The suitability of folktales as a culturally responsive learning media in ELT classroom

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Article Info

Abstract

Despite the abundance of studies and articles regarding the subject of culturally responsive teaching, there is a noticeable scarcity of research that discuss the subject of learning media in the implementation of CRT specifically in English Language Teaching (ELT) classrooms. By analyzing much further about the subject of learning media in the scope of CRT, the findings would resulted in an enriched and increased learning resources to be utilized by the educator. In this article, the author would attempt to do so by analyzing the suitability of folk tales as a culturally responsive learning media, specifically the Indonesian folktales. To assess the suitability of the folk tales, this qualitative study employed a qualitative content analysis based on the key principles of culturally responsive pedagogy and ELT materials evaluation. Some of the most well known Indonesian folktales were chosen as the subject analysis. The findings indicated that folktales would be a suitable learning media both in terms of cultural and pedagogical. All of the subject of the research exhibit inherent cultural value that can resonate with the learners and educational value that can be utilized in various occasion. These findings provide valuable pedagogical insight on how folktales can be implemented as effective learning media in culturally responsive classroom.

INTRODUCTION

The subject was known in various different way, such as culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010), culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012), culturally appropriate pedagogy (Nguyen, Terlouw, & Pilot, 2006), and culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Those are some of the terminology used to introduce the cultural approaches to education. Numerous scholars have been intrigued by it due to its ability to aid kids in achieving academic achievement. The tenets of CRT include the subject of identity and achievement, equity and excellence, developmental appropriateness, and teaching the whole child, as well as student-teacher relationships (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011).

These topics can be explored further into more specific areas of discussion. For instance, the study gains a deeper understanding of identity formation, cultural heritage, and diversity affirmation in terms of identity and achievement. We may anticipate that everyone will have equitable access to education that incorporates multicultural curriculum materials and expectations for every student in terms of equity and excellence. Developmental appropriateness involves learning styles, teaching styles and cultural heterogeneity. Teaching the whole child includes learning goals, a supportive learning environment, student empowerment, skill development in cultural contexts, and bridging the gap between the family, school, and community. Caring, relationships, engagement, and classroom environment are all part of the student-teacher relationship.

Numerous studies and articles have been published throughout the years in order to unravel the intricacies of this subject. From its effect in curriculum development (Hidayati et al., 2024), the impact it has in educator's pedagogy, the most effective methods to implement it in the classroom (DeCapua, 2016; Powell et al., 2016), etc. And yet, there is a noticeable lack of studies and articles in Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) that discuss the subject of learning media in the implementation of CRT specifically in English Language Teaching (ELT) classrooms. In this article, the author would like to discuss further about the culturally responsive learning media, specifically about Indonesian folk tales. The suitability of folk tales as a culturally responsive learning media in ELT classroom will be the main focus of this article.

The abundance of studies of CRT yet the scarcity of resources regarding the focus of learning media is one of the main reasons why this study is conducted. The aims of this research article mainly will be focused to assess whether and how folk tales align with the core principles of culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994) and fulfill the practical and pedagogical requirement to be considered as effective ELT materials (Cunningsworth, 1995; McDonough & Shaw, 2003; Tomlinson, 2013).

METHODS

In order to gather data for this study, the author primarily used a literature study—more precisely, a qualitative content analysis. The method was purposely chosen to evaluate the cultural and pedagogical suitability of Indonesian folk tales as a culturally responsive learning media in English Language Teaching (ELT) classroom. According to (Krippendorff, 2013), the usage of content analysis would allow the systematic coding and interpretation of narrative materials in order to find out relevant patterns to the educational objectives.

The subject of analysis and discussion in this study is Indonesian folk tales. Five widely recognised Indonesian folk tales from various different regions were purposely chosen to reflect the country's cultural diversity and narrative richment. Those five folk tales are: Malin Kundang from West Sumatra, Timun Mas from Central Java, Sangkuriang from West Java, Legenda Danau Toba from North Sumatra, and Bawang Merah dan Bawang Putih from East Java. The folk tales were selected based on several criteria, such as their popularity among Indonesian learners, their narrative richness that is suitable for classroom discussion, their distinctive regional culture, and finally their availability in English or translatability for usage in ELT context. While this study did not directly involve humans, the folk tales were still considered in their evaluation. They were assessed for their suitability across various educational levels, from elementary to senior high school, with emphasis on how each narrative can help the students to develop all four language skills, which are reading, writing, listening and speaking.

