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Infusing Local Culture in ESP Speaking Tasks through Case-Based Learning: Effects on Intercultural Communicative Competence

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Abstract: This study examines whether local cultural cases used in case-based English for Specific Purposes (ESP) speaking tasks were associated with students' intercultural communicative competence (ICC). In a sequential explanatory mixed-method study, 119 higher education students in two intact classes completed a post-test after six weeks of instruction. The experimental class discussed local cultural cases, while the control class completed conventional speaking tasks. Twenty students from the experimental class then took part in semi-structured interviews. The experimental class had a higher mean ICC score than the control class. Interviews yielded four themes: greater awareness of one's own culture, openness to different perspectives, confidence in discussing cultural topics in English, and the perceived relevance of the tasks. The findings suggest that familiar cultural situations can give ESP students a useful starting point for intercultural discussion. Because the classes were not randomly assigned and no pre-test was administered, the score difference was interpreted as an association rather than evidence of individual improvement.

Keywords: *case-based learning; english for specific purposes; intercultural communicative competence; local culture; speaking*

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INTRODUCTION

English learners increasingly need to explain ideas across cultural boundaries and communicate accurately (Karomah & Masyuri, 2024). This makes intercultural communicative competence (ICC) a relevant goal in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education (Brdarić, 2016). An exchange can be linguistically clear yet still falter when speakers interpret the same behavior differently (Benaired & Reguieg, 2024; Sotlikova & Haerazi, 2023). Classroom instruction, however, may focus more on grammar and vocabulary than on interpreting cultural meanings or adapting to different interlocutors (Byram, 2020; Celce-Murcia, 2007). Speaking instruction therefore needs occasions for learners to consider both what they say and how others might understand it. This is especially relevant when speakers explain practices that are familiar to them but unfamiliar to their audience. The challenge is then to make an assumed meaning explicit, rather than simply recalling a word or grammatical form.

This issue is pertinent in Indonesian EFL classrooms, where students bring varied cultural experiences to their English lessons (Acim & Salenussa, 2019; Manuhutu et al., 2025a, 2025b). Speaking activities built around preset textbook topics can leave little room for those experiences (Diep et al., 2022; Romrome & Ena, 2022). When a task seems remote from everyday life, students may have less to say and fewer reasons to explore one another's views (Dewi et al., 2023). Local traditions and social practices offer possible starting points for discussion, especially when students must explain a familiar practice to someone who does not share their background (Fu, 2018; Jaya, 2024; Jubhari et al., 2016; Ratminingsih et al., 2020). Such explanations invite reflection on both cultural knowledge and perspective taking, which are central to ICC (Byram, 2020; Iswandari & Ardi, 2022). A classroom discussion can bring these processes into view when students justify an interpretation, hear how a peer understands it, and adjust their explanation. Local content thus serves as a topic for inquiry, not merely a familiar backdrop for language practice.

Byram's (1997) account of ICC brings together attitudes, knowledge, and skills. These include curiosity about other ways of life, knowledge of social practices, and the ability to interpret and relate cultural meanings. Intercultural learning also involves continued reflection on interactions and experiences (Deardorff, 2011). For an EFL speaking class, this means that naming cultural facts is only a starting point. Students also need opportunities to question assumptions, compare interpretations, and explain their reasoning to others. The attitudes and skills in this framework are connected: curiosity gives learners a reason to ask questions, while interpretation helps them make sense of an answer that differs from their expectation. A speaking task can

bring both into the same exchange. Case-Based Learning (CBL) provides one way to organize these conversations. In CBL, students work through a real or plausible situation, consider competing explanations, and decide how they would respond (Hopper, 2018). A case gives a speaking task a concrete purpose: students ask questions, defend a position, and work with their peers toward a response (Hidayati, 2021; Koehler et al., 2020; Sapeni & Said, 2020). The approach emphasizes active participation and reflection on a specific context (Kulak & Newton, 2015). When the case concerns cultural practices, the discussion may also prompt students to consider how different people would interpret the same event. A case also gives students something specific to disagree about. That matters for ICC because a polite exchange of cultural facts does not necessarily require them to explain or revise a perspective.

