

RELIGACIÓN

R E V I S T A

The impact of song-based english lessons in the motivation of efl students

El impacto de las clases basadas en canciones en la motivación de estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera

John Vallejo, María Isabel Pérez Ortega

Abstract

Despite decades of research on the motivational impact of songs in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, many educators remain unaware of their potential. This study investigates how EFL learners perceive their learning journey when incorporating song-based lessons. Songs are valuable tools for achieving personal and group language learning goals. They offer a multifaceted approach, encompassing cultural immersion, vocabulary acquisition, enhanced listening comprehension, facilitated grammar application, and the sharpening of various language skills – all presented within a rhythmic structure. Recognizing the impact of music on mood and motivation is crucial. Research in this area is essential to understand how specific songs influence motivation levels. By investigating these effects, educators can choose music that optimizes learning environments and supports students in reaching their academic objectives. Songs are powerful tools in EFL classrooms, providing an engaging approach to language learning on multiple levels. Understanding their impact on mood and motivation allows educators to leverage these benefits and enhance the overall learning experience for students.

Keywords: EFL; motivation; songs; learning; multifaceted.

John Vallejo

Universidad Católica de Cuenca | Cuenca | Ecuador | johnsebastian14@hotmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0009-0008-7293-0772>

María Isabel Pérez Ortega

Universidad Católica de Cuenca | Cuenca | Ecuador | isabel.perez@ucacue.edu.ec
<https://orcid.org/0009-0005-0648-0126>

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Resumen

A pesar de décadas de investigación sobre el impacto motivacional de las canciones en las aulas de Inglés como Lengua Extranjera (ELE), muchos educadores aún desconocen su potencial. Este estudio analiza cómo los estudiantes de ELE perciben su proceso de aprendizaje cuando se incorporan lecciones basadas en canciones. Las canciones se reconocen como herramientas valiosas para lograr objetivos de aprendizaje lingüístico tanto individuales como grupales. Ofrecen un enfoque multifacético que abarca la inmersión cultural, la adquisición de vocabulario, la mejora de la comprensión auditiva, la facilitación de la aplicación de la gramática y el desarrollo de diversas habilidades lingüísticas, todo ello presentado dentro de una estructura rítmica. Reconocer el impacto de la música en el estado de ánimo y la motivación es crucial. La investigación en esta área es esencial para comprender cómo canciones específicas influyen en los niveles de motivación. Al investigar estos efectos, los educadores pueden elegir música que optimice los entornos de aprendizaje y apoye a los estudiantes en la consecución de sus objetivos académicos. Las canciones sirven como herramientas poderosas en las aulas de ELE, proporcionando un enfoque atractivo para el aprendizaje de idiomas en múltiples niveles. Comprender su impacto en el estado de ánimo y la motivación permite a los educadores aprovechar estos beneficios y mejorar la experiencia general de aprendizaje para los estudiantes.

Palabras claves: ELE; motivación; canciones; aprendizaje; multifacético.

Introduction

Throughout history, music has profoundly resonated with humans. This connection finds roots in the discovery of the ancient avian species *Vegavis iaai*, a precursor to modern ducks and geese, dating back over 66 million years. This early association between birds and humans, particularly their shared ability to create songs, has significantly influenced our understanding of the human psyche. Research conducted by Dean (2019), has shed light on how birdsong induces positive emotional states in humans, thereby aiding comprehension of complex problems and enhancing cognitive functions. In education, fostering positive emotional states significantly enhances learning experiences, particularly for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. Music is a tool that can be used to influence a learning environment and help set the tone of the classroom (Jorgensen, 2023).

With its combination of poetic expression and lyrical power, music can be utilized to promote classroom engagement (Bokiev et al., 2018). Music has been shown to induce the release of dopamine, aid in memory retention for ages, and engage both the right hemisphere of the brain with melodies and the left hemisphere with lyrics. It is evident that songs have a profound impact on the human brain. Exploiting this influential power constructively during foreign language instruction holds tremendous potential for significantly benefiting language learners.

