

# Teaching Efficacy of College Faculty: Addressing Inequitable Learning Experiences of Students from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds

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**Abstract:** This study explores culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students' learning experiences vis-à-vis faculty members' teaching efficacy in a community college in South Florida. As community colleges become increasingly diverse, ensuring that all students, regardless of their cultural and linguistic backgrounds, have equal opportunities to succeed academically is crucial. Drawing upon relevant literature, the researcher investigates the challenges CLD students face and the role of college faculty in promoting equitable learning experiences. The study also highlights the importance of cultural responsiveness, inclusive pedagogies, and continuous professional development for faculty in promoting equitable learning environments for CLD students. The study utilized a sequential explanatory mixed methods design consisting of two distinct phases. The first phase involves a survey on factors that contribute to inequitable learning experiences of CLD students, while the second phase involves interviews with faculty members. The results showed that many students from CLD backgrounds are not college prepared and lack vital academic skills. This unpreparedness makes it challenging for them to adapt to college teaching style, finding it difficult to express their ideas or complete assignments due to language barriers. Therefore, if faculty receive the necessary training to keep up with changing student demographics, CLD students' learning experiences might improve.

**Keywords:** Teaching efficacy, Equitable learning Cultural responsiveness pedagogies.

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## 1. Introduction

In today's globalized and diverse society, educational institutions are increasingly populated by students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds (Kaul & Renzulli, 2022; Tigert & Leider, 2022). These students bring rich experiences, perspectives, and knowledge to the classroom, enriching the learning environment. However, inequitable learning experiences and disparities in academic outcomes persist among CLD students (Mamiseishvili, 2012; Tigert & Leider, 2022). The growing diversity of college student populations has highlighted the need for equitable learning experiences that address the unique needs of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students.

Unfortunately, CLD students often face barriers that hinder their academic success, including cultural mismatches, language challenges, and biases within educational systems (Guler, 2022; Mamiseishvili, 2012). CLD students encounter various challenges that can impede their learning experiences. These challenges include language barriers, cultural dissonance, stereotype threat, and limited access to educational resources (Guler, 2022; Kaul & Renzulli, 2022; Tigert & Leider, 2022). Research indicates that these factors contribute to achievement gaps and disparities in educational outcomes (Guler, 2022; Kaul & Renzulli, 2022; Tigert & Leider, 2022). College faculty need to understand these challenges and actively work towards creating inclusive and supportive learning environments.

College faculty play a critical role in shaping the educational experiences of CLD students. Guler (2022) noted that effective teaching practices that enhance equity and inclusivity could help bridge the gap and promote success for CLD students. Thus, this study aims to explore the role of college faculty in promoting equitable learning experiences for CLD students and provides recommendations to enhance teaching efficacy in addressing the needs of CLD students.

This study was carried out in a community college in South Florida. The college was designed as a community-based institution that offers a comprehensive range of programs responsive to changes in the community. In 2008, the college became a state college accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges to offer four-year baccalaureate degree programs. The college has three campuses: Central Campus, North Campus, South Campus, and several centers across Florida. The institution functions as the main provider of undergraduate higher education for the residents of Danju County (pseudonym), which serves more than 68,000 students annually and 2,000 employees, including faculty and administrative staff. The college's transition from a community college to a state college has led to changes in students' demographics. The college now accommodates students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds. Given the CLD students' level of preparedness, socioeconomic status, and English

language barriers., there might be a problem or issue with a faculty member's ability to be effective in the classroom, affecting students' performance and success.

### **1.1 Purpose Statement**

The study explores factors affecting CLD students' college and learning experiences. The equitable learning experiences of CLD students depend on the teaching approach of college faculty. By actively engaging in culturally responsive practices, employing inclusive pedagogies, and participating in continuous professional development, faculty members can foster inclusive learning environments that address the unique needs of CLD students. Thus, this study aims to promote equitable learning experiences for CLD college students and professional development opportunities for faculty.

### **1.2 Research Questions**

- What factors contribute to inequitable learning experiences of students from CLD backgrounds?
- How do community colleges mitigate those factors to enhance CLD students' academic success?

