A PROBE INTO TEACHERS' AND STUDENTS' CHALLENGES IN TEACHING AND LEARNING ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN SELECTED PAKISTANI SPECIAL SCHOOLS: TEACHERS' PERCEPTION

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Abstract

Education in general and education for special children is the most critical yet neglected sector in developing countries such as Pakistan. This study delves into the challenges teachers face while teaching English as a second language (L2) to Students with Special Needs (SWSN) and the problems students might encounter while learning L2 in inclusive classrooms. For this quantitative study, a comprehensive questionnaire has been developed at Google Forms to gather data from the special schools of Khanewal, Multan, and Bahawalpur. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) has been employed to analyze the responses to the questionnaire. The study's participants are the teachers of SWSN selected through purposive sampling. The findings of the study reveal that 71.4% of teachers oppose the assertion that one single, traditional methodology of second (English) language teaching caters to the unique needs of SWSN, 71.5% supported the statement that technology-integrated methodology for different special students might address their individual needs. Furthermore, 28.6% of teachers express their concerns about the school curriculum which hinders students' ability to learn the English language. Through interpretation of findings, the study brings up issues such as the establishment of separate classrooms for SWSN, updating of curriculum and teachers' training for successful English communication and proficiency in technology-integrated methods, into the limelight and calls for urgent and significant improvement in the special education sector.

Keywords: Special Education, English Language Teaching, SWSN Education, L2 Acquisition

1. Introduction

Education for every individual and nation is immensely important and its significance cannot be overemphasized for persons with disabilities as education can assist their integration into society. In special education, there is a customized design set of instructions for students with different disabilities that cater to the unique needs of these students. The traditional schools or classrooms hinder their ability to learn as they fail to address the individual and unique needs of special students who have different physical, cognitive, or emotional conditions that affect their ability to learn in a conventional educational institute, and a special school equipped with tailored strategies to address their concerns and help them comply with these challenges is a better option (Farooq, 2012).

Likewise, gifted children demonstrating high intellectual, artistic, and creative abilities might struggle and perform poorly in regular conventional institutions as these conventional schools are not equipped with providing appropriate challenges and stimulations that nurture the talents and engage the gifted students. Special Schools, in comparison, planned and tailored their contents in such a way that assists both special and gifted students reach their full potential. However, In Pakistan, special education services only take disabled students in their institutions (Farooq, 2012).

In the report of the Commission on National Education, 1959 Govt of Pakistan acknowledged its responsibility to educate special and handicapped students for the first time. However, the initiative to provide them with education didn't begin until the Education Policy 1972-1980, and an average amount was allocated to special education programs in the Fifth Five-Year Plan (Pakistan Planning Commission, 1978). However, in 1980 the amount allocated for special education and govt involvement in this program was significantly increased, yet it remained insufficient to cater to the Pakistani population.

In the 1980s and onwards a significant development was observed in education planning for special children. To offer legal cover to this field the policy-making was started in 1985 and eventually, the first National Policy for Persons with Disabilities was recognized and approved in 2002. However, the true implementation of this policy was witnessed not sooner than a National Plan of Action (NPA) was presented in 2006 for the successful translation and execution of this policy into action.

The policy was focused on providing a plethora of facilities to people with disabilities such as education, vocational training, employment opportunities, medical care, rehabilitation, provision of funds, and developing disabled-friendly infrastructure like parks, buildings, and public places (Pakistan, 2002). This policy was a major development in the Pakistani history of special education. The federal govt induces the provincial govt to provide facilities and education services to children with special needs, leading to the inception of a separate Department of Special Education in Punjab province. For this purpose, special education institutes were established in different areas of the province mainly catering to four types of disabled children, namely hearing impaired, visually impaired, physically impaired, and mentally retarded.

