioritizing the issues which might cause embarrassment or even conflicts to help students to avoid communication breakdown.

7. Discussion and Implications

As previously mentioned, hindrances in integrating culture into teaching EFL in upper secondary schools come from learners' learning, curriculum and course books, teachers' instructions and management factors. The result of this study is in alignment with those of the others (Lázár, 2007; Zhou, 2011; Ho, 2011; Nguyen, 2013; Nilmanee&Soontornwipast, 2014; and Karabinar&Guler, 2015).

Learner aspect received the deepest concern from the participant teachers. First, lack of efficient language proficiency was of teachers' greatest concern. While Lázár (2007), Zhou (2011), Nilmanee and Soontornwipast (2014), and Karabinar and Guler (2015) did not recognize this constraint, the two researchers in Vietnam, Ho(2011) and Nguyen(2013) congruently proved that learners' low language proficiency was the main constraint of intercultural integration. This belief went against the intercultural language teaching principle that confirms the early effect of intercultural integration (Liddicoat et al. 2003; Newton, Yates, Shearn, and Nowitzki, 2010). Secondly, similar to the others, the participating teachers assumed that learners had rather uncertain attitude towards intercultural learning (M = 3.46). Teachers integrated culture into teaching EFL to motivate learners or facilitate language learning and teaching but they thought that the students were not willing to study culture because they gave culture learning an inferior position to language learning and focused on studying language for their exam (Lázár, 2007; Zhou, 2011; Nguyen, 2013; and Nilmanee&Soontornwipast, 2014). In brief, teachers assumed that learners' low language proficiency and motivation hindered their intercultural integration.

Besides learner constraint, curriculum aspect is a common issue in many studies (Lázár, 2007; Zhou, 2011; Nguyen, 2013; and Karabinar&Guler, 2015). In line with Nguyen (2013), Lázár (2007), and Karabinar and Guler (2015), the problem addressed in this study was the limitation of cultural contents and activities aiming to develop learners' ICC in the course books. In fact, the teachers reported that the course books they used rarely include intercultural contents and activities and they had to follow rigid schedule with fixed contents prescribed in the course books. Therefore, it is safe to say intercultural integration was restricted by the curriculum, which is proven by lack of intercultural learning outcomes, dense time distribution, and lack of proper intercultural input in the course books.

Of the four aspects, teachers were least concerned of their intercultural integration pedagogy, but they had problems with it. First, their intercultural teaching was dependent on the accessible resources: course books, supplementary materials, and intercultural environments. In Karabinar and Guler's (2015) study, teachers faced similar problems, but they managed to integrate cultures into their language lessons by designing and conducting intercultural language activities: comparing cultural practices, creating intercultural genuine conversation with their pen pals. Secondly, teachers did not have sufficient backgrounds on

intercultural integration pedagogy since it was not included in pre-service and in-service teacher training programmes (Nguyen, 2013). It is interesting that one teacher raised the issue of what specific cultural input should be incorporated in language lessons because at least, this teacher could define the problem. Back to Newton et al. 's (2010) principles, learners should be facilitated to communicate effectively and appropriately in diverse intercultural contexts, so they should be exposed to cultural diversity. Finally, teachers had highest expectations for professional development to improve IC and intercultural instructions, especially prior to the application of the new curriculum which is included with intercultural contents. To implement intercultural integration, the teachers themselves should change their own teaching practice to make their teaching language not only for instrumental but also for educational purposes (Byram, 2008).

In the same line with Lázár (2007), Zhou (2011), Nguyen(2013), and Karabinar andGuler (2015), this research pinpointed that teachers were aware of management factors namely time constraint, exam pressure, and large class size as intercultural integration constraints. First, 71.3% of teachers agreed that they did not have enough time to add cultural contents. In limited time, teachers and students had to struggle with linguistic objectives so they tended to ignore intercultural objectives due to busy schedules. Secondly, it is interesting that the teachers did not think intercultural integration and language testing worked against each other. However, they were not confident with the practicality of ICC testing. Lastly and most importantly, lack of intercultural environment for the students to practice intercultural skills was an enormous obstacle. That is why they wished for physical environment where they could face to face contact with the people coming from other cultures. Besides learning and teaching issues, institutional and social factors are regarded as hindrances of intercultural integration.

The study has defined the aspects and levels of teachers' concerns and expectations prior to the intercultural integration. Since teaching English in general education has been considered rigid, top-down, and prescribed by the national curriculum, renovation could not be successful without the change in curriculum. Based on the findings and educational contexts of intercultural integration, this research proposes some pedagogical implications as follows.

Intercultural integration should be synchronously recognized from the macro to micro level. First, IC should be part of lesson objectives to encourage teachers to conduct intercultural language activities in class to develop students' ICC instead of CC only. If so, teachers should be facilitated with course books which are friendly to intercultural teaching; or else, they have time and rights to adapt the course books in terms of contents and activities. Secondly, intercultural integration should be parts of pre-service and in-service teachers' education to raise their awareness on building IC and improve intercultural teaching practices. Thirdly, learners should be oriented with IC teaching outcomes and IC learning strategies: exploring culture, practising to communicate across cultures, and so forth. Fourthly, management should

facilitate the implementation of intercultural integration by making opportunities to invite foreign teachers as guest speakers or part-time teachers and provide supplementary materials and facilities to create genuine intercultural communication or bring diversity of intercultural input to students. Lastly, it is rather early but necessary to consider ICC testing because testing should be in line with teaching.

8. Conclusion

This research pinpointed the concerns and expectations of upper secondary EFL teachers prior the implementation of the new curriculum inclining to intercultural integration. Teachers agreed that they were concerned about learners' learning, curriculum and course books, management aspects, and teachers' instructions. Though the participating teachers not confirming that they had problems with intercultural instructions, they had great expectations for improving their IC and intercultural integrating pedagogies, which could enable themselves to fix many constraints in their own pedagogical contexts.

9. Contributions, Limitations, and Suggestions for Further Research

This research was conducted in the transition time of educational reform which shifted a focus on intercultural education. As the main implementers of any educational policy at grass root level, teachers' voice of their own perceptions in terms of concerns and expectations should be appreciated. Specifically, this research found out that the teachers were not doubtful about the negative influence of intercultural integration. Perceiving many hindrances of intercultural integration into EFL teaching, the teachers expected for training sessions, specializing on intercultural instruction.

However, this research was limited in the following ways. First, the number of participating teachers was relatively lower than the total population. Qualitative data collected from open-ended questions were far to be saturated. That is why a research with more participants and more in-depth data from open-ended questions or interviews would be more comprehensive. Secondly, this research focused on teachers' perceptions of intercultural integration in transitional period which involved the implementation of different English course books (the standard and pilot ones), but it ignored the difference of participants who have and have not used the pilot courses books. Further research could be done to analyse how teachers having used different course books perceived the constraints of and suggestions for intercultural integration.

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