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Exploring Christian Education's Response to Ecological and Environmental Education: A Case of Three Christian Schools in Lilongwe Urban Education District

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how Christian education responds to ecological and environmental education through a case of three Christian schools in the Lilongwe Urban Education District. Using a qualitative multiple case study design, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, and were analyzed thematically with ATLAS.ti. The study explores how ecological principles are integrated into school curricula, pedagogical practices, and institutional culture, emphasizing the role of faith-based education in promoting sustainability and environmental stewardship. Findings indicate that Christian education provides strong theological and moral foundations consistent with sustainable development principles. However, the extent of implementation varies across schools, largely influenced by institutional commitment, teacher competence, and resource availability. The study concludes that Christian schools have considerable potential to foster ecological consciousness and responsible environmental action when sustainability is embedded across teaching, learning, and spiritual formation.

Keywords: Christian education, environmental education, sustainability, ecology, Malawi

Introduction

Sustainable development has become a key goal globally, focusing on the harmonious coexistence of human development and environmental preservation. It emphasizes meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. In this context, education plays a pivotal role in shaping the mindset of future generations, empowering them with the knowledge and values necessary for sustaining the environment.

Christian education, a long-established educational model, has traditionally been concerned with moral, spiritual, and intellectual development. However, it has been criticized for often neglecting the importance of environmental and ecological issues. A prime example of this critique is the "White Controversy" within Christian circles, which arose from the theological interpretation of humanity's dominion over nature. The "White Controversy" refers to the views

of Lynn White, Jr., who argued that Christian teachings, particularly from the Biblical perspective of dominion, have played a role in the ecological crisis by fostering an anthropocentric view of nature. This perspective posits that human beings are entitled to exploit nature for their own benefit, a stance that has been at odds with modern ecological and environmental concerns.

In light of these critiques, it becomes necessary to explore how Christian education has responded to the environmental crisis. This research will focus on three Christian schools in Lilongwe, Malawi, to investigate the extent to which Christian education incorporates ecological and environmental issues into its curriculum and how these schools perceive their role in fostering environmental stewardship.

Problem Statement

Christian education has, to a large extent, been criticized for failing to address ecological and environmental issues adequately. The emphasis in Christian education on spiritual and moral development has often overshadowed the pressing need for environmental consciousness. While Christian values promote care for creation, many Christian schools have not sufficiently integrated ecological and environmental education into their curriculum. In the context of Malawi's urban schools, there is a need to investigate how Christian education incorporates or neglects ecological and environmental content. This research aims to fill the gap by exploring how Christian schools in Lilongwe engage with ecological issues and whether they emphasize environmental conservation in a manner consistent with contemporary understandings of sustainable development.

Aim of the Study

This research proposal aimed to explore the integration of ecological and environmental education in Christian schools in Lilongwe urban, examining how these schools respond to environmental challenges in the context of Christian teachings and sustainable development.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to explore how Christian education in Lilongwe urban, Malawi, responds to ecological and environmental issues, particularly in the context of three Christian schools. The study aims to:

1. Investigate how ecological and environmental education is integrated into the curriculum of selected Christian schools in Lilongwe.
2. Examine the perspectives of Christian educators and administrators regarding the relationship between Christianity and environmental conservation.
3. Assess the extent to which Christian schools in Lilongwe promote environmental stewardship as part of their educational philosophy.

Research Questions

1. How do Christian schools in Lilongwe urban integrate ecological and environmental education into their curriculum?
2. What is the perception of Christian educators in Lilongwe urban on the relationship between Christianity and ecological/environmental issues?
3. To what extent do Christian schools in Lilongwe urban promote environmental stewardship as part of their Christian educational philosophy?

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study extends to various stakeholders:

School Proprietors and Administrators: This research will provide insights into the importance of integrating ecological and environmental education into the Christian school curriculum. It can guide school administrators in revising or developing policies that emphasize sustainable practices and stewardship of the environment in line with Christian values. This will help schools adopt more holistic educational approaches that align with contemporary environmental challenges.

