

## LEARNER AUTONOMY IN THE CONTEXT OF MB-KM POLICY: UNIVERSITY TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

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**Abstract:** Learner autonomy has been regarded as the point of pivotal in the implementation of the new curriculum policy. This study aims to describe the lecturers' beliefs and practices in learner autonomy (LA) within the implementation of MBKM (Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka) policy. Applying a qualitative method with a case study design, this research involved 56 English Education Program university lecturers whose working within MBKM policy as the participants for the questionnaire. Then, 5 of the participants were further selected as the respondents of the interview and document analysis. The research reveals that the lecturers are knowledgeable about the notion of LA. It is shown as LA is integrated in the construction of instructional material and design also in the teaching and learning process. Furthermore, the lecturers believe that LA supports the autonomous learners' language development during the implementation of MBKM policy. Two aspects, which are political-technical environment and learning ecosystem, dominated the lecturers' perspectives in considering that MBKM policy seems to be able to give more educational choices for the learner to study both in and out of the classroom environment. However, it is depicted that, the psychological and sociocultural aspects, such as that of the relatively low degree of the students' confidence, readiness, and agility in learning, seemed to remain problematic as they tend to hinder the development of LA. Therefore, the lecturers indicated that taking a role in facilitating the students' LA development is still required to anticipate the obstacles of implementing the curriculum.

**Keywords:** learner autonomy; teachers' beliefs and practices.

### INTRODUCTION

The implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MB-KM) policy has resulted in significant changes in the implementation of learning at the tertiary level in Indonesia. It is marked by the shift of educational paradigm form that of teacher-centered to the learner-centered which is accompanied with the demand of enhancing learner autonomy specifically in the tertiary level (Xu & Kim, 2022; Ebadi et al., 2021; Yasmin & Sohail, 2018). The inclusion of learner autonomy (LA) has come with the significant change in the learning approach to become more innovative, more learner-centred, and non-restrictive in which the students are given the freedom to study outside their study program (Dogan & Kirkgoz, 2022; Ebadi et al., 2021; Nath & Meena, 2019). The approach is further supported by the stipulation of the regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture, Number 3 in 2020,

concerning National Higher Education Standards specifically on the Learning Process Standards as stated in articles 15 and 18 regarding the implementation of MB-KM Policy.

The MBKM Policy essentially aims at aligning the education system with the demand of the work field and industry in the era of Industrial Revolution 4.0 and Society 5.0 (Flores et al., 2022; Eslami & Derakhshan, 2020). In this case it is indicated that creativity, critical thinking, cooperation, communication skills, sociability, and character skills of the learners are put into emphasis. These skills can be achieved by autonomous learners. Furthermore, the MBKM policy urges the students to own their learning so as the learning process can be more focused, more purposeful, and more meaningful resulted in the differentiated autonomous learning (Aprianti & Winarto, 2021). In this situation the students are required to be able to be more autonomous by

determining integral aspects of their learning including that of deciding, monitoring, and evaluating the learning objectives, the learning content, the learning models, the learning progress, and the learning reflection. In other words, in the MBKM policy the learners are given more power and right to learn for themselves. Therefore, it is clear that this condition refers to the urgency of developing the capacity of LA (Ahmed & Hashim, 2022; Almusharraf, 2021; Resnik & Dewaele, 2021).

Learner autonomy is the key to the successful implementation of MBKM policy; however, these abilities are unable to be mastered instantly. It is declared that the ability to be autonomous in learning can only be nourished if the culture of learning accepts the embodiment of the principle of autonomy. This also means that learners autonomy depends on the teachers' beliefs and understanding about autonomy and it is reflected in their teaching and learning practices (Lennert da Silva, 2021; Magnusson & Zackariasson, 2019). It is stated that only autonomous teacher who can foster the growth and the development of autonomy in their learners. Autonomous teacher who has the ability of self-managing and self-reflection can lead the learners to do the similar way (Zabaleta & Izaguirre, 2022; Boonma & Swatevacharkul, 2020).