Research on CBL has often addressed critical thinking, collaboration, or understanding of course content; fewer studies have examined culturally focused cases in EFL speaking classes (Jendrych, 2011; Kaur et al., 2020; Samsudin, 2022). Local culture offers material for this work because students can draw on the practices, values, and dilemmas they encounter in their communities. Familiarity alone does not make a task intercultural. Students must also explain those practices, hear alternative interpretations, and reconsider what they initially took for granted. This connection between language and identity expression matters for intercultural learning (Kramsch, 2013). A culturally grounded case can therefore do two jobs at once: give students a topic they can speak about with some authority and make that authority open to questions from classmates. The task asks for both expression and reconsideration. A case about preserving a local tradition, for example, can raise questions about who values the practice, who might view it differently, and how to explain a decision in English. Students can use the discussion to build cultural knowledge, practice interpreting perspectives, and respond with openness. These activities speak to the dimensions of ICC described by Byram (2020). Whether they are reflected in students' ICC scores and accounts of learning, however, requires empirical examination. The task's value cannot be inferred solely from its cultural topic. What students do with the topic—whether they compare interpretations, listen to disagreement, and explain a response—is equally important.

Indonesia's cultural diversity makes local cases particularly useful for group discussion. Classmates may recognize the topic but bring different regional or family perspectives. Explaining these differences in English can link local experience to wider intercultural communication (Liddicoat, 2024). Although culturally responsive teaching has received considerable attention (Manuhutu et al., 2025b; Peristeris, 2017), less is known about how structured discussion of local cases relates to ICC in ESP speaking classes. Such tasks may be particularly relevant in ESP because students can consider how they would explain a cultural practice in a professional encounter. This study examines that possibility in an existing course in which students had to speak with classmates who held different perspectives. Indonesian EFL research has considered cultural content in textbooks and exchanges between learners from different backgrounds (Gupta & Sukamto, 2020; Irawan & Daud, 2021). Local case discussions add a different kind of task: students must work through an issue from their immediate social context, explain their views, and respond to peers. This combination of cultural familiarity and disagreement may create useful conditions for intercultural reflection. It also offers a way to examine the learning experience, rather than relying on test scores alone. Students can describe which situations prompted discussion, where they felt confident, and what they learned from a peer's response.

The present study brought local cultural cases into ESP speaking lessons through CBL. Students discussed situations that drew on familiar customs and community practices but required them to consider multiple responses. This design allowed the study to examine both a post-test comparison between classes and students' own accounts of the discussions. The comparison addresses patterns in ICC scores at the end of the course. The accounts help clarify the features of the cases that students found meaningful, including the chance to connect a familiar practice with a new interpretation. The study addressed two questions: 1) Did students in the local-culture CBL class score differently on the ICC post-test from students who completed conventional speaking tasks?; 2) How did students in the CBL class describe the contribution of local cultural cases to their intercultural learning?

METHODS

This study used a post-test-only quasi-experimental design followed by a qualitative phase, consistent with a sequential explanatory mixed-method approach (Creswell & Clark, 2011). Random assignment was not feasible because the participants were enrolled in two intact ESP classes at an Indonesian higher education institution. One class (n = 60) completed local-culture CBL speaking tasks; the other (n = 59) completed conventional speaking tasks. After the post-test, twenty students from the CBL class were purposively selected to describe their experiences in more detail. The quantitative phase compared the two instructional conditions at the end of the course. The qualitative phase then examined students' accounts of the case discussions, allowing the statistical pattern to be read alongside their descriptions of how the tasks worked in practice. The intact-class arrangement limits causal interpretation of the comparison.

Instruction lasted six weeks. Both classes had the same instructor and the same number of teaching hours. The CBL class discussed situations drawn from Indonesian traditions, community practices, and social

dilemmas, then proposed responses in English. The comparison class used general or workplace speaking topics commonly found in ESP materials, without an explicit cultural focus. The local cases were intended to make cultural reasoning part of the speaking task, rather than a separate discussion after it. In both conditions, students had opportunities to speak with peers, so the principal difference lay in the cultural cases and the structure used to examine them. Keeping instructional time and the instructor constant helped clarify that contrast, although it could not eliminate all differences between the classes.

