THE IMPACT OF ANXIETY ON B1 LEVEL COLLEGE STUDENTS' ORAL COMPETENCE IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

IMPACTO DE LA ANSIEDAD EN LOS ESTUDIANTES UNIVERSITARIOS DEL NIVEL B1 EN LA COMPETENCIA ORAL EN IDIOMA INGLÉS

Ruben Patricio Guanuche Díaz
Universidad Técnica de Machala - Ecuador

Sandro Vinicio Torres Asanza
Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador - Ecuador

Livington Javier Rojas González
Universidad Técnica de Machala - Ecuador

Lorena Janneth Tituana Moncada
Universidad Técnica de Machala - Ecuador

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Ruben Patricio Guanuche Díaz [1]
patog_77@hotmail.com
https://orcid.org/0009-0006-2583-1478
Universidad Técnica de Machala
Ecuador

Sandro Vinicio Torres Asanza
sandro.torres@educacion.gob.ec
https://orcid.org/0009-0006-2290-7609
Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador
Ecuador

Livington Javier Rojas González
jrlanguageteacher@outlook.com
https://orcid.org/0009-0002-3964-3073
Universidad Técnica de Machala
Ecuador

Lorena Janneth Tituana Moncada
lorena.tituana@educacion.gob.ec
https://orcid.org/0009-0008-0137-4545
Universidad Técnica de Machala
Ecuador

ABSTRACT

Oral communication is essential for anyone wishing to learn a foreign language. Feelings of anxiety and nervousness are common among learners and negatively influence the development of oral proficiency. This study aims to investigate the levels of anxiety present in the study and its impact on oral competence in a second language among students of Food Engineering, Chemical Engineering, and Biochemistry & Pharmacy at UTMACH. For this research, quantitative and qualitative methods were applied through the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz (1986) and interviews to collect and analyze information on the feelings students experience when speaking English. The total sample consisted of 147 students, 87 of whom were B1 proficient according to the CEFR. JAMOVI 2.3.28.0 was used to analyse the scores, and MAXQDA24 was used for qualitative analysis. The results showed that anxiety towards learning English has a significant and negative correlation with students' oral proficiency development.

Keywords: anxiety, communicative apprehension, oral competence

[1] Autor Principal
Correspondencia: patog_77@hotmail.com

Impacto de la ansiedad en los estudiantes universitarios del nivel B1 en la competencia oral en idioma Inglés

RESUMEN

La comunicación oral es necesaria para todo aquel que desee aprender una lengua extranjera. Los sentimientos de ansiedad y nerviosismo son comunes entre los estudiantes influyendo de forma negativa en el desarrollo de la competencia oral. El objetivo del presente estudio es investigar los niveles de ansiedad presentes en el estudio y su impacto en la competencia oral en una segunda lengua entre los estudiantes de las carreras de ingeniería en Alimentos, ingeniería Química y Bioquímica y Farmacia de la UTMACH. Para esta investigación se aplicaron métodos cuantitativos y cualitativos a través de la aplicación del instrumento para medir la ansiedad de los estudiantes ante la lengua extranjera es la (FLCAS) desarrollada por Horwitz (1986), y la entrevista para la recolección y análisis de información sobre las sensaciones que experimentan los estudiantes cuando hablan inglés. La muestra total fue de 147 estudiantes. 87 de ellos con suficiencia B1de acuerdo al MCER. Para analizar las puntuaciones se utilizó el software JAMOVI 2.3.28.0. y MAXQDA24 para el análisis cualitativo. Los resultados demostraron que la ansiedad ante el aprendizaje del inglés tiene una correlación significativa y negativa en el desarrollo de la competencia oral de los alumnos.

Palabras clave: ansiedad, aprehensión comunicativa, competencia oral

INTRODUCTION

Oral communication in a second language (L2) is important for expressing feelings and emotions, or socializing information with others; however, many people experience anxiety when it comes to speaking (Yalcin & Inececay, 2014). Understanding the factors that contribute to experiencing anxiety or worry in oral communication is critical to understanding its impact.

Anxiety in the context of foreign language learning has been a growing topic of interest in educational and linguistic research. In particular, it has been noted that anxiety can manifest itself in a variety of ways during second language (L2) learning and use, and its impact on speech has been the subject of study in numerous academic papers.

