

# Empowering Small Entrepreneurs: The Role of English in Attracting International Tourists

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\*Priyo Subekti<sup>1</sup>, Syauqi Lukman<sup>2</sup>, Aat Ruchiat Nugraha<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup>Universitas Padjadjaran

Corresponding Author: [priyo.subekti@unpad.ac.id](mailto:priyo.subekti@unpad.ac.id)

## ABSTRACT

The research investigates the importance of English skills in improving the performance of small-scale business practitioners in the tourism industry on Pangandaran Beach. This area is unique and environmentally friendly and serves both domestic and international tourists which in turn provide vast opportunities for supply. However, entrepreneurs are unable to articulate some ideas and interact better with foreign tourists because of the language barrier which limits their ability to market local culture, services and make money. Data collected includes quantitative data from 46 respondents and qualitative interviews. From these it can be discerned that English skills vary, with the majority of entrepreneurs appearing to be educated however with limited command of the language. Some of the challenges were time going to classes, finances, and language barriers. Notably however, contact with visitors, especially foreign nationals, is deemed abundant and English is deemed important to use in order to achieve satisfaction. The results illustrate the possibility that better English proficiency can lead to better quality of interaction, more positive feedback, and increased earnings. The study centres around flexible and inexpensive English training that is supplemented with the needs of the entrepreneurs like online, role gaming and etc. These kinds of activities are crucial in enabling small scale businesses to compete in the international tourism market, boost the quality of services and stimulate the growth of the regional economy.

**Keywords:** English language proficiency; Small-scale entrepreneurs; Communication barriers; Tourism sector; Global tourism market

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## INTRODUCTION

Pangandaran Beach has been one of the most popular tourist places in Indonesia, more so in West Java. The tourism sector in this area plays an important role in boosting the income of the region (Hidayat, 2016). Tourists who come either from inside or outside the country have a good influence on various micro-economy activities like accommodation, restaurant services, gift shops, and renting of sporting gears and related services. The other attractions that had induced tourists from many parts of the country and the world is the uniqueness that Pangandaran Beach has.

For instance, Pangandaran Beach's ecological park alongside a stretch of shimmering white beach which is perfect for snorkelling and diving easily translates to water-based adventure tourism. But, the appeal or attraction by itself cannot be sufficient to guarantee the success of an industry revolving around tourist activities. Good marketing or increase promotional tools, particularly through media and news publications, Oral intercession/recommendation has an impact on the geographical breadth of information about this location (Ariasa et al., 2024). In addition, some supporting facilities which are appealing to

the tourists also are of significance in informing their choices (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018). Investors can start a business by providing basic accommodation facilities, transportation, good public services and good local cuisine which will enhance the tourists' impression. Good service from businesses in this sector helps build a friendly and pleasant destination image (Hariyanto, 2017).

Community-based tourism such as Pangandaran Beach offers plenty of opportunities for small business owners to play a prominent role (Solano Acosta et al., 2018). It is these small businesses that are right at the bottom that offer some of these diverse activities, such as accommodation or lodging facilities, food items, souvenirs and even tours. Hence, their existence meets the demands of travelers and enriches the local context, which is distinct from other tourist places.

There are also aspects pertaining to the employment of people living in the area and the need for the area to have a certain level of unemployment, which in this case is being enhanced by small enterprises in this case (Minguzzi & Passaro, 2000). Such resources include out of the ordinary characteristics and local handicraft, local dishes, and even attractions based on local wisdom. As such, they act as custodians of local traditions and culture, which also become the selling point of the destination.

Moreover, small scale businesses have the competitive edge to be adjusting market demands ranging from what is trending, for example, experiential tourism, as well as the provision of eco-tourism services and products (Corner et al., 2017). By doing so, they are able to not only better their economic status but also contribute to the advancement of the tourism industry more broadly.

Historically, cross-border travelers look for places which can provide them with an experience that they have never experienced before (Dela Santa & Tiatco, 2019). They have been known to travel to places such as nature reserves, conservation areas, and ecotourism. In this context, Pangandaran has an edge over other places as it is a water based tourism spot. There's so much underwater glory to marvel at, visitors can participate in other water based activities such as a banana boat or a jet ski, it is even possible to explore protected forests in the region.

