

**THE IMPACT OF SPEECH ANXIETY (GLOSSOPHOBIA) ON STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE IN PUBLIC SPEAKING CLASS**

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ABSTRACT

Speech anxiety, also known as glossophobia, is one of the most common psychological problems that affects students' performance in public speaking classes. It can cause physical symptoms like trembling and a fast heartbeat, as well as emotional stress, which makes it difficult for students to speak confidently in front of others. This study aims to understand how speech anxiety affects students' performance and to identify the main causes and useful strategies to reduce it. The research was conducted with sixth-semester students from the public speaking class at Politeknik Tonggak Equator during the 2024/2025 academic year. A descriptive method was used, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Data were collected through questionnaires given to students and interviews conducted with the lecturer of the course. These methods provided both general and detailed information about students' experiences. The results show that low self-confidence, lack of preparation, and fear of being judged are the main causes of speech anxiety. Students who practiced more, received supportive feedback, and gradually became familiar with speaking in front of others were better at managing their anxiety. These findings are expected to help teachers build a more supportive classroom environment and help students improve their confidence and public speaking skills.

Keywords: Speech Anxiety, Glossophobia, Student Performance, Public Speaking, Politeknik Tonggak Equator

INTRODUCTION

Public speaking is an essential skill that is highly demanded in both academic and professional environments. However, many students experience intense fear or anxiety when they have to speak in front of an audience, a condition known as glossophobia or speech anxiety. Glossophobia is considered one of the most common forms of social anxiety, affecting approximately 75% of people worldwide (Daly et al., 2014, p.13). This anxiety often impairs students' ability to deliver presentations effectively, ultimately negatively impacting their performance in public speaking classes.

Speech anxiety can cause various negative effects, both physically and mentally, such as increased heart rate, sweating, trembling, and difficulty thinking clearly (Horwitz et al., 1986, p.5). In the classroom context, students experiencing this anxiety often feel hindered in delivering the material they have prepared, which in turn affects the quality of their presentation and their audience engagement. This is particularly concerning because public speaking is a core component of many higher education curricula, designed to enhance students' communication skills (Lucas, 2011, p.3).

Previous research has shown that speech anxiety directly impacts students' self-confidence, participation in class activities, and overall academic achievement (Beatty & Behnke, 1991, p.2). Furthermore, this anxiety is often exacerbated by several factors, such as the pressure to perform perfectly, fear of negative evaluation from the audience, and a lack of experience in public speaking (McCroskey, 1977).

This study was conducted during the sixth semester of the 2024/2025 academic year at Politeknik Tonggak Equator, focusing exclusively on students enrolled in the public speaking class. The study aims to explore the extent to which glossophobia affects students' performance in delivering presentations, identify the primary factors contributing to speech anxiety in classroom settings, and examine strategies that can be applied to reduce its negative effects. A better understanding of the relationship between speech anxiety and student performance is crucial to creating a more supportive and effective learning environment in public speaking classes.

Theoretically, the results of this study can serve as a foundation for further research on speech anxiety and public speaking performance, as well as enrich the academic literature. It helps broaden the understanding of psychological influences on student performance, particularly in relation to anxiety in communication contexts. Practically, this research offers insights that may help students improve their communication skills, not only in formal presentations but also in broader public speaking settings. It may also encourage the implementation of learning strategies specifically tailored for students with speech anxiety, such as more gradual or individualized public speaking practice. Additionally, the findings may inform educators in developing teaching methods that better support students in overcoming speech anxiety and enhancing their public speaking abilities.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The Nature of Speech Anxiety (Glossophobia)

“Glossophobia, also known as speech anxiety, is a fear associated with public speaking. The term comes from the Greek words *glōssa* (meaning “tongue”) and *phobos* (“fear or horror”)” (Gregersen, Horwitz, 2002, p.62). It is one of the most common fears in the world, affecting approximately 75% of college students, with more college students reporting a fear of public speaking than of death. This fear can affect both physical and emotional responses in individuals. “Physically, college students may experience symptoms such as dry mouth, trembling hands, flushed face, sweating, and irregular breathing. Emotionally, they feel intense anxiety, fear of embarrassment, and fear of looking stupid in front of their peers” (Kushner, 2004, p. 20).