Language anxiety is defined as a negative emotional response associated with communication in a foreign language, which may manifest itself in different ways, such as nervousness, fear of error, fear of the judgment of others, or insecurity in language skills. These manifestations can significantly influence the speaker's fluency, accuracy, and confidence, which in turn can affect the quality and effectiveness of spoken communication.

Anxiety

Anxiety is the feeling of fear and worry that a person experiences when performing an activity, which sometimes cannot be controlled (Javed et al., 2013). It is expressed differently in different people and causes them to react differently to the same situations, such as when communicating orally in a foreign language.

Language anxiety is defined as 'the feeling of tension and apprehension associated specifically with a second language context' (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1994: 284). This type of anxiety is closely related to second language learning, not specifically to task performance.

From a psychological point of view, joy, fear, anxiety, or anger are natural emotions that occur in all individuals in the most diverse cultures. They have a considerable biological substratum. They are essentially pleasant or unpleasant, they activate us and are part of communication with others. In turn, emotions can act as powerful motivators of behavior (Cano-Vindel, 1997). In this way, anxiety can be expressed in negative emotions and feelings that can affect the quality of oral proficiency in English when it comes to communicating, giving presentations, exhibitions, or dissertations inside and outside

the classroom.

When anxiety is limited to the language learning situation, it falls into the category of specific anxiety reactions. Psychologists use the term specific anxiety reaction to differentiate people who are generally anxious in a variety of situations from those who are anxious only in specific situations. Researchers have identified several specific anxieties associated with schoolwork, such as test taking, and with academic subjects, such as mathematics or science (Tobias, S. 1978).

There is a relationship between definitions of second language learning anxiety and its manifestations in oral communicative tasks, from the interaction of emotional, behavioral, physiological, and cognitive factors that influence the quality of English speech.

Objective

This study aims to identify the levels of anxiety and the characterization of its manifestations and impact on the oral communication of B1 level English students of the Biochemistry & Pharmacy, Chemical Engineering and Food Engineering courses at UTMACH

Theoretical framework

Anxiety when speaking a second language

It seems that anxiety about learning a foreign language is different from other types of anxiety and that it correlates negatively with L2 performance (Arnáiz and Guillén, 2012). Anxiety associated with foreign language learning appears to have distinctive characteristics compared to other forms of anxiety and is negatively correlated with second language proficiency performance.

Restricting anxiety to a language learning situation places it within the category of 'specific anxiety reactions', a psychological term often used to differentiate people who generally experience anxiety in various situations from those who only experience anxiety in specific situations (Horwitz et al. 1986, p.125). Restricting anxiety to a language learning context classifies it as a 'specific anxiety reaction', a psychological concept used to distinguish between those people who tend to experience anxiety in multiple situations and those who only experience it in particular circumstances.

According to Horwitz et al. (1986: 128), language anxiety is " a distinct complex of self- perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to language learning in the classroom that arise from the uniqueness of the language learning process". Horwitz identifies three dimensions of anxiety that

impact negatively on second language learners.

Causes of foreign language anxiety

The present study is based on Hortwitz's dimensions of second language learning anxiety. Communicative apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety.

- Communicative apprehension refers to apprehension related to verbal and non-verbal communication in learning situations, such as public speaking, participating in classes or interacting with peers and teachers. This type of apprehension occurs mainly when they lack communicative competence, even if their ideas are mature and competent. Within the classroom, it can be difficult for learners who share a native language to 'code-switch' or 'language-switch'. The more anxiety they suffer, the worse their performance in language use will be, leading to avoidance of learning and bodily reactions to the idea of speaking a foreign language (De-la- Morena-Taboada et al, 2011; Argaman & Abu-Rabia, 2002).

- **Fear of negative evaluative appraisal**: This refers to concern about academic performance and fear of failure. This dimension focuses on anxiety associated with assessments, such as exams, tests, and papers, as well as the perception of one's own competence and ability in the academic domain. This construct is known to be closely related to learners' confidence or security in using a foreign language in and out of school (De-la-Morena-Taboada et al., 2011).