Curriculum Developers: The findings of this study can serve as a resource for curriculum developers who are tasked with creating educational frameworks that address environmental issues. By understanding how Christian schools in Lilongwe incorporate or neglect ecological education, curriculum developers can design materials that promote sustainability and responsible environmental behavior within a Christian context.

Environmental Education Advocates: The research will contribute to the broader discourse on how faith-based educational institutions can play a significant role in promoting sustainable development goals. It will provide an example of how Christian education can respond to the environmental crisis, highlighting the potential for religious-based schools to become leaders in promoting environmental stewardship.

Limitations of the Study

This study had several limitations that should be acknowledged:

Sample Size: The study focused on only three Christian schools in Lilongwe urban, Malawi. While these schools offered valuable insights, the findings may not be generalizable to all Christian schools across Malawi or other African countries.

Subjectivity in Perceptions: The study relies on qualitative data collected from interviews, which may be influenced by the subjective views of participants. Different educators and students may have varying interpretations of how Christianity relates to ecological and environmental issues.

Literature Review

Christian Education and Environmental Concerns

Christian education has traditionally focused on spiritual formation, character development, and academic excellence. However, the environment has often been overlooked within Christian pedagogies, with exceptions being found in some denominational schools and Christian institutions that place a strong emphasis on creation care. As mentioned in the introduction, Lynn White's (1967) seminal article "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" critiques the role of Christianity in fostering attitudes that contributed to the environmental crisis. White argues that the Christian doctrine of dominion over nature has been misinterpreted, resulting in an exploitative attitude towards the environment.

In contrast to this view, other scholars argue that Christianity has the potential to support ecological and environmental ethics. For example, Pope Francis's 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si'* calls for an urgent response to environmental degradation, advocating for a holistic understanding of ecology that includes both human and environmental well-being. The encyclical emphasizes the importance of "integral ecology," which highlights the interconnectedness of all creation, suggesting that Christian education can be a force for positive ecological change if it encourages a theology of creation care.

Several Christian educators have taken up the challenge of integrating environmental education into their curricula. According to Bowers (2002), Christian educators are increasingly adopting environmental education frameworks that align with sustainable development goals. These frameworks integrate ecological understanding with a Christian worldview, advocating for stewardship, sustainability, and the protection of God's creation.

Ecological and Environmental Education in Schools

Ecological and environmental education (EEE) aims to raise awareness of environmental issues and promote sustainable practices. It emphasizes the interdependence between humans and nature, fostering an understanding of ecosystems and the impact of human activities on the environment. EEE also incorporates values such as respect for nature, responsible resource management, and advocacy for policies that support environmental conservation.

In the context of schools, environmental education is increasingly recognized as an essential component of a comprehensive curriculum. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has emphasized the importance of incorporating EEE into educational systems worldwide, noting that environmental challenges require an informed and engaged populace. Several studies have highlighted the importance of a collaborative approach between educators, policymakers, and communities in promoting environmental education (Tilbury, 2011). However, there is little research on how Christian schools, specifically in Africa, integrate environmental issues into their educational philosophy and practice.

In Malawi, environmental education has been incorporated into the national curriculum, with a particular emphasis on sustainable development, climate change, and biodiversity. However, how Christian schools in urban areas like Lilongwe integrate or prioritize environmental education remains under-researched. This research seeks to explore this gap and provide insights into the responses of Christian schools to environmental education.

Christian Education and Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is a central issue in contemporary global education discussions. Christian education can play a significant role in promoting sustainable practices, as Christian teachings emphasize the care of creation and social responsibility. By integrating ecological education into the curriculum, Christian schools can foster sustainable lifestyles and advocate for the protection of the environment.

Christian schools, especially in urban contexts, have the opportunity to address sustainability challenges by incorporating sustainable practices into school operations and pedagogy. However, this integration is often not straightforward, as it requires a shift from traditional Christian views of human domination over nature to one of responsible stewardship and care for the Earth. Researchers such as Hawkes (2006) argue that Christian schools can contribute to the global sustainability movement by adopting ecological education frameworks that reflect both Biblical principles and contemporary environmental science.

