

The Relationship between Metacognitive Reading Strategy Awareness and Reading Comprehension among freshman EFL Students, Ethiopia

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Abstract- *The study was an attempt to investigate the level of awareness on Metacognitive reading strategies among first year Ethiopian EFL students. It also tried to figure out the possible relationship between Metacognitive reading strategies use and reading comprehension achievement. Ninety-four EFL learners participated in the study. Metacognitive reading strategy inventory and reading comprehension test were used to collect the data. The data were analyzed through descriptive statistics to determine the mean value of strategies employed by the learners. Moreover, Pearson correlation coefficient was used to discover the association between reading strategy use and reading comprehension achievement. According to the findings Ethiopian EFL learners, were almost near to the lower limit ($M=2.55, Sd.=0.34$) line of medium level reading strategy users. Furthermore, the use of metacognitive reading strategy had weak correlation ($r=0.21, p=0.039$) with reading comprehension achievement. The possible cause of this could be lack of awareness on how to regulate and monitor reading comprehension.*

Keywords- *Metacognitive Reading strategy use; Reading comprehension; EFL*

1. INTRODUCTION

Just like teaching methodology, reading theories have had their shifts and transitions. Starting from the traditional view which focused on the printed form of a text and moving to the cognitive view that enhanced the role of background knowledge in addition to what appeared on the printed page; they ultimately culminated in the metacognitive view which is now in vogue. It is based on the control and manipulation that a reader can have on the act of comprehending a text. According to Block (1992), there is now no more debate on "whether reading is a bottom-up, language-based process or a top-down, knowledge-based process." It is also no more problematic to accept the influence of background knowledge on both L1 and L2 readers.

The literature has revealed that awareness and monitoring of one's comprehension processes are important aspects of skilled readers (Alexander & Jetton 2000; Makhtari & Reichard 2002). The same authors further point out that such awareness and monitoring processes are often referred to in the literature as metacognition, which can be thought of as the knowledge of the reader's cognition about reading and the self-control mechanisms they exercise when monitoring and regulating text comprehension.

"The ability to read the written language at a reasonable rate with good comprehension has long been recognized to be as important as oral skills, if not more important." (Eskey 1970:1)

The level of reader comprehension of the text is determined by how well the reader variables (interest level in the text, purpose for reading the text, knowledge of the topic, foreign language abilities, awareness of the reading process, and level of willingness to take risks) interact with the text variables (text type, structure, syntax, and vocabulary) (Hosenfeld, 1979).

According to Joanne Devine (1988), one thing needs to be taken into consideration: readers' internalized models of the reading process are extremely important. Furthermore, Metacognitive skills allow students to monitor their progress when trying to understand and learn new material (Camahalan, 2006). Students who engage metacognitively in reading tasks aptly use related strategies and adapt them to other tasks (Boulware-Gooden, Carreker, Thornhill, & Joshi, 2007). Similarly, O'Malley et al. (1985: 561) have pointed out: "students without metacognitive approaches are essentially learners without direction or opportunity to review their progress, accomplishments, and future directions. Further, Pressley, Snyder and Cariglia Bull (1987) suggest that metacognition helps students to be consciously aware of what they have learned, and to recognize situations in which it would be useful, and progress in using it.

The use of metacognitive strategies can distinguish poor and good readers in the sense that the former are unable to spontaneously employ effective strategies and cope with reading comprehension difficulty (Kelly et al., 2001). In fact, metacognitive behaviors or skills develop and become

reinforced as “learners experience success and feel they are agents of their own learning” (Camahalan, 2006, p. 80). “The use of metacognitive strategies helps students to ‘think about thinking before, during, and after they read’” (Boulware-Gooden et al., 2007, p. 70)

In the English and Literature program at Ethiopian Universities, for example, language students “learn to access, understand, and evaluate information, use it ethically, and create new material (papers, presentations, or other products) based on that information” with an emphasis on critical and creative thinking. One element in the training, credentialing, hiring, and retaining of language students relates to their language and information skills. Competent language students must be capable of both comprehending and communicating written information effectively.