In Pakistan mostly in government schools grammar translation method (GTM) which is an inefficient and outdated method for second (English) language learning (Panezai and Channa, 2017) is opted for teaching the English language to students (Awan & Shafi, 2016; Liaqat et al., 2021; Safdar, 2013). Special students have also been taught with GTM or its variations to impart the English language. The education and teaching practices for special students in Pakistan are not up to contemporary standards and are not helpful in their professional development (Khowaja, 2021). Technology-integrated methods can produce better results for second language acquisition for SWSN, for instance, Khan and Mahmood (2022) opine that assistive technology positively impacts the acquisition of English language for blind and visually impaired (BVI) students. It also enhances understanding and interaction with teachers. However, access to modern technology for language learning for special children is a hurdle in Pakistan mainly due to poverty and lack of awareness (Johnson, 2011). Khan and Mahmood (2022) argue that blind and visually impaired (BVI) students have little access to assistive technology (technology adapted or specially designed to improve the functioning of people with disabilities (Borg, Lindstrom, & Larsson, 2009)).

Another significant factor in L2 acquisition is school curriculum and teachers' proficiency in the target language as the non-traditional methods of L2 teaching demand a certain degree of proficiency in the communication of L2 and a revised and flexible curriculum. For instance, Farukh and Vulchanova (2016) in their study concluded that more exposure to the target language (English) results in better comprehension and acquisition of the second language in reading-deficit children. Therefore non-traditional teaching methodology and teacher's proficiency in a second language is significant in L2 acquisition. However, they argued that a reading deficit in the L1 affects negatively L2 skills (Farukh and Vulchanova, 2016).

In this paper, the term "students with special needs" and its abbreviation "SWSN", first used by Farroq (2012) in his paper, have been used for special children. The present study collects data from three different special education institutes located in three different cities in Punjab, ie, Khanewal, Multan, and Bahawalpur to assess the challenges and problems students with special needs (SWSN) and teachers encounter despite these policies and whether one school for differently disabled children is equipped with instruments to address unique needs of SWSN.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

- To scrutinize the challenges faced by teachers in special schools while teaching the English language to students with special needs and different disabilities
- To examine what challenges SWSN may encounter in educational institutions based on teachers' observation

1.2 Research Questions

Keeping in view the research purpose and objectives, the following research questions have been planned.

- What challenges do teachers face while teaching English language to SWSN?
- What problems may SWSN face in educational institutes based on teachers' observations?

1.3 Significance of Study

The research gives insights into the academic challenges in special schools which mainly arise due to the one standard curriculum for children with different disabilities and one traditional teaching methodology for second language teaching. Moreover, by taking input from teachers of special schools it underscores the significance of teachers training to make them more efficient in non-traditional methods of second language teaching and more proficient in English language communication. Furthermore, it highlights the need for special student-friendly infrastructure in schools for the easy mobility of SWSNs as the infrastructure of inclusive schools hinders their movement.

2. Literature Review

Over the past few decades, education for students with special needs (SWSN) has gained significant attention on a global scale (Rohani, 2020). According to Sulawati, Ratnawati, and Radhiyani (2021), students who exhibit anomalies or differences in their emotional, intellectual, or other domains during their developmental stages in comparison to their peers are considered to have special needs and require special education and services. As Lipkin and Okamoto (2015) assert special needs students have the same rights as other kids in terms of education and other spheres of life.

Moreover, Farooq (2012) investigated issues that Pakistani general education and regular schools faced when teaching students with special needs (SWSN). The researcher gathered the data from SWSN, their parents, as well as their teachers. 89 SWSN from 72 various families took part in this study. Of the aforementioned 89 students, twenty-three had hearing disabilities, twelve had visual challenges, and fifty-four had neurological disorders. So, Farooq's (2012) study findings pointed out that normal schools were preferable for SWSN compared to special schools,

according to both parents and learners. It was also discovered that SWSN's class fellows had a positive outlook on them, though every group of participants accepted that special education students in ordinary schools faced systemic issues.

In a similar vein, Lee et al. (2015) investigated the attitudes of preschool teachers toward the inclusion of special needs children in ordinary classrooms in Hong Kong by utilizing MANOVA. Their results showed that only a little encouragement for inclusion was reported by teachers. Regardless of their professional roles i.e., class teacher or administrator, teachers with special education training were more ardent supporters of including students with intellectual impairments as well as those with visual, speech, auditory, and language disorders. However, teachers' encouragement of students with physical challenges, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism spectrum disorder (ASD), specific learning difficulties, and students with exceptional qualities were not significantly impacted by teacher preparation or professional role.

