

Fallacy Frenzy in Advanced Level Classes of English Language in Tertiary Level: An Education for Academia and Beyond

A Study of an Advanced Level English Language Class of BRAC Institute of Languages (BIL)

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Abstract— This paper draws attention to the teaching of fallacy and through this process the attainment of in-depth education. Writing class, in the curriculum of English as a Second Language or Foreign Language context, is always an area of trial and error and eventual success. Moreover, the academic writing is a difficult part for the students where they need much effort. The main focus of this paper is how teaching fallacy helps in research learning process which is an integral part of academic writing and how learning across the curriculum makes knowledge profound. Students' primary reaction and their gradual understanding of the entire journey of fallacy teaching are discussed here too. The methods practiced for this teaching of fallacy in the language class are also evaluated here. A literature review is done to point out different scholarly views of language teaching and learning, education in academia, students' initial exposure to fallacy. Fallacy as a practice to ensure learning across the curriculum and in this way an essential education from academia till professional world are reflected here to point out an important intellectual exposure for the students.

Keywords— Fallacy Education; Learning across the curriculum; Academia; Professional world.

I. INTRODUCTION

A research shows that 70% children retain good health because of the regular intake of health drink Boost – while teacher writes it on the board and asks for the validity of the claim made here, some students instantly realize the flaw of lack of references and the others fail to perceive the flaw. In an advanced level English language class, while the above mentioned Card stacking (piling up invalid and imaginary data to prove an argument) fallacy is introduced, students' reaction flow without knowing the word 'Fallacy'. Apparent frenzied language of fallacy, which is formed due to failure of proper reasoning, makes

students realize the reasons for attempting this process while they write without having proper knowledge on an issue. By focusing on the 'rashness' of the arguments in writing and how perilous it is for a sound reasoning, the teaching of fallacy in the advanced level languages class assists students to learn about the need for an in depth knowledge on any attempted issue of writing, to achieve skill of critical writing, and to help utilizing this experience in a wider perspective.

Background of the study

A general attempt to make a claim without proper reasoning came to my concern while teaching advanced level language courses. A full volume research is the major part of the language course ENG 204: Essentials of Academic Writing in the syllabus of BRAC University English course, prior to this there is another course for Advanced level called ENG 102: English composition 1, and while teaching both of the courses, I found that arguments tend to become invalid with an absence of proper logic or evidence and they usually make this mistake in academic writing. Their interest and efficiency tend to take the path of creative writing while academic writing is ignored because of strict structure. Fallacy is used in ENG 102 in less degree as some students still stay in 'raw' state as far as the language efficiency and critical thinking is concerned. ENG 204 is more advanced and academic writing is the prime focus where good reasoning is a must and language proficiency of the students of this level remains in the advanced level from the beginning though the reasoning needs a polish. Dealing with fallacy in ENG 204 becomes interesting for me as I found that students from different semesters react to this unusual subject in different ways. Sometimes they take it very seriously from the very beginning, they realize even at the onset that teacher is going to

introduce something of great value. However, I found that sometimes students get carried away with the flawed sentences and start doubting about the depth of the lesson, but at the end they realize the importance. It is interesting to see the way students realize how ‘turbulent’ their arguments becomes if they do not possess enough insight in their chosen issue of research. As different fallacies show different flawed arguments and students observe those as separate sentences, they become aware of their flaws that they have made while arguing. This whole process of gradual understanding made me think about it as an issue which is worth of study.

The Area of Research

The focus of my research will be how the proper understanding of fallacy helps students to attempt precise, valid and critical reasoning. I will also discuss about Students’ initial reaction towards this process of finding flaws of an invalid argument. While the flaw of an argunt is presented separately through a fallacy, students can apprehend it quickly, however they fail to do so when they write. They tend to make mistakes; I will try to find out possible reasons for these mistakes too. Moreover, this research will try to explore how the experience of learning across the curriculum educates a student to be a vibrant learner.

Literature Review

Fallacy as a medium of broad based education is the major focus of this research and students’ primary reaction towards this fallacy in the academic reading class is also an underlying concern for me. While describing education, Cannon (2012) truly says that progressive education consists of student-centered learning, active learning and learner-centered education [1]. Learning analysis and argument through a progressive method ensures proper education of research in academic writing class.

