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Exploring Students' Perceptions of Using Wordwall to English Learning Motivation at Junior High School

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Abstract

This study explores junior high school students' perceptions and experiences of using Wordwall to support English learning motivation. It aims to understand how game-based media influences learning dynamics from the students' perspectives. Using a qualitative exploratory design, the study involved seven ninth-grade students and one English teacher at Junior High School as participants. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and analyzed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis. The findings reveal that Wordwall transforms previously passive classroom activities into interactive ones through visual stimulation and gaming mechanics. Based on the ARCS motivational framework, students' experiences are closely related to the dimensions of attention, relevance, confidence, and satisfaction. Despite facing technical infrastructure constraints, these findings suggest that the integration of digital media functions as an emotional bridge that reduces student anxiety and strengthens active engagement. This study concludes that the effectiveness of educational technology lies not only in its technical features but also in its ability to create a learning environment that supports students' affective domains.

1. Introduction

Education in the digital era has transformed learning practices by encouraging more interactive, student-centered, and technology-supported learning environments. The integration of educational technology is considered beneficial in improving students' engagement, creativity, and participation during

classroom activities (Judijanto et al., 2024). In English foreign language (EFL) classrooms, digital learning media provide opportunities for teachers to design more flexible and meaningful activities that accommodate students' learning needs and preferences. Through interactive and gamified learning experiences, students are encouraged to actively construct knowledge rather than passively consume information, creating a more dynamic learning atmosphere. Therefore, teachers are expected to implement innovative instructional strategies that can foster both cognitive and emotional engagement.

In English language learning, motivation plays an essential role in influencing students' participation and overall learning outcomes. As English functions as a global language used in communication, education, and technology, students are expected to develop active involvement in classroom activities. However, many students still demonstrate low motivation and limited participation during English lessons. Previous studies revealed that limited vocabulary mastery, low self-confidence, and fear of making mistakes often discourage students from participating actively in EFL classrooms (Le et al., 2024). In addition, conventional English learning activities are frequently perceived as monotonous and less engaging, which directly reduces students' internal learning motivation (Coangi et al., 2024).

Preliminary classroom observations at Junior High School also indicated that students tended to show passive participation during English learning activities. Students were often easily distracted, passive, and showed limited enthusiasm toward general classroom tasks. These conditions suggest the need for more interactive instructional media that can support students' motivation and engagement. As Anwar and Ananta (2025) argued, limited instructional innovation and the lack of interactive learning media diminish students' interest in learning. Consequently, integrating digital learning media into classroom activities may provide opportunities to transform traditional practices into more engaging and meaningful learning experiences.

One digital learning platform that has gained increasing attention is Wordwall, which allows teachers to create various interactive and game-based learning activities. Compared to linear platforms such as Quizizz and Kahoot! Wordwall offers more diverse activity templates that can support broader classroom interaction. Grounded in gamification and constructivist learning theories, game-based learning mechanics—such as visual rewards, time challenges, and instant feedback—can maintain students' engagement and lower cognitive anxiety (Hwang et al., 2023). While Coangi et al. (2024) found that students perceived Wordwall as an engaging evaluation tool, its gamified features can also be structurally mapped to stimulate continuous learner motivation.

Prior studies consistently highlight the efficacy of Wordwall in English language instruction by promoting students' engagement and participation (Mas et al., 2024; Widhiatama & Brameswari, 2024). Nevertheless, a research gap

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remains. Most previous studies mainly focused on quantitative or questionnaire-based approaches to measure specific learning outcomes. Limited qualitative studies have explored students' subjective experiences and how they interpret the use of Wordwall in relation to their learning motivation, particularly in rural public-school contexts with limited educational resources. In addition, although Coangi et al. (2024) explored students' perceptions toward Wordwall, their study primarily emphasized Wordwall as a tool for assessment rather than examining students' broader motivational learning experiences through a specific framework.

