

Challenges of Implementing the Integrated Social Studies Curriculum in Ghana

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Abstract

The Integrated Social Studies curriculum was reintroduced in Ghana in the 1990s after the inception of the New Education Reform Programme in 1987. The initial attempt of its introduction in the 1940s was unsuccessful. One major reason for its re-introduction was to discourage the teaching of the social sciences disciplines such as Geography, Economics, Sociology, History, among others through the separate subject approach. An integrated approach to Social Studies was deemed beneficial due to fact that the separate social science disciplines was seen to introduce artificial division in knowledge and provided knowledge in a disjointed manner. This study, therefore, explored the challenges teachers encounter when implementing the Integrated Social Studies curriculum in Senior High Schools (SHSs) in Ghana. A cross-sectional design was used to carry out this study in senior high schools in the Cape Coast Metropolis of Ghana. A total of 10 senior high schools were used. One hundred and twenty-nine (129) Social Studies teachers from the 10 SHSs constituted the population of the study. The census method was used to select the 129 teachers. Questionnaire was the main data collection instrument. The study revealed that majority 107(89.2%) of the teachers who teach Social Studies could not apply the integrated approach due to the fact that they did not receive adequate training in Integrated Social Studies but had one of the social sciences (Geography, Economics, Sociology or History) as their major subject during their pre-service teacher training. Challenges of teaching Social Studies in an integrated manner included teachers' lack of adequate knowledge and practices in Integrated Social Studies, and teachers' misunderstanding of what constitutes the content and scope of the integrated social studies. It was recommended that teachers should be exposed to in-service training, workshops, seminars and conferences on the integrated approach in order to improve their knowledge and skills in integration in Social Studies teaching. This will enable them to organise different teaching strategies and instructional materials in an integrated manner to engage learners entirely in the instructional process.

Key words: *Integration, pedagogy, experimental, Social Studies, Ghana.*

Introduction

Social Studies as an integrated field of study was initially introduced into Ghana in the 1940s. This was on experimental basis in three teacher training colleges – Wesley Training College, Achimota College, and Presbyterian Training College (Boadu & Kwenin, 2016). The major purpose for its introduction was to discourage the teaching of Geography, History and Civics as separate disciplines in primary schools in Africa which was said to create artificial divisions in knowledge. Thus, it was meant to introduce the social sciences as an integral field of study to the child right from the start of his or her education. However, this was short-lived as majority of the Social Studies teachers had no expertise in the integrated approach.

The academic and professional background of these teachers could not support the integrated approach due to the fact that they lacked the necessary competence in methodology and the strategies for handling the integrated social studies. Coupled with these challenges was the lack of teaching and learning materials (Kankam & Kwenin, 2016).

In order to address the above challenges, Social Studies teachers who could only cope with the separate subjects were sent to Britain to be trained in the integrated approach. Besides, in-service training, seminars, workshops, and conferences were also provided to the Social Studies teachers to better equip them with knowledge and experiences to approach the subject in an integrated manner. This ensured a successful re-introduction of Social Studies in the Ghanaian education system in the late 1980s and early 1990s when the subject was recognised nationwide as a core subject in first and second cycle levels of education in Ghana and subsequently, into the curriculum of teacher training institutions in Ghana (Boadu & Kwenin, 2016). It was believed that because Social Studies is integrated in nature, when teachers are better equipped, it serves as a means to trim the overburdened curriculum, to move toward more student-centered pedagogical approach and increase the relevance of curriculum content to students and society at large. The purpose was however, to reduce the number of subjects to be fitted into the school timetable (Kwenin, 2019).

Since its re-introduction in Ghana, two categories of Social Studies teachers are trained to teach the subject at various levels of education in Ghana. The first category is those who were trained in the separate subject approaches whilst the second category is those who are trained through the integrated approach (Boadu & Kwenin, 2016). Those who were trained through the integrated approach can conveniently use this approach to teach Social Studies. This is not the case of those who were trained through the separate subject approach. This is because the way teacher approach Social Studies depends on their knowledge, perception, understanding and the way they interpret Social Studies.

