

# FACTORS AFFECTING ENGLISH PERFORMANCE OF CLASS IV STUDENTS IN KAZHI AND KHOTOKHA PRIMARY SCHOOL, WANGDUE PHODRANG DZONGKHAG IN BHUTAN.

## Abstract

Following a qualitative approach, this study reports on the factors affecting the performance of class IV students in English at Kazhi and Khotokha Primary School under Wangdue Phodrang Dzongkhag. The study involved sixteen participants: four teachers and six students from the two schools and their parents (n=6). Participants were interviewed using semi-structured interviews and the analysis showed that participants in general agreed that students faced difficulty in terms of their performance in English subject in class four. Findings showed that various factors affected students' performance in English. Participants reported factors such as students not being able to find adequate time for learning and practicing English, inadequate resources, parents' knowledge and skills in English and the level of curriculum as contributing factors. The implications of findings for the importance of providing adequate resources and future study examining class four English curriculum has been discussed.

Keywords: *qualitative study, class four students, teachers, parents, English curriculum, resources*

## Introduction

English being a global language, it is not only offered as an important subject on its own in our curriculum, but it is also the medium of instruction for all other subject beside Dzongkha. Smith (1976) states that "English is an international Auxiliary Language" (p.36). Therefore, without a good English background a child is likely to struggle in subjects such as Science, Math, and Social Studies. A good level of written and spoken English is a foundation for good performance in other subjects for the Bhutanese students. Wilson & Trainin, 2007 (as cited in Westwood, 2008) states that the cornerstone of academic achievement and the foundation for success across the curriculum is learning to read and write proficiently.

We (Investigator and co-investigator) have been observing and teaching class IV English lessons at Kazhi and Khotokha Primary school for the last five years and found it to be one of the challenging subjects to teach and learn. Every year class IV academic performance is low compared to other primary grades. Most of the class IV students are not performing well both in formative and summative assessment especially in English subject. The evidence was discovered from midterm and annual exam consolidated result sheet academic year, 2021.

Those issues and challenges have encouraged us to carry out this research project. Moreover, it would be a great opportunity for us to find out why most of the students of class IV are unable to perform well in English subject and the factors affecting their performance.

### **Study context and problem statement**

This study is carried out in Kazhi Primary school and Khotokha Primary school, Wangduephodrang. The participants are class IV students from both the schools. All students have exposure to the English language as one of the mediums of instruction for the past four years. Although most of them face difficulty in learning English literature when they reach class IV, they can at least read and write simple English words and sentences. They also have a basic understanding of spoken English.

The principal investigator and co-investigator has minimum of seventeen years serving experience as a teacher and principal. Both the researchers have attended research trainings, and other workshops related to research and completed Masters M.Ed (Leadership & Management) course. Through our experience (Principal investigators), we came to notice that most of the teachers and students face difficulty in teaching and learning English in grade four. Students faced difficulty to read and understand the text. Most of them are unable to read and write even a simple sentence. They seek support from teachers and senior students to complete their task which was assigned to them. Gunning (2003, p.4) states that,

Reading is the first and foremost, magical, as those who recall learning to read or have witnessed their students discover the process will attest. It opens the door to a vast world of information, fulfillment, and enjoyment. After having learned to read, the person is never quite the same”.

Similarly, Gibson (2008) asserts that the students’ difficulties in writing can be overcome through process of writing and guided writing to produce a good written work.

However, the researchers (The principal investigators) argue that; although teacher mentors and assess students' works by giving feedback on daily bases, a lot of grammatical errors occur in their written works. This is one of the main factors which contribute towards making students perform poorly in English examination.

Bhutanese students learn reading and writing skills starting class III; yet students face difficulty studying English literature when they reach class IV. Although, teachers ask students to read English text, they show less interest and even if they did, they struggle despite teacher's effort in creating avenues through morning speeches, modeling reading, peer reading, and news reading. Lesesne (2006) pointed out that for pupils to be encouraged to read they should be allowed to choose the books they would like to read, to read books with lots of pictures in them, to read for contests, to have a classroom library and to have an author read to them at school(p.37).

After observing the issues and challenges faced by the teacher and students of class IV, We (Investigator and co-investigator ) decided to carry out this research with the question "What are the factors affecting the performance of class IV students in English?". We believe that this issue should be well examined through different angles to enhance the students' learning.