## **2. Literature Review**

Teaching efficacy refers to teachers' beliefs in their ability to effectively facilitate student learning and engagement (Klassen et al., 2011; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1988;). It is a crucial aspect of effective teaching, as teachers with higher levels of efficacy are more likely to employ innovative instructional strategies, develop positive relationships with students, and persist in facing challenges. When considering culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students from diverse backgrounds who may have unique needs, understanding the relationship between teaching efficacy and their academic success becomes even more critical (Savolainen et al., 2022).

Teaching efficacy has been identified as a successful theory in teaching students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds (Chu & Garcia, 2014). Factors that shape teaching efficacy include teacher preparation, specialized certification, and professional development (Paneque & Barbeta, 2006; Tschannen-Moran et al., 2001). Teachers' instructional setting, language characteristics, perceived quality of professional preparation, and certification in bilingual education/English as a second language also surfaced as significant predictors of teacher efficacy (Chu & Garcia, 2014).

Furthermore, Brown (2007) noted that teachers' professional practices should be responsive to students' culture and language to reflect the principles of culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy. However, adequate professional training of faculty to create and implement interventions and services to meet the learning needs of students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds remains a concern (Chu & Garcia, 2014). One critical aspect of addressing inequitable learning experiences is for college faculty to acknowledge their biases and stereotypes that may affect their teaching practices (Guler, 2022). Unconscious biases can result in differential treatment of CLD students, leading to lower expectations, limited opportunities, and reduced support. Faculty members need to reflect on their teaching practices, confront their biases, and actively work towards creating a fair and inclusive learning environment.(Guler, 2022; Ikpuri, 2023; Kaul & Renzulli, 2022; Tigert & Leider, 2022).

Understanding Cultural and Linguistic Diversity is critical to promoting equitable learning experiences for CLD students (Wong, 2022). Cultural and linguistic diversity encompasses students from various ethnic, racial, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds (Wong, 2022). These students often face unique challenges in the classroom due to differences in language proficiency, cultural norms, and educational experiences. Educational institutions must recognize and embrace these diversities to create inclusive and equitable learning environments. Cultural responsiveness, which involves acknowledging and valuing diverse cultural backgrounds, is fundamental to fostering equitable learning experiences. Wong (2022) recommended that faculty members need to cultivate cultural competence, develop positive classroom climates, and incorporate inclusive pedagogies to meet the diverse needs of CLD students.

### **2.1 Theoretical Framework**

Bandura's (1977; 2000) social cognitive theory serves as the theoretical framework of this study. Bandura (1977) discussed the importance of self-efficacy. Teachers' sense of efficacy is an essential element that is consistently related to student achievement (Agbonifoh et al., 2016; Chu & Garcia, 2014; Seidl & Pugach, 2009). Teachers' involvement has a significant effect on CLD students' academic engagement. According to Chu and Garcia (2014), four sources of information are suggested to contribute to the development of teacher efficacy: vicarious experiences, mastery experiences, physical and emotional arousal, and social persuasion. Several studies suggested that teachers sometimes display negative attitudes toward students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and low-socioeconomic households (Banks et al., 2013; Seidl & Pugach,

2009). Teachers tend to have lower expectations and fewer interactions with these students. These kinds of behaviors lower the students' expectations and often limit the students' academic capabilities.

Furthermore, Tucker et al. (2005) noted that "teachers who have confidence in their ability to teach persist longer in their teaching efforts, provide greater academic focus in the classroom, give different types of feedback, and ultimately improve student performance" ( p.30). Teachers' attitudes could influence how CLD students learn and their academic success. Thus, teacher involvement is vital for fostering the academic engagement of CLD and low-income students. Therefore, teaching efficacy is crucial when working with students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Data Collection

This study used a sequential mixed methods design which involved two phases (Creswell & Plano, 2018, Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). In this design, the quantitative data were collected and analyzed first, while the qualitative data was collected and analyzed second (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). In the first phase, the researcher conducted an online survey with CLD students. The researcher identified a sample of 100 CLD students, both local and international students; however, only 72 students completed the survey, N=72. The survey collected demographic data on CLD students on several items, such as gender, race/ethnicity, and country of birth. Aside from the student's demographic information, the study collected information on students' academic integration, social integration, housing, language proficiency, and financial situation. The survey participants were recruited with the help of the Student Union Office/International Office through email invitations requesting their participation in the study.

