

E-LEARNING IN ENGLISH CLASSROOM: AN ANALYSIS OF FACTORS LEADING TO ITS ACCEPTANCE

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ABSTRACT

With the colossal development in information technology and communication networks, a paradigm shift has been created from the paper-based education to web-based education. The web-based education is applied to the learning of languages also on par with technical education in engineering colleges in India. In recent years, with the assortment of smart phones and the internet, students are more willing to use technology and online resources as assets to learn English. The engineering educational systems uphold the learner-centric online English learning based on the needs of the students for placement and the demand of the situations. The traditional or face-to-face classroom settings are shared by online learning of English. This paper focuses and illustrates in detail the attitude of the students in undergoing online English learning activities. Their objective of the researchers is to scrutinize the attitude of students regarding the credibility in practicing e-learning of English. The present paper does not aim to analyze the academic improvement of the students through the e-learning of English. Relatively, it ponders on the attitude of the students towards online learning of English. The paper analyses the data related to the factors leading to acceptance of online learning of English among the engineering students at Mepco Schlenk Engineering College, Sivakasi. The responses of the students reveal that they are absolutely in favour of e-learning of English.

Keywords: Virtual learning, online learning of English, Informal learning of English, Self-Learning of English.

I. Introduction:

With the colossal development in information technology and communication networks, a paradigm shift has been created from the paper-based education to web-based education. The web-based education is applied to the learning of languages also on par with technical education in engineering colleges in India. The technical institutions are pouring their capital in building well-equipped language labs with internet connectivity encouraging learning of English through various online sources. Their main intention in training the students is to make the students acquire good English that could open the avenues for premium jobs. The students must have better English knowledge because all the technical interviews are conducted only in English. As a part of the recruitment process, the students have to take up aptitude tests which include a subset of verbal ability questions testing their English exclusively. Consequently, special training in acquiring the English language in addition to the regular syllabus and curriculum has become part of the Engineering college pedagogy activities. Moreover, some students who prefer to fly abroad may have to take up international examinations testing the CEFR level – an international standard for judging out the ability within a language. All these are online examinations that require a time-bound sharp analysis and right response in English.

The term “e-learning” is well-defined by K.H. Fee as “any learning that involves using the internet or intranet.” In the past, learning through the internet was considered a great treasure of experts. In recent years, with the assortment of smart phones and the internet, students are more willing to use technology and online resources as assets to learn English. The engineering educational systems uphold the learner-centric online English learning based on the needs of the students for placement and the demand of the situations. As K.H. Fee points out, the online English learning allows the students to be more independent as they “have control over the content, learning sequence, pace of learning, time,” etc. Therefore, special training in learning English using the internet has become a part of scholarship in technical institutions. In engineering colleges, traditional or face-to-face classroom settings are shared by online learning of English. This paper focuses and illustrates in detail the attitude of the students in undergoing online English learning activities.

A) Statement of the Problem:

As many colleges of Tamilnadu have mandatory language labs in line with the AICTE directions and curriculum, it has become necessary to use the internet and intranet for learning English. The students of Mepco Schlenk Engineering College, who are put under this umbrella, also need training in online English learning and so they are given a chance to undertake an online English certificate course in addition to the regular curriculum. Yet there is a difference of opinion among the teachers regarding the online learning of English and direct teaching

methods in the classroom. They had certain skeptical questions regarding the correct focused learning of English using intranet and internet and it is confirmed through their discussions. Some felt it be useful while a few considered it to be a waste of time as it is not designed in a direct teacher-centered manner and there is a lot of possibility of malpractices in responding to the interactive dashboard of the certificate course whereas such laxity is not possible in the real-time classroom. Though their opinions are scrutinized, the researchers have not endeavored to analyze here the opinion of the teachers. Their objective is to scrutinize the attitude of students regarding the credibility in practicing e-learning of English. The present paper does not aim to analyze the academic improvement of the students through the e-learning of English. Relatively, it ponders on the attitude of the students towards online learning of English. So, there was no necessity of pre-tests and post-tests for stemming scientific findings from the participants of the research. The paper presents an analysis on the data related to the factors leading to acceptance of online learning of English among the engineering students at Mepco Schlenk Engineering College, Sivakasi.