## **Literature Review**

Although, Ministry of Education has introduced a new normal curriculum across the schools in Bhutan since the beginning of academic year 2021, students still face difficulties in learning the English when they reach class IV. Class IV students can communicate and participate well in English literary competitions. However, they still face difficulties in learning English curriculum. As a result, most of the students performed poorly in the class as well as in the examination.

I believe that it could be because of factors such as poor reading habits, negative behaviors, actions, and beliefs of the teachers and lack of family support at home. Christenson (2002) stated that home plays an important role in children's learning and achievement because children learn many values, attitudes, skills, and behaviors at home that prepares them for school tasks.

Moreover, teachers are considered second parents of the students and main facilitators of their knowledge. Therefore, teacher must keep good relationship to know the strengths and weaknesses of students to impart knowledge. Eiss (1969) supports that having good relation

between teachers and students not only enhances academic performance, but it also helps cognitive development. Students having closer relation with teachers usually perform well in academics. They can freely communicate with their teacher, and they often look at their teachers as a role model and a trusted person.

Burden,(2000) postulates that motivation is another important factor in encouraging student's participation in the classroom activities which is a very important avenue for improving students' spoken language. If a teacher can motivate students, they are more likely to participate in the class activities and less likely to get off task and contribute to disruptive behavior. Further, according to Sergiovanni and Starratt(2002), the teacher has to get to know the strengths and shortcomings of each student so the strengths can be developed further, and shortcoming can be addressed.

Improving student's academic performance is one of the key responsibilities of teachers and beside curriculum teaching, if teachers give training on mindfulness it will also improve child's learning. Mindfulness practice has now gained growing attention in educational settings (Bender, Roth, Zielenski, Longo, & Chermak, 2018).

Moreover, parental involvement in child's learning is also important. According to Lumpkin (2010), parental involvement not only improves a child's moral attitudes and academic achievement across all subject areas, but it also promotes better behavior and social adjustment. Korkmaz (2007, p2 ) supports the above statements that:

Parents should love, respect, and care about their children, take responsibility in their children's education, take care of their children's basic needs and school needs, have a good communication with the teachers and other staff in school, not put pressure on their children, provide a good atmosphere for their children to study at home, be aware about what their children do, be a role model for their children, get to know their children's capacity and motivate them based on their interests, and let their children play games and participate in social activities.

Similarly, Sanders and Epstein (2005) states that the success of schools is heavily influenced by connections between school, family and community. They noted that students who receive support from home, family and community are triply benefitted, and are more likely to be academically successful than those who do not. (p.215)

Students should be aware of what, how and why they are learning. They depend heavily on teachers, parents, and friends. Moreover, most of them do not build reading habits and hardly reads books at home and in school. According to Pang et al. (2003), readers make progress by reading more. By reading more, they increase their vocabulary and knowledge. This in turn helps them to make further gains in reading and learning. Once children can recognize written words in their language with relative ease, they need to develop fluency in reading. Fluency develops with both oral language development and print exposure. The more children read, the more vocabulary and knowledge they acquire, and the more fluent they become in reading.

Gambrell (1996) found that when children were asked which book they had enjoyed most, 80% of them said that the ones they had enjoyed most were the ones they had chosen themselves. Greaney (1996) also says that having access to and use of a wide range of self-selected materials is associated with acquisition of vocabulary and comprehension skills in addition to development of reading habits.

Indeed Gibson (2004) pointed out that for pupils to be encouraged to read they should be allowed to choose the books they would like to read, to read books with lots of pictures in them, to read for contests, to have a classroom library and to have an author read to them at school (As cited in Lesesne (2006) p.37). Furthermore, Farrant (1997, as cited in Nalusiba 2006) emphasized that the best way of promoting reading is the use of informal methods of reading rather than formal methods. He further noted that informal methods stimulate a desire in the child to read before trying to teach him to read. He noted that this was done through storytelling and reading by the teacher and by consulting books to find out things so that children could associate books with pleasure and usefulness (p.15).

It is evident from the literature that we reviewed that improving students' academic performance and English language proficiency in particular is a collective responsibility between the teachers and parents and that factors affecting their performance should be considered in both the school and home context. Therefore, in this study, we have proposed the following research question to examine the factors affecting the performance of class IV students in English.