It must however be noted that effective teaching of Social Studies demands teachers who are knowledgeable and experience in both the pedagogy and knowledge base of Social Studies including Geography, Economics, History, and Sociology (Kwenin, 2019a). This is due to the fact that the teachers require knowledge in History, Geography, Political Science, Economics, Anthropology and Sociology to successfully teach lessons in a Social Studies class in an integrated manner. For instance, from concepts derived from sociology, teachers can understand and teach the social background and the context in which their pupils are learning. Learners must be encouraged to draw on their own experience and apply these concepts to their family, school, and community situations with which they are familiar. However, an observation the researcher made during a supervision exercise of student-teachers in the Cape Coast Metropolis revealed that teachers have difficulty in accepting that in social studies, attempt is made to embrace all aspects of society and social life. Thus, in teaching the origin of the family or school which relates to history, attempt could be made to look at the location, culture, size, progress, growth and development, events and trends, among others which cut across different subject areas such as sociology, geography, governance, economics, and politics. But this is not the situation. The challenge is that there are few teachers who could apply this (integrated) approach to teach Social Studies since most teachers are not convenient with the application of the integrated approach to teaching Social Studies.

Aside that, the term Social Studies appears to mean different things to different Social Studies teachers. Whenever Social Studies is mentioned, many Social Studies teachers quickly think of History, Geography, Civics, Economics, and Sociology. For instance, at the lower level of education in Ghana, Social Studies is usually thought of as a subject basically dealing with the development of good citizens while at the higher level Social Studies is seen essentially as a combination of the social sciences (Banks, 1994). The issue that emerges from these differences in meaning of the term Social Studies is that there is a disagreement as to what constitutes Social Studies. In general, the term Social Studies appears to relate to only school subjects in which both content and purpose are focused on human relationships but widely divorced from everyday life.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of academic qualification of Social Studies teachers?
2. How do Social Studies teachers apply the integrated approach to teach social studies?
3. What challenges do teachers face when teaching Social Studies in an integrated manner?

Research Design

The cross-sectional design was used for the study. The relevance of this design in the field of research is supported by Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) who indicate that cross-sectional design produces a good number of responses from numerous people at a time, provides a meaningful picture of events and seeks to explain people's perception and behavior on the basis of information obtained at a point in time. Thus, this design helped the researcher to gather information with greater confidence with regard to questions that related to the challenges of teaching Social Studies in an integrated manner.

Population

The population for the study consisted of all 124 Senior High School Social Studies Teachers in all the 10 Senior High Schools in the Cape Coast Metropolis in the 2018/2019 academic year. However, 120 (96.8%) Social Studies Teachers provided data that were used by the researcher. The researcher selected the Cape Coast Metropolis due to the variation in Social Studies teachers' qualification, and the perceived challenges Social Studies teachers encounter when teaching the subject, per the researcher's own observation. All the Social Studies teachers were however included (census) in the study to respond to the questionnaire due to their small size.

Instrument for data collection

The researcher developed a 3-point Likert-type scale questionnaire to collect the data. On the questionnaire, 1 represented agree, 2 represented uncertain, whilst 3 represented disagree. The Likert scale was used because it enabled the respondents to indicate the degree of their agreement or disagreement to given statements. It was also easy to construct, administer, and score (Kimmon, 1990). The main aim was to collect a body of systematized quantifiable data in respect of a number of variables which were examined to discern pattern. The questionnaire ensured a wider coverage of respondents and enabled the researcher to approach the respondents easily. It also enabled the respondents to respond quickly to the items.

Validity of the Instruments

The questionnaire was initially revised by experts in questionnaire development. They helped with the layout of the questionnaire and the wording of the items. The aim was to find out if the items were not ambiguous in nature and were not threatening. Best and Kahn (1998), and Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996) advocate pilot-testing survey instruments prior to its delivery to the participants. In this regard, the instrument was pilot-tested with 20 SHS Social Studies teachers in the Komenda Edina Eguafo Abrem District of the Central Region which shared similar characteristics with the study areas in terms of variations in Social Studies teachers' academic and professional qualification. The pilot-testing ensured that the questionnaire was suitable to elicit the right responses from the Social Studies teachers. It also helped the researcher to check the clarity of the items and to identify, restructure and re-phrase any ambiguities that existed. It was also meant to ensure that administration procedures were effective. The outcome of the pilot-test provided very beneficial feedback before the actual data collection exercise. Besides, the layout of the questionnaire needed to be revised in terms of ensuring the consistency of font size and line spacing. This made the planning for the actual field work less stressful and less difficult. More importantly, the pilot-testing of the instrument enabled the researcher to establish the internal consistency and reliability of the instrument.