- **Test anxiety:** This component is associated with the high expectations students have when taking a test, leading to increased levels of emotional burden and concern about failure. In general, this apprehension arises because learners set high and unrealistic goals for themselves (mastering a foreign language perfectly), so they demand too much of themselves and worry that they will not live up to their own expectations (Worde, 2003).

METHODOLOGY

The present research conducted an explanatory sequential sequential mixed method approach study. According to Rheychold J. Daymiel (2022) as cited in Subedi, 2016, p. 573), an explanatory sequential design involves collecting quantitative data first and then qualitative data to help explain or expose the quantitative results. This method is done since, although quantitative data provides a basic overview of the study problem, however, further analysis, through the collection of qualitative data, is necessary

for a better interpretation of the results. Google Forms was used for the collection of the questionnaire data.

The total population was 147 students. 87 of them had English language proficiency corresponding to level B1 according to the Common European Framework and were studying the subject of Technical English in the careers of Food Engineering, Chemical Engineering, and Biochemistry and Pharmacy of the Faculty of Chemical and Health Sciences of the UTMACH

The sample was selected using a probabilistic sampling of students with B1 proficiency level, excluding students with A1, and A2 levels and those who did not complete the questionnaire of the Horwitz and Cope anxiety measurement scale.

A T-test was performed for the comparison between the anxiety factors of the Hortwitz and Cope anxiety scale. Similarly, ANOVA was used for the comparison of anxiety between careers. The assumptions of homogeneity and normal distribution were verified in all cases. A significance level of $\alpha=0.05$ was used.

Data collection instruments and procedures

Two instruments were used for the development of this study, a survey and an interview for the validation of data sources. Focused interviews were used to identify the manifestations and impact of anxiety on oral communication in English.

Data collection was done through the application of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) Horwitz et al. (1986) from October 2023 to February 2024. It includes 33 items, 20 of which focus on listening and speaking skills, and the remaining items are related to general L2 learning anxiety. Each item on the scale is rated with five Likert series points, ranging from number one, which is considered the minimum score 'I do not agree at all', to number five, which is considered the maximum score 'I strongly agree'. Likewise, 24 of the 33 items refer to states of anxiety, while the remaining 9 refer to states of non-anxiety. Ortega, C. (2021)

Interview

Hernández, S. Roberto. (2006) defines an interview as 'a meeting to exchange information between one person (the interviewer) and another (the interviewee) or others (interviewees)'. In an interview conducted with 18 randomly selected students, three questions were proposed to gather information

about anxiety and its impact on oral communication.

The interview included three semi-structured questions in an attempt to get the interviewees to provide information about their feelings, experiences, and opinions about anxiety and its impact on oral communication. 1. What are the feelings you experience when you speak English? 2. Do you think anxiety influences the moment you speak English? 3. How do you describe the impact of anxiety on your spoken communication in English?

The interview was recorded, then transcribed and coded for analysis and interpretation of results. MAXQDA was used for the analysis, categorization, and coding of the interview. The categories were; physical, emotional, linguistic sensations, and negative incidence of anxiety in oral communication; while the codes were fear, fear, embarrassment, anxiety, sweating, sweating hands, rapid heartbeat, and rapid heart rate, as a result of anxiety in speaking activities.

RESULTS

Of the 87 students with B1 proficiency (29, 33.3 %) are male and (58, 66.7 %) female. The average age is 23 years old. The questionnaire was answered by 13 students (19.54%) from Chemical Engineering (9, 69.2%) females and (4, 30.8%) males, 57 students (65.5%) from Biochemistry

and Pharmacy (38, 66.7%) females and (19, 33.3%) males, and 17 students (14.94%) from Food Engineering (11, 64.7%) females and (6, 35.3%) males. There was no significant difference between the Anxiety factors at $P>0.05$.

