
English Language Teaching at Kindergarten: What Happens in The Classroom

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Abstract

This study aims to describe the English teaching and learning process for young learners in kindergarten. It used the descriptive qualitative research method. An observation checklist and field notes were used as the instruments to collect the data. The observation covers aspects of language teaching activities such as the students' role, the teacher's role, classroom management strategy, approach, technique, materials, tasks, language used, teacher-student interaction, and students' participation. This study suggested that the English teaching and learning process at Pertiwi Pre-school can be considered sufficient. It has satisfactorily met 62% of the aspects measured. Some of the highlights of this study are that the TPR method and songs are highly recommended as teaching techniques. Moreover, understanding the characteristics of the young learners is very important for the success of the teaching and learning activities.

Keywords: english language teaching, kindergarten, classroom

A. Introduction

As a foreign language, Indonesian do not use English in their daily routine. People use English for particular reasons, like teaching and learning activities. On the other hand, the use of English should be more popular. English is a crucial modal every individual must have in today's world. As a result, it is a must for people worldwide to learn and practice English. One of the ways is to introduce English as early as possible, for example, by teaching it at the preschool level, especially kindergarten.

Teaching English to young learners has become especially important in recent years. One reason for this has been the introduction of primary EFL teaching, considered a worldwide phenomenon. However, in some cases, it showed us that some teachers teaching at the preschool level are not equipped with some necessary skills to teach at this particular level.

Further, those who need English skill improvements still need good books or academic sources concerning teaching principles to young learners.¹

Teaching English to young learners is considered to be complicated to do. The teaching and learning activities can be a very challenging and stressful experience. According to Halliwell, there are many things to consider when teaching young learners, and the most crucial part is that the teaching itself needs to be very well-defined.² Some of those things are related to the needs of the students and the teachers within the school itself.

Characteristics of Young Learners

Bransford & Brown suggest that teaching English for young and adult learners is fundamentally different.³ Further, Cameron states that children are often more enthusiastic and livelier as learners than adult ones.⁴ They are more concerned with pleasing the teacher than their peers. Even if they do not comprehend why or how kids will participate in an activity, they do, however, lose interest more quickly and are less able to keep themselves motivated on complex tasks. Children do not find it as simple to use language when talking about language itself; in other ways, they might not have the same exposure to conceptual things that teachers may use to explain grammar or discourse as adult students do. Children generally appear less ashamed when speaking a new language than adults, and their lack of hesitation seems to help them achieve a more native-like accent. Children acquire the language by imitating and learning through corrections and reinforcement assistance.⁵

In relation to this matter, Scott et al. say that there was a significant difference between what five-year-olds could do and what ten-year-olds could do.⁶ Some of them may develop early, while others may develop later. However, it is not feasible to declare that at the age of five, all children can accomplish x, at the age of seven, all children can do y, and at the age of ten, all children can do z. However, we may identify some traits of young children that you should be aware of and consider during the teaching

¹ Wendy A. Scott and Lisbeth H. Ytreberg, *Longman Keys to Language Learning: Teaching English to Children* (New York: Longman, 1990).

² Susan Halliwell, *Longman Handbooks for Language Teachers: Teaching English in the Primary Classroom* (New York: Longman, 1992).

³ John D. Bransford, Ann L. Brown, and Rodney R. Cocking, eds., *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School* (Washington DC: National Academy Press, 2000).

⁴ Lynne Cameron, *Teaching Languages to Young Learners*, 1st ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁵ Mega Fariziah Nur Humairoh and Febrina Rizki Agustina, "Studi Kasus Pemerolehan Bahasa Pertama Pada Anak Usia Empat Tahun," *GENIUS: Indonesian Journal of Early Childhood Education* 2, no. 1 (2021): 31-39, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.35719/gns.v2i1.40>.

