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Reforming the Educational System in Ghana under the Fourth Republic: A Reality or a Myth?

إصلاح نظام التعليم في غانا في ظل الجمهورية الرابعة: حقيقة أم أسطورة؟

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Abstract

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There has always been a consensus around the view that if a country targets the prosperity of its nation, it has to work hard for an efficient and successful educational system. Ghana was one of the African countries that exhibited a great potential in this field at independence. Nevertheless, as too frequent government changes occurred, often under military overthrows, education increasingly regressed. With the proclamation of the Fourth Republic in 1992 after long years of military rule, the country embarked on an avalanche of reforms primarily meant at promoting the sector. The present article is an attempt to highlight these reforms and assess to what extent Ghanaian official allegations of their success were pertinent. The results show that despite the rise in primary school net enrolment rate, these reforms, often ill-conceived by non-professional staff, underscored quantity at the detriment of quality. Because of several constraints and barriers, notably administrative and financial mismanagement, they failed to meet expectations and eradicate from the roots such social ills and abnormalities as child labour, a major impediment to a successful school system.

ملخص

الكلمات المفتاحية:

كان هناك دائماً إجماع حول الرأي القائل بأنه إذا كان بلد ما يستهدف ازدهار أمته، فعليه أن يعمل بجد من أجل نظام تعليمي فعال وناجح. كانت غانا واحدة من الدول الأفريقية التي أظهرت إمكانات كبيرة في هذا المجال عند الاستقلال. ومع ذلك، مع حدوث تغييرات حكومية متكررة، غالباً في ظل الإطاحة العسكرية، تراجع التعليم بشكل متزايد. مع إعلان الجمهورية الرابعة في عام 1992 بعد سنوات طويلة من الحكم العسكري، شرعت البلاد في سلسلة من الإصلاحات التي تهدف في المقام الأول إلى تعزيز القطاع. المقالة الحالية هي محاولة لتسليط الضوء على هذه الإصلاحات وتقييم إلى أي مدى كانت المزاعم الرسمية الغانية بنجاحها ذات صلة. تظهر النتائج أنه على الرغم من ارتفاع معدل الالتحاق الصافي بالمدارس الابتدائية، فإن هذه الإصلاحات، التي غالباً ما يسيء تصورها موظفون غير مهنيين، أكدت على الكم على حساب الجودة. بسبب العديد من القيود والحواجز، ولا سيما سوء الإدارة الإدارية والمالية، فقد فشلوا في تلبية التوقعات والقضاء من جذورها على العلل الاجتماعية والشدوذ مثل عمالة الأطفال، وهو عائق رئيسي أمام نظام مدرسي ناجح.

التعليم الغاني،
النظام المدرسي،
الإصلاحات التربوية،
الجمهورية الرابعة،
التعليم الأساسي.

Introduction

Arguably, one of the most social intricate issues for any government whose major quest is nation building remains education. If the target is to achieve technological, and by extension, economic progress, then this sensitive sector has to be undeniably regarded as a fundamental factor. At independence, Ghana had a head start on the other African countries in education, particularly during the early years of the Nkrumah regime, but as time went on, things deteriorated as ineffective reforms followed one another.

The proclamation of the Fourth Republic in 1992 was a return to constitutional rule after long years under the command of the junta. This unavoidably impacted the educational system, characterised mainly by ill-conceived policy initiatives without clear direction and focus. With the victory of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) in 1992, re-elected in 1996, under the leadership of Jerry John Rawlings, an ex-military pilot in the Ghanaian Air Force, new ambitions seemed to motivate change. Educational reforms had been undertaken before, but the promises of the Fourth Republic were a better implementation of these reforms to fine-tune an effective school system in particular, and promote national economy in general.

But the ‘the nightmarish politicisation’ of education in Ghana seriously hampered an effective execution of these reforms. Amidst political campaigns and manifestos, it became an instrument of demagoguery to make promises rarely kept thereafter. Though sometimes well-intended, the desire for profound educational change was often tinged with wrong approaches and injudicious implementation (Aawaar et al, 2013). It is worthy of note that representatives of the teaching staff were never invited to join the commissions in charge of elaborating educational reforms. When reforming a sector is assigned to individuals with little knowledge and experience in the domain, there are high chances that inefficiency will be the watchword. In this respect an attempt is made to answer the following questions:

-What were the educational reforms introduced under the Fourth Republic?