Reliability of the Questionnaire

The researcher also conducted a reliability test in order to determine whether the items succeeded in testing the constructs they sought to test. The individual items were therefore tested for reliability. This was compiled by computing the Cronbach's alpha coefficient which indicated the degree of item-total correlation. The result of the reliability test was 0.75.

Data Collection Procedure

The researcher contacted the teachers each SHS separately to schedule an appropriate time to administer the questionnaire to the Social Studies teachers. In each school, the researcher organised a briefing session to brief respondents on the study. This was done to direct respondents' attention to their rights during the data collection exercise and to clarify the instructions in the questionnaire. This exercise resulted in a high return rate (96.8%). The researcher personally distributed and retrieved the 120 questionnaires from the respondents between 6th and 20th May, 2019 when permission was granted by the schools.

Ethical Consideration

In this research, the confidentiality of the data was assured. All personal data gathered were secured. The respondents were asked not to give personal private information or reveal their identities. Copies of the questionnaire were given to the teachers to peruse in order to make sure that the data collection process and the information required would not infringe on the rights of the teachers, and also create ethical problems to the schools. After they had gone through, they offered their acceptance to provide the requisite information for the study.

Data Analysis

Data from the questionnaire were organised into three sections based on the objectives of the study. All the items were checked and cleaned prior to coding. This helped the researcher to check to see if all items had been responded to. The responses to the questionnaires were then assigned numbers for the purposes of analyses. Thus, “agree” was coded 1, “undecided” was coded 2 whilst “disagree” was coded 3. After examining to see all the questionnaires were accurate and complete, the items on the questionnaires were transferred to a spreadsheet (Statistical Product and Service Solutions, version 21.0). The data were then analysed using the SPSS. All the research questions were analysed and presented with frequency counts, percentages, means, and standard deviations.

Results and Discussion

This section discusses the outcome of the views of the respondents on the study. It begins with the academic qualification of the Social Studies teachers and continues with their teaching experiences and finally ends with their knowledge on how they use the integrated approach to teach Social Studies.

Academic qualification of Social Studies teachers

The pattern of teacher qualification in Ghana differs from one level of education to another (Kwenin, 2019), but normally three years of college of education training is required to teaching at the basic level of education whilst four years or more of first degree and other higher related degrees are required to teach Social Studies at the second cycle or tertiary level of education. In some situations, a Master's degree in one of the social sciences (Geography, Economics, History or Sociology) is required to teach Social Studies at the pre-tertiary levels of education in Ghana. Information obtained is shown in Table 1.

Table 1-Academic Qualification of Social Studies Teachers

I have acquired	No.	%
Post Graduate Diploma in Education	16	12.8
Bachelor of Education Degree in Social Studies	18	14.4
Bachelor of Education Degree in Social Sciences	64	53.3
Bachelor of Arts in Social Sciences	6	4.8
Bachelor of Arts in History	12	9.6
Postgraduate Degree in other related disciplines	4	3.2
Total	120	100.0

This section sought to explore the academic qualification of teachers who teach Social Studies at the senior high school level in Ghana. The results indicate that out of the 120 Social Studies teachers who participated in the research 16 (12.8%) of them studied Social Studies obtained post graduate diploma in education (PGDE) level, six (4.8%) hold Bachelor of Arts Degree in Social Sciences, whilst 12 (9.6%) hold Bachelor of Arts Degree in History. The indication is that several categories of teachers teach Social Studies at the SHS level in Ghana. Ideally, teachers with pedagogical content knowledge in Social Studies who graduated from either University of Cape Coast or University of Education, Winneba, are better positioned to teach social studies. For instance, in the University of Cape Coast for instance, it is mandatory for Social Studies teacher trainees to read Geography, Economics, History and Sociology during their first year of training. They would however have to drop History and Sociology after the second year, and Economics after their third year, but will graduate with Geography which is considered to be their major teaching course. It is believed that integrating these subjects would adequately prepare the prospective Social Studies teacher to effectively teach Social Studies at the pre-tertiary level of education in Ghana.