In the second phase, the researcher interviewed five faculty members on their experience with teaching students from CLD backgrounds and initiatives that might improve CLD students' learning experiences. The interview participants were recruited through the assistance of a gatekeeper in the office of professional development who provided contact details of the faculty members, and an invitation email was sent to each of them requesting their participation in the study. Approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) before collecting any data. All participants signed a Consent Form before participating in the study. All participants and locations mentioned were de-identified and given pseudonyms to provide confidentiality.

#### 3.2 Data Analysis

The quantitative data were subjected to SPSS software to generate descriptive statistics. The researcher examined the data descriptively to obtain demographic information on the CLD students. The data were analyzed through descriptive statistics and frequency distribution tables. The frequency distribution table provided the number of people and the percentage belonging to each of the categories in relation to all the different types of variables. This was used to show dominant participant response patterns (Bryman, 2016; Ikpuri, 2018).

Furthermore, the qualitative data were analyzed using the In vivo coding technique (Saldaña & Omasta, 2019). This technique involves utilizing the participant's language as a symbol system for qualitative data analysis (Saldaña & Omasta, 2019). The interview transcripts were read and re-read to identify words/phrases that stood out. The researcher then used the thematic analysis approach to identify and analyze emerging themes. The results of the quantitative and qualitative phases were integrated during the discussion of the outcomes of the entire study.

### 4. Results

#### 4.1 Quantitative Result

As noted earlier, the study sample was 100 CLD students in a community college in South Florida. However, a total of 72 students completed the survey. Table 1 below shows the percentage of students that responded to the survey items.

**Table 1** Demographic Information of CLD Students

Variables	Frequency Total Sample (%) N = 72
<i>Gender</i>	
Male	53.6
Female	46.4
<i>Ethnicity/Race</i>	
White	-
Black	33.4

Asian	12.3
Hispanic	51.1
Other or more than one race	3.2
<b><i>Residence Status</i></b>	
Local	12
International	88
<b><i>Housing Status</i></b>	
On campus	34.7
Off-campus	65.3

As indicated in Table 1, out of the 72 participants that completed the survey, 53.6% are male, while 46.4% are female. Regarding ethnicity/race, about half of the participants (51.1%) identified as Hispanic or Latino, 33.4% identified as Black, 12.3% were Asian, and 3.2% were mixed or more than one race. Notably, 88% of the participants were international students (required student visas), while only 12% were local students. Most students (65.3%) lived off campus, while 34.7% lived on campus. It is important to note that on-campus residence is usually more expensive than off-campus accommodation. Also, students must move out of residence after every academic year. This creates a challenge for students who are not local and are not traveling back home. Hence, international students prefer on-campus accommodation.

**Table 2 Academic Integration of CLD Students on Campus**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Frequency Total Sample (%) N = 72</b>
<b><i>Involvement in a study group</i></b>	
Often	14.3
Sometimes	44.4
Never	41.3
<b><i>Casual meetings with faculty</i></b>	
Often	3.2
Sometimes	7.2
Never	89.6
<b><i>Communications with faculty outside of class</i></b>	
Often	17.3
Sometimes	67.5
Never	15.2
<b><i>Meetings with academic advisor</i></b>	
Often	61.6
Sometimes	35.1
Never	3.3

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics of academic integration of CLD students on campus based on several items. As indicated in Table two, 41.3% of CLD students were never involved in a study group, 44.3% indicated they sometimes participated in a study group, and 14.3% participated frequently. Most CLD students never had an informal meeting with their professors. In the same vein, 7.2% sometimes met casually with their professors. While only 3.2% had casual meetings with their professor. Furthermore, more than half (67.5%) of CLD students sometimes interacted with their professors outside of class, 15.2% never interacted with their professors, and less than two-thirds interacted with their professors outside of class. A little over two-thirds of the CLD students (61.6%) often met with their academic advisor, 35.1% occasionally met with their academic advisor, and only 3.3% never met with their academic advisor.