B. Objectives:

The objectives of the paper are to

- Analyze the attitude of the students on online learning.
- Insist on implementation of e-learning along with traditional lecture method of English

II. Research Design

- Literature survey
- Methodology: Data collection through questionnaires on knowledge acquisition through e-learning.
- Data Analysis of the student' attitude on erudition of English through e-learning.
- Suggestions.

A.

B. Literature Survey:

Online learning has become an important component in education, and it is believed to provide unique advantages in the learning process (Appana, 2008; Dolence & Norris, 1995; Katz, 1999; Shopova, 2014). When e-learning is applied to English teaching, the pedagogical strategies have to be fundamentally changed from the direct lecturing on English lessons to the indirect mentoring of the students which the teaching community hesitates to accept. Kleiner, B, Thomas N, and Lewis L feel that many teachers do not use this technology in their classes because of the lack of time, knowledge, and interest. In the past years, English teaching has been dominated by teacher-centered strategies in India, particularly in Tamilnadu, focusing on teaching grammar and reciting words. Huiwei Cai says "If we insist on emphasizing grammar and vocabulary, then students are only good at passing exams, and cannot master a language. If we do not change, the new generation will still be not satisfied with school education in the next 30 years". The result is that students are made exam-ready and so they score good marks in the exam. Yet, they cannot speak or write in English properly. To get a better English Learning experience, online learning should become part of the pedagogy in English classes.

Chhabra P says that the judicious use of blogs, twitters, tubes, podcast, smart boards and phones can facilitate and enhance both teachers and students' language learning as the use of these facilities not only provide the learners with authentic input but also they are gates to receive and share information. In e-learning, the students' focus lies on skills like writing and speaking through online chats and discussion boards after the silent processing of the input data through listening and reading. This gives a chance for students to prompt their English competency rather than the traditional lecture methods with an exclusive focus on listening. It gives room for the practice of the language. The Language acquisition does not depend on grammar and invalid exercises, but on student's own constant practice. As Huiwei Cai puts, "E-learning can turn the pedagogical strategies to student-centered, focusing on fostering linguistic sensitivity and improving listening comprehension and ability of expression so as to enable students to master English as soon as possible. Language acquisition does not depend on grammar and invalid exercises, but on student's own constant practice. That is the E-learning Pedagogical Strategy." It is easy to monitor the students if the teachers have real interest to lend a hand the students in online learning of English. Bhukya Alwar Swamy says, "Teachers can view their students' work online at any time. Learners will not miss their lessons as they can see and listen to the teacher through an online webcam and receive tests, quizzes, and notes from electronic online whiteboards."

C. Methodology:

The research study focused on gathering information on e-learning of English from students who were taking the online certificate course so that they could respond to the questions based on their synchronized personal experiences. The Online English Learning and Assessment solution from the certificate course had the content completely aligned to the CEFR, and had a suitable practice module for competitive exams. It had a strong focus on employability and preparedness for higher education. The students were given an orientation on the ways to

access the materials for the course. It was ensured that students do not have a computer and internet anxiety. Students were allowed to do the course for two hours a week in the regular working hours and after the working hours also if they needed. By the time the survey was conducted, 40% of I year B.E/ B. Tech students have completed the online course, the other 40% of them were nearing the stage of completion and the remaining 20% students were in the midway of the course. As all the I year B. E/ B. Tech students had the learning experience of English using internet, the reports on responses may be taken as authentic and acceptable. A questionnaire consisting of ten questions on online learning Experience of English was given access to I year freshmen of Mepco Schlenk Engineering College using Google forms. 363 students who had undergone online training in English for ten months provided response. Those students were from various engineering branches and embraced heterogeneous learners of the different social background, the medium of learning and the ability of knowledge absorption. The data provided by all the 363 participants are taken for analysis.

D. Data Analysis

Motivation and interest have tremendous impact on the learning of any language. It can be applied to English also. If the learning modules of English are interesting and engaging, students will naturally feel that the language is interesting. From their e-learning experiences of the past, the students responded to questions related to motivation and development of LSRW skills through online learning of English. The questions are:

1. Through my learning experiences, I feel motivated to learn English by the use of Internet because it is interesting.
2. Internet applications can be used in the class to enhance the learning of LSRW skills.

