

PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHER CONSTRAINTS IN IMPLEMENTING THE INDEPENDENT CURRICULUM

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Abstract

The independent curriculum builds teachers' enthusiasm for implementing learning that embraces the principle of diversity. The implementation is adapted to the local conditions. However, the fact is that the implementation of the independent curriculum is not as expected by the government. The obstacles teachers face are not few. This is due to the different situations in the field, including three primary schools in Kabupaten Manggarai, NTT. The teachers found obstacles, especially in the implementation of learning with the independent curriculum. This study aims to describe in detail the obstacles faced by primary school teachers in learning with the independent curriculum. This research uses qualitative approach and descriptive method. Three schools were selected because they have been implementing the Independent Curriculum for about two years. In addition, there are 12 respondents who are also implementing learning with the independent curriculum. The data collection technique used was in-depth interviews with the researcher as the main instrument. The data was analyzed using the steps of data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion. The results showed some of the main obstacles that elementary school teachers experienced in implementing learning with an independent learning curriculum, such as the preparation of learning tools, the implementation of assessments, the lack of student independence in learning, the limited time for teachers to learn, the ability of teachers to adapt teaching materials, and the limited training of teachers regarding the implementation of the independent learning curriculum.

Keywords: *obstacles; independent curriculum*

Abstrak

Kurikulum merdeka membangun semangat bagi para guru dalam melaksanakan pembelajaran yang menganut prinsip keberagaman. Pelaksanaannya disesuaikan dengan kondisi lapangan. Akan tetapi, faktanya bahwa penerapan kurikulum merdeka tidak sesuai yang diharapkan pemerintah. Kendala yang dihadapi para guru tidak sedikit. Hal ini disebabkan karena perbedaan situasi di lapangan, termasuk di tiga sekolah dasar di Kabupaten Manggarai, NTT. Para guru menemukan kendala terutama pada pelaksanaan pembelajaran dengan kurikulum merdeka. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan dengan detail kendala yang dihadapi guru sekolah dasar dalam pembelajaran dengan kurikulum merdeka. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dan metode deskriptif. Tiga sekolah yang dipilih karena sudah mulai menerapkan kurikulum merdeka kurang lebih dua tahun. Selanjutnya, terdapat 12 orang responden yang juga pelaksana pembelajaran menggunakan kurikulum merdeka. Teknik pengumpulan data yang digunakan adalah wawancara mendalam dengan peneliti sebagai instrumen utama. Data dianalisis dengan langkah pengumpulan data, reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan beberapa kendala utama yang dialami para guru sekolah dasar dalam menerapkan pembelajaran dengan kurikulum merdeka belajar seperti persiapan perangkat pembelajaran, pelaksanaan asesmen, minimnya kemandirian siswa dalam belajar, keterbatasan waktu para guru untuk belajar, kemampuan para guru dalam menyesuaikan materi ajar, dan masih terbatasnya edukasi terhadap guru terkait pelaksanaan kurikulum merdeka.

Kata Kunci: *kendala; kurikulum merdeka*

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Introduction

National education aims to produce learners with integrity, intellect, character and skills that are useful for building the nation and state of Indonesia. This goal is clearly stated in Article 1 (1) of the Education System Law. To achieve these goals, a good curriculum is needed. A good curriculum must meet several conditions, including 1) goal-oriented, such as educating the nation's children and of course according to their needs; 2) sustainable; the curriculum must be sustainable, what is lacking in the previous curriculum must be completed in the new curriculum, this is part of the benefits of how important curriculum evaluation is; 3) comprehensive; a comprehensive curriculum must cover various areas of life for today's children. The curriculum should exist as the main guide or standard in educating the nation's children; 4) Multiple functions; such as being changed according to the needs of the times, can build learners' competence, become a guide in the development of learners; 5) Criteria-oriented.

Thus, the curriculum is a plan or design for achieving educational goals through the learning process. Learning is the spirit or the heart of the curriculum. As the curriculum is part of the management of education, the curriculum has planning, implementation and evaluation. The same applies to learning, that learning must have planning, implementation and evaluation, starting from planning, the quality of the process to assessment must be clear, measurable and systematic.

