





POPULAR APPROACHES TO THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH LITERATURE AMONG STUDENTS IN SELECTED MALAYSIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS




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ABSTRACT

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The English literature component was incorporated into the English language syllabus in Malaysian secondary schools in 2000. This component incorporates short stories, novels, poems, and drama. The component has attracted interesting discourse amongst researchers, educators, and policymakers who tried to determine the most appropriate approach to the teaching of English literature to achieve positive literature learning outcomes. This study too attempted to identify the most preferred approaches to the teaching of English literature among students in selected secondary schools in Terengganu, Malaysia. Being the first study of this kind in this region, it employed a descriptive survey method with a structured questionnaire as a data-gathering instrument. The data were collected from a sample of 403 students across four different public secondary schools in Terengganu: SMK Kompleks Seberang Takir, SM Sains Sultan Mahmud, SMKA Dato Haji Abbas, and SMK Kompleks Gong Badak. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics via the SPSS statistical software package, version 20.0. The study found the moral-philosophical approach to the teaching of English literature as the most preferred approach amongst the students, followed by the information-based approach and finally the language-based approach. This evidence shows that teachers of English literature incorporate moral values in their lessons. It is envisaged that the findings of this study could be especially useful in the process of curriculum development, particularly in the Malaysian context. Besides, this study could raise teachers' awareness of their students' preferences for literature teaching approaches.

Contribution/ Originality: This study contributes to the existing literature on language learning by proposing the most appropriate approaches to the teaching of English literature in ESL classrooms. This contribution could be valuable in developing an effective English literature curriculum, particularly for secondary schools.

1. INTRODUCTION

The importance of literature teaching approaches has drawn increasing attention especially in the field of second language learning (Amer, 2003; Ghazali, Setia, Muthusamy, & Jusoff, 2009; Khatib, Derakhshan, & Rezaei, 2011a; Krishnasamy, 2015; Mustakim, Mustapha, & Lebar, 2014; Rashid, Vethamani, & Rahman, 2010; Tina, Mohammad, Fauziah, Fara, & Marzilah, 2007). Previous studies have also highlighted the importance of literature teaching approaches in the process of knowledge acquisition and achieving positive learning outcomes (Bridget & Omar, 2007; Divsar & Tahriri, 2009; Djumingin & Weda, 2019; Savvidou, 2004; Timucin, 2001; Yu, 2019). The literature component was first incorporated into the English syllabus in Malaysian secondary schools in 2000 (Ghazali et al., 2009). Since then, this literature component has attracted the attention of researchers, teachers, and policymakers. To this end, researchers and teachers are searching for better strategies for teaching English literature courses (Ahmad & Aziz, 2009; Bridget & Omar, 2007; Hwang & Embi, 2007; Krishnasamy, 2015). Therefore, determining an appropriate approach to the teaching of English literature is imperative (Divsar & Tahriri, 2009; Krishnasamy, 2015).

English literature is recognized as an effective means of language learning (Hişmanoğlu, 2005; Keshavarzi, 2012; Paran, 2008; Simpson, 2003). Besides, learning of English literature shapes learners' personality and self-awareness through communication with literary texts. It advances their enthusiasm and comprehension of the world around them (Cheng, 2016). Therefore, English literature can serve as an excellent choice that plays an educational, recreational, moral, cultural, and socio-political role in the learning environment (Azmi, Hassan, & Sidek, 2020; Ihejirika, 2014). In Malaysia, the literature component in the language syllabus of secondary schools aims to develop affection for literature among the students and equip them with an in-depth understanding of English literature (Subramaniam, 2007). The syllabus incorporates various literary texts including short stories, novels, poems, and drama. In this regard, the Ministry of Education specified that the students should have the ability to critically evaluate characters, setting, plot, as well as the author's viewpoint and other artistic devices in literary texts.