Several studies in the western and African context in ESL/EFL classes researched on reading strategy and reading comprehension. To this end, linguistic deficiencies are inhibiting factors in achieving reading comprehension (Clark, 1979; Singer, 1981; Carell, 1988). In addition to this, according to Alderson and Urquhart (1984) and Singer (1981) noted that there is a need for extensive vocabulary for achieving reading comprehension. Furthermore, they explained there is a need to account for poor readers who do guess extensively, and good readers are not good simply because they are predictors, or make better use of context. Contrary to literatures a study by Mante’s (2009) in Filipino bilingual high school students, metacognitive reading strategies were not a predictor of reading comprehension. The results of a similar study conducted by Ilustre (2011) in the Philippines showed that amongst the three subscales of metacognitive reading strategies, only problem solving strategies correlated positively with text comprehension. A quasi-experimental design study by Cekiso, M. and Madikiza, N. (2014), in South Africa indicated that learners who received reading strategy instruction scored both statistically and practically significantly higher marks on the reading comprehension test than those in the control group. Recent study by Belilew Molla (2015) in Ethiopia, Dilla University, indicated that, the use of reading strategies had neither positively nor negatively correlated with reading comprehension achievement. He further stated that Ethiopian students’ reading comprehension is below what is expected of them. One reason why metacognition is significant is that if learners are not aware of when comprehension is breaking down and what they can do about it, they will not achieve their freshmen courses effectively.

Most EFL teachers in Ethiopia are often discouraged by the inefficient reading methods of otherwise fluent students. Many foreign-language students in secondary and tertiary institutions can’t keep up with their assignments and blame their slow reading speed. Despite teachers and other concerned bodies’ effort, the researcher finds students struggling word-for-word through a text, plowing on form beginning to end and stumbling at every

unfamiliar item. Unfortunately, such slow and waste full procedures are commonly due to a lack of reading confidence created by the very manner of their learning in EFL classes.

Such close textual scrutiny seems to increase the anxiety that inhabits the reading flexibility of many students. They may come to believe that there is only one correct way to read, and this seriously hampers their studies.

Arising from the problem stated above the researcher posed the following questions.

- What metacognitive reading strategies do the participants use when reading academic texts?
- What is the reading comprehension level of the respondents?
- Is there relationship between reading comprehension and metacognitive awareness reading strategies?

2. METHODS

The focus of this study was to investigate the awareness of metacognitive reading strategies and reading comprehension achievement of students in EFL classroom. According to Zoltan (2007) classroom research is a broad umbrella-term for empirical investigations that use the classroom as the main research site. Thus, the term concerns any study that examines how teaching and learning takes place in context. Although given the variety of possible teaching spaces (for example, seminar rooms, language labs, computer rooms, lecture theatres) it may not be absolutely straightforward to define what a ‘classroom’ is, the best thing is to rely on our common sense and include any physical space in which scheduled teaching takes place. The design of this study was a descriptive one.

Data were gathered from the subjects and they were described quantitatively. Numerical data was collected through questionnaire and reading comprehension test.

The researcher used purposive sampling method to select the setting and since all the three universities were in the same cluster in which they agreed to cooperate in different academic issues like: professionals exchange, use of laboratory materials and research activities. The first batch is selected purposively because their previous grade level, i.e. preparatory stage, was expected them to make ready in their reading comprehension skills, thinking critically and with all aspects of academic challenges. It is also believed that students are expected to demonstrate better reading performance than other students during in their preparatory programs. And hence, the real manifestation of these skills should be observed in their freshmen program. Furthermore, the department of English and Literature exposes them for more reading, evaluation, and interpretation of materials. Hence, the researcher wanted to investigate the participants whether they were equipped with the necessary reading strategies to cope up their courses during their stay in their universities.

Based on this, among the total of 105 students ninety-four (94) freshmen from the department of English and literature were selected using convenient sampling method.

3. INSTRUMENTATION

3.1 Questionnaire

The researcher employed questionnaire to gather appropriate data from the participants. According to Zoltan (2007) and Cresswell (2003) questionnaires can yield three types of data about the respondent. Behavioral questions are among the three types of data. Behavioral questions, which are used to find out what the respondents are doing or have done in the past, focusing on actions, life-styles, habits and personal history.