The study utilised a combination of two analytical frameworks. The first one was Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP), derived from the works of (Banks, 2009; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994), which put emphasis on the integration of students' cultural knowledge, experiences, and frame of references based on their daily life in all aspects of learning. The purpose of the CRP

framework was to analyze and find out the folk tales' capability to reflect the students' cultural identities and promote inclusive learning. This study adapts CRP principles into four core evaluative dimensions as seen in the following table.

Table 1 CRP Code

CRP Dimensions	Guiding Questions
Cultural Representation	Do the folk tales reflect the students' culture?
Identity Affirmation	Do the folk tales affirm the learners' identity and cultural background?
Multicultural Respect	Do the folk tales foster awareness and respect for diverse cultures and perspectives?
Empowerment	Do the folk tales enable the learners to be critical thinkers and agents of knowledge?

The second framework was ELT materials evaluation framework. Drawing from the works of (Cunningsworth, 1995; McDonough & Shaw, 2003; Tomlinson, 2013), the selected folk tales are also evaluated to gain insight of their effectiveness as ELT learning materials. The folk tales were evaluated based on the following criteria including linguistic, pedagogical, and motivational aspects as seen in the following table.

Table 2 ELT Code

ELT Evaluation Category	Guiding Questions
Linguistic Suitability	Is the language level appropriate for the learners' proficiency level?
Skills Integration	Can folk tales be utilized to develop language skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking)?
Engagement & Motivation	Do the folk tales engage learners' interest and promote active participation?
Adaptability	Can the folk tales be modified or adapted for different classroom contexts?

Data analysis procedure of this study begin by reading each folk tales multiple times and then coded based on the analytical framework, after that a rubric-based coding sheet is used to systematically evaluate each story. The codes are categorized into themes that are aligned with the two major frameworks that are CRP and ELT. Rating (1-5) were assigned for each criteria based on textual analysis and pedagogical potential. Descriptive and interpretive summaries are created to evaluate the overall suitability of each folk tale. The results are presented through thematic discussion and supported with occasional excerpts from the tales.

Codes from both analytical frameworks would be presented in a single succinct table along with the result of the analysis for the entire subject of the analysis. The resulted rubric-based code sheet will consist of the codes from both frameworks as the criteria, which are Cultural Representation, Identity Affirmation, Multicultural Respect, Empowerment, Linguistic Suitability, Skill Integration, Engagement & Motivation, and Adaptability; along with the assigned rating for each folk tales. Comments and brief descriptions will also be added in the following section.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of Folk Tales

According to the content analysis of the five selected folk tales above, those folk tales revealed not so insignificant evidence of high cultural relevance, pedagogical adaptability, and engagement potential. Each tale showed distinct strengths in promoting culturally responsive teaching and supporting various language skills. The following sections are the detailed explanation of each folk tale based on the previously mentioned analytical rubric.

Malin Kundang (West Sumatra)

The story of Malin Kundang is about a poor boy from a coastal village in West Sumatra who wishes to venture out to seek fortune. Eventually, he becomes a wealthy merchant and returns home. However, ashamed of his origins and his mother's humble appearance, he denied their relationship, thus breaking his mother's heart in pieces. Enraged, his mother curses him, and Malin is turned into stone as a punishment for his arrogance and betrayal. The story emphasizes filial piety, humility, and the consequences of forgetting one's roots.

Timun Mas (Central Java)

Timun Mas focuses on the story of a childless old couple who receives a magical cucumber seed from a giant, with the condition that they must give what it has grown into to him in the future. Unexpectedly, the cucumber grows into a girl, Timun Mas, who becomes their daughter. When the giant comes to claim her, Timun Mas tries to escape using a bunch of magical items—seeds, salt, and shrimp paste—that transform into obstacles like thorny bushes and a sea to stop the monster. Eventually, the giant is swallowed by the earth. The tale showcases bravery, maternal love, and cleverness.