Christian Education in Malawi and Beyond

Christian education, particularly in Malawi and other parts of sub-Saharan Africa, has played a significant role in shaping the educational landscape, especially given the historical roots of missionary schooling in these regions. In Malawi, Christian schools have traditionally been founded by missionary groups and religious organizations, with a strong emphasis on moral and spiritual

education. These schools often operated as a supplement to the national education system, and their aim was to promote Christian values while imparting academic knowledge. In many cases, however, these schools closely followed the public curriculum prescribed by the government, which left little room for the integration of Christian teachings beyond the spiritual development of students.

In contemporary Malawi, Christian schools still play an essential role in education, especially in urban areas such as Lilongwe, Blantyre, and Mzuzu. These schools are governed by Christian principles but are also expected to adhere to the national curriculum, which often limits the explicit integration of Christian values into academic subjects. As a result, there is a tension between following the national education policies (which may or may not emphasize Christian principles) and the desire to promote Christian teachings in various subject areas. This challenge is not unique to Malawi but extends to many parts of sub-Saharan Africa, where Christian schools are often obliged to adhere to national curricula set by governmental bodies that are sometimes secular or non-religious.

The practice of "Christian Education" in these contexts is often limited to a few Christian elements that are incorporated into subjects such as Religious Education or Moral Studies. These elements may include Biblical teachings, prayers, and Christian moral guidance, but the depth of integration of Christian values into other academic disciplines like science, mathematics, social studies, and the arts is often superficial. This has raised concerns about the ability of Christian schools to offer a holistic Christian education that aligns with the faith's theological emphasis on stewardship, creation care, and environmental ethics.

Integration vs. Infusion of Christian Education

One of the critical discussions in Christian education, particularly in the context of integrating Christian values into the curriculum, is the distinction between **integration** and **infusion**. Both terms describe ways of incorporating Christian beliefs into education, but they differ significantly in their approach and depth.

Integration refers to the process of embedding Christian values and teachings directly within specific subjects or disciplines. In this model, Christianity is not merely an add-on but is weaved into the content, context, and perspective of various subjects. For instance, in a science class, the discussion may not only focus on biological processes but also include a Christian perspective on the sanctity of life or the responsibility of humans to care for creation. In an integrated model, Christian education influences how knowledge is interpreted, not just through theological lenses, but also by encouraging students to critically assess the world around them through their faith.

Infusion, on the other hand, refers to the process of embedding Christian values into the overall environment and ethos of the school, rather than its specific academic content. Infusion is less about restructuring the curriculum and more about creating an atmosphere that reflects Christian values across all school activities, including extracurricular events, social interactions, and moral guidance. Infusion does not alter the content of subjects like science, math, or history; instead, it encourages students to view those subjects through a Christian worldview. For example, a math lesson may not explicitly deal with Christian themes, but the ethical conduct, honesty in calculations, and respect for others' work could be infused with Christian values.

The challenge in Malawi and many sub-Saharan African countries is

that Christian schools often employ an **infusion** model rather than an **integration** model. While the ethos and environment of Christian schools may be infused with Biblical teachings and moral principles, the actual academic content is often not deeply integrated with Christian values. This practice limits the potential for Christian education to fully address pressing societal challenges such as environmental stewardship, social justice, and community care, which are central to Christian teachings.

In Christian schools in Malawi, the tendency is often to rely heavily on infusion—Christian education is seen as a moral foundation, but the environment of the school and the specific subjects taught are often disconnected from explicitly Christian content. For instance, environmental education, which is crucial in light of the global ecological crisis, is often seen as a separate discipline, without a strong connection to Christian theology on creation care. Instead, environmental topics are sometimes presented in secular frameworks, without a theological grounding in the concept of stewardship of God's creation.

Christian Education in the Sub-Saharan Context

Christian schools in sub-Saharan Africa, including Malawi, are influenced by both traditional educational frameworks and global educational trends. Historically, these schools were established with a strong evangelical mission to educate young people while promoting Christian morals and values. Many of these institutions were pioneers in providing educational opportunities in rural and urban areas when formal schooling systems were limited.