This study delves into a multidisciplinary theoretical framework by examining the effectiveness of integrating songs into EFL classes for enhancing motivation among students. Drawing on insights from education, psychology, linguistics, and musicology, the research explores music's profound impact on the human brain. It investigates how incorporating songs can induce positive emotional states, aid memory retention, engage various brain areas, and ultimately create a

conducive learning environment for language acquisition. Through this analysis, the study aims to contribute to the field of language education by providing insights into innovative and effective teaching methods that harness the power of music to enhance language learning experiences and motivation among EFL learners. From a linguistic and cognitive psychology perspective, the theory posits that music and language share common neural pathways in the brain (Schön, 2009). This neural overlap facilitates the integration of musical elements, such as melody, rhythm, and prosody, into language learning activities, thereby enhancing learners' phonological awareness, intonation, and pronunciation. Moreover, songs provide authentic language input, exposing learners to colloquial expressions, idiomatic phrases, and cultural nuances (Peretz et al., 2015).

Affective neuroscience and psychology contribute to the framework by emphasizing the profound emotional and cognitive responses elicited by music (Koelsch, 2014). Music can evoke various emotions, influencing learners' affective states and attitudes towards language learning. Additionally, research on the Mozart Effect suggests that music can temporarily enhance cognitive functions, such as spatial reasoning and memory, potentially benefiting language learning outcomes (Rauscher et al., 1993).

Motivational theories, including Self-Determination Theory, highlight the importance of intrinsic motivation, interest, and perceived value in fostering engagement and persistence in learning tasks (Gagné & Deci, 2005). Songs, with their aesthetic appeal, tend to have a positive effect on the commitment and value of music that will sustain them through the challenges of music (Woody, 2020). Additionally, collaborative music-making activities promote a sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness among learners, contributing to their overall motivation and engagement (Burnard & Dragovic, 2014).

From a socio-cultural perspective, the framework defines the role of songs as cultural artifacts embedded within specific social contexts (Vygotsky, 1930). Songs not only reflect cultural norms, values, and identities but also facilitate intercultural communication and understanding (Kramsch, 2009). By incorporating songs from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, EFL classrooms can foster intercultural competence and empathy among learners (Byram, 1997).

Songs are a popular tool in language learning, especially for English as a Foreign Language. Research shows they boost motivation and engagement and help learners select new vocabulary (Kocaman, 2016). However, there are downsides. Song lyrics may not always be grammatically correct, raising questions about their effectiveness for comprehensive language learning. Additionally, it is necessary to fully understand how students perceive this method. More research is needed to explore student preferences and how songs can best keep EFL learners motivated.

This article investigates the effectiveness of music to enhance the learning experience of EFL students. It explores the impact of various music genres on student engagement and academic outcomes. The research also examines the effects of age and proficiency levels on the impact of song-based activities in the classroom. Ultimately, the study aims to determine if incorporating music can create a stimulating and enjoyable learning environment that fosters student motivation and knowledge retention.

Methodology

The literature review implemented a systematic methodology to carefully examine previous research on the motivation levels of EFL from students who participated in classes centered around music and songs from 2019 up to 2024. This approach is designed to follow specific steps and criteria and ensure the review processes' reliability, transparency, and credibility. The review aims to provide a comprehensive analysis, offering essential insights into the motivational dynamics within song-based EFL classrooms.

The literature search used primary sources: Google Scholar, Research Gate, Web of Science, Eric, and others. It is crucial to utilize a vast range of sources to ensure the comprehensive coverage of academic literature across various disciplines relevant to the topic of the study, including education, linguistics, and psychology. Each source offers unique credibility and advantages, such as extensive coverage, accessibility, and advanced search capabilities. By relying on these diverse sources, the literature review aims to collect comprehensive information on the perspectives and insights on the motivation of EFL students through song-based classes, enhancing the richness and depth of the analysis.

For data collection, the literature review started with an initial screening phase where titles and abstracts of identified articles were carefully evaluated to assess their relevance to the research topic. This preliminary screening process served to locate the identification of potentially relevant literature and facilitate the efficient reliability of resources. Subsequently, articles that pass the initial screening stage will undergo a comprehensive full-text reading to determine their eligibility for inclusion in the review. This thorough examination will involve looking into the content of each article in detail to ascertain its alignment with the research objectives, methodology, and critical themes under investigation. Articles that meet the predefined inclusion criteria, such as being reviewed, published in reputable academic journals, and focusing on EFL students' motivation in song-based classes, were kept for further analysis. Conversely, articles that failed to meet these criteria or were deemed irrelevant to the research focus were excluded from the review. This meticulous data collection process aims to ensure the selection of high-quality literature that contributes meaningfully to synthesizing and analyzing findings in the literature review.

