

Effect of Anxiety and Self-Efficacy on Class Performance in Arabic Language Online Class

Suo Yan Mei¹, Morufudeen Adeniyi Shittu², & Suo Yan Ju³

¹ Faculty of Languages and Communication, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, 35900 Tanjong Malim, Perak, Malaysia

² School of Languages, Michael Otedola College of Primary Education, Km.7, Epe - Ijebu-Ode Road, Noforija, P.M.B 1028, Epe Lagos State, Nigeria. Epe Ijebu Ode Road 106101, Nigeria

³ Faculty of Major Languages, Universiti Sains Islam, Bandar Baru Nilai, 71800 Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia

Correspondence: Suo Yan Mei, Faculty of Languages and Communication, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, 35900 Tanjong Malim, Perak, Malaysia.

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore the effect of anxiety and self-efficacy on class performance in Arabic language online classes. This study used a quantitative research approach, and the data was collected through a survey instrument administered to 148 first-year Arabic learner students enrolled in an Arabic language online class. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics as well as a structural equation model to examine the relationship between variables. The study's results showed that anxiety had a negative effect on class performance, while self-efficacy positively impacted class performance. Therefore, anxiety is the main contributor to Arabic online learning performance. Additionally, self-efficacy was found to have a moderating effect on the relationship between anxiety and class performance. The findings of this study suggest that anxiety and self-efficacy are important factors to consider in an online learning environment, as they can significantly impact class performance. Based on the results of this study, it is recommended that educators in online learning environments implement strategies to enhance self-efficacy and reduce anxiety levels among their students.

Keywords: anxiety, self-efficacy, foreign language, Covid 19 pandemic, online learning

1. Introduction

Arabic is a foreign language that is studied by Muslim and non-Muslim school and university students worldwide. However, this language is not easy to cope with by Malaysian students, although some of them have learnt it as a foreign language since childhood.

With the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, many schools and universities have shifted to online learning creating new challenges for students and educators alike. This shift has been particularly obviously pronounced in Malaysia, as online learning was not widely adopted before the pandemic. As a result, students may experience increased anxiety related to learning in an online environment, which could negatively affect their academic performance. On the other hand, self-efficacy, or a student's belief in their ability to succeed in an online class, could positively impact their Arabic language performance.

Although there is growing interest in the impact of anxiety and self-efficacy on online learning outcomes, there is a dearth of research on how these factors affect class performance in Arabic language online classes. Given the unique cultural and linguistic context of non-Arabic-speaking countries like Malaysia, it is important to understand how anxiety and self-efficacy may impact students' academic performance.

Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the effect of anxiety and self-efficacy on class performance in Arabic online classes. Purposely, the study examined the relationship between students' levels of anxiety and self-efficacy and their academic performance, as well as the factors that might have influenced these relationships. This study used a quantitative research design to collect data from a sample of Malaysian university students currently pursuing online Arabic language classes. The data was collected using an established survey instrument that measured anxiety and self-efficacy levels, and academic performance in Arabic language online classes. Descriptive analysis and structural equation modelling were used to answer the research questions.

The findings of this study would have important implications for educators and policymakers in Malaysia, who are responsible for supporting students in online learning environments. By understanding the relationship between anxiety, self-efficacy, and academic performance in Arabic language online classes, educators could develop strategies to help students overcome anxiety and improve their performance. Additionally, the study would contribute to the literature on online learning, Arabic language education, and students' motivation in the Malaysian context.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Language Learning Anxiety

As Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) mentioned, foreign language anxiety is a distinct complex concoction of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process. In addition, problems the students face while learning another language are called anxiety. These problems include 'students' inability to find appropriate vocabulary items to express ideas due to their limited lexical knowledge, using the incorrect word or producing grammatical mistakes. Other examples include poor understanding of input, such as listening and producing output like a conversation (Hasan and Al-Hasani, 2019; Liu, 2006). Other researchers defined language anxiety as a psychological and physiological state that is made up of somatic, cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components (Bouras & Holt, 2007; Davison, 2008; Seligman, Walker & Rosenhan, 2001).