-How well were these planned?

- What were the constraints and barriers that the sector encountered in carrying out those plans?

-Did the transformations in question succeed to provide free and compulsory education for all in the country as advocated in political manifestos?

Objectives of paper

This article aims fundamentally at disclosing the following issues:

-Examining the educational reforms introduced under the Fourth Republic in Ghana.

-Inquiring into the obstacles encountered by the civil governments in carrying out the planned avalanche of reforms in the sector.

- Assessing the success/failure of these reforms in pushing the sector forward.

Methodology of research

Due to the nature of the subject, a historical method was adopted in covering the theme of reforming the educational system in Ghana under the Fourth Republic. An analytic descriptive method, proper to historical topics was used to explain and uncover the primary impetus behind the failure of the avalanche of changes in the sector.

1. Historical Overview

Present outcomes in any sector are largely the result of past policies, and so was the case with the educational system in Ghana. Accordingly, it is useful to glance through the major developments of this system prior to the establishment of the Fourth Republic. An interesting starting point would be the colonial era, which lasted 83 years, from 1874 to 1957 and which exerted a significant influence on the post-independence evolution of this sector. A glimpse of the British colonial educational programmes clearly shows that until the end of World War I, emphasis was placed solely on literary education which faced difficulties to bring forth socially aware and self-reliant individuals. Kay(1972) notes:

Not only is...[education]inadequate in not going far enough, but it has proved inefficient in its results. Inadequate because it fails to provide facilities for that secondary and higher education which is

essential if the African is to become an efficient citizen and is to qualify himself for leadership in the affairs of this country under the conditions attending the advent of modern civilisation. Inefficient because the character-training necessary to citizenship and leadership has been largely omitted in the present system (Kay,1972: 278).

With the coming of Sir Gordon Guggisberg in 1922, a noticeable change characterised colonial educational policy, and attention was now drawn to practical learning, more likely to meet local needs. Teaching local history and languages, and promoting the education of girls, largely neglected hitherto, were prioritised. With the construction of Achimota School in 1927 and trade schools later, the development of education in the colony witnessed a turning point. Its primary objective was now to allow Ghanaian boys at school to 'continue their education for one-third of their time, the remaining two-thirds being employed in learning the latest methods of cultivation of one or more commercial agricultural products' (Boahen,1975:113). After World War II, stress was placed on higher education through the establishment of residential university colleges 'which included all the principal disciplines in their range of studies...[and] could enter into a special relationship with London University for an interim period until they gained sufficient experience for full university status to be granted' (Lee and Petter, 1982:201).

Nevertheless, a scrutiny of colonial education reveals that there were other targets behind official statements. Abrokwa (2017) notes:

The introduction of Western education in colonial Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) thus, was not aimed at developing the Africans and their environment but to serve and adapt Africans to the colonial interests of the European powers...British colonial education policies not only created dependent higher education institutions in the final days of colonial rule in the British territories ... but the policies also failed to make these institutions relevant to their societies and peoples (Abrokwa,2017).

It is therefore no surprise that the post-independent educational sector encountered significant obstacles

on account of constraints and barriers inherited from the colonial period. In their quest to surmount the challenges they faced, the Ghanaian leaders multiplied the attempts to promote national education; however, they were confronted with a tremendous responsibility. In fact, 'Colonization introduced contradictions in the colonies which not even the granting of independence per se could solve' (Genoud,1969: 51).

