PERCEPTION AND PRACTICES OF EFL TEACHERS TOWARDS TEACHING SOCIO- CULTURAL CONTENTS FOR 10th GRADERS AT LE HUU TRAC HIGH SCHOOL, DAK LAK PROVINCE

NHẬN THỨC VÀ THỰC TẾ GIẢNG DẠY CỦA GIÁO VIÊN TIẾNG ANH ĐỐI VỚI VIỆC DẠY NỘI DUNG VĂN HOÁ - XÃ HỘI CHO HỌC SINH LỚP 10 TẠI TRƯỜNG THPT LÊ HỮU TRÁC, TỈNH ĐĂK LĂK

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Abstract - The 2018 General Education Program (GEP) has significantly reformed the Vietnamese education system. One of its requirements is for students to respect cultural diversity. This article aims at examining English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' perception and practices toward teaching socio-cultural contents (SCC) presented in the new textbook, "Tieng Anh 10 - Global Success", for 10th graders. It employs qualitative methods with the support of quantitative information. The study applies a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and teaching materials to collect data from seven teachers at Le Huu Trac (LHT) High School. The findings reveal that most teachers appreciate socio-cultural integrations (SCI) and agree that SCI does not prevent progress in terms of language accuracy. SCI's motivational benefits and positive impacts on learners' language skills were approved. However, teachers devote little time and effort to SCI. The study also proposes several implications and suggestions.

Key words - Socio-cultural teaching; English language teaching; integration of socio-cultural contents; teacher perception; classroom practices

Tóm tắt - Chương trình giáo dục tổng thể 2018 đã cải cách đáng kể hệ thống giáo dục Việt Nam. Một trong những yêu cầu của chương trình là học sinh biết tôn trọng sự đa dạng văn hóa. Bài viết này nhằm khảo sát nhận thức và thực hành của giáo viên (GV) tiếng Anh đối với nội dung văn hóa xã hội (VHXH) trong cuốn sách giáo khoa mới, "Tiếng Anh 10 - Global Success". Nghiên cứu áp dụng phương pháp định tính với sự hỗ trợ của thông tin định lượng. Bảng hỏi, phỏng vấn, dự giờ và tài liệu giảng dạy được sử dụng để thu thập dữ liệu từ bảy GV trường trung học phổ thông LHT. Kết quả cho thấy hầu hết GV đánh giá cao việc tích hợp VHXH và đồng ý rằng nó không cản trở tiến bộ về mặt ngôn ngữ. Những lợi ích và tác động tích cực của việc tích hợp VHXH đối với kỹ năng ngôn ngữ của người học cũng được công nhận. Tuy nhiên, GV dành ít thời gian và nỗ lực cho việc tích hợp VHXH. Nghiên cứu cũng đề xuất một số khuyến nghị và gợi ý.

Từ khóa - Giảng dạy văn hóa xã hội; giảng dạy Tiếng Anh; tích hợp nội dung văn hóa xã hội; nhận thức của giáo viên; thực hành trong lớp học

1. Rationale

Language learning is not only about grammatical structures and vocabulary but also about socio-cultural (SC) understanding as Byram [1, p.52] indicates "language and culture cannot be treated separately in the discussion of language teaching theory and practice". By SCI in language teaching, teachers can help students become more proficient communicators and promote their appreciation for diverse cultures.

The 2018 GEP of the Ministry of Education and Training has brought about significant reforms to the Vietnamese education system. It outlines that foreign language (FL) subjects should help students use the language effectively for learning and communication to meet the demands of human resource development in the country's industrialization, modernization, and international integration efforts. Obviously, ELT now should also focus on SCI. However, in Viet Nam, SCI in ELT has been neglected. Hoa and Vien [2, p.454] propose "From the problems of intercultural teaching perception and practices, it is assumed that intercultural integration was not implemented properly", and Long [3, p.134] states "Teachers focused more on the development of language

knowledge and skills, thus giving cultural knowledge a marginal status"

In the academic year 2023-2024, LHT High School first implemented "Tieng Anh 10 - Global Success" textbook, emerging for its prominent features, particularly its SCC. Understanding how teachers perceive and implement the SCC within the textbook is crucial for evaluating its effectiveness in promoting cultural awareness and communicative competence among students. These inquiries motivate me to conduct a study on EFL teachers' perception and practices regarding the teaching of SCC for 10th graders at LHT High School, Dak Lak province.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Background

2.1.1. The Concept of Socio-Cultural Contents

Sociologists described society as a collection of people who inhabit a shared territory, engage with one another, and possess a common culture. In his book, Aricinas [4] defines society as a group of individuals who share a specific territory and culture.

