

VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY ENGLISH DEPARTMENT STUDENTS OF STATE POLYTECHNIC OF BENGKALIS ACROSS DIFFERENT PROFICIENCY LEVELS.

Rionaldi¹⁾, Boni Saputra²⁾

¹English Department State Polytechnic of Bengkalis

e-mail: rio@polbeng.ac.id

² English Department State Polytechnic of Bengkalis

e-mail: bonisaputra@polbeng.ac.id

Abstract

This research was aimed at finding out vocabulary learning strategies employed by English Department students of State Polytechnic of Bengkalis across different proficiency levels. The subjects of the study were 28 students of English Department of Bengkalis State Polytechnic academic year 2014/2015. The questionnaire was used to collect the data, consisting of 32 items classified under three strategy categories; discovering meaning of new vocabulary (DMV), retaining knowledge of the newly-learned vocabulary (RKV), and Further Consolidation Vocabulary strategies (FCV). The quantitative data from questionnaire were analyzed using mean score. A Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) was also administered to identify students' English language proficiency levels based on Puengpipattrakul (2007); Elementary (200-395), intermediate (400-595), working proficiency (600-795). The findings of this descriptive research revealed that the working proficiency level reported the highest frequency of overall strategy use, the intermediate level's frequency of use was slightly lower, and the elementary level had the lowest frequency of use. In DMV strategies, both working proficiency and intermediate levels used guessing strategy as the most frequently used strategy. In contrast, elementary level used dictionary-use strategy as the most frequently used DMV strategy. In RKV strategies, working proficiency level used association as the most frequently used strategy. In contrast, both elementary and intermediate level used repetition strategy as the most frequently used RKV strategy. In further consolidation vocabulary (FCV), all working proficiency, intermediate and elementary levels used expanding more frequently than practice strategy.

Keywords: *Vocabulary Learning, Strategies, Proficiency*

1. INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary, a vital element which must be possessed in the whole process of language learning, still becomes the major problem faced by Indonesian English as foreign language (EFL) students. The research conducted by Nurweni and Read (1999) found that Indonesian freshmen's vocabulary size were below 2000 word level of 4000 words expected.

To achieve success in language learning, foreign language learners must have various learning strategies, and employ them in language learning. The strategies employed may vary among the language learners. According to Oxford (1989a : 236), several factors influencing the strategy choice are language being learned, proficiency level, sex, motivation level and national origin. Since there are several factors influencing the choice of strategies employed, learners' proficiency level will be the focus in this study.

The research about Vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) has received much attention. However, a small number of studies have been conducted in the past to investigate vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) employed by Indonesian EFL learners, especially about strategy employed by EFL students across proficiency levels. The research conducted by Al-Shuwairkh (2001), in Saudi Arabian context, found that proficiency level had a very weak relationship with the use of vocabulary learning strategies. In contrast, Ali (2008) found that English language proficiency significantly impacts students' use of vocabulary learning strategies. Moreover, Mizumoto and

Takeuchi (2008) found that VLSs as a whole had the greatest influence on proficiency (with TOEIC scores) among a group of Japanese EFL University students.

Since there is a lack of research in this area in Indonesia, exploration of the strategies used among proficiency levels helps learners, teachers, and lecturers to better understand the variations, frequency, and strategies employed among different proficiency levels. The strategies employed by higher level proficiency students can be helpful and modeled for the lower proficiency students to achieve success in vocabulary and language learning as well as to achieve higher level of English proficiency.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED THEORIES

Vocabulary learning mainly encompasses at least three basic components; they are discovering the meaning, retaining them in memory, and consolidating or expanding it. Marin-Marín (2005:74) defines vocabulary learning strategies as “those conscious and unconscious, planned and unplanned steps and actions that L2 learners take to discover and consolidate the form, meaning and usage of words. Intaraprasert (2004:9), on the other hand, defines vocabulary learning strategies as “any set of techniques or learning behaviors, which language learners reported using in order to discover the meaning of a new word, to retain the knowledge of newly-learned words, and to expand their knowledge of vocabulary”.

