

Challenges Facing Female Students in Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

¹Uhumuavbi Patrick Omorogbe, Ph.D and ²Eimuhi Justina Onojerena, Ph. D

¹Department of Curriculum and Instruction

²Department of Educational Foundations & Management

Faculty of Education,

Ambrose Alli University

Edo State, Nigeria, West Africa.

Corresponding Author: Uhumuavbi Patrick Omorogbe, Ph.D

Abstract

This paper identified the challenges female students faced in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. A disparity was discovered to exist in enrollments of males and females in tertiary institutions in Nigeria with females highly discriminated against. There is a report of low enrollment of female in science and technology related courses at the University level of education and that females take the least resistance by opting for disciplines designated as females such as liberal arts and Nursing. Most of the challenges faced range from religion, parental educational background and economic (poverty) factors among others. This paper posits that if a nation is to develop, empowerment of female gender is critical to overall achievement, so as to strengthen their roles in societal and sustainable development. The paper recommends that special interest be paid to the education of women so as to realize their potentials for self-actualization

Keywords: challenges, female students, enrolment, higher education and sustainable development

INTRODUCTION

Education is a means by which a nation equips her citizens for all round development. It is a fulcrum for achieving progress in all aspects of human life, national growth and development. This is in consonance with the 1998 World Conference on Education Commitment that higher education should be geared towards development and progress. Therefore, it is expected that higher education is equally accessible to all; all persons seeking higher education have an optimal range of choice and participation of women in higher education as emphasized in (UNESCO, 2003). Section (1) (4) (c) and (5) (c) of the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013) stipulated that there is need for equality of educational opportunities for all Nigerian children irrespective of any real or imagined disabilities, each according to his or her ability and there will be the provision of equal access to educational opportunities for all citizens of the country at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels both inside and outside the formal school system.

Education has been derived from two Latin words Educare (Educere) and Educatum. "Educare" means to train or mould. It again means to bring up or to lead out or to draw out, propulsion from inward to outward. The term "Educatum" denotes the act of teaching. It throws light on the principles and practice of teaching. The term Educare or Educere mainly indicates development of the latent faculties of the child. It could be seen therefore as the wealth of knowledge acquired by an individual after studying a

particular subject matter or experience life lessons that provide an understanding of something.

Also, as contained in the National Policy on Education document, one goal inter alia of tertiary education within Nigerian's overall national objectives is to contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training. As such, it is only when University education is made equitably accessible to all irrespective of race, gender, language or religion that the attainment of the desired objectives of University education can be guaranteed.

The current wave of globalization has greatly improved the lives of women worldwide, particularly the lives of women in the developing world. Nevertheless, women remain disadvantaged in many areas of life, including education, employment, health, and civil rights (Aja-Okorie, 2013). According to the United States Agency for International Development (USID) and the World Bank, 57 percent of the 72 million primary school aged children who do not attend school are females. Additionally, girls are four percent less likely than boys to complete primary schools (Gender statistics, 2010). While many gains have been made with regards to overall level of education worldwide and more children than ever are now attending primary school (King, 2013), there is still no world-wide gender parity in education. In every income bracket, there are more female children than male children who are not attending school. Generally, girls

constitute the poorest percent of household that have the lowest chance of getting an education (Jensen, 2010 cited in Aja-Okorie, 2013). This inequality does not necessarily change in adulthood.

Statistics had shown that of the 774 million illiterate adults worldwide, 64 percent are women – a statistic virtually unchanged from the early 1990s (Gender Statistics, 2010). The United Nations Millennium Development Goal (MDG) to promote gender equality and empower women therefore uses education as its target and the measure of gender disparity in education as its indicator of progress. Through the efforts of the international community, the UN had been optimistic to be able to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education and at all levels of education no later than 2015. What a lofty target to realize! Thus, education is seen as a purposive, conscious or unconscious, psychological, sociological, scientific and philosophical process, which brings about the development of the individual to the fullest extent and also the maximum development of society in such a way that both enjoy maximum happiness and prosperity. In Short, education is the development of individual according to his needs and demands of society, of which he is an integral part. The question asked therefore, is education meeting this aim? The National Policy on Education according to the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013) stipulates that education is an instrument par excellence for the development of the nation. But the budgetary allocation to education in Nigeria has been very poor with 7.40 and 7.04 per cent allocated to education in the 2017 and 2018 budgetary years as against 26 per cent recommended by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). To this end, the type of education provided is usually unable to meet the needs of the individual and society. Similarly, policies that are made to ensure every child acquires education irrespective of sex up to junior secondary three is never fully enforced.