Figure 1: Participating students by degree program (n= 147)


Students per school
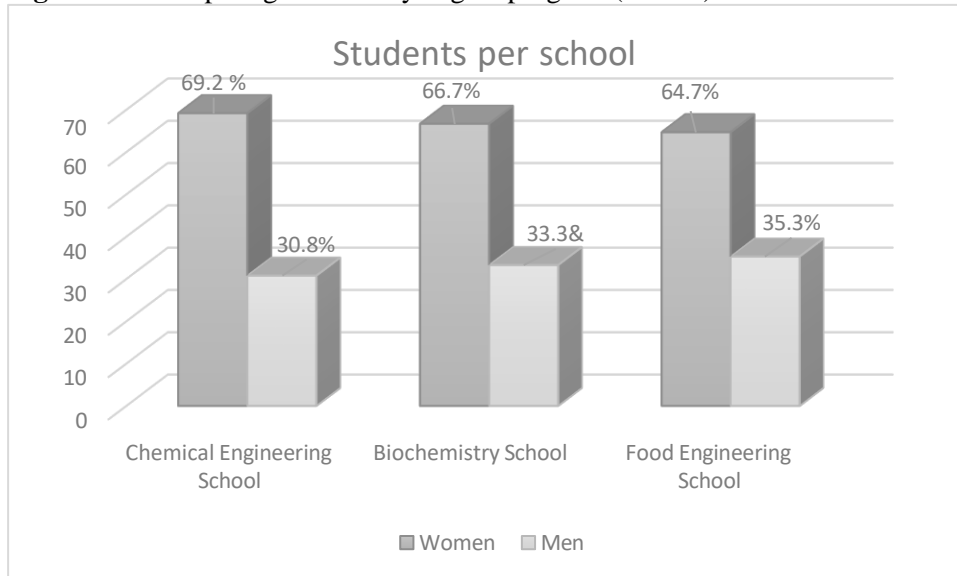
Note. The figure shows the demographic data according to schools and gender

Anxiety Levels in B1 Level College Students

To assess the anxiety experienced by foreign language learners during their learning process in the classroom environment, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) uses a 5-point Likert-type scale consisting of 33 statements, ranging from "strongly agree" (5) to "strongly disagree" (1). The ranges of low anxiety ranged from 63-85, moderate from 86-108, and high anxiety from 109-130.

Figure 2 Percentages of Anxiety Levels
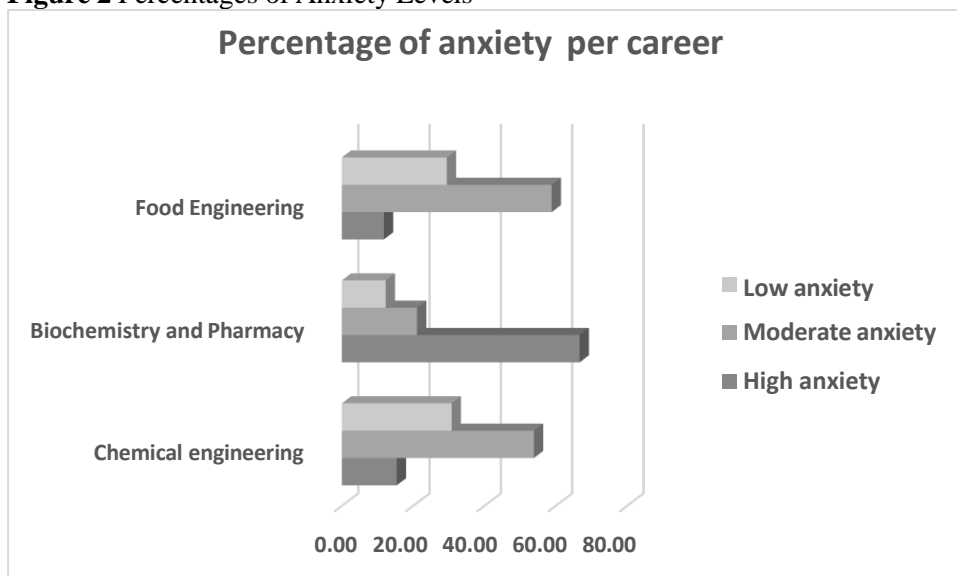
Note. The figure shows the anxiety levels per career and gender.

In Food Engineering, low anxiety reached 29.41%, moderate anxiety 58.82%, and high anxiety 11.76%.

In Biochemistry and Pharmacy, low anxiety reached 12.28%, moderate anxiety 21.05%, and high anxiety 66.67%.

In Chemical Engineering, low anxiety reached 30.77%, while moderate anxiety at 53.85%, and high anxiety at 15.38%.