Therefore, this study aims to explore students' perceptions and experiences of using Wordwall in English learning at Junior High School through Keller's ARCS Motivational Model, which consists of Attention, Relevance, Confidence, and Satisfaction. By employing a qualitative case study design, this study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how students interpret their experiences of using interactive digital learning media and how these experiences relate to their English learning motivation in a rural public-school context. This study contributes theoretically by extending the discussion of the ARCS motivational framework within game-based digital learning environments and contributes empirically by providing contextual insights into students lived learning experiences in a rural Indonesian EFL classroom.

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative exploratory design to investigate students' perceptions of using Wordwall and its relation to their learning motivation. The research was conducted at Junior High School, Boalemo Regency, Gorontalo Province. As a rural "one-roof" public school, the institution faced limited technological infrastructure, including unstable internet connectivity, the absence of school Wi-Fi, and restrictions on students bringing smartphones to class.

Due to these limitations, Wordwall activities were conducted collectively using the teacher's laptop and a classroom projector connected through mobile data tethering. Through purposive sampling, seven ninth-grade students who had direct experience using Wordwall in English learning activities were selected as the primary participants, while one English teacher participated as a supporting informant. The number of participants was determined based on data saturation, where data collection concluded because no new themes emerged from the interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted in Bahasa Indonesia to help participants express their experiences more comfortably and clearly. Student interviews lasted approximately 20–30 minutes, while the teacher interview lasted 30–45 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' permission. The interview protocol was developed by integrating Walgito's theory of perception and Keller's ARCS Motivational Model, focusing on students' experiences, participation, and motivation during Wordwall activities.

Sample questions from the interview protocol included: "Does Wordwall make you more interested in learning English?" (Attention), "Does the Wordwall material match the lessons you received in class?" (Relevance), "Do you feel more confident after using Wordwall?" (Confidence), and "Do you feel satisfied after using Wordwall?" (Satisfaction).

Prior to data collection, written informed consent was obtained from the school principal and the students' parents. Participation was voluntary, and participants' identities were kept confidential using codes such as S1–S7 for students and G1 for the teacher.

The interview transcripts were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2021) Reflexive Thematic Analysis through six stages: familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and writing the report. The coding process was initially conducted inductively to identify recurring patterns from participants' responses, which were then organized deductively into Keller's ARCS dimensions: Attention, Relevance, Confidence, and Satisfaction.

To ensure credibility, data source triangulation was conducted by comparing students' responses with the teacher's perspectives throughout the analysis process. The researcher also continuously reviewed the interview transcripts to maintain consistency during coding and interpretation. As the researcher was directly involved in data collection and analysis, reflexivity was maintained by reflecting on potential subjective interpretations throughout the study.

3. Result

This section presents the findings related to students' perceptions and experiences of using Wordwall in English learning. The findings were derived from semi-structured interviews conducted with seven students and one English teacher at Junior High School. The analysis identified four major themes corresponding to the dimensions of Keller's ARCS motivational model: attention, relevance,confidence, and satisfaction. In addition, several challenges related to the implementation of Wordwall and the teacher's perspectives were also identified.

Overview of Major Findings

The findings indicate that students generally perceived Wordwall as an engaging and enjoyable learning medium. Students reported positive experiences related to classroom participation, vocabulary learning, confidence, and motivation during English lessons. These findings are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of Major Findings

Overarching Theme	Thematic Coding Label (Sub-theme)	Conceptual Synthesis of Findings (Participant Perspectives)
Attention	Visual and Gamified Stimuli	Multi-sensory game templates, colorful interfaces, and real-time scoreboards captured students' attention and increased

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Overarching Theme	Thematic Coding Label (Sub-theme)	Conceptual Synthesis of Findings (Participant Perspectives)
		classroom engagement during English learning activities.
Relevance	Lexical and Material Alignment	Students perceived Wordwall activities as meaningful learning tools that supported vocabulary retention and helped them understand classroom materials more easily.
Confidence	Low-Stakes Participation and Self-Belief	The opportunity to retry answers and participate in a game-based environment reduced students' fear of making mistakes and gradually increased their confidence during classroom interaction.
Satisfaction	Intrinsic Achievement Gratification	Scores, immediate feedback, and enjoyable activities created positive emotional responses and increased students' motivation to participate in future English lessons.
Challenges	Digital Infrastructure Disruption	Limited technological infrastructure, including unstable internet connectivity and restricted student device access, occasionally interrupted the implementation of Wordwall activities.
Teacher's Perspective	Pedagogical Utility and Classroom Participation	The teacher perceived Wordwall as a flexible instructional medium that encouraged more active participation and helped reduce students' classroom passivity.