Very few studies have investigated the approaches to the teaching of English literature in the Malaysian context (Bridget & Omar, 2007; Hwang & Embi, 2007; Krishnasamy, 2015; Mustakim et al., 2014; Rashid et al., 2010) focusing on approaches preferred and adopted by teachers. None of these studies specifically considered students' preferences for approaches to the teaching of English literature. Therefore, this study aims to identify the most preferred approach to the teaching of English literature in selected secondary schools in Terengganu, Malaysia. Since teacher-centered approaches may result in less engagement with students in the learning process (Bridget & Omar, 2007; Nair et al., 2012) this study focused on learners' perspectives. Learner's enthusiasm and comprehension can be improved by applying an appropriate teaching approach (Muhamad, Latiff, & Hassan, 2020; Rashid et al., 2010; Timucin, 2001). The findings of this study are expected to advance our understanding of the current situation concerning teaching and learning of English Literature.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A number of studies have been conducted to investigate the literature teaching approaches in ESL classrooms (Bridget & Omar, 2007; Divsar & Tahriri, 2009; Ghazali et al., 2009; Mustakim et al., 2014; Rashid et al., 2010; Tina et al., 2007). Most of these studies demonstrated an increasing awareness of the importance of using appropriate approaches to the teaching of English literature (Amer, 2003; Khatib et al., 2011a). For example, Rashid et al. (2010) identified the approaches and strategies employed by teachers in teaching the literature component to less proficient students in Malaysia. The study found that the information-based approach was popularly employed by teachers, followed by moral-philosophical and paraphrastic approaches. The findings indicate that the teaching approach is influenced by students' inability to comprehend the English language. In this regard, Hwang and Embi (2007) noted that teaching approaches are largely influenced by students' language proficiency and attitudes.

Similar to the findings of Rashid et al. (2010), another study by Bridget and Omar (2007) found that the moral-philosophical approach was the most preferred approach amongst teachers of English literature. However, Krishnasamy (2015) found that teachers applied multiple approaches to teaching literature at average levels. Besides, Ahmad and Aziz (2009) found that students admit their teachers have a positive attitude towards literature and literature teaching, and the literature component class has made a great impact on students. Nevertheless, Tina et al. (2007) found that many teachers claimed that the language level of the literary texts selected by the Ministry was difficult for many students to comprehend. It was observed that due to limited vocabulary and lack of competence in language skills, the literature component had become a challenge for many students. As a result, teachers faced great difficulties in teaching literature to less proficient students. Eventually, a few teachers have to adopt multiple approaches to suit the needs of their group of students and achieve the objectives of teaching the literature component.

Hwang and Embi (2007) examined the approaches employed by teachers in teaching the literature component in selected Malaysian secondary schools. The study showed that the paraphrastic approach is popularly used by teachers, followed by the information-based approach and moral-philosophical approach. In the same vein, Mustakim et al. (2014) identified the approaches employed by teachers in teaching Contemporary Children's Literature (CCL) programs to upper primary schools. The study found that the information-based approach and paraphrastic approach were the most favored approaches by teachers in the teaching of CCL programs. Ghazali et al. (2009) also explored the teaching strategies and students' attitudes towards the literature texts used in Malaysian secondary schools. The study found that students have positive attitudes towards the text selection although they were less enthusiastic about the teaching methods used by teachers.

Furthermore, Savvidou (2004) examined various approaches and provides a rationale for an integrated approach to teaching literature in the language classroom. According to the study, an integrated approach to the teaching of literature in the language classroom offers students the opportunity to develop linguistic and communicative skills. Similarly, Timucin (2001) investigated the responses of undergraduate students to a proposed literature teaching approach in Turkey. The study used an integrated approach comprising language-based approaches and pedagogical stylistics. According to the study, the proposed teaching approach significantly enhances the level of students' involvement in the literature learning process. Likewise, Divsar and Tahriri (2009) also proposed an integrated model based on three models for teaching literature: Language-based, content-cultural model, and personal- model. The study confirmed the effectiveness of using a multi-step approach to teaching literature.

English literature provides an interesting drive for language teaching and learning due to its outstanding features (Khatib, Rezaei, & Derakhshan, 2011b). The teaching of English literature develops students' language skills and cultural awareness, as well as encourages their critical thinking (Azmi et al., 2020; Mahzan, Alias, & Ismail, 2020; Van, 2009). In this regard, teachers play a significant role in students' knowledge acquisition process. Therefore, it is important to ensure that teachers are equipped with enough pedagogical content knowledge for classroom practices, which in turn affects students' learning outcomes and achievement (Ghazali et al., 2009). On the other hand, students' attitude is one of the major determinants of their success in language learning (Candlin & Mercer, 2001). Students' involvement in the teaching-learning process is paramount, and their positive contributions could result in methodological success (Ahmad & Aziz, 2009).