Both classes included group discussions, role plays, and oral presentations. In the CBL class, students first read or viewed a case and clarified the situation; next, they examined possible interpretations and responses; finally, they presented a proposed solution and reflected on it. Cases were supplied as short videos, infographics, or written narratives. Students were prompted to draw on their own experiences and consider how someone from a different background might understand the situation. The final stage required groups to explain why they preferred a response, allowing classmates to question the assumptions behind it. This sequence connected preparation, discussion, and presentation rather than treating the case as a prompt for an unstructured conversation.

The intervention used six locally developed cases. Three experts in English language teaching and intercultural education reviewed them for linguistic suitability, cultural relevance, and their potential to prompt discussion of ICC knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The instructor used prepared lesson plans and teaching scripts, supported by projectors, speakers, and worksheets. The instructor piloted the materials with a small group of students outside the study. The expert review addressed the suitability of the cases for discussion; it did not itself establish an effect on ICC. Preparing the same sequence for each case also helped the instructor deliver the CBL lessons consistently across the six weeks.

Students completed an ICC post-test after instruction. Adapted from Byram's (1997) model, the instrument addressed cultural knowledge, interpreting and relating skills, and attitudes of curiosity and openness. It also included a speaking task scored with an analytic rubric for fluency, interaction, and intercultural awareness. Two independent raters assessed speaking performance; their scores had an intraclass correlation coefficient of 0.89, indicating strong agreement. For the qualitative phase, twenty students in the CBL class completed semi-structured interviews about the cases, their intercultural learning, and their confidence in speaking English. The post-test therefore included both ICC-related items and an observed speaking task. Rater agreement concerns the consistency of the speaking scores, not the validity of each post-test component. The interviews explored students' interpretations of their experience, not recalculating test scores.

Descriptive statistics summarized the post-test results, and an independent-samples t-test compared the two classes. Normality and homogeneity checks preceded the comparison. Interview material and reflective journals were examined through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researchers transcribed the material, coded relevant passages, and grouped recurring ideas concerning cultural awareness, attitudes, and communication. Because the groups were intact classes and no pre-test was administered, the analysis identifies a between-group difference at post-test; it does not measure change within individual students. Themes were compared with the quantitative pattern to interpret the findings. Interview accounts were treated as students' perspectives on the lessons, not as independent proof that their attitudes had changed.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The first question concerned ICC post-test scores. The CBL class included 60 students, and the comparison class included 59. Table 1 summarizes the scores for each class. The descriptive comparison is presented first, followed by the assumption check and the inferential test. The interpretation then considers what the design does and does not allow us to conclude from the observed difference.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for ICC Post-test Scores

Group	N	Mean ICC Score	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Control	59	61.88	2.44	0.32
Experimental	60	74.75	2.65	0.34

Students in the comparison class scored an average of 61.88 (SD = 2.44), while those in the local-culture CBL class scored 74.75 (SD = 2.65). The difference between class means was 12.87 points. These descriptive results show higher post-test scores in the CBL class, although the design does not establish how much either class changed during the six weeks. Levene's test checked the equal-variance assumption before the t-test (Table 2). The relatively small standard deviations indicate that scores within each class were clustered around their respective means. The descriptive summary clearly shows the separation between these means, but an inferential comparison is needed to report its statistical significance.

Table 2. Levene's Test of Equality of Variances

Test of Homogeneity of Variances	F	Sig.
Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	0.306	0.582

Levene's test was not significant, F = .306, p = .582. The equal-variances row of the independent-samples t-test was therefore used for the group comparison. A non-significant Levene result does not prove that the underlying variances are identical; it means the test did not detect evidence against the assumption in these data.