In the modern context, however, Christian schools in sub-Saharan Africa are increasingly faced with a dilemma. They must navigate the complexities of adhering to national educational policies while maintaining their Christian identity. National education systems in many sub-Saharan countries, including Malawi, are often secular and emphasize academic knowledge over religious or moral education. As a result, Christian schools often focus on moral education in specific subjects, such as Religious Education, without fully integrating Christian values across the entire curriculum.

However, the rise of global movements advocating for sustainability and environmental stewardship has challenged this model. The call for "**creation care**" as part of Christian education is growing, especially in light of the environmental challenges faced by African nations, including climate change, deforestation, and pollution. Yet, despite the clear theological mandate for environmental stewardship found in Christian scriptures (e.g., Genesis 2:15), many Christian schools in the region have been slow to incorporate ecological education into their curriculum.

In Malawi, Christian schools are increasingly recognizing the importance of addressing global issues like climate change and environmental degradation. However, the implementation of ecological education is often isolated and treated as a separate subject, rather than being deeply integrated into the overall curriculum. There is a growing need for Christian schools to shift from an infusion model to a more integrated model of Christian education, where the principles of stewardship, sustainability, and care for creation are not only embedded in the school culture but also in the academic subjects themselves.

Challenges of Integration in Christian Education

The shift towards integration presents several challenges, particularly in Christian schools that are still bound by traditional educational structures. One significant challenge is the lack of training and resources for teachers to integrate Christian values with

academic content. Teachers may not have sufficient knowledge or resources to connect Christian teachings with subjects like science or geography, especially in relation to complex issues like ecology or climate change. Additionally, there may be resistance to changing traditional teaching practices or curriculums, especially if it requires a fundamental shift in how subjects are approached.

Furthermore, the emphasis on national curriculum standards and the demand for standardized testing can limit the flexibility needed for schools to implement integrated models of Christian education. In many cases, Christian schools in Malawi and beyond prioritize meeting national educational requirements over fostering a holistic, faith-based approach to education. This creates a disconnect between the values of the school and the content taught in the classroom.

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Christian schools, especially in urban contexts, have the opportunity to address sustainability challenges by incorporating sustainable practices into school operations and pedagogy. However, this integration is often not straightforward, as it requires a shift from traditional Christian views of human domination over nature to one of responsible stewardship and care for the Earth. Researchers such as Hawkes (2006) argue that Christian schools can contribute to the global sustainability movement by adopting ecological education frameworks that reflect both Biblical principles and contemporary environmental science.

In Malawi and other sub-Saharan region, Christian schools offering

'Christian Education' normally follow the public schools prescribed curriculum with few Christian elements integrated. Describe showing the differences between integration and infusion principles in the literature review section

Conclusion of the literature review.

In conclusion, Christian education in Malawi and much of sub-Saharan Africa continues to grapple with the challenge of balancing Christian values with national educational standards. While many Christian schools infuse Christian principles into their ethos and culture, there remains a significant gap when it comes to **integrating** Christian teachings into the academic curriculum. For Christian schools to effectively address modern challenges such as environmental degradation, there is a need for a paradigm shift towards integrating Christian values, particularly environmental stewardship, into the core of the curriculum. This shift will require both theological and pedagogical changes, enabling Christian schools to not only teach academic subjects but also nurture students who are committed to caring for creation and promoting sustainable development in line with Christian teachings. The literature review includes a critical description of Christian education in Malawi and the sub-Saharan African context, and highlights the difference between the principles of integration and infusion in Christian educational practices. The research will explore how Christian schools are engaging with these concepts, particularly in the light of environmental education.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a **mixed-methods approach**, combining both qualitative and quantitative research techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of the responses of Christian schools to ecological and environmental education. The research was conducted in three Christian schools in Lilongwe urban, Malawi.

Research Design

Qualitative Approach: In-depth interviews were conducted with Christian educators, school administrators, and students to explore their perceptions and experiences regarding ecological and environmental education. The interviews focused on the integration of environmental issues in the curriculum, attitudes toward environmental stewardship, and the relationship between

Christianity and ecology.

Quantitative Approach: Surveys were distributed to a broader sample of students and teachers to gather data on their knowledge of environmental issues, their attitudes towards sustainable development, and their understanding of how Christian education influences environmental behavior.

