



IMPERATIVE OF AN AFROECOSOLIDARITY CURRICULUM FOR AFRICAN CHILDREN IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

African children are growing up in a world in which there is continuous encroachment on the traditional values of their continent. A great aspect of African traditional values that is often neglected in the educational curriculum in Africa is environmental values. African environmental values of earth-keeping, preservation, great sense of solidarity with fellow humans and other beings and species in the universe is described in this paper as Afroecosolidarity. This paper argues for re-designing a curriculum for African children that is African-centered and that is rooted in the values of ecological solidarity. This will arm African children to help combat the environmental and social challenges that bedevils the continent. A hermeneutic and analytic methods are deployed in this paper to examine the need for such a curriculum. The way to promote this curriculum is also examined. The paper finds that African-centered social and ecological values have been denigrated and ignored by a Western-centered education. The paper concludes that an Afroecosolidarity curriculum is an imperative for Africa to face the challenges of the 21st century.

Keywords: Africa, ecology, ecological, curriculum, children, 21st century, Afroecosolidarity, education.

Introduction

All children have a fundamental human right to education. This is not just a right to a general education but also a right to be educated in the cultural values of their parents. One of the landmark human rights is that given by the United Nations (2007). The United Nations is very clear that indigenous peoples have rights to practice and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs, teach their religious and spiritual traditions; and have their own educational institutions to teach their philosophies, literatures, languages and histories. This landmark declaration states clearly in article 14 that:

Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning... Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination ... States shall, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language (p.5-6).

In article 15, the United Nations declaration mentioned above states further that: "Indigenous peoples have the right to the dignity and diversity of their cultures, traditions, histories and aspirations which shall be appropriately reflected in education and public information" (p. 5-6). The voting records on the adoption of the United Nations declaration is summarized as follows: "The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) was adopted by the General Assembly on

Thursday, 13 September 2007, by a majority of 143 states in favour, 4 votes against (Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States) and 11 abstentions (Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Burundi, Colombia, Georgia, Kenya, Nigeria, Russian Federation, Samoa and Ukraine)" (p.1). The reasons why some nations abstained and others voted no shall not be discussed here. It suffices to note that an overwhelming majority voted to adopt it. From this declaration then many rights are safeguarded and are to be guaranteed by nations. This paper argues that one of this right is explicitly implied.

Indigenous children have a right to be educated in their ancestral traditions, values, and epistemologies inclusive of ecosystemic epistemologies. One of the greatest evils in human history is colonialism and the biological invasion of non-western lands by the European imperialists. It is unjust to deny them the rights that accrue to indigenous peoples. Even if there is debate on these rights, there should be no debate on the fact that their children have a right to be educated on environmental values that plague their environment. In stating the child's right to education, the United Nations (1989) states: "Children's education should help them fully develop their personalities, talents and abilities. It should teach them to understand their own rights, and to respect other people's rights, cultures and differences. It should help them to live peacefully and protect the environment." Any form of children' education that fails to help them know and protect their environment is lacking much that should be desired. It can be argued that from the perspective of this convention all children's education should have some environmental dimension.

A core argument of this paper is that the right to environmental education cannot just be in generality. Every form of education is informed by ideologies and philosophies of those who invent the curriculum for that education. For too long education in many African countries has been

Eurocentric and Western-centric. Education in Africa needs to be decolonized. Education should be informed by indigenous values and content. By way of procedure the paper shall make some conceptual analysis, look at the tenets of Afroecosolidarity,

Conceptual Analysis

Okoro and Afurobi (2011) defines curriculum as “the vehicle through which education is transmitted. It is a group of prescribed courses that are planned, organized educational experiences presented to the learners under the guidance and supervision of the schools” (p. 178). Idoko (2011) cites Alli to aver that: “It is a sequenced content or course of instruction needed by the learner who is expected to demonstrate some objectives or behavioural changes following instruction and experience in some content provided by the school and based on a structured form of continuing evaluation” (p. 3). Curriculum of course is not only what is taught or what is intended. It is also what is not taught or intended but inadvertently people are learning from it. This includes the way the teacher exercises power, gender relations, the attitudes of those involved in the teaching-learning process, etc. It includes what is also ignored and of consider to be important. What is not taught in the African classroom, but ignored is also part of the curriculum. For by what is not taught you teach students inadvertently on what you considered to be important. If Afro-centric values are not taught in the classroom, you are telling students these values are not important or worth teaching.

