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ADDRESSING GENDER BIAS ISSUES IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL EFL TEXTBOOKS: AN ANALYSIS OF GROW WITH ENGLISH

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Abstract

Purpose of the study: A textbook is a book containing comprehensive teaching-learning materials for a certain subject which is regularly used by both teachers and students at school. Textbooks should not contain unfair content or matters, such as gender bias. This study was conducted to examine the extent to which gender bias appears in the EFL textbook mostly employed in Aceh, Indonesia.

Methodology: This research was aimed at investigating the representation levels of gender in English elementary textbooks of *Grow with English* book 4, book 5, and book 6. A content analysis method was used, for which every page of the textbooks was investigated to explore the five aspects of visibility, priority, feminine/masculine generic construction, activity, and occupation.

Main Findings: The result of the investigation shows that every textbook contains gender bias of various representation levels. Males dominated three categories, namely priority, activity, and occupation. Meanwhile, females are only dominant in the visibility category. The results suggest that the EFL textbooks mostly used in Aceh are still not free from gender bias issues.

Applications of this study: Indonesia is a country where English is used as a Foreign Language (EFL). Indonesian schools are apt to use textbooks written by Indonesian authors as the major source for English instruction in schools. Therefore, researchers should focus their attention on the content of English textbooks used in schools because they become the guidance for these students in learning.

Novelty/Originality of this study: The results of the study suggest that the EFL textbook should be considered for revision to ensure that it is free from unfair content. This is aimed at national textbook designers when they have to produce a textbook for Indonesian learners so that the books they make available to schools are free from gender bias issues in the textbooks.

Keywords: Textbook Analysis, Gender Bias, Content Analysis, EFL Textbook, Grow with English.

INTRODUCTION

For over many years, experts have already debated the issue of gender discrimination in the English language. Many words in the English language contain the element '-man' that is male-orientated (e.g. mankind). Meanwhile, those words can apply to both men and women (Lei, 2006). This issue must be resolved; otherwise, it results in problems in social life regarding men's and women's roles in society. Mattu and Hussain (2003, p. 96) claim that it is dangerous if men and women fail to take into account their diversity in society because when they are exposed constantly to a "one-dimensional, mono-visual world in texts" that allows no room for discussion or debate, then they will develop into thinking that only men alone have the right and the capacity over women. This can lead to gender-based violence, and Rico (1997, p. 8) defines gender-based violence as "violence that reflects the existing asymmetry in the power relations between men and women and that perpetuates the subordination and devaluation of the female as opposed to the male". Consequently, intimidation and subjective use of force become a socially putative behavior.

In the classroom teaching and learning processes, teachers and learners around the world should be aware that gender bias may exist in their learning materials before it develops an incorrect insight of gender and influences their social balance. Focusing on English language learning, and for those who learn it as a second or foreign language, it has been found that textbooks do contain gender bias of various representation levels on the English learning materials which are used by both English language teachers and learners (Benavot & Jere, 2016; Mattu & Hussain, 2003). Indonesia is a multilingual country, and in its education system, English is treated as a foreign language (or EFL). Therefore, the use of textbooks as the major source for English instruction in schools is common and essential. Therefore, the Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education ought to pay attention to the materials or content of English textbooks used in schools.



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Accordingly, this study focuses on investigating and measuring the presence of gender bias in elementary textbooks for EFL learners in Indonesia. The results of this investigation will be beneficial for national textbook designers when they have to produce a textbook for Indonesian learners, and if at the end of the study the researchers found any gender bias issues in the textbooks, the specific ways in which the textbook designers can make changes can be suggested. Bearing this in mind, this study is intended to answer the following research question: What are the representation levels of gender in English elementary textbooks of *Grow with English* book 4, book 5, and book 6?

LITERATURE REVIEW

A textbook is one of the very essential aspects of any teaching-learning process, including English language teaching. It is beneficial for both teachers and students because it is among the vital tools that support teachers in teaching and a source of information and guidance for students to learn (<u>Hutchinson & Torres, 1994</u>). Furthermore, <u>Sheldon (1988</u>, as cited in <u>Lawrence, 2011</u>) also finds that many educators see textbooks as a road map or a guide of EFL programs because it eases students in learning a particular subject.