For data analysis, the extracted literature underwent a rigorous analysis to identify recurring themes, patterns, and trends relevant to EFL students' motivation in song-based classes. Thematic analysis involves systematically coding and categorizing data to uncover underlying themes and concepts within the literature. Initially, data will be organized and coded based on key concepts and ideas related to EFL students' motivation, perceptions of song-based classes, and the impact of music on language learning. This process will enable the identification of commonalities and differences across studies, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. Subsequently, themes will be further refined and clustered to identify broader patterns and relationships within the data. Through constant comparison and interpretation of findings, themes will be iteratively reviewed and revised to ensure accuracy and consistency.

Additionally, the analysis will explore discrepancies or contradictory findings within the literature and seek to reconcile them through deeper examination and contextualization. Ultimately, the synthesized findings will generate insights and conclusions that contribute to advancing knowledge in the EFL education and pedagogy field. Table 1 shows the categorization by methodologies to facilitate the application of these findings and ensure transparency in the analysis process. This table lists the initial focus of the studies and separates them by methodology.

Table 1. Categorization Chart.

Category	Studies	Authors
Enhanced Engagement and Participation	Motivating Students through MI activities in an EFL Classroom.	(Eboli, E 2020)
	Promoting Student Motivation in EFL Classroom: Through Extended Music Education.	(Nadera, 2015)
	Pop Culture and English Language Learning Motivation among AB-English Students.	(Placer et al., 2024)
Emotional Connection and Enjoyment	The use of English Song lyrics in Teaching Listening to the students at Ninth Grade of SMP Annidhamiyah Bindang Pasean Pamekasan.	(Ulfatul Karomah, 2021)
	Vocabulary Learning Autonomy Through Incorporation of English Songs: Indonesian EFL Students' Perspectives.	(Lestari & Hardiyanti, 2020)
Improved Retention and Recall	Pop Culture and English Language Learning Motivation among AB-English Students.	(Placer et al., 2024)
	Do you like listening to music? Students' Thoughts on their Vocabulary Mastery using English Songs.	(Isnaini & Aminatun, 2021)
	Exploring Language Learning Motivation Among Primary EFL Learners.	(Wallace & Leong, 2020)
Cultural Awareness and Identity	Effects of new media on English Language Learning Motivation at Tertiary Level.	(Hasan et al., 2020)
	The influence of Music and Educational Songs on EFL Students' Achievement from their Teachers' Perspective in Jenin Region.	(Bsharat et al., 2021)
Strategies Used in Song-Based English Lessons	Developing Learner Autonomy Through Project Work in an ESP Class.	(Díaz, 2014)
	Using Songs in Teaching Pronunciation to Young EFL learners.	(Saldiraner & Cinkara, 2021)
EFL Students' Perspectives on the Use of Songs as a Language Learning Tool	EFL learners' Perceptions of Song-Based Classes integrated into English Language Preparatory Program.	(Güzel & Altay, 2023)
	Use of Music and Songs as Pedagogical Tools in Teaching English as Foreign Language Contexts.	(Kumar et al., 2022)

Source: Own elaboration.

Development

Findings and Discussion

Recent educational research has shed new light on the power of music in the classroom, particularly within EFL programs. These studies not only demonstrate the motivational and enriching effects of music integration but also provide a complete argument for its inclusion in teachers' lesson planning and instructional strategies. Student interest in an activity strongly indicates its potential value, and incorporating music can transform often monotonous EFL classes into engaging and enjoyable learning experiences. As English educators, the responsibility to continuously develop innovative methods that empower students is crucial. Embracing music as a powerful educational tool allows educators to cultivate a dynamic learning environment that promotes not only language proficiency but also enthusiasm and active participation among learners.