Tang [5] noted despite numerous attempts to define the

term "Culture," scholars have not yet reached a universal concept. However, President Ho Chi Minh's definition, as quoted by Nguyet [6] in her article encapsulated the broadest understanding of the cultural domain "For the sake of survival and the purpose of life, humanity has created and invented language, writing, ethics, law, science, religion, literature, art, and tools for daily living, including clothing, food, and shelter, as well as various methods of their use. All of these creations and inventions constitute culture."

A textbook's SCC, as can be drawn from these concepts, refers to the incorporation of topics, themes, and materials that delve into the social and cultural aspects of a specific language or community. They may cover cultural practices, traditions, customs, values, social issues, historical events, literature, and art forms.

2.1.2. The Relationship of Society, Culture and Language

Ntara [7] proposed society and culture are inseparable, as culture shapes social structures and behaviors, while society provides the context for cultural expression and transmission. Society cannot be separated from its culture, as culture is essential to its identity.

Mitchell and Myles [8, p.235] argued that "Language and culture are not separated, but are acquired together, with each providing support for the development of the other". According to Liddicoat et al. [9], language and culture are intricately intertwined, with culture influencing and being integrated into all aspects of language, leaving no level of language independent of cultural influence (Figure 1).
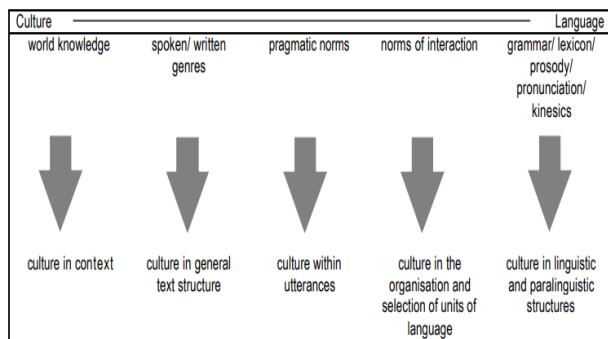

Figure 1. *Points of articulation between culture and language*

2.1.3. Integrating Socio-Cultural Contents into Language Learning and Teaching

Effective communication extends beyond grammar and vocabulary; it encompasses cultural understanding as well. A language learner who solely acquires grammar and vocabulary lacks the necessary tools to effectively communicate in that language.

Onalan [10], in his study, indicated learning the cultural aspects in the process of language learning enhances students' cultural awareness, empathy, and intercultural competence. Mazari and Derraz, [11] added that it broadens their perspectives, fosters respect for diversity, and promotes a deeper understanding of different societies and their values.

2.1.4. Overview of the Global Success Textbook Series

Foreign language teaching and learning have always been concerned by the Vietnamese Government. In 2008, the Ministry of Education and Training launched the National Foreign Language 2020 project, which particularly emphasizes enhancing the English curriculum. In comparison to the previous one, English is introduced three years earlier. Students are going to have English as a compulsory subject from grade 3 instead of grade 6. Many new textbook series are delivered in this context including the Global Success series, which is regarded as having exceptional qualities that enhance English language teaching and learning. In the view of Phong [12], the book series provides a thorough learning path that satisfies the requirements for widespread English language teaching and learning throughout the nation.

2.1.5. Introduction of "Tieng Anh 10 – Global Success"

"Tieng Anh 10 – Global Success" was officially approved by the Minister of Education and Training on January 28th, 2022. It is included in the list of English textbooks for grade 10 to be used in general education institutions from the academic year 2022-2023 under Decision No. 442/QĐ-BGDĐT. By accomplishing "Tieng Anh 10 – Global Success", students can achieve level B1 proficiency according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

The textbook revolves around four themes "Our Lives," "Our Society," "Our Environment," and "Our Future", which are explored in ten units. It is well designed for a diverse class with students of different proficiency levels, according to Que and Anh [13, p.428], "There are different topics and tasks offered for various learner levels, learning preferences, and interests". They added that the textbook also covers all language skills, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation.