⁶ Scott and Ytreberg, *Longman Keys to Language Learning: Teaching English to Children*.

process. Further, they also classified what five to seven years old can do and what eight to ten years old:

“Five to seven years old: (1) they can talk about what they are doing; (2) tell you about what they have done or heard; they can plan activities; (3) argue for something and tell you why they think, what they think; (4) use logical reasoning; (5) use their vivid imaginations; (6) use a wide range of intonation patterns in their mother tongue; (7) and understand direct human interaction. Eight to ten years old: (1) their basic concepts are formed. They have very decided views of the world; (2) tell the difference between fact and fiction; (3) ask questions all the time; (4) they rely on the spoken word as well as the physical world to convey and understand the meaning; (5) make some decisions about their learning; (6) have definite views about what they like and do not like doing; (7) have a developed sense of fairness about what happens in the classroom and begin to question the teacher’s decision; and (8) work with others and learn from others.”⁷

As we can see above, there are differences between what five to seven-year-old children can do and what eight to ten-year-old can do. So, we must be careful when teaching young learners at those stages. We also need to recognize the situation and the ability of the young learners themselves.

Moreover, Halliwell said the young students did not arrive at the language class empty-handed. They carry a pre-existing set of instincts, talents, and qualities that will aid them in learning another language.⁸ We must identify and capitalize on those prospects. Children, for example, (1) have been good at understanding meaning without essentially perceiving words; (2) are indeed decent at using limited vocabulary inventively; (3) quite often gain knowledge indirectly instead of directly; (4) feel justified in discovering and establishing fun in everything they do; (5) do have fully prepared curiosity; and (6), above all, take pleasure in talking.

Teaching Methods for Young Learners

Considering the characteristics of young learners is essential, but context is also very significant considering the teaching method applied within the classroom. Since young learners absorb the materials in distinctive ways, the teacher needs to provide a meaningful language

⁷ Scott and Ytreberg.

⁸ Halliwell, *Longman Handbooks for Language Teachers: Teaching English in the Primary Classroom*.

teaching environment using appropriate teaching methods. Some of them are:

TPR methods

Total physical reaction (TPR) is a language-learning approach invented by James Asher, a retired psychology professor. It focuses on the cooperation of words and movement. In TPR, teachers give pupils directions in the target language, and students reciprocate with whole-body motions.⁹

Asher created TPR in response to his observations of young toddlers acquiring their first language. He found that communications between parents and children frequently consisted of the parent speaking followed by a behavioral response from the children. Based on his observations, Asher developed three hypotheses: first, that language is mainly learned by listening; second, that language acquisition must activate the right side of the brain; and third, that language learning should not be demanding and burdensome. The total physical response is often used in conjunction with other approaches and strategies. It is popular among beginners and young learners but may apply to students of all abilities and ages.

Some excellent points are applying this method, such as:

- a. Straightforward to implement/no translation TPR instructions do not require translation or L1 implementation. It can assist students and teachers adjust to an English-speaking setting.
- b. Relatively new playing domain: no disadvantage for pupils with lower academic performance. TPR does not rely on left-brain, "academic" qualities. It provides an opportunity for all pupils to shine in a new setting.
- c. Teaches students to react to language rather than overthink it. TPR demands an immediate response. Because there is little time to ponder during TPR practice, students can escape the problematic tendency of over-analyzing language and be more at ease with "going with the flow" or interpreting from contexts.
- d. Decrease learner's anxiety. TPR does not need pupils to respond verbally. Furthermore, when effectively applied, students comprehend what is going on during TPR practice, leading to higher confidence and a reduced emotional filter.
- e. Distinctive teaching/learning methods of TPR may be a delightfully unusual type of education for both students and teachers. It may help break up a lecture or day and keep pupils alert when implemented appropriately.

⁹ Handoyo Puji Widodo, "Teaching Children Using a Total Physical Response (TPR) Method: Rethinking," *BAHASA DAN SENI* 33, no. 2 (2005): 235–48.

- f. Long-term memory retention/"magic" effect. Long-term retention of language elements is the objective of TPR, and the frequent repetition and recycling involved encourage the "magic" learning experience.
- g. Disguised repetition is for more effective input. We can frequently exercise linguistic targets without losing student attention when implemented skillfully.
- h. Ideal for team teaching. TPR is ideal for team teaching classrooms because one instructor may act as a model while the other gives instructions.
- i. Difficult to demonstrate. Regular, purposeful application yields result. While one-shot classes may be fascinating or entertaining, they may not provide the same outcomes as a well-planned series of sessions.