The curriculum is designed to shape learners' knowledge, attitudes and skills through learning. This is done to prepare learners who are ready for the future. In addition, the curriculum also plays a role in shaping character, moral values and life skills to make students highly competitive, independent and responsible individuals. Therefore, the curriculum is not fixed. The government often changes the curriculum applied in the world of education in order to achieve the expected goals, such as education that is in line with the times, quality education, and preparing students for future challenges. Eventually, the 2013 Curriculum was replaced by the Merdeka Curriculum. The 2013 curriculum is considered to have several shortcomings, such as limited understanding of concepts by teachers and lack of preparation. It is also limited in the development of character education. Gumilar explained that the Merdeka Curriculum offers project-based learning, the development of soft skills and students' character, and the structure of the Merdeka Curriculum is flexible. Where these things can overcome the weaknesses of the 2013 curriculum. The Merdeka Curriculum also integrates literacy, knowledge, skills and attitudes with technology (Gumilar et al., 2023).

Education in Indonesia is in the midst of an independent curriculum that has been adopted by many Indonesian schools. As implementers of the curriculum, teachers spend a lot of time in training to adapt to the significant changes in the curriculum. In this era of educational autonomy, the basic spirit of the implementation of the national curriculum, which is based on the principle of 'diversity', is adapted to local conditions. However, this becomes a problem because the availability of resources varies from school to school. For example, the availability of facilities in urban schools is different from that in rural schools. This shows that there is a gap between areas with good resources and areas with inadequate resources. Another example is the implementation of the independent curriculum by teachers in DKI Jakarta, which has a higher Human Development Index (HDI), which is certainly different from the human resources of teachers in NTT, which has a lower HDI than DKI Jakarta. These are some facts to capture the implementation of the curriculum. This is shown in previous studies such as 1) the independent curriculum training conducted by district and city education offices, provinces, and even the government at the national level is not well designed. Training is seen as less

effective; for example, training time is often compressed, and 2) teachers often rely on pupils' books, so it is teachers' habits that need to be addressed, not the curriculum (Sitorus & Ratnawati, 2024) .

It is necessary to solve the problems connected with the superficial implementation of education. The main purpose of changing the curriculum is to realise the ideals of the nation, that is, to educate the life of the nation. In this case, the intellectual life of the nation is not only carried out by educators alone but also through the cooperation of stakeholders and educators. One of them is the education team. The team is required to carry out its duties professionally and can certainly have a positive impact on progress in the field of education.

Focus on shaping teachers, for example, by asking teachers to be creative and innovative. The preparation of innovative media and teaching aids that can help students understand the concept of the material being taught is the most important part in determining the effectiveness of learning.

The findings above show that curriculum changes have many negative impacts. This was found in previous studies related to the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum in primary schools, such as the lack of preparation through training activities related to the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum, limited references, and the lack of information about the curriculum (A. D. P. Sari et al., 2023). In addition, other studies show that 1) the heterogeneity of students in the classroom is one of the obstacles to the implementation of the independent curriculum. (L. A. Sari et al., 2023); (Sufendi et al., 2023). Students' ability to understand the material is different; there are students who easily absorb and understand the material explained by the teacher, and there are students who have great difficulty in absorbing the material delivered by the teacher. In addition, there are different thinking abilities, different student skills, different learning styles, different levels of confidence and different levels of student concentration in the classroom. These factors are the main triggers that hinder teachers in implementing the independent curriculum. The teacher's design may be complete and appropriate, but its implementation in a highly contextualised classroom may not be as planned. 2) Limited facilities and infrastructure; the facilities and infrastructure factor is almost a barrier to the implementation of an independent curriculum in schools. This is certainly a problem for school stakeholders where facilities and infrastructure are actually the main factors that need to be provided to support teachers in delivering learning in the classroom. 3) Staff or teachers' views on curriculum changes and demands that have not been addressed (Putri et al., 2023). Furthermore, other studies show that 1) teachers do not prepare the initial planning of the learning process, such as filling in the platform that has been provided, without adequate guidance and lack of understanding in the preparation of tools such as learning modules; 2) in the implementation of the project development learning process, teachers do not use supporting media and teaching aids (Dewi et al., 2023). Findings such as these point to a gap between expectations and reality. It is hoped that through curriculum changes, the education system in Indonesia will progress and improve. But the reality on the ground is not as smooth as expected. Problem after problem has arisen. Problems arise from both teachers and students, and they certainly take time, energy and thought to overcome.