Attention: Visual and Gamified Stimuli

The integration of Wordwall introduced a more interactive and game-based learning environment compared to conventional, text-heavy instruction dominated by reading and writing activities. Participants highlighted that the multi-sensory templates—including vibrant layouts, animations, matching tasks, and word arrangements—helped attract and sustain their attention during classroom activities. This shift from passive learning activities to more active visual engagement was reflected in the students' responses:

"I liked it because the colors were bright and there were pictures, so it did not look boring." (Participant S1)

"The display was nice, so it made me want to pay attention and actually try to complete the game." (Participant S4)

Furthermore, competitive features and instant feedback appeared to

influence the emotional atmosphere of the classroom. Rather than perceiving the activities as stressful evaluations, students described the gamified structure as a more enjoyable and stimulating learning environment that reduced tension during English lessons:

"It felt fun because we could actively choose the answers and play, not just write constantly in our notebooks." (Participant S2)

"It did not look like a serious lesson. It felt like playing a game, so I felt relaxed and engaged." (Participant S5)

The findings suggest that visual and game-based elements helped create a more engaging classroom atmosphere and maintained students' focus during English learning activities.

Relevance: Lexical and Material Alignment

The second overarching theme centered on how participants established connections between the digital tasks and their learning needs. Wordwall was not perceived merely as entertainment; instead, students recognized its usefulness in supporting vocabulary learning and clarifying classroom materials through simplified and interactive instructions. This presentation helped students follow classroom activities more comfortably:

"I could understand the questions more easily because they were simple and clear." (Participant S1)

"I understood the vocabulary lesson much better because the rules were explained and visualized through the games." (Participant S2)

Rather than relying on isolated memorization, the platform supported vocabulary retention through repeated interaction during the activities. This repeated exposure helped students process and remember English vocabulary more naturally:

"It was much easier to remember the new English words because we saw and interacted with them many times throughout the game." (Participant S2)

"I did not feel the burden of memorizing, but I could still remember the vocabulary words naturally." (Participant S7)

Several students also explained that they attempted to access the activities outside the classroom using personal or family devices. This flexibility allowed students to continue practicing English independently at home:

"I could open and access the game again at home, so I could practice the English lesson more comfortably." (Participant S4)

"At home, it felt like I was just playing a regular digital game, but I was actually still learning and reviewing the English vocabulary." (Participant S6)

These findings indicate that students perceived Wordwall not only as an enjoyable activity but also as a useful learning medium that supported vocabulary learning and independent practice.

Confidence: Low-Stakes Participation and Self-Belief

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The analysis revealed that students experienced both challenge and increased confidence during Wordwall activities. The implementation of countdown timers created an initial sense of pressure during classroom activities. However, this pressure also appeared to encourage students to focus more carefully while answering questions:

"The timer made me feel nervous, but it also forced me to focus and answer much faster." (Participant S3)

"I wanted to get a good score, so I paid closer attention to the questions." (Participant S6)

Importantly, the low-stakes nature of the game-based environment appeared to reduce students' fear of making mistakes. Because the system allowed students to retry answers and receive immediate feedback, students reported feeling less embarrassed and more comfortable participating during classroom activities:

"I was not afraid to answer because if it was wrong, we could instantly try again as a class." (Participant S2)

"It did not feel like an intimidating test, so I felt more confident participating, and because everyone was participating together, I did not feel embarrassed." (Participant S6, aligned with S7)

As students became more familiar with English vocabulary through repeated interaction, they gradually developed greater confidence during classroom participation.