Many researchers have identified and proposed different taxonomies of VLSs. Gu and Johnson (1996), for instance, divided vocabulary learning strategies into two classes: cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Furthermore, Schmitt (1997) distinguished the strategies into two groups: The ones to determine the meaning of new words when encountered for the first time; determination strategies and social strategies, and the ones to consolidate or remember the meaning when encountered again; social, cognitive, memory, and metacognitive.

Intaraprasert (2004:53), on the other hand, classified vocabulary learning strategies into three main categories according to the purposes of vocabulary learning. The first category is strategies to discover the meaning of new vocabulary items (DMV). They are strategies to discover the meaning of words by themselves or with assistance from peers, teacher, relative and other people which included dictionary use, social strategies and contextual reliance or guessing. The second category is strategies to retain the knowledge of newly-learned vocabulary items (RKV). It refers to strategies to remember and retrieve the knowledge of newly learned vocabulary items such as rote learning or rote rehearsal, note taking, and keyword strategies. The last category is strategies to expand the knowledge of vocabulary items (EKV). It refers to strategies learners use to encounter new words for expansion of larger amount of vocabulary

Similarly, Marin-Marín (2005:157) grouped vocabulary learning strategies into four major category. They are (1) dealing with unknown vocabulary or discovery strategies which includes guessing strategies, skipping strategies, dictionary use strategies, social-discovery strategies; (2) note taking strategies; (3) memorization vocabulary which include repetition strategies, and association strategies; and (4) further consolidation strategies that is strategies to consolidate new words encountered, and look for the opportunities to meet and practice new words.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 DESIGN

The present study was aimed at determining vocabulary learning strategies employed by English Department students of State Polytechnic of Bengkalis across different proficiency levels using a questionnaire. The descriptive survey research was selected as the most appropriate design.

3.2 PARTICIPANTS

The participants of the study were 28 students of English department of Bengkalis State Polytechnic academic year 2014/2015. They were all administered the TOEIC test and then placed into three different proficiency levels based on Puengpipattrakul (2007). They were elementary (200-395), intermediate (400-595), working proficiency (600-795). There were 17.86 % students at working proficiency level, 50% students at intermediate level, and 32.14% students at beginner level.

3.3 INSTRUMENTS

The questionnaire of this research was constructed mainly based on VLSs taxonomy constructed by Marin- Marin (2005), Intaraprasert (2004) and Siriwan (2007). It was classified under three main strategies with 8 strategy categories: Discovering Meaning of new Vocabulary (DMV), Retaining Knowledge of the newly-learned Vocabulary (RKV), and Further Consolidation Vocabulary strategies (FCV). DMV Strategies include three strategy categories: guessing strategy, dictionary use strategy, and social discovery strategy. RKV strategies include repetition strategy, and association strategy. The last category is FCV strategies which include expanding strategy, and practice strategy. The quantitative data from questionnaire were analyzed using mean score.

There were 32 questions in Indonesian language with five choices of Likert scale in order to investigate the vocabulary learning strategies of the English department students of Bengkalis State Polytechnic. The five choices were ; 1= never or almost never true of me, 2= rarely or usually not true of me, 3= somewhat true of me, 4= usually true of me , and 5= always or almost always true of me. In reporting the frequency of strategy used, the researcher employed Oxford's (1990: 300) key to understanding mean scores on SILL which also uses the 5-point Likert scale. The average scores which fell in the range of 3.46-5.00 was defined as high frequency of use of learning strategies, the average in 2.46-3.45 was intermediate frequency of use, and the average in 1.00-2.45 as low frequency of use of strategies.

A Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) was also administered to identify students' English language proficiency level. The TOEIC test consisted of 200 multiple choice items: 100 listening questions, and 100 reading comprehension questions. Then, the students' English proficiency was leveled based on Puengpipattrakul (2007); they were Elementary (200-395), intermediate (400-595), working proficiency (600-795)

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 DATA ANALYSIS

Table 4.1: The Overall Use of Vocabulary Learning Strategies by High, Intermediate, and Beginner level

VLSs	Working Proficiency		Intermediate		Beginner	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
	3.41	0.334	3.24	0.432	3.09	0.523

According to the results, overall VLSs used varies significantly among the three scoring levels. The working proficiency level reported the highest frequency of overall VLSs used (M= 3.41); the intermediate level's frequency of VLSs used was slightly lower (M= 3.24); and the beginner level had the lowest frequency of VLSs used (M= 3.09). This suggests that when learning vocabulary, working proficiency used vocabulary learning strategies more frequently than did both intermediate and beginner levels. All levels reported using the vocabulary learning strategies in intermediate frequency of use.