Sangkuriang (West Java)

This Sundanese myth recounts the story of Sangkuriang, a young man who falls in love with a woman that turns out to be his mother, Dayang Sumbi. Upon discovering his identity, she tries to prevent the marriage by setting impossible tasks, such as damming a river and building a boat in a single night. However, with help from spirits, Sangkuriang nearly succeeds. Dayang Sumbi has one last trick. She faked dawn by waking the cock. Enraged by this, Sangkuriang kicks the unfinished boat, which becomes Mount Tangkuban Perahu. This myth explains the origins of geographical features and reflects themes of fate, deception, and divine punishment.

Legenda Danau Toba (North Sumatra)

This legend retold the formation of Lake Toba. One day, a poor farmer saves a magical fish that can turn into a woman, who agrees to marry him if he can promise one thing to her, to never reveal her origin as a fish. They live happily and have a son. Years later, in a moment of anger, the farmer shouted at his son, "you son of a fish," thus breaking his promise. Suddenly, the woman and child disappear, and a storm floods the land, forming Lake Toba. The folk tale teaches the importance of integrity, keeping one's word, and the mystical origins of natural landmarks.

Bawang Merah dan Bawang Putih (East Java)

This folk tale is often compared to Cinderella, due to the contrasts between the kind and diligent Bawang Putih with her cruel stepsister Bawang Merah and their wicked stepmother. One day, Bawang Putih helps an old woman and is rewarded with a magical pumpkin full of treasure. A jealous Bawang Merah, driven by greed, tries to do the same deed but, due to her insincerity and geed in her action, she is punished instead with a magical pumpkin full of venomous creatures. This tale promotes kindness, sincerity, and the moral that good deeds are ultimately rewarded while greed leads to downfall.

Table 3 Analysis of the Folktales

Criterion	MK	TM	S	LDT	BM & BP

Cultural Representation	5	5	5	5	5
Identity Affirmation	4	4	3	4	5
Multicultural Respect	4	3	4	4	4
Empowerment	4	5	4	4	4
Linguistic Suitability	4	4	3	4	4
Skill Integration	5	5	4	5	5
Engagement & Motivation	4	5	4	4	5
Adaptability	4	5	3	4	5

It can be seen from the table that all of the folk tales possess strong cultural representation within their stories. For example, in the story of Malin Kundang, the culture of Minangkabau was reflected in the setting which focused on maritime economy such as fishing, and trading. The criteria of identity affirmation also quite strongly reflected from the folk tales. Most of the folk tales contain common value that relatable to the learners such as obedience toward family, familial love, and honesty. Most of the folk tales in Indonesia also possess inherent moral values that resonate across multiple cultures. In the subject of empowerment, a lot of folk tales in Indonesia contain complex moral message, which may not be suitable for young learners without further assistance. However, for junior and senior high learners, the moral complexities that reside in the folk tales will offer the learners plenty of space for critical reflection and discussion. One of the examples from folk tales is in the story of Sangkuriang, the duality of Dayang Sumbi. On one hand she can be considered as clever and cunning when thwarting Sangkuriang's efforts, On the other hand she also can be considered as dishonest for doing so despite her earlier promise.

On the category of linguistic suitability, all of the folk tales reported a sufficient suitability linguistically to be utilized in various level of education. The usage of past tense in the narrative texts also important in introducing the subject if tenses to the learners. Folk tales can also be effective to be used to integrate language skill to the learners. The speaking skill can be developed by doing story telling and the listening skill can also be practiced at the same time. The reading skill can be developed through reading comprehension and answering written question regarding this subject. The writing skill can also be practiced during that time. The main purpose of narrative text is to entertain the reader so it won't be entertaining if it isn't engaging. The nature of folk tales as a narrative text make them inherently entertaining and engaging for the readers. The folk tales also contain various moral values that can motivate the learners be it the importance of family from the story of Malin Kundang, the ingenuity and hardwork of Sangkuriang, or the kindness and honesty of Bawang Putih. From the table above, it can be seen that most of the folk tales exhibit quite a significant adaptability. Folk tales can be adapted into various different form such as in form of text, audio, visual picture, or video. They can also be adapted into all kinds of activities such as role play and drama.