Satisfaction: Positive Emotional Responses and Sustained Motivation

The fourth theme captured students' positive emotional responses after participating in Wordwall-based learning activities. Features such as instant scores, interactive games, and visual feedback appeared to create positive feelings of satisfaction and enjoyment during English lessons:

"I felt incredibly happy because the learning process felt much more fun and active than our usual routines." (Participant S1)

These positive experiences also contributed to students' sustained interest and motivation to participate in future classroom activities. Several students expressed their willingness to use Wordwall again because the platform made English learning feel more enjoyable:

"I felt motivated because the lesson felt completely different and fun." (Participant S4)

"I want to use Wordwall again in future lessons because it makes language learning enjoyable." (Participant S2)

The findings suggest that enjoyable classroom experiences contributed to students' continued interest and motivation in English learning activities.

Contextual Challenges and Institutional Infrastructure

Despite the generally positive responses, the rural and resource-limited context of the school introduced several technological challenges during the implementation of Wordwall. Because the activities relied on mobile data tethering and a single classroom projector, unstable internet connectivity occasionally disrupted the learning process:

"Sometimes the internet connection was slow, so the game took a long time to load on the screen." (Participant S4)

Although these technical difficulties interrupted some activities, students generally remained interested and continued to perceive Wordwall as an enjoyable learning medium.

The Pedagogical Lens: Teacher's Perspective

The teacher's interview supported students' responses regarding increased motivation and participation during Wordwall activities. The teacher described Wordwall as a flexible instructional medium that could be adjusted to students' proficiency levels and classroom objectives. The teacher also observed noticeable changes in students' participation during English lessons:

"The platform provides versatile templates that can be adjusted to the students' proficiency levels. Students who are usually passive became more enthusiastic and confident enough to participate actively during the lesson." (Informant G1)

However, the teacher also noted that several advanced features required paid subscriptions and that instructional materials still needed to be adjusted to align with curriculum objectives. Overall, both students and the teacher perceived Wordwall as a beneficial digital learning medium that supported more active participation in English learning activities.

4. Discussion

This section interprets the qualitative findings by examining how students' experiences with Wordwall relate to the motivational dimensions of Keller's ARCS framework. Rather than assuming direct causal impacts, the discussion focuses on how the platform's gamified features shaped students' engagement, interaction, and motivational experiences within a resource-constrained learning environment.

Attention: Gamification Mechanics, Cognitive Focus, and Social Interaction

The findings demonstrate that Wordwall helped reduce the classroom passivity identified during preliminary observations by capturing and sustaining students' attention. Within Keller's (2010) framework, attention involves both perceptual arousal through sensory novelty and inquiry arousal through cognitive challenge. The transition from conventional text-heavy exercises to Wordwall's colorful templates, matching games, and word arrangement activities provided

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immediate perceptual stimulation that reduced students' boredom during English lessons. This supports Coangi et al. (2024), who argued that visually engaging and game-based interfaces function as important triggers for student engagement.

Students' attention was also strengthened through collective classroom interaction. Because the rural Satu Atap school lacked adequate digital facilities, Wordwall activities were conducted through a shared projector display rather than individual devices. This shared visual environment encouraged students to focus on the same activity, discuss answers together, and maintain collective attention during the lesson. As a result, attention was not shaped solely by visual stimulation but also by social interaction and collaborative participation.

Furthermore, inquiry arousal was maintained through competitive mechanics such as leaderboards, scores, and timers. These features transformed passive vocabulary reception into more active cognitive engagement by encouraging students to respond quickly and remain focused throughout the activities. From the perspective of Cognitive Load Theory, timer-based challenges function simultaneously as motivational stimulants and potential cognitive stressors. Moderate time pressure may increase alertness and concentration; however, excessive pressure can also trigger performance anxiety, particularly for students who need more time to process the tasks. Therefore, gamification mechanics appear most effective when implemented in pedagogically balanced ways that challenge students without overwhelming their cognitive capacity.

Relevance: Contextualized Input, Vocabulary Retention, and Autonomous Learning

The relevance dimension within the ARCS framework emerges when instructional activities align with students' learning preferences, prior experiences, and immediate learning needs. The findings suggest that Wordwall established this relevance by simplifying language input and embedding vocabulary learning within enjoyable and contextualized game activities. In many Indonesian public-school contexts, vocabulary instruction often relies on memorizing isolated word lists, which students frequently perceive as monotonous and burdensome.

