

## INTEGRATING LOCAL CULTURES IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE FOR CHARACTER BUILDING

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**Abstract:** Teaching a language, including English, without contents is meaningless for it consists of merely symbols and grammatical rules. Considering that language is a means of communication, the contents can be the message to be transferred. The contents of teaching English as a foreign language will be more meaningful if they are related to students' socio-economic cultural backgrounds. It does not mean that it ignores the ideas that teaching a language is also teaching its native speakers' cultures because a language itself is a kind of cultural products. In teaching English as a foreign language, the cultures of its native speakers can be used as meaningful input texts to explore and elaborate local cultures consisting of moral values and local wisdoms meaningful for character building. To do so, teachers and lecturers teaching English are suggested that they not only discuss linguistic components, but also integrate local cultures consisting of moral values and wisdoms as the contents of their teaching skills. The steps are (1) rendering meaningful input texts related to cultures; (2) discussing contents; (3) exploring and elaborating local cultures especially for productive skills; (4) using appropriate English expressions; (5) discussing contents related to cultures consisting of moral values and wisdoms; and (6) emphasizing moral values and local wisdoms for character.

**Keywords:** *local cultures, teaching English as a foreign language, moral values, local wisdoms, character building*

## INTEGRASI BUDAYA LOKAL DALAM PEMBELAJARAN BAHASA INGGRIS SEBAGAI BAHASA ASING UNTUK PEMBENTUKAN KARAKTER

**Abstrak:** Pembelajaran bahasa, termasuk bahasa Inggris, tanpa muatan tidak bermakna karena bahasa hanya terdiri atas simbol dan aturan gramatikal. Mengingat bahwa bahasa merupakan alat komunikasi, isi merupakan pesan untuk ditransfer. Muatan pembelajaran bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing menjadi lebih bermakna jika berhubungan dengan latar belakang sosial ekonomi kultur pembelajar. Hal ini tidak menafikan bahwa pembelajaran bahasa juga merupakan pembelajaran budaya karena bahasa itu sendiri merupakan produk budaya. Dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris, budaya penutur asli dapat dijadikan sebagai teks input untuk mengeksplorasi dan mengelaborasi budaya lokal yang berisi nilai-nilai dan kearifan lokal yang bermakna untuk pembentukan karakter. Untuk bisa mengintegrasikan budaya lokal dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris dalam pembentukan karakter, guru bahasa Inggris disarankan untuk tidak hanya mendiskusikan elemen-elemen linguistik, tetapi juga memasukkan budaya lokal dalam pembelajaran keterampilan. Langkah-langkahnya adalah: (1) memberikan teks input yang bermakna dan berhubungan dengan budaya; (2) mendiskusikan muatan; (3) mengeksplorasi dan mengelaborasi budaya lokal untuk keterampilan produktif; (4) menggunakan ungkapan-ungkapan bahasa Inggris yang tepat; (5) mendiskusikan muatan yang berhubungan dengan budaya yang mengandung nilai-nilai moral dan kearifan; dan (6) menekankan nilai-nilai moral dan kearifan lokal untuk pembentukan karakter.

**Kata Kunci:** *budaya lokal, pembelajaran bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing, nilai-nilai moral, kearifan lokal, pembentukan karakter*

### INTRODUCTION

Every country or nation sets its goals to meet, including Indonesia. To meet the

predetermined glorious goals of its independence as stated in the 4<sup>th</sup> paragraph of the preamble of the Constitution of the

Republic of Indonesia Year 1945, Indonesia faces internally and externally complicated problems, obstacles, challenges, and threats. Social, economic, and politic problems spring up everywhere. People tend to be materialistic and individualistic. They put their own interests as their priority. The practices of corruption, collusion, and nepotism continually occur in various governmental organizations. These complicated problems result from people's wrong ways of thinking, mentality. It seems that Indonesia has lost its nation identity – character. This fact terribly threatens national integrity, *NKRI*.