In line with this, the reading strategy survey, Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory (MARS) (Mokhtari & Reichard, (2002), consisting of thirty question items was used to obtain the required data. The MARS was found to be suitable for the purpose of the present study, because it measures L2 learners' metacognitive awareness of reading strategies use. The MARS questionnaire included three subscales of Global Strategies (13 items), Problem-Solving Strategies (9 items), and Support Strategies (8 items). According to Martinez (2008), global strategies can be defined as "generalized or global reading strategies aimed at setting the stage for the reading act: for instance, setting a purpose for reading, previewing the text content, predicting what the text is about (p. 170)." Problem-solving strategies are defined as "focused problem-solving or repair strategies used when problems develop in understanding textual information: for instance, checking one's understanding upon encountering conflicting information, re-reading for better understanding (ibid)." Support strategies use "the support mechanisms or tools aimed at sustaining responsiveness to reading: for instance, use of reference materials like dictionaries and other support systems (ibid)." The questionnaire was presented to the participants in the original version of English, and, when needed, the administrator gave Amharic translations or explanations of the question items. Almost 50 minutes in average was spent by students to complete the total questions.

3.2 Reading Test

Slightly modified reading comprehension test from www.read theory.org website was used for this purpose. Three different short texts which comprised of 17 questions- two of which are narrative (short stories) and one is expository type of texts were employed to learn more about students' reading achievements. Two of the reading texts contained (12) questions and the expository type of text included (5) questions. Possible correction and adaptation on the standard of the tests were taken according to the level of the students.

The performance objective correlation of the reading test focused on:

- Choose the correct meaning/definition
- Demonstrate understanding of words and ideas

- Determine the sequence
- Draw conclusions
- Expand vocabulary
- Find relevant facts
- Identify the main idea
- Locate the answer
- Make inferences
- Read for details
- Understand the meaning of words and ideas
- Use context clues to derive meaning
- Use context clues to fill in the missing word

Table 1. Test Items Specification

Skills to Test	Level	No. of Items	Percentage
Reading Comprehension	Literal	9	52.9
	Inferential	6	35.3
	Critical	2	11.8

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on Oxford's (Oxford, 1990) and (Makhtari & Sheorey, 2002) classification, the student whose mean score is above 3.5 ($M \geq 3.5$) is considered to be a high strategy user, the one whose mean score is between 2.5 and 3.4 ($2.5 \leq M \leq 3.4$) is a medium strategy user, and the one below 2.4 ($M \leq 2.4$) is considered a low strategy user.

The learners use the various kinds of reading strategies when they read academic materials but with different degrees of preferences. Students dominantly check whether their guesses are right or wrong. As it can be referred from the table the calculated mean value is (3.37) which is the highest among the strategies they use. However, students had great difference among them in using "I check to see whether my guesses about the text are right or wrong" as a strategy to negotiate reading comprehension. Contrary to this, the least strategy "I critically analyze and evaluate the information presented in the text" is calculated mean (1.59) and its (Sd.=0.76) value has got the least reading strategy. The majority of the respondents did not use this strategy to monitor their reading comprehension, and they have similar consensus among them in using the strategy.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of Global Reading Strategies

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std.Dev.
I have a purpose in mind when I read.	94	1.00	5.00	2.2660	1.03877
think about what I know to help me understand	94	1.00	5.00	2.6596	1.24048

what I read					
I preview the text to see what it's about before reading it	94	1.00	5.00	2.2340	1.25660
I think about whether the content of the text fits my reading purpose	94	1.00	4.00	1.8404	.72294
I skim the text first by noting characteristics like length and organization	94	1.00	5.00	2.2872	1.03303
I decide what to read closely and what to ignore	94	1.00	5.00	2.4043	1.07082
I use tables, figures, and pictures in the text to increase my understanding	94	1.00	5.00	2.4574	1.14220
I use context clues to help me better understand what I'm reading	94	1.00	5.00	2.1170	.93735
I use typographical aids like boldface and italics to identify key information	94	1.00	5.00	3.1809	1.15435
critically analyze and evaluate the information presented in the text	94	1.00	4.00	1.5957	.76649
I check my understanding when I come across conflicting information.	94	1.00	5.00	2.4681	.93558