According to Furmark (2002) and Pollard & Henderson (1998), “women, in particular, often report higher levels of speaking anxiety than men.” “This anxiety can also appear in the form of anticipatory anxiety, which means individuals may begin to feel anxious long before the actual speaking event, as they anticipate potential challenges or threats” (Scovel, 1991, p.101). For example, a college student may worry about an upcoming class presentation week in advance, imagining the fear of speaking in front of others. People with speaking anxiety may avoid these situations altogether or endure them with significant distress. Although they often recognize that their anxiety may be excessive or irrational, they find it difficult to manage these feelings without support or intervention.

Level of Speech Anxiety

The level of anxiety among individuals varies widely. Based on the intensity of symptoms and their impact on speech activities, it can be categorized into mild, moderate, and

severe levels. These levels affect the way students respond to situations when speaking in public.

1. Mild Speech Anxiety

College students with mild levels of speech anxiety may experience some signs of nervousness, such as stomach discomfort and slight sweating, but they are generally able to manage these symptoms and continue speaking in front of the class. Even this level of speech anxiety can increase focus or alertness. Based on Yerkes and Dodson's Law (1908, p.479), "mild levels of arousal or anxiety can actually improve speaking performance, as it keeps college students alert and engaged without feeling overwhelmed."

2. Moderate Speech Anxiety

At this level, speech anxiety starts to interfere with the college student's public speaking performance. Symptoms such as a rapid heartbeat, dry mouth or shaky hands and college students may begin to struggle to focus on their speech or organize their thoughts. "Moderate speech anxiety can also lead to overthinking where students excessively worry about their performance before they perform, which often leads to avoidance behavior" (Scovel, 1991, p.15)

3. Severe Speech Anxiety

Severe speech anxiety or panic level, involves intense symptoms that can make students feel "paralyzed." Students will experience symptoms of severe shortness of breath, excessive sweating, intense nausea, and even a feeling of great danger. At this level, college students will avoid public speaking situations because the fear and sense of embarrassment or failure is too great (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986).

Causes of Speech Anxiety in Students

According to Joseph A Devito writes that "one of the most important problems in speech or public speaking is the speaker's anxiety or what is often called stage fright." Devito says that there are 6 factors that cause a person's anxiety when speaking in public, namely:

1. Self-confidence

Self-confidence is a person's belief in their ability to perform certain behaviors or to achieve certain targets. Wahyuni's research (2013, p.221) shows that "there is a significant relationship between the level of public speaking anxiety and student self-confidence." Students' self-confidence is assumed to affect their level of anxiety in public speaking. Students who feel unsure of their ability to speak in front of the class often experience speech anxiety. Low self-confidence can make them worry about being evaluated or making mistakes that interfere with their performance when speaking in public speaking classes.

2. Preparation

One of the causes of anxiety in public speaking class performance is the lack of material preparation. This material should be well-prepared and supported with accurate data. The more they understand the material, the more knowledge they will have which can increase their confidence. When students feel underprepared or do not master the material well, they tend to experience confusion about how to convey information effectively. This lack of preparation causes them to feel unsure of their ability to speak fluently, which then exacerbates nervousness and anxiety (Scovel, 1991).

3. Practice

Practice in public speaking is essential to help students feel more confident and familiar with the situation at hand. "Lack of practice or speaking experience makes students tend to feel anxious when they have to speak in front of the class. When someone practices frequently, they become more familiar with the process of speaking in front of an audience,

so they can gradually overcome nervousness” (McCroskey, J. C., 1977, p.80). Practice allows students to hone their speaking skills, such as how to convey arguments clearly and techniques to interact with the audience. Without adequate practice, students will feel unprepared for the pressure of speaking in front of a large audience, making it easier to feel anxious.

4. Experience

Lack of public speaking experience often exacerbates anxiety when faced with similar situations. Students who rarely participate in public speaking activities usually feel awkward and anxious. Hancock et al. (2010, p.4) explain that “students who are less familiar with public settings often feel greater anxiety because they do not yet have the skills or strategies to deal with audiences.” This limited speaking experience leaves them vulnerable to intense feelings of nervousness, especially as they lack the knowledge or practical skills to manage the pressures that arise in speaking situations.