Therefore, investigating commitment and awareness of the university teacher to foster, integrate, and develop autonomous learners in the learning process as the embodiment the MBKM policy is an important thing to highlight. Lack of commitment and awareness of lecturers as mediators of learner autonomy in the context of practice actually can actually lead to failure in terms of developing the principle of learner autonomy (Ahmadianzadeh et al., 2020). Moreover, this tendency may also create a detrimental impact on the student learning outcomes especially being related to the implementation MBKM Policy.

The university teachers' beliefs and understanding of LA development can be tracked by looking at the definitions given by the experts in this field. Holec, for instance, introduced the term learner autonomy as an ability "to take charge" in all responsibility regarding the integral decision concerning their learning (Tan Tin, 2020; Tuyen & An, 2019). It indicates that the degree of learner autonomy itself should be viewed from the extent to which learners are able to get involved in their learning. In this sense, it is unreasonable to foster learner autonomy if the teachers themselves

have never experienced taking charge and self-managing their learning.

It is also stated that learner autonomy supposedly refers to as learners' ability to employ their "capacity for detachment and critical reflection" on the decision and action in learning. It means that learners who are autonomous will not only do their responsibility in learning but also reflect on the process of realizing the responsibility itself (Podder, 2021; Aprianti, 2017). This aspect also closely related with the state of teacher reflection. In this case reflective teachers will likely lead the learners to be reflective in their learning. Reflection can lead to the more meaningful learning where the learning process and product are becoming more personalized and suits the learners' unique characteristics. In the area of language learning, it is revealed that learner who owns the sense of autonomy is essentially the learner who know what to do with their language for the sake of their own learning (Suherdi et al., 2022).

Taking the theories of learner autonomy and the contexts of teaching and learning into consideration, there are principles that should be considered in every attempt of developing learner autonomy. These principles involve the teachers' role in the classroom, the political and technical ecosystem, the learning ecosystem, the psychological state, and lastly the social circumstances (Fadaee et al., 2021; Fandiño Parra et al., 2021; Lee & Mori, 2021; Lai et al., 2016).

The first principle is the teachers' role in the learning process. The conceptions that highlight the teachers' roles in the development of learner autonomy varied. The roles spread out ranging from the teacher as a facilitator of learning up to the teacher as the knowledge transmitter (Dorji, 2020; Aprianti, 2017; Lai et al., 2016). Yet, it is found that the roles of teachers themselves is not always placed in a discrete point because somehow, these roles can be used as an instrument of negotiation. Therefore, teachers may have a chance to negotiate their role in the teaching and learning process. However, it needs to be bear in mind that essentially the teaching and learning context in MBKM policy allowed teacher to change their perspective in taking roles in the teaching and learning practice as now the role as facilitator, negotiator, and mentor are also highlighted not only in the tertiary context but also that in the other level of education (Dorji, 2020; Aprianti, 2017; Lai et al., 2016).

The second principle is the political and technical ecosystem surrounding the development

of learner autonomy. The political and technical ecosystem relates with the construct of the regulation and curriculum applied in the university (Lennert da Silva, 2021; Yasmin & Yasmeen, 2021). This aspect highlights that, firstly, in the MBKM Program the government has clearly stipulates the regulation regarding learner autonomy in the Minister of Education and Culture, Number 3 in 2020, concerning National Higher Education Standards. The regulation states that language learners are not the passive recipients of knowledge, they shall self-manage their learning by getting involved in the process of planning, monitoring, and evaluating the learning process. This expectation is realized in various programs and regulation implemented by the government.

The third principle is the learning ecosystem (Esfandiari et al., 2021; Uličná et al., 2016). The learning ecosystem plays an important role. This aspect can either support or diminish the teacher's attempt in developing learner autonomy. In this case, although the policy has given wider opportunity for the learner to be autonomous in their learning, if the ecosystem does not support it then it will be hard for the learner to realize their expectation.

The next principle is the social ecosystem. The teachers' attempt in developing learner autonomy needs to be supported by the social ecosystem (Zabaleta & Izaguirre, 2022; Eno et al., 2019). The supports are realized in the form of the interpersonal behaviour reflected by positive collaboration with their partners at work and in the learning community. Autonomous teacher can actively get involved in the learning community focusing in the teacher attempt on providing instruction to nurture the learners' interpersonal willingness to collaborate in achieving their learning goals.