This was why Aja-Okorie (2013) asked the questions, ‘can this Millennium Development Goal be achieved? What progress have countries made to achieve this goal? And specifically, how far has Nigeria as a nation gone to meet this goal?’ Nigeria is still among the nations facing many challenges in reaching that target by 2015; which had come and gone as well as bridging gender gap in primary and secondary education. The problem of equal access to education remains. It is imperative to say that education plays a particularly important role as a foundation for girls’ development towards adult life. At the same time, ensuring gender equality requires adapting equally to the needs

and interests of girls and boys. International human rights law lays down a three-fold set of criteria where by girls should have an equal right to education, equal right in education and the promotion and protection of their right through education.

Gender inequality in education is extreme. Girls are less likely to access school, to remain in school or to achieve in education. Despite almost 30 years of the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and 20years of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), today girls make up around 56 per cent of the 77 million children not in school and women make up two thirds of adults who are illiterate. Even girls who do enroll in school may have irregular attendance due to other demands on them and the fact that their education may not be prioritized. Girls are more likely to repeat years, to drop out early and to fail key subjects and in most countries girls are less likely to complete the transition to secondary schooling. Inequality in society inevitably has an impact on the provision and content of education. (Aja-okorie, 2013).

It is therefore, necessary to examine and address the problems surrounding female students’ in participating in higher education in Nigeria.

Trends in Male and Female Enrolment in University Education in Nigeria

Evidence abound that there is gender disparity in equitable access to University education in Nigeria (See Table 1). Statistics showed that girls and women are educationally under represented and disadvantaged in most states of Nigeria. Okolo (2001) attested to this when she reported that the trend in male enrolment in different universities (State and Federal) has continued to be higher than their female counterparts. According to her, although there is sharp increase in female enrolment, unlike before, in some universities, there is still a clear inequality between male and female enrolment in some parts of the country. She maintained that inadequate access of females to technological and scientific knowledge and managerial skills show a clear evidence of inequality at higher education level. Adeyemi and Akpotu (2004) conducted a study on the trend and pattern of gender enrolment in Nigerian Universities. The study showed the gap between male and female enrolment with lower female enrolment in all aspects of the Universities. The study also

indicated a wide gap between science and non-science based disciplines as well as between the northern and southern parts of Nigeria.

Similarly, Mukoro (2013) reported low enrolment of female in science and technology related courses at the University level of education. It is observed that females take the least resistance by opting for disciplines designated as feminine such as liberal arts, education, nursing and shy away from courses in sciences, engineering, medicine and mathematics. The tables below show the trends in male and female enrolment in University education in Nigeria for the period 2003 and 2008 in Science.

Table 1: University Enrollment in Science Courses for 2003/2004, 2004/2005, 2005/2006, 2006/2007 & 2007/2008 Academic Sessions for four States in Nigeria

SCIENCE			
YEAR	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
2003/2004	603,176	443,764	1,046,940
2004/2005	484,217	353,834	838,051
2005/2006	527,180	390,780	917,960
2006/2007	521,170	391,180	912350
2007/2008	587,715	455,368	1,043,083

Source: Joint Admission and Matriculation Board, 2009 in Mukoro, 2013

Table 1 showed very little progress in closing gender gaps in University enrolments over the period of 2003/2004 and 2007/ 2008 academic session. This according to Mukoro (2013) should be a source of worry to the Federal and State Governments whose aim in the National Economic Empowerment Development System (NEEDS) is to enable every citizen to participate in the economic life of the country.

Also shown in Table 2 is the spread of enrollments of undergraduate from 1997 to 2006 according to Geopolitical zones of Nigeria. The table reveals that there is huge disparity in male and female enrollments and more so according to the zones.