I try to guess what the material is about when I read	94	1.00	5.00	2.6596	1.15984
I check to see whether my guesses about the text are right or wrong	94	1.00	5.00	3.3723	1.11668

Questionnaire result of global reading strategy

Furthermore, to see whether the participants have differences in awareness among themselves on the strategies, a large difference was not observed. However, as the SD value (1.25) indicates in table 2, previewing the text earlier before it was read by the readers had great differences among themselves. Similarly, there was a similar consensus among the respondents on the strategy whether the content of the text fits their reading purpose. The SD value indicates (0.75) which is the least value that implies there is no great disagreement among them in using "I think about whether the content of the text fits my reading purpose" as a strategy.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of problem solving Reading Strategies

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Dev
I read slowly but carefully to be sure I understand what I'm reading	94	1.00	5.00	2.8936	1.07231
I try to get back on track when I lose concentration	94	1.00	5.00	2.8617	1.02234
I adjust my reading speed according to what I'm reading	94	1.00	5.00	2.8404	.99788
When the text becomes difficult, I pay closer attention to what I'm reading	94	1.00	5.00	2.9894	1.13113
I stop from time to time and think about what I'm reading	94	1.00	5.00	2.9894	1.07258
I try to picture or visualize information to	94	1.00	5.00	3.2021	1.07343

help me remember what I read					
When the text becomes difficult, I reread to increase my understanding	94	1.00	5.00	2.9468	1.12036
I try to guess the meaning of unknown words or phrases	94	1.00	5.00	2.9149	1.14215

Questionnaire result of problem solving

Furthermore, participants perceived or used most among problem solving problem is “I try to picture or visualize information to help them remember what they read.” Its mean value is (M=3.20) that indicates that the highest of all the strategies. On the other hand, the least strategy used or perceived as important among problem solving strategies is “When the text becomes difficult, I pay closer attention to what I’m reading”. Its calculated mean value was (M= 2.84) which is the lowest mean value compared to the rest. In line with this, the SD of this strategy is (Sd.=0.99). Though it is considered lowest calculated mean among problem solving strategies, it is labeled as a medium based on Oxford’s (Oxford, 1990) classification and (Mokhtari & Reichard, 2002).

Table 4.Descriptive Statistics support reading strategies

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std.Dev.
I take notes while reading to help me understand what I read	94	1.00	3.00	1.8085	.55410
When text becomes difficult, I read aloud to help me understand what I read	94	1.00	4.00	2.3723	.86738
I summarize what I read to reflect on important information in the text	94	1.00	5.00	2.4043	.95399
I discuss what I read with others to check my understanding	94	1.00	5.00	2.6064	.85783

I underline or circle information in the text to help me remember it.	94	1.00	5.00	2.7021	1.28540
I use reference material such as a dictionary to help me understand what I read	94	1.00	5.00	2.5000	.92457
I paraphrase (restate ideas in my own words) to better understand what I read	94	1.00	4.00	2.1170	.90228
I go back and forth in the text to find relationships among ideas in it	94	1.00	5.00	2.1277	.91855
I ask myself questions I like to have answered in the text	94	1.00	4.00	1.9468	.67787

Questionnaire result of support reading strategy

As it is indicated in the above table 4.the least strategy used by the participants is taking notes while reading to help them understand what they read. Its calculated mean value is (1.8).It is the lowest value among the sub-scale strategies. This indicates that students used this strategy rarely while they were engaged in academic reading materials. Its (Sd.=0.55) also show the lowest difference among the participants on the strategies they use during their academic reading materials. Contrary to this fact, the majority of students used underlining or circling information in the text to help them remember the text .Its mean value (2.7) also revealed that students used the strategy most compared to the rest of the strategies listed under support reading strategies. As the mean value (2.6 and 2.5) indicated in the table above, discussing with others and using reference or dictionary to achieve reading comprehension are also the most widely used strategies respectively.

