



Fostering Students' Creativity in English Writing Class: Investigating The Impact of Project-Based Learning in Bridging Ideas and Words

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ABSTRACT

The lack of stimulation for students' creativity in English language learning at schools, stemming from a conventional approach that overly focuses on information transfer and offers limited scope for creativity, can be effectively addressed through the implementation of Project-Based Learning as an innovative approach. Therefore, the aim of this study is to analyze project-based learning as a means to enhance creativity skills in the English writing process of junior high school students. This study adopts a qualitative approach, where data were collected through student and teacher speeches or conversations recorded on video and noted in field journals during observations from the first to the third sessions. The qualitative data analysis follows the structured approach as per the model by Miles et al., (2018). The findings indicate that the application of Project-Based Learning in an Islamic State Junior High School in Kediri is effective in enhancing students' creativity skills in English writing, as reflected in the fulfillment of creativity indicators such as motivation, self-confidence, resilience to mistakes, initiative, humor, and critique. This research offers an innovative solution to overcome challenges in English language learning.

Keywords: *Creativity; English Writing; Innovative; Project-Based Learning.*

ABSTRAK

Kurangnya stimulasi kreativitas siswa dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris di sekolah, yang disebabkan oleh pendekatan konvensional yang terlalu berfokus pada transfer informasi dan kurang memberikan ruang bagi kreativitas, dapat diatasi melalui implementasi Project-Based Learning sebagai pendekatan inovatif. Oleh karena itu, tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk menganalisis pembelajaran berbasis proyek guna meningkatkan kreativitas dalam proses menulis bahasa Inggris siswa SMP. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, di mana data diperoleh melalui ujaran atau percakapan siswa dan guru yang direkam dalam bentuk video serta dicatat dalam catatan lapangan selama observasi pertama hingga observasi ketiga. Analisis data kualitatif mengikuti pendekatan terstruktur sesuai dengan model Miles, Huberman, & Saldana. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penerapan Project-Based Learning di SMP Islam Negeri di Kediri efektif meningkatkan keterampilan kreativitas siswa dalam menulis bahasa Inggris, sebagaimana tercermin dalam pemenuhan indikator kreativitas seperti motivasi, kepercayaan diri, ketahanan terhadap kesalahan, inisiatif, humor, dan kritik. Penelitian ini menawarkan solusi inovatif untuk mengatasi tantangan dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris.

Kata Kunci: *Kreativitas, Menulis Bahasa Inggris, Inovatif, Pembelajaran Berbasis Proyek*

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INTRODUCTION

In the ever-evolving educational era, the role of teachers extends beyond merely imparting information; they are also guides inspiring creativity and fostering active student participation (Conradty & Bogner, 2020; Priyanto & Dharin, 2021; Szymkowiak et al., 2021). To meet this challenge, Project-Based Learning (PjBL) emerges as an innovative solution shifting focus from teacher-centered approaches to more student-centric methodologies (Samaddar & Sikdar, 2023). Defined by experts as a learning method oriented towards experience and product, PjBL allows students to engage directly in projects that not only build their English language skills but also cultivate creativity (Wahbeh et al., 2021). Enhancing student creativity in English learning is essential, as it significantly impacts the development of language competence and thinking skills. Creativity enriches the teaching-learning process and opens avenues for personal expression and deeper language understanding (Erdogan, 2019; Fu, 2019).

Problems in schools regarding learning processes and student creativity in teaching English writing often arise from approaches too focused on information transfer, lack of student engagement, and insufficient creative space in English learning. Conventional learning processes often fail to stimulate student imagination and innovation in developing English writing skills. Students frequently encounter unmeaningful and unchallenging writing exercises, thus hindering their creativity (Bruner, 2022). Therefore, more innovative and student-centric approaches like PjBL are necessary. The essence of PjBL lies not only in the final result or product but also in a strong emphasis on the learning process (Chintya et al., 2023; Kamarudin & Pahar, 2023). The Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture recognizes the importance of PjBL, particularly in implementing the scientific approach integrated in the 2013 Curriculum (Sisdiana et al., 2019). This curriculum provides a foundation for developing basic competencies in students, including writing skills like creating greeting cards, descriptive texts, and various other writing types. Integrating PjBL into the curriculum ensures students not only acquire English language knowledge but also apply it through projects meaningful to their daily lives. Through creative projects, students get the opportunity to explore the language more deeply, develop original ideas, and express themselves uniquely.