Song Type

Music's profound influence on our emotions is undeniable. Humans instinctively gravitate towards melancholic melodies in times of sadness and depression, celebrate with an upbeat song, and channel frustration through energetic genres like rock or hip-hop. Music's historical evolution showcases the blues as a coping mechanism for enslaved people, hip-hop as a voice for those facing poverty, and rock music as a platform for protest, examples of the people's need to connect their emotions with a power more potent than anything known by far. Love songs and countless other genres further illustrate music's ability to evoke a spectrum of emotions. Today's diverse musical landscape offers a vast selection of genres and styles, each potentially enhancing student motivation and engagement in EFL classes, whether they are kids, teenagers, young adults, or adults.

The exciting next step is to explore how specific genres and song types can be strategically incorporated into EFL lessons, fostering a more dynamic and stimulating learning environment without leaving some important factors behind; as mentioned by Vishnevskaja & Zhou (2019), ages and cultural backgrounds have to be considered when choosing an appropriate song for students. First, Tasnim (2022), decided to use love since it is a topic that resonates with everyone, significantly boosting students' motivation levels and engagement in the class. In addition, Placer et al. (2024), chose songs that were quite popular among students because these songs can positively affect the motivational outcomes of the entire class.

However, many teachers tend to avoid controversial songs because of the strong influence they could have on students. However, for Díaz (2020), songs with lyrics that covered controversial issues and social problems were used in order to create an engagement environment for students to feel motivated to participate and say what they think about what the world is going through, which provided an exquisite experience for the learners. Güzel and Altay (2023), argued

that fostering a delightful learning experience through music in adult education requires a departure from traditional methods. He emphasized the importance of employing various genres to cater to diverse learners and create an engaging atmosphere.

When fostering kids, a more educational system of songs should be considered. Bsharat et al. (2021), propose that incorporating music and educational songs into teaching can make the learning process more tangible; students might be able to feel what they are learning, such as vocabulary and words related to the topics being covered. This proposal by the author makes students perceive music as a non-traditional and boring way of teaching English.

Enhanced Engagement and Participation

One of the most persistent challenges educators face is students' disengagement in classrooms, often perceived as monotonous or lacking in relevance, and it is understandable. For instance, Saldiraner and Cinkara (2021), say that a different type of instrument, in this case, music, was found to be more motivational for students when learning pronunciation compared to pronunciation texts, which generally tend to be challenging to understand. This lack of participation impedes the positive learning experience and creates a frustrating environment for teachers and students. To address this, educators constantly seek innovative and engaging tools to reignite student interest.

Beyond the ability music has to pique curiosity, it offers a more profound potential to address the underlying causes of student disengagement. Teachers often function as more than just instructors; they can become their friends and mentors and even give emotional support if needed. Many learners grapple with personal struggles they find challenging to articulate due to various factors, including fear of judgment, cultural norms, or simply not knowing how to express themselves effectively. This is particularly true for male students, who may be socialized to suppress their emotions. These unaddressed issues can manifest as disengagement, further hindering the learning process.

Music has been a universal language of expression and emotional release for centuries. Kumar et al. (2022), state that music motivates students to learn a lot about different topics and solve their problems. Songs often tackle relatable themes, providing solace and a sense of connection for those facing similar challenges. Educators can tap into this power of expression by incorporating music into the classroom environment. Music can create a safe space for students to connect with their emotions and find a voice, fostering a sense of community and belonging. This emotional connection can then translate into a renewed interest in learning and a willingness to participate actively without using verbal explanations all the time. Islami (2019) supports the idea that music, with the help of its rhythm and movement, is used to enhance students' motivation and vocabulary acquisition more naturally than they would with verbal explanations.

Studies have shown that the introduction of music-based teaching strategies can demonstrably increase student participation (Haji & Jejo, 2020). Music can create a more dynamic and stimulating learning environment, guiding learners to different learning styles and preferences. Furthermore, by incorporating music that aligns with the learning objectives, teachers can enhance understanding and retention of critical concepts for more extended periods of time (Sihvola & Gafor, 2020). Ultimately, by harnessing the power of music as a tool for engagement, educators can create a more positive and supportive learning environment where all students feel empowered to participate and reach their full potential.