As fallacy was introduced in depth for the first time in the advanced level and it was “learning through sentences with flaws” because while teaching I write the fallacy on the board and ask students to comment on the sentences, general reaction of the class was in favor of confusion, not knowing the reason for my objectives. Dauna Howerton, who is a senior program coordinator on the professional development team at the Charles Dana Center at University of Texas at Austin reflects the same experience “In 1998, when I first wrote a lesson on logical fallacies to teach my AP Language and Composition class, the students wrestled and moaned throughout. Then the most brilliant (and challenging) student said to me, “Mrs. Howerton, this was the most difficult

assignment you have given us all year, but I learned the most from it”[2]. My students’ reaction was same at the beginning and then they were convinced at the end.

EDUC 262B: English Language Arts illustrates a very good point saying that erroneous arguments are natural and while writing we need to put ourselves into readers shoes and should be constantly careful about not making the mistake. Students can agree or disagree but need to be cautious about the arguments they are posing [3].

Tedick (2005) emphasizes on “collaborations” which speaks about the importance of cooperation and collaborative relationships in the work of second language teacher education. It includes institutional collaboration of schools and colleges of teacher education as well as collaborative relationships that are formed among second language teacher or teacher educators themselves. Context is also important. Context represents a broad theme which touches on the contexts on which second language teacher education takes place (ESL, EFL, foreign language, immersion, and bilingual education). Geographical, cultural, social, institutional, political contexts are also important to be taken into account [4]. I believe that teaching fallacy in English Language class and introduction to fallacy in Ethics and Culture class is a total collaboration of those genres of education. Hence, with combination of these genres learning becomes fruitful. While introducing fallacy in the English language class, the social context and cultural practice of invalid and hasty judgment were focused.

Larsen-Freeman (2010) while talking about Observations and Principles of Desuggestopedia, mentions about teacher student dialogue, repetition and translation. The principle behind these activities is to help students turn on to the materials they will be exposed to [5]. The introduction to fallacy starts with an interaction between teacher and students, and at the end materials get exposed through a presentation done by the students.

Larsen-Freeman also focuses on how content based learning ensures the learning of language with the help of some other content, even academic subject matter. She adds that academic subjects naturally provide content for language instructions. This understanding leads to learning across the curriculum movement which was initiated in England in 1970[5]. Though learning across the curriculum was meant for native English speakers, this theoretical underpinning can be applied to a process which makes fallacy

content for both Ethics and culture and English language classes to teach logical reasoning, sound arguments.

Zoharik (1986), as cited in Richards (2002), talks about 3 main conceptions of language teaching and theory-philosophy conception is one of these. Theory emphasizes on rationality and philosophy or value based approach stresses on to develop a teaching module from the values that one hold about teachers, learners, classrooms and role of education in society [6].

Research Questions

- 1) How do students get introduced to fallacy and what are their first impressions?
- 2) How successful fallacy is in the language classroom to fulfill the objectives?
- 3) Does teaching fallacy 'confirm' the idea of learning across the curriculum and help students dealing with academia and beyond?

Research Hypotheses

- 1) Students get introduced to fallacy without prior knowledge, through discussion and interaction with the teacher. Students can guess the flaws and perceive the reasons for that mostly. However, students get puzzled sometimes as they find my 'intended flaws' in sentences.
- 2) Fallacy is successful enough in fulfilling the objective of good reasoning which is a prime concern of language classrooms as good writing needs good reasoning.
- 3) As fallacy is an integral part of philosophy, a combination of language and philosophy is done here and students use constructive reasoning while dealing with the professional world.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

Reflection

Student's response towards the teaching method of fallacy, their primary reaction, their understanding at the end of the class and the gradual betterment of writing are the issues I look carefully at while doing this research.

Questionnaire and data analysis

Different sets of questionnaire were used to get feedback from both teachers and students. Teachers were from Philosophy background, taking Ethics and culture course. Students were from my advanced level class. The focuses of the questionnaire are the followings – achieving broad based education

through teaching and learning fallacy, learning across the curriculum, improving arguments in writing.

Discussion on the feedback of the teachers and students is presented in the discussion part and my research hypotheses were evaluated.