Wordwall altered this learning experience by replacing rote memorization with interactive matching exercises, visual quizzes, and repeated vocabulary exposure. This repetition supported vocabulary recall and retention without creating excessive psychological pressure. From a constructivist perspective, these findings indicate that students constructed understanding more effectively through active engagement with the learning tasks rather than through passive memorization. Similar findings were reported by Coangi et al. (2024), who observed that students perceived Wordwall as a more meaningful and manageable learning medium compared to conventional instructional practices.

An important indicator of relevance identified in this study was the

emergence of self-directed learning behavior outside classroom instruction. Several students voluntarily attempted to access Wordwall activities at home using personal or family devices because they perceived the activities as enjoyable and useful for reviewing vocabulary materials. This behavioral persistence suggests that the platform's relevance extended beyond formal classroom requirements into students' personal learning routines. Consistent with Anwar and Paramaditya Ananta (2025), digital learning media may support more flexible and student-centered learning experiences when aligned with students' interests and digital habits.

However, a critical pedagogical reflection is necessary. Although repeated game interaction supported vocabulary accessibility, excessive emphasis on speed and repetition may risk encouraging surface-level recognition rather than deeper grammatical understanding. Therefore, the educational value of gamification depends not only on enjoyment but also on the teacher's ability to balance rapid interactive activities with reflective learning tasks that promote deeper language comprehension.

Confidence: Low-Stakes Participation and Collaborative Scaffolding

Building students' confidence requires learning environments that reduce fear of failure while supporting expectations of success. In conventional English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, students' participation is frequently limited by foreign language anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and embarrassment when making mistakes publicly. The findings suggest that Wordwall helped reduce these affective barriers by creating a low-stakes learning environment where mistakes were treated as normal and correctable parts of the learning process.

The platform's retry feature functioned as an important psychological safety net. Because students could immediately attempt answers again after making mistakes, errors were no longer perceived as permanent academic failures. This condition appeared particularly beneficial for passive or shy students who previously hesitated to participate during classroom activities. The game-based structure gradually nurtured a mastery-oriented mindset, where students focused more on gradual improvement and repeated practice rather than avoiding mistakes or achieving perfect performance.

Social interaction also played an important role in strengthening students' confidence. Since Wordwall activities were conducted collectively using a shared screen, students frequently discussed answers, consulted classmates, and responded together during the lesson. This collaborative interaction reflects the principles of social constructivist and collaborative learning theories, which emphasize that knowledge is constructed through peer interaction and shared problem-solving experiences. The collective participation reduced individual pressure and provided emotional reassurance, allowing students to participate more confidently during English learning activities.

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Nevertheless, the findings also revealed a dual emotional effect regarding timer-based competition. While some students perceived the timer as a motivating challenge that increased focus and excitement, others experienced nervousness and pressure during the activities. This finding suggests that gamified competition may function both as a motivational stimulant and as a source of performance anxiety. Therefore, teachers need to carefully regulate competitive mechanics to ensure that the classroom atmosphere remains supportive rather than psychologically overwhelming.

Satisfaction: Contextual Resilience, Intrinsic Rewards, and Pedagogical Agency

Satisfaction, the final dimension of Keller's ARCS framework, refers to positive emotional responses and intrinsic rewards that encourage students to sustain future learning engagement. The findings indicate that Wordwall generated strong feelings of enjoyment, accomplishment, and motivational satisfaction through instant feedback, scores, and interactive gameplay. Students expressed a clear preference for Wordwall-based activities compared to conventional paper-based classroom tasks. This finding is consistent with Coangi et al. (2024), who reported that gamified learning environments tend to generate higher emotional engagement and learning satisfaction among students.

An important finding of this study is the contextual resilience demonstrated by students within the resource-limited Satu Atap school environment. Despite unstable internet connectivity, the absence of school Wi-Fi, and limited student device access, students continued to display enthusiasm and active participation during the activities. While previous studies frequently position technological limitations as major barriers to digital learning implementation (Sari & Yarza, 2021), the present study suggests that meaningful motivational experiences may still emerge even under constrained technological conditions.