Recently, online learning has grown in popularity, with many students taking online courses for its convenience and flexibility. However, for some students, online learning can cause anxiety and stress. According to research, several factors could contribute to online learning anxiety, including technical issues (Liaw et al., 2018), isolation and lack of support (Gao et al., 2020), lack of interaction with instructors and peers (Joo, Lim, & Kim, 2019), unclear expectations and requirements (Lim & Kim, 2019), fear of technology (Alqurashi, 2019), and a perceived lack of credibility (Chou, Peng, & Chang, 2020).

Previous studies discovered that online learning anxiety negatively influenced course performance. Liu and Wang (2018) studied the relationship between online learning anxiety and foreign language course performance. The study used a questionnaire collected from 156 participants enrolled in various online foreign language courses at a university in China. The questionnaire included questions about students' anxiety levels, perceived level of course difficulty, satisfaction with the course, and performance in the course. The study discovered that students with high levels of online learning anxiety would likely perform poorly in online foreign language courses. A similar study by Zhang and Li (2020) found that online learning anxiety significantly negatively impacted foreign language learning, particularly in areas such as motivation, interaction, and self-regulation.

2.2 Language Learning Self-Efficacy

According to psychologist Albert Bandura, self-efficacy is a personal judgment of how well or poorly a person can cope with a given situation based on their skills and circumstances (2010). It is the belief in one's ability to perform a particular task successfully. Bandura (1977) suggested that individuals' beliefs about their abilities could impact their behaviour, motivation, and performance. Researchers explored that 'learners' self-beliefs in their capabilities significantly determine their language performance and achievements, and that 'learners' beliefs could predict performance better than their actual ability (Bandura, 1997; Schunk, 1991; Raoofi, Tan, & Chan, 2012). Foreign language self-efficacy played the most significant and positive role in predicting EFL learners' academic achievement (Ozer & Akçayoğlu, 2020).

Due to the advancement of digital technology, online learning has become an essential mode of education worldwide. Self-efficacy, or belief in one's ability to succeed in a given task, is an essential factor influencing online learning outcomes.

In online learning, self-efficacy refers to students' beliefs in their ability to learn and succeed in an online learning environment. Studies have consistently shown that self-efficacy significantly impacts online learning outcomes. Students with high self-efficacy are more likely to engage in online learning activities, persist in facing challenges, and achieve higher grades (Bandura, 1997; Artino & Stephens, 2009; Cho & Heron, 2015). On the other hand, studies (Chin, 2021; Ye & Jia, 2018) found that students with low self-efficacy may experience anxiety, frustration, and a lack of motivation, leading to poor performance and dropout. Researchers (Cho & Heron, 2015; Liaw, Huang & Chen, 2018; Al-Fraihat et al., 2020) argued that students' previous learning experience, perceived social support, technology acceptance and learners' characteristics could be factors that influence learners' online self-efficacy. Online learning self-efficacy is a crucial factor that affects students' engagement, motivation, and performance in an online learning environment.

While several studies have explored the impact of anxiety and self-efficacy on foreign language performance in online classes, some studies also investigated the impact of anxiety and self-efficacy on Arabic language performance. However, no specific research investigated the relationship between anxiety and self-efficacy in Arabic language online learning performance. It is a significant gap in the literature, as cultural and linguistic factors may influence students' perceptions of online knowledge and their ability to succeed in this environment. Additionally, most previous studies have focused on the relationship between anxiety, self-efficacy, and academic performance in the English language contexts rather than other foreign languages, such as Arabic, especially through online learning. As such, there is a need for further research to understand better the unique challenges and opportunities of online learning of Arabic as a foreign language and how these factors may impact students' academic performance.

3. Research Method

Participants of this study voluntarily participated and were selected from Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI). A total of 148 first-year Arabic language learners consisted of 50 males (34%) and 98 females (66%) in this study. The average age of the participant is 19, and the SD of 1.6. All participants had no experience in taking online courses.

3.1 Instrument

The study adapted scales from previous studies to collect data. The following explicates how the scales were contextualised in this study.