In almost every class meeting, students in Indonesia use textbooks. <u>Sadker and Zittleman (2007)</u> maintain that the length of classroom time for the use of textbooks is around 70-95%. Students get a lot of information from those schoolbooks and use them as guidance for learning. Teachers typically ask them to read materials from the textbooks and steer them to do the exercises provided in the books. Because students regularly use textbooks in the classroom, the content of these books should be controlled; if not, students can be socialized and exposed to negative substances which can ultimately give them bad influences on their thoughts and behavior. One of the many bad influences to hinder is sexism or as we may simply say 'gender biases'.

Gender bias in education is a subtle matter. It is not easily seen because it has massively been prevalent but resulted in bad effects for the people who become the objects. The practices of gender discrimination in the education field cause the low quality of education (Kabeer, 2003; Livingstone, 2012; Sheehan, 2012). In some regions, even the victims of gender bias have been trained through years of instruction to be quiet and passive, therefore reluctant to stand up and speak up about the unjust treatment they got. Sadker (1979) states that much attention, energy, time, and talent of the teachers given to boys over the years has made the girls be the victims.

School is identified as one of the mediators of gender socialization (<u>Taylor, et al., 2006</u>). <u>Slavin (2006</u>) maintains that education (i.e. schools) practices gender bias through three main ways, that is through (1) the reinforcement of gender stereotypes, (2) the separation of the sexes, and (3) the discriminating treatment between boys and girls (<u>Slavin, 2006</u>). The practices of gender bias are commonly found (1) in the school activities provided, (2) in the textbooks used, (3) in the education policy made, and (4) in the separation system implemented (<u>Sadker, 1979</u>).

Textbooks are one of the most frequent media that teachers use in the classroom. Textbooks give a lot of information for students and it becomes crucial since students use it as their guide. Unconsciously, it gives a big contribution to socializing gender bias through it. Therefore, approaching textbooks used in the schools with the awareness that they may have suffered gender bias is a must, and analyzing the content of textbooks before using them is very important.

Over the decades, gender bias in education, especially in school textbooks has become one of the main concerns of researchers from many countries. The majority of the studies focus on investigating the existence of gender bias in their school textbooks through gender representative in the textbooks used. Some of the works to mention are Porreca (1984) in the United States, Lee and Collins (2006) in Hongkong, Mukundan and Nimechisalem (2008) in Malaysia, Chen (2008) in China, Nagatomo (2011) in Japan, <a href="Bahman and Rahimi (2010), <a href="Amini and Birjandi (2012), and Nabifar and Baghermousavi (2015) in Iran.

The study done by <u>Porreca (1984)</u> investigated the existence of sexism in EFL textbooks and the consequences of it. Investigating 15 widely-used ESL textbooks in the U.S., she focused on (1) omission (the ratio of female to male) in the texts and illustrations, (2) firstness, (3) occupations, (4) the frequency of male nouns to nouns women, (5) women-exclusive generic masculine constructions, and (6) the type and frequency of adjectives to man and woman. The findings showed that the ESL textbooks investigated are not free from sexism (<u>Porreca, 1984</u>).

In the context of Hong Kong, Lee and Collins (2006) examined gender representation in the English textbooks used by the students there. Several 20 textbooks were analyzed which comprised ten old textbooks and ten recently used textbooks. Seven categories of gender representation were investigated in these books. The categories included visibility, roles, feminine/masculine generic constructions, titles, the order of appearance, a vivid representation of both genders and their roles, and activities. Additionally, they investigated gender bias throughout five semantic processes, which are material, verbal, relational, mental, and existential. The findings of their study revealed that subtle gender stereotyping and semantic roles have shifted in recently used textbooks as against the old textbooks. All the same, women were still found to consistently play a more limited or lesser range of social roles compared to men.

<u>Mukundan and Nimechisalem (2008)</u> investigated gender bias in the Malaysian Secondary School English Language Textbook was done by. They used computer analysis and manual analysis for content and linguistic analysis to examine gender representation in the textbook. The investigation revealed that the textbooks contained gender bias. Interestingly,





unlike other similar studies, despite the presentation of men being more dominant in the textbook, men were frequently portrayed as persons with negative characters.