III. DISCUSSION

The idea of gaining education in the academia and beyond and learning across the curriculum are two foremost factors of this research. BRAC Institute of Languages (BIL) succeeds in upholding learning across the curriculum as in one full semester they offer a combination of courses which includes different subjects – Bangladesh Studies, Ethics and Culture and English. Ethics and Culture course is based on Philosophy where students get introduced to fallacy though at a primary level. In English course fallacy is introduced for the advanced level research purposes. This integration brings forth the practice of the learning across the curriculum method.

Questionnaire from peers was methods of this research and while evaluating the responses, it is found that my peers who are teaching Ethics and Culture and who had philosophy as their major, agree that the knowledge of detecting fallacy can help students in analysis. In a piece of writing, even while students are making any criticism of a character, or comparing different ideas of different poets/novelists, fallacy can provide critical thinking and/or, they can use it to do the linguistic analysis of a certain text. Fallacy helps to form argument, finding sufficient reason behind action. The language of fallacy creates a puzzle, riddle, and twist for the students; they need their proper reasoning to come out of the riddle, students need to brainstorm a lot, come to a conclusion with reason.

Teachers of Ethics and Culture, who take part in the survey, echo my hypothesis while revealing that education is a lifelong process and fallacy offers learning and knowledge in academia and beyond. According to them, after completing study students will be involved in various professions. The knowledge about fallacy and the ways to come out of it, will increase critical reasoning, analysis, accepting or rejecting thoughts, twisting the situation, coining terms or characters.

In English course of Academic Writing which is offered by BIL, students are doing critical analysis, analytical study in their selected areas. In the same way by detecting the fallacy and coming out of it with reason, the students of philosophy often use their critical, analytical and logical evaluation.

Therefore teaching fallacy as a part of philosophy can also be integrated in English and will ensure learning across the curriculum because while writing research papers students have to pose their hypothesis and arguments with reason.

My peer review highlights that ethical part and the idea of ethics are universal and for this reason both English and Philosophy can teach ethics. The immoral practice of plagiarism is one of the highlights of BIL curriculum and this practice ensures the ethical dimension in language teaching. Since the students need to use arguments in English course from Ethical perspective (rational justification) which will deepen their ethical understanding; English course can offer fallacy as a tool to use philosophical (ethical) perspective as well as to improve language skills.

While commenting on education within academia and beyond, the peer review points out that the knowledge about fallacy can help students succeed in the professional world by creating self independence or confidence in them as when they have knowledge about fallacy they can easily sort out what to do in certain situations. Therefore, this learning build up self confidence of the students, and self confidence – by way of self efficacy often affects how well one performs and how satisfied one is with the choices he/she makes. That is how the knowledge of fallacy helps students in the professional world. Teaching fallacy is an appropriate integrated approach between English and philosophy to develop a sense in the mind of the learners “to what extent reasoning and arguments are appropriate” (Peer Review). Thus, according to my peers, who teach Ethics and Culture and who are from philosophy background, fallacy helps the educators to teach both language (English) and sound reasoning (from Philosophy) at a time which seems very effective. In the professional life, the students having knowledge about fallacy will be able to prove their credibility and demand more to their employers by being authentic in providing information which is more logical and being ethical in demonstrating moral values in comparison to the students who do not have knowledge about fallacy. Thus, knowledge about fallacy helps them succeed in professional field.

One of my peers quotes “Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language” (Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations). This quotation serves the purpose of this research rightfully. My peer further points out that the meaning of a word or a sentence depends on the relationship between speaker and hearer not

without reason and for this, learning fallacy will help students to understand the correct meaning of language. This view backs up my hypothesis – fallacy is a way of teaching good reasoning which is also an integral part of good writing.

My peers believe that teaching fallacy helps students to deal with logic: rational logic and irrational logics and beliefs, this learning is an intersection component for English course and in this way Philosophy works to develop argumentative discussion and writing. “Beauty is the key point for achieving success” – this is a fallacy where human dignity is ignored (Peer Review). This sense of morality offers an ethical realization and understanding of human rights that support both courses. In professional life or world, students need to be rational with lucid beliefs for creative and critical thinking skill, problem solving skill and leadership skill where the knowledge of fallacy will help them. Their moral faculty and argumentative thought will work enhanced by the knowledge of fallacy. These views strengthen my premises of fallacy and its “effectiveness” in the language classroom, and the implication of the method of learning across the curriculum.