The data indicate that anxiety is a significant concern, with more than two-thirds of individuals experiencing moderate to high levels of anxiety.

On a personal level, students experiencing high levels of foreign language anxiety may exhibit symptoms such as worry, distress, and sweat, among others.

Table 3 Rating scale of the students' anxiety factors variable

FACTORS	Mean	Median	SD	Min	Max
Communicative Apprehension	2.48	2.46	0.675	1.54	4.38
Test-Anxiety	2.63	2.67	0.591	1.33	4.56
Safety when using L2 in the classroom	2.64	2.75	0.577	1.50	4.00
Safety when using L2 out of the classroom	3.27	3.33	0.923	1.00	5.00
Negative Attitude to L2	2.73	2.75	0.568	1.50	4.00

Note. The table shows the student's anxiety factors.

The results obtained through the application of Hortwitz's foreign language class anxiety scale show that communicative apprehension prevails with a mean of 2.48, anxiety before evaluations occupies 2.63, security when using a second language (L2) in the classroom 2.64, security when using a second language (L2) outside the classroom 3.27, while the negative attitude towards a second language reached 2.73. In the statistical analysis of the comparison between anxiety factors using the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test, significant differences were obtained with a value of $p<0.001$. In the Dwass-Steel-Critchlow-Fligner two-by-two comparisons, significant differences were found between safety in using a second language outside the classroom and the other four factors.

Horwitz's model has been applied in different studies to analyze the impact of anxiety on second language oral proficiency learning.

The 94.74% of the respondents reported experiencing communicative apprehension in second language situations such as difficulty finding the right words or structuring their ideas coherently,

resulting in prolonged pauses or silences during oral communication, and physical symptoms such as excessive sweating, trembling, palpitations, dry mouth or difficulty breathing. Avoidance of communicative situations: Individuals may avoid participating in conversations in the second language or seek excuses for not speaking in public, to avoid the potential of making mistakes or feeling judged by others.

52.63% of the interviewees indicated experiencing fear of negative evaluation. They fear making linguistic errors manifesting themselves in constant self-correction, concern about their linguistic performance, and the perception others have of their competence in the second language.

One respondent (5.26%) stated that he was confident in using English in the classroom, mentioning that he was not afraid to communicate orally with his classmates or with the teacher in speaking activities. One respondent (5.26%) expressed that they had no difficulty or anxiety using English outside the classroom.

One student (5.26%) indicated that he has no interest in learning a foreign language, avoids speaking activities, and does not participate in interaction activities so as not to feel embarrassed with his peers.

Relationship between anxiety and oral competence according to the interview conducted

At the beginning, students reported feeling confident when speaking English, however, during the speaking activities, participants showed and mentioned experiencing physical conditions such as sweating, sweating hands, cold hands, trembling, rapid breathing, and rapid heart rate, among others. They report psychological conditions such as a sense of fear, dread, and anxiety about speaking English, stage fright, and fear that their peers will make fun of their pronunciation or body language. In addition, linguistically, lack of vocabulary, insecure pronunciation, and grammatical structural transfer from the mother tongue to the L2 affect spoken production. Stroud and Wee (2006) assumed that 'students become anxious because they are insecure about their language abilities, and because of this, are concerned about how their use of the target language will be evaluated by the teacher' (p. 299).

According to Lian and Budin (2014) 'one of the most important problems that prevent students from speaking English well is language anxiety' (p. 68). The interviewees mentioned that language anxiety can have a significant impact on oral communication. It can arise due to a variety of factors, such as fear

of error, and concern about the judgment of others, some of the students interviewed agreed that 'I am embarrassed to speak in front of my peers because I feel I am doing it incorrectly', lack of confidence in language skills and pressure to communicate effectively.

In addition to panic about speaking in front of other students, interviewees indicate that they suffer from palpitations, sweating, and stammering as a consequence of anxiety.

On the second question, the learners interviewed stated that anxiety has a negative influence, as different factors contribute to not speaking fluently in a second language. Factors such as the transfer of grammatical structures from one's own language to another, emotional factors such as panic, fear of making mistakes or of being evaluated, and mistrust affect oral communication.