However, it can be seen that these studies have not clearly and comprehensively exposed the negative sides of the independent curriculum. This is to enable the public, especially teachers, to see clearly and completely, based on accurate data, what is still lacking that is an obstacle to the implementation of an independent curriculum. This curriculum should be seen as a professional step to take the nation forward in terms of education.

The same happened in several schools in Kabupaten Manggarai, NTT. From the information gathered through simple interviews, it can be said that the main obstacles to the implementation of the independent curriculum are not only teachers, but also students and the availability of facilities. Where not all teachers have had the opportunity to participate in training, and the slow adaptation process that students go through. Limited facilities, such as an inadequate internet network, also exacerbate the situation.

Based on the descriptions above, it can be emphasised that this research focuses on the barriers experienced by primary school teachers in three schools in Manggarai, Flores, NTT. The results of this study reveal things that are simple but can become barriers for teachers.

Therefore, this study aims to describe the barriers experienced by primary school teachers in Manggarai, NTT in implementing the Independent Curriculum. The schools selected were those that had implemented the Independent Curriculum in recent years.

Research Methods

This research takes a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is an exploratory process of understanding based on various methodological traditions of inquiry that explore social or human problems. (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The problem in question is related to the obstacles faced by primary school teachers in implementing the Independent Curriculum. The research was conducted in August 2024 in three primary schools in Kabupaten Manggarai, NTT, namely SDI Leda, SDI Tal, and SDI Cuncalawir. The three schools were selected because they have been using the independent curriculum in recent years.

The data collection technique used in this research is the in-depth interview technique. The researcher acted as the main instrument in this research. The list of questions was only used as a guide for the questions. Supporting data was obtained from information through whatsapp application and google form media. This was done in order to obtain detailed information. There were 12 teachers involved in this research. The main reason for determining the schools and respondents is that the schools have started to implement the independent curriculum for approximately the last two years. In addition, the teachers who became respondents were the implementers of the independent curriculum. The interview instrument includes the teachers' understanding of the Independent Curriculum and the obstacles they face in implementing learning using the Independent Curriculum. Data analysis is carried out in three stages, namely, 1) data collection; data is collected through in-depth interviews and the researcher is the main instrument, 2) data reduction; data is reduced by sorting and selecting interview responses that are in accordance with the research objectives and those that are not appropriate, 3) data presentation; the reduced data is presented qualitatively and interpretation and comparison with other studies are carried out, then finding its meaning, 4) and conclusions; conclusions are drawn based on the results of the meaning and interpretation of data related to the obstacles of primary school teachers in implementing the independent curriculum (Rijali, 2018).

Results and Discussion

Table 1. Summary of Research Results

Name of school		Research Outcomes
SDI Leda		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Heterogeneous students b. Teachers have not been able to adapt the assessment instruments used. c. Teachers were not provided with different training. d. Teachers and students experience delays in adapting to the curriculum. e. Teachers' participation in various trainings related to the implementation of the independent curriculum is still lacking. f. Teachers have not been able to develop learning targets (TP) based on higher order thinking skills (HOTS).
SDI Tal		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Varying numbers of learners, suitability of assessment tools and time constraints. b. Other constraints such as the amount of material does not match the actual days in the month/semester.
SDK	Cunca	a. Teachers' IT skills are still low.
Lawir		b. Students are used to teacher-led learning and are not ready to learn actively and independently.

Table 1 above summarises the research findings. The results of the interviews conducted revealed things that are more or less verified in the table above. In addition, the analysis of the research findings is described in the discussion section.