Small scale entrepreneurs in the areas around Pangandaran beach have reported an increase in demand for knowledge of the English language due to the influx of tourists (Tosida et al., 2016). Learning English enables them to serve improve their service provision, satisfy the requirements of international visitors, and make better connections with global customers. Being able to communicate in English enables them to describe their goods and services, market local customs and culture, and provide a special touch to the trip that would be more memorable.

The limited English language skills of small entrepreneurs in the tourism sector is one of the major issues (Pratama, 2022). English is considered to be the common language across the globe and thus can enhance trade between home based business men and overseas visitors. However, this is not the case for many small business owners of areas where beaches such as Pangandaran Beach are accessible to international tourists as they have inadequate knowledge and skill of this language which they need when serving international tourists.

Provided the above language limitations, many effective interactions, such as explanations about the services or the products, information on the destination or adequateness and speed in meeting the demands of foreign tourists can be quickly and appropriately done. As a result, there are chances of creating a very memorable and fulfilling travel experience for these people which of course, will in turn enhance the perception of the destination among foreign tourists.

Lack of adequate language proficiency in English is also a key weakness for small businesses in regards to the exploitation of online marketing strategies (Zhao et al., 2023). Many of the worldwide geographical promotion websites have English as their dominant

language, thus, business owners who do not speak English well cannot effectively promote their businesses to the global market.

It can be said that among the barriers faced by small entrepreneurs at the Pangandaran Beach is on how they can capture the intention of the international tourists especially in the era of globalization which is highly competitive. Skills of an English language are viewed as one of the core features that can increase the level of attraction in foreign tourists. But the degree to which these skills add to the appeal of the small business enterprises to international tourists is less understood. For this reason, this inspective research wishes to investigate how English language skills can market small businesses targets to international tourists better. This study will seek to determine how English language skills are able to help small businesses in marketing in terms of explaining their products or services, showcasing the sites, and even making contact with foreign consumers.

## METHOD

Descriptive research design according to Singarimbun & Effendi (1989) has mainly been employed in this research as the framework of the work. However, a significant amount of qualitative data has also provided support for the argument. This strategy sought to highlight the general understanding of the small entrepreneurs' English language skills in Pangandaran Beach and the effect on the small entrepreneurs' relationships with the foreign tourists. This research design employs two approaches, the first is Quantitative; English language skills where a positive correlation is perceived between the interaction frequency with foreign tourists and their level of English language proficiency were quantitatively supported by collecting relevant numbers such as frequency of interaction. This data was collected using a questionnaire distributed to 46 respondents.

The second approach was qualitative; After all, it was essential to understand the perspective of small scale entrepreneurs on English language learning, and how English language learning benefits small scale business owners. Qualitative data was generated through the small scale entrepreneurs from different business types in Pangandaran Beach region by conducting open and deep interviews. The population of this study includes small entrepreneurs in the Pangandaran Beach area engaged in various sectors. The research sample was selected using purposive sampling method to ensure the diversity of business sectors represented (Bajari, 2015). Interviews were conducted with two representatives from each of the following business sectors: 1) Crafts and Handicrafts Business; 2) Clothing Business; 3) Tourist Guides; 4) Boat Rental and Water Tourism Services; 5) Local Culinary Businesses; 6) Sale of Pangandaran Typical Souvenirs (such as salted fish, typical handicrafts); 7) Small-scale Lodging Businesses; 8) Small-scale Vendors (such as chicken noodle, lotek, fried food).

In this study, the first instrument that was developed was a questionnaire based on the theories of cross-cultural communication competence and the impact of language on business relations such as the Human Capital theory (Becker, 1964) and Cross-Cultural Communication with Language Barriers (Hill & Collaborators, 2025; Muzychenko, 2008; Walsh & Cooney, 2023). The instrument included five core areas such as level of knowledge of English language, attitude towards language knowledge, number of foreign tourists visited, barriers to language communication, and the influence of language knowledge on business activity. The second instrument consisted of an in-depth interview guideline with the following aspects: 1) Interaction experiences with foreigners, particularly with foreign tourists; 2) Problems and communication barriers; 3) Language strategies that they use; 4) English language training or support they would like to receive.