Table 4.2: The Use of Main Vocabulary Learning Strategies Categories by High, Intermediate, and Beginner level

	Strategy Category	High		Medium		Low	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
VLS	DMV	3.42	0.180	3.38	0.451	3.25	0.734
	RKV	2.95	0.780	2.75	0.600	2.83	0.548
	FCV	3.41	0.334	3.24	0.432	3.09	0.523

All levels used DMV as the most frequently used strategies. FCV category was the second frequently used strategies, and RKV was the third frequently used strategies. It indicates that all

levels used discovering the meaning of the new words, and further consolidating the new words more frequently than retaining the knowledge of the new words in vocabulary learning strategies.

Table 4.3: The Use of Vocabulary Learning Strategies Categories by High, Intermediate, and Beginner level

	Strategy Category	High		Rank	Medium		Rank	Low		Rank
		Mean	SD		Mean	SD		Mean	SD	
DMV Category	Guessing strategy	4.00	0.500	1	3.75	0.803	2	3.22	0.667	4
	Dictionary use	3.35	0.285	4	3.50	0.707	3	3.53	0.980	1
	Social discovery strategy	2.73	0.953	7	2.75	0.681	6	2.93	0.877	5
RKV Category	Repetition strategy	2.73	0.643	6	2.79	0.675	5	3.26	0.684	3
	Association strategy	3.03	0.880	5	2.73	0.600	7	2.67	0.553	6
FCV Category	Expanding strategy strategies	4.00	0.490	2	3.77	0.608	1	3.39	0.553	2
	Practice strategy	3.60	0.418	3	3.04	0.771	4	2.44	0.846	7
	Overall	3.41	0.334		3.24	0.432		3.09	0.523	

In terms of seven strategy categories, working proficiency used expanding and guessing strategy as the most frequently used strategy ($M=4.00$). The strategies coming next were practice ($M=3.60$), dictionary use ($M=3.35$), association ($M=3.03$), social discovery ($M=2.73$) and repetition ($M=2.73$). Intermediate level also used expanding as the most frequently used strategy ($M=3.77$). The strategies coming next were guessing ($M=3.75$), dictionary ($M=3.50$), practice ($M=3.04$), repetition ($M=2.79$), social discovery ($M=2.75$), and association strategy ($M=2.73$). Beginner level used dictionary use strategy as the most frequently used strategy ($M=3.53$). The strategies coming next were expanding ($M=3.39$), repetition ($M=3.26$), guessing ($M=3.22$), social discovery ($M=2.93$), association ($M=2.67$), and practice strategy ($M=2.44$).

Expanding and guessing were two of the most frequently used VLSs by working proficiency and intermediate level. Meanwhile, dictionary use and expanding strategy were the most frequently used VLSs by beginner level. It indicates that all levels preferred to use expanding strategy to other strategies. However, they were different in terms of using guessing and dictionary use strategy. Both working and intermediate levels used guessing strategy as the first and second most frequently used strategies. Meanwhile, the beginner level used dictionary strategy and expanding strategy as the most frequently used strategies. In short, working proficiency and intermediate levels paid more attention to expand their knowledge and guessing, the meaning of new vocabulary. Meanwhile, beginner level paid more attention to use dictionary use strategy besides expanding strategy. Moreover, repetition and social discovery were the least frequently used VLSs by working proficiency level. In contrast, social discovery and association were the least frequently used VLSs for intermediate. Association and practice were the least frequently used strategies for the beginner level. It indicates that the working proficiency level used repetition strategy less frequently than other strategies. The intermediate and beginner levels, however, used association less frequently than other strategies.