Table 2. Undergraduate enrollment by sex and region in engineering based faculties

Undergraduate Enrollment (%) in engineering based faculties by Zone/Region												
Year	NE		SW		NW		SE		NC		Total	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
1997	27	73	23	77	0	100	23	77	12	88	17	83
1998	33	67	23	77	2	98	19	81	15	85	18	82
1999	49	51	26	74	1	99	18	82	14	86	22	78
2000	43	57	15	85	1	99	18	82	11	89	18	82
2001	34	66	34	66	1	99	19	81	12	88	20	80
2002	40	60	50	50	2	98	18	82	17	83	25	75
2003	27	73	42	58	4	96	22	78	16	84	22	78
2004	21	79	48	52	2	98	23	77	-	-	24	77
2005	25	75	53	47	4	96	-	-	80	20	41	60
2006	23	77	55	45	5	95	-	-	17	83	25	75

Source: Aderemi, Hassan, Siyanbola and Taiwo (2013)

Table 2 revealed that enrollment in engineering courses by undergraduate spread across the six geopolitical zones had had more males in school than females. The discrimination is more pronounced in the North West region of Nigeria. Similarly, Adavbiele (2016) reported that a disparity existed in enrollment between male and female students in Universities offering Engineering for the year 2012/2013 academic sessions of Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma. She asserts that over the years, as secondary education enrolments increased, the access of women to higher education has improved significantly and that in the recent past; women have become a serious factor of recognition in nation building. But however, progress is still possible, notably, their participation in fields such as science and technology. According to her, engineering is seen as a course meant for men and not women. This is shown in Table 2 above.

Table 3: Disparity in Enrollment between Male and Female Students in Universities Offering Engineering in Nigeria for 2012/2013 Academic Session

University	Males	Females
Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi	823	11
Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria	1124	22
Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma	2282	54
Bayero University, Kano	1234	30
Enugu State University, Enugu	1223	46
Federal University of Technology, Akure	2304	61
Federal University of Technology, Minna	1456	21
Federal University of Technology, Owerri	1880	72
Federal University of Technology, Yola	934	18
Igbinedion University, Okada	114	4
Imo State University, Okigwe	765	34
Madonna University, Initsha	68	3
Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife	1112	45
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka	1544	54
Rivers State University of Science and Technology, Port-Harcourt	2068	62
University of Agriculture, Abeokuta	1220	45
University of Agriculture, Makurdi	880	23
University of Agriculture, NmuDike	1121	40
University of Benin, Benin City	2480	112
University of Uyo, Uyo	943	31
University of Calabar, Calabar	1234	46
University of Ibadan, Ibadan	1822	65
University of Ilorin, Ilorin	2023	64
University of Jos, Jos	980	43

Source: Adavbiele (2016).

Year	College of Education						Polytechnics						University					
	Enrolment		%F	Out-turn		%F	Enrolment		%F	Out-turn		%F	Enrolment		%F	Out-turn		%F
	Male	Female		Male	Female		Male	Female		Male	Female		Male	Female		Male	Female	
2010	345667	311495	47.4	29320	25547	46.6	52470	36761	41.2	29147	22625	43.7	70792	49411	41.1	24345	12341	33.6
2011	327592	317274	49.2	19006	18767	49.7	52596	38237	42.1	31685	21423	40.3	65823	49107	42.7	19437	8864	31.3
2012	353072	153017	30.2	26164	25863	49.7	65994	44911	40.5	35412	22997	39.4	83266	61684	42.6	21968	10418	32.2
2013	682564	328642	32.5	18714	13860	42.5	40828	27711	40.4	21201	15697	42.5	59143	46292	43.9	48864	9068	15.7
2014	341282	264321	43.6	23239	16553	41.6	59104	44018	42.7	32104	24018	42.8	62416	49002	44.0	56149	28812	33.9
2015	396017	290633	42.3	32017	18633	36.8	69759	55217	44.2	39759	29217	42.4	65444	52825	44.7	65992	36973	35.9

Source: NBS (2016)

Table 4 also revealed that female students enrollment rate in tertiary institutions in Nigeria from 2010 to 2015 was lower than that of their male counterparts across Universities, polytechnics and Colleges of Education.

