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An Examination of Senior High Schools Teacher-Student Conflicts in Ghana

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Abstract

This study sought to examine Senior High Schools Teacher-Student conflicts at Kwahu East Municipality, Ghana. The study adopted a descriptive research design. Data was collected through the use of questionnaires to a sample of 127 students. The findings revealed that some teachers unfair use of punishment, denial of students' rights and privileges by teachers, lack of interest in teaching on the part of some teachers, and preferential treatment towards some students cause teacher-student conflicts. Also, creative thinking and redefining of purpose were both seen as positive effects of teacher-student conflict. Lastly, the study discovered lessening of the organization's effectiveness, weakening teacher-students' relationships, and outright hostile or property damage as major effects of conflict. The study recommends that, teachers should not be too strict or deny students' rights and privileges. Moreover, teachers should be friendly, fair and firm in discharging their duties when implementing educational policy, in terms of discipline.

Keywords: *Teacher-Student Conflict, Causes, Effects, Implications, Ghana.*

Introduction

Education is highly regarded for its immense contribution to the development of nations. As such, education has become the live wire upon which a country's industries, moral regeneration, and revival of its people are built (Orji & Job, 2013). In Ghana, as like other countries, the school is charged with the ultimate responsibility of developing its citizenry. No wonder most nations invest heavily in their educational sector by providing infrastructures, equipping human resources, and developing suitable policies for schools' smooth running (Adu, 2011). Any contamination in the educational industry is capable of jeopardizing the future of the nation. A prominent issue that can endanger the education process of a country is conflict in schools. Nyamajiwa (2000) described a conflict as the opposition of individuals or groups' interests, opinions, or purposes. Conflict is an inescapable outcome of human interaction (Makaye & Ndofire, 2012) and a fact of life in various organizations. Conflict is not something an individual can hold; however, it lies in the minds of the parties who are involved in it. Therefore, it is only evident when it manifests itself in arguing, jealousy, quarrel, or fighting.

Various faculties and departments of different institutions are experiencing a dramatic revolution and immense transformation with the intent of transferring the required knowledge, skills, and values to the up-coming generations (Makaye and Ndofire, 2012). Conflict in the school can thwart these aims. The issue of conflict in schools seems to be characteristic of everyday school

phenomenon. Adu (2011) posits that the differences in needs and interests of human beings have led to the frequent occurrence of conflict in schools. However, it can be managed using diverse strategies. He further points out that conflict is inevitable when individuals are brought together under one roof. Each individual is born with unique features and gifts. When not curbed, conflicts can jeopardize students' performance, which is detrimental to their future and the nation (Williams, 2009). In most cases, conflicts may have either a positive or a negative influence on students, teachers, school, or the nation, depending on the conflict's nature.

In Adu's (2011) views, the issue of conflict in senior high school's dates back to the beginning of secondary education in Ghana. This implies that conflict is not a new phenomenon in senior high schools. At the senior high school level, conflicts do occur among teachers, students, parents, and headmaster or entire school as a setting. The unpleasant relationships between teachers and students, students and students, teachers and school heads, and school and the community have conflicts as their root cause. Some schools' conflicts have resulted in a struggle for power in schools by students, teachers, and heads of School (Nyamajiwa, 2000). Such a devastating issue has disrupted the educational focus and affected the state of schools. In some instances, schools' conflicts have resulted in the physical destruction of school properties and the loss of lives of some members of the school. In recent times, incidents of teacher-students' conflicts in Senior High Schools in Ghana have been reported in the media. The Daily Graphic Online (2015) reported that students' riots at Salaga senior high school in Ghana led to the destruction of many properties. This incident resulted from a teacher sacking four students from the examination hall for indecent dressing. A similar incident was reported at Tuna senior high school, where the students went on a rampage due to an alleged stripping of a female student naked by a teacher as a form of punishment for indecent dressing (Myjoyonline.com, 2015).