Qualities of Good Learning Media

To begin the discussion, we must analyze what constitutes a good learning media. An effective learning media is defined by its capacity to support the learning process through efficiency, engagement, and relevance to the learning goals. It should improve comprehension and memory of information while being flexible enough to accommodate various learning settings and student requirements. There are six key qualities of an effective learning media based on analysis of several studies. Those are:

Effectiveness and Efficiency

According to (Lubis et al., 2023; Yanti, 2022), a good learning media should effectively convey information and facilitate understanding, while also being efficient in terms of time and resource usage. The information in this case is the lesson material according to the syllabus. By that definition, a good learning media is materials which can be effective in conveying the intended lessons toward the students in the classroom, regardless of topic.

Relevance and Appropriateness:

(Ghofur, 2022; Lubis et al., 2023) proposes that a good learning media should be relevant to the subject matter and appropriate for the learners' needs and characteristics. It should align with the learning objectives and be suitable for the topic being taught. The media should also be familiar and relatable to the students in order to facilitate an easier knowledge acquisition and comprehension.

Engagement and Interactivity

Several researchers (Januarizky et al., 2024; Santoso & Lufthansa, 2022; Yanti, 2022) do agree that an excellent learning media should be engaging to the students and stimulating their imagination, making abstract concepts more tangible. One of the ways to implement that believe is to include some interactive elements as they can enhance student interest and participation.

Quality and Clarity

A good learning media is also a high-quality media with clear and intelligible content, that quality is no less crucial than the other. Issues such as poor pacing, lack of diversity, and incongruence can hinder learning as proposed by the studies of (Lange & Costley, 2020). A learning media which can impart information in a clear and concise manner is really important.

Adaptability and Innovation

A learning media that is excellent for classroom learning should be adaptable to various learning contexts and incorporate innovative technologies to enhance learning experiences, especially in the context of Industry 4.0 (Amaliyah, 2023; Yanti, 2022). The multimodality of a learning media is one of factors that should be carefully considered. A learning media which can be presented through not only textual and oral manner, but also in audio visual manner is undoubtedly an excellent learning media.

Support for Cognitive Processes

An effective media should definitely support the construction and modification of mental models, aiding in the development of cognitive processes (Kozma, 1991). A learning media that can make the students contemplate and consider problems and subjects more than what they used to effectively is a good learning media.

Culturally Responsive Learning Media

The main theory of CRT that is going to be used as comparison and analysis in the articles is the core principles of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy by (Gay, 2000), which derived from the dimensions of Culturally Responsive Teaching by Banks. According to (Banks, 2004), there are at least five dimensions of CRT. There is a relationship between these dimensions. They consist of content integration, knowledge construction process, prejudice reduction, an equity pedagogy, and empowering school culture and social culture. The dimensions outline the practical application of CRT. The way a teacher incorporates the various cultural backgrounds of their pupils with the material they teach in the classroom is known as content integration. The knowledge construction process explains how teachers assist students in constructing knowledge within the context of their upbringing and culture in order to comprehend and explore cultural presumptions, frames of reference, and prejudices.

The focus of prejudice reduction is on students' attitudes and how to change those using instructional strategies and resources. The ability of a teacher to adapt their teaching style to the racial, cultural, gender, and social groupings of their pupils in order to support their academic success is known as equitable pedagogy. To put it briefly, empowering school culture and social structure can be achieved by looking at all facets of school procedures that empower students of different races, ethnicities, and genders. These procedures include staff-student interactions across racial and ethnic divides, sports participation, achievement proportionality, labeling, and grouping.

(Gay, 2018) expounded on the features of CRT that are relevant to the educational setting. She began with the content integration theory put forth by (Banks, 2004), which holds that a youngster can be profoundly impacted by a tale. One way to influence how they construct their knowledge is through a tale. It can shape their perception of themselves as well as that of persons from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Then, the teaching potential of cultural responsiveness was examined. (Gay, 2018) explained that while cultural responsiveness can be

incorporated into the teaching methodology, the instructor must dispel the myths and assumptions that students from particular ethnic groups do have restrictions. Since there is nothing that can be done for these children, CRT should be used to validate their culture and provide them with a comprehensive, inclusive, multifaceted, empowering, transformative, emancipatory, humanistic, normative, and ethical education. The tasks and responsibilities would be known to the teacher later.