3.1.1 The Self-Efficacy Scale

Consisted of 10 items and was designed by Bandura et al. (1996) and modified to fit the context of the Arabic language online class. The scale was used to measure an individual’s self-efficacy beliefs in the context of online learning. The reliability of the scale was found to be high, with a coefficient alpha of 0.90. In more recent studies, Kocdar, Karadeniz, and Bozkurt (2016) and Chen, Zhang, and Chen (2020) reported high internal consistency reliability levels for their modified versions of the OLSES, with coefficient alpha values ranging from 0.85 to 0.95. Test-retest reliability was also found to be high in both studies.

3.1.2 The Online Learning Anxiety Scale

The 14 items scale was developed by Fajardo et al. (2020) to assess students’ anxiety levels related to online learning. Fajardo et al. (2020) reported a high level of internal consistency for the scale, with a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of 0.90. Furthermore, Gunuc and Kuzu (2021) affirmed the Online Learning Anxiety Scale (OLAS) as a valid tool for assessing online learning anxiety. This suggests that the OLAS is reliable for measuring anxiety in online learning environments.

Participants who agreed to participate in the study must complete the online surveys at the end of the course. The surveys were administered online using a survey tool and took about 20 minutes to complete. The participants’ responses were kept confidential, and the study reported the analysis of the result. After the course, students’ final course grades were obtained from the university’s grading system and used to measure class performance.

The survey results were analyzed using descriptive statistics and structural equation modelling to determine the relationship between students’ anxiety and self-efficacy beliefs and their performance in the Arabic language online class. A significance level of $p < 0.05$ was used for all statistical tests.

4. Results

4.1 Learning Anxiety in Arabic Language Online Class

The study found that 33.8% and 11.55% of the students agreed and strongly agreed about feeling embarrassed to answer questions in an Arabic language online class. A total of 71.6% claimed that they could sense their heart pounding when called to answer questions by the lecturer during any online Arabic language class. Around 70% of the students also asserted that they started to panic when they had to speak during online Arabic language classes. This was due to the students’ non-preparation, or they felt anxious when they ‘don’t understand what their classmates say in Arabic during online classes’.

On the other hand, slightly above 50% of the students expressed that they forgot what they were trying to convey when they wrote in Arabic. Again 62.8% said they felt unsure about themselves when asked to write something in Arabic. At the same time, 53.3% claimed to freeze up when asked to answer questions unexpectedly.

Generally, more than a quarter (33.3%) of the respondents agreed or strongly disagreed that they felt embarrassed, anxious, frightened, intimidated, forgetful, unsure about themselves, panicking, panting or freezing up during their Arabic language online class. Only a handful of the students disagreed or strongly disagreed with this. In summary, panicking contributed to most of the students’ poor performance in the Arabic online class.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of Anxiety in Arabic online learning class

Class Performance	Frequency (Percentage) N = 148				
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
Embarrassed	24 (16.2)	28 (18.9)	29 (19.6)	50 (33.8)	17 (11.5)
Panting	7 (4.7)	10 (6.8)	25 (16.9)	74 (50.0)	32 (21.6)
Panicking	5 (3.4)	18 (12.2)	18 (12.2)	68 (45.9)	39 (26.4)
Anxious in class	6 (4.1)	17 (11.5)	24 (16.2)	59 (39.9)	42 (28.4)
Frightened	1 (0.7)	25 (16.9)	19 (12.8)	57 (38.5)	46 (31.1)
Intimidated	13 (8.8)	33 (22.2)	38 (25.7)	45 (30.4)	19 (12.8)
Forgetful	9 (6.1)	28 (18.9)	32 (21.6)	67 (45.3)	12 (8.1)
Freeze up	5 (3.4)	21 (14.2)	43 (29.1)	56 (37.8)	23 (15.5)
Unsure	9 (6.1)	23 (15.5)	23 (15.5)	64 (43.2)	29 (19.6)

On measuring the general anxiety level, most students (83.8%) agreed / strongly agreed to get frustrated when they could not distinguish between the Arabic pronunciation. Covertly, 90.5% claimed not to feel bad when considering attending the online class, while 67.6% claimed to be unaffected.