5. Audience

Audience is one of the causes of student anxiety in public speaking practice. For example, if students speak in front of classmates or lecturers who are considered critical, the anxiety felt can increase significantly. Devito (2011, p.1) states that “unfamiliar audiences or those considered more senior and authoritative can trigger feelings of discomfort and fear of being judged.” Students may feel that they have to meet certain expectations or standards from the audience, which makes them feel more strictly judged. These concerns often cause students to be anxious for fear of making mistakes that will tarnish their reputation or reduce positive perceptions from the audience.

6. Unfavorable experiences in the past

Unfavorable past experiences, such as being humiliated during public speaking, can create trauma and cause ongoing fear. According to Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope (1986, p.132), “these negative experiences lead to internalized feelings of fear, which can resurface when it comes to speaking in front of an audience in a public speaking class. As a result, they feel anxious about repeating the bad experience and avoid situations that may cause them to feel embarrassed or fail.”

Impact of Speech Anxiety on Student Performance

Speaking anxiety can significantly affect college students' performance in oral presentation and public speaking tasks. “This anxiety can cause physical symptoms such as increased heart rate, sweating and trembling, as well as cognitive challenges such as difficulty in concentrating and thinking clearly” (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986, p.132). These symptoms often lead to decreased confidence and poor delivery, which can hinder communication effectiveness. Students may experience mental blocks, which make it difficult for them to organize their thoughts, resulting in disjointed presentations. Additionally, speaking anxiety can reduce engagement, causing college students to rely too heavily on notes or avoid eye contact with the audience, further reducing the impact of their presentation.

Strategies to Overcome Speech Anxiety

To overcome the public speaking anxiety experienced by students, there are four strategies found by Kondo and Ying Ling (2004) there are:

1. Preparation

Preparation strategy helps students overcome speech anxiety by increasing learning, for example by re-read the material that will be presented, studying a lot of vocabulary and grammar, reading while looking for the material to be presented makes students get a lot of new vocabulary. "Students overcome their speech anxiety by increasing their knowledge of the language by reading lots of newspapers, books, watching TV News, cartoons and movies. Students also try to improve their pronunciation by practicing speaking with friends. In addition, students also practice more, make preparations and try to use English in everyday life" (Rafieyan, 2016, p.111).

2. Relaxation Strategies

Relaxation strategies that have been proven to be effective for overcoming speech anxiety and are suitable techniques for overcoming speech anxiety. The relaxation strategy has several ways to do one of which is to take a deep breath. "One of the techniques developed by Andrew Weil is 4-7-8. Inhaling, holding your breath, and exhaling for 4, 7 and 8 respectively, is the 4-7-8 breathing control method" (Vierra et al., 2022, p.10). Apart from that, relaxation techniques can be done by stretching the muscles, meditating, and listening to music.

3. Positive Thinking Strategies

"Positive thinking strategies that help students overcome speech anxiety with a palliative function that focuses on the cognitive problems underlying students' speaking anxiety" (Kondo & Ying-Ling, 2004, p.2). Positive thinking can also improve students' ability to manage stress. Positive thinking helps reduce student anxiety, and increases students' ability to manage stress, so they are able to connect their thoughts, feelings and behavior. "Apart from that, students can also try self-efficacy, self-efficacy is belief in one's own ability to successfully carry out, manage and carry out tasks, this can be a good motivation for students" (Maulidia & DJ, 2023, p.1).

4. Peer Seeking Strategy

Peer seeking strategy that helps students find comfort in thinking that they are not the only ones who have difficulty understanding speaking class. In addition, Kondo & Ying-Ling, (2004, p.11) also stated that "seeing people who have the same anxiety as themselves can be a source of emotional regulation by social comparison for students who experience speech anxiety.

METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a descriptive research design. It aims to describe the impact of speech anxiety (Glossophobia) on students' performance in public speaking class. The collected data will be used to explore the students' experiences and perceptions regarding their levels of anxiety and its impact on their performance. The research will be conducted at Politeknik Tonggak Equator, specifically in Public Speaking classes under English for Business and Professional Communication majors. This research has done in March-April 2025.