To conquer these problems, it is essential that every element of the nation be aware of the importance of character building starting from oneself either in family, school (and higher education), or community. In schools/higher education, all school/university members are responsible for character building, especially for the students, because the function of education is to develop abilities and characters and nation civilizations as stated in act No. 20 Year 2003 about National Education, article 3 (legalitas.org). In line with this act, Yogyakarta State University, Indonesia is working hard to ensure its graduates to be devout, conscientious, autonomous, and knowledgeable (<http://www.uny.ac.id/profil-uny/visi-misi>) integrating think, feel, and will for work (*cipta, rasa, dan karsa untuk berkarya*).

One of the ways to reach the vision of Yogyakarta State University, each subject matter should integrate character building in all its materials and teaching-learning processes, including English with its all branches. English, as other languages, consists of merely symbols, grammatical rules or patters, and skills. It cannot be studied without contents. Therefore, one of its con-

tents can be local cultures comprising of local wisdoms which are relevant to students' real life situations and meaningful for character building. The following discusses integrating local cultures in teaching English as a foreign language for character building: enhancing national integrity. The discussion is divided into three categories, namely (1) Language, Culture, and Language Teaching-learning; (2) Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) and Local Cultures; and (3) Integrating Local Cultures in TEFL for Character Building which falls into (a) rendering meaningful input texts related to cultures, (b) discussing contents, (c) exploring and elaborating local cultures especially for productive skills, (d) using appropriate English expressions, (e) presenting and discussing contents related to cultures consisting of moral values and wisdoms, and (f) emphasizing/highlighting moral values and local wisdoms for character building to enhance national integrity, peace and unity in diversity – Indonesia.

### **LANGUAGE, CULTURE, AND LANGUAGE TEACHING-LEARNING**

Language is one of the cultural products of a community or a nation. It consists of merely grammatical rules, patters, and skills. It cannot be studied without contents, cultures or wisdoms of its community or nation. Culture cannot be expressed and communicated without language. Language and culture, therefore, are two things which cannot be separated and they support each other. It is in accordance with Brown (2007: 210) who states that culture is really an integral part of the interaction between language and thought. Great thoughts and feels expressed using a language and manifested in the form of

good behaviours and in other forms of works will be wisdoms.

The ideas above imply that teaching a language is also teaching about its native speaker's cultures. As Gonzalez (1995: 54) states, the 'received' tradition is that language and culture are inseparable, that one has to teach both language and culture, since language itself without contextualization of culture, is merely a code leading to all kinds of intercultural misunderstanding without the cultural content. In relation to language teaching-learning a foreign language –English, it does not mean that the materials must always be authentic. On the contrary, the materials should be students' real life situation in order that their learning becomes meaningful and useful taking into account that language is a means of communication.

In teaching English as a foreign language, the predetermined objectives must be that the students are able to communicate using the target language, English. The content materials should be relevant to students' lives, social environments, universal values, cultural values, and nation diversity act No. 20 Year 2003 about National Education, article 4 and 55 (legalitas.org), while cultures adopted and adapted from English speaking countries can be meaningful input texts for receptive skills. For productive skills, the materials can be explored and elaborated from students' cultures so that moral values, living values, and local wisdoms can be discovered and identified for character building towards national integrity.

### **TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (TEFL) AND LOCAL CULTURE**

It seems to be no relationship between teaching English as a foreign language

and local cultures – Javanese, Sundanese, Balinese, Acehnese, and any other Indonesian tribes and cultures. Mostly people think that teaching English is merely about language elements of English and English cultures. They less consider that English is one of the international languages functioning as a means of communication. Ideally, on the other hand, teaching English as a foreign language is about both English cultures – mostly for receptive skills and local cultures – mostly for productive skills in discussing English language elements. The end of teaching is the students' communicative competences.

Now, it is clear that students' (local) cultures must exist in teaching English as a foreign language. It is in line with Davis (1996: 233-234) stating that student' daily lives, cultures, environments, hopes and fears, and needs must be involved in what is happening around them in the class during the teaching-learning process. In accordance with Davis, Evertson & Weinstein in Trumbull & Rothsten-Fish (2009: 326) assert that if we wish to establish in our classroom "inclusive, supportive, and caring environment" that facilitates students' learning, then we must attend to culture. Trumbull & Rothsten-Fish (2009: 322), furthermore, state that the teachers can make their classrooms work better for diverse groups of students by becoming more aware not only of their students' cultures but also of their own and by tapping into the strengths of each culture represented in the classroom.