Table 3. Independent-Samples t-test for ICC Post-test Scores

Assumption	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Equal variances assumed	-27.513	117	0.000	-12.869	0.468
Equal variances not assumed	-27.532	116.503	0.000	-12.869	0.468

The t-test showed a difference between the two classes, t(117) = -27.51, p < .001 (Table 3). The CBL class had a higher mean (M = 74.75, SD = 2.65) than the conventional-task class (M = 61.88, SD = 2.44). In the table, the difference is calculated as control minus experimental (−12.869), with a 95% confidence interval of −13.79 to −11.94. Expressed as experimental minus control, the difference is approximately 12.87 points. The sign of the t statistic reflects the order in which the groups were entered into the analysis. It does not change which class had the higher score. The post-test comparison thus supports rejecting the null hypothesis of equal class means. The reported Cohen's d was 4.99, a very large standardized difference under Cohen's (1988) conventional benchmarks. Its size warrants careful interpretation: these were intact classes, and without a pre-test, differences present before instruction cannot be ruled out. The result shows a marked association between the local-culture CBL class and higher ICC scores at the end of the course; it cannot by itself show improvement across individual ICC components. The large standardized value also describes the separation between these two samples, not the proportion of students who personally benefited. That distinction matters for a post-test-only comparison, where baseline equivalence was not demonstrated.

The cases may help explain this pattern. They asked students to weigh culturally sensitive responses to familiar social situations and to put their reasoning into English. The interview findings below offer a closer view of what students said they gained from these discussions. Taken together, the two forms of evidence describe the potential of local cultural cases for ESP speaking instruction, while leaving the intervention's causal contribution open to further study. For example, the interviews can show that students noticed differences among classmates and valued the chance to explain local practices. They cannot establish that the comparison class lacked the same experiences. The score difference matters because ESP speaking instruction often emphasizes language performance while giving students fewer opportunities to work through cultural interpretation. The wider EFL literature has noted the need to communicate across cultural boundaries (Brdarić, 2016; Karomah & Masyuri, 2024). Attention to grammar and vocabulary remains necessary, but intercultural encounters also ask speakers to interpret intentions and adjust their responses (Byram, 2020; Celce-Murcia, 2007). The local cases in this study made those decisions part of the speaking activity itself. The post-test pattern is consistent with that instructional rationale, though the design cannot isolate the cases as the sole cause of the difference. It is nevertheless useful to examine what the tasks asked students to do: cultural interpretation was practiced through speaking, rather than added as a list of facts to memorize. This feature may help connect classroom performance with the demands of communication beyond the course.

CBL gave the students a concrete issue to discuss, rather than an abstract request to talk about culture. Discussion of specific problems is central to the approach (Hopper, 2018), including its use in higher education (Kulak & Newton, 2014). Here, cases about customs and social choices asked students to explain a position, listen to alternatives, and consider an appropriate response. These demands connect with knowledge, interpretive skills, and openness in accounts of ICC (Byram, 2020). Students' comments also suggest that reflection during discussion was important, in line with a view of ICC as developing through interaction and reflection (Deardorff, 2011). The mechanism remains an interpretation of the instructional activities and student accounts. To test it more directly, future research could observe how students respond to opposing views during the discussions and assess those responses over time.

The second question asked how students in the CBL class experienced the local cases. Their accounts add context to the post-test difference: they describe what felt familiar, what prompted reconsideration, and when speaking English became easier. Four themes were identified. The themes concern cultural self-awareness, openness to others' perspectives, confidence in expressing cultural ideas, and the material's relevance. They are presented with students' own words before being considered alongside the quantitative results. Twenty students from the CBL class were purposively selected to represent different academic and linguistic backgrounds. Semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires invited them to discuss the local materials, their awareness of other perspectives, and their experiences of speaking during the lessons. The

prompts were open enough for students to describe what they found useful or difficult, rather than forcing their responses into the post-test categories. The examples reported below illustrate the resulting themes. The transcripts and written responses were read repeatedly, coded, and grouped into themes. The analysis focused on how students described cultural understanding, interaction with classmates, and the relevance of the tasks. Table 4 summarizes the four themes and their initial codes. The themes describe how participants understood their experiences; they should not be read as measured levels of cultural knowledge or motivation. Direct quotations are included to show the connection between the students' language and the interpretation offered in the analysis.