This research aligns with several previous studies that have also explored the use of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in English language teaching. For instance, the studies by Suhroh et al. (2020), Syarifah & Emiliasari (2019), and Sari et al. (2023) also discuss the implementation of PjBL in the context of English language teaching in Indonesia, evaluating its impact on students' presentation skills and writing abilities. While there are similarities in focus, differences arise in methodology and research objectives. The study by Suhroh et al., (2020) employed a quantitative approach with pre-tests and post-tests to measure the impact on presentation skills, whereas the research by Syarifah & Emiliasari, (2019) was more qualitative in nature, exploring the development of students' abilities and creativity in narrative writing. The third study, by Sari et al., (2023), was more focused on enhancing procedural text writing skills through PjBL.

The novelty of this research lies in its specific focus on junior high school students and the development of their English writing skills. It explores not only the impact of PjBL on writing skills but also its influence on students' creativity in English writing. By centering on the junior high school level, this research contributes new insights on the effectiveness of PjBL in enhancing junior high students' English writing skills, setting it apart from previous studies focused more on higher or senior secondary education contexts. Through this approach, the study aims to provide robust empirical evidence supporting the benefits of PjBL in improving students' English writing skills. Its goal is to analyze project-based learning for enhancing creativity skills in the English writing process of junior high school students. The findings are expected to offer valuable insights for educational practitioners and teachers in designing more effective learning experiences. Additionally, this study contributes theoretically to understanding PjBL's effectiveness and concretely to developing more adaptive and innovative English language education in Indonesia.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Teaching Writing for EFL

The implementation of project-based learning in various subjects such as Social Studies, English, Science, Geography, World Languages, Mathematics, and Art has been recommended in Curriculum of Indonesia (Sisdiana et al., 2019). This teaching model aims to encourage students' abilities to produce contextual works, both individually and in groups. Teachers' readiness to face 21st-century educational challenges has been enhanced through socialization conducted by the Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia across the country (Fahri et al., 2023). Project-based learning, also known as experiential learning or project work, emphasizes the psychomotor aspect and active student participation in the learning process. Project-based learning as a teaching method that involves students in longer-term tasks with shareable end

products (Hanif et al., 2019; Oyewo et al., 2022; Veselov et al., 2019). Project-based activities include direct projects, field trips, research projects, extracurricular dinner groups, and promotional video production.

Creativity Skills

Creativity skills play a crucial role in the educational context, not limited to arts and entertainment, but also permeating various fields such as business, manufacturing, technology, medicine, and administration. In educational sector, creativity is a primary focus, especially in the context of the teaching and learning process in the classroom (Henriksen et al., 2020; Marcos et al., 2020). Various expert definitions of creativity emphasize the imaginative and original aspects in achieving goals. Creativity also includes the courage to create something new and uncommon (Lian et al., 2018). It is vital for teachers to understand and encourage students' creativity. Project-based learning methods are one effective approach (Syarifah & Emiliasari, 2019; Taslim et al., 2019). By giving students the freedom to choose topics based on their interests and experiences, project-based learning facilitates the expression of students' creativity. Teachers who are creative in selecting teaching methods can help students develop their creativity skills through the project development process (Bystrova et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2022). Creativity indicators involve motivation, self-confidence, initiative, humor ability, and critical thinking towards others during project development. These indicators are adapted from Asrori, (2009), and this research is expected to make a significant contribution to understanding and developing creativity skills in the educational context.

METHOD

The primary objective of this research is to analyze project-based learning as a means to enhance creativity skills in the English writing process of junior high school students. To address this, the researcher chose a qualitative design for the study, as the data involved words rather than numbers. This study focused on five ninth-grade students at a State Islamic Junior High School in a relatively large city. Although there were 38 students in the class, these five were specifically chosen for further observation. In the implementation of project-based learning, teachers divided students into groups, and the main subject group of the study consisted of five students with varying abilities: two high achievers, two medium achievers, and one low achiever, as determined through observations and teacher input. Student behavior was recorded using field notes and a video recorder for more in-depth analysis.

