Challenges Of Utilising Child-Friendly Public Spaces In Ilorin, Nigeria

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Abstract: Public spaces are essential for the social and psychological development of children since informal learning, attitudinal and behavioural formation occur in such areas. However, most public spaces in Nigeria are incapable of nurturing the socio-psychological development of children. This is ascribed to numerous challenges, which prevent children from adequately using designated public spaces. Therefore, this study examined the various challenges that hamper the use of child-friendly public spaces in Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria. The methodology adopted survey research design, 114 respondents (57 adults and 57 children) were randomly selected from different locations in Ilorin. The quantitative data were analysed through descriptive and inferential techniques. The results indicated that public spaces in Ilorin lack the basic architectural landscape element required to facilitate the socio-psychological development of children. In addition, it was observed that existing public spaces are not adequately reserved for children, while most are overtaken by the adults who use the spaces for assemblies or businesses. Hence, the existing public spaces are unsuitable due to the lack of basic architectural landscape element required to enable the socio-psychological development of children.

Index Terms: Public spaces; Child-Friendly; Social development; Psychological development.

1 INTRODUCTION

THIS lack of friendly public spaces is a major problem in most urban centres in developing countries. The urban space in Nigeria has been bedevilled and faced with many challenges which have adversely affected the quality of public spaces especially for children. For instance, in recent years, urban society has witnessed rapid illegal sale or conversion of public spaces to residential and commercial spaces. These activities have reduced the number of public spaces available for children to utilise for socio-psychological development. In other words, public spaces have become inaccessible to members (especially the children) of the community. In search for alternative playgrounds, it has become a commonplace for children to convert neighbourhood streets into makeshift recreational facilities or playgrounds in many urban centres around their country. It has been argued it is the responsibility of the government to provide functional and hygiene public spaces for children given its socio-psychological importance. To achieve this, government (policy-makers) needs the services of key stakeholders such as architects, urban planners and estate managers. According to Pancholi, et al,.(2019), this requires evidence-based capacity and empirical studies for enhanced decision-making. While there are studies on the challenges of utilising child-friendly public spaces, there are salient gaps in them. One fundamental gap pointed out in the existing studies is that most of these studies focused on the nature and quality of modern public spaces (Van Hecke et al., 2018;Duarte et al., 2016 ; Florindo et al., 2017; Yung, et al., 2016). They are also limited on the behavioural effects of modern public space (Florindo et al., 2017; (Yung et al., 2016). The present study would fill the existing gap in literature by looking at the challenges of traditional public spaces and how the challenges affect the socio-psychological development of children in Ilorin, Nigeria.

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2 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The broad purpose of the study was to elucidate Challenges of Utilising Child-Friendly Public Spaces in Ilorin, Nigeria. In view of traditional public space (TPS) which is also called Ojude in local dialect.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

Adikutlu, (2019) found a correlation between a socio-economically disadvantaged traditional public space and the socio-psychological development of children. The findings indicate that traditional public spaces in poor neighbourhoods are potentially characterised by lack of outdoor activities. Furthermore, the findings revealed that the lack of playing fields and recreational services in poor neighbours potentially produce children with delayed socio-psychological development ([7]. In addition, the impact of public spaces on the socio-cultural development of children was examined in the literature [8]. The authors observed that the shape of traditional open space influences the socio-cultural welfare of children.

Similarly, Agboola et al., (2017) Maruani et al., (2007) revealed that the traditional public spaces reinforce the socio-cultural and psychological connections between children and symbolic geophysical spaces for children. Furthermore, Alubo,(2011) showed that children nurtured (or mingle with) by morally upright people and around safe traditional public spaces have better psychosocial development. Shabak et al., (2015) surmised that traditionally public spaces are one of the significant determinants of the cognitive and behavioural components in children. Hence, the findings suggest that societal norms and values required for socialisation are transmitted from the aged/adult members to children. Hence, the younger generation in society requires traditional public spaces for socio-cultural development in the typical African setting. However,(Shabak et al.,(2015) reported that the socialisation process in traditional public spaces is not automatically from adult members to younger (children) members of the society. However, the authors opine that social learning also occurs among people of the same age-group (i.e peers). Hence, the authors submit that children exchange