2.2. Previous Related Studies

In the field of second language acquisition, SCI in teaching and learning have been widely explored by numerous researchers in the world (Onalan; Gonen and Saglam), and in Viet Nam (Long; Hoa and Vien).

Onalan investigated teachers' perceptions of culture, describing FL study as a means to gain exposure to diverse cultures, contributing to a "global understanding of other cultures and people". He emphasized the importance of cultural knowledge for effective communication, noting that teachers primarily include cultural content to motivate students and enhance cultural awareness rather than change behaviors. Teaching culture should also align with learners' ages and proficiency levels to create effective EFL classrooms.

Gonen and Saglam explored teachers' perspectives on the role of culture in FL education. They found that while opinions varied on which cultural aspects to prioritize, teachers generally agreed that culture is essential. Familiarizing students with the target culture enhances their understanding of its traditions and values while helping them appreciate their own cultural diversity.

However, teachers' approaches are significantly influenced by curriculum requirements and limitations.

In 2013, Long's dissertation examined how Vietnamese university EFL teachers integrate culture into their teaching. The qualitative study revealed that while teachers understood culture well, their goals for incorporating it were limited, and they lacked adequate support from professional development programs to enhance their intercultural competence.

In their study, Hoa and Vien investigated teachers' beliefs regarding intercultural integration. The findings revealed a solid understanding of intercultural integration but highlighted concerns about curriculum and management, suggesting a need for improving intercultural instruction and aligned educational management.

3. Research Methodology

The study aims at investigating the perception and practices of EFL teachers toward teaching SCC to 10th graders. Therefore, the researcher employs the qualitative method with the support of quantitative data.

The study was conducted in Dak Lak province with a total sampling of seven EFL teachers who are teaching 10th graders at LHT High School, Dak Lak province. These teachers are coded as A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, A6 and A7.

Table 1 below illustrates the teachers' background information.

Table 1. Participants' Demographic Information

		No.	Percentage
Gender	Male	1	14,3
	Female	6	85,7
Years of teaching	10 to 15	3	42,8
	15 to 20	3	42,8
	More than 20	1	14,3
Educational degrees	M.A.	1	14,3
	B.A.	6	85,7

Based on the theoretical results and research objectives, the researcher created a questionnaire. After collecting, all the responses were analyzed and reported in a reader-friendly way. Then the researcher created semi-structured interview's questions, conducted classroom observations, and collected teaching materials.

The 20 items of the questionnaires were separated into three parts. All items are adopted from previous studies of Gonen and Saglam [14], Que and Anh, Dema and Moeller [15] and adapted with some adjustments to fit the aim of the current study.

The qualitative data was collected from semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and teaching materials. According to Seidman [16], interviews facilitated knowledge construction via social interaction, aiming at providing a balanced understanding of the research topic rather than verify hypotheses. Direct classroom observations and the collection of teaching materials could offer insights into how participants address SCC in their English language teaching.

All data, then, was processed together by using a thematic analysis approach to answer the research's questions. Gibson and Brown, [17] presented an assumption on thematic analysis that it is a method used to examine collected data and identify similarities, differences, and relationships within it. Braun and Clark [18], suggested that the purpose of thematic analysis is to uncover patterned beliefs and behaviors shared among the participants, providing valuable insights into the research questions.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. EFL Teachers' Perception towards the Teaching of SCC in English language teaching

To identify EFL teachers' perception towards the teaching of SCC in English language teaching and learning, the researcher collects data from the questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews.

Table 2 gives more detailed information on EFL teachers' perspectives of SCI.