Table 4.4: The Use of DMV Categories by High, Intermediate, and Beginner level

VLS	Strategy Category	High		Rank	Medium		Rank	Low		Rank
		Mean	SD		Mean	SD		Mean	SD	
DMV Category	Guessing strategy	4.00	0.500	1	3.75	0.803	1	3.22	0.667	2
	Dictionary use strategy	3.35	0.285	2	3.50	0.707	2	3.53	0.980	1
	Social discovery strategy	2.73	0.953	3	2.75	0.681	3	2.93	0.877	3
	Total	3.42	0.180		3.38	0.451		3.25	0.734	

In DMV category, all levels shared slight difference on the mean score. Working proficiency used DMV more frequently than other levels ($M=3.42$), intermediate level were slightly higher ($M=3.38$) than beginner level ($M=3.25$). However, in using the strategy categories, the working proficiency and intermediate level used guessing strategy as the most frequently used strategy in determining the meaning of the new words. They used it in high frequency of use. In contrast, beginner level used dictionary use strategy as the most frequently used strategies in determining the meaning of the new words. The working proficiency and intermediate level employed guessing strategies more frequently than did the beginner level. It indicates that the working proficiency and intermediate levels preferred guessing the meaning of new words to consulting dictionary and asking their peers, lectures and others. In contrast, beginner level preferred consulting their dictionary to guessing and asking their peers, lectures and others.

In guessing strategy, working proficiency used it in high frequency of use. In contrast, intermediate and beginner levels only used it in intermediate of use. It indicates, the working proficiency usually used guessing strategy compared with intermediate and beginner level which sometimes used guessing strategy. In dictionary use strategy, working proficiency level only used this strategy in intermediate use range. In contrast, both intermediate and beginner levels used this strategy in high frequency of use range. It means that both intermediate and beginner levels usually used dictionary use strategy while the working proficiency level only sometimes used it in determining the meaning of the new words. In social discovery strategy, all levels reported using this strategy category in intermediate frequency of use. It means that they only sometimes used social discovery strategy. All levels showed difference in terms of the mean score of using this strategy. Beginner level used this strategy more frequently than did both intermediate and beginner levels.

Table 4.5: The Use of the Most Frequently DMV Items by High, Intermediate, and Beginner Levels

Working Proficiency

No	Strategies	Mean	Rank
DMV2	I guess the meaning from word classes	4,2	1
DMV4	I guess the meaning by looking at the picture accompanying it	4,2	2
DMV1	I guess the meaning by using context clues	4	3

Intermediate

DMV4	I guess the meaning by looking at the picture accompanying it	4	1
DMV7	I use electronic dictionary	3,93	2
DMV2	I guess the meaning from word classes	3,86	3

Beginner

DMV7	I use electronic dictionary	4	1
DMV6	I use English-Indonesian dictionary	3,78	2
DMV4	I guess the meaning by looking at the picture accompanying it	3,67	3

In terms of strategy items in DMV strategy items, the working level was different with other levels because it used more variations and frequency of guessing strategy items than did other levels. Working proficiency level used DMV guessing strategy items; guessing the meaning from word classes and context clues, as the most frequently used strategies in discovering the meaning of the new words. In contrast, beginner level used more variations and frequency of dictionary use strategy items than did other levels. It used DMV dictionary use strategy items such as using electronic and English-Indonesian dictionary as the most frequently used strategies in discovering the meaning of the new words. However, all levels used guessing the meaning from context as top three most frequently used strategy items in discovering the meaning of the new words.

Table 4.6: The Use of RKV Categories by High, Intermediate, and Beginner Levels

	Strategy Category	High			Medium Rank			Low Rank		
		Mean	SD	Rank	Mean	SD	Rank	Mean	SD	Rank
RKV Category	Repetition strategy	2.73	0.643	2	2.79	0.675	1	3.26	0.684	1
	Association strategy	3.03	0.880	1	2.73	0.600	2	2.67	0.553	2
Total		2.95	0.780		2.75	0.600		2.83	0.548	

In RKV category, this category was only used in intermediate use range. It means it was only sometimes used by the learners. In terms of the frequency of use, working proficiency level used this category more frequently than did both intermediate and, beginner levels. Moreover, these three levels were different in terms of using strategy categories in RKV. Working proficiency used associations strategy (M=3.03) more frequently than repetition strategy (2.73), whereas beginner and intermediate level used association strategy less frequently (M=2.73, M=2.67) than repetition strategy (M=3.26, M=2.79). It indicates that working proficiency preferred to use association, whereas, intermediate and beginner level preferred to repetition in retaining the knowledge of new vocabulary items.