**What are the factors affecting the performance of class IV students in English?**

The **question** considers factors in both school and home and therefore the focus of the study is on the school students, teachers and parents.

## **MATERIALS AND METHOD**

### **Method of data collection**

This chapter presents the methodology that was essential for this study. It includes: research design, data collection tools, participant sample, validity and reliability, ethical considerations and data analysis procedures.

### **Research design**

According to Creswell (2009) strategies of inquiry are the type of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods designs that provide specific direction for procedure in a research design (p.2). Among the three strategies, we have used qualitative design' in our study considering that our main research aim is to explore the factors affecting english performance in grade IV. Sherab (2009, p.1) states that "qualitative research is the development of the first-hand knowledge derived from the natural setting through direct and intensive contact with the research participants".

Further, Creswell(2007), states that there are five qualitative research designs. They are Narrative research, grounded theory research, ethnographic research, case study, and phenomenological research. All the designs are not suitable for the researcher doing research on educational issues. Some designs focus on a single person whereas some are lengthy process. However, this study required phenomenological study to study the reasons leading to the low academic performance of class IV students in English.

Creswell(2007) declares that "Phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon" (p.57). Moustakas (1994) also rightly comments that the qualitative researchers tend to collect data in the field at the site where participants experience the issue or problem under study. In the natural setting, the researchers have face to face interaction over time with the participants.

### **Data collection tools**

The data collection in qualitative research involves four basic types. These are observations, interviews, use of documents and audio visual materials. For this study, we

(researchers) have used semi structured interviews for collecting data because it provided enough flexibility to re-word the questions during the interview. In semi-structured interview, interviewer has the control over the questions that he or she is going to use it in the field. It allows the researcher to control over the lines of questioning (Creswell,2007).Moreover, punch,2005 supported that “Interview is the most commonly used method for data collection in the phenomenological study.”(p.168)

### **Participant/sample**

The participants are drawn from the two primary schools under Wangduephodrang Dzongkhag (Kazhi Primary School and Khotokha Primary School). The participants were teachers and students at the above-mentioned schools, and they are currently teaching and learning in class IV. Two teacher participants were selected from those teachers who are currently not teaching English in class but have experience in teaching class III and IV in 2019 and 2020. The parent participants were also the parents of current class IV students. The study involved sixteen participants: four teachers and six students from the two different schools and their parents (n=6). Participants were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. The selections of participants were done as per their interest.

The codes used for the selected schools and participants are stated hereunder: School (A) Kazhi Primary School and the School (B) for Khotokha Primary School. Teacher one , Parent one and Student one for teacher, parent and student participants from school A. Teacher two, Parent two and Student two for teacher, parent and student participants from school B.

All the participants were interviewed by using semi structured interviews. Patton (1990) describes that there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry. Sample size depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what is at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility and what can be done with available time and resources” (p.94).

### **Validity and reliability**

To authenticate the reliability and validity of this study the researcher has collected the data and done triangulation, transcription, and data interpretation. By doing so the researcher has built coherent justifications on the themes. Moreover, this study has provided accurate information which the participants have shared.

### **Pre-Data Collection**

We received ethics approval from Chief District Education Officer, Wangduephodrang, Bhutan to carry out this study. After that, we got informed consent from the participants. Then we have explained the purpose of this study to the participants before administering the interview.

### **During Data Collection**

While carrying out the data collection, the investigators (Investigator and co-investigator) informed participants about the importance of their genuineness and honesty in narrating their experiences. Anonymity was at the top of its priority list as required by the research norms. The participation was made voluntary and options were given to participants to withdraw at any time. Accordingly, we asked participants to sign on the consent forms if they are willing to participate in the study.

### **Post-Data Collection**

After the data collection we (Investigator and co-investigator) have respected and protected the research participants through assurance of confidentiality of information shared and anonymity by not revealing the identity of the individuals. In order not to reveal the participant's identity, a typical anonymity was provided through the use of pseudonyms like numbering or coding the participants. The data was kept under lock and key.