**Table 3 Social Integration of CLD Students on Campus**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Frequency Total Sample (%) N = 72</b>
<b><i>Involvement in school clubs</i></b>	
Often	13.1
Sometimes	37.6
Never	49.3
<b><i>Involvement in school sports</i></b>	
Often	11.2

Sometimes	21.1
Never	67.7
<b><i>Involvement in other extracurricular activities</i></b>	
Often	51.5
Sometimes	32.3
Never	16.2

Table three presents descriptive statistics of social integration of CLD students on campus based on several items. As indicated in Table three, 49.3% of CLD students never participated in school clubs, 37.6% stated they sometimes participated, and 13.1% participated often. Similarly, most CLD students (67.7%) were never involved in school sports; 21.1% sometimes participated, while 11.2% were often involved in school sports. Meanwhile, A little over half of the CLD students (51.5%) often participated in other extracurricular activities, 32.3% occasionally participated in other extracurricular activities, while only 16.2% never participated in other extracurricular activities on campus.

Table 4 Financial situation of CLD students

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Frequency Total Sample (%) N = 72</b>
<b><i>Received financial aid</i></b>	
Yes	10
No	90
<b><i>Financial help from parents/family</i></b>	
Yes	77
No	23
<b><i>Had a job while in school</i></b>	
Yes	88
No	22

As shown in Table 4, only 10% of CLD students received financial aid from the government. However, most CLD students (90%) did not receive any financial help from the government. This is because most of the participants are international students, and international students do not qualify for any form of financial aid from the government. Most CLD students' finances come from parents and/or family members. As shown in Table 4, the result shows that 77% of CLD finance comes from their parents or family members. Moreover, to support the finance of their education, most CLD students (88%) had a job while in school. Only about 22% did not work while in school. Overall. Most CLD students finance their education predominantly from family or personal funds.

Table 5 Academic Preparation of CLD Students

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Frequency Total Sample (%) N = 72</b>
<b><i>Took an English remedial course</i></b>	
Yes	59
No	41
<b><i>Took Reading remedial course</i></b>	
Yes	64
No	36
<b><i>Took Math remedial course</i></b>	
Yes	89
No	11
<b><i>Took a Writing remedial course</i></b>	
Yes	91
No	9

As specified in Table 5, only 59% of CLD students took a remedial course in English, 64% took a remedial course in reading, 89% took a remedial course in Math, and 91% took a remedial course in writing. On the other hand, the result shows that about 41% appear to be proficient in English because they did not take any English remedial course. About 36% of the CLD students did not take any remedial reading course, which suggests over one-third of the CLD students are proficient in reading. Only 11% did not take a Math remedial course, and 9% did not take a writing remedial course. This result suggests that most CLD students are not

proficient in writing and speaking effectively. This shortcoming will likely affect how they interact with their professors and peers. Similarly, they could find it difficult to express their ideas or complete assignments due to language barriers. This barrier affects their learning experience.

#### **4.2 Qualitative Result**

The following themes emerged from the qualitative data analysis based on the faculty members' responses.

##### **4.2.1 Theme 1: Understanding Cultural and Linguistic Diversity**

Cultural and linguistic diversity encompasses students from various ethnic, racial, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. These students often face unique challenges in the classroom due to differences in language proficiency, cultural norms, and educational experiences. Educational institutions must recognize and embrace these diversities to create inclusive and equitable learning environments. According to one of the participants: One participant said:

"My university is very diverse. We have people from all over the world, different languages, and different colors; it is one of the best things about our university that I like. There are different types of students. Some are more computer literate and more familiar with online things, whereas some students don't know it either."