The issue of conflict in senior high schools is defined with diverse causes. Mensah (2005) posits that conflict is a phenomenon which occurs between or among parties when one party perceives that another party intends to frustrate his/her interest or overshadow its values and interest. This implies that conflict arises when a person or a group negatively affects another individual or a group. Whenever conflict arises, parties involved mostly use unacceptable means to demand their interests and needs (Orji & Job, 2013). Since conflicts have become an inevitable phenomenon, especially a conflict between teacher-student, teacher-school head, and school-community, there is the need to delve into its root causes and its effects on the school. It was against this background that the study sought to examine teacher-student conflict in senior high schools in Ghana. First, the study will explore the causes of teacher-student conflict in senior high schools in Ghana. Second, the study will also delve into the negative and positive effect of teacher-student conflict in Ghana's senior high schools.

Statement of the Problem

School violence is one of the universal problems faced by schools (World Health Organization, 2004). In recent times, teacher-students' conflicts have become rampant in senior high schools in Ghana. In one incident, a male teacher was nearly lynched at Kwahu Tafo Senior

High Technical School by male students ‘during light out’ on alleging illicit relationships with female students (Myjoyonline.com, 2015). Besides, the hand of a male teacher at Kwahu Fodoo was chopped off following a punishment given to a student, which the student deemed unfair. A female teacher in a sister school was also sent out of the classroom by final year students who had complained of teacher ineffectiveness in lesson delivery (Myjoyonline.com, 2015). These and many more incidents of conflicts between teachers and students in Ghana have been an issue of public outcry due to its potential to jeopardize the nation’s future. Alimba (2017) opines that teachers must understand that their job performance is a function of how they can constructively deal with emerging conflicts in their school. Existing literature on teacher-students’ conflicts has been documented in a narrative form. Thus, empirical studies on the teacher-students conflict in Ghana are scanty. Informed by this gap, the study sought to unravel teacher-student conflicts in Ghana using the Kwahu East Municipality as a case study.

Purpose of the Study

The study aimed to examine teacher-students conflicts in senior high schools in Ghana. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. determine the causes of teacher-student conflicts in senior high schools in Ghana.
2. assess the positive effects of teacher-students conflict on the school community in Ghana.
3. assess the negative effects of teacher-students conflict on the school community in Ghana.

Review of Related Literature

Causes of Teacher-Student conflict

Conflicts are caused by several factors that create tensions between people within an organization, including the school. The various causes of conflicts are discussed as follows;

Insensitivity to student needs: One major cause of conflict is teachers’ inability to respond to significant changes in their interpersonal environment, which is the school. It seems the absence of cognizance of students’ necessities leads to a poor teacher-student relationship. These hassles between teachers and students spring up when the teachers pass up student’s interests or needs. Students’ charisma, personal appeal, family background, socio-economic status, personal magnetism, thought processes, goals, learnability, priorities, and maturity levels influence their ability to learn and link up with educators (Tucker, 2001). Suppose the pedagogue does not consider these things, conflicts may quickly spring up between the pedagogue and the students.

Favoritism: Headteachers and teachers find themselves in conflict with students due to their preference of some students over others (Omboko, 2010). This suggests that conflict may arise when students agnize that individual attention or treatment is giving to someone over him/her. Ramani (2010) asserts that conflict arises between teachers-students when teachers exhibit preferential treatment to certain students. It can be inferred from the above that students respond

to the teacher's partiality, which they perceive as unequal treatment. This reaction eventually breakdown the connection between them since students feel they have been denied some rights.

Lack of interest in teaching on the part of teachers: The person's interest profoundly shapes an individual's attitude towards a profession for the said work. A picture of the above commentary is expressed by Kingala (2000), who pointed out that people with no calling to the teaching profession take up training as teachers but have no interest in looking after them. These teachers find themselves in a job they lack its flair. Nevertheless, the absence of other employment opportunities and the need for money push some people towards the teaching profession. They forget that teaching is both an art and science; thus, teaching is both a natural calling and some vital and scientific principles.

Value systems: Values can be described as the beliefs, norms, or faith cherished by a group of people. Individuals have different styles, norms, beliefs, impressions, opinions, and slogans in life. These values shape their choices, objectives, and how they live. When the choices and goals of students belie that of teachers, this can create conflict. Conflict arises when two people come together for a discussion but perceive the issue from different angles because of different settings, beliefs, opinions, awareness, background, disposition, reason, or outlook (Amuhaya, 2010). When one party does not adapt and understand issues using the other's eyes, conflicts will arise. Teachers have to learn the various values their students bring onboard and adjust to them.