Furthermore, the study has been conducted by Putra and Suyatno (2021) describes how Yogyakarta's special needs students are taught to be independent individuals. A case study has been used in this qualitative research design. Through observation, documentation, and interviews, data has been gathered. The interactive-inductive assessment strategy, which included data representation, data reduction, and conclusion, has been used to examine the gathered data. This study's findings have demonstrated that Yogyakarta special needs students have exhibited evidence of independent character, including readiness for study, self-assurance, individual task completion, courage to voice opinions, collaboration in groups, accurate and sufficient reading and writing, and independent maths work. Moreover, learning exercises, direct instruction, unplanned activity, exemplary behavior, and regular habituation have been used to instill independent character in students with special needs. Additionally, the study conducted by Jariono et al. (2021) attempted to examine and describe the instructional approaches used with children who have special needs. Up to thirty people participated, consisting of teachers (10) and parents (20) of students from SLBN Karanganyar and Sukoharjo. The researchers employed questionnaires, interviews, and observations as their research tools. Thus, Jariono et al. (2021) study's findings suggested that teachers' approaches to teaching special needs students in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic were effective, as evidenced by the 67.5% of respondents who strongly agreed to employ online learning and engage parents. Besides, parents who participated in the online learning process went with special needs students, and teachers and parents worked together as a unit to support, guide, motivate, design, and create innovative learning materials.

Similarly, Raof et al. (2023) have undertaken their study regarding the perceptions of secondary school teachers with inclusive learning. The researchers decided to conduct inclusive education at the school in the Sargodha District. All 17 teachers at the selected school received the questionnaire, which asked them to rate their responses on a four-point Likert scale in order to gather data. Frequency distribution and percentage measurements were used to evaluate the data. So, the findings of this study have underscored that opportunities for academic as well as nonacademic instruction offered by teachers to special students are nearly identical to those offered to their peers without impairments, but technology and productive assessment are not used to their full potential.

Research Gap:

The aforementioned researches have emphasized that a great number of studies have already been accomplished on special students. The present study marks out unique from the rest

because no inquiry has been made regarding the challenges that teachers face while teaching English to special students and the problems such students might encounter while learning in inclusive classrooms. So, the current research tries to fill that void by addressing those difficulties which usually Students With Special Needs (SWSN) encounter in their instructor's point views in Pakistani context.

3. Research Methodology

In this study, a quantitative approach is employed to delve into the perspective held by the teachers of students with special needs in learning the English language. Quantitative research is a means for testing objective theories by examining the relationship among variables. These variables, in turn, can be measured, typically on instruments, so that numbered data can be analyzed using statistical procedures. The final written report has a set structure consisting of an introduction, literature and theory, methods, results, and discussion (Creswell, 2014). The objective was not only to elucidate these perspectives but also to subject them to rigorous validation through the process of data analysis.

3.1 Instruments

The researcher developed a comprehensive set of questionnaires aimed at precisely gathering data for the research goals. The primary tool used was a 5-point Likert-type questionnaire, comprising 16 questions grouped into three parts. The first segment was designed to assess teachers' perceptions of English language learning attitudinal problems regarding students with special needs. The second part delves into the structural problems that may affect the learning of students with special needs. Moreover, the third part explores the educational problems which according to teachers' perspective students may encounter while learning an English language.

3.2 Data Collection:

  To facilitate data collection, the questionnaire was designed at Google Forms. The questionnaire was then distributed online among the teachers of 3 public schools. One of them was from Multan one from Khanewal, and one from Bahawalpur.

3.3 Participants

The study's participants were 22 teachers of students with special needs from the three (3) selected public schools in Punjab i.e., Multan, Khanewal, and Bahawalpur.

3.4 Sampling Technique

When a sample is chosen it is essential to use an appropriate methodology because it assures that the collected data is representative and relevant to the goal of the study. For quantitative research, purposive sampling is a helpful technique because its primary objective is to collect relevant data from a particular portion of the population (O'Leary, 2017). In this process of purposive sampling, participants are chosen based on particular characteristics and demands that are most appropriate to the research question.

In this study, purposive sampling is used to ensure that the participants of the study which are the teachers of the students with special needs were the most competent and pertinent source of information. O'Leary (2017) claims that this approach allows the researcher to focus on guaranteed interest groups, ensuring that the population under study is suitable for the study's objectives and able to provide rich, thorough data.