More than half of the students also revealed that they got confused when reading Arabic text without its tool (harakat). It also corresponded with the percentage of students who found it difficult to distinguish between Arabic without a tool diacritics (harakat). In summary, being frustrated, confused, and finding it difficult to read Arabic without its diacritics are the three anxiety measures that affect students learning.

Table 2. Frequency

	Frequency (Percentage) N = 148				
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
Frustrated	6 (4.1)	10 (6.8)	8 (5.4)	42 (28.4)	82 (55.4)
Difficulty	20 (13.5)	26 (17.6)	37 (25.0)	53 (35.8)	12 (8.1)
Scared	34 (23.0)	66 (44.6)	22 (14.9)	16 (10.8)	10 (6.8)
Bad Feeling	74 (50.0)	60 (40.5)	13 (8.8)	1 (0.7)	0(0.0)
Anxious	46 (31.1)	29 (19.6)	21 (14.2)	39 (26.4)	13 (8.8)
Confused	10 (6.8)	34 (23.0)	25 (16.9)	67 (45.3)	12 (8.1)

The finding is consistent with many previous studies (Alqahtani, 2018; Alghamdi & Alharbi, 2019; Al-Sabbagh & Bataineh, 2020) that foreign language learners showed anxiety in online learning environments. Alqahtani (2018) reviewed the literature on Arabic EFL learners' anxiety in online language learning and found that they experienced different anxiety levels, including fear of technology, making mistakes, and failure. In their study, Alghamdi and Alharbi (2019) discovered that Saudi EFL learners experienced online learning anxiety due to technical difficulties, lack of interaction with peers, and fear of failure. A similar study conducted by Al-Sabbagh & Bataineh (2020) found that EFL learners in Jordan experienced anxiety in synchronous online learning environments due to fear of speaking in front of others and technical difficulties, among other reasons.

4.2 Self-efficacy in Arabic Language Online Learning Class

The study found that 45% were unsure of their confidence in speaking Arabic. A total of 35.3% strongly believed in being confident while speaking Arabic. This finding is very similar to the general confidence portrayed among the students. However, more students claimed to have reasonable confidence reading Arabic text, as 54.7% said they aware confident while reading it. Generally, about one-third of the students strongly agreed that they were optimistic (either in speaking or reading Arabic) and were not worried about their online classes. Nonetheless, between 33.8% to 45.3% of the students claimed that they were unsure about their confidence (in reading, speaking and general) in class.

Contrary to confidence, 65% of the student ascertained not to worry about making mistakes in speaking during Arabic online classes. This characteristic of not being worried about their mistakes was the most prominent among students when measuring self-efficacy. In addition, more students strongly disagreed with feeling more self-conscious about speaking Arabic in front of other students in online classes compared to a face-to-face class.

In general, a few of them strongly disagreed or disagreed with having good self-efficacy in their Arabic language online classes.

Table 3. Frequency of Self-efficacy in Arabic Online learning class

	Frequency (Percentage) N = 148				
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
Confident (Speaking)	3 (2.0)	26 (17.6)	67 (45.3)	34 (23.0)	18 (12.2)
Self-Conscious	8 (5.4)	34 (23.0)	54 (36.5)	46 (31.1)	6 (4.1)
Not worried	2 (1.4)	32 (21.6)	18 (12.2)	57 (38.5)	39 (26.4)
Feel at Ease	3 (2.0)	24 (16.2)	44 (29.7)	54 (36.5)	23 (15.5)
Confident (Reading)	1 (0.7)	16 (10.8)	50 (33.8)	48 (32.4)	33 (22.3)
Confident (General)	5 (3.4)	18 (12.2)	61 (41.2)	40 (27.0)	24 (16.2)

4.3 Structural Equation Model

A structural equation model describes the relationship between multiple variables simultaneously, and it could be used regression model on constructs and the factor loading between latent variables simultaneously. Figure 1 below shows the path diagram of the model while the same shows the regression estimates and the interrelationship between the independent and dependent variables simultaneously.