The last principle is the psychological aspect. The psychological aspect indicates the types of support that the teachers give to build an atmosphere where the learners are given more flexibility and freedom to be themselves. This means that the learners are not forced to behave in an exact specific way, instead the learners must be given wider opportunities to be more expressive (Fadaee et al., 2021; Hugo et al., 2021; Elekaei et al., 2016). One of the ways to support the development the student psychological readiness to take change of their learning is by conducting reflection that can be both conducted by doing self-reflection or collaborative reflection. Collaborative reflection involves the process of discussing with peers or teacher in a group. During this session the

learners can express their experience in doing autonomous learning. By conducting this activity, the learner will have greater awareness of their learning.

The requirement of developing learner autonomy in the newest MBKM policy is not without clear reasons. MBKM policy give wider options for the educational practitioner to reconstruct their curriculum so that the learners can also have wider opportunity to take charge of their learning. Other various sub-program to achieve the essence of MB-KM Policy can be implemented in the scope of study program in the university that implement the MB-KM policy. However, although the regulation and the rational of supporting the development learner autonomy have been provided, yet it is still indicated that the success of learner autonomy development will always be congruent with the lecturer beliefs and understanding about it. Therefore, investigating the university teachers' beliefs and practices in developing learner autonomy is paramount.

The concept of the teacher autonomy and learner autonomy have also been investigated by several other researchers (Alrashidi, 2022; Saguni, 2021; Ruelens, 2019; Lennert da Silva, 2021). Their studies yield in various results. The first group indicate that learner autonomy is an essential factor that needs to be developed in all stages of learning (Lennert da Silva, 2021). This importance is realized in the different strategies of autonomy development such as that of implementing language portfolio, self-access learning, and project-based learning. The second group indicate that there is a close relationship between the learner autonomy and the teacher autonomy. These studies show the different degree of autonomy between teachers from different level and how it affects the students' autonomy (Alrashidi, 2022).

These studies have indicated the thread between teachers' beliefs and understanding and learner autonomy yet one major gap in a form of lack of information on the university lecturers' beliefs and understanding on the development of learner autonomy especially in the scope of MB-KM Policy in Indonesian setting remains unanswered. Therefore, in recognition to the gap unfilled by the existing literature then this issue is considered to be worth investigated. Therefore, this study aims to: (1) Investigate the lecturer's belief and understanding about LA. (2) Investigate the lecturers' role in LA development. (3) Investigate Teachers Beliefs and Practices on The Contribution of the Implementation of MBKM Policy in LA Development.

**METHOD**

The aim of this research is to reveal the unique and dynamic contexts of LA in the context of MBKM policy, specifically how beliefs and understanding about LA, their roles and the aspects that affect the development of LA in the MBKM policy. The natural phenomena surrounded the subjects being studied is one of the highlights of this research. Therefore, qualitative research with a case study design is implemented (Leavy, 2018). The design is specifically selected enables the researcher to get in-depth analysis of the phenomenon. To be more specific, case study is well-suited for exploring how a subject interacts within its unique context. In this case, the design allowed to clearly depict the university beliefs and understanding of LA in the context of MBKM policy.

The setting of the study was in several universities in West Javas. The universities were selected based on several considerations. One of the considerations is that the universities are the implementer of MBKM Policy which is realized through the application of MBKM Curriculum. In this research, 56 university teachers actively participated as the respondents. Furthermore, 5 teachers were further selected as the respondent for the interview and in collecting document analysis.

The respondents were carefully selected based on several criteria one of which is their interest and also their willingness to participate in the study. Although purposive sampling was used yet the respondents were regraded as the representative of the population. The respondents were also selected to represent the various teaching experience ranging from the earliest two up to twenty-seven years of teaching experience. They also thought different English classes and different language level. Therefore, as there were some conditions applied to the selection of the respondents of the study, then, the study was classified as having purposive sampling method.

This research employs three instruments; these are; survey, interviews and document analysis (Creswell, W. John & Creswell, 2018; Leavy, 2018).

The questionnaires were used in this study so that teachers' beliefs and understanding about LA can be revealed. The questionnaire is classified into three sections. The first section is aimed to reveal the universities general understanding about LA. Meanwhile, the second section is aimed to depict the lecturers' role in the teaching and learning process as it will also able to give general picture of the realization of their beliefs and understanding about LA. Lastly, the third section emphasis the

aspects that the teachers consider to be able to support their beliefs and understanding about the development of LA in the MBKM policy.