The research procedure carried out through several stages, namely: 1) Distribution of questionnaires to 46 respondents to obtain quantitative data; 2) Conducting in-depth interviews with 2 representatives from each small business sector; 3) Analyzing qualitative data using thematic methods to find common patterns in the experiences and views of

entrepreneurs; 4) Analyzing quantitative data using descriptive statistics to support qualitative findings. This research is expected to provide an in-depth picture of the role of English in supporting the success of small entrepreneurs in Pangandaran Beach, as well as present recommendations for the government or related institutions to provide English language training that suits the needs of small entrepreneurs in the tourism sector.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results of interviews with informants show that the majority of small entrepreneurs in Pangandaran Beach realize the importance of English language skills to improve interactions with foreign tourists. However, they also revealed various challenges faced in improving these skills. Some informants expressed the need for English language training organized by the tourism office and tourist community, hoping to improve their skills so that interactions with foreign tourists are not just limited to basic greetings. Others emphasized the importance of free training or English courses specifically designed for tour guides.

In addition, some informants suggested courses taught by native speakers as they are considered more relevant to the language styles used by foreign tourists. On the other hand, some informants admitted that they had never attended a course before because they felt they were too old to learn English. These findings reflect the real need as well as the big challenge that small entrepreneurs face in improving their English skills.

To support these findings, this study also presents quantitative data on the respondents' English proficiency levels collected through questionnaires. The graph below shows the distribution of respondents' English proficiency levels, comprising the categories "No Proficiency," "Basic," "Intermediate," and "Advanced." Analysis of this graph provides further insight into the extent of English language skills possessed by small entrepreneurs in Pangandaran. The following is a visualization of the distribution of English proficiency levels based on the data obtained:

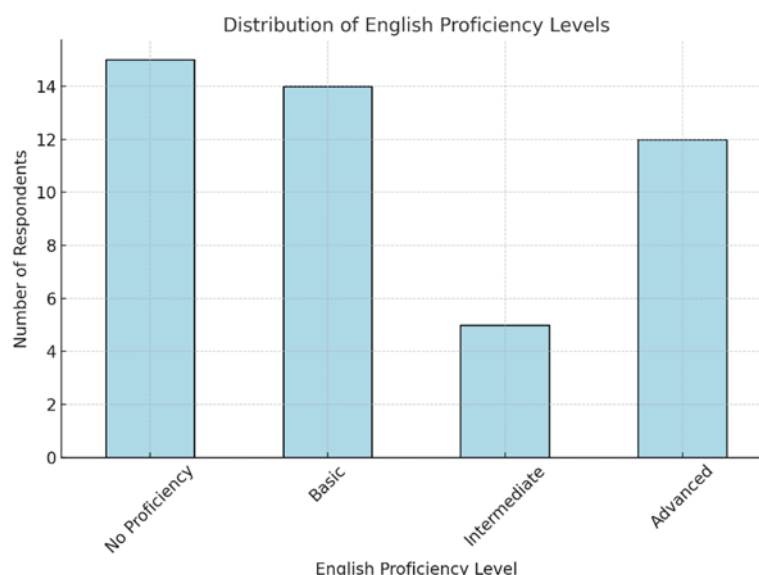


Figure 1. English language skills of small entrepreneurs (research results 2024)

From Figure 1, it can be seen that the level of English proficiency of small entrepreneurs shows significant variation. The majority of respondents, 14 in total, are in the "No Proficiency" category or have no English proficiency at all. This shows that most small businesses face major challenges in communicating with foreign tourists. Thirteen respondents had English proficiency at the "Basic" level, indicating an initial attempt to learn English, although their skills were still limited to basic comprehension. Meanwhile, only a

small number of respondents had English skills at the “Intermediate” (4 people) and “Advanced” levels (7 people). Respondents in this category have greater potential to provide adequate services to foreign tourists, although their numbers are still relatively small compared to the total research sample.