This revised version reorganizes the information to prioritize the challenges of student disengagement and the various factors that contribute to it. It then delves deeper into the potential of music to address these underlying issues and foster a more positive learning environment conducive to participation. Finally, it highlights the research supporting the use of music as a tool for engagement and the benefits it offers for students' intrinsic motivation. Wallace and Leong (2020), state that promoting the intrinsic motivation of learners by promoting the use of some tools, including music, works tremendously.

EFL Students' Perspectives on the Use of Songs as a Language Learning Tool

For EFL students, acquiring a new language can be challenging and rewarding once goals are achieved. Traditional methods, while effective in some ways, which are the ones they usually expect to have in the classroom, can often feel dry and uninspiring. However, recent research done by Oktavia et al. (2022), show that music can be used as a helpful tool to teach young learners since they need to be in constant interaction with different activities to stay motivated. Educators can effectively change traditional class perceptions using song-based classes and cultivate a culture of trust and lifelong learning.

Music as a Bridge to Engagement and Fun

The landscape of language learning has undergone a significant shift in recent years. Students are often burdened by past negative experiences that have led them to have low expectations for language acquisition, which may be why they approach learning with negativism. Al-Smadi (2020), showed that students who do not use the right tools usually tend to negatively affect their learning process more than those who use different tools, such as music. Traditional methods rely heavily on grammar drills and rote memorization, leaving many students feeling discouraged and disengaged.

Thankfully, pedagogical tools have evolved to cater to today's students' diverse needs and learning styles. Gone are the days of monotonous drills; modern classrooms embrace dynamic and interactive approaches. One such tool gaining significant traction is music for language learning. Music offers a multi-sensory learning experience that transcends the limitations of traditional methods. Hasan et al. (2020), state that music transforms learners from dependent and passive to active and autonomous, fostering participation, engagement, and enthusiasm in language learning.

A Catalyst for Vocabulary Acquisition

Music's potential to enhance vocabulary learning is particularly noteworthy. Educators can create engaging activities like "gap-filling" exercises by incorporating songs that align with learning objectives. The lyrical nature of music makes vocabulary retention more natural and enjoyable.

Studies have shown that music can be a transformative tool for both educators and students. It facilitates vocabulary acquisition in a way that feels less like memorization and more like an organic process (Ulfatul Karomah, 2021).

The Rise of Online Education and the Growing Demand for Engaging Tools

The COVID-19 pandemic triggered a dramatic change in online education, forcing educators worldwide to adapt to virtual classrooms rapidly. This unforeseen transition caught many off guard, prompting them to seek innovative teaching methods. Music emerged as a powerful tool perfectly suited to meet the challenges of fostering a dynamic and stimulating online learning environment. Eboli (2020), showed that music served her well when including multiple intelligences-based classes during COVID-19 to enhance and motivate students to participate.

Students, accustomed to the flexibility of online learning, now have heightened expectations. They crave lessons that mirror the interactivity and energy of traditional face-to-face interactions. Recognizing this need, educators discovered the versatility of music in online language instruction. Music goes beyond simply making lessons more enjoyable; it offers a gateway to enhanced vocabulary acquisition, improved pronunciation, and overall increased student engagement. Interactive activities like vocabulary-building games and lyric analysis exercises leverage the power of music to create a captivating learning experience. This integration not only addresses the need for engaging content but also capitalizes on the established cognitive benefits of music for language learning. As a result, music has become a valuable tool for educators, facilitating effective language acquisition in the diverse online learning environments that have become the new normal.

Music and age boundaries

The complexities of a new language, with its endless grammar rules and vocabulary lists, can often leave EFL students feeling discouraged. Music, however, offers a refreshing alternative. The inherent rhythm and melody of songs can spark a renewed sense of motivation and engagement, making the learning process more enjoyable and fostering a positive attitude towards language acquisition, a crucial element for success.

While younger learners are often adept at acquiring information quickly, research now demonstrates that music's motivational impact also extends to adults. Music motivates not only kids or high schoolers but also adult students (Afriyuninda & Oktaviani, 2021). The familiar tunes and enjoyment associated with music can rekindle the spark of learning, even in those who may have struggled with traditional methods. This is particularly relevant in today's EFL classrooms, where students of all ages increasingly seek engaging and interactive learning experiences.