Table 4.7: The Use of the Most Frequently RKV Items by High, Intermediate, and Beginner Levels Working Proficiency

RKV 10	I associate new words with my personal experience	3,6	1
RKV 11	I associate new words with the place I found it	3,6	2
RKV 9	I visualize the written form (spelling)	3,4	3

Intermediate

RKV 11	I associate new words with the place I found it	3,21	1
RKV 2	I repeat the word silently in my mind	3,21	2
RKV 10	I associate new words with my personal experience	3,14	3

Beginner

RKV 3	I write the word several times	2,6	1
RKV 11	I associate new words with the place I found it	3,6	2
RKV 2	I repeat the word silently in my mind	2,6	3

In terms of strategy items, working proficiency and beginner level were different in terms of using association and repetition items to retain the knowledge of the new words. Working levels used all three association strategy items as the top three most frequently used strategies in RKV. They were associating new words with my personal experience and place the word found, and visualizing the written form. In contrast, beginner level used more repetition items as the top three most frequently used strategies in RKV strategies. They were writing the words several times, repeating the word silently in mind. In short, working proficiency level used association strategy items much more frequently than did beginner level. In contrast, beginner level used repetition items much more frequently than did working level.

Table 4.8: The Use of FCV Categories by High, Intermediate, and Beginner Levels

	Strategy Category	High		Medium		Low	
FCV Category	Expanding strategy strategies	4.00	0.490	3.77	0.608	3.39	0.553
	Practice strategy	3.60	0.418	3.04	0.771	2.44	0.846
Total		3.41	0.334	3.24	0.432	3.09	0.523

In FCV category, working proficiency used more frequent use of expanding strategy (M=3.98) than did both intermediate and beginner levels (M=3.32; 293). It indicates that working proficiency level usually used expanding and practice strategy. However, intermediate and beginner level only used FCV in intermediate use of frequency which indicates that it was only sometimes used by both intermediate and lower achievers.

Table 4.9: The Use of the Most Frequently FCV Items by High, Intermediate, and Beginner Levels

Working proficiency

FCV5	I watch English movies	4,8	1
FCV4	I listen to English songs	4,6	2
FCV2	I watch English programs on TV	4,4	3

Intermediate

FCV4	I listen to English songs	4,43	1
FCV5	I watch English movies	4,21	2
FCV2	I watch English programs on TV	4	3

Beginner

FCV5	I watch English movies	4	1
FCV4	I listen to English songs	3,89	2
FCV6	I use internet to find information about English	3,67	3

In terms of strategy items, working proficiency levels used 4 out of 5 strategy items in high frequency of use. Meanwhile, intermediate levels used only 2 out of 5 in high frequency of use, and none of the strategy items were used in high frequency of use by beginner level. Moreover, all levels used listening English songs and watching English movies as two most further consolidating vocabulary items.

4.2 DISCUSSION

According to the results, overall strategy used varies among the three proficiency levels. The working proficiency level reported the highest frequency of overall VLSs used; the intermediate level's frequency of VLSs used was slightly lower and the beginner level had the lowest frequency of use. It means that the higher the English proficiency, the more the frequency and the more strategies they used in learning vocabulary. This finding is consistent with the previous studies conducted in Thailand by Siriwan, (2007). Besides, all levels reported using the vocabulary learning strategies in intermediate frequency of use. It is similar with the finding of Kapifour (2011). Furthermore, it also shows that the VLSs employed were different among three levels of TOEIC proficiency, the basis of levelling the students' English proficiency in this research. It is in line with Mizumoto and Takeuchi (2008) found that VLSs as a whole had the greatest influence on proficiency (with TOEIC scores) among a group of Japanese EFL University students.

In discovering the meaning of the new words, the working proficiency and intermediate levels used guessing strategy category as the most frequently used strategies. In contrast, dictionary use strategy category was used as the most frequently used strategies in discovering the meaning of the new vocabulary by beginner level. It is supported by Al-Shuwairekh's (2001: 254), and Cheng's (2006:122) findings who found that the successful learners or the students with better vocabulary learning achievement were different with the less successful ones in which the successful ones relied much on contextual clues and tried to guess the meaning of words from textual context more frequently than did the less successful ones. Furthermore, guessing the meaning is much more efficient than looking up word in a dictionary (Mart, 2012:178). However, difficulties in guessing may be the reason of beginner level used dictionary use strategies much more frequently than guessing. Intaraprasert (2005:167) argues that this problem arises because of inadequate information provided by context itself.