The shared and collaborative nature of the activities appeared to strengthen this resilience. Although occasional loading delays interrupted gameplay, students remained motivated because the activities were collectively experienced as enjoyable social learning experiences rather than isolated digital tasks. This indicates that the psychological and social value of interactive learning may partially compensate for infrastructural limitations in rural educational settings.

However, the findings also emphasize that the motivational effectiveness of Wordwall cannot be separated from teacher agency and instructional planning. As reflected in the teacher's perspective, technology alone does not automatically generate meaningful learning experiences. The successful implementation of Wordwall depended on how the teacher adapted the platform to students' proficiency levels, classroom conditions, and curriculum objectives. Therefore, gamification becomes educationally meaningful not when it merely functions as classroom entertainment, but when it is strategically integrated to support active participation, collaborative interaction, and meaningful language learning.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that the use of Wordwall as a game-based learning medium was associated with more interactive and student-centered English learning experiences. Compared to conventional text-based classroom activities, students perceived Wordwall as a more engaging and enjoyable platform that encouraged participation while reducing boredom and anxiety during classroom learning. The findings indicate that Wordwall supported vocabulary learning through visual stimulation, repeated exposure, immediate feedback, and collaborative classroom interaction. These interactive features helped students understand and retain English vocabulary in more meaningful and less stressful ways compared to conventional memorization practices.

Through Keller's ARCS motivational framework, students' experiences using Wordwall were strongly related to the dimensions of Attention, Relevance, Confidence, and Satisfaction. The findings further demonstrate that motivational experiences in digital learning environments are not shaped solely by technology itself, but also by social interaction, collaborative participation, and pedagogical design. In this sense, the study contributes theoretically to discussions on gamification, constructivist learning, collaborative learning, and student engagement within technology-supported EFL classrooms.

An important contribution of this study lies in its rural educational context. Despite infrastructural limitations such as unstable internet connectivity and limited access to digital devices, students continued to demonstrate positive engagement and motivation during the activities. This finding suggests that meaningful digital learning experiences may still emerge within under-resourced educational settings when technology is adapted creatively and supported through collaborative classroom practices.

The findings suggest that Wordwall should not be viewed merely as classroom entertainment, but as a supportive instructional medium that can facilitate vocabulary learning, grammar reinforcement, and active classroom participation. However, the study also indicates that excessive emphasis on speed and competition may encourage surface-level learning if not balanced with reflective instructional activities.

Therefore, teachers are encouraged to integrate gamified activities with deeper comprehension-oriented tasks. For example, grammar-focused templates such as matching tasks, anagrams, or sentence arrangement activities may be used to help students collaboratively explore sentence structures and vocabulary patterns. In addition, timer-based activities should be adjusted carefully according to students' proficiency levels in order to minimize performance anxiety and cognitive overload during complex language tasks.

The findings also highlight the importance of reflective follow-up activities after gameplay. Short classroom discussions, collaborative corrections, or teacher-

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guided explanations may help students move beyond rapid answer selection toward deeper grammatical understanding and meaningful language use. In this way, gamification becomes pedagogically valuable not simply because it is enjoyable, but because it supports active engagement while maintaining cognitive and instructional depth.

Future studies are recommended to further investigate the long-term influence of gamified digital learning platforms on students' English language development across broader educational contexts. Longitudinal and mixed-method studies may provide deeper insights into how digital gamification shapes students' motivation, grammar comprehension, collaborative learning behavior, and language proficiency over time.

In addition, future researchers may conduct comparative studies between rural schools with limited technological infrastructure and urban schools with greater access to individual digital devices. Such comparisons may provide a more nuanced understanding of how classroom context and technological availability influence students' engagement and learning experiences.

Finally, future research could explore the implementation of various low-bandwidth gamified learning platforms across different English language skills, including speaking, listening, reading, and grammar instruction, while also considering factors such as students' proficiency levels, digital familiarity, and classroom interaction patterns.

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