The result of the analysis yielded ($\chi^2 = 270.261$, Chi-square=2.456, p-value =.001, GFI = 0.768, CFI = 0.691, TLI = 0.653, NFI = 0.580, RMSEA = 0.100). With its respected p-value. This indicated that data poorly fit the model because the p-value was less than alpha ($p < .05$). The value of the normed chi-square (χ^2/df) was 2.456, which was below the maximum ratio of 5.0, suggesting that the model was sufficiently fit. In brief, the different statistical evidence suggested general goodness-of-fit for the model. (see figure 1)

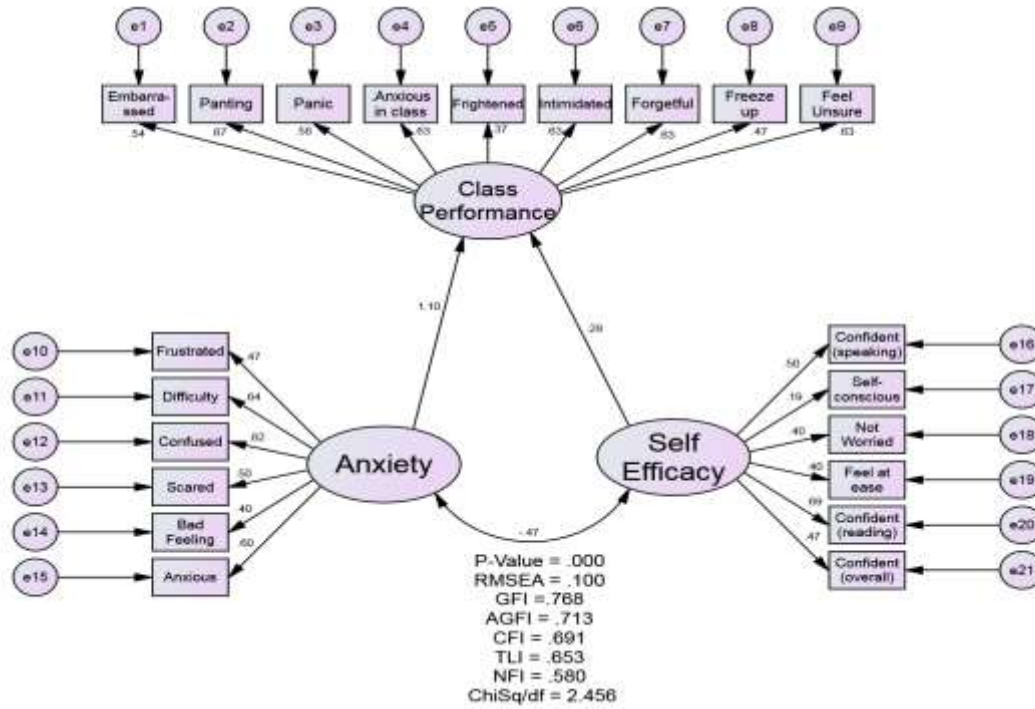


Figure 1. Full structure equation model of anxiety and self-efficacy on Arabic online class performance

The finding indicated that self-efficacy negatively correlated to anxiety. On the other hand, anxiety negatively correlated to class performance, and self-efficacy positively correlated to classroom performance. Anxiety was the major influence on class performance.

Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Default model)

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
Class Performance	<---	Anxiety	1.100	.171	5.371	***
Class Performance	<---	Self-Efficacy	.278	.167	2.418	.016
Embarrassed	<---	Class Performance	.541			
Panting	<---	Class Performance	.667	.167	5.859	***
Panicking	<---	Class Performance	.579	.166	5.361	***
Anxious in class	<---	Class Performance	.632	.178	5.672	***
Frightened	<---	Class Performance	.370	.150	3.827	***
Intimidated	<---	Class Performance	.625	.187	5.632	***
Forgetful	<---	Class Performance	.629	.170	5.655	***
Freeze up	<---	Class Performance	.475	.151	4.657	***
Unsure	<---	Class Performance	.626	.184	5.638	***
Anxious	<---	Anxiety	.600			
Feel Bad	<---	Anxiety	.399	.076	4.265	***
Scared	<---	Anxiety	.504	.133	5.208	***
Confused	<---	Anxiety	.618	.134	6.118	***
Difficulty	<---	Anxiety	.637	.145	6.254	***
Frustrated	<---	Anxiety	.471	.126	4.926	***
Confident (Speaking)	<---	Self-Efficacy	.499			
Self-Conscious	<---	Self-Efficacy	.190	.211	1.817	.069
Not worried	<---	Self-Efficacy	.401	.285	3.330	***
Feel at Ease	<---	Self-Efficacy	.403	.255	3.342	***
Confident (Reading)	<---	Self-Efficacy	.687	.331	4.217	***
Confident (General)	<---	Self-Efficacy	.466	.269	3.666	***