Chen's study in 2008 investigated secondary school textbook series, Oxford. The focus was on the pictures and texts. The analysis of pictures revealed that the chances to be successful for males were more than those for women. In the textbook, males were mentioned more often than females. Male characters were also presented as better figures. On the contrary, females were less mentioned and often depicted as the ones with weak qualities so that they needed help from males.

In the context of Iran, three studies aimed to investigate and analyze the gender representation of English textbooks used in high schools. These studies were done by <u>Bahman and Rahimi (2010)</u>, <u>Amini and Birjandi (2012)</u>, <u>Nabifar & Baghermousavi (2015)</u>. Despite different years, the study resulted in the same major finding, which was the existence of gender bias in the textbooks used in Iranian schools. <u>Bahman and Rahimi (2010)</u> did a thorough investigation into three English textbooks for grades 1, 2, and 3, and the study revealed that there was unequal treatment for males and females in the series of textbooks. A large gap is still portrayed between the presentation of females and males in the textbooks being studied. Sexism is found in the areas of nouns, pronouns, names, adjectives, firstness, reading passages, and male generics. Males are dominant in those aforementioned areas in the textbook. Meanwhile, women were invisible.

Moreover, Amini and Birjandi (2012) studied the visibility of females and males in the text and illustrations or pictures in Iranian high school EFL textbooks. In their research, several five categories were investigated, namely occupation, firstness, feminine/masculine generic constructions, activity, and visibility. Two books were analyzed and the findings showed that males were central in every category. Unfair roles between genders were also perceived; for example, women were generally stereotyped as stay-at-home mothers who mainly engaged in household chores that include room cleaning, making tea, and baking cake. Very little time was given for them doing other activities such as studying or watching TV. The books limited their portrayal of women as the sole caretaker of the home and only responsible for household chores. Meanwhile, men were mostly depicted as sports players such as playing football or Ping-Pong, reading newspapers, fixing the car, swimming, finding a new job, buying various things, among many others. Nevertheless, women and men should help one another at home, and women should be more active outside the home to cultivate a balanced society. To conclude, males dominate in both text and illustrations in the five categories being analyzed.

Meanwhile, Nabifar & Baghermousavi (2015) investigated male and female visibility in images, text, and male/female profession roles. The analysis of *English One* textbook was conducted based on the elements of social semiotics such as frequency, gaze, modality, and distance. The results of this study found that males are more present in the images compared to females. They further argue that the result of the study should better create awareness of gender positioning in the English textbook of *English One*. Learners of English should approach and do their assignments with open minds. On the other hand, they also have to be aware of the undeniable truth that these tools (i.e. textbooks) can suffer from biases of different kinds.

Gender bias issues in school textbooks have also attracted Indonesian researchers to examine. The works of Utomo, et al. (2008), Rasyidin (2010), and Salamah (2014) are some of the examples of such studies. Utomo, et al. (2008) investigated a wide range of schoolbooks consisting more than 85 primary and secondary textbooks from four major subject areas, that is, Bahasa Indonesia and English, Islamic Religion, Science-including Biology, Social Sciences and Sport and Healthy Living. The educational levels chosen to be evaluated are Years 1, 6, 9, and 12. A thorough investigation resulted in some major findings. One striking finding was that all the textbooks examined from Year 1 to Year 12 were heavily gender-biased. The textbook was full of materials showing stereotypical gender roles. The textbooks also contained sexual harassment and gender violence messages. Rasyidin (2010) examining the existence of gender bias in four Islamic Teaching textbooks published by three different publishers revealed that the four books investigated contained various kinds of gender bias forms and messages like subordination, marginalization, stereotypes, and double burden. Further findings showed that the textbooks were predominantly with men's representation. Meanwhile, the investigation conducted by Salamah (2014) to see the existence of gender bias in an Indonesian EFL textbook, Bright published by a well-known publisher Erlangga uncovered the absence of equal gender presentation in the textbook. Two aspects of the textbook, namely the number and pattern of male/female mentioned were occupied by females. Meanwhile, four aspects, which were gender roles, female/male games, and gender role models, were predominantly by males.