Unfair application of punishment: According to Afful (2009), most conflicts in the school environment typically occurs in class when a learner feels that she/he has been given an underserving punishment. If a teacher punishes a student wrongly, it undermines the mutual respect necessary to achieve the punishment's desired effect. This also breaks the symphonic relationship, thereby creating conflict. Ivancevich and Matteson (1990) explained that punishment and disciplinary measures are used to eliminate undesirable behaviors and poor performance in organizations. In their views, undesirable behaviors that attract punishment include; absenteeism, leaving school before closing time, fighting, and abusive language. The use of actions to reprimand the above mention misdeeds is described by some students as unfair.

Effects of teacher-students' conflicts

The effects of conflict on educational organizations are both positive and negative (Amuhaya, 2010). Each conflict can bring problems, benefits, solutions, and choices that may not have been previously thought of or confronted.

A positive effect of conflict on the school

According to Wright and Quincy (1998), conflict outcome could be positive. First, it is evidence of life and vitality. The only place in the world where you will find no conflict of any

kind is the cemetery: there is no conflict because there is no life. The site is meant for the dead, and as such, there are discussions to spring up conflicts of interest. Conflict indicates that people, family, associations, and organizations are alive and kicking. It is an indication that people are doing creative thinking and innovativeness (Nelson-Jones, 1995). Whenever conflict arises, the end product is verve in the working environment. Second, conflicts can result in revived motivation. Conflict often forces us to reshape or reinforce our purpose. It enables us to make needed decisions and to take action (Omboko, 2010). It requires ideas, adaptability, new commitments, and fresh motivation. As such, there is a feeling of making progress, seeking badly needed solutions, and perhaps overdue. This brings group clarity, unity, and groups' identity. Together, they have grappled with conflict and come out of it by adapting to some things.

Third, it permits the venting of frustration. In Champoux's (2010) view, people use conflicts as a valve in getting away from emotions or negative feelings. The mandate is given to people to challenge opinions or the status-quo they disagree with. They will be less frustrated. As a result, there is a higher possibility of renewing their mind-set and staying calmly with the group or organization. Lastly, it can also lead to personal growth and maturity (Eccles & Gabbaro, 1995). Conflict forces help people to know themselves better. It enables them to learn how to work more effectively with others in solving problems and resolving differences. Some people do not know how to work with a group, and as such, they bellyache continuously. When conflicts arise, they learn more and become mature after some time.

Negative Effects of Teacher-Student Conflict

Conflicts can have devastating effects on organizational performance and productivity. Conflict in schools may reduce strengths and resources such as social support and integration among teachers, and all those involved in education, increasing schools' problems (Aldag & Stearns, 1987). Nelson-Jones (1995) explains that not only can conflict in the workplace cause significant stress and unhappiness, but it can also lower outputs and, in extreme cases, bring strike actions.

Alimba (2017) examined the dysfunctional consequences of conflict on teachers' productivity. Discussions were woven around six thematic areas, which include: the conceptualization of conflict, the issue of teachers' productivity, the factors influencing teachers' productivity, the dynamics of dysfunctional conflict, exploration of the effects of violent conflict on education, and finally, the issues of dysfunctional conflict and teachers' productivity. It was concluded that it is unpalatable to the parties concerned. Conflict is a significant variable that can thwart and distort teachers' efforts despite the volume of resources provided for them to operate. Dysfunctional conflicts cannot breed anything good because their outcomes are expressed in negative terms.

Furthermore, Barker and Gum (1994) also pointed out that when conflicts arise, an association or organization's goals are relegated while the goals or interests of individuals involved in the conflicts are placed above. This results in the organization's ineffectiveness, which may eventually lead to the collapse of the organization. Owens (2001) also opines that conflicts can

have a withering effect on an organization's behavior. Conflicts germinate hostility, and the parties involved to escape might want to withdraw either physically and psychologically. In a school climate, teachers might absent themselves as a form of physical withdrawal. This may be perceived as laziness on the part of the teacher. Psychological withdrawal can also take the form of alienation. According to Jorgensen and Henderson (1990), although a solution may be obtained, the parties involved might have already experienced pain and hurt. Sometimes how solutions are developed might result in pain on the part of the parties involved.