Women Education and National Development

Nigeria significantly influences the achievement of the MDGs in sub-Saharan Africa because of its sheer size. Nearly one in every four women in sub-Saharan Africa is a Nigerian. Hence, the situation of women and girls in Nigeria has a key role to play in determining the progress of the whole region. Nigeria has performed poorly in terms of gender equality. The 2012 Gender data report in Nigeria suggests that Nigeria ranks 118 out of 134 countries in the Gender Equality Index. Also reported is that, Nigerian girls drop-out of school, earlier than their male counterparts. Evidence further shows that more than two thirds of 15-19 year old girls in Northern Nigeria are unable to read a sentence. Of course, these facts are devastating in their own right, but what is more worrisome, is that it seem efforts by the Nigerian government for the past 20 years to tackle the gender disparity in education have not had any significant impact. With regard to women's education, Nigeria's education policy has evolved since the 1970s towards a gender focus and these issues affect the development of any nation.

Development essentially has to do with improvement in human well-being, elimination of hunger and poverty, gainful and productive employment for all the citizens of a nation. According to Abbe and Momodu (1999) development means “bringing a nation to an advanced or highly organized State that is utilizing all the human and material potentials of a nation to bring about growth or advancement”. So national and sustainable development therefore, would refer to the ability to harness all the available resources, human and material or economic, to bring out the potentials of a nation. It may also imply the ability to flow along with others in terms of effective management and utilization of current developments in science and technology. According to King(2000), women often make the important and unsung contributions to national economies especially in support of export-led economic growth, yet more than 70 percent of the 2.8 billion people living on less than US\$2.00 per day are women. During the sixth Meeting of Common wealth Ministers responsible for

Women Affairs held in New Delhi, India in April 2000, it was pointed out by Spence (2000) that Poverty for example continues to have a female face. Women constitute 70% of the world’s 1.3 billion absolute poor. They have the most limited access to livelihood, resources or to new technologies-the key to employment in the 21st century.

Sustainable Development

This paper noted that despite the roles of female in sustainable development it has been recognized in many countries that the development process does not promote gender equity in the distribution of the benefits of economic growth and that men are disproportionately benefiting at the expense of women. Women’s labor is too often seen as supplementary to that of men leading to expectations that the development programme benefits will reach women via their husbands and men in their families. Nigeria is a society in transition and subject to a number of growth and development challenges, not least the systematic discrimination against women common to many developing countries. The best way to support this transition and relevance to human development is through education so that Nigeria can make best use of its human resources rather than limit the productivity and contribution of one half of its population. That is the argument in this paper which explores the issues and prospects of focusing on women education as a driver for sustainable development in Nigeria.

Below are some of the key policy initiatives embarked on by other countries and the Nigerian government to show policy commitment on education equality.

Attempts made by Government

On the Commonwealth front, there have been various moves and activities in gender equality and development. For instance, the 1995Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development is grounded in the Common wealth fundamental values of democracy, rule of law and good governance, human rights, gender equality and the promotion of sustainable development. The plan presents a vision in which: The commonwealth works towards a world in which women and men have equal rights and opportunities at all stages of their lives to express their creativity in all fields of human endeavour and in which women are respected and valued as equal

and able partners in establishing values of social justice. Within such a framework of values, women and men will work in collaboration and partnership to ensure people oriented development for all nations (Commonwealth, 2000).

Hence, we cannot continue to undermine their total and complete involvement in issues of national development in Nigeria. Again there are a number of international agreements/mandates that bear upon the issue of women involvement in national development which Nigeria is a signatory to. One of such agreements is the Beijing Platform for Action on women. The final clause of the Declaration according to Commonwealth (2000) is that “we hereby adopt and commit ourselves as government to implement the platform for Action, ensuring that a gender perspective is reflected in our policies and programmes”.

Such a plan recognizes the fact that women are very vital and indispensable in national development and we can therefore, not continue to undermine them.