An Afroecosolidarity curriculum refers to all the processes, methods, planning, contents, attitudes, skills, goals, aims that are involved in all types of teaching and learning or educational-socialization systems that are informed by the value of human beings in Africa and elsewhere standing in unison and mutual relationship among themselves and with the entire non-human world. This kind of curriculum is attentive to all environmental problems/challenges and concerned with how human

beings can dynamically and consciousness develop ways to solve these problems. The words of Byrd and Jangu (2009) can be used to describe an Afroecosolidarity curriculum,

African-centered education places people of African descent at the center of the educational experience as a subject, rather than object, From a traditional African worldview, this placement supports an inclusionary, emancipatory, multicultural learning environment incorporating reciprocal relationships and the sharing of power and resources, by giving equal representation to all groups-rather than one group over or below other” (p.204).

It is important to define human rights. Umezurike as cited by Akpochafo (2013) writes that: “Human rights are those liberties, immunities and benefits which, by accepted contemporary values, all human beings should be able to claim as right in the society in which they live” (p.96). Egboye (2015) notes that: “Rights are entitlements, privileges which usually arise from position. When a person says that he has a particular right, it implies that there is a position which he has which makes him benefit from such right. If for example, we speak of children's rights we are speaking of entitlements or rights which come to such children simply because they are children” (p. 3). For Awolowo (2006), “'Right' means that which a person has a just or valid claim over, whether it is land, a thing or the privilege of either doing or saying something” (p. 1). Fundamental human rights are what accrues to human beings inalienably and are recognized by the state. Rights are not given by the state; the state only recognizes them.

Akpochafo (2013) writes that children's rights refer to the whole benefits, privileges and entitlements that accrue to children with regard to their protection, safety, food, shelter, etc. In defining rights, it is crucial to state that in the light of the rise of the environmental movements from the 1960s

and the birth of environmental ethics, children's rights should be connected to environmental issues. Akpochafo (2013), "Environmental rights can be understood as rights to an environment that is healthy and safe. It calls on governments and international agents to ensure that environmental safety is maintained" (p. 89).

Tenets of Afroecosolidarity

The environmental education that is advocated here for African children should be grounded on African cultural values and philosophies. This is what Afroecosolidarity aims to achieve. Ikeke (2021) has highlighted and discussed the theory and concept of Afroecosolidarity previously. Afroecosolidarity is an Afrocentric transmutation of the theory of ecosolidarity. Ikeke (2004) defines ecosolidarity as "the indivisible mutual bond of inter-relatedness and inter-web-ness of all life forms both humans and the non-humans. It is the deep mystical grace and unconditional love that binds, unites and keeps all things in being and fosters them all in the journey of companionability, becoming all that humans and non-humans are to be collectively" (p. 168). In the simplest sense of it, all things are inter-related. Things and realities are distinct but they exist in ontological unity with the cosmic spirit. There is intrinsic mutuality. Every bit and piece of creation is to assist other creatures to reach their destiny or final point. No life on earth whether that of the frog, the dog, the insect, the organisms and unseen spirits is useless. Everything has value and a place in the system of things.

What then is Afroecosolidarity? Ikeke (2021) writes that:

Afroecosolidarity or its like terms... African ecological solidarity stands for the reality that ecosolidarity is an African value and indigenous way of life. Standing in solidarity with the earth is not foreign to Africa. To name a value as African does not mean it is practiced only in Africa, but it is to state the reality that the value is dominantly experienced and practiced in

African cultural life. That value of ecosolidarity (standing in solidarity with the earth or ecological world) does not mean there are not ecological deficits in Africa" (p. 323).