Several frameworks and models have been proposed to guide the implementation of CRT in ELT. The Culturally Responsive Instruction Observation Protocol (CRIOP) is one such model that operationalizes CRT through elements like classroom relationships, family collaboration, and sociopolitical consciousness (Powell et al., 2016). The Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm is another model designed to better serve students with limited or interrupted formal education by building deep cultural knowledge (DeCapua, 2016). Another crucial factor to take into account is the role that educators play in putting Culturally Responsive Teaching into practice. Developing teachers' sociocultural awareness and providing necessary tools and resources to incorporate students' cultural backgrounds into their lessons are essential components of preparing them to utilize CRT in the classroom. Encouraging an inclusive learning environment and raising the academic performance of students from varied ethnic backgrounds do depend on this preparation (Gay, 2002; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Teachers' employment of culturally responsive practices has been proven to increase with the use of professional development programs, such as those that use the CRIOP framework (Powell et al., 2016).

When implementing Culturally Responsive Teaching in ELT classrooms, there are additional factors to take into consideration, as several previous research have clarified. One of such factors is the intricacy of integrating many elements, such as student relationships and instructional techniques. When speaking with families, teachers frequently encounter obstacles including administrative rules and language barriers (Powell et al., 2016). To address the issues of fairness and inclusivity properly, the policies and instructional practices must also be consistent (Hidayati et al., 2024). However, various research indicates that culturally responsive teaching methods can effectively improve student achievement and engagement. For example, students who get instruction from teachers who successfully apply CRT typically score higher in reading and math (Powell et al., 2016).

Based on what has been discussed before, it can be inferred that a culturally responsive learning media is media that possess characteristics which will be able to supplement the development of the learners in culturally responsive environments along with the ability to support the teachers that have proficiency in culturally responsive pedagogy. Those characteristics are along the lines of being able to seamlessly integrate with the content of the lesson, support the learners with knowledge acquisition and retention process, while also mitigate the students attitude concerning the difference of culture. The learning media should also be relatively easy enough to be utilized by the teachers in various circumstances. And finally, a culturally responsive learning media should be something that can connect various people no matter what culture they came from, while also common enough to be familiar for people of any origins.

The Suitability of Folktales as Culturally Responsive Learning Media

The findings from the content analysis sections reveal that Indonesian folk tales possess not so insignificant potential as culturally responsive learning media in the ELT classroom. Each of those five stories reflect the principles of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP), such as affirming cultural identity, promoting respect for diversity, and empowering learners through morally driven narratives tales. From an ELT perspective, the folk tales can be utilized as rich language resources for the learners. Their structure also naturally supports the integrated development of the language skills of the learners. For example, the folktale "Timun Mas" is especially effective for encouraging the active engagement of young learners through creative activities like retelling, role-play, and vocabulary games, while "Malin Kundang" encourages higher-order thinking and moral reasoning skills in senior high students. Adaptability of those folktales across different age groups was also evident. While certain tales require linguistic simplification for lower levels, the core narratives of the story are all universally engaging and relatable. Additionally, the moral and cultural dimensions contained in these stories allow plenty opportunities for intercultural dialogue and comparative analysis. These results support the broader argument by (Gay, 2000) and (Ladson-Billings, 1994) that culturally responsive pedagogy was able to enhance motivation, comprehension, and learner identity in multilingual classrooms. Integrating folk tales in ELT thus not only encourage the

development of the students, language proficiency but also promotes inclusive, empathetic, and culturally grounded education