To sum up, previous studies on literature teaching approaches have confirmed that teaching approaches are largely influenced by students' language proficiency, and an integrated approach to the teaching of English literature offers a great opportunity to develop language proficiency and enhance the level of students' involvement in the learning process. Previous studies have also focused on approaches and strategies employed by teachers (Bridget & Omar, 2007; Hwang & Embi, 2007; Krishnasamy, 2015; Mustakim et al., 2014; Rashid et al., 2010) teachers' attitudes toward literature teaching (Ahmad & Aziz, 2009) teaching strategies (Ghazali et al., 2009) and

integrated approaches to literature teaching (Divsar & Tahriri, 2009; Savvidou, 2004; Timucin, 2001). Therefore, the present study focuses on students' preferences for approaches to the teaching of English literature in Malaysia. To the best of the authors' knowledge, this is the first study that examines approaches to the teaching of English literature in the study area.

3. LITERATURE TEACHING APPROACHES IN ESL CLASSROOM

According to Carter and Long (1991) there are three models of teaching literature: 1) the cultural model, which requires learners to explore and interpret the social, political, literary, and historical context of a specific text; 2) the language model, which enables learners to access a text systematically and methodically to exemplify specific linguistic features such as literal and figurative language, direct and indirect speech, and; 3) the personal growth model, which focuses on the particular use of language in a text, as well as placing it in a specific cultural context (Carter & Long, 1991; Mustakim et al., 2014; Rashid et al., 2010). These three models of teaching literature have been integrated into the following approaches.

1. Information-based approach: As the name implies, this approach represents a way of teaching knowledge about literature where literature is seen as a means of offering a source of information to learners (Carter, 1986; Hwang & Embi, 2007; Rashid et al., 2010).
2. Paraphrastic approach: This approach enables teachers to use simpler words and sentence structures compared to the complicated ones in the literary texts. At times, the teacher may paraphrase or translate complicated words and sentences into local languages (Hwang & Embi, 2007; Rashid et al., 2010). Therefore, this approach deals with the surface meaning of the texts.
3. Stylistic approach: This approach guides learners toward a closer comprehension of the literary texts via linguistic analysis and literary appreciation. There are two objectives of this approach. Hence, this approach enables learners to make meaningful interpretations of the texts and expand their awareness and knowledge of the language (Hwang & Embi, 2007; Lazar, 1993).
4. Language-based approach: This represents an approach where literary texts are viewed as a means of helping learners to develop language skills or proficiency. In this approach, learners are exposed to the target language and are connected to certain aspects of the language such as vocabulary (Carter, 1986; Hwang & Embi, 2007; Rashid et al., 2010).
5. Personal-response approach: This approach focuses on the learner's response to the literary text. It enables learners to respond to the author's intentions and the meanings evident in the text based on their understanding and thought. This approach motivates learners to read by making a connection between the themes studied from the texts and their individual life experiences (Carter, 1986; Rashid et al., 2010).
6. Moral-philosophical approach: As the name implies, this approach enables teachers to incorporate moral values in their lessons (Carter & Long, 1991; Mustakim et al., 2014; Rashid et al., 2010). It focuses on discovering moral values while reading the literary text (Rashid et al., 2010).

An approach refers to "the basic philosophy or belief concerning the subject matter being considered" (Hofler, 2010). For a successful literature program, teachers must be acquainted with a variety of approaches, techniques, and activities to encourage and develop learners' interest and knowledge of literature (Whitehead, 1968). Therefore, an appropriate teaching approach could have a positive influence on the teaching and learning process (Rashid et al., 2010; Timucin, 2001).

Based on the review of previous studies and approaches to the teaching of literature, this study aims to identify the most preferred approaches to the teaching of literature amongst students in the selected secondary schools. This study is conducted to propose an appropriate literature teaching approach that can be used to enhance ESL learning outcomes, particularly in the Malaysian context.

4. METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach in which a descriptive survey method was used. The survey was designed to generalize results from a sample to a population and reach strong and valid conclusions (Allen, Titsworth, & Hunt, 2009; Creswell, 2012). Besides, surveys provide useful information to describe trends about a large number of people (Creswell, 2012). A questionnaire was used in this study due to its ability to gather easily quantified data within a short possible time. It is usually considered as an objective research instrument that can produce generalizable results (James, 2012).

5. DATA COLLECTION

This study was limited to English language students selected from four different public secondary schools in the State of Terengganu, Malaysia: SMK Kompleks Seberang Takir, SM Sains Sultan Mahmud, SMKA Dato Haji Abbas, and SMK Kompleks Gong Badak. The literature component is incorporated into the English language syllabus offered from Form One until Form Five with various literary genres such as short stories, novels, poems, and drama. The target population of this study consisted of Form Four students in the selected schools, which suggested that the students had been learning English literature for more than three years. This group of students could be considered a good sample as they shared their experiences regarding the approaches employed by their teachers in teaching English literature. A simple random sampling method was used to select a sample of 420 students. Random sampling refers to a method of sample selection that gives each element in the population an equal probability of being selected and included in the sample (Kothari, 2004). The sample was estimated using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula for sample size calculation. A structured questionnaire adopted from Rashid et al. (2010) was modified and used as a data-gathering instrument. The questionnaire measured responses on a five-point Likert scale (Lois & Brown, 2010). It contained 28 items and was administered to the randomly selected sample of 420 students across the selected secondary schools. The main objective was to gather information about English literature teaching approaches preferred by students in learning English literature subjects. In the process of distributing the questionnaire, the students were guided on how to respond to the questions.

6. DATA ANALYSIS

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, consisting of mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage (James, 2012). The six approaches to the teaching of literature were used in the questionnaire. To ensure reliability, a pilot study was conducted using a sample of 30 respondents to determine if the questions would yield the desired information necessary for the study and to avoid inappropriate, misleading, and redundant questions. A Cronbach's Alpha of .922 was obtained, which is within the acceptable range (0.70-0.95) of statistical values (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). The descriptive statistics used in this study were calculated using the SPSS statistical software package (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA, 20.0).

7. FINDINGS

As mentioned earlier, 420 questionnaires were administered across the selected secondary schools. Out of this number of questionnaires, 409 were returned, representing a high response rate of 97.4 percent. Besides, six questionnaires were rejected during analysis due to incomplete and invalid responses. Therefore, a total of 403 questionnaires were considered for analysis. Majority (58.8%) of the students were females while 41.2% were males. A majority of the students (91.8%) were 16 years of age, 7.2% were above 16 while only 1.0% were 15 years old. A sizeable number (97.0%) of the students were the Malays while Chinese, Indians, and other ethnic groups constituted 1.0% respectively. In descriptive statistics, A+SA represents a combination of "Agree" and "Strongly Agree" responses as specified in the questionnaire. It was used to show the frequency of students who agreed with the statements provided in the questionnaire. Besides, D+SD represents "Disagree" and "Strongly Disagree" which

showed the frequency of students who disagreed with the statements. Similarly, N stood for “Neutral” and was used to show the frequency of students who neither agreed nor disagreed with the statements. Since the five-point Likert scale suggested that “5” represented the highest mean value, the values of each construct were reported within the range of 0.00 and 5.00.

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for the English Literature approaches preferred by the students.

Table-1. Preferred approaches to teaching of English literature.