Table 2. SCI - EFL Teachers' Perception

Items of the Questionnaire		No.	Percentage
1. In a FL classroom, teaching SCC is as important as teaching the FL.	Agree	6	85.7
	Undecided	1	14.3
	Disagree	0	0
2. The study of SCC in FL classes can hinder progress in linguistic accuracy.	Agree	1	14.3
	Undecided	1	14.3
	Disagree	5	71.4
3. The development of SC awareness should be kept only for the most advanced levels.	Agree	0	0
	Undecided	0	0
	Disagree	7	100
4. Teaching SCC motivates students.	Agree	5	71.4
	Undecided	0	0
	Disagree	2	28.6
5. Combining language and SCC helps learners improve their language skills.	Agree	5	71.4
	Undecided	1	14.3
	Disagree	1	14.3

The table above presents the teachers' varied perspectives on incorporating SCC in FL classrooms. Notably, 85.7% of the teachers believe that teaching SCC is as important as teaching the FL itself. This indicates widespread recognition of the significance of SCI. Regarding item 2, the majority (71.4%) disagree that SCI hinders progress in linguistic accuracy, suggesting teachers generally do not view SCI as a barrier to language skill development. All teachers oppose the idea of limiting SCI to advanced learners, which emphasizes its importance across proficiency levels. 71.4% of the teachers also agree that teaching SCC motivates students, highlighting the positive impact of this approach in ELT. Similarly, 71.4% of teachers believe combining language and SCC helps improve learners' language abilities. This reinforces the benefits of SCI.

Referring to the interviews, most teachers recognize the significance of SCI in ELT. Teacher A6 notes, "Not understanding others' societies and cultures can be a barrier to communication". Similarly, Teacher A3 states, "Including SCC in ELT promotes understanding and improves communication skills. Teaching SCC is as important as teaching skills or vocabulary." Furthermore, teachers emphasized the motivational benefits and positive impacts of SCI on learners' language skill development. Teacher A1 highlights, "Students are often more motivated to learn when they can relate the material to their own lives and experiences or when they are curious about other cultures".

4.2. EFL Teachers' Perception towards the SCC Presented in "Tieng Anh 10 – Global Success" Textbook.

The data collected from the interviews and part two of the questionnaire are used for analyzing EFL teachers' opinions toward the SCC presented in the textbook "Tieng Anh 10 – Global Success".

Table 3 summarizes teachers' perception collected from the questionnaire.

Table 3. *SCC Presented in the Textbook "Tieng Anh 10 – Global Success"- EFL Teachers' Perception*

Items of Questionnaire		No.	Percentage
6. The textbook provides accurate and reliable SCC.	Agree	5	71.4
	Undecided	0	0
	Disagree	2	28.6
7. The textbook covers a wide range of SCC.	Agree	6	85.7
	Undecided	1	14.3
	Disagree	0	0
8. The textbook provides opportunities for students to explore SCC in depth.	Agree	1	14.3
	Undecided	5	71.4
	Disagree	1	14.3
9. The textbook provides support for teachers in delivering SCC effectively.	Agree	5	71.4
	Undecided	0	0
	Disagree	2	28.6
10. The textbook offers enough materials for learning and discussing SCC.	Agree	4	57.1
	Undecided	1	14.3
	Disagree	2	28.6

As we can see from the table, the majority of the teachers perceive the textbook' SCC to be accurate, reliable, and diverse. Specifically, 71.4% agree that the textbook provides accurate and reliable SCC, and 85.7% agree on the textbook's wide range of these contents, which indicates a positive perception of its comprehensiveness.

Regarding Item 8, only 14.3% agree that the textbook provides opportunities for in-depth exploration of SCC, while a significant 71.4% are undecided. This indicates a critical area for improvement, as many teachers may perceive the textbook as lacking depth in this aspect, leading to uncertainty about its effectiveness in fostering deeper understanding.

Although 71.4% believe that the textbook supports teachers in delivering SCC effectively, just over half (57.1%) of the teachers agree that the textbook offers enough materials for learning and discussing SCC, indicating that there may be gaps in the materials provided.

In the interviews, Teacher A6 states, "The textbook is a good source of SCC because it covers many different areas, such as the inclusion of diverse topics, authentic materials, and the promotion of critical thinking." Teacher A3 adds, "The book is designed with vivid images to illustrate the learning content."

However, Teacher A2 raises the concern that while the textbook covers a broad variety of topics, it lacks sufficient materials for exploring and discussing SCC in depth. She emphasizes the necessity for teachers to seek additional resources to enhance the effectiveness and comprehensibility of their lessons, stating, "I think it covers a wide range, but it doesn't provide enough materials for learning and discussing SCC. Teachers really need to find more resources if they want their lessons to be effective and understandable".