When power was handed over to Ghanaians in 1957 under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah, promises of educational reforms had been part and parcel of the political manifestos. Whatever criticism the leader of the Convention People's Party (CPP) might have been subject to, Ghana witnessed undeniable economic and educational progress during the first years under his command. On the whole, and in spite of some striking deficits, notably the prioritisation of towns at the detriment of rural areas, there was a harsh war against poverty, ignorance and disease, three evils that Nkrumah deeply believed were the essence of backwardness. Primary stress was thus laid on education. The number of primary schools had increased from 3571 in 1957 to 3713 in 1959 and the secondary schools from 38 in 1957 to 59 in 1960. In the teaching training field, a National Teacher Training Council was set up, and the government awarded scholarships to 1,959,300 Ghanaian students to pursue varied studies in Western Europe. These included medicine, engineering, agriculture, economics and accountancy. Universities were encouraged and assisted in their work and research through the establishment of the National Research Council and the Ghana Academy of Learning. In 1961, they were granted full status, putting thus an end to the affiliation with the University of London that had lasted 13 years. In fact, the latter supervised the academic work of the Ghanaian university and awarded degrees since 1948, the date when the University College of the Gold Coast (modern Ghana) was inaugurated. This academic independence made of Ghana the most literate country in Africa (Price, 1984).

As time went on, political turbulences became more recurrent and military overthrows quite frequent. Consequently, Ghana's education system which

...had previously been regarded as one of the most highly developed, and effective, in West Africa, [was] by the 1980s... in near collapse and viewed as dysfunctional in relation to the goals and aspirations of the country. The academic standards of pupils, support for teachers, instructional materials, school buildings, classrooms and equipment had declined through lack of financing and management (Kadingdi, 2004).

As time moved on, the sector increasingly encountered serious challenges. It underwent therefore an avalanche of reforms, sometimes overhauling the entire curriculum and the school duration with the main aim of promoting vocational and technical studies at pre-university education. Nevertheless, these attempts at change were inextricably associated with changes in leadership, and because governments were short-lived, so were the reforms. A lack of inadequate tools and workshops to promote technical and vocational programmes, in addition to a lack of specialist teachers to handle this type of courses resulted in a blatant failure of the reform. All it generated was an instability of the whole system regarding structure, content and duration.

2.The Birth of the Fourth Republic and Deep Educational Reforms

On 3 November 1992, five political parties frenetically ran to the presidential poll in Ghana, two major ones with chances of winning: the government then in power with the National Democratic Congress (NDC) with Jerry John Rawlings as candidate, and Adu Boahen's New Patriotic Party (NPP). Rawlings, an air Force Lieutenant in the Ghanaian Air Force, had led the country for ten years after he overthrew Hilla Limann in a military coup in December 1981. Professor Boahen represented the Ghanaian elite, professionals and businessmen. The results of the poll showed a sweeping victory for Rawlings with 58.3% of the votes, a victory which the opposition questioned, accusing the man of fraud and malpractices (Nugent, 1995:233). Nevertheless, the plausibility of the allegations was difficult to determine as Rawlings enjoyed a great popularity notably in the rural areas of Ghana. Many asserted that there might have been

some irregularities in the ballot, but that it was unlikely that the NDC could fabricate a victory on its own by relying only on intimidation and threat (Jeffries and Thomas, 1993).

The Fourth Republic in Ghana was inaugurated on 7 January 1993, and Rawlings who now retired from the army, became the new civilian president of the country. The elections of 1992 were a turning point in the Ghanaian history. The Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC), the military government in power prior to 1992, was the longest to remain in power in Africa and convert into a civilian government under constitutional rule. This inevitably had significant repercussions on the future economic decisions to which the educational sector was tightly linked. Effective education has always been a prerequisite for the real economic development of any nation. Accordingly, the question was whether an ex-military government had the required aptitude to undertake successful long-term reforms in education and to implement an effective school system.

Basically, the Fourth Republic drew up plans to reform the educational sector that can be summed up in three main points: the availability of education for all throughout Ghana, the provision of free and compulsory basic education, and equal access to pre-university and university education for all citizens. Globally, no profound transformations were noted but there was now a clear focus on the notions of free and compulsory education for all Ghanaians from J1 to SS3 (primary to secondary), involving a real and long-term commitment on the part of the government in education, regarded now as a basic right issue. Along with this, the government chose to give more importance to science and technology, viewed in the world of today as vital for the whole economic development of the country. Moreover, it embarked on an ambitious scheme of life-long education by promoting 'a free adult literacy programme, and a free vocational training, rehabilitation and resettlement of disabled persons' (BOAKYE, 2019: 95). The idea of life-long education targeted mostly the sections of the Ghanaian society that had not benefited from enrolment in education at school going-age and to whom the government planned to provide instruction.