All the findings above showed that in all aspects investigated, gender bias was still heavily represented in the EFL textbooks. The findings indicated that the manifestation of women and men was still far from equal. This might be the reason why many researchers all over the world pay attention to gender and gender-related issues and are interested in investigating them. This is also the reason why this study was conducted. The investigation was targeted to analyze the pictures and texts developed in the textbook to see whether or not gender representation in the textbooks was presented equally.

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METHODOLOGY

The present study is a qualitative research that investigated the gender bias problems in elementary school textbooks by focusing on five variables. The five variables of this research are visibility, priority, masculine generic construction, activity, and occupation (Amini & Birjandi, 2012). In the work of Amini and Birjandi (2012), they had used the term "firstness", in which the researchers of this study altered it to the term "priority" as the characteristic of being first. "Priority" here means the quality of something being more important because being first does not always mean being more important.

Meanwhile, the corpus of this study comprised three elementary EFL textbooks. The method of selection was done through a survey on the most used English textbooks in elementary schools in Banda Aceh, Indonesia. All the elementary schools in Banda Aceh were surveyed about the textbooks they used at their school, and it revealed that all of the state primary schools (SDN or Sekolah Dasar Negeri) do not teach English at school because this was not programmed in the national curriculum. However, all of the Islamic state elementary schools (MIN or Madrasah Ibtidaiah Negeri) still teach English at school as an extracurricular subject. At these Islamic state elementary schools, six different textbooks were being used: Let's Make a Friend, Grow with English, Speed Up English, Stairway, Get Ready for Beginners, and Basic English. All of these schoolbooks become the population of this study. However, due to the time limitation of this research, only three books in the series of Grow with English books 4-6 are chosen. This is because these series are the most used textbooks in schools. The survey showed that they were used by 17 Islamic state elementary schools, more than any other books.

To obtain the data, the researchers calculated the representation of gender in English elementary textbooks in five categories (Amin & Birjandi, 2012), they are explained as the following:

- 1) Visibility: the researchers calculated the number of females and males on every page of the textbooks including female and male names, personal pronouns (e.g. he, she, his, her), and male and female terms (e.g. ma'am, sir). All of the male or female appearances in the textbook were calculated to examine which gender is more visible.
- 2) Priority: the researchers calculated the number of females or males that are firstly stated in the text, picture, or illustration in the textbook, like, ladies and gentlemen. In this phase, women are mentioned first and men are mentioned second. The calculation of priority was only used in the cases in which females and males were stated together whether in illustration, text, or picture.
- 3) Masculine generic construction: the researcher analyzed the common pronouns employed in the textbooks used when describing something that represents both men and women. The authors of the textbook at some parts included text which has a general meaning, but the author used her or him as the pronoun. Thus, the researchers discover which gender was obvious.
- 4) Activity: the researchers calculated all of the goings-on which was demonstrated in the text, illustrations, or pictures that involved male or female people.
- 5) Occupation: the researchers totaled all the professions which were stated in the text, illustrations, or pictures, and which gender was portrayed in those occupations.

The data from this textbook were gathered and analyzed by using content analysis. The purpose of content analysis is to describe and quantify phenomena of what is being studied by analyzing documents (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). It lets the researchers examine theoretical issues to enhance understanding of the data and to scrutinize these issues into fewer content-related categories (Cavanagh, 1997). Accordingly, this present study employed a checklist in conducting the content analysis. These checklists comprise text, pictures, vocabulary lists, and exercises to be examined in the textbook understudy, *Grow with English*.

RESULTS

The findings showed the categories of gender bias found in each elementary textbook, *Grow with English*, varied. The results below explain what evidence of gender bias was found in each of the textbooks, including the categorization of the evidence found, and to what extent the gender bias appears in the three series of textbooks.

Grow with English book 4

Of the five categories investigated, the researchers only discovered four categories, which were visibility, priority, activity, and occupation, which contained evidence of gender bias.

In the first category of visibility, females were dominant 130 more than males. That the author made a female as the major character in almost all the texts in the coursebook might be the reason for this dominance. The book contains six texts; four employ a female as the major character, one explains both a male and a female, and the other one describes the condition of a house. The four texts which employ a female as the major character is on page 14 telling about Nurul and her friends, on page 34 describing Nurul's classroom, on page 71 explaining about Meilin's activity, and on page 90



telling about Tigor and Meilin activity. Therefore, the result is that there was a higher level of visibility for female characters in *Grow with English* book 4.