Figure 1: motivation for LSRW skills through e-resources

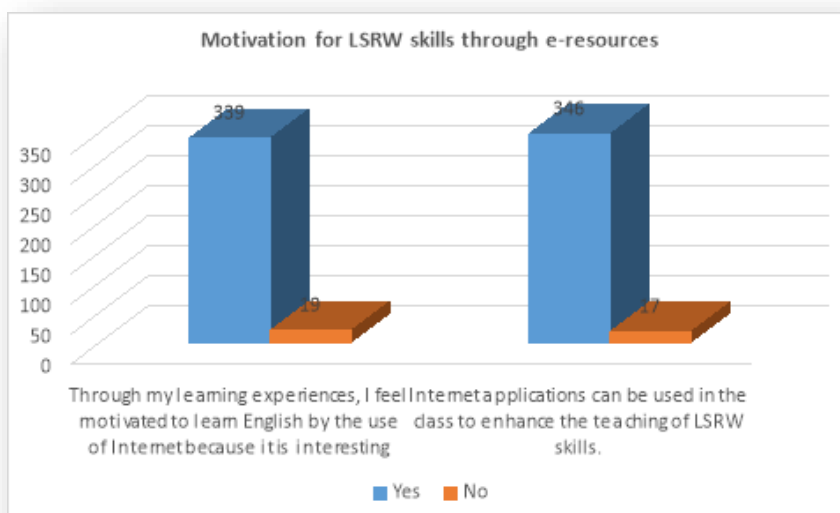


Figure 2: motivation for LSRW skills through e-resources

The above chart says that for questions 1 and 2, around 93% and 95% of the students have given positive responses respectively. The responses tell that the students have absolutely been motivated by the online learning of English. As the web based learning of English provides the high efficiency resources pertaining to the enhancement of LSRW skills like listening to video and audio, exercises related to speaking in real time situations, reading comprehension passages, adding on simple write ups, interpretation of pictures, cloze tests, grammar exercises etc., the students find the learning experience motivating. As the students are provided a monitored and guided online learning through proper learning modules compiled by the experts, the students totally focused on all the four skills of language along with grammar and vocabulary. Except a few, students have spoken in favour of enhancement of LSRW skills through online learning.

After the questions on content of English, the students were asked two more questions related to their ease and comfort in online learning of English. The questions are:

3. Through my learning experiences, Internet resources provided me more opportunities for autonomous (independent) learning.
4. E-learning offers the possibility to efficiently manage my time of learning at my convenience.

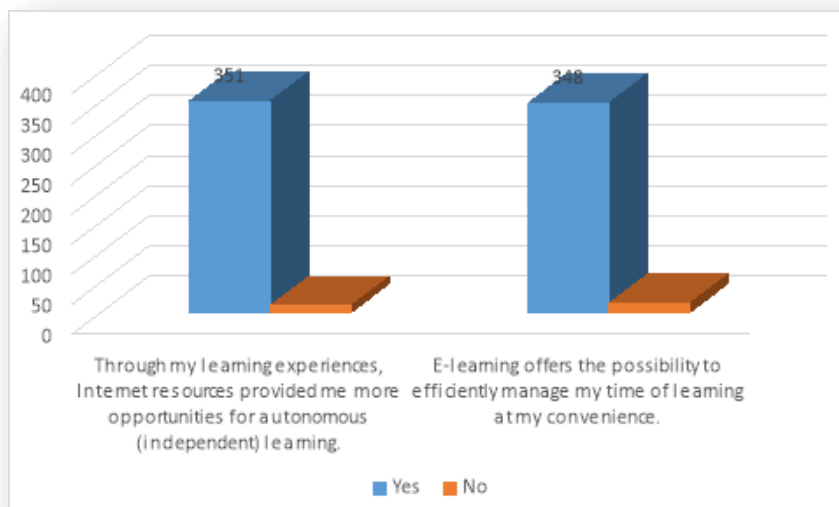


Figure 2: Autonomy and ease of e-learning

Figure 2: Autonomy and ease of e-learning of English:

The above graph shows that 351 and 348 students out of 363 have given affirmative response to questions 3 and 4. While doing the online learning of English, the students had the liberty to select their lesson from the set of streamlined modules. They may go with either one of the LSRW skills module or grammar as per their wish. They could refer to other websites also to learn the right using of unknown phrases and grammar rules. As they had this freedom of choice of topics in English learning for two hours a week in a formal lab class, they felt more comfortable. As the choice was their own, the students learnt English sincerely with complete focus on lessons. The autonomy in online learning of English helped the students to shoulder up the task with high level accountability. The materials could be accessed even after the regular class hours, which added to the convenience of their learning. Moreover, all the students do not need special training on all the language skills. The students who were good at writing can just complete the assigned modules on writing and spend more time on learning other skills. To augment the skills to be honed, they can put more efforts through e-learning. There are many websites and apps that provide special trainings.

The next question of analysis is quite interesting because it reflects the booming passion of the youth for using electronic gadgets. The question is

5. Online English learning is a good alternative to the pen-paper based system.
6. In my belief, Internet resources can replace English textbooks.

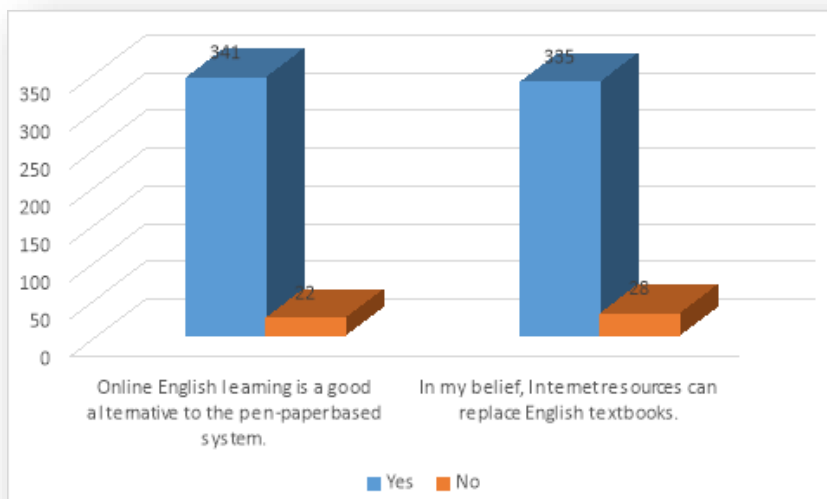


Figure 3: Paper based learning and e-resources

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The above chart on response for the questions 5 and 6 clearly shows that the students of this generation prefer e-resources for knowledge up gradation. Whenever they need information, they search the internet rather than the books in the library because good quality web resources are readily available at a cheaper cost in smart phones or palmtops in their hands. Unlike the past where limited numbers of books are the ultimate source of knowledge, the e-resources of today are available in plenty and can be downloaded for free of cost or low-cost payment. Moreover, these sources of English language learning are available in the form of interactive texts, audios and videos that hold the attention of the English language learners. It is obvious from the analysis that the students of English language prefer to tap the screen or press the keys rather than using pen and paper as electronic media is their untailored everyday habit. Consequently, they don't have an affiliation to the printed materials in the similar way in which their parents had. The habit of reading the printed materials has dwindled as more reliance is on e-sources. As the online English resources appeal to the senses of the English learners with interactions and animations rather than the printed materials and reaches the brain with new impacts, the experience of learning remains pleasant. When students use internet for English lessons, they come across the lessons of higher quality offered by the global educators. They come across the native speakers' lesson also. As a result, their preference is for internet English materials rather than paper based learning.

The involvement of the students in learning English is very important as it ensures the quick and assured acquiring of the language. The questions testing this concepts are:

7. Through my learning experiences, I was more attentive (careful) in Internet-assisted English language teaching classes rather than in the classroom.
8. Over All, I prefer e-learning of English and I believe that it is better than the traditional lecture method of learning in the classroom.