ideas through interaction with one another in socio-cultural settings, which could be considered as traditional public spaces [7]. The findings of Witvliet et al., (2010),Smith, (2010) revealed there is a relationship between psycho-social behaviour of children and their resident socio-natural environment. This implies that the nature of the environment where a child lives can influence his/her behaviour. This work further emphasised and justified the environment determinism of human social behaviour. Tucker et al(2017) showed how children respond to the physical environment. The authors noted that the interaction of children with the physical environment tends to be direct and recognisable. According to the authors, the infants are delighted to explore and move around. For example, a pre-schooler striving to master physical skills in their immediate environment is the primary medium that facilities learning and development capacities (Tucker et al 2017). In addition, the authors pointed out that "attachments to beloved objects and places are critical and central to the emotional life of the young child" [13]. Hence, the authors recommended considering children in architectural landscape planning due to the perceived influence of the physical environment on the emotional growth and social development of children. Shamsuddin et al. (2012), Dudek (2005) argued that the psycho-social development of children is dependent on the provision of an adequate environment. The author noted that a good and spacious environment is not only essential to the learning process but fundamental for intellectual and emotional development of a child. Consequently, the author argued in favour of an architectural landscape design that will provide sufficient and crisis-free spaces for learning and development of children. Özdemir, (2019), revealed the need to involve children in making decisions about socio-physical environments. The author argued that children are essential stakeholders in environmental management and governance. This stems from the notion that the emotional and social well-being of children depends on the quality of the environment where they reside. Moreover, children may have crucial ideas about their environment, if allowed to voice their opinions. The author however, advocated that children should be helped by those who believe in a child's environmental right to speak out their concerns about the physical and social environment where they live. Fromboluti et al (1999) noted that the physical environment of a child is paramount to their learning process. Furthermore, the authors emphasised that learning begins in the physical environment of the child. Therefore, the everyday play and experiences of children can help them learn more about geography and other components of the earth such as human, animals, and plants. This thought means that children learn by observing and playing with the objects (either physical or non-physical objects) in their environment. By observing and playing around their physical environment, children become familiar with the various kinds of plants and animals in their neighbourhood surroundings (Fromboluti et al, 1999). Similarly, Grose (2009), argued that children should be provided with critical physical objects or environments such as a garden with various plants and animals. The rationale behind this argument, as noted by Miller (2010), is that children learn more when exposed to physical objects in the environment. When exposed to physical objects, children tend to play and critically observe the environment, which enhances their understanding and knowledge overtime. Spencer and Blades, (2006), explored the perceptions of space and place by the children. The authors argued that children tend to explore the spaces and places where they reside and by so doing learn during the exploration process. However, the authors noted that children experience spaces and places differently based on their cultures and background conditions. Day (2007), investigated the effect of the built environment on the behaviour, health, education and development of children. The study stressed that children are frequently found residing in a built environment designed for adults. Consequently, children can be deliberately cut off from their childhood by the physical environment. Furthermore, Day, (2007) noted that the bad behaviour of children is a direct result of a poorly designed physical environment. Therefore, the study suggested that children should be considered in the architectural design phase of the physical environment due to its fundamental influence on their behaviour

4 METHODOLOGY / STUDY AREA

The city of Ilorin is a confluence of cultures populated by Yoruba, Hausa, Fulani, Nupe, Baruba, and other ethnics groups. The indigenous culture of the people of Ilorin is predominantly based on Islam, as evident in the widely celebrated Islamic festivals, compared to other areas in Nigeria. Presently, Ilorin cuts across three (3) Local Government Areas, namely; Ilorin West, Ilorin East and Ilorin South. Therefore, this research aims to examine the challenges of utilising child-friendly public spaces in the city. Hence, the target population for this study is Ilorin. From the research setting (Ilorin), five Ojudes which is traditional public space including; Ojude Oba, Ojude Balogun Alanamu, Ojude Balogun Ajikobi, Ojude Balogun Gambari and Ojude Balogun Fulani were selected for this study. In each of the Ojudes children and adults were selected through purposive sampling technique. The reason for including children and adults was to understand the challenges of utilising of child-friendly public spaces from both perspectives. Hence, a questionnaire was used to collect the respondents' data, which was subsequently analysed using the IBM SPSS Statistic Version 20.