Overall, these findings indicate that limited English proficiency is a significant barrier for the majority of small businesses in Pangandaran Beach in providing services to foreign tourists. Low levels of English proficiency can impact the quality of interactions, understanding of tourists' needs, and the ability to provide a satisfying tourism experience (Pratama, 2022). To address this issue, an English language training program specifically designed for the needs of small entrepreneurs in the tourism sector is needed. But first we must know the problem that occurs why the respondents' mastery of English is quite a significant picture, this can be seen from graph 2, namely:



Figure 2. Main challenges in learning English

Based on Figure 2 on the main challenges in learning English, we can see that 15 respondents identified “No Time” as their main obstacle. This shows that the busyness of running a daily business is a barrier for small entrepreneurs to make time to learn English. In addition, the same number of respondents, 15, cited “No Financial Resources” as a significant challenge. This highlights their financial limitations to attend paid English training or courses. The most dominant challenge was “Difficulty in Understanding”, with more than 25 respondents stating that they found it difficult to understand English lessons, both theoretically and practically. This indicates a need for simpler learning methods that are relevant to their needs in tourism (Mawardiyah, 2023). In addition, “No Facilities” was identified by a number of respondents as a barrier to learning English. Limited access to courses, training or learning materials in their area is one factor that needs to be considered.

Finally, the “Others” category indicates unique challenges that are not included in the previous categories, such as being considered too old to learn or lack of personal motivation. These findings confirm the importance of providing English language training programs that are not only affordable but also flexible and practical, so that they can reach more small entrepreneurs in Pangandaran. English proficiency is particularly important as Pangandaran Beach has now become one of the national tourist destinations, so the likelihood of foreign tourists coming is quite high, as can be seen from graph 3 below:

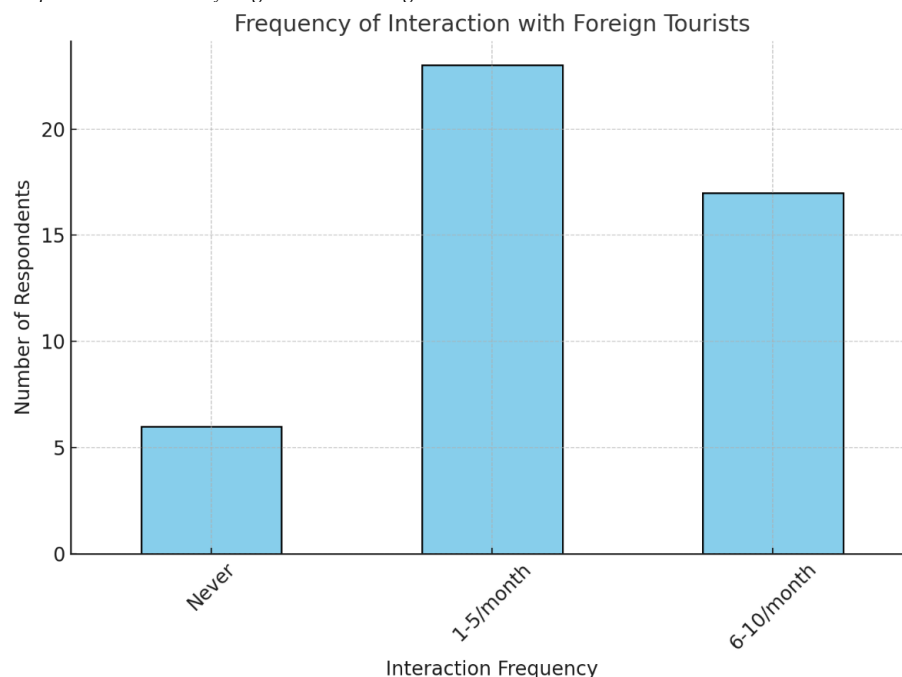


Figure 3: Frequency of interaction with foreign tourists

Based on Figure 3 on the frequency of interaction with foreign tourists, it can be seen that most respondents have a fairly active level of interaction. More than 20 respondents reported interacting with foreign tourists between 1-5 times per month, making this category the most dominant. This suggests that the majority of small businesses in Pangandaran regularly interact with foreign tourists, albeit in a limited frequency. Furthermore, the 6-10 times per month category also shows a significant number of respondents, which is more than 15 people. This reflects that there are groups of small businesses that are more frequently involved in interactions with foreign tourists, possibly because their businesses are more dependent on international tourists, such as tour guide service providers or boat rentals. However, a small number of respondents, around 5, reported that they never interact with foreign tourists. This could be because their businesses are more focused on the local market or their limited English language skills prevent them from catering to foreign tourists.