The open-ended interviews were given to the five respondents of the research. This type of interview was used as it was able to lead the researcher and respondents to be more expressive and flexible during the interview process. There are stages implemented during the interview. The first stage is aimed for the respondents to discuss on their beliefs and understandings about autonomy, the aspects that contribute to the development of learner autonomy as well as the role that the teachers take. The next stage is aimed to reveal the respondents experience and practical realization of developing learner autonomy. Guiding questions, statements and probing were used as an attempt to collect an in-depth information from the respondent of the study.

In addition, related documents were collected to be used as a form to validate the data that were gained from that of interview and questionnaires. The documents which were collected were in a form of teacher's lesson plan. The lesson plan is believed to be able to reflect the university lecturers' beliefs and understanding about LA and how it realized in the actual practice.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

From the results of data analysis, the findings and discussion of the research are divided into three main categories namely: 1) The Profile of Lecturer Beliefs and Practices on Learner Autonomy; 2) The Teacher's Role in Learner Autonomy Development; and 3) The Teachers Beliefs and Practices on The Contribution of MBKM Policy in Learner Autonomy Development.

*The profile of lecturer beliefs and practices on learner autonomy*

The first research question leads us into revealing the respondent beliefs and understanding regarding autonomy. The profile of the lecturer beliefs and understanding is mapped by means of the inventory test given to the 56 respondents of the study.

The profile of lecturer beliefs and understanding is depicted by the mean scores and the distribution of the respondents' scores. Based on the results of the analysis it is found that the respondents were mainly showed positive attitude about the promotion of learner autonomy especially in the implementation of MB-KM Policy. Not only that it was also found that the respondents generally are knowledgeable

regarding the needs to develop learner autonomy as well as the principle of developing this competency. This finding is reflected in the Chart 1.1 as follow.

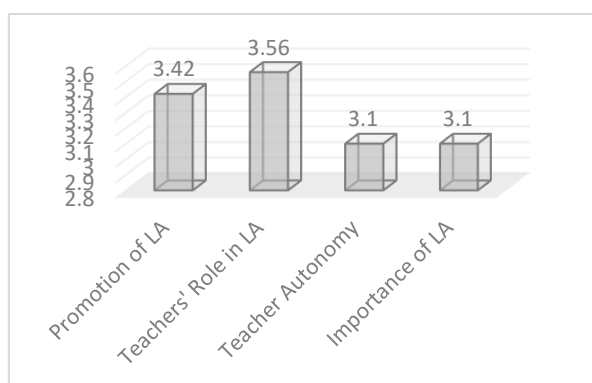


Figure 1. *Teachers' beliefs in LA development*

Figure 1. indicates that the respondents mainly believe in their central role in the development of learner autonomy which is represented by the mean score of 3,56. In this case the teachers generally state that they acknowledge that in the MB-MK Policy the students are expected to realized their optimum capability to take charge of their learning. In other words, in the implementation of MB-KM Policy the language learners are required to be able to carry active involvement in a form of self-managing learning, active reflection in a form of self-reflect and discussion, as well as use target language effectively to achieve their learning objectives.

In addition, based on the interview the respondents add that they own such sense of responsibility to stand as a role model in being an autonomous learner such as follow:

"I believe that my students need example on being autonomous in their learning. I gave simple example by making class schedule on the project that we are working as a class and stick to it. By being on time I believe that my students will realize regarding the importance of being responsible of achieving their learning goals." (R1)

"I followed several training and workshop on MB-MK Policy and it is clear that the sense of learner autonomy needs to be developed. By having autonomous learners, they will be able to fully optimum in doing the MB-MK Program such as that of learning 20 credit hours." (R2)

R1 and R2 indicate their beliefs and understanding of learner autonomy development in the university level. As shown by R2, the belief of learner autonomy development seems to be increased by the regulation given by the

government. In addition, it is also revealed that the teachers mainly believe that the learner autonomy closely related with the teacher autonomy. Therefore, they indicate that teacher needs to stand as an exaampere.