- **Data analysis**

The researchers used SPSS 20.0 and Microsoft Excel to carry out the analysis. Here, SD stands for Strongly Disagree, D stands for Disagree, N for Neutral while A & SA stands for Agree and Strongly Agree.

Table 1

		SD	D	N	A	SA	M	SD	RESULT
1. I support students with different disabilities to be included in the same class for English language learning.	%	14.3	47.6	0	28.6	0	3.526	3.178	Disagree
2. Students with different disabilities can learn the English language with the same methodology	%	9.5	9.5	4.8	61.9	9.5	2.45	2.190	Agree
3. Children without a disability can learn English language more efficiently than children with special needs in inclusive schools	%	9.5	0	33.3	47.6	4.8	2.5	2.073	Agree
4. The traditional method (GTM) suits the best to children with different disabilities better than another specialized method (Technology-integrated classrooms)	%	28.6	42.9	9.5	9.5	0	4	3.583	Disagree
5. Students with different disabilities face difficulty in English language learning in inclusive classrooms	%	0	19	4.8	61.9	9.5	2.35	2	Agree

A large proportion of teachers (47.6%) disagreed with the statement that "students with different disabilities can be included in the same class for English language learning", and a small proportion (14.3%) strongly disagreed with this assertion as shown in Table 1, which suggests that teachers have a negative perception about inclusive classes for English language learning because students with different disabilities cannot be taught in a same class. Whereas over 28.6% of teachers agreed with the above statement, reflecting a positive outlook on the significance of inclusive classrooms. In spite of the mean score of 3.526 usually indicating that the result is closer to a neutral or positive stance, the standard deviation is higher (3.178), suggesting significant variability in responses.

A large majority of teachers (61.9%) agreed and a small proportion (9.5) strongly agreed that "Students with different disabilities can learn the English language with the same methodology", as shown in Table 1, which reflects the predominant positive sentiments towards the assertion. Whilst a small proportion of respondents strongly disagreed (9.5%) and disagreed (9.5%) with the statement, indicating the challenges students with different disabilities might feel while

learning through one methodology. However, 4.8% remain neutral on this assertion. The mean score (2.45) suggests a positive sentiment towards the assertion, whereas the standard deviation (2.190) is quite higher yet lower than the mean value indicating a predominantly positive response.

A large number of teachers (47.6%) agreed that "Children without a disability can learn the English language more efficiently than children with special needs in inclusive schools," with 4.8% strongly agreeing making the overall result of "Agree," whereas a significant number of teachers (33.3%) held a neutral stance as shown in Table 1. The mean value (2.5) leans towards agreement while the standard deviation, however, is moderately high but there is a slight variability in responses.

A large portion of respondents (42.9%) disagreed that "the traditional method (GTM) suits the best to children with special needs better than another specialized method (Technology-integrated classrooms)," with a significant portion (28.6%) strongly disagreeing, leading to a strong inclination towards disagreement. Only a small proportion (9.5%) stayed neutral, 9.5% of respondents agreed and none strongly agreed indicating that the majority has the opinion that traditional method of language teaching cannot cater to the needs of students with special needs. The mean score of 4 inclines strongly towards disagreement with a high standard deviation reflecting variability in responses but the dominant sentiment remains disagree.

There is a strong consensus towards an agreement with 61.9% of respondents agreeing and 9.5% of respondents strongly agreeing with the assertion that "students with special needs face difficulty in English language learning in inclusive classrooms" as shown in Tabe 1. A relatively smaller portion disagreed and none strongly disagreed with the above statement. The mean value is 2.35 indicating a fair proclivity towards agreement and the value of standard deviation (2) is significantly low.