5 TABLES OF ANALYSIS

The results of the SPSS analysis, along with the distribution of the respondents based on location, is presented in Table 1. Table 1 shows that the highest number of respondents is from Ikokoro (14.0%), whereas the lowest is from Nolasalati (7.0%). However, other regions pooled 10.5% for Ojudeoba, 10.5% for Magagi ojuekun, 12.3% for Balogun Gambari, 8.8% for Balogun Fulani, 12.3% for Balogun Alanamu, 12.3% for Imam Gambari and 12.3% for Balogun Ajikobi. As observed, the percentage of male respondents 38(66.7%) was higher than female 19(33.3%). In addition, the data shows that 54.4% of the respondents are aged 8-9 years, 24.6% are 10-12 years, and 21.1% are aged 6-7 years. Furthermore, 84.2% of the respondents are Yoruba, whereas 15.8% are Hausa. The table showed that the more significant percentage 86.0% of the respondents reside in Ilorin west, while 8.8% reside in Ilorin east, 1.8% in Ilorin south, and 3.5% did not respond. The data also revealed that 40.4% of the respondents which mothers are self-employed, 38.6% are employed by other means, whereas 21.1% are unemployed. The table revealed that 68.4% of the respondents which are father were employed, 28.1% were self-employed while 21.1% were unemployed.

Table 1: *Distribution of the children respondents based on location*

Location	Frequency	Per cent
Imam Gambari	7	12.3
Ojude oba	6	10.5
Magaji ojuekun	6	10.5
Balagun gambari	7	12.3
Balogun Fulani	5	8.8
Ikokoro	8	14.0
Balogun alanamu	7	12.3
Nda salati	4	7.0
Balogun ajikobi	7	12.3
Total	57	100.0
Sex	Frequency	Per cent
Male	38	66.7
Female	19	33.3
Total	57	100.0
Age group	Frequency	Per cent
6-7 years	12	21.1
8-9 years	31	54.4
10-12 years	14	24.6
Total	57	100.0
Language	Frequency	Per cent
Yoruba	48	84.2
Hausa	9	15.8
Total	57	100.0
Local government	Frequency	Per cent
No response	2	3.5
Ilorin West	49	86.0
Ilorin East	5	8.8
Ilorin South	1	1.8
Total	57	100.0
Mother occupation	Frequency	Per cent
Employed	22	38.6
Self-employed	23	40.4
Unemployed	12	21.1
Total	57	100.0
Father occupation	Frequency	Per cent
Employed	39	68.4
Self-employed	16	28.1
Unemployed	2	3.5
Total	57	100.0

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork (2019)

Table 2: *Distribution of the children respondents based on the utilization of traditional public space*

Enquiries	Activities	Frequency	Per cent
Distance to traditional Public Space	Less than 500 metres	48	84.2
	More than 500 metres	9	15.8
Usage of the traditional Public Space	Walking	14	24.6
	Boju boju	10	17.5
	Takiti obo	7	12.3
	Ten ten	3	5.3
	Alo	6	10.5
	Skipping rope	8	14.0
	Bike riding	2	3.5
	Football	5	8.8
	Appreciation of nature	2	3.5
Preferable play experiences	Standard e.g. Swing/slide	41	71.9
	Imaginative; e.g. Alo	8	14.0
	Sensory e.g. Music; equipment	2	3.5
	Physical challenge, e.g. ropes course	4	7.0
	Nature based e.g. ropes course/bouncing	2	3.5
Frequent use of traditional public space	Hardly use	10	17.5
	A couple of times a week	34	59.6
	Three to four times a week	5	8.8
	A couple of times a month	1	1.8
	Almost every day	7	12.3

Table 2 shows that 84.2% of the respondents reported that the use of traditional public spaces within their homes, while 15.8% do not. Furthermore, 24.6% of the respondents reported the use traditional public spaces for walking, while 17.5% for boju boju, 12.3% for takiti obo, 5.3% for through ten ten, 10.5% for Alo, 14.0% for skipping rope, 3.5% for bike riding, 8.8% for football and 3.5% for appreciating nature. Furthermore, 71.9% of the respondents are considered standard, 14.0% were imaginative, 3.5% sensory, 7.0% are physically challenged, and 3.5% are nature-based. Lastly, 59.6% of the respondents use the traditional public spaces twice a week, 12.3% daily, 8.8% three to four times a week, 1.8% twice a month, whereas 17.5% hardly use such spaces.