Referring to the experts' ideas above, teaching-learning English as a foreign language in Indonesia should start with students' (local) cultures and end with students' cultures also. At the beginning of the class, the lecturers (teachers) should give the students apperception in the forms of

question and answer session employing students' real life situations. Having given apperception, the lecturers/teachers need to impart the students language exposures in the forms of meaningful input texts. These input texts can be either written or spoken authentic materials (further discussion on rendering meaningful input texts).

In discussing English language elements, the materials can be similar to the input texts or new texts to be linguistically analyzed and practiced. In this step, both lecturers/teachers and students focus on and discuss the contents and language elements existing in the texts, grammatical rules, patterns, derivation, phonology, pronunciation, cohesive devices, etc. moral values, living values, and wisdoms can be discovered and identified from contents and analysis of language elements (further discussion on discussing contents and linguistic features).

The next step of teaching is communication skills or productive skills. In this step, the students should employ language elements for productive skills communicatively, spoken and written, by exploring and elaborating their (local) cultures. It can be thematic activities. It is supported by Celce-Muria and Olshtain (2000: 194) who state that the thematic content should expose students to situations, texts, or discourse types that are relevant to the interest and experiences of the learners. Furthermore, both experts (2000:195) state that in order to provide learners with the most conducive learning environment, within school-centered situations, teachers should be aware of the students' needs and interests. In short, the teaching ends with students' (local) cultures –students' real life situation revealing moral values, living values, and wisdoms to be applied in their

daily lives and English functions as a means of communication (Madya, 2004).

### **INTEGRATING LOCAL CULTURES IN TEFL FOR CHARACTER BUILDING**

Discussing local cultures seems to be traditional compared to global cultures. Integrating local cultures in TEFL has three purposes: (1) catering the students with meaningful texts related to their real life situations; (2) conserving cultural heritages; (3) exploring local wisdoms (moral and living values) for character building. To be successful in English language teaching-learning process, the teachers of English must incorporate and or integrate local cultures (students' socio-economic cultural backgrounds) in their teaching so that the students' learning will be meaningful and useful. The third function of making use of local cultures as a means for character building is in accordance with Zuchdi (2009:101-102) stating that character building can be conducted either directly through certain subject matters or indirectly integrated into all subject matters that can develop cognition, affection, and behavior, including English with its all branches.

Integrating values education gives teachers another vision of their pedagogical work. In order to have a real impact, values education has to be planned as a school project, integrated into every aspect of the curriculum, pedagogy and activities, involving all the teachers as a team as well as the organizational and decision-making structure of the educational institution" (Combes in Drake, 2011: 7). In reference to Combes' idea, all school/university members are responsible for character building. The decision makers should facilitate character building in the forms of curriculums and programs. Yogyakarta State University has concerned with this and its co-

commitments related to character building are set into its vision, having devout, conscientious, autonomous, and knowledgeable graduates integrating think, feel, and will for work. The staffs support the programs and the lecturers execute the programs by integrating moral values and wisdoms inherent in materials (local cultures) of each subject matter, including English with its all branches.

The steps of integrating local cultures for character building are as follows: (1) rendering meaningful input texts related to cultures; (2) discussing contents; (3) exploring and elaborating local cultures especially for productive skills; (4) using appropriate English expressions; (5) presenting and discussing contents related to cultures consisting of moral values and wisdoms; and (6) emphasizing/highlighting moral values and local wisdoms for character building to enhance national integrity, peace and unity in diversity –Indonesia.

### **Rendering Meaningful Input Texts Related to Cultures**

Lickona (Madya, 2011: 86) suggests that character values are implanted through curriculums or programs. Character values can be integrated in meaningful spoken/written texts as 'a hidden curriculum'. Moral values, living values, wisdoms are inherent in the materials themselves. The tasks of the lecturers/teachers of English are to find out, identify, and convey them to their students while they are discussing contents and linguistic features and they are useful in their own lives, working environment, or in grasping opportunities. It depends on lecturers/teachers' sensitivity – how sensitive the lecturers/teachers are in inferring materials comprising of moral values, living values, and wisdoms for cha-

acter building to clearly be conveyed to the students.