In contrast with the visibility category, in the category of priority, male characters were leading. For texts and exercises in which males and females were mentioned together, there were five more times in which males were mentioned first, one time in a text on page 14 when explaining about Nurul and her friends, one time in a text on page 16 when mentioning about an exercise, and three separate times in a text on page 90 when describing Tigor and Meilin in a clothes shop.

Males are also dominant in the activity category because they were portrayed as doing a larger variety of activities than females. In the textbook, males' activities outnumbered females (at best 13 as against eight different activities). This suggests that there are some imbalances in the textbook. Besides, the textbook more often pictured males than females doing outdoor activities. This is shown on page 5, 50, 73, 82, 85, and 103. Some pages in the textbook also contain gender stereotypes. Domestic jobs like cleaning the house, cooking, peeling fruit, and serving food are portrayed to females, and activities like sleeping, reading the newspaper, and riding a bike are portrayed to males. These examples are on page 103, 105, and 110. Despite the facts, to a little extent, the author of the textbook has a sense of gender sensitivity. Some equitable gender roles are found in many pages in the textbook. As found on page 32, males and females did clean the classroom together.

Lastly, for the occupation category, it was not found in the textbook many variations of job referring to females or males. The textbook only mentioned three different occupations. Two occupations were held by males and one held by a female. A king on page 28 was referred for a male character and a shop assistant on page 90 was portrayed for a female one. Meanwhile, a female character is portrayed as a teacher 14 times on various pages.

Grow with English book 5

The research findings show that Book 5 contains three of five categories investigated. The analysis of those categories will be explained below.

In the visibility category, the textbook showed and mentioned males more often than females (483 as opposed to 380). Males were dominant with a bigger number in three units of the textbook. The textbook for some texts uses males as the major figures, to cite a few in the texts on pages 41, 77, 78, and 103. Besides, the pictures of male characters are found in almost every single page of the textbook. This explains why males outnumbered females for the visibility category.

In the category of activity, many gender stereotypes were found. Females were displayed more often than males doing domestic jobs like chopping garlic, peeling fruit, cooking, cutting a cake, and setting the table for lunch. Males were more often than females presented doing outdoor activities like exercising, playing basketball, and riding a bike. These gender stereotypes could be found in units 4 and 5, in which activities, like going on vacation and doing the exercise, were performed by males more often than females. Additionally, males were portrayed drinking tea while females did domestic jobs on the same page.

In the occupation category, males also outnumbered females. 13 different occupations were performed by males and only seven different occupations were performed by females. This suggests that a wider range of occupations were provided for males than for males such positions as athletes, librarians, dentists, teachers, doctors, pilots, and soldiers. Meanwhile, women were presented in common occupations like librarians, dentists, teachers, and doctors.

Grow with English book 6

The analysis of *Grow with English* book 6 showed that the book contained a different level of gender bias. This book presented only two categories, which were visibility, and activity.

The visibility category showed that females were more obvious than males, but the difference was not large. There were 33 instances in which women were mentioned, a bit greater than the number of mentions of males. Although females were exposed and stated often in the textbook, males were still leading in three units of the textbook which discuss clothes, food, and travel. Females were seldom stated in unit 5 of the book, which focuses on travel. This may build a perception that men prefer to travel while women do not. Women and men have the same opportunities to travel.

The next category was activity. This book showed various kinds of activities done by both men and women; however, they were not presented equally. Several 35 activities were done by men, but only 28 activities were done by women. This distinction in number may create an opinion that men are livelier than women. In the textbook, both men and women appeared together on the same page, but men were depicted as being more vigorous than women, as shown on pages 107, 113, and 115.

DISCUSSION

Several appealing facts revealed from the results of this study. The conclusion that can be drawn from the analysis is that the authors of the textbook seemingly have made an attempt to minimize gender bias by increasing the number of women in two books, but in other aspects of the textbooks gender stereotypes still emerged. The author may also have



made efforts to balance the activity which was performed by women and men in the textbooks, but it was equal in quantity, and not in quality. Perhaps this may be due to the "culture" of Indonesian where gender biases still appear in society. One example is such as folktales in storybooks for children, wherein most stories present the attempts of the girls to fulfill their ideal feminine roles. Rewards are given for those who do so and punishment for girls who challenge their ideal femininity (Masykuroh & Fatimah, 2019).