Data Sources

The data in this study were obtained from student and teacher speeches or conversations, recorded on video and noted in field journals during observations from the first to the third sessions. Examples of student discussions about the use of social media in project-based learning were also revealed, indicating active student engagement in discussions. Additional data included students' body language, such as giving a thumbs up as a positive attitude, recorded through video. Moreover, student projects, such as wall magazines, served as evidence of project completion and as a source for analyzing students' creativity and critical thinking skills. Other data sources included the verbal and non-verbal behaviors of teachers and students during project-based learning, both in conversations and in the final project products. All these data were analyzed to investigate the impact of project-based learning on students' ability to communicate ideas, express creativity, and think critically.

Data Collection Techniques

In this study, data were collected through three observation sessions conducted by the researcher. The first observation took place in the classroom during two English lesson hours, focusing on project-based learning activities. The second observation was conducted at the home of one of the students in the selected group, lasting six hours. The third observation again took place in the classroom but lasted only for one lesson hour. During observations, the researcher noted students' activities, verbal and non-verbal behaviors, and interactions within the group. Additionally, the students' wall magazine projects were used as a data source to analyze creativity and critical thinking skills. Unstructured field notes were utilized with a specific form, and a video recorder was used to record teacher-student conversations. Transcriptions of conversations and documentary photographs were also used as supporting data. All this data was analyzed to investigate the extent to which project-based learning could enhance students' creativity skills.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data analysis followed a structured approach in line with the model by Miles et al., (2018). This involved steps of data collection, data condensation, data display, conclusion drawing, and reflection. Data collection included observations, transcriptions, and analysis of student conversations during project-based learning. Data condensation involved reducing information, grouping, and coding data. Data display included presenting data in various descriptive forms to facilitate conclusion drawing. Each skill was assessed based on the

indicators successfully achieved by students, focusing on enhancing creativity skills through project-based learning.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This study illustrates the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) practices in the context of English language learning at an Islamic State Junior High School in Kediri. The research involved five ninth-grade students, directed to create a wall magazine as a practical exam. In the first observation, the teacher explained the project and provided examples of wall magazine prints for reference. Students were free to choose topics of their interest, and the selected group decided to focus on social media. The second observation highlighted this group, which, after deliberation, switched their topic to Indonesian animals. The process of creating a 3D wall magazine involved all group members with divided tasks, creating a dynamic and collaborative working atmosphere. In the third observation, all groups presented their work in front of the class. Students showed enthusiasm, exchanged comments, and accepted criticism constructively. The teacher emphasized praise for the projects and provided explanations for the next practical exam. In conclusion, this PjBL practice involved several steps, from explaining the material, project examples, concept discussion, preparation of materials, to project creation and evaluation. This approach proved to give students the freedom to develop their creativity in English writing through wall magazines. These PjBL steps can be implemented in English learning contexts to effectively stimulate student creativity.

In analyzing the data, the researcher used indicators from Asrori (2009), divided into two parts: process and product, with six indicators in the process and two in the product. These are the six process indicators. First, students demonstrated motivation and interest in developing the project, evident from their verbal expressions, actions, or even body language. Second, students showed confidence in their projects, unafraid of making mistakes or having less-than-perfect outcomes. Third, students did not easily give up after making errors, instead viewing failures as learning opportunities. Fourth, students exhibited initiative by developing ideas into new ones or creating new things. Fifth, students displayed a sense of humor throughout the project, balancing serious work with humor to alleviate stress. Their humor skills were evident in jokes expressed through speech, writing, or body language. Sixth, students tended to be critical of others, offering comments or suggestions and posing questions.

The two product creativity indicators were as follows. First, students consistently demonstrated their aesthetic values, visible in their projects. For instance, in creating wall

magazines or booklets, students' aesthetic values were apparent in their designs, ornaments, and chosen colors. Second, students implemented their ideas or opinions into the project. If students met these indicators, they were considered to have achieved creativity skills. The results were divided into three parts: first, second, and third observations. Throughout these observations, the researcher found conversations indicating that students met these indicators both in process and product. Starting with the first process indicator, students showed motivation and interest in developing the project. The researcher found conversations as proof that students met the first indicator.