4.3. EFL Teachers' Practices Regarding the Teaching of SCC

The researcher used a variety of data instruments to determine EFL teachers' practices of SCC presented in the textbook "Tieng Anh 10 - Global Success". These instruments included part three of the questionnaire, classroom observations and a collection of teaching materials.

Findings from Questionnaire

Table 4 shows approaches that teachers may use to address SCI.

Table 4. *SCI - Teachers' Practices*

Items of Questionnaire	Code
11. I use pictures that I prepare beforehand to present a typical image of SCC.	SCl1
12. I have my students bring cultural artifacts or real objects and present them to the rest of the class.	SCl2
13. I use authentic materials like videos, articles, songs, or advertisements, TV shows, movies…. to illustrate the SCC.	SCl3
14. I ask students to prepare presentations on specific SCC featured in the textbook.	SCl4
15. I facilitate class discussions on SC topics raised in the textbook.	SCl5
16. I encourage students to share their perspectives, experiences, and insights related to the SCC presented.	SCl6
17. I assign tasks that involve comparing and contrasting SC practices, customs, or traditions between different countries or regions.	SCl7
18. I encourage students to explore the causes of differences between home and foreign SCC.	SCl8
19. I get my students to evaluate their home and foreign SCC from different views.	SCl9
20. I design role-play activities that simulate real-life SC encounters or situations.	SCl20

The frequency of the items above is shown in the following figure.

Figure 2 describes the preferences of teachers for practicing SCC and reveals distinct patterns in their choices. Item 14 stands out as the most popular approach, closely followed by items 13 and 11. This indicates a strong commitment to actively involving students in their learning process and to visually representing SC elements with relevant and engaging resources, which helps students better understand the SCC. By focusing on these strategies, teachers can enhance students' learning experiences and deepen their understanding of the SCC.
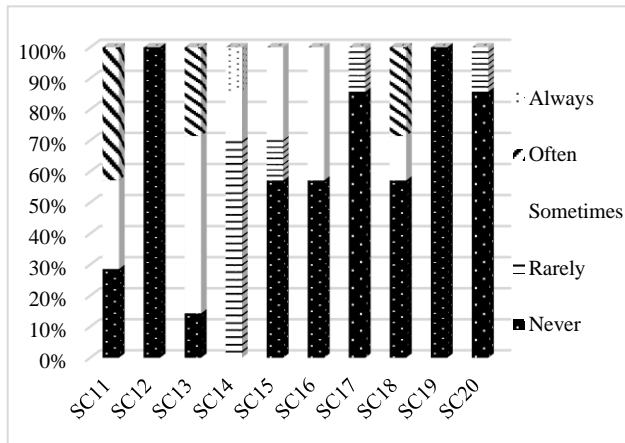

Figure 2. The Frequency of EFL Teachers' SCI

Regarding items 15, 16 and 18, the 42.9% of frequency suggests that teachers value discussions and students sharing their perspectives, experiences, and insights related to the SCC. These approaches can help deepen understanding and encourage critical thinking about SC issues.

The low-frequency percentages of items 17 and 20, with only 14.3%, show a missed opportunity for students to engage in critical analysis and gain a broader understanding of SC differences. This also suggests that experiential learning methods, which can be effective for teaching SCC, are not being used much.

Notably, items 12 and 19 did not receive any approvals as preferred methods for practicing SCC. This indicates a lack of engagement in hands-on cultural exploration, which is important for helping students connect with different cultures. It also shows that there is not enough emphasis on reflective thinking about students' own cultural backgrounds. Without these practices, students may miss the chance to deepen their understanding of both their culture and others, which is essential for effective learning SCC in FL classes.

Findings from Classroom Observations

To collect data from classroom observations, the researcher observes 21 lessons, among these, only six lessons are included with SCC. Table 5 gives a more detailed description of SCC integrated lessons.

By observing lessons, the researcher identified that the teachers allocated limited time and focused on addressing SCC in their ELT. As can be seen from Table 5, only six out of 21 observed lessons are integrated with SCC presented in the textbook. Moreover, educators dedicated

approximately 3 to 12 minutes of a 45-minute class to SCI, representing about 25% of the total lesson time.