Table 3 presents data on the distribution of the respondents based on their reasons for using traditional public spaces (TPS). The results show that 77.2% of the respondents reside near traditional public spaces, whereas 22.8% do not. Hence, over half (50.9%) use such spaces due to lack of alternative places to visit, 38.6% use traditional alternative spaces, whereas 10.5% are unsure. All the respondents (100%) agreed that the open spaces are socio-culturally attractive. Furthermore, 73.7% reported the availability of clean open spaces, facilities, and environment. The availability of safe open spaces, facilities and environment was confirmed by 82.5% of the respondents compared to 12.3% who reported unsafe environment, whereas 5.3% were unsure of the safety levels of these facilities.

Table 3: *Distribution of the children respondents based on reasons for using TPS*

Enquiries	Response	Frequency	Per cent
Proximity to residence	Yes	44	77.2
	No	13	22.8
No other places to go	Yes	22	38.6
	No	29	50.9
	Not sure	6	10.5
Socio-culturally attractiveness	Yes	57	100.0
Public space has clean facilities and environment	Yes	42	73.7
	No	15	26.3
Open space has safe facilities and environment	Yes	47	82.5

The distribution of the respondents based on the nature of the environment around traditional public spaces (TPS) is presented in Table 4.

Table 4: *Distribution of children respondents based on the nature of the TPS environment*

Enquiries	Response	Frequency	Per cent
It has an excellent natural environment	Yes	40	70.2
	No	17	29.8
Are you able to easily access the TPS in your immediate neighbourhood by walking	Yes	41	71.9
	No	16	28.1
If no, please indicate why	Too far to walk	36	63.2
	Step topography of the local area	17	29.8
	Others.	4	7.0
How often do you visit TPS?	Once per week	18	31.6
	More than once per week	30	52.6
	Once per fortnight	5	8.8
	Others	4	7.0

Table 4 shows that 70.2% of the respondents reported a pleasant natural environment, while 29.8% were not in a pleasant natural environment. Furthermore, 71.9% of the respondent reported easy access to the TPS in the neighbourhood, while 28.1% did not. The reasons for poor access was ascribed to the far walking distances to TPS as noted by 63.2% of the respondents, whereas 29.8% reported topography of the local area and 7.0% as critical reasons. Typically, about 6% of the respondents visited the TPS more than once per week, 31.6% once per week, 8.8% once per fortnight, whereas others were 7.0%.

Table 5: *Distribution of the respondents based on what limit the children from accessing the TPS*

Enquiries	Response	Frequency	Per cent
Indicate the barrier that stops or limit you from accessing the nearest TPS	Too far to walk	18	31.6
	Topography of the local area	11	19.3
	Major barriers such as busy road, railway line	28	49.1
Do you ask for permission from your parent before visiting the TPS?	Yes	45	78.9
	No	12	21.1
Limitation	Limited variety of play opportunities	28	49.1
	Lack of park furniture such as seating	15	26.3
	Lack of shade	5	8.8
	No access to toilet	9	15.0

Table 5 shows that 49.1% of the respondents mentioned a significant barrier, 31.6% mentioned steep topography of the local area; while 19.3% were too far to walk. Lastly, 78.9% of the reported asking the permission of a parent before visiting the TPS, whereas 21.1% did not.

Table 6: *Distribution of children respondents based on a current limit stay at TPS*

Do any of the following factors currently limit your stay at TPS?	Frequency	Per cent
Limited variety of play opportunities	28	49.1
Lack of park furniture such as seating	15	26.3
Lack of shade	5	8.8
No access to toilet	9	15.0
Total	57	100.0

Table 6 shows that 49.1% of the respondents have a limited variety of play options, 26.3% lack park furniture such as benches, 8.8% lack of shade, while 15.0% lacked access to toilets.

Table 7 presents the distribution of the respondents based on the level of satisfaction with the TPS in their immediate vicinity. It was observed that 50.9% of the respondents were neutral, whereas 35.1% were satisfied with the TPS, 14.0% were unsatisfied. Furthermore, the data in Table 7 shows that 29.9% of the respondents are satisfied with the TSA in Ilorin, 57.9% were neutral, while 12.3% were unsatisfied.