A look at African religious practices, rites, rituals and beliefs show the fact that African people have lived in solidarity with the earth. An explication of some African practices and beliefs reveal this reality. In many African cultures there were sacred days that were devoted for the earth to rest and recuperate. On a day like Edewo among the Urhobo people, you don't go to the streams or farms. It was believed that on a day like this the gods and spirits move through the forest. Erivwo (2005) narrates that there is this myth among the Urhobo people that the earth is not to be overpopulated, so that it is sustainable. When the animals were sent to go and ask the supreme being on the fact that human beings were dying on earth, the toad returned from the supreme being that he who dies should return home. It is from that story that the toad derived her name, "Orowhuruokpo" (the one who dies should return home to the creator). That is a powerful population ethics, human beings are not to live forever on earth. As people die, space is created for more people on earth. Death to a certain degree then is a blessing.

The notion and practice of solidarity is one that permeates African way of life. Idahosa (2004) quotes Bruno Gutman who observes that community life is expressed in Africa in the extended family system (Ummuna), the living in tune with the land community, and age grade systems in which people team up to help one another. The African notion of community includes the earth community. It is an aberration for human beings to live their lives polluting and violating the dignity of the earth. African people stands in solidarity with the earth or ecosystems. This is Afroecosolidarity. African people, using the Bantu people as an example, and as observed by Tempels (1959) affirmed that vital life was present not only in human

beings but also in plants, animals, etc. In the view of this paper, every being in creation shares in the Almighty's vital force or life power which inheres substantially in the supreme being, the creator of the universe. Ecological solidarity implies that each being in creation has capacity and potentialities to stand in alignment of mutual influence upon other beings in the created world. Afroecosolidarity is in consonance and alignment with other indigenous Afrocentric values. Byrd and Jangu (2009) comes to the aid of this paper in expressing some of these values thus: "African-centered refers to the collective community values of indigenous African people exhibited in the ancient Kemetian concept of Ma'st (truth, justice, balance, and harmony). These values are also integrated into the principle of the NguSaba (unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity, and faith) (p. 204).

Afroecosolidarity embraces both ecological and socio-humanistic values. Human beings and other realities, beings, spirits, and the supreme being form one community of life. Life is not to be segmented to the detriment of any being in the universe. There must be cooperative living that promotes environmental sustainability and the wellbeing/welfare of all lives on earth. Afroecosolidarity is an active human duty that should be embraced by all human beings in Africa and beyond. Only then will the global environmental crisis be abated. This is one of the fundamental reasons why African children should be schooled in this value and duty of Afroecosolidarity.

Right of African Children to an Environmental Education

A core argument of this work is that education and awareness about environmental issues is a human right that belongs to African children. The environmental awareness here is not just on environmental issues in general, but also in particular, and that is why this paper is speaking of an

Afroecosolidarity curriculum. Children have this right to environmental education. This has been clearly affirmed in many human rights instruments.

Every child like an adult is entitled to some basic human rights, The United Nations (1948), Federal Republic of Nigeria (2011), United Nations Children and Educational Fund (1995) states that human beings are entitled to rights like life, dignity of the human person, personal liberty, assembly and association, freedom of movement and own property. The reality is that these rights inheres in all people, including children. These rights are to be enjoyed and exercised on the earth. It is a right to be informed of environmental issues for you cannot exercise your other rights fully in a degraded and polluted environment. The African child needs to live his life and fulfil his/her destiny in the world. His right to life is threatened when the location where schools are sited is polluted with noise and poisonous gases. The child should know what is affecting his/her health negatively.

The notion of sustainable development lay credence to the idea of rights for children. United Nations (1972) states: "The natural resources of the earth, including the air, water, land, flora and fauna and especially representative samples of natural ecosystems, must be safeguarded for the benefit of present and future generations through careful planning or management, as appropriate" (p. 3). In the same place the United Nations states that: "The non-renewable resources of the earth must be employed in such a way as to guard against the danger of their future exhaustion and to ensure that benefits from such employment are shared by all mankind" (p.3). Duty is placed on states and others to ensure that development is carried out in a sustainable manner. Where there is duty, there is a right. The duty is to ensure the right of both present and future generations to a healthy environment. It can be argued that future generations do not yet

exists, but they are likely to exist if humanity is not confronted with extinction. The duty to future generations implies a right. Those to whom the duty is owed, are going to be the beneficiary of that right.