Music as a Universal Language

The concept of music as a universal language transcends mere metaphor. Music can bypass cultural and linguistic barriers, fostering a sense of connection and shared experience. This inherent universality holds immense potential for EFL learners, offering a valuable bridge in their language acquisition journey. Music is used not only by EFL students while teaching English but also by Japanese students. As with EFL students, music can enhance vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation skills, and cultural understanding for Japanese students learning English. Songs can engagingly introduce new grammatical structures, making them easier to remember. Additionally, music can provide insights into English-speaking cultures, fostering a deeper connection with the language (Abdullah & Hussin, 2020).

Conclusions

EFL classrooms can be transformed into exciting journeys fueled by the power of music. Songs are more than just background noise; they create an environment that promotes intrinsic motivation, the burning desire to learn for the sheer joy of it. This combats the fear of mistakes, a major demotivator for EFL learners. Songs act as safe spaces for experimentation, allowing students to sing along to their favorite songs, embrace rhythms, and internalize grammar and vocabulary while they have fun.

Therefore, the music goes beyond overcoming fear. Powerful ballads create emotional connections, making learning meaningful, while upbeat tunes inject fun and energy, keeping students engaged. This engagement is further fueled by cultural discovery; songs also expose students to diverse accents, slang, and everyday expressions, allowing them to taste accomplishment and a deeper appreciation for the language. Learning a language is not passive either; catchy choruses and melodies provide natural repetition, helping retain vocabulary and grammar. Nevertheless, song-based lessons go beyond memorization.

Activities like gap-filling, role-playing lyrics, and even creating original songs transform students from listeners to active participants. This sense of agency fuels a desire to explore the language further. The impact of music transcends physical classrooms. In online learning, songs become tools for engagement and interactivity. Collaborative playlists, virtual karaoke sessions, and online song analysis activities bridge geographical distances and create a sense of community.

This ability to connect and learn together through music further boosts motivation on individual learning journeys. Ultimately, song-based lessons are more than just fun; they are a powerful strategy for igniting a genuine love for the English language, propelling EFL students on a motivated and successful learning adventure.

The current research encountered several limitations. First, identifying studies that directly mentioned the impact of song-based classes on the motivation of EFL students proved to be challenging. Therefore, a systematic search was done on the articles that were in fact genuinely free in order to maximize the relevant results for each one. Second, many of the studies cited lacked of specific methods and techniques used for incorporating songs into lessons. Analyzing these methods could have helped out with a deeper insight into which methods and techniques go hand in hand with the influence of music. Finally, the focus on recent studies from 2019 to 2024 may have limited the scope of investigation since the information and practices used in the past regarding music and motivation could have been important for the actual study.

This research focuses on the potential music has on EFL students' motivation. However further investigations are necessary to fully understand the neurological effect it has on human beings. Future studies could explore the specific neural mechanism involved on the process of how different genres and styles of music influence their states and emotions, including motivation. Just as important, another research could investigate how educators can use the findings of the one done to optimize the learning experience. By understanding how music impacts different age groups, teachers can design a curriculum that strategically manipulates the motivation of students. This research may be suitable and fruitful in Latin America, due the diverse and rich musical kinds. By incorporating a wider range of music genres, educators can create engaging learning environments that cover the specific needs, subjects and preferences of students.

In essence, the research done confirms that strategically chosen songs can significantly enhance students' motivation. Many studies point to the importance of choosing songs properly depending on the students' ages and proficiency levels. The wrong choice can affect participation and engagement. However, when the criteria are carefully considered, music has the remarkable power to create a truly enjoyable learning environment. After all, music has been a constant companion throughout human history, and it's no surprise that students connect with it as anyone else.

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Authors

John Vallejo. Bachelor of Science in Education with a major in English. Teacher at the language center of the Universidad San Francisco de Quito (ILE) and the language center of the Universidad Autonoma de Los Andes (CTT de los Andes).

María Isabel Pérez Ortega. Bachelor of Science in Education with a major in English Language and Literature. Teacher at the Catholic University of Cuenca in the Language Center and tutor for the Master's Degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language at the Catholic University of Cuenca. Master's degree in Translation and Technologies from the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, and coordinator of the translation team at the Language Center of the Catholic University of Cuenca.

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