Table 4. Themes in Students' Accounts of Local-Culture CBL

Theme	Initial codes	Interpretation
Cultural Self-Awareness through Localized Case Discussions	Self-awareness, understanding local identity, reflecting on cultural values, analyzing local dilemmas, connecting self and culture	Students described reconsidering familiar customs and becoming more aware of how they would explain their own cultural practices to others.
Intercultural Openness through Collaborative Case Analysis	Empathy toward differences, accepting multiple perspectives, peer learning, cross-cultural comparison, respect for diversity	Discussion with peers from different backgrounds prompted students to notice variation in interpretations and to listen more carefully to other views.
Communicative Confidence through Contextualized Cultural Expression	Speaking confidence, idea sharing, expressing opinions in English, negotiating meaning, critical discussion	Familiar cultural topics gave students a starting point for explaining ideas in English, even when they felt unsure about their grammar.
Perceived Relevance and Motivation through Local Cultural Cases	Relevance to real life, motivation to participate, contextual learning, connection to profession, engagement	Students connected the cases to their studies, possible careers, and their interest in sharing local stories with others.

Several students said the local cases made them think more carefully about practices they had previously taken for granted. Respondent 5 explained, "When we discussed the case about local customs, I started to think more about why people in my area follow those traditions. Before this, I just accepted them without thinking." The case gave this student a reason to ask why a familiar custom persists, rather than describe it. Respondent 11 made a related point about the challenge of explaining culture in another language: *"I realized that when I talk about my culture in English, I need to really understand it first. Explaining it to others made me learn more about myself and my background."* For these students, speaking about a local practice in English involved examining its meaning and finding a way to make that meaning clear to others. Their accounts suggest that cultural self-awareness emerged through the work of explanation, not only from recognizing the topic. The two comments point to related but distinct forms of reflection. Respondent 5 became curious about the reasons behind a custom, while Respondent 11 considered what knowledge was needed to explain a tradition in English. In both instances, the task exposed a gap between familiarity with a practice and the ability to account for it. Other students may have approached the cases differently; these excerpts show how the theme appeared in two accounts, not every participant's response.

Students also described learning from classmates whose experiences differed from their own. In group discussion, a familiar practice could take on a different meaning when someone from another region responded. Respondent 4 recalled, *"When we discussed the case about traditional marriage customs, I was surprised that my classmates from other regions had different opinions. It opened my mind that even in one country, we have many ways of seeing things."* The comment shows how a local case made variation within Indonesia visible to the group. Students did not have to begin with a distant culture to encounter a perspective that challenged their assumptions. The marriage-customs case seems to have made disagreement discussable because the students could refer to concrete practices from their regions. What mattered in the account was not simply exposure to another opinion, but the recognition that several interpretations could exist within a shared national context.

Listening was as important as explaining. Respondent 16 commented, *"During the discussion, I learned to listen more and not judge quickly when someone's view was different. It made me realize that understanding others needs patience and respect."* This student connected the task to a change in how they responded to disagreement. Across the interviews, students associated collaborative case analysis with patience, openness, and a willingness to hear alternative interpretations. These are reported experiences rather than direct observations of lasting attitude change, but they show what participants valued about the discussions. Respectful disagreement was part of the speaking task: a student had to understand a peer's point before proposing a response to the case. This helps explain why participants linked intercultural learning to listening as well as to expressing their own cultural views. Familiar topics also made speaking in English feel more

manageable for some students. Respondent 7 said, *"When we talked about Indonesian festivals, I felt more relaxed because I knew the topic well. I could explain it in English even though my grammar was not perfect."* Knowing the subject helped this student keep speaking despite uncertainty about grammar. Respondent 13 described a different source of confidence: *"Explaining my local traditions in English made me proud. It is like I can represent my culture to others and show that Indonesia has many unique things."* These accounts link confidence to both familiarity with the content and a sense that the explanation matters. They do not establish a measured reduction in speaking anxiety, but they suggest why the students found these tasks easier to enter than unfamiliar topics. The two quotations also caution against treating confidence as a single outcome. One student emphasized reduced pressure to produce perfect grammar; the other emphasized pride in representing a local tradition. Both could encourage participation, although the interviews alone cannot show how much either factor influenced speaking performance.