From this data, it can be concluded that the frequency of small entrepreneurial interactions with foreign tourists tends to vary. And they get different responses when interacting with foreign customers which can be seen in the following graph:

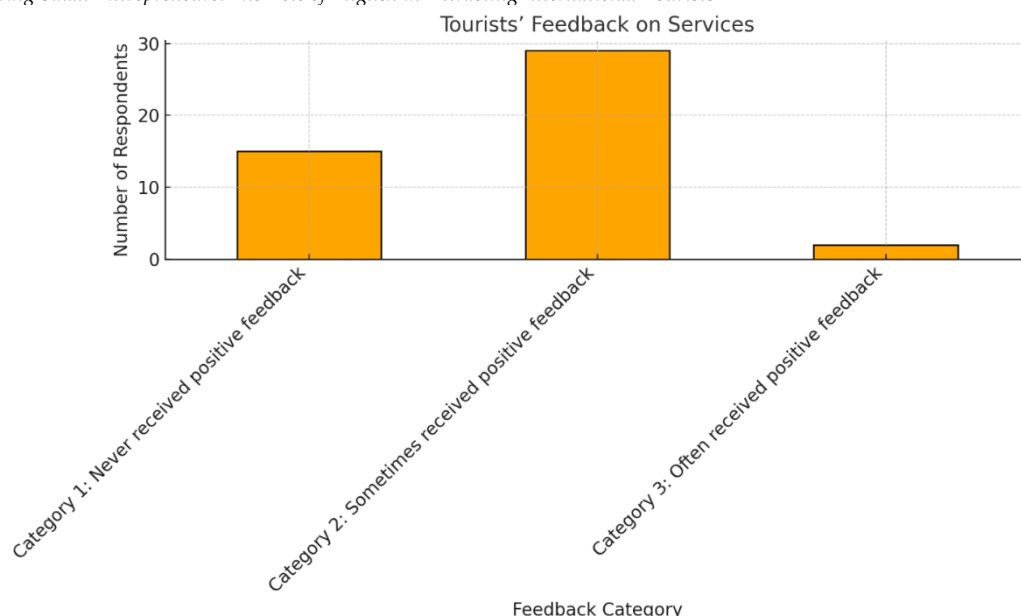


Figure 4. Feedback from foreign customers

Based on Figure 4 on travelers' responses to the services provided by small businesses, there is variation in the frequency of receiving positive feedback. The "Sometimes received positive feedback" category is the most dominant with more than 25 respondents. This suggests that the majority of small businesses receive appreciation from foreign tourists on some occasions, although not consistently. The "Never received positive feedback" category recorded a significant number of respondents, with around 10 people. This data indicates a challenge in providing services that satisfy foreign tourists, which is most likely related to limited English language skills or a lack of understanding of tourists' needs. In contrast, the "Often received positive feedback" category had a very small number of respondents, suggesting that only a small handful of entrepreneurs are able to consistently meet foreign tourists' expectations and receive appreciation for their services.

From these findings, it can be concluded that most small businesses in Pangandaran are still at an intermediate stage in terms of their ability to provide services that satisfy foreign tourists. To improve the quality of interactions and services, training is needed that focuses on improving communication skills and understanding the preferences of international tourists. These efforts are expected to help them provide a more positive experience, thus encouraging more positive feedback from tourists.