Moreover, the purpose of looking up words in dictionary is different between advance and less proficiency learners. The former tends to use bilingual dictionary to confirm their guesses, while the latter uses them to look up unfamiliar word (Hulstijn in Hunt, 2009:14). Furthermore, it is also strengthened by Gairns and Redman (1998:80) who states that dictionary is as valuable support to backup contextual guesswork and clarify the meaning. In sum, guessing the meaning of the words first, then consulting dictionary to confirm the guessing is much more effective and efficient than just looking up word in dictionary.

In retaining or memorizing new vocabulary, working proficiency level used association strategy rather than repetition as the most frequently used strategies in retaining the knowledge of the newly-learned vocabulary. In contrast, beginner level used repetition strategy rather than associations as the most frequently used strategies in retaining the knowledge of the newly-learned vocabulary. It is similar with Al-Shuwairekh (2001) finding. It is influenced by the complexity of association over repetition as stated by Schmitt (1997:132). He states that association requires a greater cognitive effort and is more difficult to employ. In contrast, repetition requires only a little cognitive effort and is easy to do. However, making associations is more effective than doing repetition in retaining the knowledge of vocabulary as Cohen & Aphek finding (1981). They found that forming associations had shown to enhance retention better than repetition. Therefore, encouraging students to be accustomed to using associational patterns over repetition is much more effective to enable them to retain more words over time.

In further consolidating the new words, working proficiency used it more frequently than did both intermediate and beginner levels. It is congruent with Siriwan's (2007), and Cheng's (2006), Al-Shuwairekh's (2001) findings. Siriwan (2007) states motivation was involved factor in the use of expanding strategies which differentiate the higher vocabulary proficient students over the lower

ones in which the former may be highly motivated to find opportunities to expose themselves to English than the latter. In short, students should be motivated to expose themselves to English and make use various media and opportunities to expand their vocabulary knowledge.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The present findings revealed differences in VLSs use among students with different proficiency level. The working proficiency level employed the highest frequency of overall strategy use, the intermediate level's frequency of use was slightly lower, and the beginner level had the lowest frequency of use. The use of strategies fell in the intermediate use range, regardless of student proficiency level. Working proficiency used guessing strategy, expanding strategy, and practice strategy in high frequency use. In contrast, beginner level used dictionary use strategy and expanding strategy in high frequency of use. In discovering the meaning of new words (DMV), working proficiency and intermediate level showed similar preferences to use guessing strategy as the most frequently used strategies whereas beginner level preferred to use dictionary use strategy. In retaining or memorizing the knowledge of newly-learned vocabulary (RKV), working proficiency level preferred to use association to repetition strategy. In contrast, beginner level preferred to use repetition strategy to association strategy. In further consolidating the new words (FCV), working proficiency level usually used expanding and practice strategies. In contrast, intermediate and beginner levels only used these strategies in intermediate use frequencies which indicate these strategies were only sometimes used by intermediate and beginner levels.

The findings provide some important implications for teachers, lecturers and students. First, students of all three ability levels used VLSs moderately. It means that they only sometimes used vocabulary learning strategies. Increasing the frequency of use of VLSs seems important as Chen (2015) found that the more strategies the participants used, the higher the proficiency, TOEIC scores, they were likely to receive. Encouraging students to use and explore more wide range useful strategies, help them to employ VLSs more frequently and effectively, and raise their awareness toward the use of vocabulary learning strategies are important.. Second, teachers and lecturers must facilitate, train, and model their students various effective vocabulary learning strategies as working proficiency did such as guessing the meaning from context and using the dictionary to confirm the guessing in discovering the meaning of the new words, using association instead of repetition to retain the knowledge of the new words, and having more expanding and practicing strategies to expand the knowledge of the new words. Besides, ist can be used as one of solutions to increase the TOEIC score of the students.

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