### **Data Analysis**

Creswell (2003) points out that data analysis involves making sense out of text and image data. It involves moving deeper and deeper into the understanding, representing and making an interpretation of the larger meaning of the data. The interview was transcribed for analysis and responses from different participants on common questions were grouped together under different headings. Creswell (2003,p191-195) describes six generic steps in the data analysis. These generic steps involve the following steps:

**Step 1:** Organize and prepare the data for analysis. This involves transcribing Interviews, optically scanning materials, typing up field notes, or sorting and arranging the data into different types depending on the sources of information.



**Step 2:** Read through all the data. A first general step is to obtain a general sense of information and to reflect on it's over all meaning.

**Step 3:** Begin detailed analysis with coding process.

**Step 4:** Use the coding process to generate a description of setting or people as well as categories or themes for analysis. Description involves a detailed rendering of information about people, places, or events in a setting.

**Step 5:** Advance how the description and themes will be represented in the qualitative narrative. The most popular approach is to use a narrative passage to convey the findings of the analysis.

**Step 6:** A final step in the data analysis involves making an interpretation or meaning of the data. Therefore, we found that all those generic steps are essential while carrying out this study. These steps helped and guided the researcher in logical interpretation of the materials collected.

### **Data analysis and Presentation**

As per the six generic steps of data analysis procedures cited by Creswell, 2003 (p. 19-20,). The data analysis and interpretation was carried out effectively. The transcription of recordings was carried out immediately after the completion of interviews. The transcribed documents were read again and again for quality interpretation of data. The common themes have been identified and grouped together and a set of five themes have emerged and presented as stated hereunder:

#### **Theme 1: Difficulty scoring in English**

Many students that we interviewed agreed that they faced difficulty learning class IV English. We asked their opinion and they shared that they found it difficult to score good marks in English. For instance, student participant three from School (A) stated that “In the mid-term exam I could not score good marks in English...” We (Investigator and co-investigator) asked similar questions to the teachers and parents, and they had a similar view that students in general struggled with English subject. Parent participant two from sample school (A) shared the following opinion. “She [referring to her daughter] did not perform well”. The views shared by parents from sample school (B) were very similar to what the parents from sample school (A) shared. Parent participant one from sample school (B) stated that, “my son could not perform

well in the mid-term exam. Likewise, parent participant three from school (B) shared that, “my daughter didn’t perform well in the exam”.

Teachers from both the schools shared that students struggled with English. Teacher participant one from school (A) stated that “From my point of view, In general the standard of English is extremely low, particularly in class IV. However, teacher participant two from sample school (A) shared that “whatever we do the way we communicate should be in English. In addition teacher participant two from sample school (B) declared that “As compared to urban students our rural students have low performance particularly in English subject”. The finding from this study suggests that teachers should encourage students to read more books and to spend more time in study when they are at home. Moreover, school should initiate remedial program to enhance students learning capacity in English subject.

## **Theme 2: Factors contributing to difficulty in English**

The students attributed their difficulty in English to not being able to put enough effort and not being able to concentrate in the class. They stated “failed to study hard “and not concentrating in the class”. The students also mentioned that they do not understand English. They failed to understand the questions and faced difficulty in writing with correct spelling.

Student participant two and three from school (B) mentioned, “I don’t understand English as I don’t have a good base, our parents are illiterate and they are not able to help us, our elder siblings are also in some other school, so it’s quite difficult to understand. Sometimes I go to my friends to learn.” In addition to that statement, some parents have the same view. The parent participants two and three from school (A) stated that their children study less and plays more. They attributed factors such as their children not finding time to study at home as contributing to their struggle in English.

Parent participant one from school(A) stated “since she is uneducated she is not able to provide academic support.”However, parent two from school (B) argued “her child is good in studies, and she feels that her daughter’s performance has been affected due to the ongoing pandemic. She said that her daughter was not able to attend regular classes due to the pandemic in 2020 which has affected her performance. When the teachers send assignments in the social media

platforms such as we chat, she used to seek help from the elders, and she used to copy what the elders have written. As a mother, I was not able to provide support as I am uneducated”. Moreover, parent participant from school (A) added “Other factors such as children having to do household chores as taking time away from their study”.

