



EFL Learners' Experiences with Flipped Classroom: A case study of students in the English Education Department

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Abstract

The flipped classroom approach has garnered considerable attention in EFL higher education due to its capacity to enhance students' autonomy, engagement, and language proficiency. Grounded in self-regulated learning theory, this study examines the experiences of EFL students in flipped learning environments, focusing on the perceived advantages and challenges as well as their implications for teaching practice. This qualitative case study was conducted at the English Education Department at Mulawarman University and involved five third-year undergraduate students (aged 20–22) who had participated in flipped teaching for Phonology and Pronunciation courses during the 2023/2024 academic year. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and analysed using the six-phase thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Findings indicate that all participants (5/5) reported improvements in pronunciation, while most participants (4/5) experienced enhanced reading comprehension as well as increased speaking fluency and confidence. Pre-class exposure to multimedia resources improved students' readiness, classroom confidence, and engagement. In addition, students developed essential self-regulated learning strategies, including time management and autonomous inquiry. However, several challenges were identified. Three out of five participants reported inconsistent motivation and difficulties in managing time, while two participants experienced challenges in understanding course materials independently without direct teacher support. These findings suggest that students may not be fully prepared for complete autonomous learning and highlight the importance of structured scaffolding in flipped classroom implementation. The study reveals that the successful implementation of flipped classrooms in EFL

contexts requires careful consideration of students' self-regulatory capacities, scaffolding needs, and equitable access to learning resources. Therefore, teachers should provide structured and varied instructional materials to maximize the effectiveness of flipped learning. Further research involving larger and more diverse samples, as well as the inclusion of teachers' perspectives and measurable learning outcomes, is recommended to extend the understanding and applicability of flipped classroom practices.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the flipped classroom has emerged as an innovative pedagogical approach in higher education as a viable alternative to the conventional lecture-based model of teaching. In this approach, students are typically exposed to instructional content in the form of videos, online modules, or readings before the scheduled class session, while face-to-face time is used for active learning activities such as group discussions, problem-solving, and practice (Brendel et al., 2025). Unlike traditional teacher-centred methods, this model prioritizes students' active role in the learning process, thereby promoting autonomy and engagement. The flipped classroom is increasingly applied in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, particularly in countries where English is not the primary language of communication, due to its alignment with digital learning environments and student-centred pedagogy.

From a theoretical perspective, flipped classroom learning is grounded in several key learning theories, including constructivist learning theory, social learning theory, and self-regulated learning theory. Drawing on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, learning occurs through social interaction within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where students construct knowledge collaboratively (Erbil, 2020). In flipped settings, pre-class materials serve as scaffolding, while in-class activities enable peer interaction and guided practice. Similarly, Bandura's social learning theory explains how students learn through observation and imitation during collaborative tasks, reinforcing language acquisition through feedback and modelling. In addition, self-regulated learning theory highlights learners' responsibility in managing their own learning processes, including goal-setting, time management, and self-monitoring. These theoretical foundations collectively support the effectiveness of flipped learning in fostering learner autonomy and deeper engagement.

A growing body of research has examined the benefits of flipped classrooms in EFL contexts. Previous studies consistently report that flipped learning enhances student engagement, motivation, and self-directed learning, while also improving language proficiency in speaking, writing, and grammar (Fisher et al., 2024). Students often demonstrate more positive attitudes, increased participation, and greater self-efficacy due to opportunities for interaction and

immediate feedback. Furthermore, (Li & Huang, 2012) found that flipped instruction reduces anxiety and supports self-paced learning, while (Gustian et al., 2023) highlighted its role in developing learner autonomy and digital competence.

Despite these benefits, several challenges have also been identified in the literature. Flipped learning requires careful instructional design and significant preparation from both students and instructors (Turhan & Kirkgöz, 2023). Moreover, students may struggle with independent learning due to limited linguistic proficiency, digital literacy, or self-discipline (Gustian et al., 2023). Without adequate scaffolding, flipped learning may even widen learning gaps among students with different abilities. These findings indicate that while the flipped classroom offers substantial pedagogical advantages, its effectiveness is highly dependent on contextual and learner-related factors.