Eccles and Gabbaro (1995) point out that conflicts can lead to aggressive behavior such as mob action, demonstration, property damage, and minor theft of property. They posit that in some cases, the frustrated individual, as a way of escaping from pain, might direct the pain to cause damage to the person or object believed to be the cause of the pain. Whetten and Cameron (2005) add that conflict saps the energy and demoralizes some people's spirits. This might as well affect their attitude towards an organization. The physical, emotional, and psychological effect of conflict on the individual or organization can result in responses that may damage the educational sector and jeopardize students' future. Hart (2002) posits that conflict causes a great deal of emotional stress. This corroborates Newstorm and Davis' (2002) view, who asserts that it leads to a lack of cooperation and teamwork when protracted conflict occurs. This might make some people have a low self-image.

Most of the existing literature on the effects of teacher-student conflict focused on the results of the school's unproductive nature when conflicts erupt. The research sought to explore other possible negative impacts aside from the effect of conflicts on the school's goals. Moreover, research on the positive part of conflicts focused on conflict as portraying life and vitality, a means of venting frustration, and a revival of motivation. The study hoped to explore other possible positive effects. Lastly, the above causes reviewed placed less emphasis on the potency of denying students' rights and privileges as tools in creating teacher-students' conflicts. Something the present study anticipates addressing.

Methodology

The researchers used the descriptive survey design. According to Gay (1987), the descriptive survey allows for collecting data to test hypotheses or answer research questions concerning the current status of the subject of study. Fraenkel and Wallen (2000) also added that the descriptive survey attempts to describe an existing situation without analyzing the variables' relationships. Concerning the sample size, the researchers selected 127 students from the target population of 190 students. The sample size selection is in line with the Krejcie and Morgan (2002) technique for choosing the sample size. Furthermore, a self-developed questionnaire was used for data collection. The researchers edited the data collected and coded. The researchers used the Statistical Package for Service Solutions (SPSS version 26) in analyzing the data using percentages and frequencies.

Analysis and Discussion

This section deals with discussing the data collected from the field to answer the research questions of the study. The results are presented based on the specific research questions of the survey.

Table 1: Causes of teacher-student conflict in school

Statement	S.A. N (%)	A N (%)	S.D. N (%)	D N (%)
Insensitivity to student needs	78(61.4)	46(36.2)	3(2.4)	-
Unfair use of punishment on students	64(50.4)	54(42.5)	8(6.3)	1(.8)
Denial of students' rights and privileges by teacher	67(52.8)	39(30.7)	16(12.6)	5(3.9)
Lack of interest in teaching on the part of teachers	63(50)	34(27)	19(15.1)	10(7.9)
Preferential treatment towards other students by teacher	57(44.9)	38(29.9)	25(19.7)	7(5.5)
Lack of acceptance/ differences in opinions on certain issues between the teacher and student	57(44.9)	35(27.6)	29(22.8)	6(4.7)

Source: Field Data, 2017.

Key: S.A. (Strongly Agree), A (Agree), D (Disagree), S.D. (Strongly Disagree)

Table 1 shows that most of the respondents, thus 124(97.6%), agreed that conflict is caused by insensitivity to student needs. In comparison, 3(2.4%) of the respondents disagreed. This is corroborated with the view of Tucker (2001). He indicated that conflict between teachers and students arises when the teacher does not consider an individual student's educational needs. Not all students respond the same way to lessons. Some require personalized educational practice. Furthermore, 118(92.9%) of the respondents agreed that conflict is caused by the unfair use of punishment on students. In comparison, 9(7.1%) of the respondents disagreed. Afful (2009) also posits a similar view that conflict typically occurs in school when a learner feels that he/she has been punished unfairly. If the teacher unduly awards punishment, it undermines the mutual respect necessary to achieve the desired effect and harmonious teacher-student relationship, thereby creating conflict.

In addition, 106(83.5%) of the respondents agreed that conflict is caused by denial of students' rights and privileges by teachers, while 21(16.5%) of the respondents disagreed. It seems students normally revolt whenever they are denied from doing what they desire to do. Moreover, 97(77.0%) of the respondents agreed that conflict is caused by a lack of interest in teaching on the part of teachers, while 30(23.0%) of the respondents disagreed. A reflection of the above

commentary is expressed by Kingala (2000), who points out that men and women who have no calling to teaching vocation take up training as teachers but have no interest in looking after them. Due to a lack of interest in teaching, they become increasingly brutal to the students. They forget teaching is both an art and science.