Reading texts about *Halloween*, *thanks giving*, *valentine*, and *origami* are not Indonesian or Javanese students' real world. The students are not really familiar with them although they can also be input texts in receptive skills. However, it will be more meaningful if reading texts as inputs are about Javanese wedding ceremony, *kethoprak*, or *wayang*. For more specific related to Javanese local cultures, Semarang has *warak ngendog* and *gambang*, Yogyakarta and Solo have *sekaten*; Klaten has *yakowiyu*; Gamping Sleman has *bekakak*; Sleman has *jathilan*; Purworejo has *ndolalak*; Banyumas has *ronggeng/lengger* and *ebeg/jathilan*, Purwodadi has *tayub*; Blora has *barongan*; Rembang has *tongtongklek*; Kudus has *ternag*; and so forth. Reading texts about those cultures and arts can be created as meaningful and more understandable input texts. They can be more explored and elaborated in productive skills and the lecturers/teachers should make the students *be proud of having them as national identity*.

A text about Javanese wedding ceremony can be one of the meaningful texts. In Javanese wedding ceremony, there are so many meaningful symbols or signs that have moral values. If those symbols in Javanese wedding ceremony are presented in English texts, they can be meaningful texts and can also be used to teach the students to have good personalities –character building.

### **Discussing Contents and Linguistic Features**

#### **Contents**

One should be sensitive to conditions and situations existing in the place where he/she lives. Everything he/she does must be meaningful that he/she gets meaningful

experiences (Zamroni, 2011; 174). Through subject matters, teachers/lecturers should be able to develop students' good characters (Zamroni, 2011:175). The lecturers/teachers (of English), therefore, should be sensitive to the moral values, living values, and wisdoms inherent in the texts. The texts about local cultures presented in the previous section can be deeply discussed and moral values, living values, and wisdoms can be found and conveyed. The examples are as follows.

*PISANG RAJA SETANDHAN SASULUHAN: bilih risang temanten engkang pinindha raja saari saestu sageda darbe wewatakaning raja engkang sarwa-sarwi tanggel jawab berbudi bawaleksana, tresna sih mring kawula, remen suka dana, hanetepi pangandika. Tembenipun saged sinuyudan ing kawula, sukur-sukur risang penganten saged dados tepa palupining brayat engkang tansah saged tinulad dening asanes.* It symbolized that the bridegroom and bride seem as if they were king and queen on one day. They should have characters as king and queen have. They must be **responsible** for their duties, **love** others, give funds for social purposes (**generous**), and fulfill their promises (**faith**). They must be able to be **good models for others**. Although the bridegroom and bride are treated as though they were king and queen, in other part, there is *SUNGKEMAN: Engkang pinindha raja saari sampun jengkar saking dampar arsa lumarap ngabyantara para pinisepuh. Boten kesupen penganten putri gya kakanthi penganten kakung esthining manah among sumedya anguswa pepadanging engkang eyang, rama, miwah engkang ibu. Penganten sarimbit sigra tumungkul amarikelu, tangkeping asta sumembah ing jengkul kanan. Ing batos among nyenyadang rumentahing sih saking eyang saha rama ibu, saha nyuwun tambahing pangestu anggenira badhe mbangun brayat, netepi jejeri agesang, sageda tulus mulya manggih raharja ....* In short, the bridegroom and bride kneel down their parents, showing their **respects** for parents.

Therefore, it is necessary to semiotically understand cultures in order that people are able to comprehend holistically social lives (Suyata, 2011:8-9). In the examples above, moral values and wisdoms are presented in the forms of symbols. The lecturers/teachers and students should be sensitive in making inference of what characters which are rendered via the symbols.

Developing students' good characters, teachers/lecturers should cater the students with meaningfully real examples as characters cannot be forced but can be implanted, created, developed, and educated. The examples of moral values and wisdoms in the above texts should be clearly stated and conveyed to the students. The lecturers then suggest that the students practice and apply what they learn and get from the discussion in the class in their real life activities. It means that when positive values and the search for meaning and purpose are placed at the heart of learning and teaching, education itself is valued (<http://www.livingvalues.net/>), especially in character building. It makes the students have good characters –knowing, loving, and doing good things based on social and religious values. If each student's (local) culture can be identified, explored, and elaborated, there will be cultural understanding among the students attending the class. They will know more their classmates' cultures and understand that each (local) culture has moral values, living values, and wisdoms. If the lecturers/teachers are able to do so, nation characters can be built and nation characters are completely important for life sustainability and its nation life, Indonesia (Suyata, 2011: 12). Therefore, national integrity can be achieved, *peace and unity in diversity –Indonesia*.