In the Indonesian EFL context, traditional teacher-centred approaches, such as grammar-translation and rote memorization, still dominate classroom practices (Yoshania et al., 2023). As a result, students are often not accustomed to taking responsibility for their own learning, which may pose challenges when transitioning to flipped classroom models. Although research on flipped learning is increasing, there remains a lack of qualitative studies that explore how Indonesian EFL learners experience this pedagogical shift, particularly in skill-specific courses that require both conceptual understanding and practical application.

This gap is especially evident in phonology and pronunciation courses, which are essential for developing intelligible spoken English. These courses require both cognitive understanding of phonetic concepts and psychomotor practice in articulation, making them particularly suitable for flipped learning environments. However, pronunciation is often considered one of the most challenging and anxiety-inducing aspects of language learning (Li & Huang, 2012), and the impact of flipped instruction on learners' confidence and performance in this area remains underexplored.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the experiences of undergraduate EFL students in an English Education Department at a public university in Indonesia, focusing on their engagement with flipped classroom learning in phonology and pronunciation courses. Specifically, this study addresses the following research questions: (1) What are students' perceptions of the advantages of the flipped classroom model? and (2) What challenges do they encounter during the learning process? By employing a qualitative case study approach, this research seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of how learners interpret and experience flipped learning within a specific cultural and educational context. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of more effective and contextually appropriate flipped classroom practices in EFL settings.

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore EFL learners' perceptions of the advantages and challenges of learning through a flipped classroom model. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate as it allows for an in-depth exploration of students' subjective experiences, beliefs, and interpretations. This design enabled the researcher to capture rich and contextual data on how students engage with and respond to flipped classroom learning, particularly in relation to both its perceived benefits and challenges.

The participants of this study consisted of five undergraduate students (four females and one males), aged between 20 and 22 years, who were in their third year of study at the English Education Department of Mulawarman University. All participants were selected from Class A through purposive sampling, as they had direct and continuous exposure to flipped classroom instruction. Specifically, they had participated in two skill-based courses—Phonology and Pronunciation Practice—during the 2023/2024 academic year, both of which implemented the flipped classroom model. In these courses, students were required to access instructional materials such as videos and readings prior to class, while in-class sessions were devoted to practice, discussion, and feedback activities.

The selection of participants was based on specific criteria, including prior experience with flipped learning, willingness to participate in in-depth interviews, and the ability to reflect critically on their learning experiences. All participants demonstrated intermediate to upper-intermediate levels of English proficiency, based on their academic performance and internal departmental assessments. Their prior exposure to conventional teacher-centred instruction, which primarily emphasized lectures and grammar-translation methods, provided a comparative basis for evaluating the flipped classroom approach.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which allowed flexibility in exploring key themes such as student engagement, learning improvement, motivation, self-regulation, and learning challenges. Each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' consent. The recordings were transcribed verbatim and subsequently translated into English for analysis while maintaining the original meaning of participants' responses. A pilot interview was conducted with one student outside the sample to refine the clarity and depth of the interview questions. The interview guide included questions related to students' perceptions of flipped learning, perceived benefits, encountered challenges, time management strategies, and comparisons with traditional classroom learning.

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout the research process. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study and provided informed consent prior to data collection. Their participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was ensured by anonymizing personal identities in the transcripts and reporting. The researcher also maintained reflexivity by

acknowledging her positionality as an English Education student and by keeping a reflective journal to minimize potential bias during data collection and analysis.

Data saturation was achieved at the fifth interview, as no new themes emerged and participants' responses began to show repetition. Given the depth of responses and the focused nature of the case study, five participants were considered sufficient to capture the key patterns relevant to the research questions.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the six-phase framework proposed by (Braun & Clarke, n.d.) which includes familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. The researcher repeatedly read the transcripts to gain a comprehensive understanding of the data. During the coding process, meaningful excerpts were labeled with initial codes representing significant aspects of participants' experiences. These codes were then organized into broader themes and sub-themes that reflected the central focus of the study, namely the perceived benefits and challenges of flipped classroom learning.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, several strategies were employed. These included careful verbatim transcription, iterative coding, and consistent comparison of themes across participants. The researcher also maintained transparency in the analytical process to enhance the credibility and reliability of the study.