S1: "Yeay, finally done."

S2: "Thank God."

S3: "I enjoy doing things like this."

S2: "Like this?"

S3: "I mean, this wall magazine."

S4: "Right, it's fun, isn't it?"

S5: "True, it makes the lessons less boring. Adds enthusiasm, doesn't it?"

S3: "Absolutely..."

S2: "Yes."

S1: "Lessons seem more interesting when we're asked to create things like this."

S4: "Exactly, that's why I'm always happy with tasks like this."

S5: "Curious about what our friends' wall magazines look like."

S1: "Yeah."

S2: "Hopefully ours will interest our classmates to read."

S1, S3, S4, S5: "Amen."

These conversations show students' interest in creating a wall magazine and their motivation to work on the project. After completing their wall magazine, S3 begins by expressing enjoyment in doing such projects. S4 continues, commenting on the enjoyable nature of the project. S5 agrees with S4, adding that such projects increase learning motivation and make lessons more engaging and less tedious. S1 shares a similar view, stating that these projects make learning more interesting. S4 is particularly fond of such assignments. In short, the conversation above demonstrates that students met the first indicator. The second indicator concerns students showing confidence in their project, without fear of errors or imperfections. The students tried their best with their wall magazine, unafraid of potential shortcomings. However, despite their confidence, they remained open to others' suggestions for improvement. The researcher found conversations indicating that students met this indicator.

S1: "One more thing, that's a Sumatran tiger in the picture, right? It's a bit unclear. And the Komodo dragon picture is too large, making it unbalanced with the others."

S3: "Thank you. We'll do better next time."

S1: "Thanks for the suggestion. But I'd like to explain a bit. These pictures are a form of our creativity, we give variation to the images and writing to avoid monotony."

S2: "Okay, dear. Hope my suggestion is helpful."

This conversation occurred during the third observation in the evaluation phase. One student commented on the animal pictures in their wall magazine. S1 thanked for the comment and suggested possible improvement for next time. Like S2, they also thanked S1 but confidently explained the reason for the varying sizes of the animal pictures. They were not afraid of their wall magazine being wrong or not good enough. They clarified that the animal pictures were a result of their creativity, with size variations to prevent monotony. S1 understood and expressed hope that the suggestion would be beneficial for them. This conversation shows that students demonstrated confidence in their wall magazine, confidently stating that it was a result of their creativity. Overall, it can be said that students met the second indicator.

The third indicator is that students do not easily give up after making mistakes; they try again and view failure as a learning opportunity. As explained in the first indicator, they were very interested in the project and motivated to create their wall magazine. Not only that, but they also did not easily give up on their project. This is evident from the following conversation, proving that they were able to meet the third indicator.

S3: "Oops, I wrote it wrong..."

S2: "It's okay. Try writing it again. Come on, cheer up!"

S3: (Taking a new sheet of paper to write) "Oh God, I wrote it so well though."

S2: "It's fine, it means you can make it even better."

S3: (Smiling) "You're right, mistakes are valuable lessons."

S2: (Smiling) "God, she's making quotes now."

This conversation happened during the project development, showing that the students did not give up despite mistakes. Instead, they viewed errors as opportunities to improve and learn, demonstrating resilience and a positive attitude towards challenges.

As seen in the conversation above, Student 3 makes a mistake in his writing. Following this, S2 offers encouragement, saying, "It's okay. Try writing again. Keep your spirits up!" S3 then takes a new paper but continues to grumble about his previous well-written draft. S2, unbothered by S3's complaints, continues to motivate him, suggesting he can make it even better. This leads to a realization in Student 3 that mistakes are valuable lessons. S2 then smiles and lightens the mood with a joke, saying, "Oh God, he's making a quote." This interaction is evidence that S3, and indeed the students in general, do not easily give up. Encouraged by S2, S3 attempts to rewrite after making a mistake. In conclusion, it can be said that the students have achieved the third indicator of creativity.