Sustainable development as understood implies present development that does not compromise the capacity and ability of future generations to meet their needs for survival, sustenance, and healthy living. That future that is spoken of is made up of likely children who will exist. Without children, there can be no youth, adult, and elderly people. Children not only have right to a healthy environment, they have duties and responsibilities to the environment and the human community. Children can help to keep their environment clean, do environmental sanitation suitable to their age, practice hygienic habits, etc. It is their right to know of these duties. It will be unjust to deprive them of these knowledge and awareness. They are part of the human community and they too make an impact on the environment and environmental resources. It is important for instance that children know of the value of trees that produce oxygen to human beings. Republic of Uganda (1995) enunciates that it is the duty of the state to promote sustainable development and create public awareness for management of natural resources for present and future generations. Children should not be denied of the basic knowledge suitable for their age on issues of management of natural resources. It is well acknowledged that education is a right in almost all human rights documents. This education should be inclusive and broad enough to embrace environmental issues.

Federal Republic of Uganda (1995) and other Human rights instruments equally assert the right of children to be protected from hazardous materials and all that is harmful that could interfere with their education and welfare. Are you going to protect children from domestic and industrial hazards without they themselves being aware of some basic hazards that can affect them? Republic of Togo (2007) states that: "Every

person shall have the right to a clean environment. The state shall oversee the protection of the environment.” It is difficult for citizens to exercise and struggle for a right that they are not aware of. Republic of South Africa (1996) states that: “Everyone has the right-(a) to an environment that is not harmful to their health or well-being; and (b) to have the environment protected, for the benefits of present and future generations, through reasonable legislative and other measures that- (i) prevent pollution and ecological degradation; (ii) promote conservation; and (iii) secure ecologically sustainable development and use natural resources while promoting justifiable economic and social development.”

One thing that is clear from the above human rights instruments and others is that each human being has the right to a healthy and peaceful environment. Children are human beings and are included in this right. Not only do they have this right, they should be educated concerning this right that they have and taught ways that they can also safeguard this right according to their own abilities. It will be wrong to think that children lack the capacity to engage in environmental issues. Swadener and O'Brien (2009) rightly argue that: “Living in harmony with each other and the natural world have to become our collective priorities. Children and adults must become more aware of what is happening around them and share the responsibility for effecting change” (p. 122). Ebbeck (2006) states that: “it is our responsibility as educators to foster in children...the capacity to think critically and reflect on their actions and the action of others, so that they will, themselves, grow in understanding of their world and all that is in it, and be poised to make a contribution” (p. 356).

Need for an Indigenously-Informed Afroecosolidarity Curriculum

The following quotation by Swadener and O'Brien (2009) is suitable to begin this section:

We might also ask, how can we develop and sustain an approach to early childhood education that foregrounds eco-pedagogy and is grounded in eco-justice principles? Are we teaching basic ecological knowledge, one of the key components of ecological literacy? ...Do our early care and education programs help to bring nature back into the forefront of children's lives.... Are we educating students on environmental issues and preparing them to be the stewards of their natural resources? (p. 132).

One might also ask, what kind of curriculum is suitable to the needs of African children in an environment that is polluted and degraded? What kind of education do they need in a continent plagued by civil wars, violence and terrorism? There is need for an indigenously-informed and Afroecosolidarity education. Byrd and Jangu (2009) write that: "Indigenous values (languages, cultures, traditions, spiritualities) are largely missing from existing education programs widely dominated by Western paradigms" (p. 207). Even when indigenous values are included they are scanty and poorly and infectively taught.

First let there be an examination of the need for an indigenously-informed curriculum. The term curriculum is embracive of the content of what is taught, the way it is taught, and all the processes and interactions that are involved in the educational system. Even what is not taught is a curriculum. When for instance in Africa there is a focus on European or Western history or subjects to the detriment of African indigenous history and knowledge systems, the educational system is inferring that Africa is not as important as Europe. This evening as this paper was being crafted there is the news that University of Malaga (2022) researchers and researchers from the University of Jaen "have discovered Egypt's oldest tomb oriented to the winter solstice. Located in the necropolis of Qubit el-Haw (Aswan), it is precisely oriented to the sunrise of the winter solstice,

in such a way that the sun's rays bathed with its light the place that was intended to house the statue of a governor of the city of Elephantine, who lived at the end of the XII Dynasty, around 1830 BC" (p.1). The point is that very often credit is given to these researchers to the detriment of the Egyptians who were part of the research. What about the Egyptians who dug and excavated? Most western reporting and education about Africa is often biased and tilted towards what benefits Europe. African indigenous education systems are often condemned and demonized by western scholars.