The writers selected fifth-semester students from the English for Business and Professional Communication study program as research subjects because they had completed the Public Speaking course and had classroom speaking experience. A total of 50 students who met the criteria and were willing to participate were chosen to complete the questionnaire.

This research employed a questionnaire as the primary data collection instrument. The questionnaire will be distributed online using Google Forms to facilitate easy access and efficient data collection. In addition to the questionnaire, a semi-structured interview will be

conducted with the lecturer of the public speaking course to gain deeper insights into students' speaking performance, anxiety symptoms, and classroom behavior. The interview will allow the researcher to collect qualitative data that will complement the questionnaire findings.

FINDINGS

This research was conducted to determine the impact of speaking anxiety (Glossophobia) on student performance in Public Speaking classes. Data was collected through a questionnaire of 51 POLTEQ students in the 6th semester who had taken the Public Speaking class as well as an interview with the lecturer teaching the course.

Findings of Questionnaire

Based on the diagram, the majority of respondents experience significant anxiety when speaking in front of the class. A large portion, around 74.5%, report feeling nervous and anxious before giving a presentation. Additionally, 56.9% experience physical symptoms such as trembling hands, sweating, or a racing heartbeat when it is their turn to speak. Many students, about 56.9%, tend to avoid situations where they are required to speak in front of others, while 64.7% admit to feeling a lack of confidence in these situations. Fear of criticism and judgment is also common, with 70.6% expressing fear of being criticized by lecturers or classmates, and 49% admitting they are afraid of being laughed at. Anxiety levels are even higher when speaking in English (62.7%) or in front of people who are more experienced (72.5%).

Previous negative experiences have also contributed to this anxiety, as 60.8% say that such experiences have made them more hesitant to speak again. The impact of anxiety on performance is notable, with 70.6% finding it difficult to concentrate and remember what they want to say during a presentation. Moreover, 68.6% often forget their words or lose track of what they want to say, while 64.7% tend to speak too quickly when nervous. Many also report trembling voices (with a combined 94.2% agreeing or strongly agreeing), avoiding eye contact due to discomfort (60.8%), and relying heavily on written notes (68.6%). This anxiety ultimately leads 70.6% of respondents to feel that their performance is less than optimal.

Despite these challenges, a majority of respondents have found certain coping strategies to be helpful. For example, 66.7% say that practicing repeatedly before a presentation helps reduce their anxiety, and the same percentage find breathing techniques effective for calming themselves. A large number, 80.4%, try to overcome fear by thinking positively, while 60.8% practice by speaking in front of a mirror or recording themselves. These findings suggest that while speaking anxiety is common among students, many are actively seeking and using methods to manage and reduce it.

Finding of Interview

| Questions | Answers |
|--|--|
| How often does the Informant meet students who experience speaking anxiety in class? | Based on anecdotal observation maybe 5 out of 10. |
| From the Informant experience, what are the signs or symptoms of speaking anxiety that are often seen in students? | Again, anecdotal assumption, inability to carry on with speech, inability to establish eye contact, inaudible voice. |
| According to the Informant, what are the | Experience, lack of preparation, the |

| | |
|--|--|
| main factors that cause students to experience speaking anxiety? | unfamiliarity with the use of the language, and the old public speaking anxiety. |
| How does speaking anxiety affect students' presentation quality and confidence? | Sometimes poorly. |
| Do students who experience speaking anxiety tend to have difficulty in thinking clearly or conveying ideas in a structured manner? | Obviously. Due to the factors given for number 3. |
| From the Informant observation, does speaking anxiety also have an impact on students' academic grades in public speaking class? | Yes. |
| What strategies do the Informant use to help students overcome speaking anxiety? Or maybe based on your experience. | Tell them that it's normal, and to focus on the message. |
| What advice can the informant give for students who want to reduce their speaking anxiety so that they can appear more confident in presenting in public speaking class? | Other factors aside, preparation will help. |

Table 4.1 Interview with the Informant

Based on the interview with the Informant, it was found that speech anxiety is a common issue among students in public speaking classes. According to his anecdotal observation, about 5 out of 10 students experience this problem, indicating that nearly half of the students struggle with anxiety when speaking in front of an audience. One of the most frequently observed symptoms of speaking anxiety includes inability to continue the speech, failure to establish eye contact, and an inaudible voice. These signs indicate a significant impact of anxiety on students' ability to communicate effectively.