The results revealed several obstacles that primary school teachers face in implementing the independent curriculum. Firstly, the obstacles faced by the teachers at SDI Leda are related to the different number of pupils, which certainly affects the assessment process. As the number of pupils varies, the characteristics also vary. This creates obstacles in the implementation of assessments. In relation to this obstacle, other studies also show the same thing, that teachers have not been able to analyse the characteristics of each student. (Tanggur, 2023). The heterogeneity referred to here is that learners have different life backgrounds, different abilities to understand concepts and different needs. It cannot be denied that there are learners who really need a personalised approach to meet their learning needs. Therefore, a teacher is required to be more flexible, creative and innovative in preparing teaching materials and managing the classroom. It should be emphasised that effective differentiation of learning requires time, energy and serious effort on the part of the teacher. Assessment is comprehensive, teachers should be able to meet all the needs of students, one of which is to understand the character and needs of each student.

In addition, teachers are able to formulate learning assessment instruments in the independent curriculum learning assessment provisions (Ardiansyah, 2023). This is an obstacle experienced by teachers at SDI Leda, where teachers have not been able to adapt the assessment instruments used, while the cause is the limited time teachers have. The many administrative requirements to be met do not match the time available to teachers. Ideally, teachers should be able to formulate learning assessment instruments. This is one of the indicators of good assessment. Because the results of the assessment become a benchmark for planning the follow-

up of a lesson. Good assessment instruments provide teachers with the means to evaluate learners' understanding, skills and other developments objectively and accurately. A good instrument has several requirements, including 1) it must be aligned with the learning objectives; the main benchmark of an instrument is the learning objectives because the instrument can be used as a tool to achieve the learning objectives; 2) it must be appropriate to the level of the learners' abilities. Therefore, understanding children's abilities is the most important thing that teachers should have; 3) teachers must compile different types of instruments; as explained, instruments are tools to achieve learning objectives. So the instruments should be different, for example, formative, summative and authentic assessment instruments. This is done to achieve the learning objectives that have been set; 4) Clear assessment criteria; if the teacher sets learning objectives, then everything must be done to achieve them. Another thing that needs to be seriously determined is to establish clear indicators of success so that teachers can interpret students' learning outcomes objectively. This is done so that teachers are able to plan appropriate follow-up based on the learning outcomes achieved by students.

In terms of preparation, the obstacles faced by teachers at SDI Leda are that teachers have not been provided with various training opportunities. Ideally, the teachers' participation in different trainings, workshops, related to the independent curriculum should be balanced with the existing demands. However, this is not the case in practice. This finding differs from the results of the study conducted by Kartini et al. where teachers were provided with various adequate training activities to be able to carry out learning with the independent curriculum. (Kartini Ayu et al., 2023). Independent curriculum training is very important for teachers. The main objective is to equip teachers with the necessary knowledge, skills and strategies to implement effectively in their respective schools. Through Independent Curriculum Training, teachers understand the concept of the Independent Curriculum philosophy. Where learning is no longer rigid and teacher-centred, but more flexible and student-centred, facilitating students to learn independently. Through the training, the competence of the teachers will certainly increase, especially in designing adaptive, innovative learning, and of course according to the needs of the students. Therefore, teachers are encouraged to be innovative and creative. Training also enables teachers to master diagnostic assessment and to implement differentiated learning. Teachers are required to understand the needs of each individual pupil. Therefore, teachers need to be trained to analyse the needs of pupils so that they can provide effective learning. Through training, teachers also understand how to integrate Pancasila values into learning. This is to produce students who have the character or soul of Pancasila. Therefore, teachers must be able to integrate learning concepts in accordance with Pancasila values. Finally, the purpose of the training is to build a collaborative learning ecosystem. Teachers need to be able to work with their colleagues to create a conducive learning environment. This allows students to learn comfortably. Comfortable cannot only be defined by creating a learning atmosphere, but also by students not learning under pressure. That is, comfortable in this case is psychological, students learn with calm and happy hearts.