The fourth indicator is the students' ability to show initiative by developing an idea into a new one or creating something novel. This indicator is similar to the third in communicating

ideas. Several conversations were found to be evidence of achieving this indicator. One such conversation occurs during the magazine project, where they discover a new way to keep paper neat even after rolling it.

S3: "Now let's cover the paper with this carpet. We'll place the paper as a background under the carpet. Then, we'll sit on the carpet, which has the paper underneath, so it won't get crumpled."

S2: (Giving a thumbs up) "Your idea is really cool."

S1: "It's a traditional method but very useful. Great idea!"

Suddenly, Student 3 suggests placing the paper under the carpet. Others question why, and he explains it's to prevent the paper from crumpling after being rolled. They lay the background paper of their wall magazine under the carpet, and then sit on it, keeping the paper neat. S2 praises S3's creative way of maintaining neatness, and S1 commends the traditional yet highly beneficial method. In short, the conversation demonstrates that students can meet this indicator.

The fifth indicator is the students' ability to demonstrate humor. During project development, they aren't always serious but also use humor to alleviate stress. This skill is evident in their jokes, conveyed through speech, writing, or body language. One conversation illustrating this is about the Komodo dragon.

S1: "What animals are we discussing?"

S4: (Laughing) "Kodomo."

S2: (Laughing) "You mean komodo."

All Students: (Laughing) "Hahaha."

S2: (Laughing) "Komodo, not Kodomo. That's your toothpaste brand."

S3: "Komodo... Komodo..."

All Students: (Laughing heartily)

S5: (Laughing and clapping, singing a Kodomo toothpaste commercial song)

"Kodomo kodomo, my good friend."

This conversation shows the students' humor during the wall magazine creation. They're not stressed and often crack jokes, like the one about Komodo and Kodomo, a popular children's toothpaste brand in Indonesia. They mistakenly refer to the Komodo dragon, depicted in their magazine, as Kodomo, leading to laughter and song. Their humor is also expressed through body language, as in the following example:

S3: "Eh... so, what next?"

S2: (Imitating gestures and sounds of the animal in question) "Then... then... it goes uu.. aa.. uu..aa."

All Students: "Orangutan!"

All Students: (Laughing uproariously)

This occurs while deciding on the next animal to describe. Student 3 asks, and Student 2 responds not verbally but through mimicking an orangutan, engaging and amusing the others. They all laugh heartily at this portrayal. Both examples demonstrate the students' humor, fulfilling the fifth indicator.

The final indicator is the students' tendency to be critical of others. During the third observation evaluation, students confidently offer comments and suggestions. They are open to giving and receiving feedback about their wall magazine. Conversations from the fourth indicator, where students collaborate and critique, also demonstrate this.

S1: "Why did you choose YouTubers as your theme?"

S2: "Because we are, uh.."

S3: "Millennials."

S2: "We need to know the latest information, like about YouTubers."

S4: "YouTubers are very popular now, so we chose this theme to attract others to our magazine."

S1: "Okay, thank you, good reasoning."

Here, S1 questions a group presenting their wall magazine themed on YouTubers. S2, 3, and 4 explain, highlighting their generation's need for current information and the popularity of YouTubers. S1 appreciates their reasoning.

In summary, these conversations demonstrate that students have met all creativity indicators during the process. However, two more indicators related to the product, the wall magazine, remain to be evaluated by the researcher. This will determine if the students have also met the product-related indicators.



Figure 1. Students' wall magazine

The first indicator of student creativity related to their products is the consistent display of aesthetic value. This is evident in their wall magazine, as shown above. They chose to make the title out of colored writing using various colored origami papers. A 3D design was selected as the main theme of their wall magazine. They added some vocabulary about animals to provide new knowledge to the readers after reading their magazine. They also ensured that the main animals they depicted were larger in size compared to those used merely as decorations. When readers engage with the magazine adorned with various decorations, they do not feel bored and are drawn to read it. The aesthetic value is apparent in its design, choice of colors, used

ornaments, animal illustrations, and more. In short, they have achieved the first indicator of creativity as seen in their product.