United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2005) identified some attempts by Nigeria to promote the girl-child education. Such attempts include: University Primary Education of 1976, the National Policy on Education (NPE) of 2004; lowering of cut-off points for admission of girls into secondary schools; scholarships into Science/Technology and Mathematics Education (STME); the promulgation of an edict banning the withdrawal of girls from schools for marriage, the production of blue print on women education by the Federal Ministry of Education in 1987 and the declaration of free education for girls in many states in Nigeria in 1988.

Conversely, all the efforts of the Federal Government in launching and adopting various programmes and the contributions of international donor agencies over the girl-child/women folks) education and their missions are yet to be attained. This is caused by various factors as illiteracy among women folks, traditional attitudes towards female group and prevalent problems facing developing countries- instability of government and insufficient political wills.

Women Access to Higher Education of Male and Female: Problems/Challenges with Enrolment According to Subjects

Gender inequality still characterizes the educational advancement in the country. From the primary school level to the tertiary, gender inequality subsists as more males are admitted to the tertiary educational level than females. Several factors according to Aja-Okorie (2013) still affect women education negatively. They include: poverty, socio-cultural

impediments, religious misinterpretation of the Holy book; societal negative attitude to women education, early marriage and other gender biases. These factors of course, impede the progress and development of girls/ women in society.

a) Religion: Some religious groups in Nigeria still believe and teach that women shall not acquire western education as seen in the Boko Haram sect in Northern Nigeria, Religious practices of *pudah* and *shariah*; (mostly in the northern part of Nigeria) and other religious sanctions against women limit their participation in higher education. Moreover, in many of the predominantly Muslim states where gender gap is high in Sokoto and Zamfara, girls are traditionally prevented from accessing formal school environments as a consequence of erroneous interpretation of religious injunctions. The betrothal of the girls for marriage at early age also hinders school attendance, retention and sustainability. This is closely tied with teenage pregnancy. To support this assertion, Okeke (2003) stated that about 3% of the teenage dropout of school has already begun bearing children before the age of 18. However, this practice is becoming unfashionable in home with educated parents.

b) Lack of Awareness (Illiteracy among parents and guardians): Majority of parents and guardians in some parts of Nigeria particularly at the rural areas are illiterate and hence, do not know the importance of education let alone investing in it. Recent data released by the chairman of National Population Commission, Samaila Makamma, revealed that literacy level among parents and guardians in the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria are as follows: South-West 73.6%, South-South 71.9%, South –East 74.1%, North –West 33.8%, North East 33.8% and North-Central 54.9%. What this implies, is that the literacy level in North West and North East combined is less than what obtains in any part of the South. This trend has implication on willingness to invest in wards' education. Illiteracy has been the greatest cankerworm which has eaten deeply in society and devastated the implementation of various wonderful policies of developing countries; illiteracy has a positive relationship with poverty. For example, since illiteracy is highly rated among women, therefore, illiterate mothers will raise illiterate daughters who will marry early and have no access to education if their husbands do not comply.

c) Poverty (Purchase of expensive science textbooks): Many Nigerian families are still living in abject poverty. According to Masha (2011), 45% of Nigeria population still lives below poverty line. This implies that out of 155 million people (2010 estimate), over 69 million are still struggling to meet their basic needs of food, shelter and clothing and cannot afford to pay for education.

Also, Williams (1987) states that the world-wide problem of low participation in Science and

Technology is compounded by low enrolment rate of girls in formal education when compared with boys with the gap widening at the higher level of education.

Several social-cultural, economic and political factors have reinforced the gender gaps evidenced in women enrolment in higher education and corresponding low accessibility to management positions. Socio cultural restraints such as limited parental resources, early marriages, pregnancy, childbearing, sexual harassment etc. negatively impact on women's participation in higher education. In many societies, the education of women especially at the tertiary level is considered unimportant since girls do not normally pay back in full measure the money invested in them. Poverty prevents many families from enrolling all or some of their children in schools or to withdraw their children especially their daughters prematurely from school not to even talk of tertiary institutions because of the cost of education or the need to put them to work either within or outside the home.

d) Cultural / Traditional factors: This factor also acts as barrier to the education of the girl-child. Many of the cultural and traditional practices advocated for the girl-child by the societies and families stem from the belief that females are inferior and must be controlled as well as prepared for their main role to be wives and mothers.