Regarding the main factors causing speaking anxiety, Informant highlighted lack of experience, poor preparation, unfamiliarity with the language used, and general public speaking anxiety. These factors contribute to students' fear and hesitation when delivering presentations, making it difficult for them to perform confidently. Furthermore, speaking anxiety negatively affects students' presentation quality and confidence. In some cases, students struggle to think clearly and organize their ideas in a structured manner, making their delivery less effective. This aligns with the factors mentioned earlier, where a lack of preparation and experience leads to confusion during the presentation.

Additionally, speech anxiety has a direct impact on students' academic performance in public speaking classes. Since their ability to deliver a structured and clear presentation is compromised, their grades are also affected. To help students overcome this issue, the Informant encourages them to understand that anxiety is normal and advises them to focus on the message rather than their fear. He also emphasizes that preparation plays a crucial role in

reducing anxiety, as being well-prepared can boost confidence and improve overall performance.

In summary, the interview findings indicate that speech anxiety is a significant challenge for students, affecting both their performance and academic outcomes. However, by recognizing the causes and implementing strategies such as proper preparation and focusing on the message, students can gradually reduce their anxiety and become more confident speakers.

Discussion

The findings of the questionnaire and interview highlight that speech anxiety is a prevalent issue among students in public speaking classes. The results indicate that a significant majority of respondents' experience nervousness before speaking in front of the class. This aligns with the literature on glossophobia, which suggests that speech anxiety is one of the most common fears among students (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002). The physical symptoms reported by respondents, such as trembling hands, sweating, and a racing heartbeat, further reinforce the findings of Kushner (2004), who noted that speech anxiety manifests in both physical and emotional responses.

One of the key factors contributing to speech anxiety among students is past negative experiences in public speaking. The data indicate that more than half of the respondents believe that previous bad experiences have increased their fear. This supports the idea that anxiety can be reinforced by past failures or criticisms, making students more apprehensive about future speaking situations. Moreover, Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope (1986) suggest that unfavorable past experiences, such as being humiliated or ridiculed, can lead to long-term speech anxiety, making students avoid speaking opportunities. This avoidance behavior can create a cycle where students do not gain enough speaking experience, thus exacerbating their anxiety further.

Furthermore, the findings show that fear of peer judgment and criticism from lecturers plays a significant role in increasing students' anxiety. This is consistent with Wahyuni (2013), who emphasized the relationship between low self-confidence and public speaking anxiety. Self-confidence, or the lack thereof, is a crucial factor affecting students' ability to perform well in public speaking classes. When students feel they are being scrutinized by peers or authority figures, their anxiety levels tend to rise, leading to hesitations, stuttering, or even avoidance of speaking opportunities. As Devito (2011) highlights, speaking in front of unfamiliar or highly authoritative audiences intensifies the fear of being judged negatively.

Language barriers also emerged as a significant factor contributing to speech anxiety. Many respondents reported feeling more anxious when speaking in English rather than in their native language. This aligns with Scovel (1991), who highlighted that unfamiliarity with the language can increase anticipatory anxiety and lead to avoidance behavior. The lack of fluency in a second language can create additional pressure, as students worry about mispronunciations, grammatical errors, or an inability to express their thoughts clearly. Rafieyan (2016) supports this finding, stating that students who feel unprepared linguistically tend to experience higher levels of anxiety when delivering presentations.

Additionally, students feel more nervous when speaking in front of an audience perceived to be more knowledgeable or experienced than themselves. This suggests that audience composition can greatly influence a speaker's confidence, a phenomenon also noted by Hancock et al. (2010). When students perceive their audience as critical or more skilled, their anxiety may escalate, causing them to struggle with coherence, voice projection, and overall delivery. The fear of failing to meet perceived expectations can cause mental blocks and reduce performance effectiveness.

Avoidance behavior was another common response to public speaking anxiety. More than half of the respondents admitted that they tend to avoid situations where they have to speak in front of many people. This supports Scovel's (1991) assertion that moderate to severe speech anxiety can lead to avoidance behaviors, which may further hinder students' ability to develop their public speaking skills. Avoidance not only limits students' opportunities to improve but also reinforces the belief that public speaking is a fearful experience, leading to a continuous cycle of anxiety and underperformance.