The task of decolonizing the curriculums that are taught in various schools in Africa is incomplete. In many schools in Africa, the bulk of what is taught is still western-inspired ways of knowing and being. This has carried on from the time of the advent of Europeans into Africa. With regard to Christian religion, there are brands of missionary religion that are culprits in totally condemning African cultural values. Idahosa (2004) noted that:

African culture has been viewed by European and American missionaries as primitive, pagan, heathen, savage or barbaric. Locked in their own cultural in their own cultural mindset, and lacking intuitive sympathy and imaginative perception which are indispensable for any successful study of an alien culture, they were generally unable to discover the profound meaning which lay beneath the symbols, customs and rituals which they observed in African culture. They often left out the very part of the African culture and religion which counts, and made caricature of the African precisely in those moments in life when the African sets in motion his or her most genuine values. They confused symbols with what is symbolized and thus arrived at the absurd conclusions. They elevated magic, sorcery, conjurations (voodooism) and animal or human sacrifice as the 'essence' of African religion" (p. 34)

Byrd and Jangu (2009) write that:

Imperialists have used education and science to exploit resources from Africa and people of African descent for centuries. African forms of education (indigenous knowledge passed through oral traditions) are characterized as primitive, backward and associated with witchcraft. To control people, communities in Africa and the diaspora are inundated with propaganda and educating purporting the benefits of capitalism. Colonial languages such as English or French widely dominate. Educational institutions in exploited communities and countries extol the virtues of Western knowledge and corporations. Western researchers or people of African descent trained in western education ignore or disparage native values, knowledge, customs, culture, and identity” (p. 197).

African environmental ideas and ideals as encapsulated in the theory of Afroecosolidarity have informed African ways of life and enabled Africans to journey through the centuries to the present day. African cultural ways and values enabled Africans to conquer and overcome the ravages of slavery, colonialism and many other evils. It enabled Africans to live and survive in their environment. These values can still continue to assist Africans to overcome present challenges. And so they need to be critically engaged and not abandoned. This is one of the vital reasons why there is need to evolve an Afrocentric and ecocentric curriculum, which in this work is called, Afroecosolidarity curriculum. The denial of African history, civilization implies by extension that there is nothing like African ecological thoughts and ways.

One fundamental reason for an indigenously-informed and Afroecosolidarity curriculum is that educational curriculum should be relevant for each age. The needs of previous generations can be different from the needs of today. Okoro and Afurobi (2021) argue that a relevant

curriculum addresses the challenges of the society for which it is evolved. From pre-colonial times to colonial times, to postcolonial times curriculum has evolved. Contemporary environmental challenges threaten the continuous survival of human life and environmental well-being on earth. The entire world is endangered by environmental problems such as climate change, land degradation, atmospheric pollution, environmental warfare, soil erosion, terrorism, and so forth. It will be perilous for society to ignore the environmental challenge. It is important then to have a curriculum that attends to these issues. For people in Africa it should be a curriculum that does not ignore their indigenous eco-values. It is a synthesis of these values that partly grounds the theory of Afroecosolidarity.

The imperative for a curriculum for children that attends to environmental issues is well noted by Swadener and O'Brien (2009) when they write thus: there is need for children to learn about the rights of other human beings and other species, curriculum for children should be built around eco-justice, earth-keeping, and human rights. It is crucial to relate that human beings are not the only species that matter on earth. When human beings fail to take into adequate consideration the needs and interests of other species, they often create curricula that projects them as conquerors, exploiters, and masters of other species. Andrzejewski, Pedersen and Wicklund (2009) cite Spiegel who quotes Alice Walker saying: "The animals of the world exist for their own reasons. They were not made for humans any more than black people were made for whites or women for men" (p. 137). A curriculum that makes human beings more attentive to the needs of other beings, organisms, species and realities on earth is crucial and important. And for African children that curricula should be drawn from the Afro-centric ecological cosmology, herein described as Afroecosolidarity.