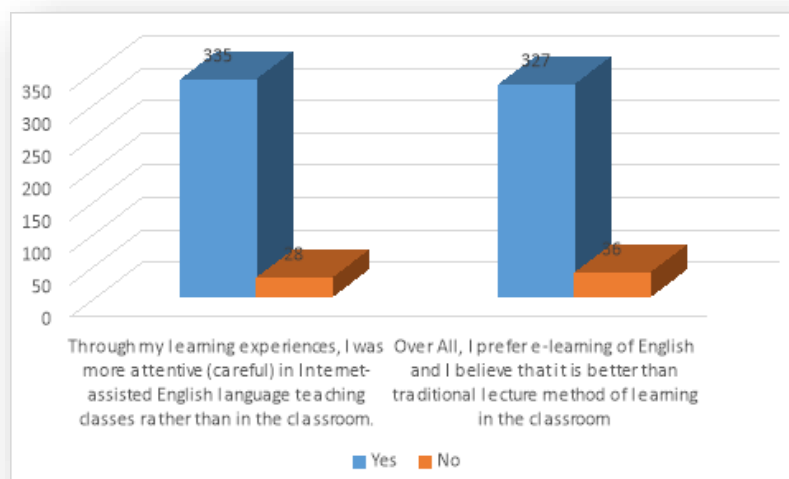


Figure 4: conscientious learning of e- resources in English

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From the above chart, it is clear that 335 and 327 students have answered in favour of question number 7 and 8 respectively. They feel that the online English resources need more attention as it demands an individual response or interaction from each person where as individual attention is less possible in a huge classroom. The e-learning materials in English have a variety of attention-grabbing interactive platforms like dashboards and multimedia tools with a combination of texts, images, animations and video recordings. The students integrate and manipulate the learning concepts from various sources, unlike in the classroom, which is mainly unidirectional as lead by the teacher. During e-learning of English, the students cannot be just be passively listening or taking down the notes as they do in the traditional class. The students have to be mentally vigilant during the online English learning process and physically active by involving in simple activities shifting from one interface of English to another. This keeps the learners alert. The content of learning of the current segment is being chosen by the English Language learner, although the overall path of learning is defined by the mentor. The students feel more responsible and dedicated as the lessons are their choice. Most of the content delivery platforms for English language need a periodical response from the students. So, the students are active and there is less chance of distraction. However, in the classroom settings, the teachers are active and the students are passive receptors many a times. The teachers keep on conveying what they know, feel or demand some response from students which the students may not find interesting or agree with. Though the concepts are valuable and the approach of teaching is worthy, students may find the lessons to be tedious because the teacher is active whereas students have to be passive with no space for self expression in a big class. Even if some students prefer to convey their opinion, they do not do so because they have inhibition to express themselves in an English class. In the online learning, they are free to give their response because it is a one to one interaction between the computers and the English learners and so they need not worry about holding a good image among peer group. They can proceed with more confidence.

All the language learners are naturally curious to know their progress levels. Students prefer to check their language competency and to decide whether to proceed with the same English learning strategies or to modify it in future. So, they were asked to answer the following questions.

9. Online English Learning is more comfortable and enjoyable to me because it gives immediate feedback (marks) on my performance.

10. I think I would like to use Internet assisted language learning materials and activities in my future EFL learning as much as possible.