More so, 95(74.8%) of the respondents agreed that conflict is caused by preferential treatment towards other students by teachers, while 32(25.2%) of the respondents disagreed. This affirmed Ramani's (2010) view when he pointed out that students' conflict with teachers arises when teachers demonstrate preferential treatment to specific students. It can be inferred from the above that students react to teachers' actions, which they perceive as unequal treatment. This suggests that conflict may arise between the teacher and students when they feel that the former gives special treatment to other students.

Last, 92(72.5%) of the respondents agreed that conflict is caused by a lack of acceptance/ differences in opinions on specific issues between the teacher and student, whereas 35(27.5%) of the respondents disagreed. This confirms the view expressed by Amuhaya (2010) that conflicts occur when two or more individuals interact in the same state of affairs. But see the issue from different perspectives because of different settings, awareness, background, disposition, or outlook. When there is a lack of acceptance and understanding of individual differences between the teacher and student, conflict will arise.

Table 2: Positive Effects of teacher-student conflict in school

Statement	S.A. N (%)	A N (%)	S.D. N (%)	D N (%)
Conflict is evidence that people and organizations are alive	63(49.6)	63(49.6.5)	1(.8)	-
It is evident that people are doing creative thinking and coming up with new ideas	57(44.9)	64(50.8)	6(4.7)	-
Conflict often forces us to redefine or reinforce our purpose	67(52.5)	54(42.5)	5(3.9)	1(.8)
Conflict forces us to make needed decisions and to take action	71(55.9)	41(32.3)	13(10.2)	2(1.6)
Conflicts allow the release of build-up emotions and the negative feeling	64(50.4)	54(42.5)	7(5.5)	2(1.6)
Conflict forces us to know ourselves better and learn how to work more effectively	58(45.7)	58(45.7)	7(5.5)	4(3.1)

Source: Field Data, 2017.

Key: S.A. (Strongly Agree), A (Agree), D (Disagree), S.D. (Strongly Disagree)

Table 2 indicates that 126(99.2%) of the respondents agreed that conflict is evidence that people and organizations are alive while 1(.8%) of the respondents disagreed. This confirms the view

expressed by Wright and Quincy (1951), that conflict outcome is evidence of life and vitality. Again, 121(95.3%) of the respondents agreed that conflict is evidence that people are doing creative thinking and coming up with new ideas, while 6(4.7%) of the respondents disagreed. This affirms the position expressed by Nelson-Jones (1995) that conflict is evidence that people are doing creative thinking and coming up with new ideas and changes. Whenever conflict arises, the end product depicts proof of innovation in the working environment. Also, 121(95.3%) of the respondents agreed that conflict often forces people to redefine or reinforce their purpose, while 6(4.7%) disagreed. Conflicts lead to the germination of new ideas, which revitalize the path for achieving the organizational goals. The intensity of the reinforcement strategy will help organizations to achieve their goals. In addition, 121(95.3%) of the respondents agreed that conflict forces us to make needed decisions and to take action, while 6(4.7%) of the respondents disagreed. This confirms Omboko's (2010) argument that conflicts force people to make needed decisions and take action. It requires new commitments and fresh motivation. As a result, there is a feeling of making progress, seeking badly needed solutions, and perhaps overdue.

Moreover, 118(92.9%) of the respondents agreed that conflicts allow the release of build-up emotions and negative feelings, while 9(7.1%) of the respondents disagreed. This finding corroborates Champoux's (2010) view that conflict can serve as an escape valve that allows the release of build-up emotions and negative feelings. Last, 116(91.3%) of the respondents agreed that conflict enables people to know themselves better and learn how to work more effectively, while 11(8.6%) of the respondents disagreed. Conflict forces people to learn how to work more effectively with others in solving problems and resolving differences. This shows personal growth and maturity (Eccles & Gabbaro, 1995).