3. Result

This chapter presents a detailed thematic analysis of interview data collected from five third-year EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students learning in the English Education Department at a state university in Indonesia. The students had experienced flipped classroom learning during the fourth semester in two significant courses: Phonology and Pronunciation. Two major themes Perceived Benefits and Challenges Encountered by EFL Learners, with respective sub-themes, were revealed through the analysis. The results also highlight individual variation in experience based on motivation, level of language, and learning style.

For the sake of clarity, participant demographics are summarized in **Table 1**, with a summary of thematic frequencies in **Table 2**.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Participant	Gender	Year of Study	Class	English Proficiency Level	Prior Flipped Classroom Experience
A	Female	3 rd Year	Class A	Intermediate	Yes (Phonology & Pronunciation)
B	Female	3 rd Year	Class A	Intermediate	Yes (Phonology & Pronunciation)
C	Female	3 rd Year	Class A	Intermediate	Yes (Phonology & Pronunciation)
D	Female	3 rd Year	Class A	Intermediate	Yes (Phonology & Pronunciation)
E	Male	3 rd Year	Class A	Intermediate	Yes (Phonology & Pronunciation)

Table 2. Frequency of Themes Identified

Theme/Sub-theme	No. of Participants Mentioning
Pre-class exposure improves comprehension	5/5
Improvement in pronunciation	5/5
Reading comprehension enhancement	4/5
Increased speaking fluency and confidence	4/5
Difficulty understanding material independently	3/5
Contradictory findings on topic complexity	1/5

1. Perceived Benefits of Flipped Classroom Learning

All five participants had positive opinions about the flipped classroom approach. The most prominent strength mentioned was early access to learning material particularly multimedia material to enable greater preparation beforehand of in-classwork. The strategy was considered a method of providing

independent study, building levels of confidence, and linguistic ability in pronunciation, reading, and speaking.

A. Improved Pronunciation Skills

One of the greatest outcomes was that all the participants (5/5) indicated that they believed their clarity, accuracy, and confidence with pronunciation had been increased through the flipped classroom. Pre-class videos typically consisted of demonstrations of stress pattern, intonation, and articulation which were easily accessed numerous times by participants.

“In the pronunciation course, we could learn how to pronounce words correctly at home by watching videos or finding additional resources. I could practice how to pronounce certain words before class.”— **Participant A**, Female, Intermediate

“Flipped classroom really helped me improve my English, especially pronunciation. I could focus on aspects I needed to work on, and in class, I practiced those skills.”
— **Participant E**, Male, Intermediate

Participants emphasized the benefit of asynchronous flexibility to rewind, replay, and repeat some audio clips since this helped them memorize correct pronunciation templates at their convenience.

B. Enhanced Reading Comprehension

Four participants reported noticeable improvements in reading skills, particularly in processing academic texts and technical phonological descriptions. Pre-class reading assignments allowed them to annotate and translate challenging terms before engaging in group discussions.

“Reading was improved because we had to read the materials first. It helped with comprehension too because the texts were usually complex.”
— **Participant C**, Female, Intermediate

“I think flipped classroom helped with my reading skills because we had to read and understand the material before class. That helped me follow the discussions more easily.”
— **Participant D**, Female, Intermediate

This pre-class reading not only facilitated understanding but also enriched classroom interaction and participation in class discussions because students had already formed preliminary understandings.

C. More Speaking Fluency and Confidence

Speaking confidence and fluency improvement was also seen in four out of five participants with this model. As students had already completed content before class, they believed they were better prepared to participate during discussion, presentation, and peer interaction.

D. Increased Speaking Fluency and Confidence

Four out of five participants also asserted that their confidence and fluency in speaking enhanced through this model. Students, already having accessed material prior to class, were better equipped to make contributions during discussions, presentations, and interactions with peers.

“Because I already read the material, I participated more in class. I could contribute to the discussions more confidently.”

— **Participant A**, Female, Intermediate

“Because I had done the work in advance, I was more active and better prepared. I was able to participate more in discussions and speak in class.”