A community's customs and values are also often reflected in folk stories. They are essential for maintaining cultural identity and raising students' awareness of other cultures. Folk tales can also be utilized to cultivate cultural appreciation and understanding of students. It can be started by having a greater awareness of their own and other cultures, which also can be done through the use of folk tales (Quý & Phương, 2023; Rachmawati & Murti, 2021; Yumnam, 2023). For young readers in particular, folktales are often used for character education and moral teaching in a more interesting way. They give those youngsters a foundation for learning about moral behavior and social interactions by highlighting characteristics that often appear in the story including patience, harmony, acceptance, honesty, and sincerity (Supardjo et al., 2020). These tales can also serve as an excellent media to teach traditional values since they employ symbols, animals, and plants related to the culture to communicate life lessons (Supardjo et al., 2020). From the finding section above, it is revealed that folktales are excellent materials for teaching languages, especially English as a foreign language (EFL) or English as a second language (ESL). Through recurring and rhythmic storytelling, they offer real and captivating resources that improve vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. In addition to facilitating language learning, this method promotes linguistic and cultural competency by bridging cultural divides (Mishra & Satpathy, 2020; Yumnam, 2023; Safitri, 2024).

Challenges and Strategies

While folktales offer numerous educational benefits, there are challenges in their integration into modern curricula. These include the risk of reifying reductive notions of cultural difference and the need for further research into their intercultural benefits. There are both advantages and disadvantages to using folktales in English Language Teaching (ELT) as culturally responsive learning materials. Folktales can improve language acquisition by offering real, interesting content that fosters linguistic proficiency and cultural awareness. However, there are certain difficulties in integrating them into ELT.

Challenges in Implementation

One of the things hindering the use of CRT in ELT classroom is cultural misunderstanding. Due to their lack of cultural awareness, students may misunderstand folktales and their cultural value. There are some possibilities that the students may develop a certain negative view toward the usage of folk tales in the classroom (Gustianing, 2022). The lack of local folktales in the common ELT materials is also a factor to consider. Folktales in textbooks, for example, usually employ the more well known folk tales, which often come from outside of the region, even though there are plenty of folktales from the region. This indicates the need for more regionalized content (Hastini et al., 2023). Additionally, teachers as educators might not have all they need to successfully include folktales into their lessons. To utilize folktales effectively, teachers require resources and tools, such as strategies that include vocabulary support, post-reading discussions, and pre-reading exercises (Safitri, 2024). Other things are the conceptual challenges. It is possible to perpetuate simplistic ideas of cultural diversity by using folktales as merely cultural representations. Rather, intercultural participation should be the main focus, enabling students to actively participate and analyze folktales from many cultural traditions (Bruijn, 2019).

Strategies for Effective Implementation

Students' participation and understanding of local cultures can be enhanced by customizing folktale content to represent those cultures (Hastini et al., 2023). Pedagogical challenges can be addressed by providing educators the required resources and techniques to successfully integrate folktales into their lessons (Safitri, 2024; Yumnam, 2023). The learning process can be enhanced and intercultural competency can be developed by encouraging students to actively participate and share their cultural viewpoints (Bruijn, 2019).

Most application and utilization of folk tales as a culturally responsive learning media outside of ELT classroom are focused on the character building for the students. The majority of folk tales contain life lessons and messages that are definitely positive in life such as honesty, compassion, bravery, kindness, perseverance, diligence, cleverness, and etc. Such lessons will be even more profound and effective for the students when coupled with examples of real life scenarios on how

those virtues can be applied (Fitri et al., 2025; Setiyoningsih et al., 2025; S & R*, 2023; Umezinwa & Nnyagu, 2018). For example, honesty can be rewarding when applied in a real life occupation that deals with other people such as services because with honesty we can build trust with the customers. While folktales offer significant potential as culturally responsive learning media in ELT, challenges such as cultural misunderstanding, limited representation, and pedagogical limitations must be addressed. By focusing on context-specific integration, teacher training, and promoting intercultural participation, educators can effectively harness the benefits of folktales in language learning.

CONCLUSION

According to the discussion above, it can be indicated that the media literature of folk tales with its multimodality has a great potential to be utilized as a form of supportive learning media in a culturally responsive foreign (English) language learning classroom. However, there are also some limitations and shortcomings in this study. One of the biggest examples of those limitations is due to the nature of the study, which was mainly theoretical and focused more on the documents and past studies instead of practical on site research. The lack of those practical researches might result in some deviation in the findings when compared to this article. Despite the shortcomings of this article, the author still hopes that this article itself can be useful for the readers and if possible, the topic and subject of this paper can be developed much further in the future.

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