There are several important things that teachers need to pay attention to when implementing the independent curriculum, including learning outcomes that are the main priority, learning tools that are adapted to the characteristics of the students, and learning resources and teaching materials that are adapted to the conditions of the students. (Indriyani & Jannah, 2023). Related to this, the obstacle for teachers at SDI Leda is that teachers and students experience delays in adapting to the existing curriculum. Both in terms of learning resources and teaching materials. This has an impact on the difficulty of presenting material in

the classroom. Teachers who are used to teaching according to the themes of the 2013 curriculum will have to return to teaching according to themes. This also relates to the essence of the independent curriculum, namely strengthening basic skills and holistic understanding, such as combining science and social studies subjects in IPAS; integrating computational thinking in Indonesian, mathematics and IPAS, and English as an elective subject. (Kemendikbudristek, 2023). In addition, another obstacle experienced by the teachers at SDI Leda is that there is still a lack of teacher participation in the various trainings related to the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. This is different from the teachers at SDN Larangan-Banyumas, where teachers participated in the In-House Training (IHT) for the preparation of Independent Curriculum Learning Tools. The result of this training is in the form of learning tools based on the Independent Curriculum (Abdul Azis et al., 2022).

Furthermore, another obstacle is related to the preparation of learning objectives (LOs) based on higher order thinking skills (HOTS), which should take into account students' abilities. This is an obstacle because of the different abilities of learners. HOTS is the ability to connect, manipulate and transform existing knowledge and experience critically and creatively in making decisions to solve problems in new situations (Dinni, 2018). Thus, HOTS is linked to different requirements in the independent curriculum. Therefore, primary school teachers are required to be able to integrate HOTS in the development of teaching modules. The solution that can be done to overcome this problem is to participate in various training or education programmes on how to integrate HOTS in the development of teaching modules. Teachers need to be able to fight against limitations and be willing to keep learning. This is the case for primary school teachers in the Teacher Professional Education Programme (PPG), where teachers take the time to study with HOTS experts (Nissa, 2022). There are several solutions to the lack of teacher capacity to develop HOTS-based learning objectives. Firstly, teachers need to be trained. This is mandatory. Through training, teachers' skills and abilities are honed and trained so that they can be applied back in their respective schools. The training must focus on the preparation of learning objectives, starting from analysis, evaluation and creation. Secondly, in addition to the training, teachers are accustomed to being guided by Bloom's Taxonomy. If necessary, teachers are encouraged to learn Bloom's taxonomy by heart. This is so that teachers get used to identifying students' abilities from the lowest to the highest level. Thirdly, teachers need to be provided with specific examples and guidelines leading to HOTS-based learning objectives. This will make it easier for teachers to understand and apply the concept. Fourthly, schools need to support teachers in preparing HOTS-based learning objectives. This can be done by giving teachers extra time, by giving teachers access to certain resources and literature and, of course, by providing appropriate training. And it is the school that facilitates teachers. Remember that implementing effective learning is a shared goal, not an individual one.

The above obstacles are experienced by the teachers of SDI Leda, other obstacles are also experienced by the teachers of SDI Tal, namely the limited references in preparing materials and learning to make products according to the abilities and characters of the students. This obstacle is also experienced by teachers at SDN 3 Tikala, namely the lack of references for teachers in preparing lessons with an independent curriculum (Kabanga et al., 2023).

In addition, teachers at SDI Tal also experienced barriers in implementing learning assessment, such as the large number of students, the suitability of assessment tools, and time constraints. This was also experienced by teachers at MTS Raudlatul Ulum Aek Nabara Labuhanbatu, where teachers experienced barriers in implementing learning assessment as an integral part of learning (Nasution, 2023). Another obstacle is that the scope of the material does not match the actual days in the month/semester. Similar constraints were experienced by

teachers in SDN 17 Rejang Lebong, where teachers felt that one of the main obstacles to implementing the independent curriculum was that the material was considered too broad (Amelia et al., 2021). In principle, the Merdeka Curriculum is designed to give teachers the freedom to prepare teaching materials according to the context in which they teach and, of course, the needs of the students. However, research findings show that teachers often feel that the learning material in the Merdeka Curriculum is very broad and not balanced with effective learning time. Teachers also explained that although the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has a high degree of flexibility, the demands of the material presented are very broad and quite difficult to complete in the available effective time. This problem has several causes, such as teachers being in a hurry to teach in order to complete the material. Because of the rush, teachers are unable to cover the material in depth. Based on this description, the following several things could be a solution for teachers implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, including; 1) Simplify the material; this means that teachers need to minimise the material. Group essential and non-essential materials. Prioritise the teaching of essential material in the time allotted. 2) Adjusting time; teachers need to manage time well and measure it so that it is balanced with the material being taught. 3) Encourage and facilitate students to learn independently, especially in project-based materials, so that teachers focus only on meaningful materials and concepts.