The finding is in accordance with several research findings. In this case they also indicate the close relation between the educators beliefs in LA with the development of LA in the actual practice (Saraswati, 2019; Darsih, 2018).

#### *Teacher's role in learner autonomy development*

This section reveals the role and practice of lecturers in development of learner autonomy in the scope of implementation of MB-KM Policy. The role of the university teachers in the development of learner autonomy is described in Table 1. as follows:

Table 1. *Teachers' role in autonomy development*

Categories	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Teacher as Developer	1.0	4.0	3.22	1.57
Teacher as Counsellor	1.0	4.0	2.85	1.72
Teacher as Trainer	1.0	4.0	3.25	1.85
Teacher as Facilitator	1.0	4.0	3.65	1.41

Table 1. indicate that the teachers generally activate their role as facilitators when students were faced with making decisions. This is reflected by the mean score of 3.65 which can be included as the highest among the other three aspects. The role is then followed by teacher as trainer by the mean score of 3.25. In this case it is revealed that the teachers no longer perceive their role as knowledge transmitter instead they admit that their role is to develop a supportive atmosphere for a more autonomous learning, to help learners get to their goals, and to encourage social interaction among the lecturers and students.

Furthermore, Table 1.1 shows the distribution of teachers' beliefs about their role within the scope of learner autonomy development. As shown in Table 1.1, the respondents generally show a positive attitude towards their role in embedding the principle of learner autonomy in the learning process. The respondents express their understanding that the role of the teacher or educator has an important part in the process or stages of learner autonomy development. In the learner autonomy development stage, respondents indicated that they generally activate their role as a facilitator at times when the students are faced with

the stage of making decisions. In this case the respondent tent to give constructive advices in the self-managing action that needs to be taken by the students. This indication is shown by the following excerpt:

“The students often consult in deciding the action that they need to take during the Research Collaboration Program with one of the institutions in the West Java. I gave them advise yet still they need to take the final decision by themselves.” (R3)

“In my writing class the students are producing several writing products. I support this process by giving them writing portfolio so that they can learn on managing their learning starting from making timeline of conducting writing stages” (R4)

As depicted by the respondents, although they no longer take the role as merely the knowledge transmitter yet they still communicate intensively with the learners to as to facilitate them to achieve their learning goals. This finding supports the previous argument put forward by several other research. In this case, they also discover that the teachers are there to support the development of learner autonomy. One of the dominant roles that the teachers tend to take is in a form of taking a role as facilitator of learning and coaching (Parcerisa et al., 2022; Tran & Duong, 2020; Lai et al., 2016).

#### *Teachers beliefs and practices on the contribution of the implementation of MBKM policy in LA development*

In third sub-point, the university teacher's belief in the development of learner autonomy is focused on the elaboration of beliefs and lecturers' understanding of aspects that play an important role in development autonomous learners. The aspects are the psychological aspects- that the students' readiness, learning ecosystem, teacher readiness, dan technical political aspects The results of surveys and interviews show that lecturers have diverse beliefs and understandings when it comes to the development of LA within the scope of implementing the MB-KM Policy. the profile illustrated in Table 1.2 below.

Table 2. *Teachers Beliefs and Practices on The Contribution of the Implementation of MBKM Policy in LA Development*

Categories	Min	Max	Mean	SD
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Learner Autonomy and Students Readiness	1.0	4.0	2.83	.93
Learner Autonomy and Learning Ecosystem	1.0	4.0	3.55	.98
Learner Autonomy and Socio-Cultural Aspect	1.0	4.0	3.15	.78
Learner Autonomy dan Technical-Political System	1.0	4.0	3.59	.98

Table 2 shows that the technical and political aspects are the aspect that gets the greatest value. In this case, the representation of the score is as follow.