This implies that the teacher will be more abreast of concepts in Geography than in the other integrating subjects due to the length of period with which they would have to study Geography. It is also clear from Table 1 that 64 (53.3%) teachers of Social Studies hold social sciences degree. This group of teachers either has Geography as their major teaching course or Economics as their major teaching course. By nature, the knowledge and experiences gained as part of their training are not effectively integrated to equip them adequately to teach Social Studies at the SHS level. Their teaching would reflect the nature of training they acquired. A reflection of the assertion that the way teachers teach is a reflection of the way they were trained.

The outcome from Table 1 points out two categories of teachers who teach Social Studies in senior high schools in Ghana – graduate teachers who are trained in Social Studies education from the University of Cape Coast and untrained teachers who may be university graduates but not trained as teachers to teach social studies. This has a lot of effects on the implementation of the integrated Social Studies curriculum. This is because the second category of teachers, despite their training in the components of Social Studies education (such as Geography, Economics, Sociology, etc.), were not adequately prepared to teach Social Studies at the SHS level of education since the nature of non-education social science subjects offered by the various universities in Ghana is not effectively integrated to provide trainees broad and integrated body of knowledge and experiences that will enhance teaching. They are likely to teach Social Studies from a specialist rather than an integrated perspective, hence teaching their protégés to become specialists in academic subjects. They would lack the ability and skills of connecting and interlinking knowledge from different subject areas to effectively teach social studies. The first category of teachers who have received training in Social Studies education however stand the better chance of teaching Social Studies effectively. In relation to this finding, a lot of researchers have made observations regarding the importance of teachers' academic and professional qualifications. For instance, Bishop (1986), on his part, noted that for a teacher to be able to educate others he must himself be well educated. Thus, there is a positive relationship between academic and professional qualifications of teachers and students' learning outcome. Students acquire more knowledge and experiences from teachers with high academic qualification than teachers with weak academic and professional qualifications. Similarly, Fisher (2006) observed that teachers with little or no training tend to use authoritarian and inefficient methods that make students see school as repressive places with little to enjoy. It is in line with these assertions that Moseti (2007) noted that the effectiveness of any curriculum implementation depends on the quality of teachers that are there to translate the syllabus into practical terms in the classroom.

Teachers' teaching experience in years

In this study, experience in teaching, based on the number of years in the teaching profession, was an important parameter. It is believed that such teachers have gained a lot of experiences in the teaching of social studies. Any teacher who had taught Social Studies for four and more years was considered experienced. The outcome from Table 2 shows that almost half of the Social Studies teachers 61 (50.8%) had experiences that range from 4 to 10 years and beyond, whilst 64 (53.3%) had teaching experience less than 2 years.

Table 2-Teachers' teaching experience in years

Teaching experience	No.	%
Less than 1 year	36	30.0
1 to 3 years	28	23.3
4 to 6 years	26	21.7
7 to 9 years	16	13.3
10 years and above	19	15.8
Total	120	100.0

This is a clear indication that the senior high schools Social Studies teachers have varying degrees of teaching experience. The implication is that teachers with many years of teaching experience are aware of the classroom activities and tasks, methods and the instructional materials to be used in the impartation of knowledge and experiences in Social Studies in an integrated manner among learners. They would have also acquired skills and knowledge required in the setting and preparation of students for better academic performance and understand the special needs of students in relation to different learning environments. Also, having taught the same content for a long time, the teacher has mastered skills and confidence in content delivery.

According to Mutoro (2001), a teacher's experience determines competence and efficiency. On the other hand, Social Studies teachers with few years of teaching experience could receive guidance from the experienced teachers and therefore gain the necessary experiences from the experienced teachers.

Social Studies teachers' application of integrated approach to teaching social studies

The respondents were required to indicate how they apply the integrated approach to teach Social Studies. Their views have been presented in Table 3.