In addition, high levels of anxiety may discourage students from participating in speaking activities, causing them to avoid speaking the foreign language Olaya, V. A., & Ahumada, L. S. (2023). The interviewees stated that as a consequence of speaking anxiety, their performance is limited because they are focused on making a good evaluation rather than maintaining a fluent dialogue or discourse with their peers or other speakers.

When a person experiences language anxiety when speaking a second language, they are likely to experience difficulties in expressing themselves clearly, which may result in less fluent communication. Worrying about making grammatical or pronunciation errors may lead to more choppy communication and less participation in group conversations. In addition, anxiety can make it difficult to understand spoken English, as the person may be so preoccupied with their own performance that they cannot fully concentrate on what others are saying. Silva (2011), points out that "anxiety affects participation and performance in that students are more aware of the difficulties of LE performance and therefore tend to decrease their activation, which implies inattention and demotivation that lead them to feel less capable of performing and achieving the goal".

Impact of foreign language anxiety

Numerous investigations into the matter have identified various adverse effects of foreign language anxiety on the learning process, as discussed by Horwitz (2010, 1986), MacIntyre (1999), and Marwan (2016). These effects can be classified into five primary areas.

Regarding academic performance, a heightened level of anxiety towards foreign languages results in

decreased academic achievement, potentially leading to students discontinuing their studies, as suggested by Bailey et al. (1999), who argue that students with elevated foreign language anxiety are more prone to dropping out compared to those with lower levels of anxiety.

From a social standpoint, highly anxious students display reluctance to engage in communication with others, as evidenced by Price (1991). Additionally, Horwitz (2010) contends that such anxiety fosters a reluctance among students to communicate in English.

From a cognitive perspective, this anxiety may act as a barrier hindering the processing of information within the learner's cognitive system, as indicated by Krashen (1982) and MacIntyre and Gardner (1989).

This anxiety may also influence other affective factors, including attitudes and motivation, as demonstrated by Horwitz (2010), affecting the learner's overall sentiment towards the learning process. Furthermore, Liu and Huang (2011) argue that it correlates negatively with motivation to learn English.

DISCUSSION

The findings obtained in this study probably support previous studies, finding that anxiety affects foreign language learning in different ways specifically during oral proficiency activities. Students tend to experience high levels of anxiety.

The results of the student interview are consistent with the study conducted by Djigunovic (2006) on learners of English as a foreign language to investigate the effects of anxiety on language processing. Anxiety manifests itself in insufficient oral language production due to emotional factors involved in speech.

Concerning to the anxiety reactions manifested and observed in the students, they coincide with the study conducted by Zuzsa Tóth (2011) who manifested negative feelings and emotions in and about classes, psychophysiological symptoms, and reluctance/avoidance of L2.

The anxiety factors observed in this research agree with the study by Hardacre, Bahiyyih (2020). Second language anxiety can be the result of a combination of internal physiological processes, cognitions, emotional states, personality traits, the demands of the situation, the relationship with other people involved, as well as the context, among many other factors.

Students' confidence in oral communication in English is closely associated with their proficiency. Lack

of confidence to express themselves freely is related to stage fright, embarrassment, and concern about evaluation as mentioned by Rheychold J. Daymiel (2022) in his study.

CONCLUSIONS

The results show that anxiety is generally present in the study group. The difference between low, medium, and high anxiety is minimal in the students when it comes to speaking English.

Some physical factors are present in the activity of oral communication such as sweating, rapid heart rate, and cold hands; emotional factors such as feelings of panic, nerves, anxiety, insecurity and distrust; and cognitive factors such as vocabulary shortage, transfer of grammatical structures from Spanish to English, and poor pronunciation have a negative impact when students use the language for speaking.

The students interviewed stated that language anxiety negatively impacts on students' speaking skills. Fear of evaluation and insecurity about communicating ideas correctly in English are present whenever students use the language in or out of class.

Anxiety is shown to be an obstacle to the acquisition of speaking skills and to the maximization and effectiveness of their outcomes.

This study recommends proposing content integration activities, gradual conversations, expositions, simulations, and role-plays, as well as the use of technology and audio-visual resources that allow for autonomous and collaborative learning where students are motivated and gain confidence to express themselves by speaking.

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