In every topic discussed in the class, the lecturers/teacher should be able to

make inference about values and reflect what they do in the classroom to be applied outside the classroom. It supports the process of learning as a meaning-making process, contributing to the development of critical thinking, imagination, understanding, self-awareness, intrapersonal and interpersonal skills and consideration of others. Effective values educators (lecturers/teachers) are aware of their own thoughts, feelings, attitudes and behaviors and sensitive to the impact these have on others (<http://www.livingvalues.net/>). Furthermore, the lecturers/teachers should be able to impart the students real actions reflecting good characters. It is the hardest thing to do because they give more impacts than advice does. *Action talks louder than words (satu tauladan lebih baik daripada seribu nasihat)*.

### ***Linguistic Features in Writing***

Discussing English language features – morphology, phonology, pronunciation, grammatical rules, punctuation, cohesive devices implies moral values forming good characters. In discussing writing for example, when the students determine topics to write down, it means that they have *initiative* and have to be *creative* in developing the topic. When they apply the rule of capitalization and punctuation, they practice to be *meticulous* and *careful*. When they correctly use cohesive devices, they learn to be *successive* in conveying ideas. When they revise their draft, they learn to be *open-minded*, *honest*, and *responsible*. When they present their writing, they are to be *informative*. Each linguistic feature has character to develop as long as the lecturers/teachers are sensitive enough. At the end of the discussion, the lecturers/teachers should tell the students that in fact they also learn to have such good characters.

### ***Activities***

Activities during the teaching-learning can be categorized into individual work, group work, and classical work. Each type of activities has good characters to develop, practice, and apply. Individual work makes every student become autonomous, honest, and responsible. Group work makes the students possess characteristics of cooperation, togetherness, leadership, responsibility, care, understanding, and tolerance. Classical work has the same impacts as group work does, but it occurs in a larger community. It trains the students to live in a real community, social lives. At the end of the activities the lecturers/teachers should also tell the students characters to develop.

### ***Exploring and Elaborating Local Cultures Especially for Productive Skills***

Local wisdom values and aesthetic values, among other values, can be the source of character education and support character building in the cycle of character education implementation (Madya, 2011: 89). They can be derived, explored, and elaborated from local cultures. They are about people's beliefs related to what is good, bad, right, and wrong, and also what is important in lives controlling their behaviours. Therefore, lecturers/teachers teaching English as a foreign language must maximise their own inner resources and draw deeply on the wisdom of the ages, the best of our traditions, cultures and ways of being and doing (Drake, 2011: 3).

Exploring and elaborating students' local cultures are appropriate for productive skills, speaking and writing. Having got meaningful input texts for receptive skills, the students have to explore and elaborate their own local cultures in detail and also correctly employ English language

rules for their writing and speaking activities. Having known what their cultures really are and what the contents are, it is expected that they love their cultures, are proud of their cultures, and love their country, Indonesia. As a result, national integrity can be achieved, unity in diversity – Indonesia. If possible, the students are also to find out the values inherent in their cultures. If not, in the presentation and emphasizing session, the lecturers/teachers should be able to make inference and find out what good characters can be derived. It depends on lecturers/teachers' sensitivity.

### **Using Appropriate English Expressions**

Good characters that can be implanted, developed, and applied in using appropriate English expressions are politeness, empathy, respect, care, etc. Good characters to be implanted, developed, and applied depend upon what expressions which are used. Requesting can develop character *being polite* and *respectful*. Expressions of sympathy can develop character *being caring* and *empathetic*, and so forth. After using such expressions, the lecturers/ teachers tell that they should apply what they have learned in the class in their daily lives. The lecturers/teachers can also tell what characters the students should develop while they are learning and using such expressions.