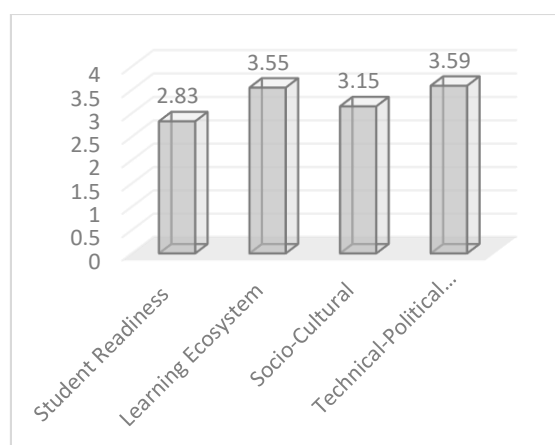


Figure 2. *The contribution of MBKM policy in learner autonomy development*

The Chart 2. shows that the Technical and Political aspect was ranked first (mean score of 3,59). Through the interview results, it was found that the lecturer understood that Learner Autonomy is supported by the educational policy and it is nurtured not only in university level, but also in other level of education. The development of LA and this aspect was in fact facilitated by the government through the Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka (MB-KM) Policy. This freedom, as stated by the respondents, is obtained through the opportunity given to students to study outside the study program as much as 20 credits. These findings are contradictory with findings from previous studies which found that teachers tend to assume that government policies tend to give strict rules on the teaching and learning process also student learning outcome resulting in the lack of LA development.

Meanwhile, the Learning Ecosystem aspect was ranked second with the acquisition of understanding and confidence in its contribution to the development of LA (3,55 mean score). Through the interview results, it was found that the lecturer understood the importance of establishing a learning ecosystem that supports students to activate their autonomous capacities. One of the respondents expresses as follow:

**R5:** *"I support the development of learner autonomy by giving more example on how to be autonomous and resourceful in learning. For sure autonomous does not mean that the students need to learn in isolation, instead they need to be creative and innovative in exploring their self-potential and also the availability of other people around them to achieve their learning goals."*

One of the learning ecosystems that lecturers believe is capable of developing the learning ecosystem is in the form out-of-class activities in the form of capable online resources provide flexibility for students to receive language exposure (Nguyen & Habók, 2021; Lengkanawati, 2017; Cakici, 2017; ). Respondents shows that LA development cannot be separated from the environment supporting place for students to develop themselves autonomously.

Social and cultural aspects become another determining aspect in successful development of LA to implement the Policy MB-KM (mean score of 3.15). Respondents generally indicate the importance social settings and the environment in supporting LA. The last aspect is the student readiness in taking responsibility in learning. The teachers acknowledge that the students may not quite familiar with the process of planning, monitoring, and evaluating their reading. In terms of familiarity, it was found that during the classroom intervention the students tended to show different involvement especially when they did the learning tasks on the material that they newly encountered.

However, it is revealed that the student readiness which also includes the student psychological aspect seems to gain relatively low degree of mean score (2.83). It is further revealed that it is depicted that the respondents seem to consider that the students still relatively have low degree of confidence, readiness, and agility in learning. Therefore, they claimed that further facilitating in learning may still be needed so as to support the development of LA.

The findings are similar with several research results. They indicated that different students, such as poor and high proficiency students, showed

relatively different tendencies of LA (Fadaee et al., 2021; Hugo et al., 2021; Elekaei et al., 2016).

## CONCLUSION

The research reveals that the lecturers were knowledgeable about the notion of LA. It was shown as LA was mentioned in the construction of instructional material and design also in the teaching and learning process. Furthermore, the lecturers believed that they need to support the autonomous learners' language development during the implementation of MBKM policy.

In addition, the respondents mainly believe in their central role in the development of learner autonomy. In this case the teachers generally state that they acknowledge that in the MB-MK Policy the students are expected to realized their optimum capability to take charge of their learning.

In terms of autonomy development, two aspects, which are political and technical environment, dominated the lecturers' perspectives in considering that MBKM policy seems to be able to give more educational choices for the learner to study both in and out of the classroom environment. However, it is depicted that, the psychological aspects, such as that of the relatively low degree of the students' confidence, readiness, and agility in learning, seemed to remain problematic as they tend to hinder the development of LA. Therefore, the lecturers indicated that taking a role in facilitating the students' LA development is still required to anticipate the obstacles.

The MB-KM policy is a crucial context in this research, which emphasizes autonomous learning and the study's results shed light on its impact on learners and education. In this case, the findings might lead to the establishment or improvement of supporting learning environment for nourishing LA. In other words, these findings could offer guidance, resources, and mentorship to help learners develop and maintain autonomy.

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