The finding of this study supported many previous studies (Qaysi et al., 2020; Raza & Yousaf, 2021; Lee et al., 2019). Qaysi et al. (2020) found that anxiety significantly negatively impacted students’ academic performance in online classes. Raza and Yousaf (2021) discovered that students with higher levels of self-efficacy performed better in online classes than those with lower levels of self-efficacy. In a similar

study, Lee et al. (2019) established that students with high anxiety levels and low self-efficacy levels were more likely to struggle with online class performance than students with high levels of both constructs.

5. Discussion

This study investigated the effect of anxiety and self-efficacy on class performance in an Arabic language online class. Findings indicated that first-year Arabic learners expressed speaking anxiety in online Arabic classes. The majority of participants (83.8%) expressed being frustrated, confused, and finding it difficult to read Arabic without its diacritics are among the top three factors that affect their Arabic language online class performance. On the other hand, participants showed good self-efficacy in the Arabic language online class. The study also discovered that anxiety was negatively correlated with Arabic language class performance. This finding is consistent with many previous studies. Li et al. (2018) employed a meta-analysis that found that foreign language anxiety had a moderate negative effect on language performance across various languages and age groups. Similarly, a study by Lin and Huang (2019) found that online language anxiety significantly predicted lower language performance in a sample of Chinese EFL learners.

Self-efficacy has had a greater impact on performance than motivation and language learning strategies. The current study also discovered that Arabic language learners showed good confidence in their capability in Arabic language online classes. The study's findings indicated that self-efficacy positively correlated with Arabic language online learning. The finding is consistent with many previous studies (Göksu & Çeliköz, 2018; Wu, 2019; Wang & Gao, 2020). Göksu and Çeliköz (2018) discovered that self-efficacy beliefs significantly predicted foreign language performance among Turkish university students. Similarly, Wu (2019) found a positive correlation between self-efficacy and foreign language performance among Chinese university students. In another study, Wang and Gao (2020) found that self-efficacy significantly predicted foreign language proficiency among Chinese students studying in the UK. The study also found that self-efficacy was positively correlated with language learning motivation and engagement.

Foreign language learners who experience a high level of online learning anxiety and low self-efficacy may struggle to perform well in an online learning environment. Students who experience high levels of online learning anxiety and low levels of self-efficacy may struggle to perform well in online courses. In contrast, learners with high self-efficacy and low anxiety may perform better in online classes as they feel confident in their abilities to succeed and could focus their cognitive resources on learning and mastering course materials.

Educators could help students succeed in online courses by providing them with the tools and resources they need, regardless of their level of anxiety or self-efficacy. As a result, educators and administrators must take measures to support 274 students in developing self-efficacy and managing anxiety in online learning environments. That could include providing study skills resources, encouraging regular communication and feedback, and providing mental health and well-being support.

6. Limitations and Future Studies

The study is not free from limitations. First, data were collected from the self-reported survey. Although self-reported data have been used in empirical research on teaching and learning, it poses challenges to the researchers in regard to its validity and reliability. Future studies should employ multiple data collection methods to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being studied and help triangulate the data for increased validity. Secondly, the study only involved first-year Arabic language learners from one public university in Malaysia; the small sample size could lead to higher sampling error, affecting the findings' generalizability. For future studies, researchers should include more learners from different institutions to decrease sample errors and increase generalizability. Finally, a future study could make use of a mixed method design to collect data from multiple sources and triangulate the data to increase validity. Additionally, conducting longitudinal studies could provide a more detailed understanding of the factors that influence these outcomes and could improve the validity of the findings.

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