— **Participant E**, Male, Upper-Intermediate

The flipped model appeared to reduce classroom anxiety, enabling students to prepare content-specific vocabulary and talking points in advance.

2. Challenges Faced by EFL Learners in Flipped Classrooms

However, some challenges evolved, including mesh learning considerations on learner autonomy, motivation, and the cognitive effort required by independent studies:

A. Motivation and Time Management Problems

Three participants admitted difficulty maintaining consistent motivation and organizing their time effectively. Some reported **procrastination** and attending class without reviewing the materials, which reduced the effectiveness of the flipped model.

“Sometimes I felt lazy... studying before class took effort, especially when I was at home.”

— **Participant A**, Female, Intermediate

“My motivation was not consistent, especially when there was a lot of material or assignments.”

— **Participant E**, Male, Intermediate

"I kept procrastinating reading the stuff... sometimes I didn't even open it up before class."

— **Participant F**, Female, Intermediate

Others delayed and attended class without being prepared, which undermined the strength of the flipped model. These responses suggest the self-directed needs of flipped learning, which is not best suited for every learner without additional support or accountability processes.

B. Independent Difficulty in Understanding Content

Two students struggled to learn course material on their own, particularly when the material was theory-based or dense. These students could not recognize the key concepts without the instructor explanations.

"Sometimes I had no idea what the material was about... unless the instructor told us outright."

— **Participant C**, Female, Intermediate

One implication of this result is that less knowledgeable or less fluent students may be swamped by the independent method of flipped learning and may require more facilitated scaffolding.

C. Inconsistent Conclusion: Flipped Learning Works Better on Less Complex Material

One of the users provided a balanced perspective, pointing out that the flipped model performed better with simpler subjects while complex materials still required live intervention by the teacher.

"It works when the topic is easy, but when it's hard, I need the teacher from the start. Videos are not enough."

— **Participant C**, Female, Intermediate

This comment is a counter example in the sense that it reveals that the flipped classroom is not automatically efficient for all subjects. Delicate or cryptic subjects might perhaps benefit from a mixed model that incorporates flipped and traditional methods.

Thematic analysis confirms that flipped classroom teaching offered clear benefits to EFL students in the realm of reading, speaking, and pronunciation. The approach encouraged better preparation, language awareness, and activity. However, accomplishment was highly dependent on student motivation, language skill, and the nature of the material. The study shows that although the flipped

approach has gigantic potential, implementation must be supplemented by efficient scaffolding, observation, and adaptive teaching devices in an attempt to meet the diverse learning demands.

4. Discussion

Perceived Benefits of Flipped Classroom Learning

The findings indicate that flipped classroom pedagogy is an effective pedagogy for improving the language skills of EFL students, particularly for phonology and pronunciation courses. The students repeatedly indicated that previewing course content beforehand facilitated them to grasp hard material more conveniently and engage actively during class time. This is in line with Cognitive Load Theory, which asserts that the removal of extraneous load through pre-exposure enhances students' ability to process new information. By removing the initial presentation of content from class, students came to class better prepared and more confident, thus optimizing classroom practice time.

In accordance with Constructivist Learning Theory, namely Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, the flipped format enables students to acquire information at their own speed before receiving guided practice from peers and instructors. This scaffolding through videos, slides, and internet resources provides just-in-time aid to better enable understanding. Participants emphasized the importance of replayable materials, especially for pronunciation rehearsal, in consonance with results by (Ramirez et al., 2022) and corroborating the role of multimodal learning in second language acquisition.

Improved reading comprehension and speaking fluency emerged as prominent outcomes. Students noted that having time to annotate texts and use translation tools independently enabled more meaningful classroom discussions. This echoes (Lo & Hew, 2017a) findings that flipped learning promotes learner-centered strategies and self-directed preparation. Notably, participants shared that such preparation alleviated anxiety during speaking activities and encouraged greater classroom participation, reflecting the **Affective Filter Hypothesis**.