In addition to the two schools above, the same thing happened at SDI Cuncalawir. One of the main obstacles in this school is that teachers' IT skills are still low. In fact, the presence of technology is intended to make it easier for teachers to access various independent curriculum platforms. The platform in question is the Merdeka Mengajar (PMM) platform, which provides features that can help teachers get references, inspiration and understanding in implementing the Independent Curriculum. Some of the things that teachers learn on PMM include inspirational videos, independent training, evidence of my work, student assessments and teaching tools (Nurani et al., 2022). By implementing an independent curriculum, students are encouraged to be more active learners, develop independent skills, and become leaders in their own learning (Hanipah, 2023). But this is far from reality. Students are used to teacher-led learning and are not ready to learn actively and independently. This problem is fatal because it is supported by teachers who are not ready to be more creative and innovative in implementing learning. In fact, the independent curriculum requires teachers to be able to be the driving force. This means that a teacher must be able to be active and enthusiastic, creative, innovative and skillful with the aim of being a facilitator to drive change in schools. (Arviansyah & Shagena, 2022). Basically, changes are made for the better. The same goes for curriculum changes. The Merdeka curriculum requires students to be independent learners and active. However, students who are not used to this do not know anything and cannot do anything. It is a challenge for teachers. Therefore, the creativity of teachers is needed to: 1) gradually help students cultivate independent learning, for example, by giving them tasks to do individually and letting them learn to make their own decisions about these tasks; 2) gradually encourage students to learn on their own.

Build students' self-confidence by giving them appreciation for their work and efforts; 3) Getting students used to thinking critically, processing problems, and solving them based on their own principles. Students are guided to solve practical problems in the environment; 4) Slowly get students used to working with other students. This is done so that students can learn with other students or capable students can become tutors for other students. This will form an

attitude of sharing and teamwork; 5) to find out all the independent learning developments made by students, teachers are expected to monitor by giving simple feedback, for example, through questions and answers or small group discussions. Of course, for all this to work well, creative and innovative teachers are needed. The Merdeka Curriculum basically provides flexibility for teachers to develop teaching materials and learning methods according to the needs and characteristics of the students. In the Merdeka Curriculum, teachers are expected to be not only teachers but also facilitators to meet the learning needs of students. There are many things that teachers can do to develop creativity, including; 1) project-based learning; the teacher involves students in a project that is contextual in nature. In its implementation, teachers are expected to really guide students to play a big role in the project; 2) applying a differentiated approach; teachers need to get to know the characters, interests and learning styles of students so that the methods applied are adjusted to these differences. This is very good in meeting the learning needs of students; 3) involving students in group learning to form a person who likes to work together and not rely on individual abilities; 4) teachers need to be technologically literate so that they are able to integrate digital tools in learning. For example, by preparing good and interactive PowerPoint slides. This will certainly attract students' attention and make learning more effective.

Based on these findings, it can be said that teachers in general are not ready to implement independent learning in many ways. More education through training, technical guidance, workshops and seminars is the solution to the above problems. In addition, training must be continuous in order to improve teachers' skills. Teachers are the key to the success of a curriculum. If the teachers' skills are improved, the implementation of learning will surely be good and smooth. The government's goal of educating the nation will surely be realized.

Conclusion

Based on the results of interviews with teachers who implement an independent curriculum, it can be said that there are still obstacles to maximizing the implementation of an independent curriculum in elementary schools. These obstacles are not only found in the teachers but also in the students. Teachers as educators are the most important element in the implementation of independent curriculum learning. Therefore, in relation to these obstacles, continuous training for teachers can be a solution to maximize the implementation of an independent curriculum in primary schools. In this way, teachers can learn, explore, so that creativity, innovation, and the ability to use technology are formed. Furthermore, teacher training should be done through direct exposure by experts rather than allowing teachers to learn independently through online platforms. The specific point that can be conveyed in this paper is that training in the use of ICT is also important for elementary school teachers, especially in Manggarai, NTT.

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