Acknowledging and valuing diverse cultural backgrounds is fundamental to fostering equitable learning experiences. Wong (2022) recommended that faculty members need to cultivate cultural competence, develop positive classroom climates, and incorporate inclusive pedagogies to meet the diverse needs of CLD students. Developing strong relationships between faculty and CLD students is essential for promoting equitable learning experiences. College faculty should try to understand students' backgrounds, cultures, and languages, demonstrating cultural competence. Faculty members can establish a sense of belonging, trust, and respect by acknowledging and valuing students' identities. Creating an inclusive classroom climate encourages active participation and collaboration and promotes academic success among CLD students.

##### **4.2.2 Theme 2: Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Culturally responsive teaching is a vital approach that recognizes and values students' diverse cultural backgrounds in the classroom. It goes beyond simply acknowledging cultural differences and actively integrating them into the teaching and learning process. This approach is essential for creating an inclusive and equitable educational environment (Gittens, 2007). Implementing culturally responsive pedagogy is crucial for meeting the diverse needs of CLD students. Culturally responsive teaching involves incorporating students' cultural backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives into the curriculum and instructional methods. Faculty members should strive to develop a representative and inclusive curriculum, integrating diverse voices and perspectives. Doing so can create a supportive learning environment where CLD students feel valued, respected, and engaged. According to one of the participants:

"Some students are not prepared for college. So that kind of made us need to learn, maybe dial back, and teach this generation differently. But I think every instructor has experienced this in one way or another, just with the interaction with students and how they perform on exams and prepare for exams."

O'Leary et al. (2020) argued that culturally responsive teaching ensures that all students feel welcomed and included in the classroom regardless of their cultural backgrounds. Valuing and incorporating students' cultures, experiences, and perspectives creates a sense of belonging and validates their identities. This inclusivity fosters positive relationships, mutual respect, and a supportive learning environment. Culturally responsive teaching leverages students' prior knowledge, experiences, and interests, making learning relevant and meaningful. It taps into their cultural assets and utilizes them as valuable resources for academic success. By incorporating students' cultural identities and experiences, culturally responsive teaching creates a more equitable and enriching educational experience for CLD students.

##### **4.2.3 Theme 3: English Language Support**

Language plays a vital role in students' academic success. College faculty should recognize the linguistic diversity among CLD students and provide appropriate language support. Providing bilingual resources or implementing teaching strategies that accommodate various language proficiency levels. One participant mentioned how some college students struggle with writing. According to the participant:

"The grammar, the sentence structure. It is just not at the college level. And it is difficult as veteran teachers to work with students who are not performing at a high level, so we've had to change how we instruct a little bit. And it would be helpful if we had more training on the type of students we are getting. Hmm, what they are lacking is the best way to reach them and get our point across, so they learn the material and do well on exams."

Embracing multilingualism in the classroom can enhance CLD students' learning experiences and foster their academic growth. Providing effective ELS helps bridge the language and cultural gaps, enabling CLD students to access educational opportunities and thrive in their studies. It is essential to assess the language proficiency of CLD students to understand their specific needs. This assessment can include speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. It helps identify students' strengths and areas that require further support.

#### **4.2.4 Theme 4: Professional Development and Collaboration**

The data analysis revealed that there is a need to provide training to faculty regarding teaching students from CLD backgrounds. Similarly, faculty need to understand the best instructional practices and strategies that can enhance the learning experiences of students from CLD backgrounds. One participant said:

"The institution tries to provide training once a year with COVID-19 happening and us moving online in March. We received training right away to transition to online learning, which was different than usual. But overall, maybe once a year. Professional Development outside of the university. If I had my choice, it would happen at least once a semester".

From the participant's point of view, the training that faculty receives once a year is inadequate. Faculty need more training to be more effective. Creating a faculty development program can also influence how faculty feel about their role as a teacher and can increase teacher self-efficacy. Again, some faculty members may lack the right pedagogical skills to teach CLD students. Faculty would be more successful in teaching diverse student populations if faculty development were made available for them.

To enhance faculty's teaching efficacy, there is a need to consider the teaching styles of faculty members regarding working with CLD students. This is vital because these students have a different level of preparation. New techniques or new teaching methods can enhance the learning experiences of CLD students. College faculty should actively engage in professional development opportunities focused on cultural competence, diversity, and inclusive teaching practices to improve their teaching efficacy. Institutions can provide workshops, seminars, and resources to support faculty in their efforts to address the needs of CLD students. Collaboration between faculty members, student support services, and administrators can also significantly promote equitable learning experiences and share effective strategies.