While taking the classes, it was noticed that students could link the fallacy with their ethics and culture class contents, their arguments were becoming flawless, the sense of logic enhanced. It is interesting that students could get a strong sense of ethical values from the teaching of those classes and could relate those to the English class while issues of ethical practice was introduced, such as giving up the habit of quoting without proper reference and not providing invalid arguments (for not knowing a specific issue properly) while coming to a conclusion

While assessing the findings, it is interesting to perceive students’ first impression and their gradual realization through a process of an intense education. Students get introduced to fallacy without prior knowledge, some arguments with flaws were only presented and they were told to comment on the sentences, were not even hinted by the teacher that those could be wrong. The session was interactive. I was always curious to know about their first impression on fallacy and eventually which direction their impressions on fallacy follow afterwards. It is interesting to observe that 25% knew about fallacy and its existence in the argument even before attending the class. They learnt it in their high schools and colleges while they were taught to have valid and legitimate arguments while writing. 25% students did not know about invalid arguments at all. 10% of students say that they were vaguely aware

about it, but did not realize the “seriousness” of its damage in writing. 40% of the students knew that writing might have some invalid arguments but they were not fully aware about the arguments. The above scenario proves that though fallacy was puzzling at the beginning, students get to realize the main objectives of introducing fallacy in the language class – to teach students sound reasoning for the research paper.

For the students the introduction of Fallacy was quite out of the box, interesting because there was an underlying link between each of the fallacies, they were quite excited to learn it as they discover the flaws of the argument. Students admit that they were shocked to see that unknowingly they were making mistakes. Students came to know about a good writing. The teaching of fallacy will make them very cautious to know about the flaws of the argument and use the flawlessness of the argument and make the writing refined. For students, fallacy seems to be confusing and unnecessary but at the end it proves to be a eye opener I believe that this sense of gradual belonging to the world of fallacy and taking the full advantage of it became possible because of the interactive session in the classroom. The whole atmosphere was student centered; teacher played the role of a facilitator.

Students apprehend the aptness for introducing fallacy in their language course and that is quite obvious in their eagerness to think from reader’s perspective and clarify the write up accordingly. Students claim sensing how easily one can slip into fallacy and the disadvantage of not staying focused on writing criteria, and being elusive while writing. They realize the need for making writing more accurate and valid, and in this way bringing a lot of trust and eagerness from the readers. They also become interested in collecting a wide range of information from different perspectives. A sense of moral obligation and making writing more authentic are created among students which are some of the objectives of introducing fallacy while teaching research. Feedbacks from the students prove me right about my assumptions.

While students were asked to comment on how fallacy helps them in the language class they talked about “awareness” that learning fallacy has created which has made them careful about their writing style and the need for editing to improve logical perspective. Writing becomes refined as fallacy teaches them to make propositions very clearly and eventually come to a valid conclusion. Students accept the fact that they were deceptive before getting

introduced to fallacy. Moreover, fallacy introduces to students a way of thinking and researching that is devoid of faulty judgments and biasness. Therefore, when this thought process is put into writing, writing turns out to be fallacy free and in this way arguments become stronger. Knowledge of fallacy assists students to write better argumentative paper which is a central part of any research work. Though students did not explain properly, they gave an interesting view saying that fallacy makes them aware about grammatical mistakes. I believe they mean proper structure of a sentence.

As one my focuses in this research is an integration of different genres of education and how does it help students, students views regarding this is essential as they are a significant part of this learning process. Though they were not taught philosophy in depth, they got a tiny portion of philosophy with the introduction to ethics which is a part of philosophy. However, they could connect and realize the advantage of integration of philosophy and language teaching. 60% students succeeded in getting this link between ethical practice and language learning as they say that philosophy taught them diverse thoughts and they cannot be biased. Fallacy guides to the logical thought. The product of these two combinations is a very challenging write-up which if done effectively, is flawless to the core. Philosophy and writing both require an effective process of thinking. Arguments and contradictions are parts of Philosophy and English Education both, so learning about fallacy enhances both. Philosophy can be highly equivocal, and we also see its influence in classic literary works. A good understanding of fallacy can help to scrutinize these write ups in a better way. Integration of two genres of knowledge gives new insight to understand work. Students will learn how to make the thoughts sound and logical.