Further, students reported heightened motivation and interest, facilitated by their change from being passive recipients to active agents. Such a shift is in consonance with Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 1985) where autonomy, competence, and relatedness are emphasized as the main drivers of intrinsic motivation. Students were more responsible for their learning processes, which enhanced self-regulatory processes such as time management, utilization of online materials, and self-evaluation—behaviors necessary for long-term learning and success in technology-supported education environments (Aldalur et al., 2024)

Thus, the flipped classroom not only fosters language achievements but also fosters learner autonomy and motivation an intrinsic mix for long-term language acquisition in EFL environments.

Difficulties Faced by EFL Learners in Flipped Classrooms

Along with the many benefits, the flipped classroom model was accompanied by a series of challenges such as motivation, self-learning, and digital equity. The challenges form the basis of the need for more cautious and context-sensitive use of the model.

One of the biggest concerns was the issue of student motivation and time management, with learners reporting difficulty in developing consistent preparation habits outside the classroom. This is reinforced by (Etemadfar et al., 2020) (Lo & Hew, 2017b) noting that while flipped learning promotes autonomy, it also demands a high level of self-discipline that has not been developed by all learners. The model presupposes a level of maturity and organization that may not yet be realized in undergraduates juggling a multitude of academic and personal responsibilities. In this case, the role of executive functioning and the necessity of metacognitive skill building comes to prominence.

The other related issue was students' difficulty in making meaning of rich content independently, particularly those with lower English proficiency. This finding is supported by van (van Alten et al., 2019) who argue that flipped learning requires sound instructional scaffolding via guide questions, images, and low-level summaries to ensure equal access to content. Without these supports, the model can potentially reverse-engineer, and even enlarge, achievement gaps across students of different levels of proficiency.

Another contextual concern is the digital divide, although not specifically mentioned by participants, common to most EFL environments, especially in developing regions. As (Brendel et al., 2024) explain, the absence of stable internet connectivity, digital literacy, and learning devices may undermine the very foundation of flipped learning. An infrastructural shortcoming must be acknowledged by institutions in preparing technology-enriched teaching and ensuring equity in access to digital resources.

Interestingly, the sole respondent who stated flipped learning was effective only for less complex subjects suggested learners may prefer more traditional, instructor-led instruction of abstract or difficult material. This result corroborates cognitive apprenticeship models that imply instructor-led modeling with growing release of responsibility as content complexity emerges. This would imply a potential blended strategy, blending flipped and direct instruction, may prove more effective on a variety of topics.

Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to flipped classroom theory in EFL contexts by reaffirming the value of multimodal, autonomous learning environments and positioning learner agency at the heart of pedagogical innovation. The findings contribute to theoretical frameworks such as Constructivism, Self-Determination Theory, and Zone of Proximal Development by illustrating how exposure to pre-

class content and actively involved in-class engagement interact to enable language development.

Moreover, it adds to the growing body of literature in flipped learning through the emphasis it places on the affective and metacognitive nature of learning, focusing not only on the development of skills, but also on learner attitude, motivation, and autonomy in online learning contexts.

Practical Implications

From a practical standpoint, the findings offer several recommendations:

1. For EFL Instructors:

- Prepare pre-class materials at different levels of difficulty and incorporate guiding questions, subtitles, or summaries.
- Save in-class time for active engagement in the form of role-plays, debates, and peer comment.
- Add brief assessments or checkpoints to give incentives for pre-class preparation.

2. For Institutions:

- Provide technological support and infrastructure, such as access to equipment and reliable internet.
- Offer workshops on self-regulated learning strategies to better prepare students for independent learning.
- Develop instructor professional development modules in instructional design, content creation, and classroom facilitation in flipped classrooms.

3. Cost-Benefit Considerations:

- While the flipped classroom may require initial investment in multimedia resources and instructor training, long-term gains in student motivation and learning efficiency justify the cost.
- Pilot projects and phased implementations can maintain institution risk in line while generating local feedback.

Critical Reflections and Cultural Considerations

The single surprising outcome was variability in the efficacy of flipped learning by topic complexity. This is an argument in favor of adaptive use, the recognition that not all content is appropriately suited to flipped mode. Cultural context also gets in the way. Teacher-centered learning still prevails in much of Asian EFL instruction, and students may be unfamiliar or resistant to high degrees of learner autonomy. This cultural dynamic has the potential to affect motivation and motivation, suggesting that graduated exposure to the flipped model is a

predictor of long-term success.