Table 7: *Distribution of the respondent based on how satisfied there are with TPS in their environment.*

Enquiries	Response	Frequency	Per cent
How satisfied are you with the TPS in your immediate	Very satisfied	1	1.8
	Satisfied	19	33.3
	Neutral	29	50.9
	Unsatisfied	8	14.0
In general how satisfied are you with TPS in Ilorin	Very satisfied	3	5.3
	Satisfied	14	24.6
	Neutral	33	57.9
	Unsatisfied	7	12.3

The study also examined the convenience of the respondents to the traditional public spaces in Ilorin. Hence, Table 8 presents the measurements of the accessibility of respondents to TPS in the city.

Based on the findings in Table 8 below, it can be observed that 94.9% of the respondents reported TPS are located near their children. However, 54.2% reported the TPS does not meet the requirements for children with mobility difficulties or visual impairment. Other respondents (67.8%) reported that each TPS has the good surface paths where children can play easily. Furthermore, 52.5% reported that the TPS connect to other TPS in Ilorin city. In addition, 76.3% reported that the TPS allows smooth movement in and between spaces, whereas 61.0% reported that the public spaces have multiple accessibility entrances in the right places. Based on the results, it could be surmised that the respondents agreed, to some extent that the identified TPS are accessible. This contradicted what the children said about those traditional public spaces.

Table 8: *Measuring the accessibility of TPS in Ilorin city from adult.*

Enquiries	Yes	No	Not sure
Is it located close to where children are?	56(94.9%)	2(3.4%)	1(1.7%)
Does it meet the requirements of children with mobility difficulties or visual impairment?	26(44.1%)	32(54.2%)	1(1.7%)
Does it have right surface paths where children can play easily?	40(67.8%)	18(30.5%)	1(1.7%)
Does it connect to other traditional public spaces in Ilorin city	31(52.5%)	23(39.0%)	5(8.5%)
Does it allow smooth movement in and between spaces?	45(76.3%)	13(22.0%)	1(1.7%)
Does it have multiple accessible entrances in the right places	36(61.0%)	23(39.0%)	-

Table 9: *Measuring the attractiveness of traditional public spaces in Ilorin city from adult respondents.*

Enquiries	Yes	No	Not sure
Does it have positive historical or archaeological images?	35(59.3%)	23(39.0%)	1(1.7%)
Does it have attractive recreational infrastructures?	30(50.8%)	28(47.5%)	1(1.7%)
Is the environment clean, hygienic and well maintained?	43(72.9%)	16(27.1%)	-
Does it have attractive landscape elements?	16(27.1%)	43(72.9%)	-
Does it have well-defined boundaries and welcoming entrance areas?	25(42.4%)	34(57.6%)	-
Does it have domestic animals fouling around the area?	44(74.6%)	14(23.7%)	1(1.7%)

Table 9 shows that 59.3% of the respondent reported that traditional public spaces have positive historical or archaeological images. Furthermore, 50.8% reported that the TPS has attractive recreational infrastructures, while 72.9% reported that TPS is clean, hygienic and well maintained. Other respondents (72.9%) reported the TPS does not have attractive landscape elements, whereas 57.6% reported well-defined boundaries and welcoming entrance areas in TPS. Lastly, TPS with domestic animal fouling around the area were confirmed by 74.6% of the respondents. Therefore, the findings from this construct are considered nuanced. However, some respondents suggested that TPS in the study areas are attractive, whereas others report the spaces are unattractive because they lack certain qualities that could have made them attractive.