In an answer for how the knowledge of fallacy will help the students beyond academia, students talk about not having any problem while doing research paper, putting hypotheses and research questions. Knowledge of fallacy will help in better reasoning for any professional life especially the ones related to policy making, journalism or making reviews, understanding laws to almost any writing related profession. Being educated would spare the embarrassment of coming across as an ignorant person and help students write papers properly (if that is what job requires).

While doing this research on fallacy, my students’ reaction towards the method of teaching, their first impression about fallacy become primary concerns

for me as fallacy is taught in an in-depth approach as a part of learning research. Students' reaction was perceptible from their classroom activities and their responses but I intended to know more about their experience of first exposure to fallacy. It is interesting to observe that 25% of the class did not know about fallacy but only 2% of the students find it confusing. Interactive classroom could be a reason for this. Dialogic mode was adopted as method of teaching; through an informal conversation the fallacy was introduced. Teacher was facilitator and stepped in when needed. Students find the class interesting.

ENG 204 is a course which mainly focuses on research and analysis with sound reasoning to prove the hypothesis and it is an essential part of research. Fallacy plays a significant role in teaching valid reasoning as it contains random flaws in arguments – piling up data without proper references, establishing faulty cause and effect relationship, diverting from the main focus, hasty generalizing etc. and by detecting the flaws from the sentences and the drawn conclusions students become aware of the importance of valid logical reasoning. Good reasoning in order to produce good writing is the objective of the Advanced level English Language class which I teach and students' research at the end of the semester proves that fallacy helps them in reasoning. In the way of establishing the hypothesis through the feedback received from the students it is demonstrated that most of students agree with the idea of teaching valid arguments through fallacy.

Learning across the curriculum is always an area of interest for me. Fallacy is a part of Philosophy and it is introduced in teaching Ethics and Culture course of BIL which is compulsory for all the students. Fallacy is also taught in the advanced level class of English course. The effect of this diverse education in students' academia and professional world is also a major focus of my research. Fallacy teaches the soundness of thoughts, arguments and actions and this skill is applicable in the classroom and beyond. My proposition regarding the practice of learning across the curriculum and its positive effect gets strength as my peers and focus group of students ascertain this fact through their ideas in favor of learning across the curriculum.

This research focuses on a long term education by introducing apparently ingrained frenzy of fallacy and then a gradual knowledge of valid arguments and decisions. The first impression on fallacy is always a perplexing matter for me as I find some of my students extremely enthusiastic, some seem clueless,

some knew about it before, and for some fallacy in new. Students' feedback through questionnaire justifies this proposition of mine as it goes for diverse reactions.

Fallacy is introduced in ENG 204: Essentials of Academic writing course which mainly focuses on research and the reason for this introduction is to help students find out the flaws they usually make while posing an argument and come out of those logical errors. My experience in the class says that students detect the common mistakes they make while using reasons, such as they tend to quote, summarize and paraphrase without citation, they create imaginary data (Card Stacking), they take help of faulty cause and effect relationship (Non Sequitur) when they do not possess proper knowledge about an issue and they usually generalize depending on few occurrences (Hasty generalization). Fallacy makes students cautious about putting logical ideas together. Students' feedback seconds my proposition of fallacy as a tool for good reasoning which is an integral part of good writing.

Fallacy involves both philosophy and language learning in BRAC University. The idea of philosophy comes under Ethics and Culture course and my peers from that course reflect that a combination and reinforcement of learning is possible as fallacy teaches logical flaws in both Ethics and Culture and English Language. Learning across different subjects of a curriculum leads the success of the students beyond academia and one of the important propositions of this research gets justified as far as a long-term education is concerned.