Table 2

		SD	D	N	A	SA	MEAN	STD	R
1. School buildings are disabled friendly	%	9.5	19	14.3	47.6	0	2.894	2.575	Agree
2. Students with Different Disabilities can move easily in the classrooms	%	4.8	9.5	14.5	47.6	19	2.3	2.024	Agree
3. Classrooms are arranged to provide ease for Students with Different Disabilities	%	4.8	4.8	9.5	61.5	9.5	2.263	1.919	Agree

4. Students with different Disabilities have problems with easy access to basic amenities in the school	%	4.8	28.6	14.3	47.6	0	2.9	2.549	Agree

The findings from the second dimension of the questionnaire provide a comprehensive view of the teacher's perspective regarding the structural problems that students with special needs may encounter while learning the English Language highlighted in Table 2. When the perspectives of their teachers were taken, the majority of them 47.6 % agreed that the buildings of the school are friendly for disabled students. This suggests that the school of students with special needs encourages learning a language by providing a supporting environment for them. Whereas 19% of the teachers are of the view that the school buildings are not friendly for such students, reflecting the perspective that teachers are not satisfied with the infrastructure of their school buildings. While 14.3% of the teachers have a neutral point of view regarding this question, suggesting they are neither fully satisfied nor dissatisfied with the learning-friendly building of the school for disabled students. The weighted mean of 2.894 for these results proposes that overall agreement is with the statement that the buildings of the school are disabled-friendly. The findings of the next statement from Table 2 offer valuable insight that a large number of teachers agree (47.6%) that students with special needs can move freely in the classrooms. This suggests that the classrooms of such schools are big enough that students can move easily in the class. Learning a language is directly linked to the type of environment provided in the classroom. However, 19 % of the teachers strongly agree with this statement, indicating a perception that the territory of classrooms allows space for the free movement of students with special needs. Out of the total 14.5 % have a neutral point of view whereas the percentage of teachers who strongly disagree and disagree are 4.8% and 9.5 % respectively. A slight agreement tendency is indicated by a 2.3 mean score. The value of the 2.024 standard deviations suggests some variation in opinions.

Based on the data of statement 8, a high percentage of 61.5 % agree with the statement that the structure of the classes is arranged in such a way that it provides ease to such students. This high percentage recommends that teachers are highly satisfied with the infrastructure of the class. While results give an equal percentage of 9.5 % of those who strongly agree and those who have a neutral point of view regarding this statement. 4.8% of the teachers perception is that they strongly disagree with this statement. At the mean score of 2.263, the agreement is slightly favoured. Indicating agreement with this statement, the standard deviation of 1.919 shows a narrow range of responses.

The findings of statement 9 of the questionnaire suggest that 47.6% of the teachers agree with the statement that in their schools students face problems and challenges to get access to basic facilities. The teacher seems to be aware of the challenges their students face due to a lack of basic amenities. However, 28.6% disagree with this statement reflecting that their school takes care of such situations where special students do not face such challenges. 14.3% of the teachers gave a neutral opinion regarding this situation. While 4.8% of teachers out of the total seem to strongly disagree with this statement. The mean score of 2.9 usually indicates that the result is close to a positive stance, whereas the standard deviation of 2.54 suggests the point of degree of agreement.

Table 3

		SD	D	N	A	SA	MEAN	STD	R
1. The English curriculum is in accordance with the learning abilities of SWSN	%	4.8	23.8	0	61.9	4.8	2.6	2.302	Agree
2. Teachers are proficient in the English language to teach English to SWSN through non-traditional methods	%	0	19	4.8	61.9	9.5	2.35	2	Agree
3. Teachers have different ways to communicate with SWSN	%	0	19	4.8	57.1	14.3	2.3	1.974	Agree
4. Students with different disabilities face problems in note-taking during the English Language class	%	0	9.5	9.5	61.9	14.3	2.15	1.974	Agree
5. SWSN are given preference in English academic activities	%	4.8	42.9	4.8	33.3	9.5	3	2.720	Disagree
6. The examination and assessment system is encouraging for SWSN	%	9.5	33.3	14.3	33.3	4.8	3.1	2.792	Disagree

A large number of participants (61.9%) concurred that " the English curriculum is in accordance with the learning abilities of SWSN". Only a few respondents (4.8%) thought that the English curriculum did not adequately address the needs of students who were special needs. Relatively more respondents (23.8%) disagreed that the English curriculum matches the students' needs. There is unanimity on this issue as evidenced by the lack of respondents who selected the neutral option. The curriculum clearly meets the needs of these students, as evidenced by the small percentage of respondents (4.8%) who strongly agreed. With a mean score of 2.30, the agreement is leaned slightly. The responses show a moderate spread, as demonstrated by the standard deviation (2.60). A larger standard deviation indicates that respondents were less certain or in disagreement with one another. Thus, as evidenced in statement 10 of table 3, not everyone agrees that the curriculum adequately meets the needs of students with special needs, despite widespread agreement to the contrary.