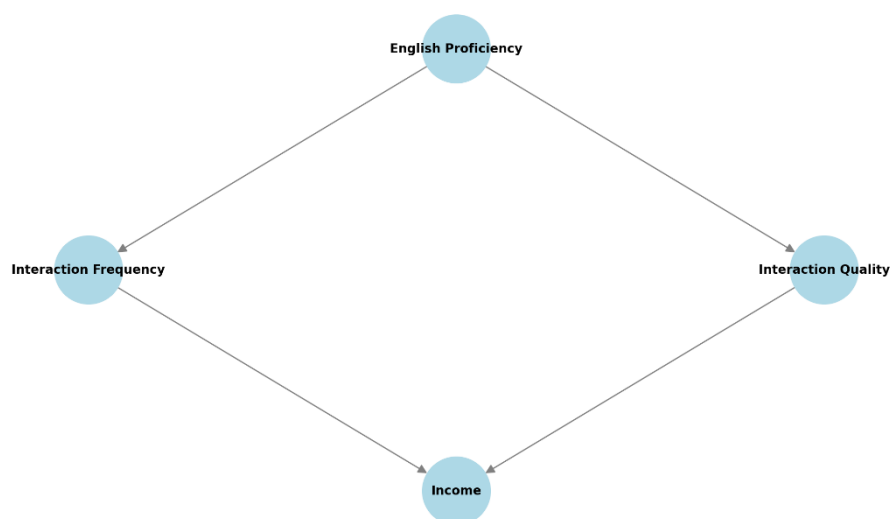


Figure 5. framework of thought

From Figure 5, this conceptual framework specified the relationships among several variables that affect the small entrepreneurs' engagement with foreign tourists, that is, proficiency in English, frequency of interaction, interaction quality, and revenue. English language proficiency is critical in determining the frequency of interaction of the small businesses with foreign tourists. Entrepreneurs that are proficient in English are likely to be more willing to communicate making the interaction frequency to be higher. Furthermore, English language proficiency also affects the interaction quality. When a small business has adequate command of the language, they are capable of grasping more of the tourists' desires and hence be able to serve them better thus improving the overall experience of the tourists.

The interaction frequency with a foreign tourist influences the earnings directly. Small businesses earn more as they deal with tourists more often since frequent engagement provides them with more chances to market their goods or services. High interaction quality on the other hand earns revenue in increased tourist's satisfaction, feedback, and recommendations to other tourists. Therefore, this conceptual framework outlines the variables' interconnected aspects which are English language proficiency, interaction frequency, interaction quality and revenue earned. When looking at the prospects of small entrepreneurs, enhancing English skills should be among the initiatives taken as it, otherwise, actively assists them to raise their quality of interactions, frequency of communication and therefore, their earnings.

From the conceptual framework presented, the correlation between English proficiency, interaction and income implies that attaining communication skills in English is critical in enhancing small tourism businesses. High English skills facilitate small businesses to improve the frequency and the comprehension of conversations with foreign tourists which results in better customer care and increased sales (Liu & Wu, 2019). However, for this potential to be maximized, it is critical to understand what opportunities can be exploited and which challenges small businesses have to face in the course of acquiring English language skills.

Small entrepreneurs in Pangandaran have a big opportunity if they communicate effectively with foreign tourists in order to boost their income and expand their market (Beladi et al., 2009; Kotler, n.d.). Knowledge of the English language gives access to international markets enabling them to market their products and services more effectively. Furthermore, effective communication is beneficial because it helps bolster the trust of tourists and enhance their overall experience which can lead to foreign tourists recommending other prospective customers to the business (Basri et al., 2016; Matzler et al.,

2019). All these not only boost profits directly but also enhance the reputation of micro-enterprises as important components of the regional tourism development.

It is a fact concerning many small entrepreneurs and business people who regard the conquered markets as unfilled the tough competition and deadlines are taken only with the aim of worrying about the English language as a second barrier. The entrepreneurs receive no help whatsoever in this matter as they cannot afford to attend quality English language courses or lack the facilities in their areas. The mobilization of language's knowledge is also manipulated either by heavy operating tasks they have to deal with or by the lack of division of their time in reasonable proportion to work the English language. To deal with these problems, they have to search for alternatives, intensive, subsidized and practical training which offer some of them to seize the greater scope.

## CONCLUSIONS

English language skills significantly support the success of small business operators in the Pangandaran tourism sector by enhancing interactions with foreign tourists, which directly correlates with increased income and market size. Despite this potential, entrepreneurs face barriers such as limited access to training and time constraints for learning English. To address these challenges, it is suggested that local governments, tourism stakeholders, and junior planners implement flexible English language training programs tailored to small business needs. Online or mobile application training can accommodate time constraints, while partnerships with businesses or international organizations can offer low-cost or free instruction. Practical teaching methods, like role-playing with tourists, would ensure applicability and comprehension. However, the study's findings are limited by a small sample size, restricting generalization, and the focus solely on English proficiency without examining other factors like education, experience, or government aid. Further research, including longitudinal studies, is necessary to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing small-scale tourism operators and improve their competitiveness in international markets.

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