So, we can conclude that the students will be very active in the class by using this method. As a result, the atmosphere in the classroom will be charming, and we can also give the material to the students without being worried that the students will not get the material delivered.

Using Games

Games are an excellent exercise for language development, especially for young children. Children love games, so they may engage in the game without feeling anxious. Games may considerably encourage children since they are activities that are typically known to children in terms of structure, rules, and others. Because of this acquaintance, they link to the children's experience.

According to Du, Yu, Li, and Kusmayarti, games are primarily inclusive exercises since they include all the children and can accommodate varied learning styles and personalities. They are also inherently repeating tasks, maximizing target objects' input and frequency without boring pupils.¹⁰ It is possible to play, despite poor language skills, a simple guessing game (e.g., "Is it a...?") repeatedly with youngsters. The pupils will enthusiastically repeat the pattern without becoming bored because it is part of a game and has a proper communication function.

Games are especially beneficial for a youngster just learning a foreign language. The teacher can stimulate them by using games before engaging in language-production tasks. Some youngsters are eager to try their hand at manufacturing, while others are bashful and require more time. This 'silent' time/period should be available to the youngsters, whom we should

¹⁰ J.L. Du, P.F. Yu, and M.L. Li, "Leading Role of Educators in English Language Teaching for Young Learners," *IJET* 9, no. 9 (2014): 17–20, <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.3991/ijet.v9i9.3939>; Sri Endang Kusmaryati, "Teachers' Perspectives of Teaching English to Young Learners (A Descriptive Study at Primary Schools in Kudus)," *ELT WORLDWIDE: Journal of English Language Teaching* 7, no. 2 (2020): 93–103, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.26858/eltww.v7i2.9723>.

never force to produce words.¹¹ As a result, games provide an essential tool for youngsters to listen to and grasp language without producing it. They may completely engage in all activities without feeling compelled to generate speech.

Action chain is an example of a game we can play in the classroom. The game's purpose is to make the students, especially young learners, active in the class by doing some actions and making them familiar with various activities that usually occur in their lives. The first thing that the teacher needs to do is divide the class into two groups. This game aims to listen to the topic or theme given and keep adding related actions and shout out the name of the action at the same time. If one of the group members forgets the steps, fails to add a new one, or forgets about the order of the activities, the teacher will eliminate them. The group with the most members remaining will be considered the winner. Each member of two groups will stand in line and do an action one by one.

Thus, using games is one of the methods that we can do in our classroom. Like TPR method, games can also make students keep active. It is suitable for them because the students enjoy and are happy with the lesson. Students will remember the learning for a long time.

Using Songs

Most youngsters like singing songs, and they may be a pleasant distraction from the monotony of learning a foreign language. Incorporating themes in the classroom can also provide a welcome respite from following a prescribed curriculum for the instructor. The teacher may teach songs to any number of children, and teachers with little resources can utilize them effectively. Songs can help young children acquire a second language and strengthen their language skills. However, inefficient performing of songs makes the potential for language acquisition may be underutilized.¹² Moreover, song lyrics should be appropriate for students' ages as they must be simple and easy to listen.¹³

There are some advantages that we can get when we decide to use songs to teach English to young learners:

- a. Songs aid in the acquisition of vocabulary, grammar, and syntax. Children perceive complete phrases and acquire grammar and syntax

¹¹ Fiona Copland and Sue Garton, "Key Themes and Future Directions in Teaching English to Young Learners: Introduction to the Special Issue," *ELT Journal* 68, no. 3 (2014): 223–30, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccu030>.

¹² Neil T. Millington, "Using Songs Effectively to Teach English to Young Learners," *Language Education in Asia* 2, no. 1 (2011): 134–41.

¹³ St. Mislikhah, "Penanaman Nilai-Nilai Karakter Melalui Lagu Anak," *GENIUS: Indonesian Journal of Early Childhood Education* 2, no. 1 (2021): 60–74, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.35719/gns.v2i1.39>.

subconsciously when they learn with music. It is a simple method for kids to learn and memorize new words and phrases.