Moreover, the study places its focus on contextual sensitivity to the socio-economic, technological, and pedagogical constraints that characterize learners' realities. It requires localized cognition of flipped learning, as opposed to one-size-fits-all deployment of models developed in Western, high-resource environments.

5. Conclusion

This research has examined the perceptions of English as a Foreign Language students in the English Education Department towards flipped classroom activities. Overall, the outcomes depicted that the majority of students had favorable attitudes towards flipped learning, and an extensive number expressed considerable benefits of flipped learning in terms of increased understanding, confidence, and skill development related to the English language, particularly pronunciation, reading, speaking, etc.

Students also reported increased levels of participation to participate in classroom practice as well as observable shift from more passive learning roles to more active learning tasks. Students also shifted towards self-directed learning strategies within the flipped classroom strategy and focused on taking more autonomy for learning.

While there are advantages believed to be of the approach, flipped class also had its challenges. Challenges students reported experiencing were: time management, varying levels of motivation, and the more difficult part of being independent when learning new content. Overall, the challenges reflect the value of high-quality instruction, clarity in design, and consistent teacher support so that learners especially ESL learners who are still learning English aren't lost.

It must be mentioned that the results of this study are the outcomes of one class with limited sample size, and therefore, cannot be extended to EFL learners in general. This study was limited to students' perceptions of reflection, not incorporating teachers' perceptions as well as perhaps the quantitative learning gains due to student reflection.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

While this study provides significant percepts into the overall experiences of many EFL learners regarding flipped classroom learning in phonology and pronunciation courses, this study certainly has some limitations, all of which need to be construed within the context and findings of the study.

Limited Generalizability

The study involved only five third-year EFL students, all from one class in

the same Indonesian university. Their viewpoints add depth to the findings, but the small and homogeneous sample restricts generalizability to any other population of EFL students, institutions, or contexts of education. The varied learner profiles, year levels, and institutional cultures will produce very different experiences with the flipped classroom approach.

Potential Researcher Bias

Qualitative research, typically, includes some potential bias regarding the role of the researcher in the data collection, interpretation, and thematic analysis. Strategies had already been employed for better trustworthiness (like verbatim transcription and more than one coding cycle); however, possibilities influence the interpretations by the researcher and their expectations related to flipped learning. A more robust triangulation approach such as member checks or peer debriefings would increase trustworthiness.

Absence of Longitudinal Data

Learner perceptions were studied at one point in time in this study. Longitudinal follow-up is needed to determine the long-term impact of flipped learning on language development, learner autonomy, or academic performance. Some of the advantages or hindrances, such as motivational changes, retention, or delayed learning gains, may take time under this model to emerge, which the present study could not follow.

Limited Attention to Wider Educational Environment

While the perspectives of students were the primary concern, this study did not cover what lecturers' roles are, how institutional policies and technological infrastructure support or hinder flipped classroom implementation. These factors are critical, especially in resource-scarce contexts where effective integration depends on external support systems.

Future Research Directions

To address these limitations and make an additional contribution to the field's knowledge about flipped learning in EFL contexts, several future research directions are proposed:

Larger and More Diverse Samples

To analyze if the experiences reported in this study are prevalent in other learner populations, multicenter studies with participants from additional regions are necessary. Expanding the range of language skills, educational qualifications, and types of academic programs would increase generalizability.

Longitudinal and Mixed-Methods Studies

In exploring the long-term effects of flipped learning on sustaining language skills and learner autonomy, longitudinal studies would be beneficial. A mix of interviews, classroom observations, along with quantitative and qualitative assessments, would provide deeper understanding and richer insights into the teaching and learning processes

Comparative and Cross-Cultural Studies

Studying the differences in flipped and traditional classrooms, or within culturally or institutionally diversified flipped classrooms (urban, suburban, rural, public/private, for-profit/non-profit) would provide context-specific outcome data along with valuable evidence-based insights.

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