The results also highlight the coping strategies students employ to manage their anxiety. A majority of respondents practice speaking in front of a mirror or record themselves to improve their performance, which supports McCroskey's (1977) findings that practice can help reduce anxiety. This method allows students to identify areas for improvement, build familiarity with their speech, and gain confidence in their delivery. Kondo and Ying Ling (2004) suggest that structured preparation is one of the most effective ways to combat speech anxiety, as it provides students with a sense of control over their presentations.

Additionally, many students rely on breathing techniques and positive thinking to manage their fear, reinforcing the effectiveness of relaxation strategies in reducing anxiety (Furmark, 2002). Techniques such as the 4-7-8 breathing method (Vierra et al., 2022) have been shown to help students regulate their physiological responses, allowing them to remain calm and focused during their speeches. Positive thinking, as emphasized by Kondo & Ying Ling (2004), also plays a vital role in reducing anxiety. By shifting their mindset from self-doubt to confidence, students can improve their ability to handle stress and perform better in public speaking situations.

The interview findings with Informan provide further insight into the impact of speech anxiety. He observed that approximately half of his students struggle with this issue, with common symptoms including failure to establish eye contact, inaudible voice, and an inability to continue speaking. His perspective aligns with the research of Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope (1986), which states that severe speech anxiety can cause students to feel paralyzed and unable to communicate effectively. Moreover, he emphasized the importance of preparation in reducing anxiety, a point also noted by Scovel (1991), who found that students with well-prepared material tend to feel more confident.

Furthermore, the concept of peer-seeking strategies (Kondo & Ying Ling, 2004) was also evident in the responses of students. Many students mentioned that discussing their fears with classmates who share similar experiences helped them feel less isolated. Seeing others who experience the same challenges can serve as a source of emotional support and validation, reducing the perception that speech anxiety is an individual failure rather than a common experience.

Overall, the findings of this study confirm that speech anxiety is a multifaceted issue influenced by past experiences, language barriers, audience composition, and self-confidence levels. While anxiety negatively affects students' performance, the use of strategies such as preparation, practice, relaxation techniques, and peer support can help mitigate its impact. Recognizing the causes of speech anxiety and implementing effective coping mechanisms can contribute to students' long-term confidence and success in public speaking. Institutions should consider integrating structured public speaking training, workshops on anxiety management, and peer mentoring programs to support students in overcoming speech-related fears. By addressing speech anxiety comprehensively, students can develop greater confidence and competence in their communication skills, ultimately enhancing their academic and professional growth.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that speech anxiety has a significant impact on students' performance in delivering presentations. Most students experience noticeable physical and psychological symptoms such as trembling, excessive sweating, a racing heartbeat, mental blocks, and difficulty maintaining eye contact that negatively affect their ability to speak confidently and effectively. In more serious cases, students may even avoid speaking tasks altogether, which further hinders their growth in public speaking skills.

The research also identified several dominant factors that contribute to speech anxiety. One of the primary causes is students' past negative experiences, such as being criticized or embarrassed during previous presentations, which lead to a long-lasting fear of failure. In addition, fear of judgment, especially from peers and lecturers, low self-confidence, and limited language proficiency, particularly in English, were found to be major contributors. The audience composition also plays a role; students reported feeling more anxious when speaking in front of individuals perceived as more knowledgeable or authoritative.

Despite these challenges, the study also uncovered a variety of strategies used by students to manage their anxiety. Among the most common and effective methods are consistent preparation and rehearsal, such as practicing in front of a mirror or recording themselves. Many students also implement relaxation techniques, including deep breathing and positive thinking, to manage their physiological symptoms. Furthermore, peer support plays an important role. Students who openly discuss their fears with classmates tend to feel less isolated and more emotionally supported, which in turn helps reduce their anxiety levels.

Overall, speech anxiety is a multifaceted issue that affects students on both emotional and physical levels. However, with the right strategies such as adequate preparation, structured practice, self-regulation techniques, and emotional support, its negative impact can be minimized, allowing students to gradually improve their performance and confidence in public speaking.

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