These target categories were mostly in rural areas in the northern parts of the country, generally lagging behind the rest of Ghana socio-economically speaking. In these regions with a high population growth, poor sanitation, social vices and youth unemployment usually went along with a widespread illiteracy. An Adult Learning Programme was thus launched through non-formal institutions and foreign non-governmental organisations which the government planned to finance along with foreign operatives.

By the end of the eighties, and in a desperate attempt to salvage national economy from sinking, the PNDC had capitulated to the pressure exercised by the then wide spread crisis, and approached the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank for loans. The international institutions conditioned the granting of their funds with the imposition of reforms in different sectors, including education. The core component of the reform was not adapted to the Ghanaian school and soon turned to be a blatant failure. In 1993, the first experience revealed the inadequacy of the reforms and its flaws. The first results showed that only 3.2 % of the pupils were eligible for admission at university. The majority failed to take the University Entrance Examination (U.E.E.).

Such results generated intense unease among the academics, parents, students and civil organisations. Quite indecisive, and in an attempt to respond to the mounting frustration and pressure, the government headed towards implementing a 'better' school system by setting up the Education Reform Review Committee in July 1994. The latter was entrusted with the main aim of examining the reasons for the failure of the preceding reform at a time when professionals simply demanded its abolition. The Ghanaian civil society regarded the advocated reforms as driven more by an attempt to embroil education in politics as an instrument of political propaganda than by a real concern with the sector and its current difficulties. The success was thus highly impeded by political counter-interferences. As Abdi et al. put it:

...the education system is not addressing the priority needs of the poor majority but of the elite. In order to maintain political and economic power,

governments follow educational policies that produce social inequality and also intensify already existing inequities.... educational investment decisions have been determined more by political pressure from socially dominant groups than by economic feasibility. (Abdi et al., 2006:143).

3.The Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education Programme (FCUBE)

In an attempt to address the recurring problems of teacher training, provision of physical structures, curriculum review and development and financing, the Ghanaian government launched the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education Programme (FCUBE) (1996-2005) with the main goal of guaranteeing that all Ghanaian children of school going-age were in school. It was largely a donor-funded reform scheme that targeted all levels of national education. It was financed by the United Nations Children's Educational Fund (UNICEF), the Department for International Development of the United Kingdom, the World Bank, the European Union, the Swedish International Development Agency, the United States Agency for International Development and the Danish International Development Agency (Kadingdi, 2004). Theoretically, the plan was to offer services that included waiver of school fees, supply of free text and exercise books, school uniforms and school footwear (Brenyah, 2018). Much was expected from such a plan and the Ministry of Education particularly emphasised its strict implementation. The latter underlined clearly four main aims: to improve the quality of teaching and learning, to improve management efficiency and sustainability, to increase access and partnership and to decentralise the management of the education sector. The new curriculum intended mainly to develop the learners'

...skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing and knowledge of the principles and skills of the numeracy, measurement and of the relationship involving space and shape. In addition, knowledge and understanding of the cultural, economic and physical heritage of the people and their neighbours should be emphasised. Research and study skills, skills of enquiry, analysis and knowledge of healthy

living plus issues of gender sensitivity in text of curriculum as well as in illustration should be pursued (Kadingdi, 2004).

Accordingly, the Ministry of Education insisted on the vital importance of developing the lines of the new educational direction so as to provide an education of quality for all Ghanaians. The main objective was thus to stress literacy, numeracy and ensure a proper knowledge of culture and technical and vocational skills. The challenge was arduous. Initially, the curriculum encompassed nine subjects later reduced to five in lower primary school and six in upper primary school. The Ministry intended to devote more time in these levels to allow for a better assimilation of the basic skills of writing, reading and numeracy. It has been observed through the preceding educational policies and experiences that subject overload was the main cause of pupils' early dismissal from school. The new government intended to favour quality over quantity. At lower primary school, the subjects taught were English, Ghanaian language and culture, mathematics, environmental studies and religious and moral education. In the upper primary, and in addition to the subjects of the previous level, integrated science (science and agricultural science), physical education, music and dance were introduced.