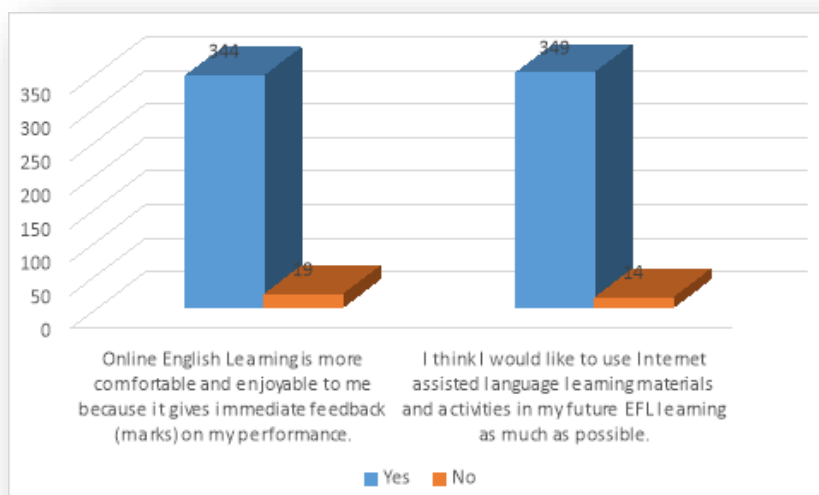


Figure 5: Feedback status and future usage of online English learning

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The chart 5 shows that 344 and 345 students have favoured the questions 9 and 10 respectively. In a classroom of heterogeneous learners, it is not possible for the teacher to provide feedback to each and every individual. Even if a formal evaluation process is administrated, it takes time for a teacher to give feedback unlike the online interactive modules. The teachers take a few days to evaluate the tests. By the time, the students lose interest in that evaluation process and results. Most of the online evaluations are added with the correct answers for the mistakes committed by them and the reasons why the answers are wrong. Students prefer online English learning because it is user friendly and appealing to the younger generation. Because of many positive aspects of the online learning of English, students are ready to accept it for their future English language acquisition.

Suggestions:

From the above analysis, it is obvious that the students have steadfast interest in e-learning. In the era of technical boom, English learning through electronic media is possible and feasible with wide numbers of enthusiasts. As the students have a little pride in using the gadgets, the same can be tapped in the right way to make them learn English with hunger. The passion for e-resource can be made an asset for learning online English. Once the students start using the gadgets for improving English, they explore the contents themselves and get interested in auto-learning. Self-learning of English is the best choice of e-learning strategies as it drives the individual with sincerity and perseverance. As the web based learning of English offers the high proficiency resources pertaining to the enhancement of LSRW skills, the students of English find the erudition motivating.

Although the concept of e-learning of English is readily accepted by the students, the teachers still have a little hesitation in approving learning of English using intranet or internet. When the lecture is delivered in the class, they have the satisfaction that the idea is conveyed to the students clearly and majority of the students have learnt it. They have the confidence that they lead the students in the right direction through good explanations and elaborations of concepts through direct method of teaching whereas that kind of teacher satisfaction is lagging in online learning. However, it is the duty of the teacher to act as a mentor in suggesting the right route of synchronizing the need of the student and the pleasant English learning. The teachers can allocate some of the topics to be imparted through direct learning method and the remaining topics to be learnt through self-learning using online mode. The systematic online learning of English must run in parallel with direct lecture method and this has to be incorporated in the syllabus itself.

Monitoring and managing both types of classes is indeed a dual work to the teacher as the activity of estimating ensured e-learning of English also demands time and energy. The students' must be periodically evaluated through some online quizzes, blogs, and other interactive platforms or through direct interactions in the class. The outcomes of e-learning may fail if the students are not mentored in the right direction with proper guidance and feedback. The possibilities of malpractices in e-learning of English like copying, screen sharing, and helping the friends by completing the task of one person by another can be mitigated by the highlighting the need for them to

use English. Yet another criterion to impress the e-learning students of English is to create awareness on job opportunities that English could generate for them. The unfortunate fact prevailing here is that the teachers know all these techniques to motivating the students for e-learning of English, but they are held tight with so many academic and non-academic activities and they have less time for cordial interaction with the students on this topic.

Limitations:

When there is more reliance on E-learning in the classroom, the relation between students and teachers will be greatly change. The students may lose respect for the teacher and start depending on e-resources. The teachers must be the leaders in taking the students through the learning modules and their hidden presence must be felt by the student. If so, the students will have learning responsibility and admiration for the teacher. As online learning of English focuses on the individual and independent learning and not on the open group interaction which is essential for placement. In fact activities like oral presentation and discussions are more effective only in the real time face to face interaction rather than the collaborative platforms through internet. However, the facility must be made available to the students who hesitate to talk in front of the whole class in the beginning stage of the training. This will make the students shake off the language inhibitions. Yet another disadvantage is the possibility of copying and open support received from friends for the completion of task and responding mechanically to the questions posted without understanding of the ideas conveyed.

Conclusion:

Those who have forethought and scientific spirit will realize the need and the importance of e-learning in English teaching learning. E-learning will greatly improve the efficiency of learning English leading to good English knowledge absorption and consequently the placement percentage. E-learning of English is the trend of the day and need of the hour. It is quite good for reducing the burden on the students. Once the pedagogical strategies are modified, the teachers may also equally find the English e-learning tools to be interesting. Online learning of English is accepted nowadays as it is student-centered with focusing on direct interest of students and nurturing sense of language. Many teachers will accept it in future.

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