Generally, students use all of the Metacognitive reading strategies while they read academic materials; however, their awareness to employ them during academic reading varies among the thirty strategies. Among the three sub-scale strategies “checking to see whether their guesses about the text are right or wrong” has the highest mean value which is (3.32).This indicates that the majority of students used this strategy as a means to achieve reading

comprehension than the rest of MAR strategies. Similarly, the least MARS is indicated by the mean value of (1.62) which is stated as "I try to analyze and evaluate critically the information presented in the text". This shows that the majority of students did not prefer to use this strategy .Its (Sd.=0.93) is also indicated that there was high consensus among the participants in neglecting this strategy. This may be lack of awareness or there may have different reasons not to employ as a strategy during academic readings. It has to be left for further research.

The means of individual items ranged from 3.32 (Sd.=1.11) to 1.60 (Sd.= 0 .76). Among the thirty items examined in this study, twenty three strategies were considered as moderate strategies and seven were considered as low-usage strategies, while none belonged to the range of high usage. Hence, it is clear to observe that all the three reading strategies were used dispersedly.

Table 5.The Mean Value of the three MARS

		Global Reading strategy	Problem solving Reading strategy	Support Reading Strategy
N	Valid	13	8	9
	Missing	0	5	4
Mean		2.4923	2.9548	2.2872
Std. Dev.		.48195	.11383	.30408
Min		1.60	2.84	1.81
Max.		3.37	3.20	2.70

Statistical result of MARS

Based on the principle indicated above, the writer attempted to investigate which groups of reading strategies was used most and which was used least by students. Based on the calculated mean value (2.95) ,as it is indicated in table 5,problem solving reading strategies used most. Its (Sd.=0.11) value indicated that there was a common consensus among the research participants concerning problem solving strategies. Therefore, problem solving reading strategy was used moderately by the participants.

In similar vein, global reading strategy is laid nearly low. Its mean value (2.42) and (Sd. = 0.44) indicates low usage of the strategy by the participants. It is found between Problem solving and Support reading strategy in this study. On the other hand, participants reported" support reading strategies "as the least used strategy group among the three groups .As its mean value (2.28) and (Sd.=0.30) indicated in the table, it is the least strategy used compared to the mean value of the other two groups.

To be brief, As seen above in Table 3, the overall mean score demonstrates that the participants of the study were medium strategy users (M=2.49) as long as Global

reading strategy use is concerned. Besides, the writer also checked the total awareness on problem solving strategies .In relation to this as the calculated mean value is (M=2.95).When the value is compared with the mean value of theoretical framework, Mokhtari & Richard (2002) introduced the Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory (MARS),the mean laid in medium level. This indicates that participants use Problem solving Reading strategies in medium level. Its (Sd.=0.11) indicates that the participants of this research had almost similar awareness as they reported in the questionnaire.

Table 6.Over all mean of Methacognitive Awareness of Reading strategies

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Dev.
overall mean	3	2.29	2.95	2.5554	.34843

Overall mean of MARS

Based on the research questions, it was the aim of the study to find out whether students usage of reading strategies low, medium or high. Based on the principles indicated by Oxford's (Oxford, 1990) and (Makhtari & Sheorey, 2002) classification their overall usage was calculated and indicated in the above table. Hence, its overall mean value (M=2.55) indicates, students use all the thirty strategies moderately. However, the mean value is laid at the lowest margin of medium scale. Although the value is laid under moderate scale, it is possible to say the majority of students lack complete awareness on how to negotiate and monitor reading comprehension.

The second research question of this study was posed to know more about the students' reading comprehension level. This research question is mainly investigated quantitatively using statistical data gathered through the reading comprehension test. Slightly modified from www.read theory.org website was used for this purpose. Three different short texts which comprised of 17 questions- two of which are narrative (short stories) and one is expository type of texts were employed to learn more about students' reading achievements. Two of the reading texts contained (12) questions and the expository type of text included (5) questions.

The maximum score expected was (17) and the lowest one was (0). As to Alsamadani (2009), students who scored 7 and below out of 17 are considered low, between 8 and 12 are considered medium level, and above 13 are considered high level of comprehension.

Tabe.7.Reading Comprehension Score

Level of Comprehension	Frequency	percentile	Mean
Low (≤ 7)	32	34.04	6.1
Medium (8_12)	56	59.57	9.8
High (≥ 13)	6	6.38	13.3
Over all mean			9.7

Level of Reading comprehension based on students reading score

As shown in Table 7, 32 students scored 7 and below in the reading comprehension test. If this 32 is calculated in percentage, it becomes (34.04%) of the total population who took the test. The grand mean calculated for those who scored 7 and below is (6.1). It is also observed in the same table that 56 (59.57%) of the students scored between 8 and 12 and are classified as having a medium level of comprehension. The mean score for the students who have a medium level of comprehension is (9.8).