Ways to Promote an Indigenously-Informed Afroecosolidarity Curriculum

The role of the teacher or educator is crucially important in promoting an Afroecosolidarity curriculum. It is practically the teacher in the classroom or other settings who has the day to day responsibility to implement the content of any curriculum. It is the teacher who teaches the topics in the scheme of work or course outlines. In some situation the teacher is free especially in university setting to design his course outline following the course description that have been provided. He has great powers to ensure that topics that bring out Afroecosolidarity issues are presented. Even when ecological topics are not explicit in the written curriculum, the teacher can in his/her explanations relate them to ecological issues from the Afroecosolidarity perspective. The teacher can teach in such a way that the people he teaches knows that environmental issues are important and should not be neglected. As asserted above children have a right to be made aware of environmental issues. Right from the earliest days of the children's education, the teacher should inculcate in them environmental values. And for children in Africa, this should be an Afroecosolidarity education that attends to African perspective on environmental issues. Even if theoretically the teacher is seen as coordinator or facilitator of learning, the teacher has duties to foster the teaching process that is eco-friendly. The teacher is an essential person in the teaching-learning process and the implementation of any curriculum. Ipaye as cited by Onyeachu (2011) says that the teacher is irreplaceable even in a world that is filled with advanced technology.

Speaking of the role of the teacher in promoting an Afroecosolidarity education and curriculum, teacher education is important then. In the process of teacher education and preparation, the teacher should be taught the imperative of knowing about environmental challenges and how these problems can be solved. A person's consciousness and level of

awareness are important. What you are not conscious of or aware of you may not often attend to or do something about. According to UNESCO teacher education should include general studies. Any form of general studies that does not include studies about the earth or planet on that study is taking place is certainly deficient.

The current curriculum in many African countries need to be reformed to deliberately incorporate environmental issues and values. In terms of content, it is the duty of government and her various agencies to approve guidelines and courses that are taught in schools. In Nigeria we have the National Universities Commission that oversees university education in Nigeria. The Commission has a minimum benchmark that universities must meet. A Commission like this should ensure that environmental issues from an African indigenous perspective feature prominently in the curriculum.

There must be a deliberate and systematic effort to dismantle colonial education. The reality is that even though the colonialists have left Africa, their influence and impact still looms large on education in Africa. By the way, what is colonial education? Ezeani (2013) opines that: "Colonial education is to be understood as a totality of influences on and experiences by the colonised in a colonial environment. This means that colonial education is more than formalised colonial system of education" (p. 17). When much of the content that is taught in African schools are western topics and issues, then you know that colonial education is still influencing. Education in Africa is filled with western theories and concepts, whether it is political science, social studies, philosophy, theology, sociology, etc. Only very few topics are devoted to issues grounded in African experience and cosmology. Ezeani (2013) argues that in colonial education there was a de-Africanisation of Africa as Africans were told to abandon their cultures, names, human dignity, languages

and this has produced inferiority complex among many Africans. It is painful to note, as the author immediately cited notes that African children know more about western countries than their own country. How many African children can tell their traditional folktales, sing their traditional music and speak their native language? An Afroecosolidarity curriculum is needed that decentralises Europe and makes the African continent a core and essentialist in education in Africa. Afroecosolidarity curriculum is not only concerned about ecological issues but also the social and human issues that affect the African continent. For the ecological embraces both human and natural realities.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the need for an Afroecosolidarity educational curricular in Africa. The paper showed that African children have a right to such a curricular for they should be taught environmental values from their own cultural ambient point of view. It was revealed above that many human rights instruments and documents emphasizes the need for children to be educated in environmental issues. As indicated above much of the curriculum in Africa is still Eurocentric or Western-centric as it privileges Western histories, cultures, theories, and epistemologies over that of Africa. For today and future generations of Africans to meet and combat the environmental predicament, an Afroecosolidarity curriculum should be evolved. If this can be done and effectively implemented, it will greatly help to combat the global environmental crisis.

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