Out of the five aspects that were analyzed in this study, four aspects were found to contain gender bias in the textbooks. They are the priority, visibility, occupation, and activity. The major presence of gender bias is obvious in two categories, which were activity and occupation. In those two aspects, gender stereotypes were still many presents. A gender stereotype is defined by Singh (2015) as a conviction of female and male characters. Females are mostly represented as dependents and males are usually depicted as independents. The textbooks presented males and females doing almost the same activities, but quantitatively, men were still illustrated as the figures with more active roles compared to women. Also, the textbooks have evidence of the gender stereotype that portrays women as the sole actor who is responsible for domestic chores. Numerous illustrations in the textbook display a woman doing her chores like cooking meals while man is doing leisure activities like reading a newspaper, drinking tea, or listening to music. If there are certain activities or actions which are repeatedly shown as being done by only one gender in various images in books, TV, and newspapers, that image may translate into beliefs that may be embedded into the shared values as a gender stereotype (Brown, 1996, as cited in Manea 2013).

Thus, gender stereotypes ought to be excluded from Indonesian textbooks to avoid social misunderstanding of the role of women and men in modern society. The current mindset needs to be changed because discrimination in gender norms and practices put across the textbooks can lower female students' engagement in the classroom and limit their expectations in education and life (Benavot & Jere, 2016). Karlina (2019) who talks about Indonesian development program contexts using gender-oriented development-based claims that the development programs should be shared jointly based on four principles, which are 1) equal cooperation gained access, 2) role, 3) control and 4) beneficiary participation. This is so that both men and women play equal parts in developing the country to increase their quality of life quality.

Many facts show that nowadays men and women, especially in urban areas, have similar or almost equal job opportunities. However, it cannot be denied that we still find many women who face discrimination, and thus they are not sure of their capability, especially those living in rural communities. Various cases are found that women have reluctantly continued their schooling to a higher level. Cases like being a teacher or nurse becoming girls' favorite careers are also a common phenomenon. There could be many reasons for this. One of them is that textbooks like the ones being investigated present a limited range of occupation opportunities for a woman, or at least the quantity of occupation options for women is lower than men. Women have a large influence on changing society to be better. Blumberg (2014) maintains that no families, communities, or nations would reach their full potential when they ignore the full potential of girls.

CONCLUSION

The data of this research show that all the series of *Grow with English* textbooks analyzed contain gender bias at different levels. Of the three series, *Grow with English* book 5 was more biased against females than the other of its series, books 4 and 6. Further investigation shows that of the five categories to investigate related to the existence of gender bias, four existed in the textbooks. Three categories, namely priority, activity, and occupation were preoccupied with males and only one category, namely visibility, was preoccupied with females. Besides, even though the number of activities done by females and males presented in the textbook is equal, quantitatively males are still more dominant than females. The textbooks described males as the ones being more diverse and creative than females.

All these data then suggest that all three series of *Grow with English* investigated, too much extent, overrepresented male characters not only linguistically but also visually in occurrence, priority stereotypical occupation, and activities. Seemingly, deeply rooted in our culture, sexism has become a prevalent phenomenon. This makes the production of language teaching materials not easy to avoid. This study further suggests that the books need to be revised to eliminate all of their gender bias issues. The teacher who would use Grow with English 4, 5, or 6 in their learning process should be aware of the existence of gender bias issues in those textbooks. They should add some other suitable materials to cover up the drawbacks.

LIMITATION AND STUDY FORWARD

No study covers all aspects of the research problem. Despite that the aim of this research has been achieved; this research was conducted not without limitations. This present study only focused on one series of books, *Grow with English*, and used content analysis to examine the extent to which gender bias appears in the EFL textbook mostly employed in Aceh, Indonesia. There are still other textbooks that are utilized in the English classes in Indonesia. Therefore, to complement findings from this study, future research should focus on more English textbooks written by Indonesian authors to analyze the issue of gender bias and use other methods to conduct analysis.



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