As could be observed in the table, 6(6.38%) of the subjects got between 13 and 17 and are found to have a high level of comprehension. The mean score for those who have a high level of comprehension is (13.3). However, the number of students whose result between 13 and 17 is insignificant. The average calculated mean of all the subjects who took the reading comprehension test was 9.7 (10.3%) which indicates that the comprehension level of almost all the students is considered to be low. Hence, the students' low level of reading comprehension might have resulted from their inadequate knowledge to appropriately and effectively use the different types of metacognitive reading strategies when reading academic materials.

The third question in this study was to find out whether there is relationship between Metacognitive reading strategies use and reading comprehension achievement. To test the relationship between these two variables, two tailed Pearson correlation coefficient was produced that measures pairs of variables by means of scales using numbers (in SPSS, version 20) method.

Table.8. Correlation between Metacognitive Awareness Reading Strategies (MARS) use and Reading Comprehension score

		Reading Test Result	Mean of MARS
Reading Test result	Pearson Correlation	1	.214*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.039
	N	94	94
Mean of MARS	Pearson Correlation	.214*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.039	
	N	94	94

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

In this result the Pearson correlation between MARS and Test results is (r) equals 0.214 ($p < 0.05$) which indicates there is linear relation between the two variables because r is different from 0. According to Cohen, L. (1992)

guidelines, the association between the two variables is weak ($r = 0.214$). This finding is also related with the study on 40 EFL second year students at Dilla University by Belilew (2015) showed that nearly all of the reading strategy types had not been correlated with the students' reading comprehension level. A similar correlational study by Sanit Erlina (2015) showed that there is a very low correlation ($r = 0.19$) between reading comprehension and reading strategies. Furthermore, a finding by Mante (2009) as indicated in Clarisse Anne P. (2011) neither reading motivation nor the use of metacognitive reading strategies was a predictor of the reading test scores. This means that the higher the students utilization of metacognitive reading strategies did not automatically contribute to the higher comprehension they made. The possible cause is the lack of knowledge of reading strategies owned by the students.

At a normal condition, metacognitive awareness reading strategy use and reading comprehension have direct relationship. Recent trends within the domain of reading comprehension have led to an increasing emphasis on the role of metacognitive awareness of one's cognitive and motivational processes while reading (Alexander & Jetton, 2000; Guthrie & Wigfield, 1999; Pressley, 2000; Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). Indeed, researchers agree that awareness and monitoring of one's comprehension processes are critically important aspects of skilled reader. Thus, this finding indicated that the students were not consciously and effectively using these strategies. The reason might have been because they were unaware of how and when to use these strategies. However, EFL learners' beliefs and motivation on reading different materials didn't explore in this study, it should be addressed with another research.

5. IMPLICATION AND RECOMENDATION

This study has some practical implications for EFL teachers. The major goal of teaching metacognitive strategies lies in helping vulnerable students become independent learners and, potentially, successful thinkers. Further, teachers should design activities where students share reading strategies and comment on those that were successfully employed (Schraw & Brooks, n.d.), which is part of the thinking about doing process.

An application of cognitive psychology to education has supported the idea that learners benefit more from instruction that helps them reflect on their own learning processes (Armstrong, 1994). Teachers should make sure EFL students in particular are effectively helped with assimilating metacognitive behaviors and sufficiently scaffold, so that they can use the newly learned strategies and cope with both academic and nonacademic reading tasks. Therefore, it is hoped that teachers be familiar with approaches to, and ways of, teaching efficient study strategies in general, and reading metacognitive strategies in particular.

Curriculum is another variable to consider if effective teaching of metacognitive strategies is to occur. In addition to the teacher's familiarity with metacognition, the curriculum and instruction ought to include statements of why the strategy should be used, directions for implementation, and a list of sources for information on how to create similar activities from the strategy in use (Mitchell, 1996).

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