Table 3- Social Studies teachers' application of integrated approach to teaching social studies

	Disagree		Undecided		Agree		Mean	Std Dev
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%		
The integrated approach reflects in my scheme of work and lesson plans.	98	81.7	7	5.8	15	12.5	2.69	.69
My instructional objectives are stated to reflect the integrated approach.	84	70.0	9	7.5	27	22.5	2.48	.84
The content I teach is organized in an integrated manner.	77	64.2	12	10.0	31	25.8	2.38	.87
My methods and activities selected reflect the integrated nature of teaching social studies.	96	80.0	6	5.0	18	15.0	2.65	.73
I integrate knowledge and ideas from different subject areas to implement my lessons.	110	91.7	3	2.5	7	5.8	2.86	.49
I engage learners in a variety of learning activities which cut across different subject areas.	81	97.5	12	10.0	27	22.7	2.45	.84
I formulate and ask questions that stimulate learners' imagination.	71	59.2	15	12.5	34	28.5	2.31	.89

Concerning teachers' ability to use the integrated approach to implement Social Studies, majority of teachers (N = 98, M = 2.69, SD = .69) disagreed that the integrated approach reflects in their scheme and their lesson plans, the methods selected to teach Social Studies as well as teaching and learning activities that are selected to teach social studies. By implication, while most teachers are mandated to teach Social Studies, they lack the competence in handling the subject in an integrated manner. Majority of the Social Studies teachers (N = 84, M = 2.48, SD = .84) disagreed that their instructional objectives were stated to reflect the integrated approach and (N = 110, M = 91.7, SD = 2.86, .49) also disagreed that as their lessons progressed, they presented facts by integrating knowledge and ideas from different subject areas to teach. This is an indication that most of the teachers had problems with the central focus of ensuring effective teaching of social studies, thus, integration. The subject cannot be effectively taught if teachers are not proficient in the issues presented in Table 3. Teachers would rely mostly on their own experience to transmit knowledge. It must be noted that with the integrated approach, as teachers teach, they should be able to blend knowledge and experiences from other related subject areas in order for their lesson to be seen as integrated whole. This should be done by linking ideas, theories, generalizations, principles and concepts from various disciplines such as Geography, Economics, History, Sociology, etc. in order to transmit knowledge to learners in a holistic manner. As part of the teaching and learning activities, teachers must organise activities such that learners as well would execute the activities in an integrated manner by drawing knowledge, ideas, views, and competencies from these different subject areas.

Challenges of teaching Social Studies in an integrated manner

This section gathered the views of the Social Studies teachers concerning the challenges of teaching Social Studies through the integrated manner. Table 4 presents the outcome of the responses.

Table 4- Challenges of teaching Social Studies in an integrated manner

Challenges of teaching Social Studies in an integrated manner	Disagree		Undecided		Agree		Mean	Std Dev
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%		
Social Studies courses offered in teacher training institutions do not adequately equip me to teach the subject.	4	3.3	3	2.5	113	94.2	1.09	.39
Specialization in one of the foundation courses of Social Studies creates poses challenges to my teaching.	6	5.0	0	0.0	114	95.0	1.10	.44
Most teachers lack practical skills to teach Social Studies in an integrated manner.	8	6.7	4	3.3	108	90.0	1.17	.52
Difficulty in applying the recommended methods of teaching Social Studies such as inquiry and problem-solving methods appropriately.	9	7.5	4	3.3	107	89.2	1.18	.55
Lack of understanding and proper interpretation of the concept of integration in Social Studies	23	19.2	14	11.7	83	69.2	1.09	.39
Inadequate relevant textbooks for teaching Social Studies.	104	86.7	2	1.7	14	11.7	2.75	.65
Teachers over-rely on teaching syllabus and Social Studies textbooks without any reference to other related textbooks.	60	75.0	6	5.0	24	20.0	2.55	.81
Limited teaching and learning resources to ensure successful integration.	73	60.8	11	9.2	36	30.0	2.31	.91

The teachers (N = 113, M = 1.09, SD = .39) agreed that the Social Studies courses offered by teacher training institutions do not provide detailed topics that are in line with the senior high school syllabus. Another problem identified by the teachers concerning the teaching of Social Studies in an integrated manner was the fact that some teachers had one of the social sciences (either Geography, Economics, Sociology or History) as their major subject during their pre-service teacher training. This was the view of majority of the teachers (N = 114, M = 1.10, SD = .44). It is an undeniable fact that these major courses or various areas of specialisation would influenced how they teach Social Studies as they would put more emphasis on their areas of specialization. To the teachers, they encounter problems in trying to draw and relate different concepts to teach Social Studies due to their areas of specialisation. Majority of them had background in either Geography, Economics, History and Sociology which made it difficult for them to integrate facts and ideas when teaching Social Studies. According to Kwenin (2019a), teachers who specialized in Geography, history, or Economics tend to put more emphasis on these areas when teaching Social Studies because they will be more comfortable to teach their areas of specialisation. Therefore, for any teacher to be able to teach it, he or she should acquire training in all the components of the integrated Social Studies (Geography, Economics, History, etc.). Having knowledge in one of the components could tempt teachers to skew teaching to the aspect they can teach best to the neglect of other equally important components.