No.	Approaches	Total (F/%)				
		Mean	SD	A+SA	D+SD	N
A Information-Based Approach						
1	Teacher guides students to identify and read informative extracts the story	4.03	.869	315(78.2)	20(32.0)	68(16.9)
2	Teacher provides specific details on the literary elements found in the text	3.94	.887	196(73.5)	29(7.2)	78(19.4)
3	Teacher elicits information from students about the text	3.32	.922	173(42.9)	70(17.4)	160(39.7)
4	Teacher explains the main content of the text to the class	4.14	.847	332(82.4)	20(5.0)	47(11.7)
5	Teacher explains to the students with background information of the text	4.05	.915	301(74.7)	20(4.9)	76(18.9)
	Total	3.90	.888	70.34	13.30	21.32
B Paraphrastic Approach						
6	Teacher provides a written paraphrased version of a complementary reading text	3.77	.925	271(67.2)	34(8.5)	98(24.3)
7	Teacher solely uses a paraphrased version of the text	2.87	.950	94(23.4)	143(35.5)	165(40.9)
8	Teacher guides students to paraphrase the text	4.00	.893	297(73.7)	20(4.9)	84(20.8)
9	Teacher explains figurative and ambiguous language used in simple words	3.74	1.281	257(63.8)	80(19.8)	65(16.1)
10	Teacher uses simple terms to explain what the story is about to students	4.26	.955	334(82.9)	21(5.2)	45(11.2)
	Total	3.73	1.00	62.2	14.8	22.7
C Stylistic Approach						
11	Teacher defines the correlation between language and content information	3.83	.839	273(67.7)	19(4.5)	110(27.3)
12	Teacher compares the stylistic effect with other languages	3.36	.869	163(40.4)	46(11.4)	181(44.9)
13	Teacher explains the synonymous units of the words in the text	3.94	.939	292(72.4)	28(7.0)	82(20.3)
14	Teacher highlights the styles used in the text	3.80	.902	266(66.0)	32(7.9)	100(24.8)
15	Teacher asks students to explain the styles used in the text	3.36	1.037	187(46.4)	73(18.2)	141(35.0)
	Total	3.66	.917	58.6	9.80	30.46
D Language-Based Approach						
16	Teacher infers meaning from clues in the text	3.30	1.042	179(44.5)	82(20.4)	139(34.5)
17	Teacher guides students to read between the lines	4.11	.911	315(78.2)	22(5.5)	62(15.4)
18	Teacher asks students to make predictions on what will happen	3.58	.996	224(55.6)	54(13.4)	124(30.8)
19	Teacher guides students to express opinions towards a text	3.84	.922	279(69.2)	35(8.6)	87(21.6)
20	Teacher sets simple language activities in a literature lesson	3.97	.941	297(73.7)	28(7.0)	74(18.4)
	Total	3.76	0.962	64.2	11.0	24.1
E Personal-Response Approach						
21	Teacher guides students to relate the themes to personal experiences	3.84	.922	273(67.8)	26(6.4)	100(24.8)
22	Teacher asks students to compare the text to any text they have read earlier	3.48	.939	198(49.1)	54(13.4)	148(36.7)
23	Teacher encourages students to respond to a text	3.62	.968	217(53.8)	37(9.2)	136(33.7)
24	Teacher encourages students to express feelings towards the issues raised in the text	3.65	1.02	242(60.0)	45(11.1)	114(28.3)
	Total	3.65	.962	57.8	10.0	30.9
F Moral-Philosophical Approach						
25	Teacher incorporates moral values in the lessons	4.22	.859	324(80.4)	13(3.2)	65(16.1)
26	Teacher tells students directly the moral values found in the text	4.11	.887	320(79.4)	22(5.5)	60(14.9)
27	Teacher guides students to search for moral values from a text	4.03	.944	303(75.2)	22(5.5)	77(19.1)
28	Teacher raises students' awareness of values derived from the text	4.15	.961	313(77.7)	23(5.7)	66(16.4)
	Total	4.13	.913	78.2	4.98	16.6

Note: Level indicator: Low=0.1-2.99, moderate=3.0-3.49, high=3.5-5.

As shown in Table 1, the most preferred approach amongst the students was the moral-philosophical approach (mean=4.13), followed by information-based and language-based approaches with mean values of 3.90 and 3.76

respectively. The moral-philosophical approach is mostly adopted to teach short stories and poetry (Bridget & Omar, 2007). Further analysis of the findings indicates that the statement "Teacher incorporates moral values in the lessons" represented the highest mean value (mean=4.22) which is logically found in students' responses to the moral-philosophical approach. In this regard, 80.4% of the students agreed while only 3.2% did not agree with the statement. On the other hand, the statement "Teacher solely uses a paraphrased version of the text" represented the lowest mean value (mean=2.87). The students' attitudes, familiarity with the approaches, and their level of language proficiency might have influenced the selection of their preferred approaches to the teaching of English literature.