Most participants (61.9%) supported that "teachers are proficient in the English language to teach English to SWSN through non-traditional methods", as shown in Table 3. None of the

respondents thought that teachers lacked proficiency in the English language. 19% disagreed, which is a sizable portion that felt teachers are not proficient enough in this area. Assurance in teachers' abilities is demonstrated by nearly 10% (9.5%) who strongly agreed 4.8% were indifferent, possibly doubting the proficiency of the teachers. The 2.35 mean score has a slight agreement tendency. The responses appear to be fairly evenly distributed, as indicated by the 2.00 standard deviation, which points to some degree of consensus.

 In light of statement 12, most people (57.1%) accepted that instructors use a variety of communication techniques. However, 19% disagreed, which may suggest that they think teachers only use a few different ways to communicate. More than 14% (14.3%) strongly agreed, indicating trust in the adaptability of teachers' communication. Just 4.8% of respondents said they were neutral. Not a single respondent thought that teachers' communication strategies were totally inadequate. Once more, the mean score of 2.30 leans slightly in favour of agreement. Similar to the preceding statement, the standard deviation of 1.97 indicates a comparatively narrow range of responses.

The majority (61.9%) concurred that "students with special needs face problems in note-taking during the English Language class." However, 14.3% strongly concurred, indicating a perception of these obstacles as being important. 9.5% stayed neutral, probably not sure how serious the issue is. A tiny percentage (9.5%) disagreed, presumably thinking these students don't have serious problems taking English language notes. None of the respondents said that taking notes posed no difficulties for students with special needs. The 1.97 mean score has a slight agreement skew. A moderate response spread is indicated by the 2.15 standard deviation, which suggests some variation in opinions.

Indicating a view that "SWSN are given preference in English academic activities," the majority (42.9%) disagreed. 33.3% of respondents, or more, said that English academic activities are preferentially assigned to students with special needs. Indicating a conviction that these students enjoy substantial preference, nearly 10% (9.5%) strongly agreed. Uncertain about receiving preferential treatment, a small portion (4.8%) opted neutral. Just 4.8% of respondents thought that educational activities do not give special consideration to students with special needs. At 2.72, the mean score, disagreement is slightly favoured. Indicating a lack of agreement on this issue, the responses' large range is shown by the standard deviation of 3.00.

Based on data from statement 16, opinions regarding the examination system's encouragement of students with special needs are mixed, with 33.3% disagreeing and 33.3% agreeing. There is no consensus, which is supported by the high standard deviation (3.10). While some agree the system offers encouragement, a sizable portion disagrees, speculating that it may not be optimised to the maximum for these special students.

Conclusion

The research uncovers important insights regarding the perception and experience of teachers instructing students with special needs. 61.9% of teachers are sceptical about the effectiveness of English language learning in inclusive classrooms as a single, traditional teaching methodology may not address the individual needs of SWSN. In comparison, technology-integrated teaching methodologies have been preferred by 71.6% of teachers. 71% of teachers acknowledge that special schools allow easy mobility of SWSN provided with disabled-friendly infrastructure and supportive environment, but the variability of responses reveals that there could be an improvement in the availability of resources and accessible buildings as the physical

environment enhances the learning of SWSN. The general consensus regarding the suitability of the English curriculum and teachers' proficiency in integrating non-traditional methodologies is in their favour. However, there are notable concerns about these statements highlighting that there is room for improvement in curriculum designing and teacher training which should be addressed for effective learning of SWSN. Additionally in spite of tailored instructions and teachers effective communication in special classrooms teachers reveal that SWSN has problems in notes taking, which underscores a need for the implementation of more individualized strategies in classrooms.

Overall, the research emphasizes significant development in second language learning for SWSN in special schools. While there is a prevalent positive outlook there are reservations of teachers regarding the structural, methodological, and curricular aspects of inclusive schools highlighting the significance of establishing more special learning institutes. Moreover, the variability of responses regarding these challenges in special schools also underscores the fact that there should be improvement in these areas. By revising and addressing these areas, the educational experience of SWSN will be more fulfilling offering a more inclusive and supportive learning environment.

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