- b. They can use appropriate words in context. Children perceive vocabulary and phrases in context rather than as separate words or sentences.
- c. Songs may be memorable and re-usable. Unlike listening comprehension, a piece of music is captivating and enjoyable. ESL students will like hearing it numerous times over several months, as long as not overlapped in a single class.
- d. Songs improve listening abilities. Listening to English music naturally improves listening abilities if the student understands the language.
- e. They promote speaking fluency by using natural language rhythms. When children hear native speakers play songs for ESL, they hear English's natural rhythms and stresses, which improves their pronunciation and speaking fluency.
- f. Songs are entertaining and motivating for students. Using music in the classroom may improve the mood, bring in a surge of energy and enthusiasm for life, captivate the children's attention and motivate them in their desire to learn English.
- g. Songs can boost one's self-esteem. Using themes for ESL allows youngsters to listen to and practice English in a group setting, participating without being singled, and steadily improving with each hearing. It can result in a significant rise in confidence, spreading across all learning.
- h. Songs serve as memory aids. We've all heard how a piece can become stuck in our heads, precisely what we want for our English language students.
- i. Songs improve classroom management. More mundanely, yet crucially for a teacher, playing a piece of music quickly draws the class's attention. All pupils participate in the movements or begin to sing along.

In summary, songs also can be a device or a tool to attract the students attention. Songs can also help us when we try to transfer information to our students. By using songs, we also can control and manage our class activity.

Telling Story

Children or young learners love stories. Somehow, young learners will be very quiet, solemn, and calm when we tell them a story. We can say to our students' much information through the story. So, it has become one of the effective methods of teaching English to young learners.

There are some reasons why telling the story is effective in teaching English to young learners:

- a. Stories have a comprehensive approach. The stories employ a holistic approach to language teaching and learning that highly values children's engagement in rich, realistic foreign language applications.¹⁴
- b. Stories promote natural language acquisition. Language is acquired instinctively by young learners. The activities you undertake in class should aid in this type of learning. Your most precious resource is your stories. They provide youngsters with a universe of sustained meaning to which they may relate. Reports can later be used to assist youngsters in learning listening, speaking, reading, and writing.¹⁵

Therefore, we can conclude that having a deep understanding of the characteristics of young learners is very significant and essential before teaching something to them. Moreover, the teacher needs to be aware and careful about what they say because young learners, with their unique characteristics, will absorb and imitate it immediately. Based on this rationale, the researcher was highly interested investigating and analyzing the teaching and learning process at Pertiwi Kindergarten because English is one of the subjects taught to young learners.

B. Methods

This study uses qualitative descriptive research. It describes how the English language teaching and learning process are done at Pertiwi Kindergarten. Observation and field notes were used as the instrument to collect the data. One of the classes at Pertiwi Kindergarten was chosen as the research sample. The observation was held twice to see the consistency of the data collected. The researchers used an observation checklist developed from the blueprint and a mobile phone camera as the instruments. The observation checklist is in the form of table consisting of six columns. The first column contains the index dimension related to the teacher's and student's attributes. The second column contains the teaching framework of pre-teaching, whilst-teaching, and post-teaching. Then the third column contains the essential aspects to observe. The fourth column includes 57 descriptions or indicators of the parts. The fifth column contains the descriptions or indicators of the teaching and learning process. And the last provides further information about the observation in the form of comments from the researchers. Then, the data analysis used an observation checklist prepared beforehand. The validity of the data was checked by cross-checking the result of the observation and the field notes obtained.

¹⁴ Lynne Cameron, *Teaching Languages to Young Learners*.

¹⁵ Mary Jamesetta Slattery and Jane R. Willis, *English for Primary Teachers: A Handbook of Activities and Classroom Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

C. Result

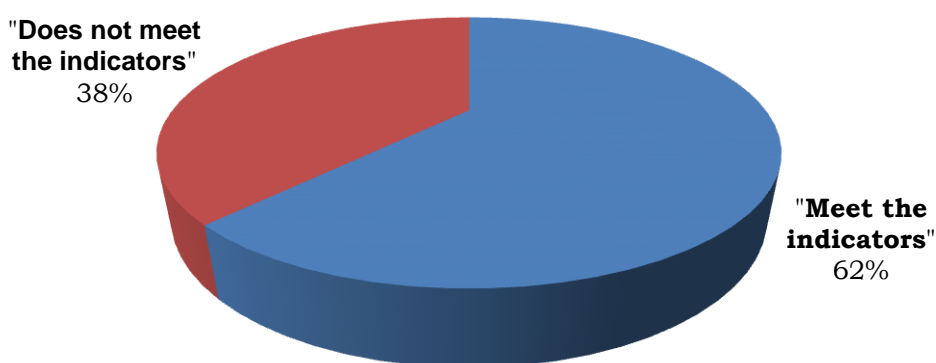
The result of the classroom observation within the teaching of intermediate grammar class is as follows:

Table 1. Recapitulation of Classroom Observation Result

No	Teaching Framework	Aspects	Number of Indicators	Evaluation Checklist	
				Yes	No
1	Pre-teaching	Role of the Teacher	5	3	2
		Role of the students	3	1	2
		Classroom Management Strategy	13	9	4
2	Whilst-teaching	Approach	4	2	2
		Technique	7	4	3
		Material	2	1	1
		Task	2	1	1
		Language used	6	3	3
		Teacher-students' interaction	4	4	-
3	Post-teaching	Role of the teacher	4	2	2
		Role of students	3	2	1
4	Students' participation	Motivation	2	2	-
		Enthusiasm	1	1	-
5	Language used	Appropriateness	2	1	1
TOTAL			58	36	22

Table 1 said that the teaching and learning process met most indicators within each aspect. It completed 36 hands and failed to meet 22 indicators. Hence, it said that the teaching and learning process had sufficiently met the indicators within the observation checklist by abiding by 62.06% of the aspects used.

Chart 1. The Percentage of Classroom Observation Result



From chart 1, we can see that 62% of indicators measured in the observation checklist cover some teaching and learning activities for young learners. Meanwhile, 38% of the teaching and learning indicators are unfulfilled within the teaching and learning activities.

D. Discussion

From the study results, some of the field notes taken from the results of the observation are as follow:

1. At the beginning of class, the teacher told the students to stand up and sing a song together.

In this case, the teacher uses a TPR and song as the teaching method. They sing and have some actions at the same time. They sing the *"If you are happy and you know it"* song. It is suitable for the students. It can build happiness right from the start. It is in line with the implementation of Total physical response (TPR) proposed by Asher.¹⁶

2. The teacher does not speak English every time. Bahasa Indonesia still dominates the language used by the teacher.

The teacher has made a good decision not to speak English every time in class. Since English is a foreign language, it is not necessary for English teachers who teach in pre-primary school to speak English all the time. Sometimes, it makes the students confused and cannot understand what their teacher says, especially those unfamiliar with English.

¹⁶ James J. Asher, *Learning Another Language Through Actions: The Complete Teacher's Guidebook*, 3rd ed. (California: Sky Oaks Productions, 1988).

3. In the middle of the class activity, the teacher told the students to sing a song. But just a few students who sing along.

The teacher made a mistake here. The teacher should explain the song earlier. When some students do not sing along, they will be having fun with others. It was, of course, disturbing the teaching and learning process. Besides, the students will lose their concentration, and it will not be easy for us, the teacher, to get their attention back.

Most kids love singing songs, and songs may frequently provide a pleasant break from the monotony of learning a foreign or second language. Using themes in the classroom context can also provide a welcome respite from following a defined curriculum for the teacher. A teacher may deliver songs to any number of pupils, and even teachers with little resources can make excellent use of them. Songs can significantly help young children learning a second language develop their language skills. However, performing songs inefficiently and the potential for language acquisition may be underutilized.¹⁷

There are some advantages to implementing songs to teach English to young learners:

- a. Songs can enhance the acquisition of vocabulary, grammar, and syntax. Children perceive entire sentences and absorb grammar and syntax subconsciously when they learn with songs. It is a simple method for kids to learn and memorize new words and phrases;
- b. Songs have the ability to apply meaningful language in context. Children typically receive vocabulary and phrases in context rather than as separate words or sentences;
- c. Songs can be memorable and re-usable. Unlike listening comprehension, a song is catchy and enjoyable, and ESL students will enjoy hearing it several times over the course of several months, as long as it is not overplayed in a single class;
- d. A teacher can use songs to strengthen listening abilities. Naturally, having listened to any English song helps a student's performance skills as long as the learner understands the language;
- e. Songs promote speaking fluency by using natural language rhythms. When learners receive pieces from the native speakers, they hear the natural rhythms and stresses of English, which improves their pronunciation and speaking fluency;
- f. Songs are entertaining and motivating for students. Using music in the classroom may elevate the mood, bring in a surge of energy and enthusiasm for life, captivate the students' attention and encourage them to learn English;

¹⁷ Millington, "Using Songs Effectively to Teach English to Young Learners."