At anytime in any context, women are critical actors in the education process. The roles of women in schools are often defined in terms of their 'natural' affinities with children and their innate love for teaching and nurturing, as well as their ability to do it. Nonetheless, men still dominate women in every country in the world, Nigeria inclusive; resulting in widespread discrimination against women and girls. The impact of unequal power relations and discrimination is often felt most severely when material poverty exists, as this increases vulnerability. Inequality in the Nigerian society inevitably has an impact on the provision and content of education, as well as on the ability of girls to enter, remain in school and participate in education. In our society there are some limitations for women to progress in education and to be considered outside their family roles, expectation and responsibilities. Reinartz (2002) argues that balancing work and family is a major hurdle for working women. Hence, family responsibilities influence the career and education choices of women who mostly have disproportionate work of care of children and the home.

The tradition, customs, socio cultural values, ethics, motherhood instincts are some of the factors influencing gender bias in the education sector. Cultural and social beliefs, attitudes and practices

prevent girls from benefiting from educational opportunities to the same extent as boys. Education is seen in some societies as a fear of change and now with globalization, the fear becomes even greater-fear to lose the cultural identity, fear of moving towards the unknown or unwanted.

Furthermore, the gender disparity is exacerbated by the powerful economic and social rationale for investing in the education of sons rather than daughters, as daughters are perceived to be less valuable once educated, and less likely to abide by the will of the father, brother or husband. The plight of women, in terms of education is compounded by this negative attitude of parents toward female education (Oniye, 2010). Another implication for poor education opportunity for women is involvement in low paying ventures. It has been noted by Oladunni (1999) that because of societal stereotype and stigmatization on certain professions and subjects as the exclusive preserve of men and or women most Nigerian women have been forced into less paid jobs (teaching, nursing services, agriculture, small scale food processing, secretariat duties, clerical duties, note-counting in banks, cleaners and middle level professional occupations). In most societies, both the public and private sectors continue to be dominated by men, leading parents to ask themselves: why bother educating our girls if they will never make it anyway?

e) Duration of Course: The duration of course to be taken is a major consideration in sending female children to school. Many parents or guardians cannot afford to let their female children out of their sight for too long and as such, male restrain them from attending to courses with longer duration.

RECOMMENDATION

Drawing from the words of Aja-Okorie (2014), the following recommendations to endure high rate of female students' participation of education in Nigeria are made;

1. teaching and research on gender related issues will bring about peculiar gender problems that can be identified and solved. Some issues such as parental perceptions of costs and benefits of educating females, seclusion practices and early marriages have been identified through research.
2. special gender orientation workshops and short training programmes could be organized as sources of empowerment. Female students should be allowed to assume leadership roles and responsibilities in activities in the school.
3. scholarships and fellowship could be awarded to female students to motivate them.
4. to reduce the gender disparity in terms of academic opportunities a fifty percent quota each to both male and female is advocated at issuing scholarship and fellowship opportunities.

5. higher education policy makers must have the will to reduce gender imbalance. This should reflect right from the admission policy and enrolment figures.

CONCLUSION

Education is a tool to leveraging every society. The role of women in society building cannot be over-emphasized. There is a close link between education and development. Therefore, if a nation must progress; empowering the female gender discrimination is critical to its overall achievement. Therefore, challenges facing women in higher education especially in developing countries like Nigeria must be eliminated. This is necessary in order to strengthen the roles of women in their contribution to societal development and then become functional members of the society.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE ACTION

To promote advocacy concerning the access of female gender to higher education and their participation in this sector:

1. UNESCO should establish an International observatory panel on women higher education especially in the area of science education to monitor access, participation and presence in decision making.
2. Institution should set up a senior committee to ensure that goals concerning gender equality are attained especially in the North West Geo-political zone of Nigeria.
3. Special attention should be given to fields where women are under-represented e.g. Science & Engineering.
4. The principle of life-long learning for women should be supported and appropriate measures adopted to permit them to continue their studies to re-enter the workforce and harmonize their professional and personal responsibilities.
5. Clear trends to strengthen the empowerment of highly qualified women to be visible in the fields of research, training, advocacy and networking.

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