8. DISCUSSION

The findings reported in this study show that students prefer moral-philosophical and information-based approaches to the teaching of English literature in the study area. These findings are consistent with the study conducted by Bridget and Omar (2007) which focused on popular teaching approaches from teachers' perspective. Besides, the findings of this study are similar to those obtained in most studies focusing on the literature teaching approaches from teachers' perspective (Hwang & Embi, 2007; Rashid et al., 2010).

Rashid et al. (2010) found the moral-philosophical approach, which represented the most preferred approach amongst students examined in the present study, to be the second most preferred approach amongst literature teachers. Also, Hwang and Embi (2007) found the moral-philosophical approach to be the third most preferred approach. The findings reported by Rashid et al. (2010) might be different because the study focused on less proficient students. Therefore, the findings of this study were more consistent with Bridget and Omar (2007) study which revealed that the moral-philosophical approach was most preferred.

The findings of this study indicate that teachers in the selected secondary schools incorporate moral values particularly in teaching short stories and poetry. According to Kow (2002), cultural perceptions are encouraged by learning of English literature in the Malaysian context. This study shows that teachers and students have similar preferences for literature teaching approaches. When the preferences of students and teachers are consistent, positive learning and teaching outcomes are likely to be achieved (Candlin & Mercer, 2001; Hwang & Embi, 2007). By utilizing the moral-philosophical approach, moral values could be inculcated in students' mindsets. However, the findings also reveal that students use the personal-response approach to interact with texts (Carter, 1986; Rashid et al., 2010) but it is the least preferred approach amongst students.

The moral-philosophical approach to teaching English literature is preferred by students, perhaps because they liked their teachers to focus on moral values while teaching literature subjects. Through literary texts, students are exposed to elements of the target culture (Azmi et al., 2020; Mengu, 2002). The teaching of English literature thus could also be an important means of cultural adaptation and development of moral values that shape students' personality (Kow, 2002; Mengu, 2002; Ogunnaike, 2002; Zhen, 2012). According to Tutyrahiza (2008), exposing students to moral values from the text is a valuable strategy regardless of students' level of language proficiency. The knowledge acquired through a teaching approach also allows students to appreciate the cultural background and morals which could help them in shaping their personality and developing their community (Azmi et al., 2020; Rahayu, 2009; Velu, 2010).

Having integrated the literature component into the EFL syllabus, determining an appropriate approach could be beneficial to the Ministry of Education (Bridget & Omar, 2007; Rashid et al., 2010; Savvidou, 2004). Therefore, the findings of this study offer important clues to the Ministry of Education concerning the choice of appropriate literature teaching approaches. In turn, this could supplement the effort of the Curriculum Development Centre toward achieving the best literature learning outcomes. In determining an appropriate teaching approach, this study recommends that students' involvement in the teaching-learning process is paramount and their positive contributions could result in methodological success (Ahmad & Aziz, 2009; Timucin, 2001).

9. CONCLUSION

This study examined students' preferences for approaches to the teaching of English literature in selected Malaysian secondary schools. According to the findings, the moral-philosophical approach to the teaching of English literature is the most preferred approach amongst students, followed by information-based and language-based approaches. Consistent with these findings, research showed that secondary school teachers favor the moral-philosophical approach as well (Bridget & Omar, 2007). This shows that, certainly, teachers of English literature incorporate moral values in their lessons. The moral-philosophical approach makes students aware of moral and philosophical values identifiable through the reading of the literary texts (Rashid et al., 2010).

Since the incorporation of the English literature component into the English language syllabus in 2000, research on students' preferences for literature teaching approaches has either been lacking or inadequate. Hence, the findings of this study provide valuable information to the Ministry of Education concerning the choice of appropriate literature teaching approaches, particularly in the process of curriculum development. The contribution of this study lies in proposing appropriate literature teaching approaches that can help educators to develop a successful English literature curriculum, particularly for secondary schools. Besides, this study can raise teachers' awareness of their students' preferences for teaching approaches. To this end, the students are allowed to express their feelings concerning the teaching approaches adopted by their teachers, which in turn, allows teachers to make decisions in the teaching and learning process. Teachers of English literature are required to encourage their students to develop a passion for reading literary texts.

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