## **5. Discussion**

The study results show that several factors contribute to inequitable learning and college experiences of CLD students. These include language, finance, social integration, and academic preparation. These factors influence how CLD students learn. Finance constitutes a significant factor that affects low-income and CLD students. For example, international students pay higher tuition as compared to domestic students. This substantial financial commitment tends to affect them. Instead of focusing on learning, their focus is divided as they think about how to ensure their tuition is paid. This financial burden affects their learning experience.

CLD students sometimes do not possess a sound academic background, such as reading textbooks, asking questions in class, and preparing for examinations (Akanwa, 2015). This poor preparation makes it difficult for them to adapt to the college teaching style; some students may have a poor relationship with their professors, and these issues tend to affect their learning experience. In the same vein, English language is an essential element that determines how students learn, and most CLD students are not proficient in writing and speaking effectively. This shortcoming will likely affect how they interact with their professors and peers. Some CLD students experience culture shock due to coming to a new environment with different cultures and learning dynamics (Hegarty, 2014). All these factors make it difficult for them to adapt to the college teaching style. Hence, there is a need to consider how faculty can help these students to succeed academically.

In line with previous studies, Mamiseishvili (2012) stated that international students who required remedial English in their first year in college were less likely to succeed than international students who did not have to take any remedial English. Similarly, the author found a positive and significant relationship between academic performance and language proficiency (Mamiseishvili, 2012). This suggests that CLD students who come to the United States have better language skills and academic preparation and are more likely to succeed than CLD those who lack academic preparedness and language proficiency.

To address the issue of inequitable learning experiences for CLD students, faculty members can employ various strategies that enhance teaching efficacy. Fostering a culturally responsive classroom climate requires creating a safe and inclusive space where students' identities and experiences are acknowledged and respected. Secondly, incorporating inclusive pedagogies involves utilizing diverse teaching methods, materials, and assessment strategies that accommodate different learning styles and cultural backgrounds. Lastly, ongoing professional development opportunities, such as workshops and training sessions, can equip faculty members with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively support CLD students.

Having a belief that one can be successful is a crucial component of teaching. A strong faculty development program designed with evidence-based practices, an encouraging environment, and targeted to the unique needs of the diverse students will help faculty develop competence in teaching and improve their teaching efficacy. Participation in faculty development programs allows faculty members to observe good teaching techniques and participate in discussions that provide feedback about their teaching, which can create a positive experience and opportunity for growth.

### **Conclusion**

To this end, this study explored factors affecting CLD students' learning experience and how faculty members' teaching efficacy could promote equitable learning experiences for this set of students in community colleges. The teaching efficacy of college faculty is pivotal in addressing the inequitable learning experiences CLD students face. Faculty members can create inclusive learning environments where all students thrive by actively engaging in culturally responsive practices, implementing culturally responsive pedagogy, providing language support, fostering relationships, and engaging in professional development. Community colleges should prioritize equitable practices, support faculty in enhancing their teaching efficacy, and continue working towards eliminating disparities in academic outcomes for CLD students. Only through collective efforts can we ensure that all students, regardless of their cultural and linguistic backgrounds, receive an equitable and enriching education.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The sample size of the study was quite small. This small sample size may affect the generalization of the research findings and results, according to Bryman (2016). A small sample could have a possibility of producing a biased result.

### **Recommendations for Practitioners**

Recommendation for practitioners includes conducting faculty training on teaching efficacy that can improve the learning experiences of CLD students at community colleges. The institution may introduce workshops that include pedagogical training for faculty members when dealing with CLD students. Similarly, a professional learning community is another avenue that can enhance faculty's knowledge. CLD students are stressed when an academic task is beyond their capability. Even when a task is within their performance capability, it becomes stressful when students are over-extended emotionally or physically. Hence, CLD students need academic support and the right teaching and learning environment to succeed.

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