Table 3: Negative Effects of teacher-student conflict in school

Statement	S.A. N (%)	A N (%)	S.D. N (%)	D N (%)
Conflicts lower productivity and, in extreme cases, causes strike actions.	42(33.1)	72(56.7)	9(7.1)	4(3.1)
Conflicts result in the lessening of the organization's effectiveness	51(40.2)	58(45.7)	15(11.8)	3(2.4)
Conflicts weaken teacher-student of relationships	59(46.5)	37(29.1)	24(18.9)	7(5.5)
Conflicts can lead to outright hostile or property damage	46(36.2)	44(34.6)	28(22)	9(7.1)
Conflicts demoralize the spirits of teachers or students	51(40.2)	37(29.1)	26(20.5)	13(10.2)

Source: Field Data, 2017.

Key: S.A. (Strongly Agree), A (Agree), D (Disagree), S.D. (Strongly Disagree)

Table 3 shows that 114(89.8%) of the respondents agreed that conflicts lower productivity and, in extreme cases, cause strike actions, while 13(10.2%) of the respondents disagreed. This confirms the opinion that Nelson-Jones (1995) expressed that conflict can lower productivity and strike extreme cases. Strike actions commonly affect the productivity and ineffectiveness of organizations. As such, it can jeopardize the future of the nation. Again, 109(85.7%) of the respondents agreed that conflicts result in lessening the organization's effectiveness while 18(14.2%) of the respondents disagreed. This is directly in line with the view expressed by Barker and Gum (1994) that many at times, amid conflict, opposing individuals or groups will typically put their interests or goals above those of the organization, resulting in the reduction of the organization's effectiveness. This will limit productivity and prevent the organization from achieving its goals.

Furthermore, 96(75.6%) of the respondents agreed that conflicts weaken teacher-student relationships, while 31(24.4%) disagreed. On this score, Jorgensen and Henderson (1990) add that though a solution may be reached in conflict resolution. The means of attaining the solution may cause pain to the people involved, thereby weakening relationships. This weaken relationship can affect students' performance significantly. In addition, 90(70.6%) agreed that conflicts could lead to outright hostile or property damage, with 37(29.4%) disagreeing. This confirms Eccles and Gabbaro's (1995) assertion that conflict can lead to outright hostile or aggressive behavior such as mob action, property damage, and minor theft of property.

In some cases, the frustrated individual may direct aggression against the person or object perceived to be the cause of the conflict, which may cause distraction. Lastly, 88(69.3%) of the respondents agreed that conflicts demoralize teachers or students' spirits, while 39(30.7%) of them disagreed. This affirms the position expressed by Whetten and Cameron (2005) that interpersonal conflict saps energy and demoralizes the spirits of an individual. Once the teacher or student is demoralizing, he/she cannot teach/learn well.

Conclusions

From the study, the researchers conclude that teacher-students' conflicts are caused by; unfair use of punishment on students, denial of students' rights and privileges by a teacher, lack of interest in teaching on the part of teachers, preferential treatment towards other students by a teacher and lack of acceptance/differences in opinions on certain issues between the teacher and student. In addition, conflicts, as evident from the study, have positive effects. Conflict indicates that people and organizations are alive; it is also evidence that people are doing creative thinking and coming up with new ideas; conflict often forces people to redefine or reinforce their purpose, make needed decisions, and to take action; conflicts allow the release of build-up emotions and negative feeling; conflict also enables people to know themselves better and learn how to work more effectively. Lastly, we also conclude that conflicts negatively affect organizations and individuals since it results in the lessening of the organization's effectiveness, weakening teacher-students' relationships, leading to outright hostile or property damage, and demoralizing the spirits of teachers or students involved in the conflict. Thus, conflict is a 'necessary evil. It is bound to

occur; therefore, educators and school administrators must put measures in place to tackle conflict in senior high schools to curb conflict from escalating into a deadlier one.

Implications for theory and practice

The study's findings imply that heads of schools and teachers should fairly administer punishment to students and explain why he/she was punished and the expected behavior to demonstrate. Also, heads of schools and house masters should consistently organize colloquiums for students and outline the school's rules, regulations, and typical behaviors. In addition, teachers should not be too strict or deny students of their rights and privileges. Ghana education service should continuously organize seminars for teachers and teach them how to provide counseling students. Lastly, teachers and school heads should try and offer fair treatment to all students. Educational stakeholders should accept the values, ideas, and opinions of students and incorporate them into theirs. These practices would help to reduce the factors that cause conflicts in schools.

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