- g. Songs can boost children's self-esteem. Using themes for ESL allows kids to listen to and practice English in a group setting, participating when they can without being singled out and steadily improving during the listening process. It can result in a significant rise in confidence, spreading to all aspects of learning;
 - h. Songs serve as memory aids. We have all heard how a piece of song can become lodged in our heads, and this is what we need for our English language students;
 - i. Songs improve classroom management. It is complicated yet crucially for a teacher in some senses. Playing a music quickly draws the class's attention. All of the students join in and begin to sing along. If the teacher did not already have their attention they now do.
4. The material or the book used by the students is not colorful.
- Young learners like something colorful. It will attract their attention. So, when they have a book that is not bright, they will get bored, and something colorful around them will be more enjoyable. In addition, the students will lose their concentration at last.
5. The teacher's pronunciation is not very well.
- As an English teacher, it is a must to have good accent. The students tend to imitate what the teachers say and what they do. Hence, it is crucial to have good accent because once the teacher mispronounces some words, the students will imitate them and become accustomed to their mistakes. It strengthens Scott's statement that so many teachers are teaching at the preschool level do not hold what it takes to teach English to young learners.¹⁸ It is very crucial and significant for the teaching and learning process itself.
6. The teacher does not make any corrections to the students' mistakes.
- Teacher has made the right decision. Studying a language, as a teacher, it is not necessary to correct to the students' mistakes every time. Doing so will make them lose their confidence or not want to say something whenever the teacher forces them to speak or say something later.
7. The teacher often says something in English which is grammatically incorrect.
- As an English teacher, it is necessary to be careful in explaining and doing something. It is required to say something in English correctly, either in the grammatical or phonological (pronounce something) aspect. The teacher needs to remember that young learners are like a sponge. They will absorb everything. Therefore, the teacher must be careful what they say and do.

¹⁸ Scott and Ytreberg, *Longman Keys to Language Learning: Teaching English to Children*.

Moreover, the teacher must explicitly instruct the students on every learning task related to this matter. Because of the characteristics of young learners who like to ask something frequently, it will make the class noisy. However, sometimes they keep silent and do not say something. When they decide to stay quiet, it will be more challenging to use to identify them, whether they understand or not.

8. There are too many break times making young learners lose their focus.

The teacher should avoid having a break time in the middle of teaching and learning. Too many break times will allow young learners to have fun with the others and not listen and pay attention to the teacher. As a result, the class will be uncontrolled and noisy. Furthermore, related to the topic and the materials, the teacher cannot constantly change them. The teacher needs to avoid giving different unmatched issues with the previous one.

9. The teacher cannot manage and control the class well.

Being an English teacher at the preschool level is not an easy job. The teacher must be very creative, patient, and kind to the students. To manage class in the pre-primary schools, the teacher needs to keep giving variations to make young learners not bored quickly. In this case, there was one moment when the teacher got angry with one of the young learners and scolded him in class. It is unacceptable behavior. The teacher should not get mad at the students. The students, especially young learners, will be disappointed and lose enthusiasm. So, being patient and having a pleasant classroom atmosphere is a must.

E. Conclusion

From the study result, we found that the teaching and learning process of English at Pertiwi Kindergarten had sufficiently met 62% of the aspects measured within the instruments used. It indicates that the teacher had adequately met the characteristics and principles in English language teaching for young learning, such as: (1) using a TPR method in the class; (2) using a song to deliver the materials taught in the teaching and learning process; and (3) making sure that the students keep being active in which it did not make the students get bored quickly. However, some aspects are possible to develop further such as (1) the teacher keeps making mistakes either grammatically or phonologically; (2) the teacher cannot manage and control the class well; and (3) the teacher seems not to have a deep understanding about the characteristics of the young learners. As a result, the teacher cannot apply the teaching methods optimally.

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