Most of the teacher participants on the other hand stated that the main cause of low performance of class IV students would be due to sudden switch in different areas of the learning package from lower primary to upper primary. However, teacher two from school(A) and teacher one from school(B) agreed with the parents that students find learning English challenging because they are not able to get adequate support at home in terms of academic support because most parents are illiterate which means that they cannot read, write, and speak English. On the other hand, the teacher participant one from school (B) states that “poor performance could be due to poor reading habits which leads to poor understanding”.

Another interesting factor shared by a teacher two from school (B) stated that “ using of the local language to explain concepts in English is hampering students’ English skills”. In addition, Teacher two from school (A) stated, “Children are of different ability, and understanding them is important. So, when dealing with them we need to cater to the need of different individuals and then the other one could be their behaviour issues. Therefore, motivating and encouraging the students is important.”

The data from this study indicates that parents should at least give time for students to study at home and they must provide basic guidance such as providing academic advice although they are uneducated. Moreover, teachers need to provide special remedial support to the students to build good English background.

### **Theme 3: Support services available.**

#### **Parental Support**

The students are of the view that they do not have to do any household chores, they are advised to study and not to play with mobile phones. The student respondent one from school (B)

stated, “They [parents] do not let me do any home chores, they make me complete my homework and advise me to study only. The parent respondent one and two from school (A) and parent two from school (B) stated that “they used to inquire about homework, and make sure the children complete the assigned work. They also advise the children to seek help from the elder siblings or class VI students. Parents being uneducated they are not able to monitor homework effectively”.

### **Teacher Support**

While inquiring about the academic support the teachers provide, Teacher two from school (A) stated that “she encourages the students to read books and help them to clear their doubts during free time. Teacher one from the same school shared that “she (teacher) “encourage active learning and provides model reading. Boost participation and reinforce the skills and values.”

Similarly Teacher one from school (B) stated that “he gives more opportunities to speak and discuss in class using English as medium, and also focus more on reading”. In addition to the above statement the teacher participant two from the same school (B) stated that “he provides resources, use different strategies and practice reading.”

In the same way, students participant two from school(A) shared similar views on the help provided by their English teacher. She stated that “our teacher provided support through social media (we chat), coaching classes after the school, re-teaching the lesson, making them read text and library books, and explaining them till they understand the concept”.Moreover, student participant three from school (A) explained that ,“Our English teacher always encourages us to visit at her home to learn English subject better. So, I used to visit madam’s house and learn what is unknown to me.”

Teacher two from school (A) also stated that “ she uses teaching materials/teaching aids such as flash cards, presentation and audio visual aids such as videos, powerpoint presentations, ICTs, worksheets and print materials, to support students’ learning”. However, the findings from this study suggest teachers and parents to work together for the academic success of the children; it is definite that the students’ learning will be enhanced. Even the illiterate parents could be able to provide support to their children by using varieties of strategies such as advising children to seek help from seniors and meeting with concerned English teachers.

#### **Theme 4: Services needed/required**

When we enquired about the services that the school and teachers needed, The teacher participants one and two from school (A) and teacher participant one from school (B) shared same views that they needed more resources in terms of teaching learning materials, allocated separate reading periods, more ICT facilities so that students can enjoy learning English, and better internet connectivity in the schools. The data indicates that school administration should seek support from relevant agencies and must arrange teaching learning resources in school and it should be made available at any times.

#### **Theme 5: Issues with class IV English curriculum**

In class IV, the English curriculum includes teaching and writing of essays, poems, letters, and stories. Teacher-participant one from school (A) shared that “the English curriculum is very challenging for the students of class IV due to the vastness of the text and improper (insufficient) time distribution. The level of the content does not match with the level of students”. Further, this respondent shared that may be from class III when they directly go to class IV there is a big jump in the curriculum. In class III, there is less writing and most of the time students use pencils to write in the workbook. But in class IV students must write more with the pen including higher level essays. So, the sudden change in the level is a challenge for students. Even in teaching, the lesson input is more compared to what they have done in class III.

In addition, most of the teacher-participants from both the sample schools supported the above statement and said that the factor which affects the performance of class IV students in English is because of the higher standard of English content.

Although new curriculum has been introduced in academic year,2021. The findings from this study still suggest school and curriculum developer to revisit and review class IV English curriculum to overcome those challenges such as: mismatch between level of content and standards of students, vastness of the text and improper (insufficient) time distribution and higher standard of English content.