### **Presenting and Discussing Contents Related to Cultures Consisting of Moral Values and Wisdoms**

Having explored and elaborated their own (local) cultures and had productive skills activities, the students are given a chance to present what they have (cultures) or discuss in groups (speaking). In writing, the students can exchange their work so that each student can read his friend work

and know what his friend has related to cultures. Writing and speaking activities can be done in integrated way. Each student presents his writing in front of the class and others pay attention to the presenter. In this step, all students get the information of the content of others' writing and they can work together discussing linguistic features and revising the texts. Accomplishing this activity, the students will get cross-cultural understanding and be aware that each culture has moral values, living values, and wisdoms for building their characters. The lecturers/ teachers' role is to help the students' discussion related to contents and linguistic features. At the end of the presentation, the lecturers/teachers tell the students good characters that can be derived from the students' materials and presentations. It is in line with Drake (2011: 9) stating that the living values education materials can be adapted according to varying cultural, social and other circumstances. However, educators/lecturers are encouraged to choose the values that they wish to work with or characters which are relevant.

### **Emphasizing/Highlighting Moral Values and Local Wisdoms for Character Building to Enhance National Integrity, Peace and Unity in Diversity –Indonesia**

Pirous in (Suminah, 2011:177) states that "if you lose your wealth, you lose nothing; if you lose your health, you lose something; but if you lose your character, you lose everything." It seems to be clear that character is absolutely important for an individual, group, community, society, and nation for life sustainability. Lickona in Wahab (2011:68-69) states that good character consists of knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good. It covers cognitive, affective, and psychomotor



domain. Good character is not formed automatically; it is developed over time through processes of teaching, examples, learning and practices. It is developed through character education that can be integrated in all subject matters, including English with its all branches.

In reference to Pirous and Lickona's ideas and the discussion on previous section, it is suggested that the lecturers/teachers of English, besides telling the students, emphasize/highlight what good characters exist and are to develop which are inherent in every single material and activity. They also should emphasize that good characters the students know should be actualized in their real life activities. Related to good character *tolerant*, the lecturers/teachers should highlight that tolerance is completely important because they live in diversity so that the students are able to understand and tolerate with one another. If it can be done by all lecturers/teachers and students in Indonesia, national integrity can be achieved and, therefore, peace and unity in diversity – Indonesia can be actualized.

Therefore, attitudes of tolerance should be implanted and developed in children's (students') minds, behaviours, and lives to anticipate conflicts resulting from diversity (Kusmaryani, 2011:105), especially in Indonesia – a country full of diversity, for the sake of peace and unity. Besides, the lecturers/teachers should give real examples so that the students are easy to follow. It is difficult to do but it works more as *action talks louder than words*.

## CONCLUSIONS

With regards to the above discussion, some conclusions can be made. Moral values, living values, and wisdoms exist in materials of all subject matters, including

English with its all branches, and every single activity the lecturers/teachers and the students do during the teaching-learning process. Local cultures are meaningful English materials full of moral values, living values, and wisdoms for character building. Character building, therefore, can be done by integrating local cultures in teaching English as a foreign language. It depends upon the lecturers/teachers sensitivity in discovering, identifying, developing good characters inherent in the spoken or written texts consisting of local cultures. Good characters should be implanted in students' minds to be implemented in their real lives. If it can be realized, peace and unity in diversity – Indonesia will exist.

## UCAPAN TERIMA KASIH

*Alhamdulillahirrabbi 'alamin*, artikel ini dapat terselesaikan. Penulis mengucapkan terima kasih kepada semua pihak yang telah membantu hingga terselesaikannya artikel ini, terutama kepada (1) Ibu Prof. Suwarsih Madya, Ph. D. yang telah memberikan sejumlah masukan dan istilah kepada saya sehingga ide-ide dapat dikembangkan; (2) Bapak G. Suharto, M. Pd. yang telah memberikan masukan dalam pengembangan ide secara teknis; dan (3) Bapak Margana, M. Hum., M. A. yang selalu menasihati dan *mengopyak-opyak* untuk memulai berkarya. Namun demikian, saya menyadari bahwa artikel ini masih jauh dari kesempurnaan. Oleh karena itu, masukan, kritik, dan saran yang membangun saya harapkan dari para pembaca supaya saya dapat menulis artikel-artikel yang lebih baik untuk masa-masa yang akan datang. Terimakasih.

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