The results further indicate that most teachers lack practical skills to teach Social Studies in an integrated manner (N = 108, M = 1.17, SD = .52) and the difficulty in applying the recommended methods of teaching Social Studies such as inquiry and problem-solving methods appropriately (N = 107, M = 1.18, SD = .55). These responses could be attributed to the diverse nature of Social Studies education which demands that teachers read wide and be resourceful in finding relevant information from the integrating subjects (Geography, Economics, History, etc.) and providing and blending relevant experiences in order to approach Social Studies from different perspectives to achieve a holistic purpose. All these call for thorough preparation on the part of the teacher and this tends to render integration as a demanding approach.

The result also shows that there is lack of understanding and proper interpretation concept of integration in Social Studies ($N = 83$, $M = 1.09$, $SD = .39$). This response is not surprising since the concept of integration in Social Studies has been contested and defined differently by different writers and authors across countries. Most teachers do not have clear understanding of the concept integrate and therefore are unable to apply it effectively to teach Social Studies. This results from the fact that the concept of integration is either contested by many writers or simply misunderstood. This therefore becomes a threat to the use of the integrated approach to teach Social Studies.

Recommendations

The following recommendations have been made to help address some of the challenges teachers experience with the teaching of Social Studies in an integrated manner. For effective use of the integrated Social Studies curriculum, teachers' academic qualifications, professional qualification and teaching experiences should be adhered to. Teacher training institutions should also ensure that teacher trainees in Social Studies are equipped with skills, knowledge and experiences that would enable them teacher Social Studies effectively through the integrated approach. The foundation course of Social Studies should such as History and Geography stressed in Social Studies lessons should be approached in an integrated manner.

Besides, the content of Social Studies education at the senior high school level should represent a unified curriculum. The teaching of Social Studies should be planned and implemented in such a way that learners will as well see knowledge in a holistic manner. Since most of the teachers were not experienced in the integrated approach, they could still benefit from attending in-service courses, workshops, seminars and conferences on the integrated approach in order to improve their knowledge and skills in integration in Social Studies teaching. This will also enable them to organise different teaching strategies and instructional materials in an integrated manner to engage learners effectively in the instructional process.

Conclusions

Social Studies in SHSs in the Cape Coast Metropolis is mainly taught by teachers who are specialists in Geography, History, Economics and Sociology. Teachers who have experienced Social Studies in an integrated manner from their previous teacher training institutions would conveniently use knowledge and competencies from different subject areas in an integrated manner to teach concepts in Social Studies. By implication, if teachers are not well grounded in the use of the integrated approach to teaching Social Studies, the teaching of Social Studies may to be done effectively since they may lack the skills to ensure effective transfer of knowledge from one subject area to another subject area.

It may be concluded that the Social Studies courses offered by different teacher training institutions do not seem to adequately prepare trainees to handle Social Studies in an integrated manner. The courses seem to fall short in equipping trainees to be resourceful and inculcating the right pedagogical content knowledge in the subject especially in an integrated way. This is due to teachers' inability to draw knowledge, skills, experiences and competencies from related subject areas and blend them in an integrated manner. Besides, Social Studies as an integrated subject is not clearly understood by many teachers.

It should also be acknowledged that integration in Social Studies is a difficult approach to some Social Studies teachers and that the use of it presents several challenges for teachers. The sources of these challenges include teachers' lack of adequate knowledge and practices in the integrated Social Studies, teachers' misunderstanding of what constitute the content and scope of the integrated Social Studies, limited teaching and learning resources to ensure successful integration of concepts and ideas in Social Studies, as well as time constraints to effectively teach Social Studies in our educational institutions.

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