The second product-based creativity indicator is the students' ability to implement pre-established ideas or opinions into the project. As seen in the above conversation, their ideas about Indonesian wildlife were used as the primary material for their wall magazine. In the students' product, they featured Indonesian animals as the main theme of their magazine. One of the students also had an idea to create a concept similar to an animal's thought bubble, shaped like a cloud. This idea was then applied to their wall magazine, as evident in the above image. In one of the conversations above, Student 4 asked others which animals they would like to describe. Student 1 suggested depicting the Komodo Dragon, Bird of Paradise, Orangutan, Javan Eagle, and Student 3 added the Sumatran Tiger. Ultimately, they decided to describe all these animals in their magazine, creating descriptive texts for each. This evidence shows that the students were able to achieve two creativity indicators related to the product.

Out of the six indicators of creativity skills, the students managed to achieve all six in the process and two in the product. In other words, the extent to which project-based learning enhances students' creative abilities in developing a project during the English writing learning process is that the students were able to complete all the creativity indicators in both the process and the product. As explained above, the main focus of this research is more on the process than the product. The product indicators serve as proof that they were able to complete their wall magazine project. In conclusion, since the students were able to complete all the creativity indicators in the process, project-based learning can perfectly assist students in enhancing their creativity skills.

Discussion

The findings of this research indicate that Project-Based Learning (PjBL) is effective in enhancing the creativity skills of junior high school students in the English writing process. Through the application of PjBL in an Islamic State Junior High School in Kediri, ninth-grade students were tasked with creating a wall magazine. This process involved creative steps including topic selection, planning, execution, and final presentation (Horbatiuk et al., 2021; Yuliansyah & Ayu, 2021). The analysis of the learning process revealed that the students met all the creativity indicators proposed by Asrori, (2009), which include motivation and interest, self-confidence, resilience to mistakes, initiative, humor, and critical abilities. The students showed high motivation and interest in making the wall magazine, as seen from their enthusiasm and positive comments. The students' confidence in their project was reflected in how they received

and considered critiques and suggestions. They did not easily give up when encountering mistakes, viewing them as learning opportunities. The students' initiative was evident in the creative ideas they developed during the wall magazine creation process. Humor played a crucial role in the learning process, helping them overcome stress. The students' critical skills were reflected in how they gave and received feedback during presentation sessions.

From a product perspective, the wall magazine produced showed high aesthetic value and the implementation of creative ideas. The students successfully applied their concepts and ideas into the wall magazine in an engaging manner, ensuring that both the visual aspects and the educational content were appealing to the readers. Constructivist learning theory, which underpins PjBL, posits that the best learning occurs when students are actively involved in constructing their own knowledge (Cobb, 2006; Jemberie, 2021; Patang et al., 2020). This research affirms that PjBL provides opportunities for students to apply this theory. They are not merely passive recipients of information but actively construct knowledge through the projects they develop. This also aligns with collaborative learning theory, which emphasizes the importance of cooperation and interaction among students in the learning process. In conclusion, project-based learning has proven effective in enhancing students' creativity skills in the English writing process. This not only strengthens their language skills but also develops other essential skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, and communication.

This research, conducted in an Islamic State Junior High School in Kediri, is notable for its unique focus on the impact of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) on creativity skills and English writing at the junior high school level. Unlike previous studies by Suhroh et al. (2020), Syarifah & Emiliasari (2019), and Sari et al. (2023), which explored PjBL in different contexts, this study specifically targets junior high school students and measures the direct impact of PjBL on their creative skills in English writing. It provides new and important insights into the effectiveness of PjBL in a middle school educational context, adding valuable empirical evidence for educational practitioners and teachers to design more effective learning at the junior high school level. The study not only strengthens the students' language skills but also highlights the importance of collaboration, communication, and critical thinking, which are vital in holistic education.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) practices at an Islamic State Junior High School in Kediri has effectively enhanced students' creativity skills in the English writing process, evidenced by the fulfillment of creativity indicators including motivation, self-confidence, resilience to mistakes, initiative, humor, and critique. Challenges in this research

may lie in the limited number of samples and the variation in educational contexts, which could affect the generalizability of the results. For future research, it is recommended to implement PjBL on a broader scale with different contextual variations and to examine the long-term impact of this method on creativity skills and English language learning.

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