Sampling

Three Christian schools in Lilongwe urban were selected, ensuring a diversity of denominational affiliations and educational levels (primary, secondary). Participants included a mix of teachers, administrators, and students. A purposive sampling method was used to select key stakeholders who are directly involved in the curriculum design and environmental education initiatives.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data from interviews, focus group discussions were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns in the responses.

Quantitative data from surveys was analyzed using descriptive statistics to assess the level of environmental awareness and attitudes among students and teachers.

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

The findings are presented according to the major research questions, drawing upon both qualitative and quantitative data collected from interviews, surveys, and document analysis.

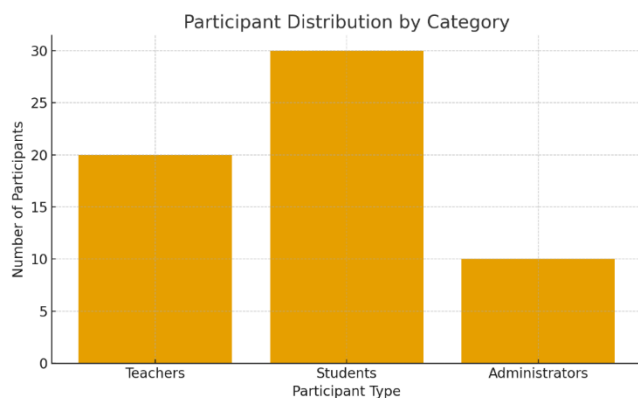
Demographic Characteristics of Participants

A total of 60 respondents participated in the study, comprising teachers (n=20), students (n=30), and school administrators (n=10) across three Christian schools (denoted as School A, School B, and School C). The respondents represented diverse denominational affiliations—Catholic, Interdenominational and Pentecostal—and varied levels of educational experience. Most teachers (70%) had over five years of teaching experience, while 30% had served less than five years. About 60% of the students were in upper primary or secondary levels, where environmental topics are typically introduced.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Category	Sub-category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Remarks
Participant Type	Teachers	20	33.3	Represented all three schools
	Students	30	50.0	From upper primary and secondary levels
	School Administrators	10	16.7	Head teachers and deputy heads
Total Participants		60	100	
School Representation	School A			Watamu Private Primary School
	School B			Heritage Christian School
	School C			Lilongwe Pentecostal Primary School
Denominational Affiliation	Catholic	—	—	—
	Interdenominational	—	—	—
	Pentecostal	—	—	—
Teaching Experience (Teachers)	More than 5 years	14	70.0	Majority of experienced educators
	Less than 5 years	6	30.0	Newer entrants to teaching

Student Level	Upper Primary/Secondary	18	60.0	Exposed to environmental topics
	Lower Primary	12	40.0	Limited exposure to environmental to



Evidence from Curriculum and Teaching Practices

Analysis of school syllabi and interviews revealed that all three schools follow the national curriculum provided by the Malawi Institute of Education (MIE), which contains limited but explicit references to environmental topics—mainly in Social Studies, Agriculture, and Science. However, the integration of Christian perspectives on ecology and environmental stewardship was found to be minimal.

School A (a Catholic institution) integrates ecological education through its Moral and Religious Education (MRE) subject, where lessons on 'care for God's creation' are occasionally included, linked to Biblical themes such as Genesis 2:15 (man's responsibility to care for the garden).

School B (a Protestant school) reported organizing occasional environmental clean-up activities and tree planting exercises but did not explicitly link these to Christian theology in the classroom.

School C (a Pentecostal school) emphasized environmental cleanliness and discipline as part of the school's moral code but did not integrate environmental topics into its academic subjects.

Overall, only about 25% of teachers indicated that they intentionally connect environmental lessons with Christian values or theology. The majority (75%) acknowledged that while they discuss environmental issues, they do so from a secular or civic perspective, following the national syllabus.

Teachers' Awareness and Pedagogical Practices

Teachers generally expressed awareness of environmental challenges such as deforestation, waste management, and climate change. However, when asked whether these issues were framed as Christian responsibilities, most teachers admitted they were unsure how to make that theological connection.