As previously mentioned, seven teachers are participating in the research coding A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, A6 and A7. Thus, it can be observed from the table that only four (A1, A2, A3, A6) out of the seven teachers included SCC in their English lessons.

Table 5. Classroom's Observations

Teacher	Lessons	SCI's Stage & Time	Aims
A1	Unit 6. Gender Equality Lesson 1.	Warm-up (3')	To discuss SC topics raised in the textbook
A1	Unit 6. Gender Equality Lesson 3.	Warm-up Pre-stage (9')	To discuss SC topics raised in the textbook
A2		Warm-up Pre-stage (9')	To discuss SC topics raised in the textbook
A3		Pre-stage Post-stage (12')	To present a specific SC topic featured in the textbook
A6	Unit 6. Gender Equality Lesson 7.	CLIL (5')	To present a specific SC topic featured in the textbook
A6	Unit 8. New Ways to Learn Lesson 7.	Culture & CLIL (8')	To discuss SC topics raised in the textbook

Upon careful analysis of the classroom observation data, it becomes evident that the integration of SC knowledge into language instruction is not given significant emphasis. Furthermore, only about 28% of observed lessons included integrated SCC. This trend emphasizes a prevalent tendency where the time and focus allocated to SC knowledge remain relatively limited.

Finding from Teaching Materials

Teaching materials collected from the teachers mainly include lesson plans and powerpoint presentations. Notably, all the lesson plans are taken from teaching resources provided by the publisher without any adaptation. The powerpoint presentations are adapted to fit the students' ability and teaching situations. Most teachers skip over SCC.

Moreover, an additional discernment was made regarding the simultaneous use of the e-book iteration of the textbook accessible on the Sachmem.vn platform.

This practice underscores a prevailing reliance on externally provided educational materials, suggesting a limited degree of customization or personalization in the instructional content delivery processes conducted by educators within the academic setting.

In short, this section aimed to explore how EFL teachers practice teaching SCC. The questionnaire's data analysis revealed that the teachers at LHT High School utilized various teaching methods to cover SC topics in their lessons, though not frequently. However,

observations of classroom practices and the collection of teaching materials indicated that the participants allocated limited time and effort to teaching SCC. The absence of SCI suggested a lack of emphasis on the importance and necessity of addressing SCC in a FL classroom.

5. Conclusion

The findings on the teachers' perception toward SCI in FL teaching indicate that teachers at LHT High School overwhelmingly recognize the importance of SCC in FL education and its role in motivating students. There is a strong belief that SC awareness should be integrated at all levels of language instruction. However, some teachers express concerns regarding linguistic accuracy's progress when SCC are taught, and there are variations in opinions about the effectiveness of integrating SCC in language.

The findings on teachers' perception of the textbook' SCC indicate that "Tieng Anh 10 - Global Success" presents a good source of SCC, particularly in terms of accuracy, reliability, and diversity. Teachers feel supported in delivering this content effectively. However, concerns exist about the depth of exploration, with many respondents undecided about its effectiveness in promoting a thorough understanding of SC topics. Additionally, the adequacy of learning materials is identified as a potential area for improvement.

In an attempt to find the results regarding EFL teachers' practices of SCC, the data analysis indicates that although teachers of LHT High School utilized a variety of teaching methods to address SC topics, these practices were neither frequently implemented nor significantly emphasized. It is evident that teachers' actual practices in integrating SCC do not align adequately with their acknowledged importance of such content.

In conclusion, the research findings indicated EFL teachers' positive perceptions regarding the integration of SCC in ELT. In addition, they expressed a strong appreciation for the SC knowledge included in the textbook "Tieng Anh 10 – Global Success". However, the study also highlighted a gap between these perceptions and the actual SCI in ELT for 10th graders at LHT High School. Despite expressing these beliefs, teachers dedicated very little time and effort to the teaching of SCC.

These findings suggest that EFL teachers should put more effort into integrating SCC by incorporating additional teaching materials to make SCC more engaging. They should also adopt innovative and flexible techniques and methods that facilitate SCI. By implementing these strategies, the integration of SCC in ELT can be significantly enhanced, thereby enriching the educational experience for both teachers and learners.

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