Students connected the cases to purposes beyond the classroom. Respondent 5 explained, *"Before, learning English felt far from my life, but when the topic was about Batik and Indonesian hospitality, I felt it was useful for my major and my future job."* The topics helped this student see a connection between English, the field of study, and possible work. Respondent 18 added, *"Learning with local stories makes me feel proud and more interested. I want to know how to tell these stories to foreigners in English."* Here, interest came from wanting to share a local story with someone outside the community. Taken together, the accounts suggest that the cases gave students a reason to participate and a clearer sense of how they might use English. Students reported motivation; this phase did not measure it as a separate outcome. The students' references to a major, a future job, and conversations with foreigners give the theme a specifically ESP character. A cultural case seemed useful when they could imagine needing that explanation outside class. These accounts describe perceived relevance rather than a general claim that local topics will motivate all learners equally.

The interviews help explain why local cases may be useful for intercultural learning. Before students could discuss a custom with others, they had to decide what it meant to them; this resembles the role of cultural self-awareness in ICC (Iswandari & Ardi, 2022). Expressing a local identity in another language also calls for reflection on how that identity is presented (Kramsch, 2013). This interpretation is consistent with work on locally grounded language materials (Fu, 2018), community knowledge in writing classes (Jubhari et al., 2016), and local culture in reading instruction (Ratminingsih et al., 2020). Classmates' differing views then gave students a reason to listen and reconsider their own assumptions. Such movement between local experience and wider perspectives is relevant to intercultural learning (Liddicoat, 2024). Finally, some students reported that a familiar topic helped them speak more readily, a possibility also discussed in work on contextualized language tasks (Hidayati, 2021; Koehler et al., 2020). The students' accounts thus connect three parts of the lesson that are sometimes treated separately: knowing a topic, noticing that others understand it differently, and finding the English to discuss that difference. The interview data show how participants experienced this connection, though they do not measure each part's contribution to the ICC score.

The findings bring a cultural dimension to the literature on case-based activities, which has often emphasized critical thinking and collaboration (Jendrych, 2011; Kaur et al., 2020; Samsudin, 2022). In this study, the interviews show how a case can prompt teachers to explain their own practices and respond to differences among peers. Teachers working in multicultural ESP classrooms could use locally relevant dilemmas to give speaking tasks a clear social purpose. The approach may be particularly helpful where conventional classroom topics leave students with little personal connection to the discussion (Manuhutu et al., 2025a; Muhria et al., 2025). These implications are based on one setting and students' accounts, so their relevance to other classes should be examined rather than assumed. Case selection would need particular care. A useful prompt should allow students to explain a practice from experience while leaving space for disagreement and for people within the same community to hold different views. The discussion then becomes an opportunity for interpretation, rather than a request for one student to represent an entire culture.

Overall, students in the CBL class had higher ICC scores at post-test and described the cases as useful for reflection, dialogue, and speaking confidence. A study with baseline measures and additional classes would help determine whether the approach produces changes over time. Future work could also examine how teachers select cases that invite multiple perspectives without treating any community as culturally uniform. The present results offer a starting point for that work: the statistical difference is striking, and the student accounts identify features of the lessons worth studying more closely. Neither form of evidence alone resolves how much of the difference resulted from the instruction.

CONCLUSION

Students who completed local-culture CBL speaking tasks had higher ICC post-test scores than students who completed conventional tasks. In interviews, participants described becoming more aware of familiar practices, listening to differing views, and feeling more confident discussing cultural topics in English. The cases appeared to make the speaking tasks relevant to their studies and possible future work. These findings suggest that local cultural situations can provide a practical starting point for intercultural discussion in ESP classes. The

study compared two intact classes without a pre-test, so it cannot establish individual gains or rule out pre-existing class differences. Research that follows students over time would better test the approach. Observations of case discussions could also clarify which kinds of exchanges support intercultural interpretation and which remain at the level of describing a familiar custom.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI

The authors declare that no generative AI or AI-assisted technologies were used in the writing process of this manuscript.

CONFLICTING INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Tiara Nove Ria: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing and Editing. Rudi Hartanto: Data curation, Validation. Sri Wahyuni: Supervision, Writing - Review. Turab Hussai: Formal analysis, Visualization.

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