Overall, the plan's commitment was to assist the Ghanaian government in the tricky task of promoting effective teaching and learning in Ghanaian schools. In this respect, teachers were summoned to

... use pupil-centred instructional practices and assessment techniques and to improve school supervision by both circuit supervisors and school headmasters. Plans were made to create a sustainable in-service professional development system and to develop and test distance-learning technologies for teacher training and classroom instruction. Success was to be measured by a specified increase in achievements of pupils in Model Schools, and a specified increase in enrolment and retention rates (Kadingdi, 2004).

4.Results of the FCUBE

Statistically, the number of basic schools increased from approximately 13,000 in the 1980s to over 18,000

by the end of the NDC's presidential term in 2000, but this remains an insufficient criterion of evaluation. The rise in the number of schools implied more finance and more means of effective management. It was clear from the beginning that the FCUBE was a great challenge for the Ministry of education in Ghana. Overall, and in spite of the available donor funds, the plan faced difficulties to achieve the target goal mainly due to a lack of administrative capacity. This resulted in a striking shortage of the basic school material resources like chalk, exercise books and textbooks, in addition to the inadequacy of the teachers' guides and syllabuses. These were irrelevant to the Ghanaian context and failed to meet the needs of both teachers and learners.

On the pedagogical side, things were not better. Teachers were insufficient in number and the absence of a well elaborated teachers' training system compounded the difficulty for the sector. In fact, it was primarily based on an overemphasis on academic knowledge at the detriment of the teaching methods and this only produced a generation of teachers that lacked the basic requirements of the teaching job: motivation, aptitude and commitment. Rote learning was a widespread method amongst teachers who found it easier to rely on this inadequate technique to deliver instruction than to cause learners to interact in class for a better school outcome. Rote learning was, and probably is still, useful when it came to times tables in maths because learners remembered when memorizing by repetition, but for the rest of the subjects, it only produced individuals learning by heart items they did not always understand. This method could hardly be responsive to the FCUBE's goals as envisioned in the reform and to national aspirations too. (Braimah et al, 2014)note:

...provisions were hardly made to get adequate trained and qualified technical and vocational teachers as well as textbooks to man these schools. Some schools were without teachers while those with teachers were inadequate or lacked specialist teachers to handle the technical and vocational programmes which constituted the core component of the new school system and a departure from the old school system. ...Third textbooks, teaching and learning materials,

machinery for the vocational and technical education were either not available or inadequate. Indeed, most schools got their first-year textbooks in the second year and the second-year textbooks in year three. The effect was that the teachers and students never had access to third-year textbooks before they sat for the final examination (Brammah et al., 2014).

But to lay the blame on the teaching staff only and attribute the failure of the experience to inappropriate methods would be unfair. How can teachers be blamed for not adopting a collaborative form of learning where greater control has to be in the hands of the learners when they themselves have been the result of a 'chalk and talk' instruction for generations? The Ghanaian young trainees themselves have been victims of a concept imported from abroad and about which little was done to be responsive to current challenges. Kadingdi notes:

The need for new understandings amongst teachers is particularly crucial in the case of current reform efforts in basic education because many of the ideas central to these efforts are foreign to Ghanaian teachers. Having grown up in a very traditional educational system teachers are now being asked to change, and as a result to teach, in ways that are unfamiliar to them and in ways that they did not experience as students. Furthermore, the reforms themselves are not based on a prescriptive approach of the kind that Ghanaian teachers have always experienced. Rather, in the reforms teachers are being encouraged to build on pupils' ideas and knowledge to help them develop conceptual understanding and relevant skills (Kadingdi, 2004).

Additionally, the poorest families were largely excluded from the benefits of the scheme which seemed to have targeted solely a section of the Ghanaian society. Although, and as its name suggested, the FCUBE targeted free education for all and was therefore expected to reduce educational expenditure and remove the financial barriers that prevented the lowest classes from joining school, educational authorities continued to levy learners culminating in an early school leaving age. This inevitably impacted the quality of teaching and the pleasure of learning

alike. Akyeampong(2009) notes:

[The] ... FCUBE...did not go far enough to offset the opportunity costs of schooling for the poorest households by abolishing all forms of fees and reducing significantly the indirect costs associated with attending school. The incidence of late entry, overage attendance and poor households' need for child labour also posed a further threat to the benefits FCUBE promised(Akyeampong, 2009).