It is interesting that students come up with valuable suggestions about things to be included in teaching of fallacy and the methods could be followed to make the teaching of fallacy more effective. Suggestions, such as - getting students collect the flaws of arguments in debates or real life as part of the out-class activities, introducing fallacy at the beginning so that in the long run students can detect the fallacies they are themselves committing, making students write about a certain given topic, checking (by the teachers) for the common fallacies made by the average number of the students and teaching them first, making students find their own fallacy in their previous essays are worth mentioning. One of the students, doing her major in Pharmacy goes for a suggestion which I find very creative. She says that teaching fallacy will be more efficient if fallacies are taught through colorful posters where there will be the descriptions of fallacy in bullet point form, examples of fallacy and cartoon figure indicating the

fallacy. These suggestions will definitely be applied to make learning more fruitful in future.

IV. CONCLUSION

Students of academic writing class of BRAC University, with the teaching of fallacy, acquires a sound knowledge of the topic of research, critical thinking based writing and a holistic education beyond academia. They persist to come out of the habit of piling up data without reference, which seems 'alluring' when they lack knowledge. They succeed in the arena of academic and moral education because of their perseverance, which is worth mentioning at the end. With proper changes in methodology based on teacher and student feedback, teaching of fallacy can be proper source of uprooting invalid arguments from student's writing which will ensure a broad based education too.

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APPENDIX 1

Questionnaire for the Students

- Were you aware about invalid arguments in writing before getting introduced to fallacy?
- What were your first impressions while you got introduced to Fallacy in ENG 204 class?

- How did fallacy help you in writing?
- According to you what should be the main objectives of teaching fallacy in a writing class?
- Fallacy is also an important part of philosophy, how does a combination of two different genres of knowledge help students in education?
- Did you enjoy the fallacy class?
 - Yes
 - No
- Was the method of teaching appropriate to teach students not to make flawed arguments?
 - Yes
 - No
- Among the fallacies that were taught, which ones are the common among students like you?
- How would this knowledge of flawed argument help you in professional life?
- Was learning fallacy an easy task or you found it complicated?
 - Easy
 - Complicated
- Is there any suggestion for the teacher to improve the teaching of fallacy?

Questionnaire for Teachers

- How does teaching fallacy as a part of philosophy can also be integrated in English and will ensure learning across the curriculum?
- Can fallacy offer an ethical understanding for the students of both philosophy and English Language? If yes, how does it do that? If no, then why not?

APPENDIX 2Questionnaire

a) Were you aware about invalid arguments in writing before getting introduced to fallacy?

Yes, I was.

b) What were your first impressions while you got introduced to Fallacy in ENG 204 class?

It was an interesting experience. The name of different types of fallacy have an indirect link with that the fallacies those they refer to although they sound funny. Beside, I found it as a very useful lesson in my ENG-204 class at Savar Campus.

c) How did fallacy help you in writing?

Lessons on fallacy helped me in ~~two~~ ^{three} ways. Firstly, I have become aware of some flaws that I used to make regularly making my writing sub-standard, for example, the card-stacking fallacy, begging a question or circular arguments. Secondly, I was an inefficient analyzer of the writings of my friends or younger siblings before I had the knowledge about "Red herring" or "Non-sequitor" fallacy. Now, I can easily pin-point these errors from any piece of write-up. Thirdly, I would like to say that sometimes, I can make my writing, ^{especially stories} different or more pleasant to the reader by appropriate use of fallacies, such as, "Either/or" fallacy, "False Analogy" or "Post hoc" fallacy.

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APPENDIX 3

d) According to you what should be the main objectives of teaching fallacy in a writing class?

Ans:- In writing class, fallacies are taught to alert the students who despite having a strong and creative skill on writing are unable to score high. The teachers try to equip the students better helping to standardise or improve their oral, more emphatically written presentation. Therefore, the knowledge of fallacy guide the students how to use English language more effectively and wisely.

e) Fallacy is also an important part of philosophy, how does a combination of two different genres of knowledge help students in education?

The use of fallacy in philosophy is unintentional in the form of "Slippery Slope" which involves with constructions, like, "If ---- then ----" and "False Dilemma" which deals with constructions, such as "either/or". Both of these are sub-classes of deductive fallacy applied by philosophers who put forth a conclusion after an observation or experience. On contrary, use of logical fallacies in language is considered as a kind of flaw. So, ~~these~~ the same tool-fallacy is being used in different ways in two genres of knowledge— philosophy and language. Therefore, ~~the~~ students learn and are capable of justifying the appropriate way and place of using fallacy, as a whole.

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