Common responses included:

"We teach environmental topics because they are in the syllabus, not because they are part of our Christian teaching." (Teacher, School B)
 "Sometimes we use Bible verses during assemblies to talk about caring for the environment, but it is not part of the classroom content." (Administrator, School A)

This indicates that Christian schools in Lilongwe largely infuse Christian values into school ethos rather than integrate them into curriculum content, consistent with findings in the literature review.

Perceptions of Christian Educators on Christianity and Environmental Issues

Educators expressed diverse perspectives regarding the relationship between Christianity and environmental stewardship. 60% believed Christianity supports environmental conservation as part of caring for God's creation; 25% viewed environmental issues as secondary to spiritual concerns; and 15% were uncertain due to lack of theological training. Some referenced Biblical stewardship and moral responsibility but lacked systematic theological understanding of ecology.

Promotion of Environmental Stewardship in School Culture

Most schools promoted environmental cleanliness and orderliness as part of Christian discipline. Activities such as campus cleaning, waste segregation, and tree planting were common, especially during annual environmental days. However, these activities were often practical and moral rather than theological.

Summary of Key Findings

Research Question	Major Findings
1. How do Christian schools integrate ecological and environmental education?	Integration is minimal; most schools follow the national curriculum without explicitly linking environmental topics to Christian teachings.
2. What are the perceptions of educators on Christianity and environmental issues?	Majority view Christianity as compatible with environmental care but lack formal theological grounding or curriculum support.
3. To what extent do schools promote environmental stewardship?	Environmental stewardship is promoted through practical activities but lacks explicit theological integration or reflection.

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Integration versus Infusion in Christian Education

Findings confirm that Christian schools in Lilongwe primarily employ an infusion model rather than an integration model of Christian education. While Christian values are infused into the overall ethos and moral conduct of the schools, academic subjects—particularly environmental topics—remain largely secular. This aligns with Bowers (2002) and Tilbury (2011), who note that many faith-based schools emphasize moral formation but fail to embed Christian theology into curriculum content.

Educators' Theological Understanding of Ecology

Educators' limited understanding of creation care theology mirrors the gap identified by Lynn White (1967) and later addressed by Pope Francis (2015) in *Laudato Si'*. While teachers acknowledge the moral importance of protecting the environment, few connect this with the Biblical mandate in Genesis 2:15. The findings demonstrate a need for teacher training in eco-theology and Christian environmental ethics.

Curriculum Constraints and National Education Standards

All schools adhere to the national curriculum, which restricts faith-based integration. This confirms Hawkes' (2006) argument that Christian schools face structural limitations that hinder incorporation

of Christian worldview perspectives in secularized educational frameworks.

School Practices and Environmental Stewardship

Although environmental activities like tree planting and campus cleaning were common, they lacked theological reflection. Schools treat environmental care as an extracurricular moral activity rather than as a theological imperative.

Conclusions

The study concludes that:

1. Christian schools in Lilongwe Urban show limited integration of ecological and environmental education into their curriculum.
2. Educators recognize the importance of environmental care but lack adequate training and resources.
4. Environmental stewardship is practiced superficially.
5. There is a critical need for curriculum innovation integrating Christian theology with ecological education.

Recommendations

For School Administrators

- Develop school-based policies integrating Biblical teachings on stewardship with environmental education.
- Encourage partnerships with environmental and theological institutions.

For Teachers and Curriculum Developers

- Provide teacher training workshops on environmental education and sustainable development.
- Revise curricula to include Biblical reflections on ecology.
- Promote interdisciplinary teaching linking theology, science, and social responsibility.

For Christian Education Bodies and Churches

Develop theological frameworks and resources supporting creation care.

Encourage congregations to collaborate with schools on spiritual-ecological projects.

For Future Research

Conduct comparative studies across rural and urban Christian schools.

Examine behavioral outcomes of faith-based environmental education.

Conclusion

The study highlights the untapped potential of Christian education in Malawi to contribute to sustainable development through environmental education. Moving from an infusion to an integration model will empower Christian schools to align theology, pedagogy, and practice toward ecological responsibility.

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