It is worthy of note that the FCUBE was also under criticism because of an overall mismanagement of the plan by the Ministry of Education. One particular malfunction was related to the geographical facilities it failed to provide for pupils to ensure an effective implementation of the plan. Theoretically, the learners benefited from a totally free education, but in practice the long distance they had to travel to go to school (2.5km on average) generated additional expenses the poor households were not always ready to assume. Moreover, the provision of the necessary school material such as text books, sports fees, printing fees and tables and chairs, witnessed long delays. This predictably impacted the course of schooling and incited the local school authorities to find a workaround: resort to pupils to assume the fees (Little, 2010). The notion of free education had already lost much of its significance and was being slowly turning into cost-sharing basic education, sweeping away the moral commitment of the Fourth Republic in guaranteeing the right of free education to all Ghanaians.

It is thus worthless to want to improve education and expect a high enrolment rate when people's primary preoccupation is how to secure food and other basic needs at the end of the day. Poverty is inextricably bound up with education as child labour is the only option left for poor households to survive. A child cannot (and should not) be at work and at school simultaneously. The FCUBE failed to understand this link between economic conditions and schooling capacities which determined therefore the rate of school attendance or drop-out. Brenyah (2018) notes:

Indeed, the Universal Basic Education through capitation grants targeted at least 4 measures to ensure

100% compliance. These targets were to ensure that children who have never enrolled in school were enrolled, ensured zero drop out at the primary school level, ensured all children complete primary level and that no child dropped out during the JHS level. The possibility of zero drop out at all levels was so much questionable and had generated a lot of debates. There cannot be zero drop out when sub-Saharan African countries are living in abject poverty (Brenyah, 2018).

It would certainly be completely unfair to assert that the plan did not impact enrolment rates at all, but compared to expectations, the results were meagre. If we compare Ghana to other Sub-Saharan countries that launched the same plan at the same period, notably Malawi, Kenya and Uganda, we can note that increased school enrolment rates were much slower to come. Statistically, the net enrolment rate decreased from 76% in 1998 to 61.9% in 2002. In fact, it kept fluctuating, increasing or decreasing insignificantly through the years. The material and management difficulties that the government encountered not only caused the failure of the plan, but further regressed education as there was a return back to the shift schooling system, introduced in Ghana in 1951 when the country was still under colonial rule though with an internal self-government under Kwame Nkrumah as Prime Minister. This shift system, which consisted of pupils attending school either in the morning or in the afternoon alternatively for two weeks, was highly criticised for the low enrolment rate it engendered in the afternoon classes (Brandford et al., 2013). Teachers were demotivated in front of tired pupils who were neither willing nor apt to concentrate on and grasp the content of lessons.

In addition, the interest shown by the government in technical and vocational education with a technological orientation seemed an overambitious course of action. The limited means the government devoted to such an investment culminated in a failure to build the required practical shops in sufficient numbers, and the rehabilitation of those few already built ones which deteriorated was going at a slow pace, sometimes not even starting. All this contributed to demotivate learners and their parents

alike. The government soon abandoned the plan in a step backwards to general education as introduced in the early years of independence. It can therefore be asserted, fairly enough, that although there had been an avalanche of theories underpinning the achievements of educational reforms in Ghana under the Fourth Republic, the FCUBE was associated more with shortfalls than with a real success.

Conclusion

The Fourth Republic in Ghana brought its fair share of change in educational reforms. Although well intentioned, they remained an extremely complex task for the Ministry of Education. Tinged with inconsistencies, the major policy initiatives ended in a striking paradox. The contribution of foreign donor partners was expected to relieve the sector and promote progress, but various management and financial inefficiency culminated in meagre results. Reforms targeted form more than content. A high school enrolment did not only mean higher numbers of learners at school, it had to do with better syllabuses, an effective teacher training and the availability of school items as well. Although statistically these reforms increased school enrolment rates for some time, yet quantity did not always go hand in hand with quality. Policy makers in charge of educational change were not necessarily the most qualified people to launch effective school reform schemes. Politicising the educational sector was one of the factors that significantly hampered tangible progress in the Ghanaian educational sector.

Conflict of Interest

I declare that I have no conflict of interest

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