Table 10: *Measuring the socio-cultural well-being of traditional public spaces in Ilorin city from adult respondents.*

Enquiries	Yes	No	Not sure
Does it provide opportunities for a range of outdoor activities for children?	52(88.1%)	7(11.9%)	-
Does it provide opportunities for diverse play, sport and recreational activities for children?	53(89.8%)	6(10.2%)	-
Does it provide opportunities for children to learn about their cultural heritage?	47(79.7%)	12(20.3%)	-
Does it provide opportunities for the children to know their socio-historical backgrounds?	47(79.7%)	12(20.3%)	-
Does it provide places and opportunities for social interactions?	55(93.2%)	3(5.1%)	1(1.7%)
Is it acceptable to the socio-cultural needs of the children?	53(89.8%)	4(6.8%)	2(3.4%)
Is it safe and welcoming with no evidence of antisocial behaviours?	44(74.6%)	8(13.6%)	7(11.9%)
Does it have the capacity to facilitate community involvement?	48(81.4%)	9(15.3%)	2(3.4%)
Does it have good -cultural features?	45(76.3%)	13(22.0%)	1(1.7%)
Does it have appropriate lighting systems for night activities such as "hide and seek"?	36(61.0%)	23(39.0%)	-

Table 10 shows that 88.1% of the respondents reported that TPS provide opportunities for various outdoor activities for children, whereas 89.8% reported TPS to cater for diverse play, sport and recreational activities for children. Others or 79.7% reported that TPS provide opportunities for the children to learn about their cultural heritage, whereas 79.7% reported TPS to cater their socio-historical backgrounds. The respondents (93.2%) also reported TPS to provide places and opportunities for social interactions, and 89.8% reported that TPS provides an avenue for the socio-cultural needs of the children. Furthermore, 81.4% reported that TPS facilitate community involvement, have useful memorable socio-cultural features (76.3%). The safety of the TPS was also examined in the study. The findings showed that 61.0% of respondents reported appropriate lighting systems for night activities such as hide and sought. As such, the TPS are considered by 74.6% of the respondents who reported that each TPS is safe and welcoming with no evidence of antisocial behaviours. Overall, the results showed that traditional public spaces in Ilorin have socio-cultural significance not only for the children but also for the adults.

6 DISCUSSION OF THE KEY FINDINGS

The study examined the challenges of utilizing child-friendly public spaces in traditional places in Ilorin, Nigeria. The results indicated that friendly public spaces for children ensure rapid socio-psychological development of children. This is similar to the study of This finding agreed with the studies of (Kaplan et al., (2008), Alubo (2011), Shabak et al., (2015), Smith, (2010), Agboola et al., (2017) . For instance, the findings of Smith (2010) revealed that there is a relationship between psycho-social behaviour of children and their resident socio-natural environment. This implies that the nature of the environment where a child lives can influence his/her behaviour. This work further emphasised and justified the environment determinism of human social behaviour. Similarly, Agboola et al., (2017) and (Kaplan et al., (2008) revealed that the traditional public spaces reinforce the socio-cultural and psychological connections between children and symbolic geophysical spaces for children. Furthermore, Alubo (2011) showed that children nurtured (or mingle with) by morally upright people and around safe traditional public spaces have better psychosocial development. Shabak et al. (2015) surmised that traditionally public spaces are one of the significant determinants of the cognitive and behavioural components in children (Duarte et al., 2016; Florindo et al., 2017). However, as found in this study, public spaces in the study areas lack the basic architectural landscape element required to facilitate the rapid socio-psychological development of children. About 78% of the respondents indicated that public spaces are ill-equipped with necessary facilities that attract people such spaces. The respondents also emphasised that most traditional public spaces have been taken over by businesses that have built different shops or occupied the spaces for commercial activities. This finding is in tandem with the findings of Dudek (2005) and Özdemir (2019). For instance, Dudek (2005) argued that the psycho-social development of children is dependent on the provision of an adequate environment. The author noted that a good and spacious environment is not only essential to the learning process but fundamental for intellectual and emotional development of a child. Consequently, the author argued in favour of an architectural landscape design that will provide sufficient and crisis-free spaces for learning and development of children. Özdemir (2019) argued that there is the need to involve children in making decisions about socio-physical environments. The author noted that children are essential stakeholders in environmental management and governance (Van Hecke et al., 2018; Yung et al., 2016).

7 CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the study concluded that the existing public spaces for children are not friendly to children. This finding is ascribed to the lack of fundamental elements of the architectural landscape that could have facilitated the socio-psychological development of children. The study, therefore, concludes that conscious efforts should be geared towards the creation of children-friendly public spaces for every zone in the city. Based on this conclusion, the study suggests that the services of urban planners and architects should be employed to create and run child-friendly public spaces for every zone in the city.

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