#### **Discussion and recommendations.**

The current qualitative study investigated factors contributing to class IV students facing difficulty in English subjects at Kazhi and Khotokha schools under Wangdue Dzongkhag. Findings from the analysis of the semi structured interviews involving teachers, parents and students showed that grade IV students in both the schools faced difficulty scoring good grades in English various factors contributed to students' difficulty in English subjects. Factors include students not being able to put in enough effort, parents not being English literate and therefore not being able to provide adequate support and guidance, sudden change in the level of curriculum in class IV, schools not having adequate support in terms of ICT facilities and the use of local language to teach concepts in English by the teachers.

According to Menheree and Hooge (n.d), parental involvement in children's education matters. It matters for their achievement, motivation and well-being at school". The findings from the current study showed that most of the parents are very supportive. However, findings showed that most parents being illiterate in English, they were not able to provide adequate support and guidance at home. In alignment the finding from our study, Fema, (2003) was of the view that the major cause of the errors in English can be attributed to the interference of mother tongue with the English language. He added that students often use their native language or mother tongue in all their interactions and English is only used within the four walls of the classrooms and ends there. Our findings also show that teachers use of the local language to teach concepts to students as hampering students' English language development.

Our findings also showed that teachers felt that inadequate resources in the school in terms of ICT facilities, reliable internet connection, availability of teaching and learning materials, and proper time allotted for teaching and supporting English were hampering students English performance. These challenges pertaining to resources facing schools in Bhutan has been reported in a study by Kamenopoulou and Dukpa (2017) Bhutanese teachers' perspectives on inclusion and disability. We argue that although the government may not be able to provide all the resources immediately, considering that English is a core subject and a medium of instruction in our schools, the government prioritize these issues and make appropriate plans to address the issues gradually.

Another pertinent factor that came out of our study is the complexity and high level of the English curriculum in class four and the sudden change of level for students between class three and four. Teacher participants expressed that class four curriculums are very challenging for the

students because there is a sudden jump in the level between class three and class four English curriculums in terms of complexity and also vastness. For instance, in class four students are expected to write a more complex level of essays requiring them to use their understanding of more complex and abstract concepts. Following these findings from our study, we argue that there should be some room for change or adjustment in how students are prepared in class three or perhaps provide more time to students to learn English in class four and give teachers flexibility to adjust how the curriculum is delivered. In addition, we propose that the government to prioritise support to schools in terms of providing resources that will encourage students to take interest in English, give avenue for teachers to discuss best practices and initiate studies to examine and review English curriculum.

### **Limitations of the study**

We acknowledge that a larger number of participants could have resulted in much deeper or richer narratives in terms of findings. The language competency of the participants could have also impacted the type of responses generated.

### **Conclusion**

Through the use of a qualitative method, the current study investigated factors affecting class IV students' English performance in Kazhi and Khotokha primary schools under Wangdue Dzongkhag. The analysis of qualitative interviews gathered from class four students, their teachers and parents showed that class four students in general struggled with English curriculum. The analysis of the data showed that a multitude of factors such as students not being able to put adequate effort, illiterate parents, inadequate resources, and complex curriculum contributed to difficulty faced by students in English.

We (Investigator and co-investigator) recommend that the support from teachers and parents are the most prominent and defining factors for achievement of academic excellence in grade IV English. This study has proven that 90% of the students' performance in English depends on how effective the instructional practice was carried out by the concern English teacher. Therefore, teacher must read more books, attend professional development programs and must upgrade once own knowledge by attending different courses. On the other hand parents are recommended not to depend fully on teachers for student's education. They need to attend parenting Education

and must provide academic support for enhancing students learning at home. Finally we recommend the government to prioritize providing adequate resources and initiate study examining relevancy, regency, and adequacy of the current class four English curriculum.

### **Ethical Approval:**

As per international standard or university standard written ethical approval has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

### **Consent**

As per international standard or university standard, Participants' written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

### **Disclaimer**

The very important ethical issue that researchers should be mindful is that findings shall not be falsified. They need to have ethical consideration during pre- data collection, during data collection and post data collection (Creswell, 2003). We (Investigator and co-investigator) have understood and followed the code of conduct while carrying out research works



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